

# Argentina: Falling For Iguazu Falls

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# Iguazu Falls is That Amazing!

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When I told my sister, who had visited [Argentina](#) on a trip around the world with her family, that I was going to [Buenos Aires](#), she immediately said I should be sure to see Iguazu Falls.

“Um, I don’t think I’ll be near there,” I said, adding that I’d rather spend my time exploring the capital’s neighborhoods, hanging out at sidewalk cafes, and visiting its many markets.

Iguazu is pretty much at the opposite end of the long country of Argentina.

Besides, I’d already seen plenty of waterfalls during my years of travels, mostly in mountainous [Japan](#) where every trickle is honored with a name, and I had no intention of spending my precious two weeks in Argentina seeing yet another one.



Devil's Throat, with Argentina on the right, Brazil on the left.

Especially since going to Iguazu Falls requires a domestic flight from [Buenos Aires](#). Especially when I heard it was one of Argentina's top attractions, meaning it was likely to be overrun with tourists.

Sipping coffee in Buenos Aires' Palermo district seemed infinitely more satisfying than jostling with crowds just to see water falling from a cliff.

## Getting to Iguazu

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A series of catwalks that hopscotch across islands and islets leads to Devil's Throat.

But when my traveling companion—who had already spent a month in Buenos Aires prior to my arrival—said that every Argentinean seemed to recommended Iguazu (also spelled

Iguazú) as one of the country's top spots, I agreed we should go.

The trip from Argentina by rental car would have made for a very long drive, so flying made the most sense.

Not that it ended up being cheap to visit [Iguazu National Park](#): a US\$300 roundtrip flight, \$8 for the airport transfer to our lodge, a \$12 bus ride to the park the next day, and about \$24 to enter the park itself. And of course, there's lodging and meals on top of that.

Visiting the park takes an entire day to do it justice, which means you probably need a minimum of two nights in Puerto Iguazu, the gateway town to Iguazu National Park on the Argentine side of the falls.

(Brazil, with its own airport and national park, is on the other side of the river and also offers stupendous views, but Americans and Canadians need expensive visas—not available at the border here—to enter Brazil; they must also pay reciprocity fees to enter Argentina).

### The Falls at Iguazu National Park

Devil's Throat, the most impressive of some 270 falls at Iguazu National Park.

The verdict? Going to Iguazu was worth it, every peso. In fact, I was totally blown away.

Iguazu National Park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 (Brazil's Iguazu National Park followed in 1986), but even that falls woefully short of giving this jaw-dropping natural wonder its due.

That's because Iguazu Falls isn't just one waterfall but rather a series of many cascades

spread along a 1.6 mile-mile stretch. The effect is overwhelming, an experience that will remain with you for the rest of your life.

The Iguazu River, flowing about 820 miles mostly through Brazil before hooking up with the Parana River, spreads to almost a mile wide and glides around many islands and islets as it runs through the national park and drops dramatically off a wide lava cliff in the form of numerous falls, about 275 of them, some as high as 240 feet.

Iguazu gets its name, in fact, from the native Guarani language meaning "great water." That seems like an understatement.

The park offers many viewpoints of the falls from various angles, but the most magnificent view is reached via a relaxing open-car train ride and then a series of catwalks to Devil's Throat, where you can peer over a massive U-shaped cascade that roars with fury and shoots up so much white mist that it obscures any views of the abyss below and is visible even from the plane when you land at Cataratas del Iguazu International Airport.

But the mist is a great canvas for ethereal rainbows, and watching water glide toward the semi-circular edge before hurtling over the edge is mesmerizing and humbling.

Capuchin monkey in the park.

For me personally, it created the same feeling of insignificance I have when gazing at the stars of our vast universe and was a reaffirmation that the beauty of our planet deserves cult-like status and must be preserved for our own sanity if not our survival.

Other Diversions at Iguazu National Park

But I could have done without the Great Adventure safari and boat trip (an extra \$50), which

my friend said we should do because who knew if we'd ever be back.

The guided tour started off innocently enough, with an open-top ride through the jungle while an interpreter explained the history of the park and pointed out the diversity of flora and fauna.

We then boarded a boat for a pleasant 3.7-mile trip upriver and were instructed to put our valuables into waterproof bags, because the highlight of the great adventure is this: being taken directly underneath one of the falls.

One of many species of snakes in Iguazu National Park.

### **Freezing Cold Water!**

I can't give a visual description of what it's like to be inside a waterfall, because the pounding rush of water was so intense I had to keep my eyes tightly shut, and because the water was so shockingly cold, all I could do was scream bloody murder.

Luckily, the ordeal was quickly over, but then came the kicker.

Once was apparently not enough, and back we went into the falls for yet another screaming frenzy and test of endurance.

I suppose most people might consider this fun, but to me, the only good outcome was that we were soaked, which felt welcoming on such a hot winter's day.

(Argentina has seasons that are opposite those in the northern hemisphere; winters are moderate in tropical Iguazu, while its summers around January and February are rainy, hot, and humid and are also more crowded because of school holidays.)

Standing in front of the tremendous Devil's Throat.

But it wasn't just the waterfalls that made the day memorable. Iguazu National Park, declared a national park in 1934 and spreading over 293 square miles, boasts the country's greatest biodiversity and is shrouded in thick and lush rainforest.

There are well-marked hiking trails that wind around the park allowing various vantage points and the chance to see the park's many inhabitants.

There are 2,000 species of plants and 450 species of birds alone, including swifts, toucans, and magpies. There are also Capuchin monkeys, butterflies galore, all kinds of fish, snakes, and turtles; if you're lucky, you might even see Yacare caiman, foxes, giant anteaters, tapirs, ocelots and, if you're beyond lucky, the elusive jaguar.

But the most visible residents are the pesky coati, which gathers any place where there are humans, including the park's several restaurants.

I thought they were rather cute until one of them climbed onto our outdoor table and made off with our sandwich so handily, I decided it must be a pro at stealing food from unwitting tourists. Coati can climb, jump, and grab things with such ease, I wasn't surprised to hear they are related to raccoons.

Enjoying Nature Outside the Park



Many hiking trails through [Iguazu National Park](#) provide different views of the falls.

I also enjoyed where we stayed for three nights, La Cantera Jungle Lodge, snuggled in woods, and with a small swimming pool and hammocks hanging on every room's verandah.

A highlight was joining a one-hour hiking tour through the jungle surrounding our lodge with a local Guarani guide, who explained how various plants and trees have been used for food and medicine, whether as a blood coagulant or to treat mouth sores.

### **A Charmless Town**

We also took advantage of the hotel's free bikes to ride the road that loops around the forest. Not once did we feel compelled to go into town, which is charmless and doesn't have much to recommend it outside of grocery stores where you can stock up on snacks for your hotel room and a few good restaurants.

In any case, our time in Iguazu was the right combination of outdoor escape and relaxation,



and I'll never be so complacent about waterfalls again. On the other hand, Iguazu has probably ruined me for life.

For comparison, Niagara is only about half as high as Iguazu and only a third its width. They say that the only waterfall that can rival Iguazu is Victoria Falls in Africa. I'm putting it on my bucket list, and if you haven't already, you should put Iguazu on yours.

But think twice about that boat ride, and don't let a coat run off with your lunch.