

Surviving your first year Abroad

You don't want to just be surviving your first year abroad, you want to fulfill your dreams and create memories that last a lifetime!

A move abroad is a serious life change, a huge upheaval. Endless planning, packing, organizing, shipping all to take your life from one location to the next. Yes it is as exhilarating, and challenging.

To make it happen, you put any nagging doubts and doomsday friends aside to get on with all you need to do, one step at a time.

Now it's over, you're in your new country, living the dream. Or are you?

There will be times when it's not all rosy



With the big move behind us – we may think the worst is over. We get lost in the excitement of living the dream. In the first phase of the move you are likely to see nothing but a world of endless possibilities.

Don't get me wrong, it still can be.

But, I also need to break it to you, that this lovely honeymoon phase wears off.

Which can leave you with a brutal reality, that the routine of life isn't that much different abroad then it was at home. One day, you'll realize that you still get up to go to work, you shop and you have a routine. It looks and feels exactly like our old life. Only worse as someone has removed the age old comforts, favorite haunts, and friends. They may have also changed the channel are all now speaking a new language – that you are not learning as fast enough for conversations past 'hello how are you?'.

It can also be at this vulnerable moment that those nagging doubts we parked before the move come back to haunt us...

Did you make the right decision?

Will this ever feel like home?

And the biggest fear, did you fail your dream or did your dream fail you...

All you may need a coffee and friendly ear, someone to share your doubts and challenges with. A friend to go to the movies with. Or a savvy local to ask for a dentist recommendation.

Whatever you do, don't start tottering on the brink either of moving forward – or going back. See it as an opportunity.

Time to take control and make it 'Home'



If you have lived abroad you may recognize the moment.

It's a wake up call and realization that living abroad is not all cocktails with mini umbrellas on a beach. It's part of the move, and part of being a nomad. When the old life starts to fade away, it's time to replace it with a fulfilling new life.

Up until this point, all your focus has been on work, a place to live, setting up the internet and a hundred other mind-numbing tasks. So much so that you haven't had the chance to establish a social life.

What you need is a plan of action.

Planning and creating a new

home abroad:

To help to motivate yourself make a list on why you moved, and what you love about living where you do. Stick this list some prominent like the fridge. Then make the effort to do those things you enjoy that attracted you to this adventure in the first place.

If you moved for nature, go out and spend time in it. If you are in Argentina and love the tango, then learn it. Whatever it is – put it on your list and into your agenda!

In all honesty, every place has its pros and cons. What we need to do is recognise them and make sure we are balancing them out. We can do this by focusing on the positives, rather than the negatives.

The very best thing that you can do to get you through these moments of doubt is to make **'friends'**. Someone you can grab a coffee with, who can share or add to your perspective. It's always the people you meet, that'll make a foreign country feel like home.

Now Let's get out there and meet people



We all know finding good friends isn't easy, we all know they are valuable and rare. Yet, the world is a pretty big and there are a lot of great places to meet people, with a bit of EFFORT.

The best way to meet like-minded people is through something that you love, common interests. What are your hobbies, are there courses and workshops that you can attend?

A [language exchange](#), is helpful in that it helps to improve your language skills and meet new people. Your exchange partner will also speak your language and is likely to have or plan to travel. A word of caution: be selective of who you choose to meet up with. [Remember the objective – meeting like-minded others', there are those that use the language exchange for an inroad to dating foreigners... and hence may have other objectives....]

It's handy to meet a few established foreigners and locals, which is where international groups such as [internations](#), or [Expatica](#) (Europe) or [Expatriate](#) work a treat as most have local gatherings. You can also find local events through [meetups](#) or a local version of the site.

Getting onto the mailing list of your own embassy in your new country is also worth while, they'll invite you to holiday celebrations and they may also have a chapter of commerce, who will get together for meetings or lunches. Which is a great place for business networking.

If you are shy, force yourself to event – you are not likely to be the only shy person there. It's going to take Effort – you are going to need to go beyond comfort zones. I assure you it will be worth it.

There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't met yet. Walter Butler Yeats

You'll meet a valuable people at each outing, and a few of these will grow into valuable friendships.

You will find before you know it, you'll have a social life, new hobbies and language skills. You will be going to the

movies or hanging out with friends.

Someone will have recommended the perfect doctor, dentist and hairdresser after all word of mouth among peers are the best recommendations.

Now, instead of feeling homesick and full of doubt, you'll feel settled and at home.

The dream you had of living in a new country has become a reality. You can kick back and enjoy the experience and dare we say it, start planning the next move...



Armchair Travellers guide to

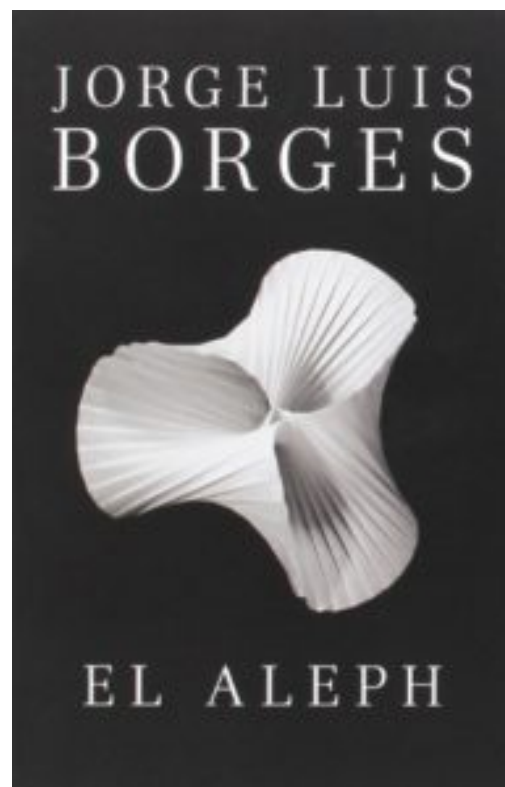
Argentina

Have you ever dreamt of visiting Argentina? Perhaps interested in an insider's perspective to this fascinating country? Have you ever pondered about why Evita and Che are either fanatically loved or hated?

Or perhaps you are look for inspiration for an upcoming trip to Argentina? Any which way, this Armchair Traveller's Guide to Argentina is the ideally place to start exploring the country from the comfort of home.

Books and movies can paint a history like no other. They give you an understanding of a countries like Argentina's colourful past, its challenges and dictatorships, its culture and why it is the way it is today.

The best books about, or written by Argentine's:



You might not have heard about many Argentine writers, the country and its dark past have produced some of the best in the world. One of the most renowned and one worth reading is [Jorge Luis Borges](#). He writes like none other.

From [The Aleph and Other Stories \(Penguin Classics\)](#) to his [collected library](#) of short stories and [poetry](#). His work is simply mesmerising, and he is one of the most under appreciated yet spectacular writers and thinkers of his time.

His thoughts, mind and work have a multitude of layers that are both enticing and profound. Every time you read one of his stories you'll see new dimensions, ideas and provocative metaphysical concepts. His poetry on suburban streets of Buenos Aires where he lived, adds a richness to the city that assure you'll never see them in the same light again.

If you've seen the magic weaved by the tango or the eloquence in a game of polo; it is this same grace, flow and passion that [Jorge Borges brings to his writing](#). A fascinating writer that will share Argentina and all its charm with you like no other.

[Without the streets or dusks of Buenos Aires, a tango cannot be written. - Jorge Luis Borges Click To Tweet](#)



[The Tango Singer](#)

Tomas Eloy Martinez

If you are looking for a book that captures and brings to life the rawness of energy that is Buenos Aires, this is it. You can almost feel the energy emanating off the pages and through the dance and music of the tango. The heaviness that borders on a dramatic, always serious yet spellbinding dance between two dancers. This book, will leave you a little breathless for the city, the tango, for the music, and for life. At the end you won't believe it was

all fiction, it feels so real, as though you had lived it. It's not. It is just an exceptional well told story, yet it is so captivating you can't help but wish it to be real, and that the book would last forever. It's the perfect read whether you love the tango, exceptional stories or Argentina. **Buy the book or find out more about it on Amazon: [The Tango Singer](#)**

[Santa Evita](#)

Tomas Eloy Martinez

This is fiction rather than being a biographical account about the life of Evita Peron, and written by an Argentine living abroad. This may grant him a little more creative license than if he were living in Argentina. It doesn't stop this book from being both a compelling read. There are a lot of books written about Evita, and like Che, you either like her or you don't. The reality is that there is not much information available as Evita Perez. Evita, herself either omitted it or changed it, to suit the picture she wanted to present to the world. So most books on the subject are heavily biased opinions of the writers perspective. This book and period in history shaped much of modern Argentina – as did the story of Evita, which is why it's highly recommended. It's a hard book to find, I

suggest looking it up on **Abe books**: [Santa Evita](#)

[Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life](#)

John Lee Anderson

Che is either loved or loathed, and you'll get a very different point of view on why depending on who you ask. It's best to read up and learn as much as you can before defending or jumping into arguments on this touchy subject. This biography is one of the best and unbiased on the market. It is also the largest, and most in-depth, so best read from the comfort of home rather than carrying it around in your backpack.





ARMCHAIR TRAVELLERS

Guide to Argentina

WWW.TRAVELMOVE.LIVE.COM

There are points of this time period that were new to me, and rarely mentioned in our history books. Despite some of the atrocities committed in his name, Che fought for his beliefs, took action where others dare not, he gave his life fully to the end for a higher ideal. He saw and understood first hand what the American placed dictators were doing to Latin America, and took steps to create change where he was able.

A poetic hero, fighting for justice in a rather unjust and corrupt world. For anyone who wants to get to know the man behind the story. You can find out more: [Che: A revolutionary life](#)

For those interested in more information on Latin American History, and how that history formed revolutionaries like Che Guevara. The best book is: [Open Veins of Latin America](#). It is a real eye-opener as to the use and abuse of the resources and people in Latin America, long after the Spanish conquest.

Further Famous books already well noted, and written about that are also worth a mention on this reading list are:

- [Motorcycle Diaries](#): This covers the years of Che's early adulthood and much of the text was based on his diaries that he wrote while travelling through South America on his Motorcycle. This has since also been turned into a film, it is available on [Prime or DVD](#).
- [In Patagonia](#): Bruce Chatwin's is one of the best travel writers in the world. This book is without a doubt one of the most well quoted and famous book on and about his travels through Patagonia.

Experience Argentina through Film

Not all good writers in Argentina are novelists, some are brilliant film makers. A few films like the Nine Queens have been copied, but the English version just isn't the same.

The history and humour of the Argentines goes deep, and there are some idiosyncrasies that you get about the culture that you just won't get elsewhere.



Here are a few of my favourite films.

[The Nine Queens](#): The story on and about a bank robbery, it's the most famous Argentine film. It's on the humourous side, but also is just a cracking story about a some would be slick robbers and the many failures they make.

[Igualita de Mi](#): A favourite comedy, about someone who believes himself to be a bit of ladies man. You'll meet a few of these characters if you do ever go to Argentina, they would be smooth talkers. This movies put them in the funniest light and it a perfect romantic story with a lot of unexpected twists.

[A boyfriend for my wife](#): Another great romantic comedy with a few of Argentina's best actors. The Argentine's have a way of bringing a story that you'll never find in a Hollywood movie – which is what makes them so incredibly funny.

[The Official Story](#), looks into once of the sadder aspects of the adoptions of children of 'the disappeared one's' by wealthier or military families at the time of Argentina's dictatorship in the 1970s. This is the story of a mother of one such adoptee who tries to look into the Official story of what was going on at the time. While it was a shocking period in Argentina's history, these adoptions and the disappeared one's was real.

[The son of the Bride](#): A look at how crazy that family and life can get Argentine style.



Did you know Argentinian's love to Read?

Argentine's love to read and will be happy to discuss a wide range of books they've read. The upside of this also means that you'll find bookshops all over the country. One of my favourite bookshops in Buenos Aires is the [El Ateneo Grand Splendid Bookstore](#). In it's previous life it was an old theatre that has been transformed into one of the most stunning bookshops. Its the perfect way to spend an afternoon.

If you to make it to Argentina and are looking for English books, you'll find them at [Walrus Books](#), San Telmo in Buenos Aires. They have an excellent selection of new and second-hand books.



In Summary:

So, whether you are planning or dreaming about Argentina, it is worth reading up on its literature. Take the opportunity to see the city of Buenos Aires through the eyes of Borges.

The tales in these books are so well weaved that you will see the city and country in ways you had not believed possible in such a short time. You will feel as though you've walked the streets. Had the tango dance a beat on your heart and a touch of revolutionary spirit will stir your soul.

Books and movies can unlock a richer experience of a country, a view behind the veil, this list on and about Argentina will be the key.

Of course if you'd like to visit, be sure to check out why [November is the best time to visit Argentina](#). If you are considering moving there, here's a [The reality of Living and Moving to Argentina](#).

Or if you just want to escape some more from the comfort of home, I also have a [Armchair Travellers Guide to England](#).

A few of the images are mine, and others a big thank you to:
Alfons Morales on [Unsplash](#)
[7 SeTh](#) on [Unsplash](#)
[Jeison Higueta](#) on [Unsplash](#)

How to Bla Bla your way around the French Rail Strike

Without a doubt we are all for a bit 'La Revolution', and in most cases happy to support workers rights and protests on the whole.

Yet, do you hardly recall a real strike being held that interrupted your every day life? Australia, Netherlands or the UK rarely strike – and the most we hear is rumours, threats, union meetings before it's all neatly sorted out. And we are informed of the results.

The Revolution in France never really ended

Here, in France, where I am currently travelling they have an ongoing train strike – From April to June. WHAT... Yes, a 3 whole months, it's spring and many tourists and locals are affected.

Read the details, or see the dates here in more detail here: [Trainline EU](#)

And they mean it. I went and asked at the tourist information if there really was a strike – seriously? there really isn't any trains?? Are you sure? The woman looked at me and my most absurd questions – of course there is a strike, which means limited to no trains.

Luckily while not everyday, booking anything can be tricky, I would advise where possible you travel on the days there is no strike.

Yet, there is another new transport disrupter that has stepped in and saved the day, a modern day knight / driver in shining chariot to whisk you off to where you'd like to go, meet [Bla Bla Car](#).

There is No Bla Bla about it...

So I have to declare I am a bit of a car sharing newbie – and was super nervous about getting into some strangers car, most likely this person won't speak english – and my French is dismal at best. How would this work?

Yet, thanks to my stubborn streak, I wasn't going to let the Rail strike stand in the way of where I wanted to go, so I decided to risk it. And try to Bla Bla my way across France to get to where I was going, when I said I was going to get there.

I found [Bla Bla car](#) to offer the best carpooling service, and there has also been a huge influx of French subscribers to the site, and a really community that is helping people everywhere to get them to where they are going – the easy way.



My First Bla Bla Experience

My first ride was a challenge to say the least. I caught a taxi to the middle of nowhere and had to hope for the best. The taxi driver spoke to the driver, and the many messages the driver texted never arrived – as the website didn't show my country code... so, the driver rang – trying to speak french on the phone had me in tears, and I had no idea what was being said.

The taxi had left me in the wrong freeway exit, and the driver had to drive all the way around and hence was annoyed. Communication melt-down at it's best. However, the driver found me, we resolved the issue. He was super kind and I got across the country in less than 3 hours, while if I had taken the bus it would have taken me 13 hours!

The second driver had a full car, and was young yet a sensible, polite and charming. So all in all with only a small wait between lifts, I got from Carcassonne in the South West of France up to La Creuse in the Middle of France cheaper and quicker than I would have ever gotten the train or bus for.

Lessons in using Bla Bla Car in a Foreign Country

So, while use of car pooling in another language isn't without it's challenges and limitations. There were a few lessons learnt in the experience:

My advice:

- Try different routes, and have a play around with the locations – without dates, so you can gauge what the more travelled routes are
 - Also go for rides that can pick you up from a central location (ie. Train station, this means there are also taxis or buses should anything go wrong)

- Be sure to check the if they have room for luggage or not
- Don't be worry if the car has other passengers (I found this ideal as that meant I didn't need to talk to the driver)
- Read the reviews, Leave a review
- Make sure you are on time
- Always be polite and respectful

Bla Bla Car in Summary



Not only is the rail strike a spanner in the works, it is also difficult with the rail network or buses to get to get to the smaller cities or across from one region to another. I am loving the option of using [Bla Bla car](#) to get me to where I want to go. While I personally like travelling by train, for me to get from here to my next destination Brittany I would need to change trains 6 times, which makes the journey a long an arduous one. While if driving it's just 4 hours away.

Bla Bla Car is available in a variety of countries in Europe, and while you do pay for the ride, depending on what the driver is asking – it is still much cheaper than public transport. Payment it is via the website using paypay.

You can also set your preferences, music, smoking/ non smoking, and a little of a lot of bla bla (talking).

Keep on Roaming

I will continue to carpool across France, strike or no strike. Admiring and yet avoiding the impact of the mini-revolution that is currently underway.

I'll have my own revolution in defiance and not let it dampen my travels or stop me in getting to where I want to, when I want to get there.

Yes, the language barrier can be a challenge and also a great opportunity to learn some French and if you do speak the language the perfect chance to have a chat to a local. So don't let a transport strike or your nerves get in the way.

Book a ride, get your Bla Bla on, and keep on Roaming.
What is life, if not a constant adventure.

Website: <https://www.blablacar.com/>

Book Train/ Bus: [Oui SCNF](#)

Download your Moving Abroad Checklist

Ready for the Big Move abroad? if so here is your moving abroad checklist

So finally you've decided to move abroad, it's the next step in this adventure called life. It's when the saying "you have the world at your feet" is all too true and it sits perched on the horizon and is ready to become a reality.

Yet let's be honest, the actual moving part sux – it's tedious, overwhelming and there are many days (for me anyway) where you can be completely immobilized by the number of things that need to get done.

This is why I've created you a [Free, easy moving abroad checklist](#). A summary of the most important things that you'll need to remember.

Keep in mind, not all moves are equal:

Do keep in mind the fact that every country has different requirements and every situation is unique. So Remember to Check:

1. Passport requirements:
2. Work requirements
3. Health requirements
4. Tax requirements
5. Import / Export requirements: Or outsource this to removalists.
6. Pets: be sure to check import/travel requirements, the vet can advise. Be warned that some countries like Australia need a quarantine period and strict pre-vaccination schedule – so start planning at least 6 months before!

To give an example of an easy move, for me to go back to Holland as I have a Dutch passport is reasonably easy. I turn up, show my passport and we're done, right?

Wrong....

The downside is that I need to go register myself as living in the country again, which I get to do with all the other immigrants' somewhere in the middle of nowhere, and I do need to show them official proof of where I am living – which is

not always easy if you are staying with friends.

Yet this is still an easy move...

On the other hand, when I moved back to Australia, I needed to have:

- Health certificate (vaccinations, lung scan for TB, blood test for HIV)
- Translated Criminal checks of my last countries of residence (last 5 years)
- Financial Statement
- Birth Certificate
- Declaration of ties to Australia
- Proof that I once lived in Australia

There was more, however, let's keep it simple for now.

Tax Returns, an Easy way to make travel money

There are also steps you need to take to leave some countries. I need to sign out of Holland for example. Another of these steps includes taking care of your taxes, which in some instances can be a bonus.

For instance, if the financial year goes from June – June, and your leaving in December means you'll only have been paid half a years salary. Which when stretched over the whole year puts you in a lower salary bracket that you were originally taxed on. Meaning you'll be refunded the difference.

Hence be sure to check with the tax office before leaving.

It simply pays to be organised: use

a moving abroad checklist

Yes, I've been stuck at the airport without a visa, having to ask for a police certificate in a country I no longer lived in (very tricky and near impossible – it pays to have lawyers as friends).

So unlike me, make sure you are organised. Have a countdown timeline of what needs to be done, and keep a list of the dates and deadlines if you have them. There is always so much to do, pack, pay and organise before you go.

☒ Be sure to also give yourself the time and space to catch up with friends and family. Drop in and have your last brunch at your favourite spot, reminisce and savor those last moments before you go.

To help you be more organised, I've created a short free easy to-do list that I've used in my last 3 moves, and in my experience of the 5 international moves before that.

Download it here: [Moving Abroad Checklist.](#)

More than anything have fun with your new adventure. You'll be on your way soon enough, so be sure to enjoy the ride!!

As a wise someone named Emerson once said, **“its the journey not the destination.”**

Best place in the Flinders

Rangers for wine tasting and Devonshire tea

Blesings Garden Wines and Devonshire tea in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia

Once and while you come across an unexpected gem in the most unlikely of places. As we were driving through the Flinders Ranges to Port Germein, we drove past a road sign for a Cellar door and Devonshire tea. Having missed lunch the idea of a scone or two with a pot of tea was tempting, So, we followed the signs to a lovely remote winery in the typical Australian Countryside. With stunning views of the surrounding area, we were greeted by Margo, David, and their lovely dog Papillion.

The scones were some of the best, home baked and served with the most delicious fresh cream and a selection of locally handmade jams, and tea – seriously divine!



A perfect afternoon, David played some subtle classical piano in the background, while the native birds added some music of their own; the sheep grazed contently on the endless golden fields that where the odd Eucalyptus trees swayed in the wind

and filled the air with their fresh scent.

Margo & David the owners joined us for a chat, making us feel right at home. It was as though we were spending an afternoon with friends on the patio, enjoying their hospitality. David's family has owned the property and gardens for generations, so he has a story or two to tell of it's history.

We have take note of this gem, as it's definitely a place to go back to spend a lazy afternoon, taste some wine with friends (this local boutique brand has won a selection of awards). You can easily pass the time enjoying a piece of the 'Real Australia' in it's; scenery, charm, hospitality, wine, culture and history.

www.blesingsgardenwines.com.au

Bangor Southern Flinders Ranges
White Park Road, Bangor, South Australia

An insiders guide to Amsterdam

Ah Amsterdam, You've seen the movies. You've heard the stories. Whatever your reason is for going to the enchanting city – you definitely want to make the most out of your time there.

Amsterdam is more affordable than London, friendlier than Paris and more fun than Rome – and it's no secret, everyone knows it.

This is why the city has approximately 18+ Million visitors a year. Which is 350K a week, in a central area that has only

830K residents. As you can envision, it gets a little crazy-busy on the weekends.

So you have the choice 1) wrestle with the masses, waste your time in queues and see what everyone else does. Or 2) hang out and see Amsterdam like a local, avoiding the crowds in the process and having an unforgettable experience.

Even in a populated small city, you can become an expert at avoiding crowds. For instance, you'll find all cyclists on one street and no one on the parallel street – so take a ride on the wild side, and make your own path through town.

TIP: Avoid getting run over by Cyclists

Ok, I admit. I've run over the occasional tourist. I rang my bell, ting and they jumped – the wrong way right in front of me... And in my defence, the old bike's brakes are shot and don't work. I tried to stop really I did... splat...

So a free tip – watch out for cyclists, where a bike is painted on the path that means it's a bike path, and when you hear 'ting ting' behind you – jump to your left, not to the right. Walk and be aware, we are not trying to run you over... but may not be able to help it.



What to do, what to see, where to go:

While the magic of the city is endless, there are a few things that are always highly recommended that I never get sick of. Such as:

1. Canal Cruise

The best way to see Amsterdam. It's a water city and the view you get from the canal is unique night or day. The companies are all the same so get on a boat anywhere anytime!

2. Rent a bike

Getting around on a bike is the second best way to get around Amsterdam and an incredibly local experience. You can rent a bike from almost anywhere. Get a map and get off the same street as everyone else, you'll find all the tourists on one road while the next one over goes in the same direction with no one on it, so always take the opportunity to take the road less travelled! Tip: Remember where you park it – with more bikes in the city than people – it can be an adventure to find your bike again at the best of times.

3. City Library

Not for the books. What many people don't know is that it has a café/ restaurant on the top floor where you can find an affordable lunch and enjoy the panoramic view of the city. It's one of the only spots in the city where you can get an aerial view, a great photo opportunity as it's a bit dull – there are rarely any tourists.

4. Quieter Shopping streets: (read: Skip Kalverstraat)

1. Amstelstraat: Not as touristy as the main shopping street but has some of the most unique design shops where you'll find some real treasures.
2. 9 Streets in the Jordan: Great tiny streets well lit up at night full of boutique stores – however

these are publicized and will be full of tourists – yet due to the charm, still worth visiting.

3. StaalStraat: home of Droog Design and Puccini and a few other cute unique shops too – around the corner from the Waterlooplein markets – which are great on a Saturday. Rembrandt's house is also there, if there is no queue be sure to check it out – the oldest bar in town is across from his house – it's the one that may fall over at any minute.

5. Museums

1. [Droog Design Museum](#)

While it's not officially a museum they do have some of the best young, talented designers/artists that work for them so the items on show are inspiring.

2. [van Gogh Museum](#)

This museum got a huge makeover quite a few years back, and to everyone's horror, it was closed. Yet, all was made good when they reopened, as not only is the museum itself stunning, but it also shows off van Gogh's artwork like non-other. There will be a queue, however, this is one of the few instances it's worth the wait (do get there as early as possible).

3. [FOAM Photography museum](#)

One of the most undervalued museums in my view, and yet perhaps it's something I am grateful for – as it's much less crowded. They always have local and international exhibits on, and the space



itself is a curiosity.

6. **ARTIS:** Not the zoo but the hood, it's one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and is so much quieter and more spacious than everywhere else. It's' as if someone has waved their magic wand and made all the tourists disappear. You can visit the butterfly room in the [De Hortus Botanicus](#) (Botanic Garden), and find a seat at a café on the canal at [Bloem](#). Take a look around the stunning architecture of the [Hermitage](#) or have a coffee in the garden (the inside is a bit overly stuffy, so don't waste your time unless that's your jive and you like Faberge eggs and paintings of men with tutus around their neck...).

7. **Day out to the Historic village of Volendam.**

If you are spending more than a weekend there are also a few things to do outside of town. Volendam is a small bus ride away (public bus in 20 mins and a few euros) and captures some of the old-world Dutch charms. You'll catch the odd person still wearing the traditional dress, it has typical houses, including one that is a museum. And you can try the raw herring, or at least use one for a photo prop as everyone else does.

8. **Tulips fields forever**

now if you are lucky to be there around spring, and the weather is favourable – you'll get the opportunity to visit one of my very favourite places: [Keukenhof](#). An

endless array of tulips – as well as many other flowers, remind the world that the Dutch are one of the largest flower exporters in the world, and certainly know how and where to grow them. If you can get out of town, at least visit the Flower market in town.



Foodies Delight: Best places to Eat in Amsterdam:

Chocolate: [Puccini](#). [Staalstraat](#). This without a doubt is the best handmade chocolate spot in the world, not only do they have an amazing array of flavours, from pepper, chilli, and cinnamon through to cognac – they make it out the back so the smell is as intoxicating as the taste. There is such a wide selection it's not rare to see some tourists in there for hours as they try to make a choice before buying most of the shops.



Rakang. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: This really is the best Thai restaurant in the world (Yes, even better than in Thailand). It's an all-time favourite thanks to the incredible

food, service, kitsch twist and ambience. What's really great is that you can have any dish on the menu made with tofu instead of meat. Approx. €50p.p Elandsgracht 31. Tel: 020 620 9551 <http://www.rakang.nl/>



Breakfast / Cake: [Gartine](#). There are few spots that do a real breakfast. As the Dutch staple is bread and cheese.

Not so at Gartine, the food is beyond delicious, the chef has her own cookbook, and they grow a lot of their own produce on their plot outside of town. Their cakes are so good, I admit it's the only place I'll also pre-order my dessert without questioning the calories.

The only downside is getting a table, they're always booked out in advance and it's a small place, yet if you'd like to experience the best breakfast spot and cakes in town it's well worth the phone call, or the wait. Tel: 020 320, Taksteeg 7, Amsterdam.

[Modern Dutch: Greetjes](#), I've heard so many discourses on whether Real Dutch cuisine actually exists (beyond french fries). I know for a fact it does. I am Dutch and while it might not be the cuisine of the century, and you might not see a Dutch Restaurant in every (or any) city, there is a rather modest yet delicious one right in the centre of Amsterdam. And trust me, this is the age-old grub my family relished ok, albeit a more modern somewhat funky version.

Fries: [Vlaamsefriethuis](#), voetboogstraat 33 – Best place ever, once again tucked away in a side street, and looks like and is a hole in the wall, however, you can follow your nose or the queue, as there are always people waiting in this spot. be sure to try the 'Oorlog' which means war, with onions, mayo and sate sauce!

Olliebollen Van: this is a big van parked at the odd place around town – depending on the time of the year, that has what looks like big fat juicy doughnuts. And they are only 100 times more delicious and authentic!

Insiders' guide to Amsterdam

I have skipped the museums that I find depressing. Reminders of wars, and relics, are full of old masters that go on forever and can get a little overwhelming.

As a local, I've included a short list of where I take visiting friends. Places that I never tire of. I've been on 100's canal rides and still love it. I never tire of seeing the Magere Brug (Skinny bridge) at night, and will always stop for a second when I cycle past it, to savour a moment of its magic. To me, this is more breathtaking than any expensive museum.



I recommend if you are going for a few days be sure to grab yourself the [iamsterdam card](#), which gets you into most museums

and public transport free for a few days. It gives you the opportunity to pop in and out of museums that you might not visit otherwise.

I hope you take yourself off the well-worn path, avoid the masses, and see the “Real Amsterdam”. The joy of travel comes from unique experiences and insights into a local culture, a real taste of a mysterious foreign land, that you rarely find standing in a queue with many other moaning tourists.

So head out into this enchanting world and go and create some unique and memorable experiences of your own. Uncover the lesser seen – yet even more enjoyable – Amsterdam for yourself.



Portland: Keeping it both Real, and Weird

Portland won me over from the start; This quirky, liberal, funky town has a pretty cool vibe. Within a few days, it jumped to the top of my list of favourite cities in the world.

My little bit weird and favourite thing to do: is that people looked you right in the eye and gave a genuine smile. And this my friends is the place to do it, people weren't glued to their mobiles, avoiding eye contact so much like the rest of the world – nope – straight in the eye look with a real smile... and that my friend, is priceless!

The city, for those that are unaware, is also the inspiration and muse of the much-loved quirky little bit weird show ['Portlandia'](#). If you've not seen it, be sure to check it out before you go.

Yes, the city is weird in the best of ways; its bike friendly, food cart crazy. Home of the alternative crowd – dare I say, critical thinkers... that are all growing their own food and beards (other than the ladies).

For a crafty creative like me, it's a huge Creative Mecca – one that must be visited and walked around at least once in this lifetime. It features some of the Best indie craft fairs, such as; [crafty wonderland](#), [renegade Craft Fair](#), [Picnic Music+Arts Festival](#), [Portland Fleaforall](#). All worth visiting, be sure to check the dates before you go.

My Portland Recommendations:

To Sleep:

I used **Airbnb**, and stayed in Val's [Buddha room](#) – If I could've I would've moved in stayed forever! A lush, green and safe neighbourhood, a short walk to top local eateries, shops and gardens.

Where to Eat in Portland



[Brass Tacks](#), Most delicious Sandwiches I've ever eaten, ever! (This folks, is saying something – no not because I eat tones of sandwiches, but because I am an older than 29 ;-)). I had the vegan 'Meatball Wizard, and Salamigeddon'. Makes my mouth water just thinking about them!

[Sweeedeede](#) – this home cooked food rocked it! I loved the homely unpretentious vibe as much as the outstanding quality of their food...

[Salt & Straw](#); The Best Ice Cream; with flavours like Pear and Blue Cheese, Honey Lavender and Strawberry Honey Balsamic with Black pepper. As well as the standard classics. Don't wait for summer; these are worth checking out all year round.

[Que Sabosa](#), it the best Mexican food cart, I had the Burrito

that was filled with fresh roasted vegetables, and mind blowing handmade sauces – that you don't come across this side of the border – authenticity all the way. @ N Williams.

Others recommend [voodoo doughnuts](#). I didn't get any, I walked passed saw the line of people waiting, wondering if it was a pop concert. But no, it gets this busy – so I put it top of my list for my next visit. I didn't even wait in line at the Vatican, sorry dude's can't wait in line for doughnuts....

Where to shop in Portlandia

[Crafty wonderland pop up shop](#): I recommend you visit Portland in June for the real event, which I missed. This pop-up soothed the pain. I was awestruck by the stunning and unique handcrafted items on display. There ain't no suitcase big enough to fit all I wanted to buy (no credit card limit high enough either).

[Collage craft supplies](#) If you craft, pondering the idea of crafting this is the supply store to go to. I spent hours and hours in there – it has everything and more.

[Contemporary museum of Craft](#): This has rotating exhibitions of fine quality handcrafted artisan good are. Let's say its many leagues above what I fathom to make.

– [Mississippi Ave](#): This is the street where you want to hang, shop and live nearby, it has the quaintest, to unique shops. There are too many to list in one post.

What to visit/ do

[City parkland](#), huge, walk-worthy and a must visit. I wish I'd put more time aside for this, as you could take a picnic and get lost in there for a very long time.

[Powells Bookshop](#): filled to the brim with both the best

collection of new and used books. I never buy books when travelling, but made the exception as there were a few books that I knew I'd not find anywhere else. this alone would be worth living close to Portland for. Also check out their schedule they often have speakers, authors or evenings of banter.

[Made here PDX](#) for best artisan handcrafted goods for both men & women.

To finish off, to prove that Portland is weird, here are a few unknown yet interesting facts;

- It's illegal to walk across the street with your shoes untied.
- It's illegal to whistle underwater.
- It's against Portland law to modify the weather without obtaining a license first. Luckily this is not something I attempted to do while there ☐ Does make me wonder if anyone has this license?...

Despite what others say about the weirdness, I felt more at home in Portland than I have anywhere in a long time. I had some deep thought-provoking conversations with some incredible people, saw and bought some amazing handmade wares, was inspired by all the creative craftiness that I saw – and ate some of the best food of my life. This is my kind of city, for visiting or living and any time in Portland is time well spent.

This is my friends, is my kind of city, for visiting or living any time in Portland is time well spent.

An Enchanting place to stay in Bangkok: Phranakorn Nornlen



Welcome to
Phranakorn Nornlen

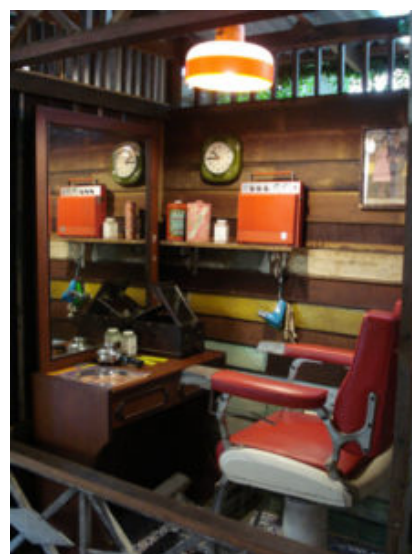
I spent days looking for somewhere decent to stay in Bangkok, Thailand. I googled: Hidden oasis and unknown gem – as I was determined to find a special, quiet place to relax after a long flight. I also wanted something affordable, luxurious yet with character and charm... I searched and searched and searched some more – it must exist.... I finally found it in [Phranakorn Nornlen](#).

I arrived with minimal expectations, and I realised I'd won the jackpot in having found one of the most enchanting places that I've ever stayed (as an avid traveller, this is saying something).

There is one big downside of [Phranakorn](#) Nornlen, that you may never want to leave! I know I didn't (I actually extended my first stay and made sure my return flight also passed through Bangkok so I could go back for a few days)

Every time I went into city of Bangkok, the hustling bustling busyness and masses of people got to me, so I'd run back the B&B, so I could spend more time there. Relaxing in their oasis of calm and tranquility.

It is located not too far from Kaosan road, which is a short 10 minutes walk wat – yet it's far enough away to avoid being touristy. Everything from the divine ginger tea, mouthwatering food, hangout area and small design details are beyond words.



Visit the barber shop

Downstairs is made up to be an old market, so you have antique mini stalls such as a barber shop, post office, corner store, sewing room etc. it is playful, charming and eclectic.

And don't get me started on the room design... each room is unique and is shabby chic meets industrial fun design. I especially love, the details such as murals on the wall of books shelves and butterflies. These look like they could come to life any second. Books lamp, handmade shower curtains, bed linen, in my room I even had an antique typewriter...

While my all time favorite part of staying at [Phranakorn Nornlen](#) is that they also do creative workshops; tie-dye, stamping, sewing or cooking. They have a timetable, pricing

and enough to keep you or the kids busy.



Old tuk tuk

Luckily for me I was gifted a small bag for staying more than two nights – filled with a hand cream, mosquito repellent and hand fan all came to good use over the course of my stay in Thailand.

There was also a lounge area downstairs with pillows, amidst plants, swings and an antique tuk tuk. People were quietly working on their laptop enjoying a local drink or just recharging their batteries before heading back out into the city for more site-seeing.

It may cost slightly more than normal Thai B&B, however I can honestly say it is worth every penny. [Phranakorn Nornlen](http://www.phranakorn-nornlen.com/) has not forgotten it's all in the details; from the homely service through to all it offers. It is an oasis in a city of craziness, a hidden gem, and a real treat.

If you are ever in Bangkok you know where to go and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

<http://www.phranakorn-nornlen.com/> even their site is cute ☺



The oasis garden



Bedroom murals



Enchanting
decor



Mural bookshelf



Oozing charm i



Token tuk tuk



Market hairdresser



Traditional Entrance



Butterfly

Going back in Time from Buenos Aires to Colonia de Sacramento

**Sometimes the best thing to
do in Buenos Aires is to get
out of town.**

Buenos Aires is many things; bustling and vibrant and at times

overwhelming.

When the city starts to feel crowded, the best thing to do in the city is to get out. And the quickest and easiest way to do this is to visit Colonia del Sacramento in Uruguay. Which is a hop skip and a boat ([buquebus](#)) ride away.

TIP: If it's a windy day take the normal boat and not the hydrofoil. Unless you have a hardy stomach and don't mind all the people around you who do not.

Go for a day – I promise it'll feel like a week. The benefits of time-travel.



Historic centre

Colonia is the polar opposite to Buenos Aires. The tranquillity and change of atmosphere is notable from the moment you disembark.

It's as though you've time-travelled back in time. To an era when people walk slower, talk slower and live slower. The antique cars seem to be stuck in a time-warp, to the point that they are sprouting weeds.

You can see these cars parked in front of the old colonial houses that add an artful flavour to the place. And turns even an amateur photographer into a professional.

It's a small pueblo (town), and while they'll try to rent you a bike, moped or car when you get off the boat, there's not a real need. Best advice is to get a map, turn to the left and mosey into town which is a mere 5 minute walk.

Visiting the UNESCO site of Colonia de Sacramento



Colourful houses of Colonia

The road leads you straight to the Porton de Campo, which is the Historic gateway into the old town center. It's in these cobblestone streets that all find quaint houses and places of interest.

While the whole town is a living museum, there is a wide array of small museums to cater for most every taste.


You can find these on the on the [Museums of Colonia website](#) along with their opening times and details.

For instance, there is the; Portuguese Museum, Ceramic Museum, Indigenous Museum, House of Nacarello (which also has a great little garden) and many more.

When you tire of the museums, the lighthouse is also worth a visit. If you're feeling energetic, you can climb to the top and get a view across town and the rivers murky waters.

Yet, with so much to do in such a small place, Colonia is where you've come to relax. So you may also skip the museums.

Be sure to Relax! Slow down and Enjoy.

 It's a barrio that inspires you to take your time, enjoy the gardens and the local charm, wind down, and relax. At this point, it might be time for a coffee or lunch.

The best spot for a coffee is a café on the waterfront called [Lenta Maravillas](#). It's a local house that its owners open a few days a week when it transforms into a cafe. And it's here where you will find the best cakes, décor, and food in Colonia.

While the décor is enchanting, the best spot is outside in the garden. where you can swing in a hammock or deck chair under the willow trees, while the sailing boats and clouds float on by.

The craziness of the big city is soon forgotten and already becoming a faint memory.

Once you've recharged, and regained your energy. There are a few of the artisan stores, on the 'Calle Real'. It's the best place to whittle away some time and dollars.



Modern and dated modes of transport

After more ambling on this lazy day, it's time to go and find somewhere to eat. Be sure to keep your eye out for restaurants offering asado (BBQ). One treat here that you won't find in Buenos Aires, is BBQ fish.

Finish off the day with a wander around the rest of town. Down along the harbour is a great mix of old house, ruins, and artwork.

To feel like you've been away for weeks, you can always spend the night. [Posada Plaza Major](#) is a lovely old hacienda and in a central spot in town.

Yet, even if you don't spend a night – you'll find that even after a mere day you'll feel like you've been away for weeks.

Recharged and ready to rock the big city once more. You'll

arrive back in Buenos Aires and be ready for a few more rounds of the bright big magical city.

 **Resources:**

[Buquebus Ferry & Bus Service](#) between Buenos Aires and Colonia a few times a day. Tip: Be sure to arrive with plenty of time for immigration and the process of queuing to reserve, pay, pick up ticket

[Museums in Colonia website](#)

[Playa Major Hotel](#)