

COUNTRY PROFILE
March 2006

ARGENTINA – SOCIAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARGENTINA – TOURISM FOR ALL

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Tourism has become over the last few years one of the most dynamic sectors of the national economy in Argentina and it will continue to play a high priority role in the future by the diversity of its products.

The National Tourism Law (Law N° 25.997), which has been adopted at the end of 2004 and considers tourism as a main factor for development, will certainly contribute to the growth of this sector.

During the summer season 2005 – 2006, more than 22 million tourists are expected to the holiday centres throughout Argentina, representing an increase of 6 to 7% compared to the previous season. Overall, between 32.7 and 33.7 million tourists are expected in the main tourist destinations of Argentina this year. In terms of incomes, this season should represent a total of 3.5 billion USD in inbound tourism and 4.6 billion USD in domestic tourism. The latter would represent an increase of 9.1% compared to the same period last year.

Moreover, the investments in the sector follow the increasing number of domestic and international tourist arrivals. In 2005, the investments in the accommodation sector reached over 1.1 billion USD and the same figure is estimated for this year. Nearly 460 million USD will be invested for the construction of more than 200 establishments.

In the Republic of Argentina, social tourism has started its development since 1945, when the right for paid holidays was recognized within the set of the worker's rights (Decree 33.302/45 ratified by law 12.921). This recognition combined with the support provided to the trade unions for their strengthening and managing capacity allowed a strong development of social tourism in Argentina.

Until the mid 1980s, social tourism has been characterized by the fact that the main targets were workers and their families and the main service providers were hotel units belonging to trade unions. In a country with full employment and a high affiliation rate to trade unions, it was possible. Moreover, the establishments could support high management costs as the annual occupancy rate was also very high.

As far as the public sector is concerned, it created an important infrastructure of services and developed proposals in the social tourism sector through the construction of National Tourist Units and, to a lesser extent, by contracting private services. The growth of social tourism in Argentina was constant until 1980. At that time, only in the province of Córdoba were located more than 240 establishments commonly called Holiday Camps providing accommodation with a capacity exceeding 36,000 beds, most of them belonging to trade union organizations.

It's interesting to note that, unlike European countries, the importance of self-management units of Social Tourism (associations, mutual society, religious institutions etc.) was not significant in Argentina.

In 1988 was created the Federal Council for Social Tourism, a public body integrated by specific official organisations from all Argentinean provinces, in charge of defining social tourism policies and strategies in each province, through exchanges, reciprocal conventions in accordance with the existing infrastructure in each jurisdiction.

Currently in the Republic of Argentina, the Federal Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism specifies as one of its main objectives, that tourism be recognized as a key social and economic activity for the development of the country but also that its practice be considered as a social right for the personal development of the people throughout the benefit of leisure time and travel in the country.

For that reason, the incoming tourism linked to the domestic and social tourism will only succeed its full achievement if all the population has access to tourism by overcoming the economic, social, and cultural obstacles. By turning tourism for the few into tourism for all in which disabled persons, students, seniors, and lower income families can fully participate to tourism activities with the support of the State, it will be possible to attend the social demand that has increased during the last few years and to allow a better distribution of the benefits generated by this activity.

That is why since January 2002, the occupancy rate has increased in the tourism units of Embalse Rio III and Chapadmalal which belong to the National Government. Within the framework of the Federal Programme, the Government is looking for new alternatives regarding the seasonality issue and a better distribution of the visitors which can be done by diversifying the products and services and by adding new destinations.

The Directorate of Tourism Services of the National Government manages two main programmes. One of them uses the State infrastructures, Embalse Rio III's and Chapadmalal's Tourism Units and the other one is carried out through the Federal Programme which integrates the private hotel sector with a main focus on small and medium-sized enterprises established in more than 20 destinations throughout the country, enabling numerous job creations and thus contributing to the regional development. These programmes imply the concrete implementation of the concept of Social Tourism as a tool in favour of a better equity towards the citizens excluded from the right to travel.

The practice of this right should be reached through the research and implementation of the relevant means and implies to define a real social tourism policy, to create infrastructures, develop systems of social help for unprivileged people, awareness-raising, staff training, etc.

Tourism services provided by the National Tourism Office are accessible through the Social Tourism Programmes designed for the population with lower income in order to ensure they can enjoy their holiday periods.

The Federal Tourism programme includes a five-night stay on half board in more than 100 hotels across the country.

National Tourism Units programmes include a six-night stay on full board designed for students, seniors, persons with distinct abilities, families, congresses or special events.

Chapadmalal's Tourism Unit is composed of 19 bungalows and 9 hotels classified as follows: 2 (two) "A" class hotels, 6 (six) "B" class hotels and 1 (one) for children 6-12 years old.

Embalse Rio III's Tourism Unit is made of 50 bungalows and 7 hotels: 2 (two) "A" class hotels and 5 (five) "B" class hotels. Among the bungalows, 11 consist of 3 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom, and service room. The other bungalows have two bedrooms, living room, bathroom and kitchen and are in a heaven-like location in the middle of a pine forest.

To better illustrate the evolution of Social Tourism over the last few years in Argentina, the following table presents the occupancy rate of the National Tourism Units and of the Federal Tourism Programme carried out by the Official Tourist Office. The figures show an increase of 330 % between 2000 and 2004 and an increase of 25 % between 2004 and 2005.

COMPARATIVE TABLE (TOURIST DAYS)

NATIONAL TOURIST UNITS AND FEDERAL PROGRAMME

	EMBALSE'S TOURISM UNIT	CHAPADMALAL'S TOURISM UNIT	FEDERAL PROGRAMME	TOTAL
Year 2000	79,750	99,559	29,850	209,159
Year 2004	297,548	303,657	85,344	686,549
Year 2005	322,821	390,187	135,372	848,380