



IN VINO VERITAS: After a challenging climb, enjoy some post-trail pampering with Mendoza-region wine.

Argentina, Uncorked

HIGH ROUTES AND HAUTE LIVING IN SOUTH AMERICA'S WILD WINE COUNTRY

Argentina's Aconcagua—at 22,835 feet, the highest peak outside the Himalaya—offers Seven Summits cachet without requiring crack mountain skills. But if you're short the three weeks needed to reach the summit, the awe-inspiring valleys in Aconcagua's shadow are an easy bus ride away from Mendoza, the region's base city and host to more than 80 percent of Argentina's wineries.

The classic trek is a three-day ascent to Plaza Francia—the closest most trekkers get to the top. At 13,500 feet, the plaza's stony plateau offers supreme views of the peak without the challenge of summiting. En route, you'll pass tumbling rivers, towering moraines, and spiked glaciers. On your descent, stop at the eerie Puente del Inca, a natural sulfur bridge over Río Mendoza, and soothe your feet in steamy hot springs.

What's best about Mendoza? A day begun at a high-altitude campsite can end in a century-old wine cellar with a celebrated glass of Malbec in hand. The region pairs New World wilderness with Old World refinement. And, with Argentine pesos still at three for the dollar, enjoying a little post-trail pampering has never been more guilt-free.

—Carolyn Whelan

EAT: Argentina's über-macho gaucho culture makes John Wayne look like Richard Simmons; beef cooked over an open flame is really, really big. Try an *asado* (barbecue) at Facundo (+54-261-420-2866) on Sarmiento Street.

SIP: Bodegas Escorihuela (www.escorihuela.com.ar) is one of the Argentine producers that consistently impresses the *Wine Spectator* crowd. Sample the Escorihuela Gascón with lunch (\$20) on-site at 1884, regarded as Latin America's best bistro.

SLEEP: Situated on Mendoza's lively Plaza Independencia, the stylish Hotel Argentino (\$50, includes breakfast; www.argentino-hotel.com) caters to urbanites up from Buenos Aires for a wine country weekend.



The Climb | Mount Aconcagua

Summitting Aconcagua is like going on a long hike with the wind knocked out of you. The summit (left) is nontechnical, but because of the high altitude and extreme cold, most trekkers hire a guide; Aventuras Patagónicas leads 20-day summit climbs (\$3,900; www.patagonicas.com). Xperience Aconcagua (\$155; www.aconcagua-xperience.com.ar) offers the trek to Plaza Francia mentioned above. Those who go it alone should allow three weeks and have extensive experience climbing peaks over 10,000 feet high in all types of weather. If you plan to hike without a guide, be sure to bring your own gear; outdoor equipment is expensive in Argentina.

—Sean Leslie