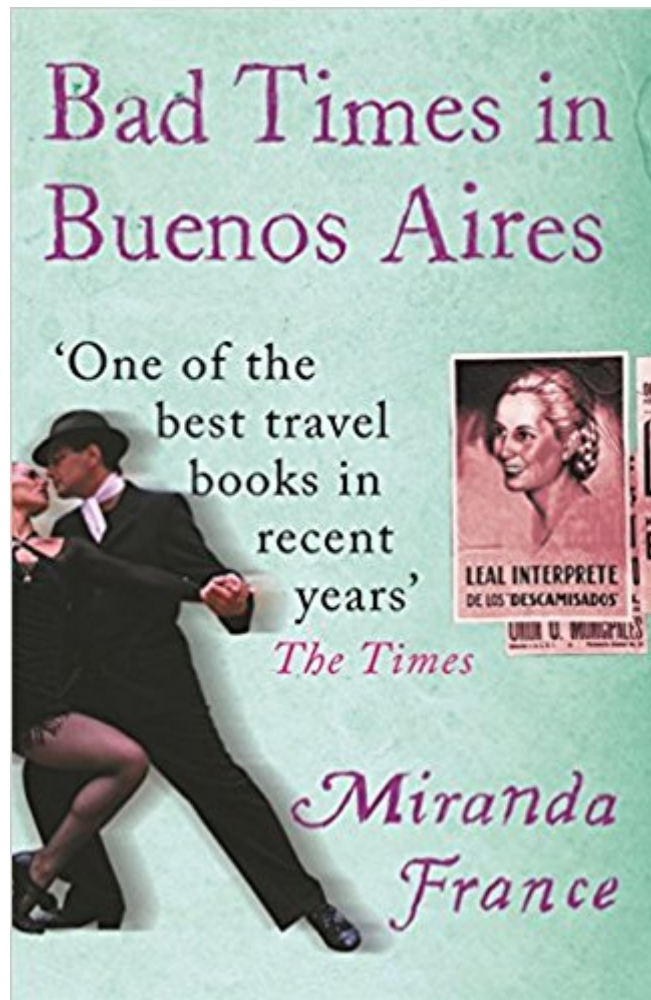




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Bad Times In Buenos Aires



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Synopsis

A funny and poignant account of life in Buenos Aires, by a young prize-winning writer. In 1993 Miranda France moved to South America, drawn to Buenos Aires as the intellectual hub of the continent, with its wealth of writers and its romantic, passionate and tragic history. She found that it was all these things, but it was also a terrible place to live. The inhabitants of Buenos Aires are famously unhappy. All over South America they are known for their arrogance, their fixation of Europe and their moodiness. Very soon, Miranda France encounters 'bronca' - the simmering and barely controllable rage that is a staple feature of life in the Argentinian capital. She finds that 'bronca' has deep roots: the violence and racism of the first European settlers; the dictatorships, especially in the 1970s when so many 'disappeared'; even Evita Peron, for there was no rage to rival Evita's.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Phoenix (an Imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd) (January 7, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0753805510

ISBN-13: 978-0753805510

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 46 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,616,850 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #43 in Books > Travel > South America > Argentina > Buenos Aires #178 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Argentina #646 in Books > Travel > South America > General

Customer Reviews

France, who moved to Buenos Aires in 1993 as a freelance journalist, entwines personal recollections with research and thoughtful descriptions to provide a fascinating glimpse into the Buenos Aires she experienced. For instance, we are introduced to Sylvia, who required English vocabulary to express her three main interests: food, love, and headaches. France also spent time floating with the Aymara Indians on their man-made island homes. Her narrative is fascinating, describing tragic historic events, the myths surrounding Evita Pern, obsessions with psychoanalysis, and Frances own inner debates as she explores a different culture. The article that was the foundation for this book won the Shiva Naipaul Memorial Prize for travel writing. A wonderfully

insightful journey into a city and its people; recommended for public libraries. Alison Hopkins, Queens Borough P.L., Briarwood, NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ah, the tango! And juicy beefsteaks as thick as your arm. And gorgeous people sitting in cafes minding other peoples' beauty while cultivating their own. What an exotic image Buenos Aires conjures in travelers' minds--until they actually visit the place, according to British journalist France, who spent time living in the Argentine capital in the early 1990s and came away with a pretty good impression. She remembers the building where she lived as "permeated with an air of disappointment," and it seems the atmosphere of the whole city has that smell. The memory of Eva Peron meets the visitor at every turn; there is no escaping the Argentinians' obsession with psychoanalysis; and the dictatorship of the 1970s left sores in society that still fester and bleed. The infrastructure is falling apart, and the elegant buildings that in decades past earned Buenos Aires the sobriquet "Paris of South America" are crumbling. Read France's book, but if you still find the idea of Buenos Aires intriguing, by all means go and find out for yourself! Brad Hooper --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I think the title of this book is a bit of a misnomer. And this book probably belongs in the travel literature genre. Author Miranda France describes her interactions and observations while in Buenos Aires, and she adds some background. Argentines and others will take issue with some of the background presented. I think Buenos Aires will always be an enigma for outsiders. France spent time in Buenos Aires during the early part of the Argentine economic crisis, which occurred from 1999 to 2002. This was a great historical event that people in many countries can now relate to and understand. At that time the facts of the Argentine debt default were for the most part virtually unknown outside the country. It was easy to assume that economic problems somehow stemmed from the national character of Argentines. It's my view that France made some of these assumptions, but I think I could have done the same at that time (although not now, I believe). The description of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo was informative. These are Argentine mothers of children that were "disappeared" during the Dirty War from 1976 to 1983. I saw many of them during one of my visits to Buenos Aires and their pain was palpable. This is a reminder that in our times even the most civilized places can experience drastic political changes and brutal violence. France describes the tango, the slimness of Argentine women and many things that enchant everybody that visits Buenos Aires. In many respects I've never been in such a civilized city.

I'm so glad I found this book. I spent some time in Buenos Aires almost 10 years after this book was published. I don't speak very much Spanish and was shamefully ignorant of the history of the city. However, I am very sensitive and observant. I came away from my stay there with a negative impression of BA and its people. I found this feeling to be validated on page 100 of the book when France quotes Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, "Argentine tristeza is so elementary, nay massive a powerfulness, that it at once conquers any sensitive newcomer;" To spare any feelings from being hurt, I won't divulge the details of my experience or give my brutally honest opinion. In sum, I found this book to be validating and informative. I appreciate France's honesty, it certainly helped me. I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders. For years, I just couldn't figure out why I had such a bad time in Buenos Aires, why didn't I enjoy the city and my time there like I have other large cities all over the world. This book clarifies many feelings and perceptions that I had and now I know that I wasn't just making things up in my mind. I also found France to be a very good writer and would have enjoyed this book even if I hadn't visited BA before reading it. She writes beautifully and captures the complexities of BA and life in general in an intelligent and fluid manner. I tried to understand the sting that this book may have had for natives in BA. I guess I got a little feel of it when she wrote about the American tourists visiting Eva Peron's grave site. She sounded judgmental and snide in her description. I didn't take this personally though. After all, this is her book and her experience and she was just reflecting what she saw and heard. How can one fault her for that?

If you want a travel or tour book for Buenos Aires, don't buy this book. You will be disappointed. It is more a series of essays about the author's living in Bs As for a period of about a year. As such, it gives some insight into certain social and economic conditions in Argentina ranging from *vivenza criolla* (Creole cunning), to the "Dirty War," the war against Britain for the Falkland Islands, tango, and many other topics. I read this book as a tanguero whose instructors have returned to Bs As on an annual basis. We have a concern about what is happening in Argentina. We have friends who live there. The information in "Bad Times in Buenos Aires" is quite timely in view of a recent currency devaluation, currency restrictions, and multiple business and personal bankruptcies and personal tragedies. There has been a concern about economic conditions for years. One did not really need a crystal ball to be able to predict what was going to happen. Although written by a journalist, it gives some insight into both social and economic matters. I find myself asking why bad things happened in Argentina. Not too long ago, Argentina had an economy that was stronger than

that of either Canada or France. Many things that happened in Argentina also happened in Chile [military dictatorship, economic problems, and citizens who disappeared], but with a different result. Inquiring minds want to know why. I wanted to know why. No book has all the answers, but it provides a good starting place for discussion. I value "Bad Times in Buenos Aires" for the insight it has given me. It is not the kind of book that would ever make me decide not to go to Buenos Aires. Quite the contrary, it would encourage me to go and open my eyes to something other than dance lessons and milongas in San Telmo and other tango venues. As tourists, we often tend to be short-sighted and see only the things that tour organizers want us to see. We need to do more and develop the sensitivity to understand another country and its people. With international understanding and cooperation, problems can be solved. However, we must remember that problems are solved by the collective action of many people, not just leaders and employees of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and multi-national corporations. It also takes individual citizens. It may help if you go to Buenos Aires on your annual vacation.

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