

▪ City Break

Music at the end of the world

Ushuaia, located at the tip of South America, is the southernmost city in the world and since 2005, has been building its reputation as a hub for world class music acts and festivals.

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PHOTO GORRIS



PHOTO LAS HAYAS RESORT HOTEL

In recent years, music has become another big draw to this world's southernmost city; (facing page) Tierra del Fuego has long captivated visitors with its stunning landscapes and ice-capped peaks



PHOTO FACUNDO SANTANA

Ushuaia

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(From top) A ride on the Tren del Fin Del Mundo steam train is a great way to view Ushuaia's wonders as it puffs along a hilly route and covers many areas that are inaccessible by foot; the city clings to the shore of Tierra del Fuego; a sign proclaiming Ushuaia as the city at 'the end of the world'; (facing page) Ushuaia launched its first jazz festival this year

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emoteness seems to define Argentina's far-south settlement of Ushuaia. Some 3,200 kilometres from Buenos Aires and very far indeed from the rest of the world, the city clings to the shore of wind-swept Tierra del Fuego, at the very tip of South America. It is squeezed

between the jagged Martial mountain range and the gunmetal waters of the Beagle Channel, where near-incessant gales howl in from Patagonia's untamed steppe, and snowstorms can descend from icy Andean peaks even at the height of summer. Head any further south and the next stop is Antarctica.

Yet here, in the world's most southerly city, a cultural revival is starting to draw musicians, artists and chefs from Europe, Asia and North America. In a region known for untamed nature, pioneer culture and sheep farming, Ushuaia is emerging as an unlikely cultural hub.

Southern symphony

"As the southernmost city in the world, Ushuaia has become an international brand," explains Hernán Román, an event producer who helped launch an annual classical music festival in Ushuaia in 2005. "At best, the city's remote location was once seen as a mixed blessing. Now, it's become an asset, a unique selling point. Other cities in Argentina have their plus points – their history, their architecture, their natural beauty – but only Ushuaia is city at the end of the world."



Tourists seem to agree. Hikers and climbers have long been drawn by Tierra del Fuego's challenging trails and ice-capped peaks; in-the-know fly fishermen, too, have long valued the monster-sized trout and salmon to be found in the island's glacier-fed streams and lakes. Only in recent years, however, has Ushuaia become a must-do destination for mainstream tourists.

Some 300,000 vacationers arrived last year, adding USD130 million to the city's coffers. Visitor numbers are rising by 15 percent each year, as winter skiers increasingly



favour the challenging runs and guaranteed snow at Cerro Castor, just 26 kilometres from town, and as burgeoning Antarctic tourism has turned Ushuaia's port into a busy re-supply stop for polar-bound cruise liners and yachts.

Indeed, it was Ushuaia's emergence as one of Argentina's most popular tourist destinations that spurred the city's first classical music festival, the **Festival Internacional de Ushuaia**, in April 2005. Argentine conductor Jorge Uliarte, who now presides over the Berlin Symphonic Orchestra, had long harboured a desire to bring world-class classical music to Patagonia's southern reaches. "Jorge was conducting with Georg Solti at the Salzburg Festival in Austria, and believed he could apply that festival's model to Argentina," said Hernán.

Jorge took the reins as artistic director, gaining the patronage of Salzburg city authorities and winning enough commercial sponsorship and government interest to put his plans into practice. Since 2005, the 15-day festival has gained stature each year, showcasing opera, chamber music and solo recitals by some of the world's premier musicians. Headline concerts have seen Jorge conduct large-scale symphonic works with leading orchestras from Prague, Berlin and Moscow.

Cool culture

Tierra del Fuego's austere topography and sheer isolation deterred settlers for far longer than in Argentina's more pastoral regions. Charles Darwin journeyed along its shoreline ▶



The pioneer culture

Lucas Bridges is perhaps the best known of Patagonia's pioneers. His father, an English missionary, came to Tierra del Fuego in 1869 to convert the island's now-extinct Yamana, Aush and Ona tribes to Christianity. Lucas was born in the tiny house his father built on the site that would later become Ushuaia. As a child, he grew up with Yamana boys as playmates, speaking their language and hunting side-by-side for guanaco. In 1886, when the Argentine state gifted the family a plot of land some 85km to the east, they set up the island's first farm, **Estancia Harberton** (Email estancia_harberton@yahoo.com). Lucas later described his childhood vividly in *Uttermost Part of the Earth*, the autobiography he penned in 1948, a year before his death. Both Harberton and Estancia Viamonte, a sister property, remain in the hands of Bridges' descendants, and accept paying guests.

PHOTOS FACUNDO SANTANA

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in the 1830s – the channel would later take the name of his ship, the HMS Beagle – but it was only in 1870 that English missionaries set up an outpost to convert the island's now-extinct indigenous inhabitants to Christianity. Even after Ushuaia was officially incorporated in 1884, it spent the next 60 years as little more than a penal colony. Only in the early 20th century did determined pioneers clear enough of Tierra del Fuego's dense forests of lenga and coihue, varieties of southern beech, to support large-scale sheep farming.

Yet the city's tough past has receded sufficiently that its symbols have become tourist attractions in their own right. Fuegian pioneer culture is best displayed at **El Almacén de Ramos Generales**, an atmospheric cafe housed in a

“HEAD ANY FURTHER SOUTH AND THE NEXT STOP IS ANTARCTICA”

1906-built general store, where tools, toys and mementos fill the floor-to-ceiling shelves. Even the penal colony is now a museum hosting exhibitions of maritime and Antarctic art, and the steam train its prisoners were forced to build has become the tourist-oriented **Tren del Fin del Mundo** – the Train at the End of the World.



(Clockwise from top) The Martial mountain range cloaked in snow; the city's much-lauded classical music festival began in 2005; catamaran and yacht rides are popular activities on the Beagle Channel



Today, visitors come to take day trips along the **Beagle Channel** in catamarans or chartered yachts, marvelling at the sea lions and Magellanic penguins that bob in their wake, their passage marked by giant petrels and black-browed albatrosses. Some foray into the island's glacier-scoured interior on horseback or mountain bike, ascend the Vinciguerra or Martial glaciers – a chairlift eases the ascent to the latter, and provides an unparalleled bird's-eye view of the Beagle Channel – or search for Andean condors and guanaco, a wild and woolly cousin of the llama, in **Tierra del Fuego National Park**.

Others are content to soak up the frontier spirit that lies just beneath Ushuaia's surface. Stroll a few blocks from **Avenida San Martín**, the bustling main boulevard, for instance, and you'll see unpaved streets with houses patched together from mismatched planks and corrugated zinc. There is charm in the ruggedness:

Each building is washed in shades of seashell, honey or lime, each garden boasts a colourful patch of lupins that somehow survive the fearsome winters.

A musical link to the future

Sandra Ruiz Díaz set out to harness these two sides of Ushuaia, its rough and its smooth, when she launched the city's first jazz festival, **Jazz at the End of the World**, this year. She aimed, she says, to strike a balance between local and international talent, and strove to form bridges, not divisions, between residents and visitors.

“Ushuaia has become a kind of international city,” says Ruiz Díaz, who also runs Fundación Inti Main, a non-profit group



PHOTOS FUNDACION INTI MAIN



PHOTO FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE USHUAIA

(Below) Jorge Uliarte, artistic director of the Festival Internacional de Ushuaia; (right) Las Hayas Restaurant offers fine dining and sweeping views of the city and the peaks of Chile's Isla Navarino



PHOTO LAS HAYAS RESORT HOTEL

promoting local culture. “To live here means to be surrounded by the yachts, airplanes, languages and aromas of the outside world. At the same time, it serves no one to favour visitors over locals. I believe that projects designed for tourists can also become part of the everyday structure of residents' lives.”

Held in June, at the height of the southern hemisphere winter, the festival saw hundreds of Argentine and international skiers packing the city's pubs to listen to jam sessions by some of South America's hippest jazz acts. Every space in town, it seemed, was filled with a photography show, documentary screening, workshop or talk on the subject of jazz. Headline acts were broadcast on television throughout Latin America.

“The repercussion has been tremendous, both within Argentina and around the world,” says Ruiz Díaz. “It's really helped to put Ushuaia and its people on the map.”

Guide to Ushuaia



GETTING THERE

Malaysia Airlines flies from Kuala Lumpur to Buenos Aires twice weekly



STAY

Set three kilometres above town on the beech-carpeted slopes of Cerro Martial, **Las Hayas Resort Hotel** (Avenida Luis Fernando Martial 1650 Tel +54 2901 430 710 www.lashayashotel.com) affords sweeping views of the city, the Beagle Channel and the mysterious peaks of Chile's Isla Navarino beyond. The 93-room hotel squeezes maximum mileage from its imposing location: A comfortable lounge stretches the length of the building; bar, fireside den and restaurant all share the same view. **Los Cauquenes Resort & Spa** (Bahía Cauquen Tel +54 2901 441 300 www.loscauquenesushuaia.com.ar), which opened last year, is only first five-star property on the Beagle Channel shoreline.



EAT Chez Manú

(Avenida Luis Fernando Martial 2135 Tel +54 2901 432 253) applies French technique to local produce; the black hake, a local delicacy, is superbly presented. **Tía Elvira** (Maipú 349 Tel +54 2901 424 725 www.tiaelvira.com) has been serving no-nonsense seafood on the Ushuaia waterfront for three decades. King crab, grilled salmon, and trout dominate the menu at waterfront **Restaurant Küar** (Avenida Perito Moreno 2232 Tel +54 2901 437 396 www.kuar.com.ar). Housed in a

recently renovated, 1906-built general store, newcomer **El Almacén de Ramos Generales** (Maipú 749 Tel +54 2901 424 317 www.ramosgeneralesushuaia.com) is coffeehouse, bakery and wine bar combined.



DO Ushuaia International Music Festival

(www.festivaldeushuaia.com) is a presentation of classical music, held each April, while **Jazz at the End of World** (www.jazzalfinushuaia.blogspot.com) takes place in June every year. Visit the **Ushuaia Penal Colony** (Tel +54 2901 436 321 www.museumaritimom.com) for an extensive collection of maritime and Antarctic art. The former prisoners' steam railway, the **Tren del Fin Del Mundo** (Tel +54 2901 431 6000 www.trendelfindelmundo.com.ar), offers daily departures all year. Catamaran voyages on the Beagle Channel pass sea lion colonies en route to the **Les Eclaireurs lighthouse** (Tel +54 2901 421 139 www.rumbosur.com.ar).



BEST TIME TO VISIT

Spring (September–November) and summer (December–March) are the most agreeable seasons for hiking and climbing; the ski season peaks between June and August.



VISITOR'S INFORMATION

www.argentinaturistica.com