

Frommer's[®]

Argentina



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1st Edition

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Christie Pashby*

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El Cencerro ★★★ Smaller, cozier, and more rustic than some of the other places listed here, this working *estancia* will make you feel like you're part of the farm's daily goings-on. It's owned by Buenos Aires-based psychologist Liliana Herbstein, who spends her weekends here. The ranch takes its name from the *cencerro*, a bell used by gauchos to tame horses. Rooms and public areas are filled with antiques and odd objects Liliana and her husband Eduardo have collected over the years, including antique luggage from Liliana's family's old store in Buenos Aires. Eduardo is an architect and artist whose work also hangs throughout the main house. Activities include horseback riding, helping with the animals if you want, carriage rides, bicycle rides, and trekking. Only 3km (2 miles) away is the historical Capilla del Señor, a charming town established in the early 1700s. You can walk or bike there on your own, or ask

for optional guided tours. Similar to San Antonio de Areco in feel, it's virtually unknown to non-Argentines, and thus more authentic. Real gauchos wander the downtown, going about their business after a day tending cattle. Every second Tuesday of the month, the town has an animal auction, which Liliana attends with some of her guests. The area is also the center of Argentine ballooning, offered as an option for another \$80 (£44). Four bedrooms, some with shared bath, are in the main house, where Liliana also spends her time, making you feel like a guest in her private home. By the end of 2007, they will have added four more rooms designed by Eduardo. One of the charms of this property is the wooded creek flowing through it; it makes a relaxing place for a nap, a picnic, or an afternoon spent reading or listening to the water and the cows in the distance. The property is 21 hectares (52 acres). You can access the *estancia* by bus from Buenos Aires to Capilla del Señor and then a \$4 (£2.10) taxi ride. By *remise* from Buenos Aires, 80km (50 miles) away, it's about \$45 (£24).

Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta 39; 2812 Capilla del Señor. ☎ 11/4743-2319 or 11/15-6093-2319 (in Buenos Aires). www.estanciaelcencerro.com.ar. 4 units. From \$95 (£50) including all meals and some drinks; \$45 (£24) day rate includes lunch. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; bicycles; game rooms; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; bird-watching; carriage riding; horseback riding. *In room:* Ceiling fan.

PAMPAS & ESTANCIAS

San Antonio is a popular base for exploring Argentina's famous *estancias*, which doubled historically as both farms and fortresses, built throughout the country along trails from Buenos Aires as a means of conquering and stabilizing territory originally controlled by the Indians. The majority of Argentina's *estancias* date from the middle to late 1800s. After General Roca's Campaign of the Desert in the 1870s, in which he murdered most of the Indian population within 150 miles of Buenos Aires, *estancia* culture, and the cattle and grain tended on them, flourished. Despite the bloody history that gave birth to them, today they're seen as a retreat from the chaos and stress of Buenos Aires. They are popular among Porteños on weekends or for day trips. With the increasing boom of tourism to Argentina, many foreigners are beginning to delight in them as well.

Most of the *estancias* listed here are a half-hour from San Antonio, and no more than 2 hours from Buenos Aires. You can drive to all of them on your own, or use a bus service from Buenos Aires to San Antonio and then catch a taxi from there. For a fee in the range of \$50 (£28), almost all the *estancias* will also provide transportation from your hotel or the airport in Buenos Aires. Because many *estancias* are accessed by dirt roads, it is advisable to rent a 4WD vehicle, especially if rain is predicted during the time of your visit. The websites of the *estancias* listed here post detailed driving maps.

Services and features vary, but the atmosphere at most *estancias* is a cross between a rustic resort and a bed-and-breakfast. Nothing relieves stress like a day or a few in the country, and horseback riding, trekking, lounging by the pool, and eating and drinking aplenty are all part of a day's work in the Pampas. In general, the rates for *estancias* include a full board of four meals—breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner—and sometimes all drinks including alcohol. Lunch, the highlight of a dining experience on an *estancia*, is usually an *asado* or barbecue where everyone, including the workers, gathers to socialize. Day rates generally include only lunch and limited activities. Most *estancias* are real working farms, with hundreds of acres and cows, horses, and other animals attended by real gauchos (not all of whom dress in the traditional way). If you're in the mood to milk a cow or watch the birth of colt, you just might have the chance.

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