

Down To Earth Urban Bike Tours

by: Kelsey Marie Bell | 30 July 2009

section: [The Tourist](#)

Maybe it's the result of too many field trips in primary school, but for whatever reason I have an extreme aversion to group tours. Shuffling around a busy city in a crowd of strangers while straining to hear a guide speak is just not for me.

There has to be another way. And, in a city full of creativity, of course there is: enter the world of bike tours, and the company Urban Biking.

Based in the city of Buenos Aires the company offers four distinct tours, two of which are half-day (four hours long) and run twice a day, everyday, at 9am and 2pm. A tour of northern Buenos Aires, appropriately called, "The North," covers Retiro, Barrio Parque, Palermo Woods, Palermo Soho, and Recoleta. The other half-day tour offered, "The South," covers the city's southern areas, Puerto Madero, the city's ecological reserve, La Boca, San Telmo and Plaza de Mayo. An additional tour, "Porteño Nightlife," sets off at 9pm in order to let tourists see the city lit up at night. Finally, a full-day tour in Tigre lets participants explore the island by land and by sea, adding kayaking to the mix.

While the price of this full-day option seems pretty steep at US\$ 82, and the nighttime tour running US\$45, the two daytime tours are each US\$35. After doing some internet research, I found that the daytime tour price is about the same as that charged by other companies offering the same service. Figuring that would be the better deal I opted for the tour 'The South'.

A little after 2pm on a Sunday I arrive at the e-mailed meeting point of Santa Fe 702, 'Museo de Armas'. I spot a group of five people clustered around six bicycles. Pleasantly surprised by the smallness of our group, I introduce myself and am handed a complimentary bottle of water and helmet for the day. Everyone is dressed pretty casually, a mix of jeans, kakis and sweatpants, letting on that we are in for an easy ride.

Kickstands up, we're off towards Puerto Madero. As we gaze from the pier towards *El Puente de la Mujer*, our group is told about the nineteenth century construction of the port and its revival as a result of foreign investment. There's time for photos and then we push through the Sunday crowds to ride on towards the ecological reserve. I linger towards the back of our pack to practice some Spanish with the guide bringing up the rear. Having just heard that the neglected grassy plot of land in front of me is one of many spaces that had been cleared out for a bridge-to-nowhere type project commissioned by the dictatorship, we begin to talk history and politics.



Photo by Stephanie Santana



Photo by Stephanie Santana

The conversation continues as we ride through, not around, some of the rougher spots in La Boca. I'm impressed that the guides take us on a route that lets us see some of the grit and poverty that lies beyond the explosion of colour and feigned elegance of Caminito. When we all sit down to chat and enjoy *mate* and *alfajores*, I get the feeling that our guides genuinely like giving the bike tours. They seem interested in imparting to us the reality of Buenos Aires and the subtleties that have shaped the city. In any tourist type situation there's an often uncomfortable dynamic at play, but here I feel treated like an equal with my guides. This is something in itself that makes the experience more memorable than similar other activities in which I've taken part.

Urban Biking Tours include Bike, helmet, tour guide, mate, alfajores, a bottle of water, and traveller's insurance for the duration of the tour. Private bike tours of the city of Buenos Aires during the day are offered for US\$ 70, at night US\$90 and of Tigre for US\$162. Tours can be booked, and paid for via PayPal and some major credit cards online.

For more information about Urban Biking call 4568 4321, e-mail info@urbanbiking.com, or visit the website: <http://en.urbanbiking.com>

Revista Argentines

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