

# gringo

## JIN BA

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**G**ringo isn't exactly the most flattering term. It's certainly not a word I would use to describe myself.

I don't wear a fanny pack. I don't wander through Latin America in khaki shorts and sensible shoes. I don't travel to foreign countries without learning any of the language and expect people to understand English just because I'm speaking slowly. I'm not loud. I don't own anything with an American flag on it. I'm not one of *those* Americans. Sure, plenty of *those* Americans might visit Buenos Aires, but for the most part they don't live here. Part of the reason I moved to Buenos Aires was to get away from *those* Americans. After all, I like to think of myself as a cosmopolitan citizen of the world. I read the newspaper. I went to college – in Berkeley. I criticize the United States all the time. I speak fluent Spanish. I should blend right in here in Buenos Aires.

### OR NOT

Although I've loved my time in Buenos Aires, with each passing day I feel more and more American. No matter how many giant steaks I eat or *punchi-punchi* anthems invade my eardrums, there's a limit to just how Argentinian I can be. The reason why? Social norms. There's just no way around the fact that I love tried and true American standards like customer service, efficiency, safety and the ability to get change.

Can someone please explain why getting change is borderline impossible in Buenos Aires? All the ATMs give out \$100 bills, yet no one is willing to change them. Even at places like the supermarket, requests for change are often met with sighs, eye rolling or a simple refusal to complete the transaction.

Restaurants will usually give change, although getting to a waiter to pay attention to you is a whole different matter. Even with huge wait staffs and set menus, it takes forever to finish a meal in Buenos Aires. Although I certainly enjoy eating leisurely, I would happily skip waiting for half an hour to make eye contact with my waiter just so I can ask for the check. Of course, the waiters can't be held responsible for the local cuisine. Food in Buenos Aires can be quite good, even excellent. The beef lives up to the hype, the pasta and pizza is top

shelf and the ice cream is probably the best I've ever tasted. Miga sandwiches and choripans are delicious snacks. Beyond that, Buenos Aires is in serious trouble. For some reason, vegetables only seem to be available in puree form or after they have been breaded and fried. Ethnic foods are an unmitigated disaster. Why is only salmon sushi available? At least public transportation is widely available, not to mention inexpensive. Unfortunately, navigating the countless bus lines can be quite tricky, even with the help of the *Guia T*. Riding the *subte* is easier, although it inexplicably closes at 10:30pm and the various lines only intersect downtown. Taxis are always readily available, which is great except for the times when the cab driver hears your accent and decides to take the scenic route. There's also the possibility of them driving you into a dark alley and robbing you. To be fair though, most drivers fall under the category of "slightly sketchy" rather than "dangerous maniac." Actually though, "maniac" just might be the right word to describe the average driver in Buenos Aires. Swerving cars, rolling stops and ignoring lanes are all commonplace, as are horrific accidents. Where are all the stop signs in residential areas? Pedestrians literally take their lives into their own hands just by crossing the street. For some reason, oncoming traffic seems to speed up whenever I cross the street. However, assuming that I don't get run over, I plan to stay in Buenos Aires. I love it here. There's a blooming art and music scene to enjoy, more ice cream to eat, new neighborhoods to explore and a whole lot more to discover. I know that some of my discoveries may offend my gringo sensibilities – sensibilities I didn't even know I had before I got to Buenos Aires. But I'm sticking it out in this city. Honestly, it shouldn't be too hard in the gorgeous tree-lined streets of Palermo that I call home. 