

ARGENTINA | 275 WATERFALLS

Iguazu Falls affords stunning views from trail, boat and walkway

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

We're surrounded by a fairytale landscape of multi-layered cataracts, interspersed with basalt cliff faces and deep green, jungle-like rainforest.

Iguazu Falls is so expansive that every time we round a corner on the network of paths, we're faced with yet another stunning scene.

Iguazu boasts a string of superlatives from UNESCO World Heritage Site to one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature in a worldwide vote in 2011 (www.new7wonders.com).

What sets Iguazu apart from other famous waterfalls is that this is not just one wall of water, but a series of 275 cataracts that stretch for almost three kilometres.

The wide Parana River takes a sharp curve, flooding a huge area resembling a small lake, then plunges 80 metres over a horseshoe-shaped fault line.

The falls straddle the Argentina-Brazil border with national parks and visitor facilities on both sides.

Most falls are on the Argentina side,



Waterfalls plunge over the fault lines at Iguazu Falls, which straddles the border of Argentina and Brazil. | ARLENE AND ROBIN KARPAN PHOTO

where it is generally easier and cheaper to visit.

The tourist town of Puerto Iguazu has plenty of accommodation and other services and is close to the park. We walk trails and boardwalks above the tops of falls where we peer over the drop, then follow paths along the base of the walls of water and to intermediate levels where

we're doused by constant spray.

If that's not wet enough for you, boat trips head right underneath the falls for a proper soaking.

The highlight is at the far end of the park, reached by a 20-minute trip on a miniature railway, not much bigger than a kids' amusement park ride. At the end, we follow a kilometre-long walkway right over the river

to the Devil's Throat.

An observation deck looks over the brink and into the depths of the narrow end of the powerful crescent-shaped 80-metre drop. The awesome force of the water, deafening roar and clouds of spray add to the devilish aura.

The river is lined by sub-tropical rainforest, where we follow other trails through stands of bamboo, palms and mixed woods. An array of birds and butterflies abound and the occasional capuchin monkey peeks through the canopy.

Signs showing a coiled snake don't need any translation, making it clear that you should stay on the trail.

Seeing coatis is practically guaranteed. These sly, raccoon-like critters with long tails and pointy noses are notorious for trying to snatch your food.

Iguazu's most iconic wildlife is the great dusky swift. These small birds constantly dart around the falls, then suddenly seem to disappear. They fly right through the torrents of water to roost and nest on the cliff faces behind the falls.

Curious behaviour at first glance, but it's the ideal haven where no

predators can reach them.

From the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires, the falls are 1,400 kilometres northeast. Just getting there turned out to be half the fun.

Instead of flying, we opted for an overnight bus. Sixteen hours on a bus isn't normally our idea of a good time, but we were quickly won over by Argentina's luxury intercity buses.

Most are double-decker, with seats the size of first class on airlines. The seat back folds down and the footstool folds out, which turns it into a bed.

Shortly after we left Buenos Aires, the bus attendant came around with champagne. Then supper was served, accompanied by a nice Argentine wine. Before bedtime, the attendant came around again, this time offering a whiskey or liqueur nightcap.

With city centre to city centre service and fares a fraction of the cost of flying, this soon became our preferred way of travelling around the country.

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