



Argentine tourist trains

The foundations of the Argentine communication system have been laid down in rail systems' blueprints¹. Trains have always been an indispensable factor, for production and leisure as well. Along the northern borders, there's one of the world's most beautiful places – the Quebrada de Humahuaca. Before colonial times, this area was a very important part of the Inca Empire, as it is an oasis in the middle of arid land. The need to establish a fluent communication with Chile's mine production brought the rail system to this area in the times of Independence. The result was the amazing *Tren de las nubes*, **train of the clouds**, built in several stages between 1921 and 1948. More than 500 km of rails open the path to an amazing journey through the clouds, whose last stop is *La polvorilla*. Running at more than 4,000 mts above the sea level, the train appears to ride on air as it crosses the viaduct² of the same name. The journey is a lifetime experience and can be done all year long – although during winter there are some parts that are not accessible. All ten coaches are moved by a diesel locomotive. Comfort is a must and passengers can enjoy the ride without worrying about anything.

Another incredible train ride can be experienced near the border with Brazil. The **rainforest train** (*Tren de la selva*) runs all the way through the national park of Iguazú, to one of America's greatest falls – the Iguazú Falls. These gigantic red-watered falls in the middle of the rainforest are just a beautiful spectacle available all year round, though in summer the temperature can easily reach 45 °C.

Travelling south from Buenos Aires, there's a must for those who want to travel through Patagonia. Known all over the world because of its cross path, *La trochita*, the **Old Patagonian Express** is a 750-mm narrow gauge³ railway using steam locomotives. It is 402 km in length and runs through the foothills of the Andes. Nowadays, with its original character largely unchanged, it operates as a heritage railway and was made internationally famous by Paul Theroux's book *The Old Patagonian Express* (1978). This train is not only a circulation service to witness amazing sights, but living history as the wagons are the original 1922 ones.

(Adapted from www.buzzle.com)

GLOSSARY

- 1** models or prototypes
- 2** a series of spans or arches used to carry a road or railroad over a wide valley or over other roads or railroads.
- 3** the distance between the two rails of a railroad



Old Patagonian Express

ACTIVITIES

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 Why was the Quebrada de Humahuaca important before colonial times?
- 2 Why was the train of the clouds built?
- 3 When can you plan your trip by the train of the clouds?
- 4 What is the rainforest train?
- 5 What is the Old Patagonian Express internationally famous for?
- 6 Why is the Old Patagonian Express a heritage railway?