



A Trip to Argentina

The day after Tom's question I started to prepare for my business trip to Argentina. Buenos Aires, the city in which I would arrive, wasn't really my favorite place in the world. It had great architecture and atmosphere, but its traffic and pollution seemed to overshadow everything.

Each time I was in Argentina it astonished me how macho egos dominated the business arena. Challenged by a growing mountain of economic and organizational problems, Argentinean businessmen were constantly searching for solutions. Ironically, however, when someone from another country shared how other companies or countries had successfully dealt with similar situations, the Argentinean businessmen would almost always reply that such solutions and methods could not work for them. After all, their situation was very unique!

Defensively, they would argue how they had absolutely no hand in creating the problems and issues at hand, then explain why they were truly unique and could not be compared with others. Subsequently, they would discard all the potential solutions that had been offered, and feel sorry for themselves all over again. Not *all* Argentinean businessmen were like that, but I met quite a few in Buenos Aires with just such an attitude.

However, if the focus of the conversation was turned away from business, political and economic issues to social, environmental and philosophical topics, the Argentineans were great conversational partners. They are a great people, but I just wish that their women were more dominant in business and politics. The businesswomen

with whom I dealt were always eager to get things resolved. They were smart and not afraid to copy things from other countries or industries if that could solve their problems. I am certain that Argentinean men have the same skills and drive, but many times their macho mentality clouded the issues.

Still, I was excited about this trip since I would have to travel outside of the capital, Buenos Aires, to Salta, a small provincial town at the base of the Andes Mountains in the northwest of Argentina. As I knew from traveling in other countries, the atmosphere and mentality in a country's capital can be very different from the rest of the nation, and this is certainly the case in developing countries. This visit to Salta would give me an opportunity to get to know Argentineans outside of Buenos Aires.

The purpose of my trip was to visit a small hotel and meet with its owners, managers and staff to evaluate the potential of their hotel to join the multinational hospitality corporation for which I worked. As a hotel developer, I had traveled half the globe during the last ten years. Friends and family always offered to come along and carry my suitcases, for no one realized how few opportunities I had to really see something of the countries I visited during these trips. Such travel was merely strenuous on my body and stressful in terms of my family life.

But this trip was different. It would be more than walking through airports, sitting in planes, getting into taxis and meeting with people in conference rooms somewhere in a big city. This was one of those trips during which I would get to see some of the country and meet some of the provincial natives.

Later that day I left from Calgary airport and connected early in the evening in Chicago to Buenos Aires. After takeoff, the monotonous sound of the airplane engine put me to sleep somewhere high above North America. Then, boom! I suddenly woke up. Boom, boom! The plane was going through some heavy turbulence, and I guessed we were somewhere above the Amazon. I had noticed on previous trips there was almost always heavy turbulence above the rainforest.

As I tried to fall asleep again, Tom's question came back into my mind. Why *do* people have to pay for food? Why *do* we allow hunger to exist in our society? Surely there's enough food on this planet to feed everyone! Actually, I had seen an abundance of food in some of the poorest countries in Central America as a result of their tropical climate. How did a minority population in the world obtain the right to the majority of the world's food resources? Why do we allow people—children—to be hungry? With these questions flying through my head, I eventually dozed off again.