



NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDES | SAN TELMO



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Buenos Aires



San Telmo

San Telmo: You've read about its history, you've heard about its beauty, now let's find out about its glory. San Telmo is a *barrio* of cobblestone streets and old-fashioned street lamps, century-old colonial buildings and modern art galleries, antiques dealers and flea markets, *parrillas* and *milongas*. It's a neighborhood with a rich and romantic heritage and is closely affiliated with Buenos Aires' tango culture. It's also a tourist mecca with a bohemian ambience and boundless drinking and dining options.

San Telmo is one of the oldest barrios in Buenos Aires and traces its history back to the 17th century. Over the years, shipyard workers, noblemen, European immigrants and artsy types have left their mark on the barrio's character. The first to arrive were the dockyard workers, at a time when the barrio was considered to be a poor area. A Jesuit mission opened in 1708 with the goal of educating impoverished residents. It was short lived, however, and closed in 1767. In 1806, the Parish of San Pedro González Telmo (San Telmo) launched another failed attempt to provide education. San Telmo is the patron saint of seafarers and the barrio's namesake.

San Telmo's fortunes began to change in the mid-1800s when, following the installation of lights, gas fittings and sewers, it caught the eye of aristocrats and the well-to-do. They took advantage of cheaper plots of land to build grand mansions and townhouses. Unfortunately, this mini golden era came to an end in 1871 when an outbreak of cholera forced people to move north to Recoleta and Retiro. San Telmo then experienced a revolution in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The mansions made way for plazas or got converted into apartments. Consequently, waves of European immigrants, artists and freethinkers moved into the area, hence the multicultural vibe.

Nowadays, San Telmo pays homage to its history and remains a popular tourist spot. It's a short walk south from the city's central barrios of Monserrat and San Nicolás and is well-connected by buses and the metro. The mix of architectural beauty, shopping and nightlife make it many visitors' favorite barrio. If Palermo is too commercial, Puerto Madero too modern and Recoleta too expensive, then San Telmo's cheaper rents and livability could be right up your alley.

Things to See & Do

A focal point of San Telmo is **Plaza Dorrego**, a square surrounded by bars and restaurants. It's a great place to sit and watch the world go by or catch an impromptu tango show. This is especially the case on weekends, when the square turns into an open-air antiques and handicraft market. On Sundays, the **Feria de San Telmo** stretches about ten blocks along **Calle Defensa**, between Plaza Dorrego and Plaza de Mayo. This is the barrio's busiest day, when tourists converge in masses. Browse the 250-plus market stalls for local handicrafts, food, leather goods and art. Pause to watch street performers, musicians and tango dancers.

Don't stress if you can't go on a Sunday; on any given day, **Calle Defensa** presents a wonderful glimpse into the barrio's



charm. Peer inside independent galleries, antique shops and bookstores. **Walrus Books** (walrus-books.com.ar, **Estados Unidos 617**) is a lovely little shop that sells used books in English. Stroll around **San Telmo Market** (**Defensa 961**) to find vintage clothing, record stores and antique sellers. Take a moment to admire the market's impressive 19th-century wrought-iron structure. Go to **Pasaje San Lorenzo** and check out the street art and unique architecture at places like **La Casa Mínima** (**Pasaje San Lorenzo 380**).

Culture vultures never lack for things to do in San Telmo. See contemporary art exhibitions at the **Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires** (MAMBA) (museoarte-moderno.buenosaires.gov.ar/, **San Juan 350**). Notable artists represented include Wassily Kandinsky and Joan Miró. Discover Argentina's cinematic history at the **Museo del Cine** (**Defensa 1220**). Learn about Argentina's federal prison history at the **Museo Penitenciario Argentino Antonio Ballvé** (**Humberto Primo 378**). Admire the architecture of the Jesuit-built San Pedro González Pedro Parish Church (Humberto Primo, next to the prison museum).

Take a break from the crowds at **Parque Lezama**. Enjoy the large green areas or check out the sculpture garden, which includes a monument of Pedro de Mendoza, one of Buenos Aires' founding fathers. Look for the colorful domes of the **Russian Orthodox Church** (**Brasil 315**). Afterward, find artifacts from Argentina's War of Independence, among other historical objects, at the **Museo Histórico Nacional** (**Defensa 1600**).

Cafes & Restaurants

Meat is plentiful here. **La Brigada** (parrillalabrigada.com.ar, **Estados Unidos 465**) is a favorite among locals and packs customers in elbow-to-elbow at its cluster of tables. The rooftop terrace is perfect for a breezy, sunny day.

For something other than beef, try **El Banqueano** (restoelbaqueano.com, **Chile 495**). It specializes in unusual meats such as alligator, chinchilla and llama.





LA BRIGADA (PARRILLALABRIGADA.COM.AR, ESTADOS UNIDOS 465)

This is a San Telmo restaurant at its best: tightly packed tables, patrons knocking elbows, suited waiters, a sweaty *asador* and great meat. It started with one floor but now has three, including a rooftop terrace. Order your meat *jugoso* (rare) and the waiter might just cut it with a spoon. Like La Cabrera, it's a bit pricier but the whole experience is a good value.



SAO

CHOCHÁN (FACEBOOK.COM/CHOCHANBUENOSAIRES, PIEDRAS 672),
This place is almost exclusively dedicated to pork in its many incarnations.





EL HIPOPÓTAMO (BRASIL 401)

El Hipopotamo opened in 1909 and looks frozen in time, complete with a checkerboard floor, fileteado artwork and old beer memorabilia.





Coffee lovers should make a pit stop at Coffee Town, squeezed in amid the antique sellers and fruit stalls of San Telmo Market.

Don't miss **Chochán** ([facebook.com/chochanbuenosaires](https://www.facebook.com/chochanbuenosaires), **Piedras 672**), either, which is almost exclusively dedicated to pork in its many incarnations. Meanwhile, **Caseros** (**Caseros 486**) serves up modern takes on classic Argentine dishes in the form of prix-fixe menus.

San Telmo also plays host to some fantastic international cuisine. Among the best spots are the French-style bistro **Brasserie Petanque** ([brasseriepetanque.com](https://www.brasseriepetanque.com), **Defensa 596**), the Mediterranean-influenced **Club Social Deluxe** ([restaurantclubsocial.com](https://www.restaurantclubsocial.com), **Caseros 442**) and the excellent Basque-inspired **Sagardi** ([sagardi.com.ar](https://www.sagardi.com.ar), **Humberto Primo 319**). **L'Atelier de Celine** ([latelierdeceline.com.ar](https://www.latelierdeceline.com.ar), **Carlos Calvo 242**) offers a fusion of Latin American ingredients with French influences. For a taste of Middle Eastern flavor, pick up a kebab or falafel from **El Banco Rojo** (**Bolívar 914**). Other delicacies at this takeout joint include shrimp wraps, Philly cheesesteaks and hearty burgers.

Should you be a health-conscious eater, check out **Hierba Buena** ([hierbabuena.com.ar](https://www.hierbabuena.com.ar), **Caseros 454**). This organic deli prides itself on serving natural foods that not only fill you up but also nourish and cleanse your body. There's a great selection of teas and lemonades, too. Coffee lovers should make a pit stop at **Coffee Town** ([coffeetownargentina.com](https://www.coffeetownargentina.com), **Bolívar 976**), squeezed in amid the antique sellers and fruit stalls of San Telmo Market. All of the coffee is fair-trade and comes from as far afield as Ethiopia and Sumatra.

If you've seen the television show *Café San Juan*, you'll know all about **Café San Juan La Cantina** ([facebook.com/CafeSanJuanrestaurant](https://www.facebook.com/CafeSanJuanrestaurant), **San Juan 450**). If not, go to experience a meal presided over by the animated celebrity-chef Leandro "Lele" Cristóbal. The portions are abundant and dishes range from traditional *locro* (stew) to homemade pasta and pig roast. The cafe has its own beer and a wide range of affordable wine, to boot.

In addition to its eclectic set of restaurants, San Telmo plays host to several of the 54 *bares notables*. Find two situated on the edge of Parque Lezama. **Bar Británico** (**Brasil 399**) dates back to 1928, when it was a popular meeting point for railroad workers and English World War I veterans. It was used in the filming of *The Motorcycle Diaries* and has long been a hangout for writers. **El Hipopótamo** (**Brasil 401**) opened in 1909 and looks frozen in time, complete with a checkerboard floor, *fileteado* artwork and old beer memorabilia.

Set in a building 150 years old, **Bar El Federal** ([barelfederal.com.ar](https://www.barelfederal.com.ar), **Carlos Calvo 599**) is about as authentic as it gets. Set on a street corner deep in the heart of the barrio, it's an ideal spot to observe old men proselytizing and to watch San Telmo's characters walk by. On the main tourist drag of Calle Defensa is **Bar Seddon** ([barseddon.com.ar](https://www.barseddon.com.ar), **Defensa 695**), a classic bar-cum-restaurant with dark wood furniture and high ceilings. Drop by for a beer or even a candlelit dinner. At the rear entrance to San Telmo Market is **La Coruña** (**Bolívar 994**), a truly classic B.A. bar. Dusty, decaying and oozing rustic charm, it serves as a perfect reminder of how *porteños* spent their time socializing in the early 1900s.

One of the most pleasant bar-cafes in the barrio is **Café La Poesía** ([cafelapoesia.com.ar](https://www.cafelapoesia.com.ar), **Chile 502**). Set in a 19th-century building, it has all the traditional cafe decoration: tiled floor, dark wood bar and vintage posters. The poet Rubén Derlis founded the bar in 1982 and has since attracted writers, artists and musicians. Order a coffee, Malbec or craft beer and watch the clientele engage in deep conversation, or catch up on your latest book.

Drinks & Nightlife

Like restaurants, bars are in no short supply in San Telmo. You'll find British-style pubs, craft-beer bars, cocktail lounges, live music venues and tango dance halls.



CAFÉ LA POESÍA (CAFELAPOESIA.COM.AR, CHILE 502)

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KIRIE MUSIC CLUB (FACEBOOK.COM/KIRIECLUB, BOLÍVAR 813)

Kirie is a music venue, Mediterranean restaurant and whiskey bar. Music ranges from tribute acts and alternative rock to folk and new wave. Check their respective websites for a schedule of events, the majority of which are free.





For beer, head to **Gibraltar** (thegibraltarbar.com, **Perú 895**). Styled as an English pub, it attracts expats and backpackers who come to watch *fútbol*, play pool and sink pints. Expect a wait on weekends after 10 p.m. A similar vibe can be found at **La Puerta Roja** (lapuertaroja.com.ar, **Chacabuco 733**), which comes from the same owners as El Banco Rojo. Look for the red door, give it a knock and walk up the stairs to join the mayhem. For a quieter scene, try **Breoghan Brew Bar** (**Bolívar 860**). The beers here are top quality and brewed on site. It's also rarely overcrowded. On the same block is **Rubik Lounge Bar** (facebook.com/Rubikloungebar, **Bolívar 825**), which usually gets going around 11 p.m.

For those who like their cocktails, **Doppelgänger Bar** (doppelganger.com.ar, **Juan de Garay 500**) is a must-visit. The menu is a celebration of all things gin, vodka and vermouth. Stop by from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., between Tuesday and Friday, for happy hour. Completely different but also worth checking out is **Bar Sur** (bar-sur.com.ar, **Estados Unidos 299**). It's perhaps the best place in San Telmo to watch tango shows, and there's a performance every night of the week. The bar itself dates back to 1910.

Kirie Music Club (facebook.com/kirieclub, **Bolívar 813**) is a great place for live music and also serves great burgers. Check their website for a schedule of events, which range from jazz and rock concerts to album launches and DJ sets.

