



FESTIVITIES  
IN SALTA AND  
TILCARA

*'General Güemes  
and the return of  
the sun.'*

Argentina

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ON THE ROAD



*How often does it happen that, within the space of a week, not only do you come face-to-face with tough gauchos and an indigenous community, but they also let you photograph their most important festivals of the year?* I was lucky enough to get the chance in northern Argentina. I travelled from Salta, where I met skilled horsemen and women, to Jujuy, where villagers offered me legumes and coca leaves. Both communities were celebrating honoured figures — one, an army general from the past, and the other, the return of the sun to secure the future.

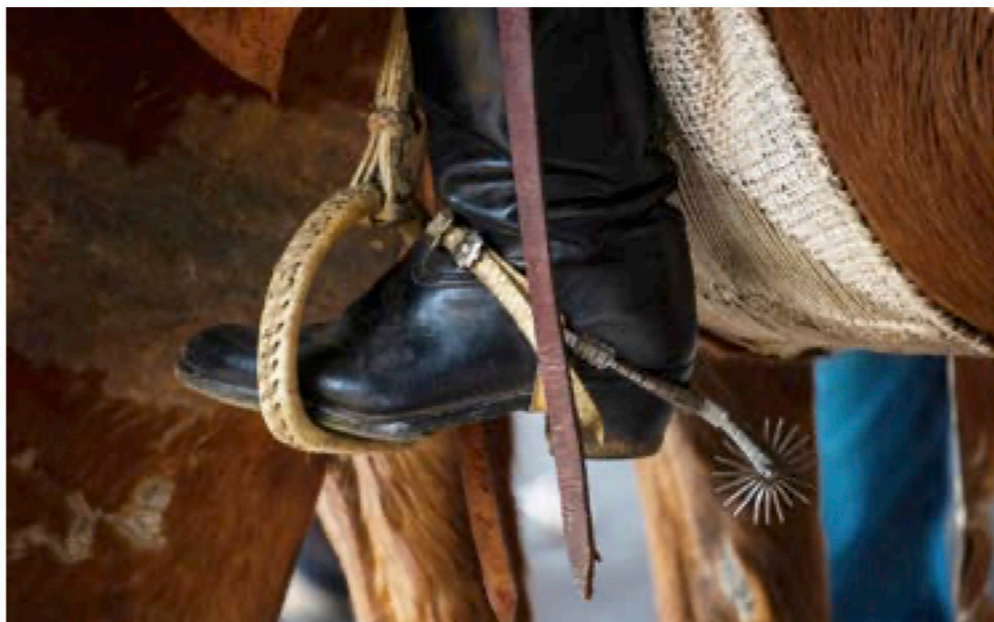
*Thousands of gauchos in the streets*

General Güemes holds a special place in the hearts of the Argentinian people. Every year, on the 17th of June, the anniversary of General Güemes' death in 1821, thousands of gauchos gather in the city of Salta to honor him and celebrate his legacy. General Güemes played a crucial role in the fight for Argentinian independence, leading a group of gauchos — known as the 'gauchos de Güemes' — against the Spanish forces. Salta, the provincial capital in mountainous northwestern Argentina, is the epicentre of this annual gathering, as it was here that he established his base of operations during the war.

Gauchos are an integral part of Argentinian culture and identity. Their expertise in horsemanship and their ability to adapt to the harsh conditions of the pampas (grasslands) made them invaluable allies in the fight against the Spaniards. The annual gathering is a celebration of gaucho culture and a tribute to their contributions to the nation. Local communities come together to create traditional costumes and perform music and dances that showcase their culture. The gathering is also an opportunity for local artisans, with stalls offering traditional crafts and Argentinian cuisine, such as empanadas, asado (a barbecue with a lot of meat), and mate, a popular beverage made from the leaves and twigs from the yerba mate plant. But the most striking are the sturdy gauchos on horseback, proudly parading through the streets of Salta, displaying their equestrian skills and traditional attire. The outfit of a gaucho is indeed quite impressive — they typically wear a brightly woven poncho (which doubles as a saddle blanket and sleeping gear), with loose-fitting trousers called bombachas, belted with a chiripa girding the waist. They also carry a facón (large knife) and a rebenque (leather whip).

I would have happily covered the distance on the back of a horse, wearing a cowboy hat and a colorful woolen poncho with deep red stripes, but Oscar drove me further north in a sturdy 4x4, to Jujuy, a region that shares its border with Bolivia and is home to the famous Cerro de los 14 Colores, the Mountain of 14 Colours.







*Inti Raymi in Tilcara: A Spectacular Celebration of the Sun*

Tilcara is a charming town nestled in the breathtaking landscapes of Jujuy, where a vibrant ancient annual festival takes place. Inti Raymi is a celebration that honours the sun and marks the winter solstice, a symbol of life and fertility. The festival is deeply rooted in the beliefs and practices of the indigenous communities in Tilcara. Inti Raymi is a time of renewal, a moment when the people come together to celebrate the harvest and welcome the return of warmth and abundance.

The origins of Inti Raymi can be traced back to the ancient Inca civilisation, which flourished in the Andean region of South America. The Incas revered the sun as the supreme deity and believed that its presence was essential for the prosperity of their crops and the wellbeing of their people.

One of the central ceremonies involves the symbolic representation of the sun's return, known as 'el retorno del sol'. A significant aspect of Inti Raymi is the offering to 'Pachamama,' the revered goddess of the earth. People bring gifts such as coca leaves, corn, and flowers to express gratitude for the abundance provided by the land. These offerings are carefully placed on a communal altar, and prayers are offered for the well-being of the community and harmony between the people and the natural world. For the indigenous communities of Tilcara, Inti Raymi is not just a festival; it is a deeply meaningful and spiritually significant event. It serves as a reminder of their ancestral roots and a way to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage. Moreover, Inti Raymi plays a crucial role in raising awareness about indigenous rights and promoting cultural diversity.

By the time the sun appeared over the distant mountains, I was chilled to the bone. I wouldn't have missed these cold hours for the world, but maybe I should have taken a warm, colourful, woolen poncho from the gauchos in Salta to this second festival in Jujuy. 'Here,' said one of the older men who had led the rituals, 'take some coca leaves to chew.' He noticed my hesitation and quickly added that it would take a lot of leaf-chewing to get high. 'But when you're particularly tired, you'll certainly notice it gives you a lift. In the meantime, let me mix some with boiling water to make you a coca tea. This will warm you.'

And as I drank the soothing warm tea, I watched the sun rise higher and higher, highlighting the clothing, faces, and offerings. And I realised profoundly that respect for what nature brings us is no longer mainstream. But it always should be.



