

## ARGENTINA WINGSHOOTING: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

by GGG Staff

The dream of once-in-a-lifetime, no-limit wingshooting is luring increasing numbers of American sportsmen to Mexico and South America. Currently, Argentina seems to be the most popular wingshooting destination, perhaps because that country has one of the more stable governments in South America, and because U.S. hunters like its reversed seasons. The country's peak wingshooting opportunities run from April through August, which are fall and winter months below the equator, and warm jackets, down vests, and insulated waders are required.

We recently booked a five-and-a-half-day wingshooting hunt to Argentina. Our objective was to shoot large numbers of doves, ducks, and geese. Here's what we experienced:

### In The Field

We took a 10-hour flight from Miami to Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Aerolineas Argentinas. After clearing Argentine customs and taking our firearms through a check-in point, our outfitter, Floro Lavalle, drove us to the first of three hunting areas.

Upon arrival at a ranch near Salazar, two hours from Buenos Aires, we had a quick lunch before being taken to a dove-hunting area. We were given a generous supply of

shells, and assigned a bird boy. The bird boys did not speak English very well, but they had guided enough American hunters to communicate adequately.

It was windy and the doves flew erratically. Though the shooting was fun and challenging, the quantity of



*Above: Our Argentine hunting trip was adequate in terms of game numbers, but not spectacular.*

*Below: The bird boys earned their \$20-a-day tips retrieving ducks we took at 40 yards and beyond.*



birds in the area was disappointing. We hoped this first afternoon of dove shooting was only a warm-up for better things to come.

Accommodations at this ranch were well above average by Latin American lodging standards. In fact, we stayed in the elegant home of the landowner, and enjoyed maid service and home cooking. The hospitality was warm and gracious.

The following two days of duck shooting were good, but not spectacular. Lousy weather didn't help. The action was almost exclusively pass-shooting, with less than 20 percent of the birds actually dropping down into our decoys. Most shots were at 40 yards or more, testing both wingshooting ability and shell performance. Cripples were relentlessly chased down by the bird boys. Those young men earned their suggested \$20-per-day tip.

Our next stop, another two-hour drive away, was at a private ranch near the town of Coronel Pringles, an area southwest of Buenos Aires where geese are plentiful. This time we spent two days and nights in a much less elegant ranch house converted into multi-bedroom units.

Once in the field, our host and guide, Luis, kept in close touch with each bird boy via portable radio, conversing in Spanish. It appeared that he was checking on the number of geese each of us had downed. When our quarry reached approximately 20, the bird boy was instructed to begin picking up the decoys, because the van was on the way to collect us. Some of us were picked up when birds were still flying, which was frustrating.

Although far less sophisticated than our previous lodging, accommodations at this ranch were clean and comfortable. The food was good, but not extraordinary. At the end of our stay, Luis informed us we had to pay an additional \$80 each to cover his expenses. Some of us paid the fee; others refused, and nothing was ever mentioned again.

Our final stop was at Floro Lavalle's beautiful 100-year-old mansion near

the small town of Sierra de la Ventana. We shot doves and pigeons at this location, firing 10 or more boxes of shells per day. Though the quality of the action was excellent, the quantity of doves and pigeons fell short of our expectations.

The food at Lavalle's was tasty, but not extravagant. We would have preferred to see more beef dishes, since Argentine beef is the finest in the world. Excellent Argentine wines complimented our meals. Table-side service was informal but well-performed.

Lavalle has a good command of the English language and a sharp wit. Table conversation in his home was easily the best of the trip. Both he and his wife made every effort to ensure our hunt was a success, attempting to make our visit more enjoyable. At this location, our guns were thoroughly cleaned at night, without extra charge.

We selected several ducks for mounting among those we killed at our first stop. Our host there had packaged and frozen them for us, then Lavalle took the birds to his home and kept them frozen until our final departure.

At the end of our trip, we were driven to a nearby airport in Bahia Blanca for the short flight back to Buenos Aires. We paid Aerolineas Argentinas \$45 in excess baggage fees to handle the box of birds we were taking home, but there were no additional costs levied for our massive collection of guns and personal baggage.

When we arrived at the Buenos Aires domestic airport, we were met by one of Lavalle's representatives, who helped us with our bags. After taking us on a brief souvenir-shopping sidetrip, he drove us to the Buenos Aires International Airport. The transportation and shopping assistance were compliments of the outfitter.

We followed all the required procedures for declaring our frozen birds for mounting when entering the U.S. Customs area at the Miami International Airport. However, an error by Aerolineas Argentinas resulted in disaster; our tro-

### Trip Costs Table

Outfitter Fee .....	\$2,790
Shells (average 35 to 40 boxes) .....	\$460
Tips .....	\$160
Airfare (Miami/Buenos Aires/Miami) .....	\$1,183
Incidentals .....	\$23
Total .....	\$4,616

phies sat out in the August heat and spoiled.

### Guns, Gear & Game Recommends

There are several wingshooting outfitters in Argentina. While most of them run legitimate, quality-oriented operations, a few don't. So if you are planning a hunt in this game-rich country, go with a reputable booking agent and check references.

Total cost of our five-and-a-half-day trip totaled \$4,616, which included the airfare, outfitter fee, shells, tips, and miscellaneous expenses.

Though certain aspects of the trip were memorable, we were bothered by other parts. As we noted, we expected to shoot more birds at each locale, and it is the quality and quantity of game that makes or breaks hunting trips. However, attending to details is also important, especially when you're traveling in a foreign country. We didn't like that we were dunned for more money at one stage of the trip—that's an all too common problem.

● In sum, we can't unilaterally recommend this trip. We believe the hunts needed more of Lavalle's personal attention, especially in the area of goose hunting. Lavalle is honest and works hard to please his clients, but we would advise him to retool those portions of his hunting package that he subcontracts.

For more information, contact Floro Lavalle Outfitting, Azcuenaga 1360, (1425) Buenos Aires, Argentina, telephone (011) 541-821-7128, fax (011) 541-822-9132.