

Argentina



Argentina, officially the Argentine Republic, is a country located mostly in the southern half of South America.

It benefits from rich natural resources, a highly literate population, an export-oriented agricultural sector and a diversified industrial base. Although one of the world's wealthiest countries 100 years ago, Argentina suffered during most of the 20th century from recurring economic crisis, high inflation, external debt and capital flight. A severe depression, growing public and external indebtedness and an unprecedented bank run culminated in 2001 in the most economic, social and political crisis in the country's turbulent history.

Since then, the economy has grown slowly as the government continues to rely on expansionary fiscal and monetary policies, which have kept inflation in the double digits.

With this history of turmoil and unrest, Argentines are often keen to focus on 'quick wins' and short-term business interests. It has been difficult to plan long-term in a country where tomorrow was uncertain. Personal relationships therefore are of enormous importance in business dealings. Governments have come and gone, inflation has increased, but the only things that could be relied upon were the strengths of a good, stable, long-term relationship.

To conduct business in Argentina, it is necessary to obtain third party introductions through institutions such as law firms, consulting firms or banks. Should you need to reach a decision maker, you must go through his or her personal assistant or secretary first. Politeness is essential when dealing with these intermediaries as they determine the order in which visitors get access to their bosses.

Punctuality is appreciated and expected from visitors to Argentina for all business related occasions. However, you may find your Argentine counterpart to be 15 to 20 minutes late. Initial meetings can be formal and start with small talk including personal questions about your background and family.

Argentines are not overly patriotic but they will take offence at negative comments about the country as a whole. Show interest in what you hear, ask questions and let your companions elaborate on what they have to say about the topic at hand. They love sports like football, rugby, polo, tennis and enjoy talking about famous Argentine sportsmen who stand out in these fields. Avoid talking about local or international politics, neighbouring countries, and the Malvinas (Falklands) conflict. Some businesses will not favour conversations about human rights violations. Remember Argentines are vehement speakers, and frequently interrupt one another. Don't take offence if you are interrupted, as it is a sign of participation and interest.

Address people by using the titles Señor (Mr), Señora (Mrs), Señorita (Miss) followed by surnames. Physicians and lawyers are addressed as 'Doctor' followed by surnames. When a woman marries she adds her husband's surname preceded by 'de' but keeps her father's surname: Julia Pérez de Larrea.

Argentine business culture is as bureaucratic as other Latin American countries; however, higher-level executives have a reputation for efficiency. Usually, those in the highest positions of authority are entrusted with the final decision, so it's important to remain patient. Moreover, it may be necessary to make several trips before the transaction concludes.

While Argentines are usually warm and friendly, they are also very proud and may be easily offended by comments that leave room for misunderstandings. 'Saving face' and respecting everyone's honour and personal pride are crucial requirements for doing business in the country, especially in rural areas and small cities.

Position, dignity and personal style – these are all key factors in an Argentine management approach. It is important that the boss acts like a boss and does not try too hard to be seen as 'one of the guys'. This does not mean that the interpersonal relationship between a manager and his subordinates is not of critical importance – it merely reflects that in such a hierarchical culture, managers are to be respected and obeyed. Character and kindness towards others are also essential qualities. You will earn respect by showing empathy for others, treating everyone with dignity, showing respect to those of a higher status and avoiding aggressive behaviour.

As Argentine managers will often manage through direct instructions, it is important that you give precise, clear instructions when asking for tasks to be performed. Try not to leave any vagueness in your requests as this could lead to confusion or even a lack of respect for your management credentials.

You may have to deal with subordinates who could strongly influence the final decision, which may be made behind closed doors. Maintaining good relationships with these intermediaries is crucial to your success. Although the pace of business is accelerating, decision making can be a slow process that requires much patience. Attempts to rush or put pressure on the process are not likely to succeed. Argentines are often uneasy with change and reluctant to take risks. If you expect them to support a risky decision, you may need to find ways for them to become comfortable with it first, for instance by explaining contingency plans, outlining areas of additional support, or by offering guarantees and warranties.

While machismo attitudes remain strong in this country, it has made a lot of progress towards gender equality over the last two decades. Women are holding positions of similar income and authority as men. Female business travellers should graciously accept any chivalric gestures they receive, while exercising caution and acting professionally in business and social situations.

Impeccable appearance is very important in Argentina. Dress conservatively and make sure shoes and suits are in excellent condition. First impressions can have a significant impact on how people view you.