



MOVIES



ARGENTINA THROUGH FILM / 1

Argentina, as a hub of Latin American culture, is also a great place for movies. It's got a particular talent for clever crime dramas and movies about the country's tortured political history. Our recommendations also take a walk on the lighter side with comedies about a neurotic young Jewish man and an unlikely friendship between a grumpy shopkeeper and a bewildered immigrant from China. And while we don't vouch for its historical accuracy, you might also enjoy Madonna in the musical *Evita*. It will have you humming the tune of "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" as you pack for your South American adventure.

BLESSED BY FIRE (2007)

DIRECTOR: TRISTÁN BAUER

According to *The New York Times*, this bitter drama about the Falklands War "captures battlefield chaos and confusion with a visceral force you won't forget." In 1982, Argentina's military dictators invaded the desolate island in the South Atlantic known to them as the Malvinas and to the British who had held it for a hundred years, as the Falklands. The film focuses on the devastating experiences of underequipped young Argentine soldiers.

CHINESE TAKE-AWAY (2011)

DIRECTOR: SEBASTIÁN BORENSZTEIN

This offbeat comedy-drama was an Argentine box-office hit. The reclusive owner of a tiny hardware store reluctantly employs a young Chinese man who speaks no Spanish. Roger Ebert wrote that it "is hardly possible to suggest how involving this story becomes... I became invested ... I cared. The film deserved my care."

18-J (2004)

VARIOUS DIRECTORS

In 1984, the bombing of the AMIA (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association) building killed 86 people and wounded over 300. This docudrama of ten, ten-minute short films by ten different directors explores the events and the pain of the victims in very personal, sometimes surprising, ways. *Variety* called it a "worthy and affecting homage" that also provides a "perceptive overview of Argentine life."

EVITA (1996)

DIRECTOR: ALAN PARKER

Not all critics warmed to this big-budget musical drama starring Madonna and Antonio Banderas which was based on the Tim Rice-Andrew Lloyd Webber theater hit. But the film does at least evoke the melodrama that surrounded the legendary Eva (Evita) Perón. She grew up poor but became beloved by millions of working-class Argentines (the so-called shirtless ones) after she married President Juan Perón and became a major political figure herself and the official Spiritual Leader of the Nation.



movies

ARGENTINA THROUGH FILM / 2

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN (1985)

DIRECTOR: HÉCTOR BABENCO

William Hurt won the Oscar for best actor for his role as a gay man imprisoned alongside a leftwing activist. It was also nominated for the Best Picture Award. The film is set in an unnamed South American country but is based on a 1974 book of the same name by the activist Manuel Puig about cellmates in a Buenos Aires prison during Argentina's military dictatorship.

LOST EMBRACE (2004)

DIRECTOR: DANIEL BURMAN

The largely autobiographical comedies by director Daniel Burman are often compared to the works of Woody Allen. Ariel, a young Jewish man, is drifting through life. He barely knows his father, who moved to Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Now Ariel wants to leave Argentina for Poland. *The New York Times* said that the film's modesty is "part of what makes it durable and satisfying."

NINE QUEENS (2000)

DIRECTOR: FABIÁN BIELINSKY

This con-artist caper is a classic of Argentine cinema. The critics and audiences polled by Rotten Tomatoes loved it as well, scoring it over 90% fresh with *Chicago Tribune* calling it "one of the most clever, most enjoyable, thrillers in years." It stars, as does a number of our other recommended movies, the wonderful Ricardo Darín. In 2006, Darín and director Bielinsky teamed up again for another cerebral thriller, *The Aura*.

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES (2004)

DIRECTOR: WALTER SALLES

A political, sexual, and emotional coming-of-age story based on the diaries of one of the most famous of all Argentinians, the medical student turned guerilla leader Che Guevara. The youthful Guevara and a friend take a break from their comfortable Buenos Aires lives for a fun road trip across Argentina and South America that becomes more serious the further they travel. *The New York Times* called it a "lyrical exploration" of how a political understanding of the world emerges. The scenery is remarkable.

THE OFFICIAL STORY (1985)

DIRECTOR: LUIS PUENZO

Many films and novels revolve around what happened to the children of leftwing activists who were forcibly "disappeared" by the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. This is one of the most powerful. A wealthy couple agonize over whether they want to know how their beloved, adopted daughter came to them. It won the Oscar for best foreign language film.

THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES (2009)

DIRECTOR: JUAN JOSÉ CAMPANELLA

Another Oscar-winning drama for best foreign language film. Twenty-five years after the murder and rape of a young woman, a retired investigator relives the case. Rotten Tomatoes scores it over 90% fresh while *The Guardian* thought it, "supremely watchable, and well-made, with a dark, sinewy sense of history."