

## 3. NORTHWEST REGION

The Northwest is a territory of about 300.000 sq. km., a surface of the size of Italy, although inhabited by no more than 3 million people. In this region you have the most abrupt changes of climate and landscapes in the country. There are lunar landscapes, deciduous forests, and impenetrable jungles, hundreds of Indian ruins, adobe villages, Jesuit churches, rupestrian art, streams and rivers of clear water, giant cactus, deserted roads, friendly people, wine cellars, artisans, hunting, fishing and plenty of sun. Under clear blue sky, small villages let the seasons pass quietly being only interrupted by the carnivals, Indian markets and the worship of "Pachamama" or Mother Earth who provides maize and the pastures where the llamas and guanacos graze. The north western region is a place of high peaks; here is America's highest mountain, the Aconcagua (6.959 m / 22.831 ft). Here South America touches the sky!

### 3.1 Province of Salta



Situated 1600 km (994 mi) from Buenos Aires, in a very fertile valley, Salta is now a great tourist and handicraft centre and the best starting place for tours of the Northwest. Salta got its name from the Aymara word *sagta* meaning very beautiful. Being Capital of its province, it is a handsome city founded in 1582, with fine colonial buildings. Of all the provincial capitals, Salta is the city that has best preserved its patrimony of colonial architecture.

### Salta - Excursions

#### Half Day City Tour (approx. 3 hours)

We will do an outside visit of the Cathedral, the 9 de Julio Square, the Archbishop's Palace and the Cabildo as well as other main buildings, as they are only open late afternoon. We will also go by bus to the San Bernardo Hill. This is also possible by hill chair, but it would be a surcharge (optional). During the tour we are going to pass through the residential areas, which mostly are built in colonial style. After this visit we will continue to San Lorenzo a small but nice village about 10 km away from Salta. Last stop of the city tour is the Art and Crafts Market of Salta.

*Recommended (not included):*

*High Mountain Museum (MAAM) – web <http://www.maam.org.ar>*

*San Bernardo Hill lift*

#### Full Day Humahuaca (approx. 14 hours)

Depart from Salta in North direction until crossing the border between Salta and Jujuy provinces. In the province of Jujuy the Quebrada de Humahuaca begins. Indigenous traditions are kept alive in this fascinating area, strong in local traditions, cuisine and music surrounded by the multicoloured hillsides.

The Quebrada de Humahuaca frames the villages of Purmamarca, Maimara, Tilcara and Humahuaca, colourful hills feature adobe homes, historical chapels, and pre Hispanic Ruins. This place was declared Cultural World Heritage site by UNESCO.

You will visit Purmamarca with its Cerro de Siete Colores (Seven Colours Hill) and Tilcara with its Pucará (old indigenous fortress situated in a magnificent frame of cactus and colourful mountains – visit included) where you can do a little walk and visit the ruins and the Archaeological Museum – optional visit.

Continue further north and stop at Humahuaca where you can appreciate the nice handicraft market and the Belgrano monument.

On the way back to Salta visit the city of Jujuy and its principal sights.

*Distance covered: 520 km (323 mi)*

**Full Day Cafayate** (approx. 12 hours)

In the early morning you will leave Salta and pass by Cerrillos, El Carril, Coronel Moldes, Ampascachi, Talampaya and Alemania to reach the Quebrada del Rio Las Conchas, declared Natural Monument by the UNESCO due to the bizarre formations and colours of its hills. All figures are indicated by signs helping visitors finding them. The most spectacular ones are La Garganta del Diablo (141 km), El Anfiteatro (142 km), El Sapo (153 km), El Fraile (155 km), El Obelisco (165 km) and Los Castillos (168 km). Finally you'll arrive in Cafayate: a quiet, clean, little town, with low rainfall, lying between two ranges of Andean foothills and surrounded by vineyards.

Cafayate town is famous for its fine Torrontes wine (white wine of fruity flavour), you will have the chance to test some wine, visit the art and crafts market.

In the afternoon, return back to Salta via the same route, which allow you to appreciate the differences of formations and colours visiting the Quebrada de las Conchas in the morning and in the afternoon.

*Distance covered: 390 km (243 mi)*

**Full Day Cachi** (approx. 12 hours)

Depart from Salta to Cerrillos, El Carril, Pulares, Quebrada de Escoipe and Cuesta del Opispo (Bishop's Slope) at 3.348 m (10.984 ft) above sea level. In this slope one can find a stone of an old mill of which still today nobody knows how it could remain anchored there.

The highest point of Calchaquí Valley is named Piedra de Molino, it represents a gate between two valleys: Lema Valley (deeper and more temperate) and Calchaquíes Valley (between cordons of the Precordillera, about 1.200 m / 3.937 ft higher and more arid). You will continue to the Recta de Tin Tin crossing the National Park Los Cardones and passing by Payogasta, before you'll reach the typical village Cachi.

Cachi is situated 2.210 m (7.251 ft) above sea level at the confluence of Rio Calchaqui and Rio Cachi and at the foot of Nevado de Cachi hill. This picturesque village is part of the Calchaqui Valley and surrounded by hills and mountains which belong to the Precordillera of the Andes. It has conserved its colonial style mixed with the heritage of its primitive inhabitants. Its main square is surrounded by paved streets and stone houses, adobe walls covered by lime and white sand, wrought iron grids, roofs of cactus or reed covered with mud. Visit to the Archaeological Museum (optional not included) and the parochial church.

*Distance covered: 320 km (199 mi)*

**Full day Salinas Grandes / Purmamarca** (approx. 13 hours)

In the early morning you depart to the beautiful Salinas Grandes (Salt Lakes) situated in the province of Jujuy. The trip begins along Route 9 heading north, traversing part of the Quebrada de Humahuaca, and passing by the villages of Volcán and Tumbaya. We then take Route 52 to the town of Purmamarca. We make a stop to photograph the Cerro de Siete Colores, the beautiful hill of seven colours. Leaving Purmamarca behind we continue on Route 52 and begin to climb the slopes of Lipan eventually reaching an altitude of 4.170 m (13.681 ft) above sea level. Our next stop is the Salinas Grandes, the impressive great salt flats. After taking several photos we return to Purmamarca for sightseeing in the town. Noteworthy attractions include the ancient church and the handicraft market where local Indians sell their wares. Return to Salta.