

# A Fulbrighter's Guide to Mar del Plata

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## Overview

Former ETA Fulbrighters:

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## The University

You have been assigned to the *Universidad Nacional en Mar del Plata* (UNMdP). Your time will be divided between the *Profesorado de Inglés* program in the school of humanities and the *Laboratorio de Idiomas*, a community outreach project of the university. The *Profesorado* is located in the university complex on (Dean) Funes street, between Gral. Roca and Rodríguez Peña streets, about 20 blocks north and 12 blocks west of the Plaza Colón in the city center. The language lab is more centrally located, to the northeast of Plaza Colón, at 25 de Mayo and San Luis streets, on the edge of Plaza San Martín.

The *Profesorado* is one of the best in the country. Professors are well qualified – several have been Fulbrighters, – coursework is demanding, and the students have to work very hard in order to stay in the program. There is a high attrition rate, but this is common throughout the higher education system in Argentina. A full-time student could finish the program in 4 years, but most take *much* longer, retaking several courses, and/or not taking a full course load. Many of the advanced students are already teaching in public schools or language institutes. There are probably around 150 students in the program. The head of the department is Adriana Caamaño; the administrative assistants are Mariela and Andrea. The office is supposed to be open daily from 9am to 3pm, but this can vary greatly. The two computers with Internet and printer are available for use by teachers and I relied on them a lot before I had my own laptop. There is also a free, student computer lab on the *multimedia*, top floor of the building.

The *Profesorado* curriculum is divided into language, methodology, and cultural blocks, with several required classes in each block. You can assist with any classes, based on your interests. Courses are usually 6-8 hours a week, in 2 hour blocks, with different teachers responsible for different blocks (usually one theoretical section, and several practical sections). Most classes are offered in the morning, with few happening after 4pm. Classrooms are *very* basic and AV equipment is only available in a couple of them (the *multimedias* on the top floor) or by special request from the *bedel*, a sort of department manager/ registrar / equipment – very important – guy. Heating in the winter is minimal, so wear warm shoes, socks, and sometimes even gloves.

The 2006 Fulbrighter, Ramsey, focused on literature courses. In 2007, I assisted with the intro language classes, INI and INA, and teaching methodology courses. In addition, both of us participated in *Comunicación Integral*, offered second semester and by far our favorite course in terms of content and teaching style. Another important part of our job is organizing conversation workshops, which are optional, can focus on any topics, and always attract a small group of highly motivated students. With anything you do, don't be shy in taking initiative and just starting things on your own. Otherwise, you may be stuck doing very little. The best way to get information to students is to post on the *cartelera* (bulletin board) outside of the department office and through word of mouth. Although most students have emails, they don't necessarily check every day and many use email just for social reasons.

The *Laboratorio de Idiomas* is run by the university and functions like a foreign language institute, offering courses in several languages, at all levels. The courses are paid (around 100 pesos a month) and open to any high-school graduate in the community. The quality is high and the building is in much better condition. The director of the lab is Ana Lía Regueira and her assistant is Ricardo Paderni, both very helpful. I spent one day per week helping in various classes at the lab, some on a weekly basis, others bi-weekly. I also did a lot of special guest lectures in classes on other days, as well as offered some Saturday workshops, both for teachers and for students.

Note: The English-teaching community is fairly small, and most teachers work at 3-4 schools or institutes, so everyone knows each other.

## Housing

Compared to other Argentine cities, student apartment housing in Mar del Plata is abundant and relatively inexpensive. You could probably spend several weeks examining all the available options, as there are rental agencies – *inmobiliarias* – on every block. Some agencies have pictures of the apartments; others just walk with you to see the places.

For an efficiency (all in one room), expect to pay around US\$150; for a one-bedroom (i.e. bedroom and living room) around US\$200. Prices should be quoted in pesos and should include the monthly maintenance fee, but generally not utilities or cable. Expect to pay all of your rent, plus commission and deposit (one month's rent each), up front, in cash. Even if the *inmobiliaria* accepts credit cards, it's not a good option because they will charge you and additional 15-20%. You should receive an official record (receipt) of your payment, but that might be as close as you get to an official contract. If there is any way for you to pay in two installments spread out throughout the year, I recommend it because it can give you some leverage with the *inmobiliaria* if you encounter problems, like needing to get something fixed.

Apartments available for students come fully furnished, including kitchen equipment, but not sheets or towels, so I recommend bringing your own. Twin and double-sized beds are the most common. Most apartments will also have a TV, but not necessarily cable. You can set up monthly cable service from *Multicanal* for about US\$25/month. They also offer cable/internet packages, but if you're lucky you can find an unrestricted wireless network nearby. There are also internet cafes everywhere, which charge about US\$0.50 per hour. Gas and electricity bills come every two months. I paid about US\$5/month for electricity and US\$10-15/month for gas (higher during winter months when I used the gas heater more). When looking for an apartment, make sure that it has heating (usually a gas heater) with proper ventilation.

Anywhere within a 10-block radius of the center – more or less – is convenient and safe to live. The area around the university is not recommendable because it's a bit out of the way. Many students, including Ramsey in 2006, live around the *Terminal de Omnibus* (just west of Plaza Colón). It's close to all you need and there are several buses that take you to the UNMDP campus on Funes. I lived on the north side of downtown, close to the *Shopping Los Gallegos*. It was also convenient and allowed me to walk to the university in about 25 minutes.

### **Helpful vocabulary**

*alquiler* – rent

*ambiente* – room (any; not just bedroom)

*contrafrente* – with windows to the back of the building vs. the street; these kinds of apartments are considered not as desirable, thus cheaper, but can be more quiet (there is *a lot* of street noise)

*departamento* – apartment

*encargado* – building manager, who lives on the ground floor of the apartment building and is in charge of cleaning and general maintenance

*expensas* – monthly maintenance fee, usually included in the rent; could also refer to all utilities costs

*garantía* – a type of guarantee that is usually provided by a renter's home-owning, local relative; this is a huge obstacle for foreigners renting an apartment, but some agencies are willing to overlook it if you pay the entire 8-month's rent in advance (yes, this is considered normal); ask about this up front

*inmobiliaria* – rental agency

*reciclado* - renovated

### **Immobiliarias known for renting to students**

*Manzo Propiedades*, Av. Luro at Santa Fe, 495-5752, <http://www.manzoinmobiliaria.com.ar/>

- Used by Natalia in 2007. They have a good selection of apartments, but they were mostly irresponsible and untimely in handling apartment problems.

*Gonnet Propiedades*, Corrientes 1987, 494-7625, <http://www.gonnet.com.ar>

- Used by Ramsey in 2006

## Transportation

The best way to travel, locally and long-distance, is by bus (*colectivo*). At night, taxis are the safest option.

Local buses take a while to figure out, but at *kioskos* you can buy a city map + bus guide, which lists the routes of the buses. You can also kind of figure out bus routes from the listings at bus stops. In order to ride city buses, you need to have a magnetic bus card with credit. These are available at limited locations, so plan well. Buses don't necessarily stop at all the stops, so you have to flag it down by holding out your arm.

Buses 571 and 531 go to the university campus at Funes.

Taxis are a relatively inexpensive mode of travel and are safer when traveling alone or at night. You can call one ahead of time or just flag one down on the street by waving your arm.

Mar del Plata is very accessible for long-distance bus travel, via the *Terminal de Omnibuses* located at Alberti and Buenos Aires. Tickets are purchased mainly at the terminal. It can be quite confusing because there is not central directory of departures and arrivals; you have to go from one ticket window to the next to find out departure times and prices. Most companies accept credit cards. When purchasing a ticket, you will be asked for your passport number. On many routes, you can also choose the type of seats: semi cama (4 seats across per row; recline to 120°); coche cama / cama ejecutivo (3 seats across; recline to 160°); suite (3 seats across; recline to 180°). Bus seats are called *butacas*.

Some companies, but not all, also have ticket outlets in the center. For example, there is an office at San Martín and Corrientes that sells tickets for multiple companies and a variety of destinations. The *reposteros* trade union at Av. Luro and España has a *librería* (paper goods store) that sells *Rápido Argentino* company bus tickets to Buenos Aires and La Plata at 15% off. They only take cash.

My recommendations of bus companies are: *Via Bariloche*; *Andesmar* (goes to Mendoza and some other destinations in the west); *Tony Tur*, *El Rápido Argentino* (to/ from Buenos Aires); *FlechaBus* (lots of destinations, including BsAs).

## Shopping

- Chain grocery stores – Carrefour, Disco – You can buy everything at these places, just like you would in the US. There is a large Carrefour on the outskirts of town, which is like a Target or Wal-Mart and it's probably the best place to get all of your household needs taken care of when you first arrive.
- You can find better quality (and lower priced) meat, cheese, bread and produce at the small *carnicerías*, *fiambrerías*, *panaderías* and *verdulerías*, respectively. The *Ferias Comunitarias* at San Luis and Belgrano has all these small shops under one roof.  
Recommended *carnicería* – Raffe (several locations)
- Cabrales – several locations; specializes in gourmet and international goods
- *Dietéticas* – these types of shops sell bulk goods and health food; great for buying cereal, crackers, spices, baking supplies, legumes, rice and grains
- Department store – *Los Gallegos*, it's sort of an institution in Mar del Plata but it's a bit overpriced and caters to the older (and wealthier) shopper

## Miscellaneous

*Popurri de Idiomas* – This is a foreign language conversation group that meets at 6pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays at Café Recoleta on Santiago del Estero between Av. Luro and San Martín. There are tables for different languages. This was a one of my favorite experiences in Mar del Plata because it provided an opportunity to meet a wide variety of people from all walks of life.

### Some of my favorite places to eat:

- *El Jamón* – Argentine comfort food, affordable and abundant; Bolívar and B. Mitre
- *Antares* – microbrewery; two locations: on Córdoba at Alvarado and on Bernardo Irigoyen and Formosa
- *Paso Obligado* – the place to go for a *picada*; on Santiago del Estero and Avellaneda
- *Centro Comercial El Puerto* – the place to go for seafood; several restaurants all around one parking lot plaza; take any bus that goes to the port – Since Marplatenses are not fans of seafood, most of the restaurants cater to tourists. It gets busy on weekends, but if you go during the week, the places are giving food away for free to attract business.
- *La Nieve* – great empanadas, pizza, sandwiches, etc., in other words: Argentinean fast food; Rivadavia and Catamarca
- *Los Amigos del Mar* – the place for sushi: authentic, fresh and affordable; on Tomás Guido between Bolívar and Moreno
- *Petit Four* – a café specializing in scrumptious desserts; on San Luis between Belgrano and Moreno
- *Los García* – all you can eat *parrilla*, some of the best beef in town

**Going out** – There are basically three nightlife areas: Alem street and Hipólito Yrigoyen street (bars), and Av. Constitución (huge discos). People in Argentina don't go out until 2 or 3 am, so take a nap beforehand!