



AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

6 April 2020

**LETTER TO AUSTRALIANS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR**

G'day everyone. Following my letter of last week, I wanted to provide an update on the current situation, and to repeat some of the important information I included in that letter.

The COVID-19 crisis continues, and the measures adopted by governments in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay are very tough. This is undoubtedly causing difficulties for many Australians remaining in this part of the world. The team at the Embassy continues to work on options to get you home. You have all been very patient, and I can only plead for a little more. In the meantime, please ensure that you are safe. If you feel unsafe, please contact the Embassy.

As I advised earlier, the Argentine Government has implemented a national quarantine and closed its borders until 12 April. All scheduled international flights are suspended and land border crossings are closed, although limited charter flights to the US and Europe are possibilities. The Paraguayan and Uruguayan Governments have also closed their borders. Similar measures have been taken in other Latin American countries.

During this time I urge you to follow the advice of local authorities and abide by local regulations, which can and will be enforced by the police. Our staffing at the Embassy is reduced, but we will do what we can to continue to keep in touch with you and provide consular advice and services as best we can, particularly for Australians who may have chronic health conditions or who are particularly vulnerable in other ways.

As a result of the lockdown, it can be difficult to change accommodation and you will need to seek permission to move. There are hotel and other options available online, but please let the Embassy know if you have difficulty with accommodation and we can contact the Argentine Ministry of Tourism on your behalf for assistance.

I acknowledge that for many people the lockdown and closure of the borders will cause financial hardship. In the first instance speak with your airline to check whether it has provisions to accommodate passengers who hold confirmed bookings on flights that have now been cancelled. I would also encourage you to contact your travel insurer in the event that assistance may be available. In particular, you should check with your travel insurer if your travel insurance is due to expire because you have not been able to return home. I know it is difficult, but if you do not have sufficient funds available you may need to speak to your family and friends at home to help you through this.

I know that many of you have already provided to the Embassy details of your current location and contact numbers. We have registered these. While we are in lockdown it is vital that the Embassy knows where you all are located and the team is able to communicate with you as best we can. It will allow us to provide you updates on local situations and to inform you quickly in the event options to depart become available. I stress that at this time we cannot say that further flights will be available but we're working hard with the Argentine government and airlines on this.

**Register:** If you have not already done so could you please provide, by email to [consular.buenosaires@dfat.gov.au](mailto:consular.buenosaires@dfat.gov.au) the following details:

- (i) Full names, dates of birth and passport numbers for yourself and all accompanying Australians.
- (ii) Where you will be located during lockdown – if this is a hotel please provide the full hotel address, phone number and your room number.
- (iii) The best way to contact you – email and phone please. We would like to be able to speak to you all individually, but please understand that we are a small office and that we too will be under lockdown restrictions. Email communication is most efficient from our end, but if this is not possible for you of course phone us on 54 11 4779 3500. We will not have reception staff until the lockdown is over but we're doing the best we can to answer your calls.
- (iv) Advice if you suffer from a chronic medical condition and you are concerned about access to medications or treatment.
- (v) Name and Australian contact information for a nominated family member that we are able to contact on your behalf in the event of an emergency. We are of course bound by the Australian Privacy Act so will not contact other persons about your situation unless it relates to a life-threatening emergency. It would be helpful though if you could confirm your consent for this in your email.

**Medical:** If you have a condition for which you take regular medication it's vital that you have ample supplies to see you through. Australian prescriptions cannot be filled in Argentina, Paraguay or Uruguay so if you do need to get additional medications it's important to start thinking about this.

Doctors and pharmacies will remain open during the lockdown. I recommend you visit a GP rather than going to a hospital at this time, unless of course you have an emergency. Your hotel should be able to give you advice on a GP nearby or may have a doctor on call that you can access. I suggest you have a chat with your hotel's concierge or reception about this, including what arrangements they have in place in the event you have some sort of medical emergency.

**Visas:** We've heard from several Australians concerned about the issue of overstaying their visas if they go into lockdown. Argentine authorities have advised that they will extend temporary and transit visas for 30 days if they are due to expire after 17 March.

As you can understand, the situation is changing daily and we encourage you to continually monitor our social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook and Instagram- for further updates over the coming days.

Please also continue to monitor advice on the government's Smartraveller website – there is a general COVID bulletin on the main page of the site, and individual Travel Advice for each country on the website [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au).

Very importantly please follow the advice given by the authorities in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, particularly in relation to lockdown procedures and restrictions in place. For the latest health information (in Spanish):

- Argentine Ministry of Health at <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/salud>
- Uruguayan Ministry of Public Health at <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-salud-publica/>
- Paraguayan Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare <https://www.mspbs.gov.py/>

**Travel:** There are a limited number of charter flights being operated from Argentina – usually to Europe or North America – and sometimes Australians are able to purchase tickets on these. Please check carefully that you are able to transit the countries en route to return home given restrictions in each country. If you are able to secure an airline ticket that will get you home, you are allowed to travel within the country to the airport to catch this flight. However, conditions are strict - you must have a confirmed onward flight ticket, cannot arrive in Buenos Aires more than 24 hours before the plane departs, must not have any symptoms of covid-19 and must seek prior authorisation to travel with at least 24 hours' notice. Many provincial governments have implemented restrictions as well.

Please contact the Embassy on [consular.buenosaires@dfat.gov.au](mailto:consular.buenosaires@dfat.gov.au) if you have an onward flight and need to travel to meet it. We can help you obtain the necessary approvals. These restrictions apply to all internal travel - including buses, planes and travel by car.

**Safety:** While movements will be heavily restricted during the lockdown it is still important to consider your personal safety and security.

- Information on security concerns can be found in the “Safety” section of our travel advice at [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) – just type Argentina or the country you are in into the destination box and follow the prompts.
- It's important to be vigilant about your safety even when in lock down – the basics are crucial: ensure your hotel room doors are locked and use the extra safety latch; if you do go out make sure you are back at your accommodation before it gets dark; make sure you watch your wallet, mobile phone and other valuables, and ensure your passport is secure. All those normal common sense precautions but it's easy to be complacent. We want you to be safe.

You may be, or become, separated from families and friends and there remains a tremendous amount of uncertainty as to when life will return to normal and when you may be reunited with loved ones. I urge you to keep in touch with your families and loved ones. And please, keep an eye out for fellow Aussies you may encounter and may need help.

I would be very grateful if you could pass this letter on to other Australians that you are aware of currently in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Warm regards

Brett

Brett Hackett  
Australian Ambassador