



Mendoza: City of Trees

| BASIC INFORMATION ¹ | World Rank ² | | Similar to |
|--|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| Urban Area Population: 2001 | 840,000 | 396 | Mexicali, Oslo, Liverpool, Kuhlina |
| Urban Land Area: Square Miles: 2001 | 85 | 309 | Provo-Orem, Strasbourg, Pune. Toluca |
| Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers: 2001 | 220 | | |
| Population per Square Mile | 9,900 | 496 | Riyadh, Zurich, Moscow, Merida |
| Population per Square Kilometer | 3.800 | | |

22 October 2007

Setting

Mendoza is the capital of Mendoza province in Argentina. The urban area is located just to the east of the Andes Mountains at an elevation of approximately 2,500 feet (800 meters). The pre-cordillera of the Andes reaches 10,000 feet (3,200 meters) within 20 miles (32 kilometers) of Mendoza. Aconcagua, the highest mountain outside of Asia, reaches 22,841 feet (6,962 meters) is only 70 miles (110 kilometers) from Mendoza. Aconcagua, while on the crest of the Andes, is wholly within Argentina, rather than on the border with Chile.

The urban area is on to the north of the Rio Mendoza, which has a wide riverbed in the area of Mendoza. The Rio Mendoza courses from the Andes, through a spectacular canyon (see Rental Car Tour: Trans-Andean Highway, <http://www.rentalcartours.net/rac-andes.pdf>)

The urban area is relatively elongated. It is generally oriented north to south, along a 10 mile (16 kilometer) axis. The urban area tends to be less than 5 miles (8 kilometers) wide, with fingers of development protruding toward the east.

Population, Land Area and Density

The population of the Mendoza urban agglomeration is 840,000. The urban land area is approximately 85 square miles (200 square kilometers). Mendoza is Argentina's fourth largest urban area. The central city of Mendoza has approximately 110,000 residents. The Mendoza urban area has a population density approaching 10,000 per square mile (3,800 per square mile). This density is fairly uniform throughout the urban area. Even in the central business district, there are few buildings that rise to more than five floors.

¹ For definitions of urban terms see <http://www.demographia.com/db-define.pdf>.

² Among urban 707 areas with more than 500,000 population (<http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.com>)

The Trees

The most unique characteristic of Mendoza is the trees. They are virtually everywhere, except in the new, higher quality developments noted above. Even in Centro, the trees are overwhelming. Of course, the overwhelming greenery of the trees would be largely absent during the winter, since most of the trees are deciduous.

Housing

It appears that the overwhelming majority of residences are single-family detached. There are a few apartment and condominium buildings, including a few that appear to be abandoned, incomplete construction (Plates 13, 62). The neighborhoods range from a few apparently informal dwellings (Plates 4-6), to middle-income Latin American (Plates 10, 11, 47, 50), to high quality housing that any Western European or American would be pleased to live in. The middle income housing is on small lots, often with walls and sometimes with little in the way of a front yard.

Much of the highest quality housing appears to be new developments on the urban periphery. Each of these is protected by security, which makes it difficult to obtain photographs. The most impressive such development identified was Palmares de Presidente, which is located on the southwestern periphery of the urban area. This development includes a many large houses (Plates 51-58). On the east side of the urban area is Parc de Descanso, much of which is still under construction. As in Palmares de Presidente, Parc de Descanso includes many large houses (Plates 70-78). There are also high quality older homes, especially toward the university district on the west side of the urban area (Plates 33, 41-44).

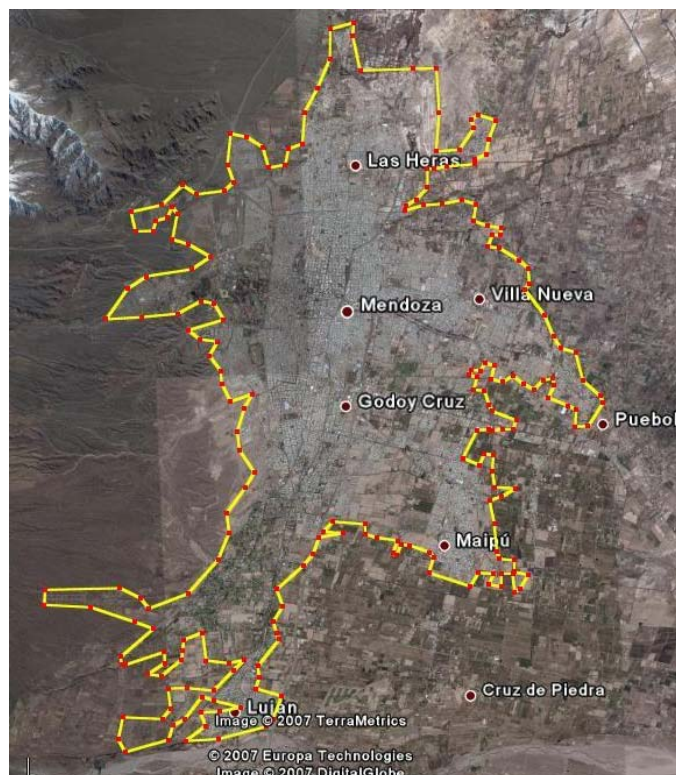
Central Business District and Commerce

Centro, or the central business district, is alive with pedestrian activity. Mendoza has a high-volume, large retail core, with local and international shops as well as eating establishments. The sidewalks are crowded in the evenings. During the spring, when this visit was made, a number of restaurants had outdoor dining.

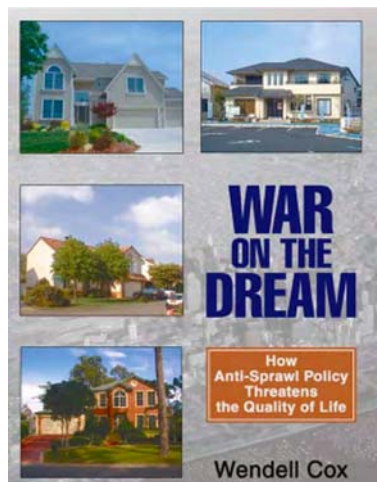
Mendoza is well served by hypermarkets, with a large Wal-Mart (Plate 19) on the south side and a large Carrefour (Plate 64) on the east side.

Transport

Mendoza has a plethora of buses, which is typical of Latin American urban areas. In addition to the diesel buses, there are electric trolley buses, which is somewhat unusual for an urban area of this size (Dayton, Ohio, which is somewhat smaller, and Valparaiso, Chile, which is somewhat larger, also have trolley buses). Long lines of people are observed at bus stops.



The urban area has a high quality freeway system. A four to six lane freeway approaches the urban area from the south, which also serves as the principal roadway to the west. The Trans-Andean highway diverges from the freeway south of the urban area. There is also a four to six lane freeway leading to the east, toward Buenos Aires. Finally, an inner city loop is formed by two freeways.



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Urban Tours by Rental Car: About the Series

Urban Tours by Rental Car offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety -- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, *Urban Tours by Rental Car*.



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