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Argentina at the Smithsonian, 2010 [1]

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Argentines do not make up a particularly large percentage of the Latino population in the US. The results of the 2010 Census will certainly provide more accurate data, but a 2007 Pew Research Center project established that, though it is the third most populous country in Latin America, Argentina does not figure into the top 10 countries of origin for Hispanic residents in America, lagging behind in fourteenth place and making up a mere 0.06% of the US population. Given the average American's slim chances of crossing paths with an Argentine in the US, coupled with Argentina's remote location at the far south of South America, it is not surprising that few people in the US are acquainted with Argentine culture.

Argentina's recent Oscar success has certainly drawn attention to the country. At this year's Academy Awards ceremony, where most film experts placed their bets on the German film *The White Ribbon*, people were surprised when Argentina's *The Secret in their Eyes* was announced as the winner in the best foreign language film category. Now playing in major theaters across the US, the movie promises to bring a little piece of Argentine culture to American audiences and possibly spark new interest in the Southern country among the American public.

Given this happy coincidence, the recent launch of "Argentina at the Smithsonian 2010" could not have been timed better. Organized by the Smithsonian Latino Center in partnership with the Secretariat of Culture of the Nation of Argentina, the Embassy of Argentina in DC and other institutions, the series of events consists of a variety of free and ticketed programs and exhibits scheduled to take place throughout the year in the different museums that make up the Smithsonian in Washington DC.

Envisioned as a celebration of Argentina's bicentennial, "Argentina at the Smithsonian 2010" seeks to highlight the country's historical, artistic and cultural richness. The holistic approach embraced by its organizers, who have strung together various events distributed throughout several months into a comprehensive and unique program, will allow for synergy among the different exhibits and activities, and possibly attract more attention to the program as a whole. Offering free public events in addition to ticketed ones will certainly ensure a higher turnout, as will the fact that shows and exhibitions are not targeted at a single audience, but instead aim to reach out to adults, children and entire families. At the same time, events are not limited to a particular type, but include activities that range from a simple museum exhibit to a hands-on crafting experience with native Argentine designers.

Beyond the characteristics that seem to point at the program's success, the reason why "Argentina at the Smithsonian 2010" is particularly interesting is that it features elements of traditional Argentine culture alongside more recently developed cultural expressions and trends. In this sense, music shows are not limited to the well-known tango genre, but they also extend to Argentine rock. And while "The Story of Argentine Wine" may not be new to wine-

connoisseurs, lectures and films on Afro-Argentines, often ignored in the study of the country, may expose many Americans to this part of Argentina's history for the first time. The list goes on , including exhibitions of emerging Argentine photographers, a visit by famous contemporary artist Guillermo Kuitca, and a lecture on Argentine poets in the US. The delectable diversity of Argentine cuisine will feature prominently, demonstrating that Argentina has more to offer beyond outstanding beef. If events in Holland are any indication, empanadas and facturas go hand in hand with the effort to win hearts and minds, as the Prince of Holland's marriage to Argentine Maxima Zorreguieta was accompanied by a sharp uptick in the popularity of Argentine restaurants in Amsterdam.

While this cultural diplomacy initiative is confined to the Washington Beltway, it has the characteristics necessary to generate interest in Argentina among Americans who visit the events. Hopefully, this program marks the beginning of a series of cultural events that will continue beyond the celebration of Argentina's bicentennial and generate ongoing interest in the country.

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