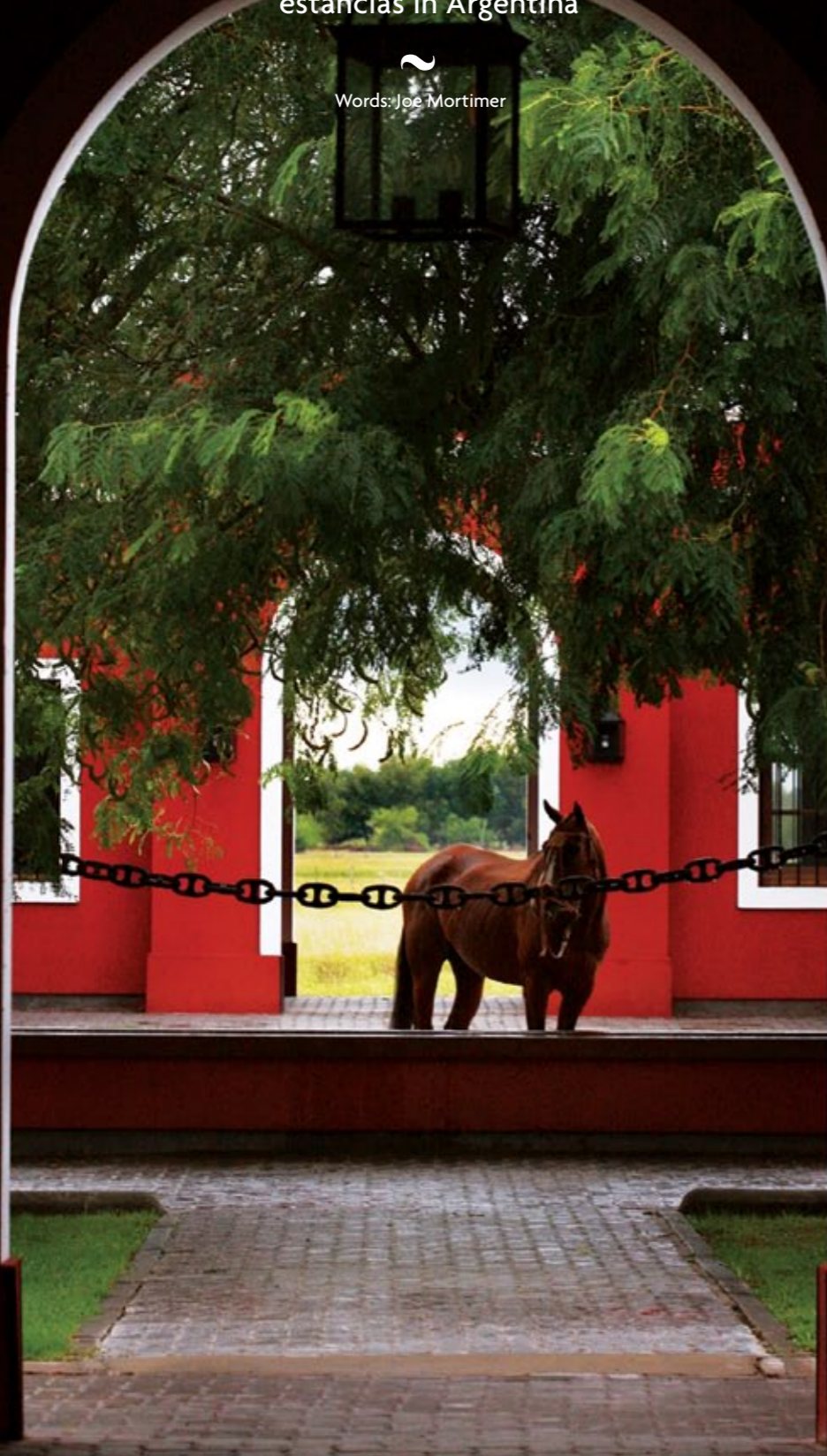


# LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

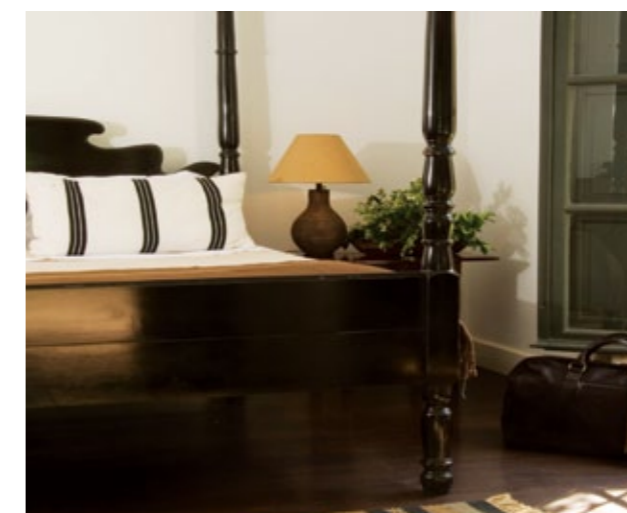
Authentic gaucho culture meets rustic luxury at La Bamba de Areco, one of the oldest and most elegant estancias in Argentina

Words: Joe Mortimer



## The important bit

**WHAT:** Cottage Suite  
**WHERE:** Estancia La Bamba de Areco, 2760 San Antonio de Areco, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina.  
**PRICE:** from US \$760 to \$990  
**TEL:** +54 2326 454 895  
**BOOK:** [reservations@labambadeareco.com](mailto:reservations@labambadeareco.com)  
[www.labambadeareco.com](http://www.labambadeareco.com)



The sound of a ringing bell cuts through the still, early afternoon air in the countryside outside San Antonio de Areco, a traditional farming town 90 minutes from Buenos Aires.

The noise summons the guests of La Bamba de Areco to a magnificent al fresco lunch in the shade of tall eucalyptus and acacia trees, where plates are piled high with fresh salad, grilled provoleta cheese and an endless supply of Argentine steak, which sizzles on the *parilla* (grill) nearby.

It's a typical lunchtime at La Bamba, an exquisitely restored *estancia* (ranch) with 11 luxuriously appointed suites, each named after polo ponies, where an idyllic vision of the life of an Argentine rancher is shared with guests seeking a taste of the bucolic countryside.

After a languid lunch, I retire to my Cottage Suite, Jabalina. The cool residence is separate from the main buildings of the 185-year-old *estancia*, which looks out onto landscaped gardens, tall trees and manicured polo fields, where the resident international team train in polo season.

With dark hardwood floors and antique furniture, the residence's natural palette of whites and browns creates a rustic, luxurious environment, with an open fireplace and an anteroom with daybed and dresser. There are no televisions at La Bamba and WiFi is limited to certain areas, which is a blessing in this all-natural setting.

The bathroom, beautifully decorated in blue and white tiles that are wonderfully cool underfoot on warm afternoons, has a huge bathtub and colonial-style basin overlooked by prints of polo matches.

But the La Bamba experience begins long before you arrive in the suite. Approaching via a dirt road leading from the rural town of San Antonio, famed for its silversmiths, the *estancia* is reached through an avenue of plane trees speckled with sunlight.

The main building, a terracotta-coloured low-rise built around a u-shaped courtyard and an ancient well, has a central tower where vigilant guards once stood watch against unwanted visitors. A small library on the top floor of the tower is stacked with hardback books about photography, Argentine culture and graphic design.

It feels more like a private home and that's how the hosts, Lucija and Guillermo, refer to it. Formerly interior designers, the affable duo were invited to run the magnificent property on behalf of its French owner after successfully reimagining the interiors and acting as local fixers during the process of converting the *estancia* into its present form in 2009.

It's a convivial atmosphere every evening, when guests meet in the lounge for drinks before dinner is served at a large table surrounded by black-and-white prints of indigenous people. The food is exquisite, though if you're not a fan of communal dining, a private table can be arranged elsewhere on the estate.

The highlight of the *estancia* has to be La Pulperia, the former bar-cum-tack room, where passing travellers used to rest their horses and enjoy a thermos of *yerba mate* – or something stronger – before continuing their journey. Now, it's a rustic lounge-bar space, with whitewashed walls covered in local artwork, timber roof and an enormous fireplace taking up an entire wall.

Days at La Bamba are spent luxuriating in the natural surroundings, which feel a world apart from bustling Buenos Aires, 120kms away, or lounging by the pool after an indulgent hot stone massage. Alternatively, for the quintessential gaucho experience, you can while away the hours riding horses with Andres, the *estancia's* "tame gaucho" (Argentine cowboy) who leads rides around the property under the endless blue sky of the Argentina Pampas. ☞