

Dateline: Cordoba, Argentina

Dove hunting with JJ

Timetable: Year round

Accommodations: Modern lodge

Food: Outstanding, especially for the beef lover

Hunt: Easy

For decades the Cordoba area of Argentina has been well known for its dove shooting. Many lodges have surfaced here that cater to USA-based wingshooters, and I have shot at quite a few of them. **One of the best is Sierra Brava Lodge.** The lodge owner is Juan Jose Sala, former assistant prosecuting district attorney in the city of Cordoba. It was obvious during my recent visit that he enjoys catering to wing shooters a lot more than he did “lawyer-ing”. Called “J.J.”, Sala is at the lodge and travels with the hunters on almost every shoot. **This personal attention, as any traveler has found over the years, is very important to maintaining a top-notch rating with clients.**

In the main lodge there are four double rooms. In an adjoining lodge there are two additional double rooms, so the lodge is full with 12 people. During most of the Sierra Brava shoots there are probably about six to eight shooters. Right in front of this latter lodge is a beautiful swimming pool, so bring trunks. If there are six shooters, Sala might set them up in individual rooms. However, some shooters do want to share a room with a buddy, and that can be arranged, too. All the rooms are clean, each with a private bath, and guests will not feel crowded. Meals are served at both the lodges.

The vehicles that take gunners to the hunting areas are large mini-buses with four rows of seats behind the driver. Shooting with a party of seven there was plenty of room. One of the important features of Sierra Brava is the short drives to the hunting fields from June through February. This is because **J.J.’s lodge is adjacent to a major dove roost that holds millions of birds.**

Through his hunting leases nearby where countless acres of small grains are grown, many of these drives are only a few minutes. As one might guess, doves using the adjacent roost fly to these nearby fields.

In April and May, the doves at this roost fly to the north. This probably has to do with crop harvest, but these are

the only months that drives to the shooting area are 45-60 minutes.

During this time period, clients enjoy an Argentinean barbecue or “asado” in the field, but J.J. has plans to build a small lodge in this more northerly area, probably two rooms to start with, so up to four hunters can stay right in this productive shooting area during the few months the doves migrate north.

Sala’s clients enjoy serious high volume shooting if they want. Such shooters can certainly be accommodated. As an example, the first day our party of seven shooters shot over 12,000 doves. One shooter shot over 3,000, another shooter shot over 2,000. Since I’ve shot doves in South America so many times, I am no longer so figuratively mad at them. I shot fewer than 1,000 birds and was definitely low man on the figurative totem pole. That evening, as dinner was winding down, the group was surprised by two singer/entertainers who put on a great, great show for the group – J.J. special touch – and a perfect ending to a perfect day.

Anyone shooting South America for doves is going to have an interesting bird boy. One of my bird boys, Diego, had three years in working on his B.A. in psychology. Some of the bird boys are great shooters. One American gunner needed a break, so he offered his bird boy his gun and use of his shells, commenting, “Shoot until you miss, and then I’ll take over”. The bird boy shot over 50 times without a miss. I was told this youngster was encouraged to come to the U.S. by another American wing shooter to train in Colorado and, eventually, to compete in the Olympics. The bird boy was that good, but that fellow is still in South America guiding American-based wing shooters.

Many of those who travel to South America these days, especially those who have shot in Argentina one or more times previously, want really high doves. **On more than one shoot our group was presented with many super high birds.** Most of us were shooting 20 and 28 gauge guns, and it is amazing how far the small gauges will reach out and up to kill a dove stone dead in midair. In my experience **there’s little doubt that more and more wing shooters want these high birds.**



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While 15 to 20 years ago in South America a small percentage of wing shooters rented guns, just the opposite is true today.

A full 80 percent of those traveling to the Cordoba area are now renting guns from the outfitters. Typically, the cost is \$ 50 a day. Sala has good 12 and 20 gauge Beretta and Benelli semi-autos with a few over-unders also available, including a few 28 gauge guns. The Argentine 12, 20 and 28 gauge shot shells are excellent.

There's no need to arise at the crack of dawn, whether hunting close to the lodge or driving the 45-60 minutes to the field. Shooters will find birds awaiting them no matter when they arrive, and their shoulders will be wanting a reprieve even before lunch is ready. Typically shooters leave the lodge from 8.00-8.30 each morning.

No matter where one shoots in the Cordoba area, he or she should expect top-notch food, and this is especially true for those who love beef. Of course, Argentina is well known for its beef, and everyone is pleased with how much flavor it has. **Expect beef prepared in many ways at Sierra Brava.** Also, when a diner thinks the meal is over and is awaiting dessert, that's when the main entrée comes, so be willing to push back on some of the courses. Red Argentinean wine is always served. At almost every meal doves are also served, but one never tastes the same dove recipe twice. **The Sierra Brava chef is very innovative with these wild birds, and everyone raves about their preparation and their taste.**

But it's the eared dove that so many shooters come to the Cordoba area for, and there is little doubt that the small grain fields surrounding Cordoba hold more doves than anywhere in the world. The habitat is ideal, plus most of these fields were once brush or pasture and not all that long ago. Once the land was cleared and small grains were planted the dove population exploded, and the birds are still exploding.

The temperature is very temperate, and some fields are always nearing harvest, being harvested or just harvested. Because the birds have the endless food supply, as well as huge, huge roosting areas for nesting and resting, a rare phenomenon among wildlife has occurred. It is documented that these eared doves can produce young of their own at only three months. Many outfitters around Cordoba say that the populations are still expanding despite plenty of U.S. based wing shooters doing all they can to help the local farmers.

Reaching Cordoba is relatively easy, flying overnight from Dallas, Miami or Atlanta to Santiago, Chile, and connecting with a late morning flight to Cordoba. This flight gets clients into Cordoba in time for an afternoon hunt that day of arrival. Most hunt packages are for a half-day hunt on arrival, two full days of shooting, a morning hunt the last day and then a late afternoon departure from Cordoba to Santiago to connect with the overnight flight back to the States.

The two half-day/two full-day shooting package has been recently reduced to \$ 1,140 plus the hunting license of \$ 65 per day and tips for bird boys and the lodge staff. Shells are currently \$ 10.75 a box.

The Bird Hunting Report has featured more than one report about dove lodges around Cordoba and will doubtless publish more, but **Sierra Brava is a very special place for many reasons**, most of which have already been covered. Couple intense high-volume shooting and short drives to the gunning fields during most months of the year with a lodge owner who goes right into the field with his shooters, dines with them at breakfast, lunch and supper, and it's a combination that works.

To book a trip to Sierra Brava: **Detail Company Adventures, Jeri Booth, 3220 Audley, Houston, TX 77098; 800-292-2213; www.detailcompany.com; info@detailcompany.com**

-Nick Sisley