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International Festival highlights Sofia Adrogué's native Argentina

By Kim Hogstrom
Contributing writer

It's hard to imagine that there's anyplace more beautiful than Houston in the spring.

Yes, we know it means that the grueling summer is just around the corner, but for a brief moment in time, we're in heaven.

Not small among the wonderful things about spring here, is Houston's annual international festival, now in its 42nd year. Every spring, the Houston International Festival, also known as iFest, celebrates a different country by fea-

turing its food, music, art, costumes, dance and more.

This year, on April 21 and 22, and April 28 and 29, downtown Houston will team with the flavors, colors, sounds and sights of one of the most interesting regions in the world; iFest 2012 is dedicated to South America, and particularly, Argentina. Even by iFest standards, it promises to be a stand-out.

"Argentina is a nation rich with immigrants, and very European," said Sofia Adrogué, iFest Country Ambassador, Houston attorney and native Argentinian.

HOUSTON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

On April 21 and 22, and April 28 and 29, downtown Houston will team with the flavors, colors, sounds and sights of one of the most interesting regions in the world; iFest 2012 is dedicated to South America, and particularly, Argentina. For a complete schedule of events, visit ifest.org.

It's little wonder Adrogué was chosen the official ambassador for iFest. This vital, intelligent woman has a passion for her native country that



Photo by Alan Warren / HCN

Sofia Adrogué is the 2012 International Ambassador for the Houston International Festival in April. She's also a Houston lawyer and author.

shines as brightly as the South American sun. "In the 1940s and 1950s, Argentina was one of the richest countries in the world," Adrogué continued, "and it attracted people from all professions and many cultures: doctors, lawyers, artists and scientists all immigrated there."

"Today, it's not uncommon for people in Argenti-

na to speak three or four languages: German, French, Spanish and English, for example. The European influence can be seen everywhere. That's why Buenos Aires is called the 'Paris of South America.' The country is beautiful, and our ambition with iFest is to empower people who attend, with knowledge about it.

"When you walk in

someone's footsteps for a moment, you get to know them better," Adrogué said in her rich, lyrical, Argentinian accent.

What can visitors expect to find? Music and dance professionals will appear on nine different stages scattered about festival grounds — five main music stages and four smaller cul-

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FESTIVAL
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tural stages. Each music stage will have four or five sets per day, with shorter sets on the smaller stages. It's possible to enjoy 18 different performances a day this year, including local, national and world-class artists. In all, an astounding 2,000 performers will appear on the iFest stages.

There are also some new features that visitors won't want to miss. This year, attendees can walk through an Argentinian town at the Chevron Living Museum. Guests will find a life-sized mock-up of the "Streets of Buenos Aires" including some of its monuments such as Recoletta (the final resting spot of Evita Peron) and the Casa de Rosada. The entire Living Museum will be enveloped in all things Argentina.

And kids are by no means forgotten at iFest. There's the Green Mountain Energy Kid's World featuring a petting zoo, climbing wall, crafts and activities. Ten local nonprofit agencies will be on site with fun kid-stuff ranging from making musical instruments, to anthropology demonstrations and practice excavations.

"We also distribute more than 7,000 teacher's curriculum guides highlighting the featured country to local schools," added Kayler Williams, Administrative Director of Houston Festival Foundation, Inc, the nonprofit arts and education organization that produces the festival.

"Each year, we partner with the World Affairs Council to bring about 600 school children to visit the Living Museum during the week. The children really like it and learn from it," she said with a smile.

While Houstonians have certainly embraced the Houston International Festival thanks to its lively performances and enrich-

ing experiences, the positive economic impact of the festival is nothing to sneeze at either.

"The festival hosts an estimated 250,000 visitors, including locals and many tourists. These folks fold thousands and thousands of dollars into the local economy through lodging, meals, and other expenditures during the event," explained Kim A. Stollis, Houston International Festival Foundation's CEO and President. "It's a good thing for all of us."

"Houston really is a melting pot," explained Adrogue. "The festival is a good opportunity to showcase Houston as a city for all people. We are a paradigm of the future of all American cities. We don't just talk the talk here, we walk the walk. We're a city of inclusion. Diversity is not an aspiration here, it's a reality, and iFest is a great way to celebrate it," she concluded.

Has it ever been stated better than that?



Photo by Alan Warren / HCN

From left to right, Kayler Williams, Sofia Adrogue and Kim Stollis work together for the Houston International Festival. Adrogue is a 2012 International Ambassador of her native Argentina. Williams is Administrative Director of Houston Festival Foundation, Inc, the nonprofit arts and education organization that produces the festival and Kim A. Stollis is the Houston International Festival Foundation's CEO and President.



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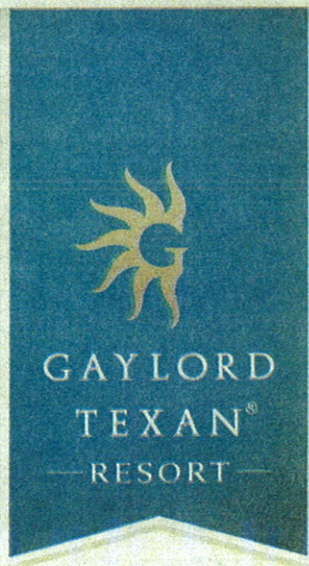
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