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THE SPORT OF KINGS: POLO AS IT IS PLAYED AROUND THE WORLD

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HISTORY, GLAMOUR AND COMPETITIVE SPIRIT
- ALIVE AND WELL IN THE SPORT OF POLO

Polo is regarded as the oldest team sport in the world. To pick up a mallet and settle into a saddle is to join a longstanding tradition of rivalry, competition and nobility that emerged in Persia more than two and a half thousand years ago (where players would knock about the heads of the empire's enemies). Since then, the sport has achieved more of a glamorous reputation and has an enduring connection with royalty; after all, this is 'the sport of kings'.

Polo became more popular in the mid-1800s when British tea planters observed a game in Manipur – a northeastern state of India – and brought the concept back to the UK. In 1875, the London-based Hurlingham Polo Committee wrote what was the first formal set of rules and players went on to introduce the game to countries including Argentina, Australia and the United States. Polo is now played in more than 75 countries worldwide.

The sport requires a high degree of horsemanship. An appropriate pony is also essential and stylish gear is recommended (complete your look with the [Armis Edge helmet](#) for groundbreaking shock technology that is both sleek and wearable). Polo embodies the seamless marriage of sport and style, creating some of the world's most exciting events. Passione Lifestyle unpacks the sport as it is played around the world.

SPAIN

Sotogrande is a privately owned residential development in southern Spain. Founded in 1962 by American entrepreneur Joseph McMicking, the originally gated community was designed as an exclusive luxury resort where residents could live beneath the sun of the Mediterranean coast. McMicking's nephew, Enrique Zobel, was particularly interested in polo; he served as the Mania Polo Club president then Zobel supervised the construction of Sotogrande's first polo field, which held its first tournament in 1967. Since then, the sport has been integral to the Spanish region's community. Each year, Sotogrande holds the Enrique Zobel Memorial Tournament.

Teams from across the world comprising the world's best polo players face off each season (spanning from spring to mid-September) in a celebration of Sotogrande's summer sport. In 2024, the rumbling hooves of the 53rd International Polo Tournament return to Santa Maria Polo Club for what is sure to be another year of excitement. Sotogrande hosts more than 20 polo tournaments each season, including the Gold Cup, the Silver Cups, and the Women's Polo Tour, which attract some of the world's most talented teams. Expect accomplished players on nimble ponies, live music and lots of refreshments.

If you want to get involved, the Ayala Polo Club should be first on your list. Guests can take polo lessons and enjoy the club's three exercise tracks, professional-standard fields, riding school and tournaments. The Santa Maria Polo Club is equally worth a visit for its excellent hospitality facilities and polo clinics.



© Sotogrande

UNITED KINGDOM

The first polo match in England took place on Hounslow Heath in 1869. Within six years, Hurlingham – in southwest London – had become the sport's headquarters, and in 1875, the Hurlingham Polo Committee wrote the first formal set of rules. Over the following decades, polo took off in the UK and the County Polo Association was formed in 1898 to support the growing number of country clubs and the tournaments they hosted. Some of the most famous cups were established then, including The Champion Cup, The County Cup and The Coronation Cup.

The UK features frequently in the international polo calendar. Highlights include the Prince of Wales Trophy, The Queen's Cup and Trippetts Challenge. In what is a quintessentially British affair each year, teams from across the world – this year including Australia, Argentina and Dubai – go head-to-head in a series of exciting matches during Chestertons Polo in the Park. The festival runs for three days in June and includes quality matches, some of London's best food outlets and VIP and hospitality upgrades for a charming weekend.

Within the striking greenery of the Cotswolds, visitors can find The Beaufort Polo Club, which boasts one of the UK's best polo schools. Here, Hurlingham Polo Association-approved coaches can teach all skill levels - whether students are trying the sport for the first time or aspiring to a professional level. Polo Experience packages include a welcome briefing with refreshments at the clubhouse, instruction from HPA-accredited coaches, and free entry to the grounds to watch the professionals in action. Hurlingham Polo offers authentic and elegant clothing from the home of British polo to complete your sporting look. The [Hurlingham Polo Gloves](#), for example, offer grip, movement and style.

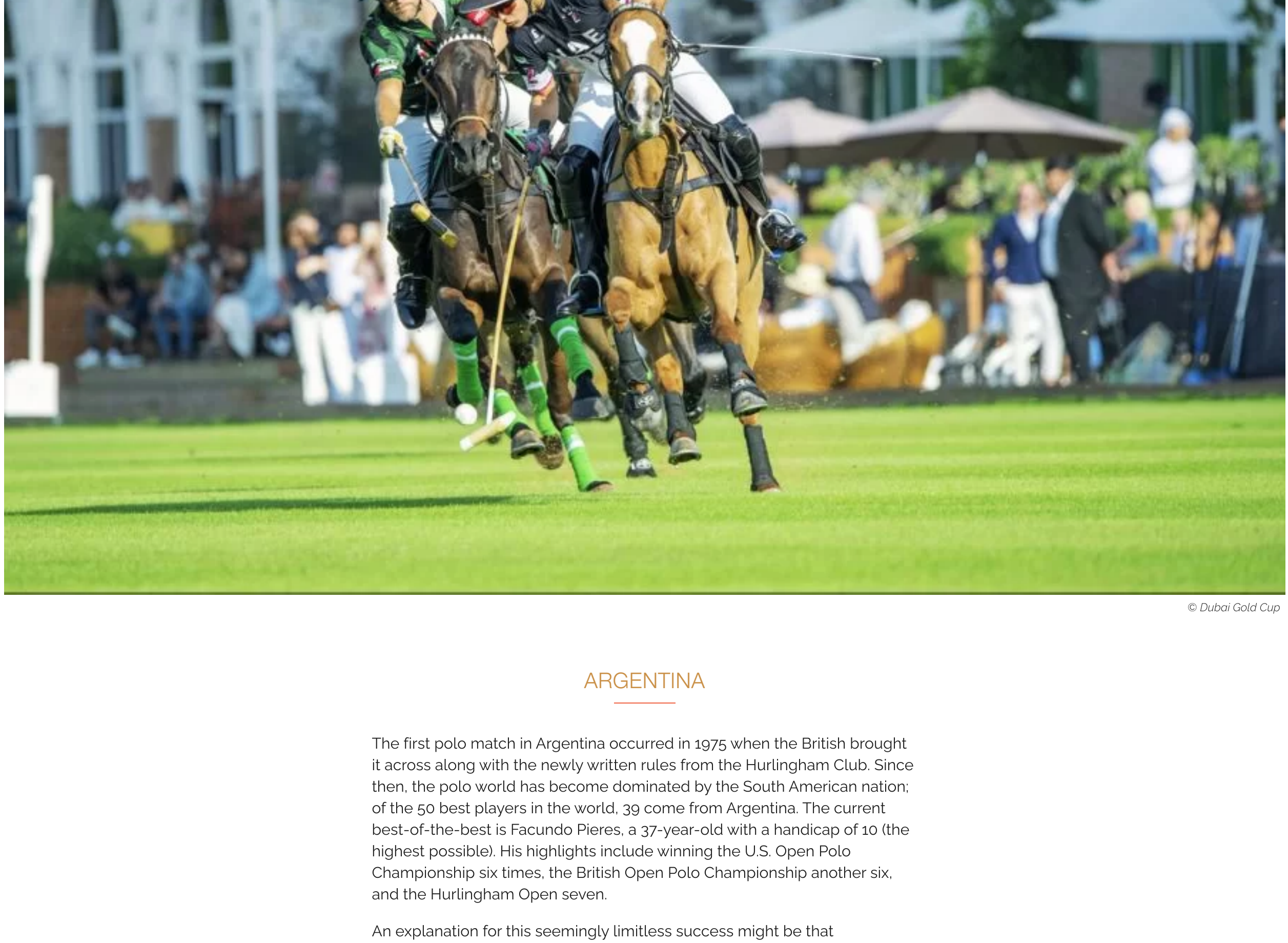


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DUBAI

Dubai is making a name for itself as a crucial appointment on the polo calendar. In 2009, the **Dubai Polo Gold Cup Series** was established with the support of His Highness Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the current ruler of Dubai. What started as one game turned into a series of five; the lineup now includes The Silver Cup, Gold Cup, Polo Masters Cup, Dubai Challenge Cup and the Dubai Cup, all recognised by the World Polo Tour. The series is on a par with the most important polo tournaments in the world. The Dubai Polo Team has racked up a number of wins at Sotogrande's Gold Cup.

The Al Habtoor Polo Club is more than a sports organisation; it's a community set out over 140 acres of land and features luxury homes, villas and a riding school. Visitors will find two international-sized arenas and more than 500 stables (think of the number of horses). The Polo Academy and Riding School offer expert coaching and lesson plans ranging from individual classes to corporate packages. For something a little different, try your hand at camel polo for a Middle Eastern twist on the traditional game. Although camel polo features many of the original rules, there is the obvious adjustment to a new riding partner, which challenges how you might



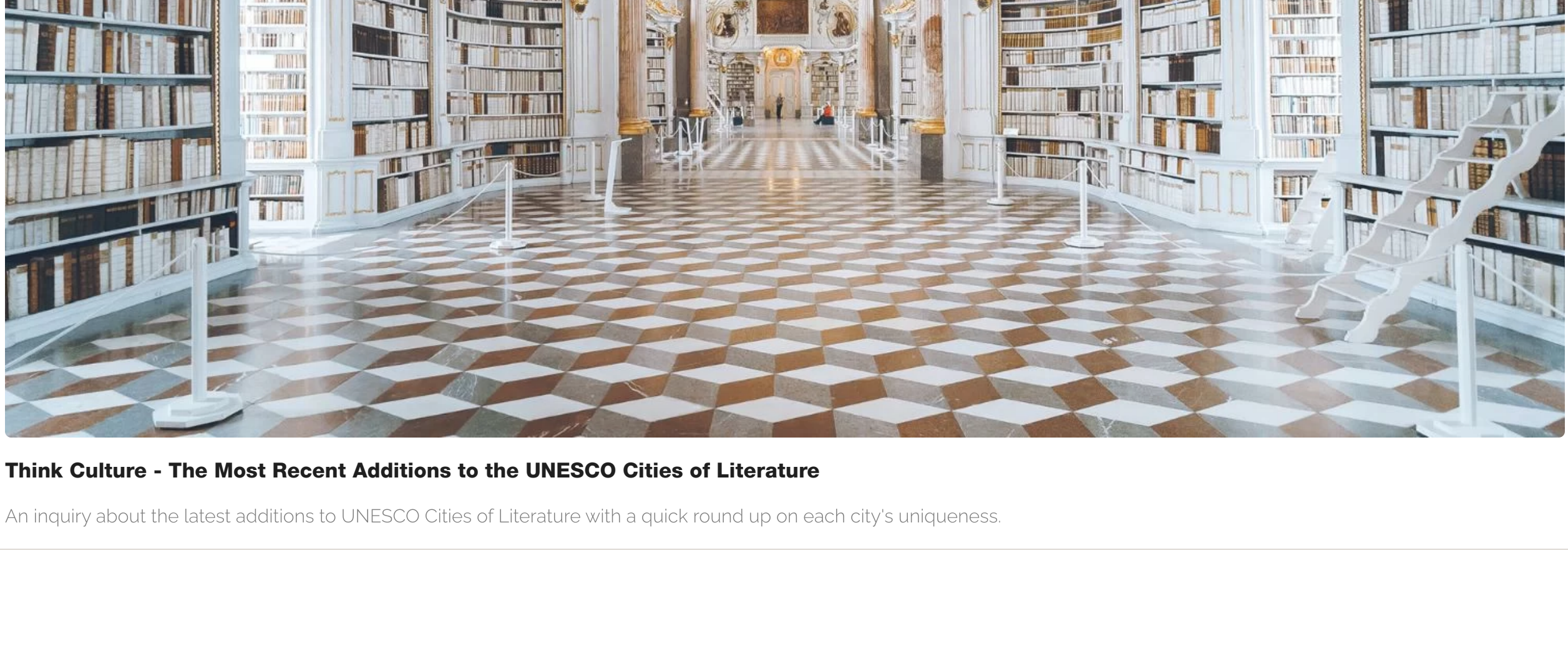
© Dubai Gold Cup

ARGENTINA

The first polo match in Argentina occurred in 1975 when the British brought it across along with the newly written rules from the Hurlingham Club. Since then, the polo world has become dominated by the South American nation; of the 50 best players in the world, 39 come from Argentina. The current best-of-the-best is Facundo Pieres, a 37-year-old with a handicap of 10 (the highest possible). His highlights include winning the U.S. Open Polo Championship six times, the British Open Polo Championship another six, and the Hurlingham Open seven.

An explanation for this seemingly limitless success might be that Argentine polo leads the way regarding horse quality. Here, ponies are stronger, more agile and flexible than most and can sell for over £100,000. Equally, there are over 5,000 players, 1,000 polo fields and 300 clubs nationwide. Argentina even has its own Hurlingham Club, which was founded in 1888.

In Buenos Aires, the **Campo Argentino de Polo** (or Cathedral of Polo) hosts some of the sport's most anticipated and important games; among them is the Argentine Open Championship, and one of THE prestigious events on the polo calendar. Thirty thousand spectators fill the stands yearly to watch agile ponies race across the field as their intuitive riders track the ball. If you want to get out on the field, try La Tarde Polo Club, one of Argentina's finest. A stop at the on-site pool and spa facilities can follow tailor-made training programmes and classes for every level.



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