**Arrabal:** A slum or sketchy neighborhood.

**Bajo:** The area of Buenos Aires where the city meets the Río de la Plata.

**Bajofondo:** underground, lumpen

**Bandoneón:** A small box-shaped button accordion or concertina popularized in the early twentieth century in relation to the growth of tango music in Argentina and Uruguay.

**La Boca del Riachuelo (or simply La Boca):** A working-class Italian immigrant neighborhood in the southern outskirts of Buenos Aires, located along the banks of the Riachuelo, where it meets the Río de la Plata.

**Boedo-Florida:** The names of two different streets in Buenos Aires, each used to identify a different aesthetic or literary tendency in the vanguard period of the 1920s. Left-leaning writers were identified with Boedo, a main street and name of a working-class neighborhood in which they published a magazine titled *Extrema izquierda* (Extreme left). Cosmopolitan writers became identified with Calle Florida, a more upscale, commercial avenue in the city center where their favorite café was located.

**Candombe:** Afro-Uruguayan drum music and dance form that contributed to the formation of tango.

**Canyengue:** 1. Low-class, related to the slums. 2. Expressive style of tango dance developed in the early twentieth century, characterized by a close embrace in which the couple does not directly face each other but forms an inverted V, both dancers maintain bent knees, and the steps are typically short.

**Compadre:** A man who acts in an arrogant, provocative, or presumptuous way, ready for a fight.

**Compadrito:** A street thug or pimp, known for his strut or forward-bent gait as well as a signature style that included a hat, specific hairstyle, and high-heeled shoes.

**Conventillo:** Tenement or boarding house that typically catered to poor or immigrant renters and was characterized by overcrowding, substandard sanitary conditions, and lack of privacy. Most had an interior patio, associated with the development of early tango dance.

**Corte:** A pause, break, or embellishment in tango dance.

**Cortina:** Literally, curtain. Used in tango to refer to a short musical interlude that separates *tandas* during a milonga.
Criollismo: In Argentina and Uruguay, the valorization of autochthonous cultural expression in literature and other arts. Despite the focus on local cultural production, criollismo was significantly influenced by European cosmopolitan values and preferences.

Criollo, criolla: Noun: A person born in the Americas of “pure” Old World blood, whether European or in some cases African. In the Río de la Plata region, criollos distinguished themselves both from indigenous peoples and from anyone not born in Argentina. Adjective: Aesthetic style privileging local elements over European or other foreign influences.

Farol: A streetlamp or gaslight, an iconic symbol of early tango danced on the street.

Filete, fileteadores: The art and artists of a decorative style of painting used for commercial purposes in early twentieth-century Buenos Aires and now associated with tango. Fileteadores typically portray flowers, leaves, ribbons, flags, and lettering in their works.

Gardel, Carlos (1890?–1935): The most famous tango singer of all time, generally credited with inventing the tango canción or tango song.

Gaucho: A native cowboy of the South American pampas or Patagonian grasslands, a symbol of criollo identity.

Golden age of tango (roughly 1935–1950): The period of the twentieth century during which tango enjoyed its greatest popularity in the Río de la Plata region. Characterized by the proliferation of the orquestas típicas, especially those of Juan D’Arienzo, Aníbal Troilo, and Francisco Canaro. The popularity of the orquestas of Osvaldo Pugliese and Carlos di Sarlo continued on into the post-golden age period.

Guardia vieja (1900–1925): Literally, Old Guard, the period in which tango developed a recognizable form in dance and music. The most famous figures from the period are Eduardo Arolas and Ángel Villoldo.

Gringo: In the context of the Río de la Plata, a disparaging term for a foreigner or immigrant, very commonly used to refer to Italians.

Habanera: Dance rhythm developed and popularized in Cuba in the nineteenth century, considered an antecedent to tango.

Lunfardo: Colloquial vocabulary or language that developed in the Río de la Plata region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that borrows from several immigrant influences and indigenous terms, as well as various kinds of word play including vesre, in which the syllables of words are used al revés or backward, for example, gotan for tango.

Malevo: A low-life character or troublemaker, skilled with a knife.


Milonga: 1. A rioplatense style of music and dance that preceded and contributed to the formation of the tango. 2. The fastest of three basic rhythms that constitute traditional tango dance music (the others being vals and tango). 3. The places or events where the tango is danced.

Milonguero, milonguera: 1. A person whose life revolves around tango dance and
tango philosophy 2. The most skilled dancers in a milonga, able to negotiate within the reduced spaces of a crowded dance floor 3. A dance style characterized by a close embrace and short steps.

Murga: In Uruguay and Argentina, a collective of street musicians or troubadours, usually identified with a specific neighborhood.

Nuevo tango: 1. A style of music associated with Astor Piazzolla and the incorporation of jazz and classical elements with traditional tango, popularized from the 1950s on. 2. A style of tango dance popularized from the 1990s on that breaks with the traditions of tango de salon, tango canyengue, or tango milonguero by opening the embrace, dancing off-axis, and avoiding the rigid social codes of the milonga. 3. A style of electronic music influenced by hip-hop and other contemporary world musics, popularized from 2000 on.

Oriental: Uruguayan, someone or something from the east side of the Río de la Plata.

Orilla: Literally, water’s edge; metaphorically refers to a fringe or marginal area.

Orquesta típica: The ensemble of instrumental musicians associated with the popularization of tango and tango dance during the golden age of tango. Usually included at least three bandoneons, a string section with violins, viola, and sometimes cello, and a rhythm section with piano and upright bass.

Payador: Itinerant poet and musician or minstrel associated with the pampas and later the outlying urban areas, famous for engaging in verbal-musical duels.

Piazzolla, Astor (1921–1992): Composer, arranger, and bandoneón player who revolutionized the sound of instrumental tango by introducing new rhythms, jazz and classical orchestration, and untraditional instruments such as saxophone and electric guitar. Considered the primary architect of nuevo tango music.

Piringundín or peringundín: Low-end bar or dance hall that caters to the riffraff or orillero population.

Porteño, porteña: Adjective used to describe a person, thing, or quality of Buenos Aires.

Práctica: Dance “practice” session in which the social codes typical of the milonga are relaxed and dancers are free to experiment. Musical accompaniment is generally constant, instead of being divided into tandas.

Pugliese, Osvaldo (1905–1995): Legendary tango composer and musician known for his rhythmically intense style beloved by dancers. A leftist, Pugliese has been adopted as a popular saint by tangueros, who invoke his name as a talisman for good luck.

Quilombo: 1. Brothel. 2. Mess, disorder, upset. 3. In Brazil a maroon settlement of escaped or fugitive slaves.

Río de la Plata: River Plate, the river and estuary formed by the confluence of the Uruguay and Paraná rivers that serves as a border between Argentina and Uruguay.

Rioplatense: From the Río de la Plata region, especially the primary port cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

Sainete: A short theater piece, often a farce, important in early twentieth-century theater in Argentina and Uruguay. Sainetes often dealt with popular and vernacular topics and provided an early forum for tango.
Suburbio: A poor, outlying neighborhood.

Tanda: In a milonga a set of three to five songs, usually all tango, vals, or milonga.

Tango de salón: A dance style generally built on an eight-count basic sequence of salida, cruzada, and resolución, modified or embellished with sandwiches, calesitas, sacadas, barridas, and other adornments. The embrace is often open, and steps may be longer than in tango milonguero. Outside of Argentina salon style tango often erroneously refers to stage performance tango, in which ganchos (leg hooks), boleos (leg swings), and other large movements are more frequent than in the traditional milonga setting.

Tango milonguero: A dance style designed for the limited maneuverability of a crowded milonga, in contrast to tango de salón or other styles used in performance. Characteristics include a close or closed embrace, chest-to-chest contact, a straight spine inclined slightly forward, allowing for free movement from the waist down, with the marca proceeding from the chest of the leader.

Tango rioplatense: A term that recognizes tango’s origins and development in both Argentina and Uruguay, especially in the principal port cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo.