



Paraguay

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Paulista Grill (p775)
- ➔ Ciervo Blanco (p775)
- ➔ Milord (p782)
- ➔ Hiroshima (p782)
- ➔ Meshin (p790)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Casa de la Y B&B (p781)
- ➔ Mbaracayú Eco-lodge (p786)
- ➔ Santa María Hotel (p783)
- ➔ Hotel Tirol (p783)
- ➔ Para La Tierra Biological Station (p787)

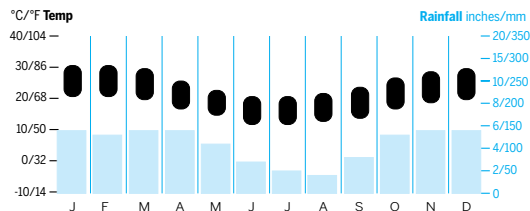
Why Go?

Little-visited, little-known Paraguay is a country much misunderstood. Despite its location at the heart of the continent, it is all too often passed over by travelers who wrongly assume that a lack of mega-attractions means there's nothing to see. But it's ideal for those keen to get off the gringo trail for a truly authentic South American experience.

Paraguay is a country of remarkable contrasts: it's rustic and sophisticated; it's extremely poor and obscenely wealthy; it boasts exotic natural reserves and massive human-made dams; it is a place where horses and carts pull up alongside Mercedes-Benz vehicles, artisans' workshops abut glitzy shopping centers, and Jesuit ruins in rural villages lie just a few kilometers from sophisticated colonial towns. The steamy subtropical Atlantic Forest of the east is a stark contrast to the dry, spiny wilderness of the Chaco, the location of the isolated Mennonite colonies.

When to Go

Asunción



Feb Let loose during Carnaval season in Encarnación.

Jul–Aug Pleasant winter climate makes it the best time to visit the Chaco.

Dec Follow the pilgrims to the Caacupé basilica on the Día de la Virgen (8 December).

Connections

Despite its location at the heart of the continent, Paraguay is often circumvented by travelers. A country almost surrounded by major rivers, many of its land border points involve a bridge crossing with customs offices at either end. The main border crossings are Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil) to Ciudad del Este; Posadas (Argentina) to Encarnación; or via the Ruta Trans-Chaco from Bolivia.

As a member of Mercosur, a trade bloc of southern states, Paraguayans don't need to complete customs formalities to cross to Brazil and Argentina. Foreigners do!

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks

Start with a historic tour of Asunción, take day trips to Itaiguá, Yaguarón, Caacupé and San Bernardino. From here head east to Laguna Blanca, where you could volunteer with Para la Tierra Biological Station, before moving on to Ciudad del Este to visit the awe-inspiring Itaipú Dam. A night in the forest at Hotel Tirol will prepare you for a few days' bird-watching in the real wilderness at Parque Nacional San Rafael. Return to civilization at Encarnación, a great base for visiting the Jesuit Missions before crossing the international bridge to Posadas, Argentina.

Three Weeks

Complete the two-week itinerary but return to Asunción via Santa María de la Fe and head north to colonial Concepción. Take a boat up the Río Paraguay to Bahía Negra and visit the Paraguayan Pantanal, before experiencing the landscape contrast in the dry Chaco at the Mennonite colonies of Loma Plata and Filadelfia. Visit one of the Chaco national parks before continuing along the Ruta Trans-Chaco and crossing into Bolivia.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Asado** Grilled slabs of beef and pork: the focal point of every social event.
- ➔ **Chipa** Cheese bread made with manioc flour.
- ➔ **Chipa guasú** Hot maize pudding with cheese and onion.
- ➔ **Empanadas** Pasties stuffed with chicken, cheese and ham, beef or other fillings.
- ➔ **Locro** Maize stew.
- ➔ **Mbeyú** A grilled cheese and manioc pancake.
- ➔ **Queso Paraguayo** The unusual local cheese.
- ➔ **Sooyo** Thick soup of ground meat, often with a floating poached egg.
- ➔ **Tereré** Iced yerba maté tea drunk ubiquitously and constantly.

AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Guaraní (G)
- ➔ **Official languages** Spanish, Guaraní
- ➔ **Money** ATMs widespread, plastic rarely used
- ➔ **Time** GMT minus four hours

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 406,752 sq km
- ➔ **Population** 6.9 million
- ➔ **Capital** Asunción
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎ 911
- ➔ **Country Code** ☎ 595

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	3750G
Canada	C\$1	4050G
Euro zone	€1	6000G
New Zealand	NZ\$1	3375G
UK	UK£1	8250G
USA	US\$1	5350G

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Hostel bed** US\$15
- ➔ **Evening meal** US\$7.50
- ➔ **Bus ticket** US\$15

Resources

- ➔ **FAUNA Paraguay** (www.fauparaguay.com) Animals and wildlife.
- ➔ **Senatur** (www.senatur.gov.py) Tourist ministry portal.
- ➔ **Discovering Paraguay** (<http://discoveringparaguay.com>) Paraguayan life and culture.