



Uruguay

Uruguay, officially known as the República Oriental del Uruguay, is the smallest Spanish-speaking country in South America. It is bounded to the south by the River Plate, in the west by the River Uruguay, and shares its northern border with Brazil. The mainstay of the economy is still agriculture, and most of the rolling countryside is taken up by estancias, producing cattle, sheep and crops. Uruguay enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in South America, security is excellent and the people are warm and friendly.

Logical combinations include Argentina and Brazil.

Climate and when to go

Uruguay has a gentle climate, with mean temperatures ranging from 25°C in the summer, to 12°C in the winter. Rainfall is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year (though July and August can be wetter). The high season in Punta del Este is their summer, December to March.





Montevideo and surrounds

Montevideo ('hillock with a view') was founded in 1726 on a promontory on the River Plate. The city has a variety of architectural designs ranging from elegant French and Italian colonial buildings to Art Deco. The main squares are the *Plaza Independencia*, the centre-piece of which is an imposing black marble mausoleum of Artigas. At the eastern end of the square is the Palacio Salvo apartment block, rather reminiscent of a miniature Manhattan skyscraper. The *Plaza de*

la Constitución (also known as *Plaza Matriz*), peaceful and leafy, houses the historic cathedral. The fish market is well worth a visit. Nearby there are several estancias offering a range of activities (including riding), which can make a pleasant alternative to staying in a more conventional hotel.

Most visitors arrive via Buenos Aires or on the excellent hydrofoil service which runs from Buenos Aires to either Colonia (45 minutes) or Montevideo (2½ hours).

ESTANCIA SAN PEDRO DE TIMOTE



Beautiful 18th century estancia 160km north of Montevideo and now a country house hotel. The original land (30,000 hectares, now reduced to 1,200 after years of subdivisions) was owned by John Jackson Ball, from Staffordshire. Tennis court, pool (sometimes empty in winter) and plenty of horses.





HOTEL L'AUBERGE



4km from Punta del Este. Stylish small hotel, built around a 1940's water tower; just 2 blocks from the beach. Large gardens, a pool, restaurant and tea room, still famous for serving waffles. Our favourite rooms are in the water tower; as although small they have plenty of character and views of the ocean. Activities nearby include golf, restaurants, casinos, bars and nightlife in Punta del Este.

Colonia

Colonia del Sacramento, 2 hours west of Montevideo, was founded by Portuguese settlers from Brazil in 1680, as a rival to the Spanish Buenos Aires on the other side of the River Plate. It has some of the only, and best preserved, colonial architecture and buildings in this part of South America, in the Barrio Histórico. There are various interesting museums and churches. There are good beaches nearby (the best is Playa Ferrando, 2km east), the water is fresh and brown!



Punta del Este

140 km east of Montevideo lies the vibrant beach resort of Punta del Este, with good nightlife. In its leafy suburbs are hotels, golf courses, casinos and holiday homes (some available to rent). Between Punta and Montevideo is Piriápolis, founded in the 1890's as a bathing resort, and popular with *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) in particular. It is a pretty, hilly area with pine and eucalyptus woods.



Piriápolis



San Miguel Portuguese fort



Hotel Las Cumbres, near Punta del Este



Rocha



Uruguay Itineraries

MONTEVIDEO, PUNTA DEL ESTE, AN ESTANCIA AND COLONIA



A good introduction to this friendly country, staying at small hotels with real character.

Montevideo

Day 1: Stay a night at the Hotel Belmont House, a charming and elegant Relais & Chateaux property in a quiet suburb, with pool.

Punta del Este

Days 2-3: Driven east to Punta del Este for 2 nights at the lovely Hotel L'Auberge, a 5-minute walk from the beach (*see page 64*).

The interior

Days 4-6: Driven north-west (about 3 hours) to Estancia San Pedro de Timote (*see page 63*). Spend 3 nights relaxing at the hotel and enjoy the facilities including a pool, tennis court and of course horses.

Colonia del Sacramento

Days 7-9: A 4 hour drive south-west brings you to Colonia where you have 2 nights at the Hotel Plaza Mayor, a beautiful colonial hotel set around a fragrant courtyard. Colonia is a pretty town to explore or there are beaches to relax on. Transfer to the port for the catamaran to Buenos Aires, or back to Montevideo.



Hotel L'Auberge



Hotel Plaza Mayor

RIDING IN URUGUAY



A fast-paced ride across estancias and along the beaches of Uruguay, with very varied scenery and wildlife. Fixed departures from February to April and in October and November.

Montevideo and surrounds

Days 1-2: Met in Montevideo and driven north to Estancia Parada Arteaga for an introductory ride and first encounter with the gauchos. The following morning ride to Estancia San Pedro de Timote (*see page 63*) for a night.

Rocha

Day 3: After a morning ride, driven north-east along a panoramic road through the province of 33 and into Rocha, with its pristine beaches, emerald shores and network of lagoons. Overnight at the 18th century Fortín de San Miguel, on the Brazilian border. Afternoon ride around the rolling hills of San Miguel.

Barra Chuy beach and Santa Teresa National Park

Days 4-5: After a morning ride, drive to the Brazilian town of Chuy, where you meet the horses for an exhilarating gallop along a pure white sandy beach. After 22km arrive at La Coronilla, on the beach, for a 2 night stay. The following day ride south, through coastal hills, sand dunes and woodlands and into the forested Santa Teresa National Park. One often sees dolphins feeding in the bay.

Laguna Negra and Don Bosco

Days 6-7: After a short drive, arrive at Laguna Negra, with many migratory and resident birds. Ride in the lake (bareback if you wish!) and through forests of fig and exotic palms. A final drive brings you to Estancia El Sauce, a working farm, and your home for 2 nights. Rides around the estancia will teach you about the traditions and life here. A large marsh area is home to otters, black-necked swans, flamingos and capybaras.

Cabo Polonio to Punta del Este

Days 8-9: Drive to Guardia del Monte, another working estancia on the shores of a lagoon. After lunch ride through towering sand dunes to Cabo Polonio, a fishing village which can only be reached by horse or four wheel drive vehicles. Sea lions or even (October-November only) southern right whales may be seen as you ride up to La Quebrada, a country inn in the hills, where you spend the night. The next afternoon there is time for a quick tour of fashionable Punta del Este, before being driven to Montevideo for onward connections.





Venezuela

Sitting on the north-eastern shoulder of South America, Venezuela borders the Caribbean to the north, and the Amazon basin to the south. A spur of the Andes crosses the western edge of the country with peaks reaching 5,000m, several with permanent snow.

The endless plains of the Llanos teem with wildlife, and in the south-east the extraordinary table mountains (immortalised by Conan Doyle in his 'Lost World') rear above the savanna. Such geographical diversity coupled with a good network of internal flights makes Venezuela an ideal introduction to South America.

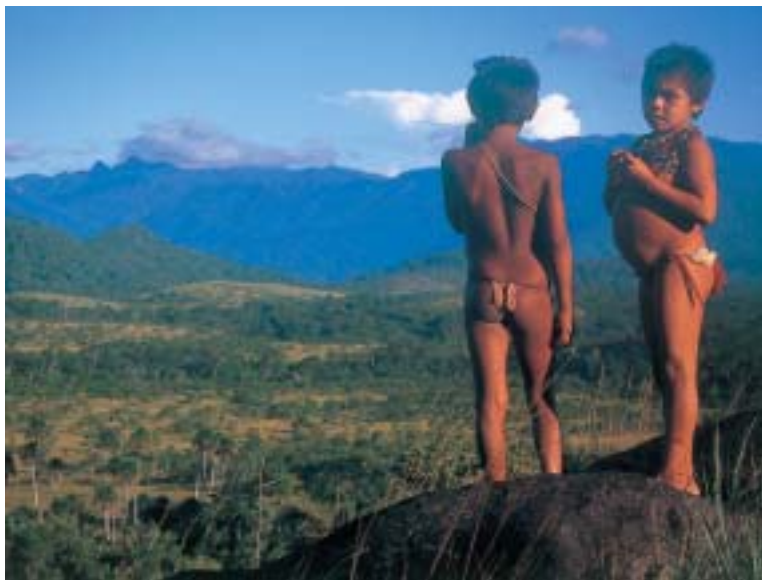
A visit to Venezuela can be combined with Ecuador and the Galapagos, or Guyana.

Climate and when to go

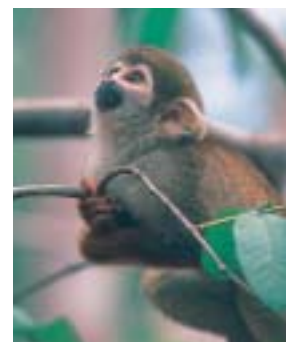
As it is only just north of the Equator Venezuela has a hot climate all year. Increasing altitude in the Andes can mean cool nights and the coastal regions are hotter with very little rainfall at any time. There is a rainy season from May/June to October when short tropical downpours can be expected, and this is consequently a good time to see the waterfalls.



Angel Falls



Capybaras



Squirrel monkey