



## SOUTH STAR TOURS, INC.

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### Introduction

Paraguay was once so isolated it was called an island surrounded by land. But in recent years, this small, landlocked country has opened up to the outside world. It has adopted democracy and free trade. It's friendly and relatively safe. Still, it's not often given serious consideration by travelers planning South American itineraries. Perhaps that's because its attractions aren't as dramatic as those of its neighbors.

What it does have is a surprising variety of unspoiled terrain for bird-watchers, anglers and nature lovers -- ranging from savanna and marshland to subtropical farms, ranches and rain forest. Its stark, sparsely settled Chaco region, where most of the country's indigenous Guaraní Indians reside, offers good opportunities for trekking. These days, you can have these more subtle pleasures nearly all to yourself.

**Full country name:** República del Paraguay/Republic of Paraguay

**Area:** 407,000 sq km, 157,143 sq miles

**Population:** 5,585,828

**Capital city:** Asunción

**Government:** Republic since 1967

**Language:** Spanish (official), Guaraní (essential)

**Religion:** 97% Roman Catholic, 3% Mennonite and other Protestants

### Facts for the Traveler

**Visas:** Passport required, Visa required, return ticket required

**Health risks:** Yellow fever, cholera, typhoid, polio, and malaria

**Time:** GMT/UTC -3

**Electricity:** 220V 50HzHz

**Weights & measures:** Metric

# Paraguay

### When to Go

The climate ranges differs greatly from summer to winter. Torrential storms can build up and appear out of nowhere on hot days. Summers (November-February) can be unbearably hot, and winter (July-August) can be very cold (and there is no central heating). Spring and fall are the best times to visit. If you're going any time but summer, pack a sweater

### Culture

Paraguayan culture is a blend chiefly of Guaranian and Spanish elements, supplemented by more recent Argentine, German, and Italian influences. The culture of Paraguay has remained isolated and therefore has retained many features introduced in the 16th and 17th centuries by the Spanish conquerors, artisans, and Jesuit missionaries. The Ateneo Paraguayo, a leading cultural center, sponsors art exhibits, lectures, and concerts, and Guaraní culture is promoted by the Academy of Guaraní Language and Culture, the Indian Association of Paraguay, and the Guaraní Theater.

Paraguayans express their culture in arts such as embroidery (*aho poi*) and lace making (*ñanduti*). Their music, which consists of lilting polkas, bouncy *galopas*, and languid *guaranias* played on the native harp, is also distinctive and beautiful. Outstanding harpists and composers, such as Félix Pérez Cardozo and José Asunción Flores, were not only held in high esteem locally but also achieved fame abroad during their lives.

### Events

The festival of San Juan takes place during June in Paraguay. Great food, fire walking, odd contests, and the burning of Judas Iscariot in effigy. A very interesting experience. Generally, each city puts on their own celebration, with some of the smaller rural towns being more authentic. In Asunción, the capital, every organization or large business puts one on, but their more family-oriented, definitely much more tame than the others.

### Attractions

The capital city is situated on the Bay of Asunción, an inlet off the Paraguay River. Planned on a colonial Spanish grid system, it has many parks and plazas. On the way to the waterfront the visitor enters the old part of town, an area of architectural diversity. A good view of the city can be had from the Parque Carlos Antonio Lopez high above Asunción. The Botanical Gardens are situated in a former estate of the Lopez family on the Paraguay River.

There is also a golf-course and a small zoo. The Lopez Residence has been converted into a natural history museum and library. Package trips can be booked to see the Iguazú Falls and the Salto Crystal Falls, and river trips to Villeta or up the Pilcomayo River to the Chaco. Luque, near the capital, is the home of the famous Paraguayan harps.

### **Iguazu Waterfalls**

The Iguazú National Park is one of the most important ecological treasures of the world. The biodiversity of species that inhabit 5,500 hectares make it the only place of its kind in South America. There are between 160 and 270 waterfalls that vary according to the river flow and reach a front of almost 3 kilometers and a height of approximately 70 meters. Of all the falls, the most outstanding one is the Garganta del Diablo. It groups several falls in a semicircle 200 meters wide and 90 meters high. Its name ("throat of the devil") comes from the mysterious aura produced by the noise of the water and by the vapor generated as the water falls. It is only possible to arrive at the falls by boat. Flooding destroyed the passages that used to lead to the Garganta.

### **The Central Circuit**

A popular tourist itinerary is the 'Central Circuit', a route of some 200km (125 miles) that takes in some of the country's most interesting sites clustered around the capital. San Lorenzo dates from 1775 and is the site of the university halls of residence and an interesting Gothic-style church. Founded in 1539 by Domingo Martínez, Ita's main specialty is handpainted black clay Gallinita hens. Yaguarón is set in an orange-growing district 48km (29 miles) from the capital and played a part during the Spanish conquest as a base for the Franciscan missions. Their churches date back to 1775.

Situated in the foothills of the Cordillera de los Altos, the historic village of Paraguarí has several old buildings in colonial style. The holiday center of Chololo, 87km (54 miles) from the capital, has tourist facilities that include bars, restaurants and bungalows for rent.

Piribebuy was the scene of bloody fighting during the war of the triple alliance. The Encaje-yú spindle lace, the 'sixty-stripe' Paraná poncho and other handmade goods are produced here. It is also famous as a place of worship of the 'Virgin of Miracles'. Situated on Lake Ypacarai, 47km (29 miles) from the capital, San Bernardino is a holiday resort and, owing to its beaches and lake shores, very popular during the summer months. It also has a camping ground, 'Camping 19'.

### **The Chaco**

This vast, scarcely populated area, consisting mainly of empty plains and forests, covers 61 per cent of the country's total surface, but is inhabited by only 3 per cent of Paraguay's population. The drive from Asunción leads through the Low Chaco, a land of palm forests and marshes, and reaches the Middle Chaco with its capital Filadelfia. Here Mennonites of German descent have set up farms and other agricultural outlets as well as their own schools and are considered to be the only organized community in the whole of the Chaco region. The Chaco is home to Paraguay's major national parks including the Defensores del Chaco, Tifunque, Enciso and Cerro Cora. Wildlife and nature enthusiasts can also visit the area's beautiful biological reserves (in Itabo, Limoy, Tati Yupi) or the protected forests in Mbaracayu and Nacunday, where over 600 species of birds, 200 species of mammals and numerous kinds of reptiles and amphibians live in a natural habitat.

The Chaco is, after the Amazon rain forest, the world's second-largest forest area and is a popular location for pursuers of ecotourism.

### **Jesuit missions**

In the 16th century, the Company of Jesus started the process of converting the Guaraní people to Christianity. As a result, the native Indians eventually agreed to live in reducciones, large villages with a fairly rigid socioeconomic structure based on Jesuit principles and values. Skilled in construction and artistic techniques, the Guaraníes left behind a heritage of churches, religious sculptures and paintings scattered throughout Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay. Seven of the largest Jesuit missions remain in Paraguay, and those in Jesús de Taravangué and Trinidad del Paraná have been declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. They can be reached either by plane, car/bus or via light river transport.

### **Environment**

#### **Climate**

Subtropical with rapid changes in temperature throughout the year. Summer (December to March) can be very hot. Winter (June to September) is mild with few cold days. Rainfall is heaviest from December to March. Conditions are wetter and cooler in the east and drier and warmer in the Chaco area in the north.

#### **Nature**

There are 11 national parks and protected areas, the largest of which are in the *Chaco* region in the north of the country. Birdlife is particularly abundant, and there is also a wide variety of animals, including the Chacoan peccary, once thought to be extinct. Visitors should take plenty of insect repellent with them when visiting remote areas. A good way to view flora and fauna is from boats which run along some of Paraguay's rivers. Trips can sometimes be arranged on cargo vessels if there are no passenger services. The trip along the fast-flowing River Paraguay from Asunción via Concepción passes through fascinating landscapes, eventually leading as far as the huge marshlands in the north and over the Brazilian border.

#### **Landforms**

The Paraguay River divides the country into two separate regions: On the western side is the Chaco (jungle, marsh and scrub); on the eastern side is fertile, grassy farmland leading into hilly, forested country. The eastern side is the most heavily populated. The broad Paraná River, which forms a border with Brazil and Argentina, provides landlocked Paraguay with a link to the sea. The southeastern border is formed by the Paraná River, containing the Itaipu dam shared with Brazil. It is currently the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world, generating nearly all of Paraguay's electricity.