

SOUTH AMERICA · BEACHES · FOOD · WINE · HISTORY · CULTURE



Uruguay

Colonia del Sacramento, founded in 1680 long before Uruguay existed, keeps its cobbled Portuguese lanes, while Punta del Este and the dune-backed beaches of Rocha draw South Americans every summer. Montevideo is a relaxed, liberal capital of parrilla grills, candombe drumming and Art Deco façades, and the interior is gaucho and estancia country.

Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Uruguay and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

CAPITAL Montevideo	CURRENCY Uruguayan peso (UYU) £1 ≈ UYU 53.56	LANGUAGE Spanish	BEST TIME Dec–Feb
DAILY BUDGET £45–£210 ££ Moderate	PLUGS Type C, F, I, L 220V · adapter needed	FLIGHT FROM LONDON 16h via Madrid or São Paulo ~£800–£1,400 return	TIME ZONE UTC-3 standard time

Uruguay is compact, gently rolling and easy to navigate, and most trips follow its coast. Many visitors cross the River Plate by ferry from Buenos Aires to Colonia, continue to Montevideo, then head east to the beach resorts: glossy Punta del Este and José Ignacio, then wilder Rocha, where car-free Cabo Polonio is reached by 4x4 truck or on foot across the dunes and Punta del Diablo draws surfers. The interior is a different world of cattle country, best experienced from a working estancia, with hot springs near Salto in the north-west. Wine lovers can add Tannat vineyards around Montevideo and Carmelo.

Uruguay is one of South America's priciest countries, with restaurant and hotel bills closer to southern European levels, but it is easy, orderly and unhurried. January is the peak, when Argentines and Brazilians fill the east coast and Punta del Este's prices soar; by March the beaches are quiet and the weather still warm. Uruguayans are famously relaxed — mate gourd and thermos in hand — and the country surprises visitors with its progressive streak, from being the first nation to legalise cannabis to its mostly renewable electricity. It suits slow travellers, food lovers and beach-goers rather than adventure-seekers.

Top 5 highlights

HISTORY

Colonia del Sacramento

Founded by the Portuguese in 1680, this UNESCO-listed quarter of cobbled lanes, low colonial houses and vintage cars on a River Plate peninsula is just over an hour by fast ferry from Buenos Aires. Climb the lighthouse and stay for sunset.

NATURE

Cabo Polonio

A cape of dunes, rocks and a lighthouse in Rocha with no road access: open-top trucks ferry visitors across the dunes from the park entrance. The village has no mains electricity, and sea lions and fur seals bask on the rocks below the lighthouse.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Casapueblo

Artist Carlos Páez Vilaró spent decades building this sprawling white hotel, studio and museum into the cliffs of Punta Ballena, west of Punta del Este. Visit late afternoon for the sunset ceremony, when a recorded poem accompanies the sun's descent.

4

FOOD

Mercado del Puerto

A 19th-century iron market hall in Montevideo's Ciudad Vieja, now packed with parrillas grilling beef, chorizo and offal over wood embers. Go at weekend lunchtime and order a medio y medio, the local sparkling-and-white-wine aperitif.

5

NATURE

Santa Teresa National Park

Near the Brazilian border, this coastal park combines planted forest, quiet beaches and the pentagonal 18th-century Fortaleza de Santa Teresa. Surfy Punta del Diablo, a fishing village turned backpacker hangout, is next door.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Montevideo

≈ 1.8 million people

The capital's Ciudad Vieja, eclectic Palacio Salvo and 22km riverside rambla reward a few days, along with the Sunday Tristán Narvaja flea market and candombe drumming in Barrio Sur.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Maldonado–Punta del Este

≈ 120,000 people

Maldonado is the working town and Punta del Este, on its peninsula, the glamorous resort, with the giant hand sculpture on Playa Brava, boat trips to Isla de Lobos's sea lions and late-night January parties.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Salto

≈ 115,000 people

A pleasant riverside city on the Argentine border, with the Daymán hot springs on its outskirts, Arapey's further north and the Salto Grande dam upstream; a useful stop on overland routes.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Uruguay

Best time: **Dec–Feb.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

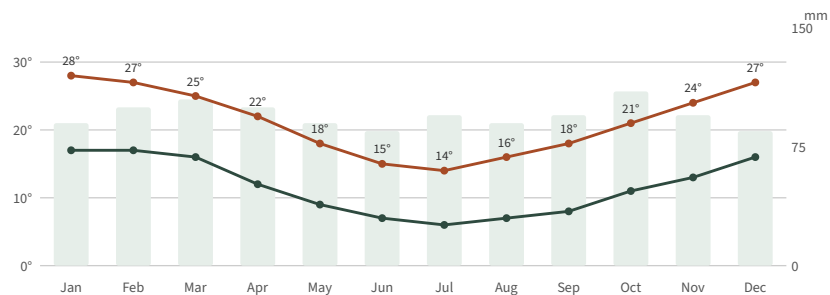
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Montevideo

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Mar	Carnaval Billed as the world's longest carnival, Montevideo's runs for around 40 days from late January, with satirical murga choirs on neighbourhood stages (tablados) and the Desfile de Llamadas candombe parade.
Mar–Apr	Semana Criolla During Easter week, known locally as Semana de Turismo, Montevideo's Rural del Prado hosts a gaucho festival of rodeo-style horse breaking, folk music, crafts and open-fire cooking.
Mar	Fiesta de la Patria Gaucha Every March, Tacuarembó's Laguna de las Lavanderas fills with thousands of riders for horsemanship contests, campfire cooking, music and re-enactments of rural history.

How much does Uruguay cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ UYU 2,410 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ UYU 5,356 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £210 per person / day ≈ UYU 11,248 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Asado Beef ribs, sausages, sweetbreads and other cuts cooked slowly over wood embers on a parrilla grill — a Sunday ritual and the centre of Uruguayan social life.	Chivito Uruguay's towering steak sandwich, layered with ham, bacon, mozzarella, fried egg, lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise, usually served with chips.	Chajá A sponge cake layered with meringue, cream and peaches, created in Paysandú in 1927 and now sold in bakeries nationwide.
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Getting around

Comfortable long-distance buses run from Montevideo's Tres Cruces terminal to almost every town, including Colonia, Punta del Este and the Rocha coast. Ferries link Buenos Aires with Colonia and Montevideo. There is little useful passenger rail. Hiring a car makes sense for the coast and estancias, as roads are good and quiet; in Montevideo, city buses, taxis and Uber are easy to use.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C F I L 220V — bring a UK-to-C/F/I/L adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 911 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +598	TIME ZONE UTC-3 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Leave around 10% in restaurants, as service is rarely included; the cubierto, a per-person cover charge for bread, is separate. Round up taxi fares.

ETIQUETTE

Greet with a single kiss on the right cheek once introduced. If offered mate, drink it all and hand it back; saying 'gracias' signals you have had enough. Dinner rarely starts before 9pm.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Carrasco International Airport (MVD), Montevideo; Capitán Corbeta Carlos A. Curbelo International Airport (PDP), Punta del Este

Visas & entry for Uruguay

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Uruguay without a visa for up to 90 days.

To stay longer or take up residency in Uruguay, see Dirección Nacional de Migración (in Spanish). For other information on entry regulations and living in Uruguay, contact the nearest Uruguayan Embassy.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Uruguay

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Family Day

Fri 1 Jan 2027

New Year's Day

Sat 1 May 2027	Workers' Day
Sun 18 Jul 2027	Constitution Day
Wed 25 Aug 2027	Independence Declaration Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	<i>OH-lah</i>
Thank you	Gracias	<i>GRAH-see-ahs</i>
Please	Por favor	<i>por fah-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Disculpe	<i>dees-KOOL-peh</i>
How much is this?	¿Cuánto sale?	<i>KWAN-toh SAH-leh?</i>

Know before you go

Book Punta del Este, José Ignacio and Rocha well ahead for January, when Argentine and Brazilian holidaymakers fill the coast; prices fall sharply from March.

Paying with a foreign card has long earned visitors a VAT discount at many restaurants and hotels; ask whether the scheme currently applies before paying cash.

Lunch is the best-value meal: many Montevideo restaurants offer a weekday menú ejecutivo with a main, drink and dessert. Much of the country winds down during Easter week.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.