URUGUAY

Location

Uruguay is located in the southeastern part of South America. It is bordered by Brazil to the north, by Argentina (across the bank of both the Uruguay River) to the west and the estuary of Río de la Plata to the southwest, and the South Atlantic Ocean to the southeast. Uruguay is the second-smallest South American country (after Suriname); most of the low-lying landscape (three-quarters of the country) is grassland, ideal for cattle and sheep rising. Its area is slightly smaller than the state of Washington.

Capital Name: Montevideo

Geographic coordinates: 34 53 S, 56 11 W

Time difference: UTC-3 (2 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)

Daylight saving time: +1hr begins second Sunday in October; ends second Sunday in March

Geography

At 68,036 square miles of continental land and 54,903 sq mi of jurisdictional waters and small river islands, Uruguay is the second smallest sovereign nation in South America and the third smallest territory. The landscape features mostly rolling plains and low hill ranges (cuchillas) with a fertile coastal lowland. A dense fluvial network covers the country, consisting of four river basins or deltas (the Río de la Plata, the Uruguay River, the Laguna Merín and the Río Negro). The major internal river is the Río Negro ('black river'). Several lagoons are found along the Atlantic coast. The highest point in the country is the Cerro Catedral at 1,685 ft 3 in the 'Sierra de Carapé' mountain range. To the southwest is the Río de la Plata, the estuary of the Uruguay River, which forms the western border, and the Paraná River, that does not run through Uruguay itself.

Climate

Uruguay has a relatively mild climate. The temperature average for the warmest months, January and February, is 22°C (72°F), and for the coldest month, June, is 10°C (50°F). Rainfall is well distributed and averages about 890 millimeters (about 35 inches) a year. During the winter months, cold storms known as pamperos blow from the southwest, but frost is virtually unknown in most parts of the country.
The coolest month is June. The rainfall is equally distributed throughout the year, but tends to be a bit more frequent in the autumn months. There can be frequent thunderstorms in the summer.

**History**

The inhabitants of Uruguay, before European colonization of the area, were various tribes of hunter, gatherer, native Americans, the most well known being the Charrúa Indians, a small tribe driven south by the Guaraní Indians of Paraguay.

Europeans arrived in the territory of present-day Uruguay in the year 1536, but the absence of gold and silver limited settlement in the region during the 16th and 17th centuries. Uruguay became a zone of contention between the Spanish and the Portuguese empires. In 1603, the Spanish began to introduce cattle, which became a source of wealth in the region. The Spanish founded the first permanent settlement of the territory of present-day Uruguay in 1624 at Villa Soriano on the southwestern coast of the Rio Negro. In 1680, the Portuguese built a fort at Colonia del Sacramento. Spanish colonization increased as Spain sought to limit Portugal's expansion of Brazil's frontiers.

Another segment of colonial Uruguay's population consisted of people of African descent. Colonial Uruguay's African community grew in number as its members escaped harsh treatment in Buenos Aires. Many relocated to Montevideo, which had a larger black community, seemed less hostile politically than Buenos Aires, and had a more favorable climate with lower humidity. As a province of the Viceroyalty of La Plata, colonial Uruguay was known as the Banda Oriental, or Eastern Strip, referring to its location east of the Rio Uruguay. The Spanish founded Uruguay’s capital, Montevideo, in the early 18th century as a military stronghold; its natural harbor soon developed into a commercial center competing with Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires. Uruguay's early 19th century history was shaped by on going conflicts between the British, Spanish, Portuguese, and colonial forces for dominance in the Argentina-Brazil-Uruguay region.

In 1806 and 1807, the British army attempted to seize Buenos Aires as part of their War with Spain. As a result, at the beginning of 1807, Montevideo was occupied by a 10,000-strong British force that held it until the middle of the year when they left to attack Buenos Aires. The Uruguayans' road to
independence was much longer than those of other countries in the Americas. Early efforts at attaining independence focused on the overthrow of Spanish rule, a process begun by José Gervasio Artigas in 1811 when he led his forces to victory against the Spanish in the battle of Las Piedras on May 18, 1811. In 1816, Portuguese troops invaded present-day Uruguay, which led to its eventual annexation by Brazil in 1821 under the provincial name, Provincia Cisplatina. On April 19, 1825, thirty-three Uruguayan exiles led by Juan Antonio Lavalleja returned from Buenos Aires to lead an insurrection in Uruguay with the help of Argentine troops. They were known as the "Treinta y Tres Orientales". Their actions inspired representatives from Uruguay to meet in La Florida, a town in the recently liberated area, where they declared independence from Portugal (and therefore Brazil) on August 25, 1825. Its neighbors did not recognize Uruguayan independence until 1828, after the Argentina-Brazil War, when Britain, in search of new commercial markets, brokered peace between Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

Claimed by Argentina but annexed by Brazil in 1821, Uruguay declared its independence four years later and secured its freedom in 1828 after a three-year struggle.

**Important Dates**

- January 1 - New Year
- January 6 - Three Kings Day, Good Friday every year
- May 1 - Labor Day
- May 18 - Battle of Las Piedras
- June 19 - Anniversary of Jose Gervasio Artigas
- July 18 - Constitution Day
- August 25 - Independence Day
- October 12 - Day of the Race
- November 2 - Day of the Dead
- December 25 - Christmas

**Population**

3,460,607 (July 2007 est.) The smallest country in size in South America has over 3 million inhabitants as of the early 2000's. Almost half of the population is of Italian origin followed by French, Germans, Portuguese, British (English or Scots), Swiss, Russians, Poles, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Dutch, Belgians, Croatians, Greeks, Scandinavians, Irish, Lebanese, and Armenians. Mestizo and the remaining are from African or Asian (mainly Japanese and Chinese) descent. The rest of the Uruguayan population is African or white-African descent ("Mulatos"), almost 5% or 6%. About 1 or 2% are of Asian descent, mostly are Lebanese/Syrian Arab, and Chinese or Japanese ancestry. Amerindians are nonexistent. Uruguay is the only country in America without this type of population. Uruguay has the most homogeneous population of the western hemisphere.
Many of the European immigrants arrived in Uruguay in the late 1800s and have heavily influenced the architecture and culture of Montevideo and other major cities. For this reason, Montevideo and life within the city are very reminiscent of Western Europe.

During the 1970s and 1980s, an estimated six hundred thousand Uruguayans emigrated, principally to Spain, Italy, Argentina and Brazil. Other Uruguayans went to various countries in Europe, Australia and the USA.

As a result of the low birth rate, high life expectancy, and relatively high rate of emigration of younger people, Uruguay's population is quite mature. In 2006, the country had a birth rate of 13.91 births per thousand populations, lower than neighboring countries.

**Currency**

The official currency is the Uruguayan peso (designated NPS, $U, or simply $); each peso is comprised of 100 centavos. Uruguayan pesos are available in $10, $20, $50, $100, $200, $500, $1,000, and $5,000 notes; coins come in 10, 20, and 50 centavos, and 1 and 2 pesos. The Uruguayan currency devalued by half in July 2002, and the exchange rate (2008) was approximately 26 pesos to the dollar. The value of the peso fluctuates greatly with inflation.

**Education**

Uruguay had the highest literacy rate in Latin America, at 96% in 1985. There was no appreciable difference in literacy rates between males and females, but there were discrepancies between urban and rural rates. Uruguay's system of universal, free, and secular education required a total of nine years of compulsory school attendance, from age six to fourteen. The proportion of children of primary school age listed in school had long been virtually 100%. Furthermore, from 1965 to 1985 the proportion of children
of secondary school age listed in some form of secondary school grew from 44 to 70 %, also the highest rate in Latin America. The postsecondary education enrollment rate was about 20 %. Coeducation was the norm, and females and males attended school in near-equal numbers at all levels. As is typical of any nation, rates of schooling were higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Uruguay has one of the highest rates of literacy in Latin America. Primary education is compulsory, and Uruguay is one of the few nations in the Western Hemisphere in which all education, including college and postgraduate work, is free. In 1996 primary schools numbered 2,415 and were attended by 345,600 students; secondary schools had an enrollment of 170,700. Institutions of higher education include the University of the Republic and about 40 teacher-training schools.

**Language**

Spanish, Portunol, or Brazilero (Portuguese-Spanish mix on the Brazilian frontier).

**Religion**

Most Uruguayans hold on to the Roman Catholic faith (62%), with smaller Protestant (4%) and Jewish (3%), as well as a large none professing group (31%).

Although the majority of Uruguayans do not actively practice a religion, they are nominally church members in the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities. It is widely considered the most secular nation in Latin America.

**Agriculture**

Agriculture played such an important part in Uruguayan history and national identity until the middle of the twentieth century that the entire country was then sometimes likened to a single huge estancia (agricultural estate) centered around Montevideo, where the wealth generated in the Hinterland was spent, at its Casco or administrative head.

Today, agriculture contributes roughly 11% to the country’s GDP and is still the main foreign exchange earner, putting Uruguay in line with other agricultural exporters like Brazil, Canada and New
Zealand. Uruguay is a member of the Cairns Group of exporters of agricultural products. Uruguay’s agriculture has relatively low inputs of labor, technology and capital in comparison with other such countries, which results in comparatively lower yields per hectare but also opens the door for Uruguay to market its products as "natural" or "ecological."

Campaigns like “Uruguayan grass-fed beef” and “Uruguay Natural” aim to establish Uruguay as a premium brand in beef, wine and other food products.

Some of the Uruguayan export commodities are: Meat, rice, leather, wool, fish and dairy products. Uruguay export partners are: Brazil 15.1%, US 12.1%, Argentina 6.8%, Mexico 6.4%, China 6%, Germany 5%, and Russia 4.9% (2006)

**Food**

Uruguay's food is characterized by some unique meals and flavors, which are typical of the Uruguayan culture. The main Uruguayan meal and maybe the most worldwide known Uruguay food is the "asado". The Uruguayan "asado" consists on a specific variety of meat called "tira de asado", with "chorizos" and other meat related elements, cooked over fire wood in special ovens locally called "parrillero". This Uruguayan food owes its magic not only due to the meal itself, but to the way Uruguayans use to meet, cook it and eat it together, many times playing "truco", a typical Uruguayan card game.

Besides the Uruguayan food known as "asado", there also are several other unique ingredients, which turn the typical Uruguayan cuisine into a very traditional and magical one. One of these other elements is the "dulce de leche", a type of creamy sweet ingredient which can be added to cookies, bread or even eaten by itself. Another main "ingredient" always present in Uruguayans' houses is the "mate", an infusion made of an herb typical from Uruguay and the region called "yerba mate".

Among other dishes there is the "milanesa", consisting on meat, which is fried after being covered with milled bread and beaten eggs. Another highly recommended Uruguayan food visitors should try is the "chivito". The “chivito” consists on a unique type of meat sandwich containing several other
ingredients such as bacon, cheese, tomatoes, eggs, olives, onions, mayonnaise, ketchup and many others, which can be customized according to each person's preferences.

One of the most recommended and typical Uruguayan drinks is the "clericó". The "clericó" consists on a combination of different wines and fruit juices, often apple juice although it can contain others as well. Besides this, and for those who enjoy a good cup of wine, there is the typical Uruguayan Tannat wine, which is traditional of this country and recognized to be among the best wines of the world.

Landmarks

- The **Estadio Gran Parque Central**, popularly known as Parque Central, is the stadium of [Club Nacional de Football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Club_Nacional_de_Football). It is located in [Montevideo, Uruguay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montevideo), near Nacional headquarters, in the La Blanqueada neighborhood. In this stadium, Nacional plays its home games. This stadium was one of the venues of the [1930 FIFA World Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1930_FIFA_World_Cup), and it is the grounds in which the first match in the history of the [FIFA World Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA_World_Cup) was played.

- The **Museum of American Art of Maldonado** is located in the city of San Fernando de Maldonado, integrated to the beautiful city of Punta del Este, the best tourist resort in the region, at 130 km from Montevideo (Uruguay's capital).

- **MAAM** is an active institution dedicated not only to foster integration and knowledge among our countries but also to promote the diffusion of their histories. This museum not only holds a valuable collection, but its building is a valuable landmark, exemplifying the old urban 'estancia' (farm), overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and the beautiful green fields where it has been located for more than one hundred years.

- The **Cerro** (hill) for which Montevideo (from the Portuguese “Monte vide eu,” “I see a hill”) is named.
- The **Mausoleum of Jose Gervasio Artigas**, the Uruguayan national hero.

- The **Cabildo**, formerly the seat of the national legislature.

In Montevideo are the **University of the Republic** (1849), the **Institute of Higher Studies** (1928), the **National Historical Museum** (1900), and the **National Museum of Fine Arts** (1911).