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SIGNATURE PARAGUAY: THE MISSIONS AND THE CHACO

11 days from **£3,550pp**

**PARAGUAY / ASUNCION AND THE HEARTLAND / THE CHACO / THE JESUIT MISSIONS OF
THE SOUTH / ARGENTINA / IGUAZÚ FALLS / IGUAZU FALLS - ARGENTINIAN SIDE /
IGUAZU FALLS - BRAZILIAN SIDE**



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love



OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

A comprehensive holiday in the last undiscovered country on the continent, wedged between Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina but with a unique and distinctive culture and landscape in its own right.

- DAY 1** City tour of Asunción.
- DAY 2** Visit Sapucaí railway museum.
- DAY 3** Drive through the Chaco wilderness of pastures, wetlands and thorn forests.
- DAY 4** Safari tour of the salt lakes and cactus forests of the Chaco.
- DAY 5** Visit Filadelfia's Mennonite museum. Return to Asunción.
- DAY 6** Visit historic towns on the Ruta Jesuita.
- DAY 7** Visit the Jesuit Missions ruins of Trinidad and Jesus.
- DAY 8** Explore the San Ignacio Mini Mission in Argentina. Continue to Iguazú.
- DAY 9** Visit the Brazilian side of Iguazú Falls.
- DAY 10** Visit the Argentina side of Iguazú Falls.
- DAY 11** Transfer to airport for connections to international flight.

ITINERARY

Ask most people where Paraguay is, and not that many will be able to point to this shyly land-locked country on a map. And most of them won't know anyone who has been there. But that isn't a reason not to go: what was in living memory merely a despotically-run, underdeveloped republic is now an optimistic place with a creative, youthful population and a commitment to restoring the attractions of the Spanish colonial era in its quirky riverside capital, Asuncion.

In addition, in the bird-filled wetlands, salt pans, lagoons and thorn forests of the Chaco Paraguay hosts some of the most remote wildlife wilderness on the continent and a stunning clutch of well tended ruins of once glorious Jesuit missions, which are also found over the border in Brazil and Argentina. For history, culture, the arts and nature, this comprehensive holiday will satisfy all the curiosity of the visitor who wants to go beyond the most popular destinations.

DAY 1

City tour of Asunción.

The 15km journey to the city of Asunción from the airport in Luque takes around half an hour. Having arrived at your hotel you'll later be taken on a tour of the capital's highlights. As recently as the latter part of the 20th century Asuncion was the backwater capital of a military dictatorship, a quirky place where the centre of town was colonised by Korean shopkeepers selling contraband electronic equipment (there are still plenty of them trading there). Nowadays, in more democratic times, both artistic creativity and pride in the city's long history (it was founded in 1537) thrive, and you will see how in your enlightening guided city tour.

The once literally crumbling, battle-scarred buildings from the Spanish colonial era in the historic centre have been given a facelift, and your stroll around the four main plazas will reveal imposing buildings such as the Panteón, where past heroes are interred; the Casa de la Independencia, where freedom from Spain was plotted. Perched high above the Paraguay river, a sleepy tree-lined square links the striking white Cathedral with the rose-hued Cabildo, the national seat of government until 1894 when it moved to the elegant Palacio de López nearby.

Stops may include the old railway station frozen in time since the late 1800s when British-built steam trains connected Asunción with the interior. In another reference to the turbulent past, the base of a defiled statue of former president Alfredo Stroessner sits within the Plaza de los Desaparecidos (Plaza of the Disappeared). Meanwhile contemporary younger generation is promoting diversity with a series of striking murals and art exhibitions.

DAY 2

Visit Sapucaí railway museum.

Deep in the countryside and around 90km (2hrs) from the capital, sleepy Sapucaí feels like the end of the line, although the railway on which it sits once ran all the way to Encarnación on the border with Argentina. The railway service in Paraguay may well be the first in Latin America – other lines dispute this claim but it is certainly one of the pioneering ventures on the continent. And it was the British who oversaw and engineered the building of the track (and stock) which ran from Asuncion to Sapucaí, where, since the railway fell out of use, many of the old engines have come to rest, rusting away in sheds or out in the meadows around.

On your guided visit you'll be able to wander the ghostly graveyard of rolling stock and the little museum in one of the enormous old sheds will definitely be of interest to railway buffs. Near the railway is Villa Inglesa, a jumble of tumbledown houses and once-grand villas built by the engineers, many of which are still lived in.

DAY 3

Drive through the Chaco wilderness of pastures, wetlands and thorn forests.

Today you'll be setting off into a true wilderness: the wildly beautiful Chaco, a remote area of barely populated marshland, lagoons, cattle prairies and semi-arid plains. The tiny population includes members of the indigenous Guarani community, and relatively affluent pioneer settlements established by pacifist Mennonites from Russia and Europe who fled military service in their own countries.

The latter includes Filadelfia (an orderly town of 10,000 souls specialising in cattle-ranching), 460km from Asuncion, which you reach by the lonely Trans-Chaco "highway" which goes on to cross the border into Bolivia.

On both sides of the road a vast savannah unfolds, studded with thousands of fan-shaped palm trees. Occasional lagoons appear by the roadside and if you are lucky you may spot egrets, roseate spoonbills and jabiru storks. Cross the Tropic of Capricorn and the characteristic palm forest of the humid Chaco gives way to the arid savannah of the dry Chaco, with its bottle-shaped trees and huge cacti.

Arrive in Filadelfia late afternoon, with time at leisure to relax and explore the town (there's a bookshop, a couple of banks and a gift shop – that's about it) and engage with its friendly High German-speaking inhabitants, some of whom also speak English.

DAY 4

Safari tour of the salt lakes and cactus forests of the Chaco.

Today you'll set off to explore the hinterland of salt-water lagoons and native Chaco forest within a couple of hours' drive of Filadelfia and the nearby Mennonite colony of Loma Plata. The beautiful savannah here is rich in wildlife, especially birds. If you are lucky you may spot exotic species such as roseate spoonbill, rhea and giant storks (jabiru) as well as a plethora of water-birds. Chilean flamingos overwinter in the Chaco between April and October.

Mammals and reptiles are harder to spot but caimans are occasionally seen sunning themselves in the lagoons and you may catch glimpses of deer in the bush.

DAY 5

Visit Filadelfia's Mennonite museum. Return to Asuncion.

Visit Filadelfia's museum which tells the fascinating story of the arrival of the Mennonites in the Chaco and the brutal Chaco War of 1932-35. There are photos of the colonies during the early days and exhibits include the possessions the Mennonites brought from north Europe. There is also a section with stuffed exhibits from the first study of wildlife of the Chaco by a Mennonite pioneer, Jakob Unger. You will normally be accompanied by one of the Mennonite curators, a chance to ask questions and learn more about the local community.

Drive back to Asunción, arriving late afternoon.

DAY 6

Visit historic towns on the Ruta Jesuita.

Today you'll be heading south and east to discover the marvellous ruins of the Jesuit Reductions, Christian settlements established to convert, teach and protect the native Guarani communities. These intricate and still impressive buildings are little visited but evocative of the extraordinary era in Spanish colonial times when the Guarani were taught architecture, music and craftwork. They are usually visited by following the newly devised "Ruta Jesuita".

Depart after breakfast for Santa Maria de Fe, visiting places of interest en route. Yaguaron has a well preserved Franciscan church. It's beautiful throughout: simple on the outside with white walls (the original frescoes deteriorated and had to be painted over) colonnades and a steep pitched roof. Elaborate and colourful wooden doors lead to a stunning interior which is intricately detailed with carved and painted wood.

Continuing across cattle country, you pass through typical provincial towns with picturesque old houses and shady squares. Visit San Ignacio Guasú, the first of the Jesuit-Guarani Reductions (founded 1609) and an essential stop for its excellent museum with its collection of Jesuit-Guaraní statues, carvings and art.

From San Ignacio, continue through peaceful countryside to Santa Maria de Fe. The town's museum has over 50 statues carved out of cedar by the Guarani and their teachers during Jesuit times. Visit the handicrafts co-operative on the plaza, run by the women of the town. Overnight at a simple hotel with a charming setting on the plaza.

DAY 7

Visit the Jesuit Missions ruins of Trinidad and Jesus.

Today you'll travel to the Unesco-listed ruins of Trinidad and Jesus, the once-great Jesuit-established communities (Reductions). The first part of the drive is through sparsely-populated cattle country, before tomorrow you reach the city Encarnación and cross the vast Paraná river to Argentina. You enter a prosperous agricultural region settled by descendants of Germans, Ukrainian and Japanese immigrants over a century ago: there's a well-ordered feel to the small towns strung along the highway.

Arrive at 18th century La Santísima Trinidad del Paraná, the jewel of the Jesuit ruins, nestled rolling palm-studded countryside alive with the screeches of parakeets and southern lapwings. Among the highlights are the stone carvings: an intricate frieze of angels playing musical instruments survives in the ruined church, which has elaborately carved door porticos and pulpit. The vast plaza has many colonnades and the ruined houses of the indigenous indians.

The smaller ruins at Jesus de Tavarangue have a peaceful setting on high ground with panoramic views. The focus here is the church: the Moorish-influenced doorways are strikingly beautiful. Drive on to your hotel in Bella Vista, established by Paraguayan immigrants of German descent.

In the evening (Fri-Sun only, except during rain), you will be driven to Trinidad for a magical night walk accompanied by classical music and a sequence of carefully-crafted visual effects. Throughout the tour, the ground of the entire main plaza is studded by dozens of dazzling white lights representing the night sky, with other structures joining the display as the walk progresses.

DAY 8

Explore the San Ignacio Mini Mission in Argentina. Continue to Iguazu.

Today you leave Paraguay to head to the Iguazú Falls in Argentina. It's about an hour's drive from Bella Vista to the border at Encarnación. A strikingly modern bridge spans the wide Paraná river, connecting Encarnación with the Argentine city of Posadas on the opposite bank. The drive from Posadas to Puerto Iguazu takes about 4 hours, but you'll stop an hour into the journey through eucalyptus and pine forests at the Jesuit ruins of San Ignacio Mini, one of the oldest of the Reductions (founded in 1610) and painstakingly restored by the Argentine government.

Wander in the bright sunlight through the remains of its streets bounded by the red sandstone walls of the school, the canteen, and houses. The ornately-carved church, overlooking the grand square, stands as a shell today, but it is clear it was an impressive building. There's also a small museum.

Continue to Puerto Iguazú, another 3 hours' drive with scenic stretches of the native subtropical forest which once covered the whole region.

The Iguazú Falls are unquestionably one of the most extraordinary natural phenomena in the world. A total of 275 falls thunder over a rust-coloured cliff surrounded by dense tropical forest. The U-shaped Devil's Throat is the most dramatic sight, here the frothing water of the Iguazú River crashes over a 1.5km wide precipice and columns of vapour are thrown skyward.

DAY 9

Visit the Brazilian side of Iguazú Falls.

Your guided tour will take you to the walkways on the Brazilian side of the falls which offers an overall panoramic vista. Most impressive perhaps is the 1.5km paved walkway leading along the granite cliff to a viewpoint close to the rim of the Floriano Falls.

Closer to the road there is an elevator which takes you back up from the spray-splashed walkway at the bottom of the falls to a point level with the top where there is a small shop, restaurant and terrace.

DAY 10

Visit the Argentina side of Iguazú Falls.

Today there's a guided excursion to the Argentine side of the falls. Start at the National Park Visitor Centre, where there is a display illustrating the biodiversity of the tropical rainforest. From here, a little natural-gas-powered train transfers you to Cataratas station where the Upper Walk begins. This sequence of causeways and passerelles links dozens of tiny, basalt islands at the top of the rock face. These walkways cross the myriad streams of the Río Iguazú as they cascade over the lip of the precipice. A succession of lookout points allows your gaze to follow the water, as it plunges onto the rocks below.

You can then continue to the Lower Walk, which involves stairs, and gives you a totally different view of these falls. Climb back up to the train and continue to Devil's Throat Station. From here, a kilometre-long walkway leads you across the river to the thunderous Garganta del Diablo, which offers a spectacular vantage point peering into the thundering vortex below. This is a full day tour (around 6hrs) and there's about 3km of walking.

DAY 11

Transfer to airport for connections to international flight.

Transfer over the border into Brazil and drive to Foz airport, where you will take a domestic flight to connect with your international flight home.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office
Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides
All land and air transport within Latin America
Accommodation as specified
Meals as specified
Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Walking tour of Asunción
Excursion to Sapucaí railway village and museum
Guided explorations in the Chaco
Visit to the Franciscan church of Yaguaron
Visit to the Jesuit-Guarani art museums of San Ignacio Guasu and Santa María de Fe
Visits to the Jesuit ruins of Trinidad and Jesus de Tavarangue
Walking tour of Trinidad by night (Fri-Sun only)
Guided tour of the Brazilian side of the Iguazú Falls
Guided tour of the Argentine side of the Iguazú Falls

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities
Meals other than specified
International flights to Latin America
Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket
Optional excursions

ESSENTIALS

TRIP SUITABILITY

Spanish and the indigenous language, Guaraní, are spoken in Paraguay. In Argentina it's Spanish.

TRANSPORT

9 road journeys, some on unmade roads, but always scenic, with stops along the way to visit places of interests or take photographs. Most journeys are between 1-3 hours, the main exception being the long (8hr) drive to and from the Chaco.

The order in which you visit places and attractions featured within your itinerary though Paraguay may change according to opening hours and national holidays.

ACCOMMODATION

At all levels, we prefer smaller hotels with some local character; whether boutique, one of a local chain or independent. The hotels in Paraguay outside Asuncion are the best available at their locations; quite basic but friendly and often owner-run.

MEALS

Breakfast daily; Lunch days 3 – 7.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

11 days, 10 nights: Asuncion 2; Filadelfia 2; Asuncion 1; Santa Maria 1; Bella Vista 1; Iguazú 3.

CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Paraguay is the Guarani, in Argentina it is the Argentinian peso.

HOW TO TAKE IT

Cash machines (ATMs) are available in Asuncion, Posadas and Puerto Iguazú and in most shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since ATMs sometimes don't work and cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds. We recommend that additionally you take a reasonable quantity of US dollars cash (no more than is covered by your insurance), which you can exchange into local currency. There are money changing offices all over Asuncion which convert US dollars cash into Guaranies (passport required). Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused. You can take sterling, but the exchange rate is not always competitive or even available, restricting the number of places where you can change money.

For our latest [currency advice for Argentina](#) please see our FAQs section.

DAILY SPEND

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US\$25 per day should cover the cost of meals not included in Paraguay, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants in Argentina and you will pay considerably more but you are on full board at Yacutinga Lodge.

TIPPING

Tips are expected and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income. We recommend approximately \$10 per person for a half day and \$20 for a full day for guides and half that for drivers.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Tipping guidelines can be found in our Briefing Dossier.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

AIRPORT TAXES

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TIME DIFFERENCE

GMT -3 hours.

TIME DIFFERENCE

There is a fair bit of travelling on this holiday, sometimes on unmade roads. Be prepared for some early mornings and potentially some extremely hot weather in summer (Jan-Mar). This holiday is suitable for all able reasonably fit visitors, including families. In other cases if you have a disability or other special requirements, please do call us.

CLIMATE

The climate of the low-lying Paraguay and Argentina's Misiones province is sub-tropical. Summer is extremely hot and humid, with average temperatures in Feb reaching 35°C. In the southern winter temperatures are variable and it can be cold at night. Most precipitation falls Oct-Apr but it can rain at any time of the year.

CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

In the southern hemisphere summer it will be hot in summer so take loose-fitting, light clothing for maximum comfort. An umbrella is a good idea in case of a tropical shower. At other times of the year prepare for a European summer with the possibility of some cold nights.

Strong, comfortable footwear is essential and you should bring insect repellent, sun block and sun glasses. You should take swimwear for pools. A good pair of binoculars will help you get the most out of your visit to the Chaco and Yacutinga lodge.

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts. Good equipment is very important and hard to come by in South America.

GETTING THERE

Flight time to Asunción is about 17 hrs. There are no direct flights from the UK. Some routes involve a change of 'plane in Brazil, Europe or the USA.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following; polio, tetanus, hepatitis A, typhoid and yellow fever. Anti-malarials are not required for this holiday (please check with us if you are also travelling elsewhere). For specific requirements you must consult your GP.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.



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LATIN AMERICA

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm

Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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