

PENTA

Great Escapes: Montevideo Showcases Uruguay's Unique Appeal

By Jake Emen March 10, 2023 5:00 pm ET



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Montevideo, Uruguay, remains a mystery in the minds of American travelers, lost amid the attention-grabbing giants on the continent, from the old world charm of Buenos Aires to the unmistakable beachside energy of Rio de Janeiro. The city, and t Uruguay itself, don't clamor for the limelight, though those who take the time to visit will quickly understand the allure that keeps those in the know returning time and again.

Home to 1.4 million residents, Montevideo is a lush, green city, filled with tree-lined avenues and ample parks, and outdoor-optimized spaces. It's also lined by beaches, with plenty to see and do in the heart of town.

Plan to use the capital as a jump-off point for exploring Uruguay's idyllic countryside for a glimpse at its laid-back lifestyle, with a smattering of charming beach towns and seemingly boundless stretches of ranches. Most American travelers arrive via Buenos Aires, either on a short hopper flight or via ferry ride, with the journey across the wide mouth of the Rio de la Plata taking about three hours.

STAY

The Hyatt Centric Montevideo in Pocitos is adjacent to the beach of the same name, and well-positioned for walking tours of the city. Contemporary, colorful rooms come with a mix of city and ocean views, with suites being equipped with soaking tubs and balconies. The hotel has several on-site dining options, as well as a sleek spa and indoor pool.

For a boutique stay, try the Alma Historica. The charming property has just 15 rooms, each of which is unique and showcases thematic design inspired by popular Uruguayan cultural figures, ranging from poets to tango singers, and from legendary football players to artists of all stripes, with common features including wooden floors, high ceilings, and a mix of vintage furnishings with modern flair.

EAT & DRINK

Try chivito—Uruguay’s ubiquitous, hearty steak, ham, and cheese sandwich—at the restaurants El Tinkal, Bar Arocena, or Chiviteria Marcos. La Pulperia, La Perdiz, El Fogon, and La Cocina de Pedro are all worth a try for a Uruguayan asado, or barbecue meat. For empanadas, head to Empanadas Santa Maria and Empanadas Carolina.

Montevideo is known for its food markets, including the Mercado Agricola Montevideo, or MAM; Mercado del Puerto; Mercado Ferrando; and Mercado del Prado. The Montevideo Wine Experience is a bustling wine bar with an expansive collection from the region and serves as a popular gathering place, and Jacinto is a common stop on the tourist eating trail thanks to a plug from the late Anthony Bourdain. Head to Patagonia Restaurant for picadas or pizza, or La Fonda del Puertito for elevated bar bites, and close out the night at Baar Fun Fun, a historic hot spot known for its tango performances and signature drinks.

EXPLORE

Plaza Independencia is the city’s chief public square, and abuts the Ciudad Vieja, with the old quarter still home to stunning examples of colonial architecture. Take in the sights with the Theater Solis, the Montevideo Metropolitan Cathedral, Palacio Salvo, and Palacio Legislativo. Make a visit to the Andes Museum 1972, dedicated to the airplane crash of the same year that inspired the movie *Alive*, or tour the historic grounds of the Castillo Pittamiglio.



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Take a stroll along the waterfront La Rambla de Montevideo, a prime place to people watch, and continue to Punta Brava, which juts out from the city and extends into the sea, offering a vantage point of both, as well as the outcropping's remaining 1800s brick lighthouse. Pick up a locally-produced craft at the eclectic Galería Acatras del Mercado. There are a handful of beaches to visit in the city, including Playa Ramirez, Playa del Buceo, Playa Malvin, and Playa de los Placitos.

Outside of the city, José Ignacio lies a scenic two-hour drive down the coast from the capital, with the small seaside village punching far above its weight in terms of global appeal. While Punta del Este is the more popular, and perhaps more overcrowded, beach destination, José Ignacio shines for its tranquility.

Vik Retreats boasts three separate hotels in the area: Bahia Vik, a 48-room beachfront resort with a swanky series of villas and rooms each named for the artist whose work comprises its décor; Playa Vik, a short beach stroll away, with 19 rooms centered on a main house featuring an infinity pool aligned to match seasonal sunset views; and Estancia Vik, a family retreat turned into a luxury, 12-room estate hotel set on a pristine 1,600 hectares of ranchland. José Ignacio is home to a burgeoning, world-class arts scene, a cultural movement which began in earnest with the efforts of famed, enigmatic chef Francis Mallmann, whose Posada del Mar opened in 1978.



Be sure to stop into the perspective-altering Skyspace Ta Khut from James Turrell. The art installation housed in an enormous, dome-topped stone enclosure is timed to coincide with the nightly sunset, and is located at Posada Ayana, another luxe choice of accommodation. Restaurant Parador La Huella is always mobbed and a local favorite comprising an indoor-outdoor space nestled along the sand; Mostrador is noted as an all-day hangout with mix-and-match lunch plates; and La Susana is a trendy beach club specializing in fresh seafood.

Beyond browsing the village's many shops and galleries, visit the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Atchugarry, or MACA, the first of its kind in the country. Leave time to visit a winery or two, with Bodega Garzón the most internationally acclaimed; it's home to a Francis Mallmann restaurant.