

# Uruguay Independence Day Special

## History and culture reflect rich heritage

Uruguay is a country of 3.56 million people in South America, sitting between Brazil and Argentina. Close to 2 million Uruguayans live in the capital, Montevideo, which is also the largest city. Independence Day is celebrated on Aug. 25, marking the date of secession from the Empire of Brazil in 1825.

Since independence, Uruguay has gone through many turbulent and prosperous years to become a leading light in post-colonial South America. It is ranked first in Latin America for democracy, peace, combatting corruption and e-government, while maintaining high global measures on socially progressive issues like personal rights, tolerance and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

Montevideo sits on the northeast bank of the Rio de la Plata, along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. As well as being the capital, it serves as administrative headquarters of the Mercosur (Southern Common Market) and ALADI (Latin American Integration Associa-

tion) trade blocs, making it an important financial hub described as a vibrant, eclectic tech center with an entrepreneurial culture.

The city was born as a Spanish colony and strategic military enclave — the walls were built around 1741 and began to be demolished in 1829. Today, the historical area is the neighborhood of Ciudad Vieja. It contains several colonial-era buildings of note, including the Metropolitan Cathedral, Museo Torres Garcia, the Cabildo and the Solis Theatre. The wall that once surrounded the area is now gone, with only the Gateway of the Citadel remaining in Independence Square. The center of the square is home to a monument to Gen. Jose Gervasio Artigas — the father of Uruguayan nationhood — below which is his mausoleum. A quiet place of contemplation away from the bustling city above, the general's resting place is guarded by soldiers.

With its seaside location it is no surprise that Montevideo features an abundance

of waterfront real estate. Locally known as the promenade, running along the river and sea is a linked series of roads and paths that combine to make over 20 kilometers of thoroughfares. Many sections of the promenade are named after notable people, and the honored include Woodrow Wilson, Mahatma Gandhi and Charles de Gaulle. An intrepid visitor might attempt walking the length of the promenade, but sprinkled along are many soft sand beaches, such as Pocitos, lined with modern buildings. The white sand beaches play host to locals seeking a breezy escape during summer, surfers and windsurfers, volleyballers, kayakers, and runners in the annual Montevideo Marathon.

The Estadio Centenario was built for the inaugural FIFA World Cup, hosting every match of the international soccer tournament, which was ultimately won by the host nation. It was declared the first Histor-

ical Monument of World Football in 1983.

A major tourist destination, Colonia del Sacramento is two hours from Montevideo by car or an hour from Buenos Aires by boat. Culture and history come together right at the mouth of the Rio de la Plata. Characterized by Portuguese and Spanish architecture, the city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. Cobble streets, like the Calle de los Suspiros (Street of Sighs), take visitors back to an earlier age, while the city's promenade leads to Real de San Carlos and the San Benito Church. Facing west, the promenade offers magical sunset views over the confluence of the river and ocean.

*This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy and references excerpts from Uruguay Natural, the government's official tourism website. For more information, please visit <https://uruguaynatural.com/index.php/en>*



Left: Salvo Palace overlooks Independence Square and the statue of Gen. Jose Gervasio in Montevideo.

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Left: Cobble streets in the historic neighborhood in Colonia del Sacramento, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Right: Pocitos Beach, Montevideo



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