



# PARAGUAY

## Short Facts

**Official Name:** Republic of Paraguay

**Political System:** Democratic Presidential Republic

**Official Language:** Spanish and Guarani. Guarani is currently spoken by 90% of the population and about 75% of Paraguayans also speak Spanish.

**Currency:** Guarani

**Capital City:** Asuncion (Population 2,800,000)

**Geography:** Total Area: 406,752 square kilometres.

**Population:** 6,349,000 (estimate in 2009)

**Neighbours:** Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia

**Ethnicity of the population:** mestizo (mixed Spanish and Amerindian) 95%, other 5%

**Population by religion:** Roman Catholic (89.6%), Protestant (6.2%), other Christian (1.1%), unspecified (1.9%), non believers (1.1%)

## HISTORY

Europeans first arrived to Paraguay in the early sixteenth century when Asunción was founded. The city eventually became the center of a Spanish colonial province but Paraguay declared its independence after overthrowing the local Spanish administration on May 14, 1811. Throughout history, Paraguay has had political instability and war with its neighbours which resulted in loss of its territory to Brazil and Argentina.

Paraguay is a Democratic Republic. The President acts as both head of state and head of government. Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is used in both the government and the two chambers of the National Congress. After World War II, politics were unstable with several political parties fighting for power in the late 1940s. These unstable governments ensued until 1954 with the stable regime of Alfredo Stroessner, who modernised the country to some extent.

## ECONOMY

Asuncion in Paraguay is ranked as the world's least expensive city to live in. Paraguay has not had a great success in economy, partly due to the fact that the country is landlocked. It has become dependant on trade with Brazil and Argentina. Paraguay's largest economic activity is based on agriculture, agribusiness and cattle raising.

## CLIMATE

Paraguay crosses the Tropic of Capricorn and because of this, the local climate varies from tropical, subtropical and temperate. However certain regions of the country record little fluctuation in temperature between seasons. The Parana region has 2 seasons which are summer (October to March) and winter (May to August) when temperatures are usually mild.

## SCHOOLS IN PARAGUAY

Literacy exceeds 91% and does not differ much between males and females. Primary and secondary education is free, mandatory and takes a total of 12 years (9 years of primary study and 3 years of high school). Asuncion has a large number of both public and private schools, many of which are of good quality and meet international standards

## FOOD

Local foods include manioc, sopa paraguaya (thick bread), chipa (bagel like bread), and local cheeses.



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## **RECREATION AND FAMILY LIFE**

Family life is important in Paraguay and social gatherings often include parents, children, all blood relations and god parents. Family interests determine to a large extent which political party they will join, who they will marry and other things. They are especially warm and open to visiting tourists and foreigners.

The culture of Paraguayans largely derives from the male Spanish ancestors and the female Guarani Indian wives. This accounts for the fact that most Paraguayans are bi-lingual and speak both Spanish and Guarani, the two official languages of the country. Embroidery and lacemaking are two traditional art forms that are practiced by the locals. Music includes polkas, "Galopas" and "Guaranias" (which is music played on a harp).

Paraguay is known for receiving an award for having the biggest barbecue in the world! In the world's largest one day open-air barbecue, 30,000 people consumed 28 kilo tons of meat over 6 hours!

Paraguayans are fond of sports. While soccer is the most popular sport, fishing, tennis, basketball, and golf are also common. The annual Transchaco Rally, a three-day motor rally covering thousands of miles of dirt roads of the sparsely populated Paraguayan Chaco, is held in September.

Asunción is also host for several symphony orchestras, and ballet, opera and theatre companies.

## **YFU IN PARAGUAY**

YFU Paraguay provides arrival and departure orientations for students. In some areas, local volunteers may organize events with other volunteers, host families and students in the surrounds.

## **EXCHANGES WITH:**

Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Sweden and the USA