

Paraguay: Where the Flags Never Seem to Come Down

Crossing into Paraguay from Argentina took less than thirty minutes, but it felt as though we had entered a different world. As we approached the border, the landscape gradually shifted. Palm trees began appearing along the roadside, tropical vegetation became more common, and the air felt warmer. It was the first reminder that Paraguay occupies a unique place in South America, sitting between the continent's temperate south and tropical north.

Asunción surprised us. Paraguay is considered one of the poorest countries in South America, yet the city presented a more complicated picture. Modern shopping centers displayed luxury brands, large fancy homes were seen throughout the city, and large screens flashing as if we were in Las Vegas. Interestingly, rather than the city being separated into wealthy and poor neighborhoods, we noticed large estates standing next to simple family homes. The city felt less divided, one could say Asunción is an eclectic city.



What stood out most, however, was the pride Paraguayans have for their country. Municipal elections were taking place while we were there, and political enthusiasm filled the streets. Just like in any place, candidate signs covered every available corner, but it was the caravans that caught our attention, long lines of cars drove through neighborhoods honking horns, waving flags, and celebrating their preferred candidates. The energy felt less like a campaign and more like a festival. In fact, we were confused as to whether it was about the election of something else because that same spirit was evident about soccer.

As Paraguay was preparing for the upcoming World Cup and a friendly match against Honduras, everywhere we looked, Paraguayan flags could be seen – flying from car windows, at street corners, at homes, and people proudly wearing the soccer jersey. A vendor tried to sell us a jersey, and we replied with “it’s the wrong team for us.” She commented on how much it meant to see Paraguay return to the World Cup after a sixteen-year absence. For a country that had not appeared on soccer's biggest stage since 2010, the excitement was impossible to miss. As you read this newsletter, the World Cup has started, and the United States defeated Paraguay 4-1... ouch!

Soccer in Asuncion goes far beyond the professional game. Throughout the day we would hear fireworks around town. At first, we assumed there was a celebration taking place somewhere nearby. Eventually we learned that fireworks are often set off whenever a goal is scored, whether it is a professional match, a local club game, or even a youth match. In Paraguay, soccer is truly lived.



As we listened to fireworks and walked among Paraguayan flags, we found ourselves walking by the waterfront of the landlocked country. Yes, Asunción has a beach – the Paraguay River flows directly through Asunción, giving the city a coastal feel despite being hundreds of miles from the ocean. As it turns out, it is navigable from the Atlantic Ocean which makes Paraguay an import hub destination in South America. It is amazing what you can find in Paraguay that you cannot find in Argentina, including a water-operated organ!



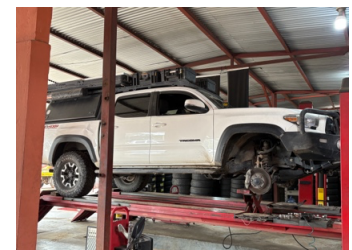
Huh? Yes, unlike a traditional pipe organ, this instrument uses water as part of its mechanism. It was designed by Paraguayan architect, musician, and artist Fernando "Amberé" Feliciángeli. The installation contains 27 tubes and 9 musical notes. The keys float in water, and when pressed, they displace water and air, producing musical notes.

In an attempt to find other bodies of water, one weekend we drove to Areguá, a town known for its pottery and ceramics next to the Lago Ypacaraí, one of Paraguay's largest and most famous lakes. Areguá is located less than an hour from Asunción and felt like the perfect Sunday destination for families looking to escape the city. Similar to Valparaíso, it struck us as a town that must have once been full of charm. While that character is still visible, the town appeared somewhat neglected, giving us the opportunity to imagine how it could have looked decades ago.



Paraguay also brought us something we never expect but always treasure, new friendships. Through one of the Overlanding Facebook Groups, we met Killian and Angelina, a German couple who now call Paraguay home. They welcomed us into their house for an asado where we spent the evening with locals, Jan and Mirian, and young Germans building a new life in Paraguay. Jan, an older rancher of German descent, and his wife Mirian, invited us to visit their estancia in El Chaco.

This invitation may very well give us a reason to return, different from the reason why we crossed the border on the first place, to take care of Taco Libre's needs, by the way, he now has new shoes, fresh oil, and is energized to continue exploring South America





In addition to the people we met, what we will remember most about Paraguay is its energy and their “soup.” On weekday evenings, plazas remained full of life – children played soccer and volleyball long after sunset, families strolled through the plazas, streets were lined with restaurants and bars with giant screens broadcasting soccer matches. As for the soup, it is a bit dry... a comforting cornbread enriched with cheese and sweet onions, baked until golden on top and soft in the center.

Paraguay may not attract the same attention as some of its larger neighbors, but during our time there we discovered a country filled with pride, community, and an unmistakable love for life. It is a place where friendships form quickly, celebrations seem to happen daily, and the sound of fireworks drifting across the city often means that somewhere, someone just scored a goal.

June 16, 2026

