

Paraguay

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ruta Trans-Chaco to Bolivia** – try your luck (bumpin', sittin' or cruisin') on the continent's most bumpy dust-ways (p815)
- **Parque Nacional Ybycuí** – wend your way through blue-butterfly-filled subtropical rainforest to dreamlike waterfalls (p808)
- **Trinidad** – explore the picturesque remnants of the Jesuits at one of the world's least-visited Unesco sites (p808)
- **National parks in the Chaco** – watch a jaguar race through the scrub, sleep under billions of stars, experience the absence of humanity (p815)
- **Off the beaten track** – marvel at history and nature in the well-organized and not hard to reach Parque Nacional Cerro Corá (p813)
- **Best journey** – sit back, relax and watch wildlife from your hammock on the Río Paraguay – this ain't your mama's river cruise (p812)

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 406,752 sq km (bigger than Germany, about the size of California)
- **Best bargain:** hammocks
- **Best street snack:** *chipa* (corn bread)
- **Budget:** US\$20-30 a day
- **Capital:** Asunción
- **Costs:** *residencial* room in Asunción US\$7-10, bus rides per hr US\$1.30, *chipa* 15¢
- **Country code:** ☎ 595
- **Famous for:** contraband, corruption, the Chaco
- **Languages:** Spanish (official), Guaraní, Plattdeutsch, Hochdeutsch, Lengua, Nivaclé, Aché
- **Money:** US\$1 = 5364 guaraní
- **Phrases:** *porã* (cool), *vai* (disgusting), *arete* (party)
- **Population:** 6.5 million
- **Time:** GMT minus 4hr
- **Tipping:** 10% in restaurants only
- **Visas:** most non-EU citizens, including Americans, Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders, need a visa (US\$45 single entry, US\$65 multiple entry)



TRAVEL HINTS

Don't refuse an invitation to sip *tereré* (iced herbal tea). Try fresh warm *chipa* – those from commercial sellers on the buses are best.

OVERLAND ROUTES

Popular entry points via bus include Foz de Iguazú, Brazil; Posadas, Argentina; or via the bumpy Ruta Trans-Chaco from Bolivia.

Paraguay is a country of fascinating contrasts. It's rustic and sophisticated. It's extremely poor and obscenely wealthy. It boasts exotic natural reserves and massive man-made dams. It is a place where horses and carts pull up by Mercedes Benz cars, artisans' workshops abut glitzy shopping centers and Jesuit ruins in rural villages are just a few kilometers from sophisticated colonial towns. Steamy subtropical rainforests with metallic butterflies contrast with the dry and wild frontier of the Chaco. Here, many Mennonites have created their haven, living alongside some of the country's many indigenous groups, while the European influence is particularly strong in the laid-back towns and the more chaotic capital. Surprisingly, backpackers are rarer than pumas in Paraguay, but travel is always do-able – whether on a bone-rattling kamikaze-style bus trip or leisurely bobbing up the Río Paraguay aboard a rickety boat. While Paraguayans are more used to visits from their bordering neighbors, they are relaxed, kind and curious to anyone – share a *tereré* (iced herbal tea) and they will impart their country's alluring secrets. The residual effects of dictators, corruption and contraband contribute to an overall sense that, for many years, much of Paraguayan life has taken place behind closed doors, as its people partake in public protests with confidence.

CURRENT EVENTS

Current leader President Nicanor Duarte Frutos makes headlines. Paraguayans were finally released from a dictatorship when he was democratically elected in 2003. Having taken over the reigns of a corrupt system in one of the most corrupt countries in the world, it's probably not surprising that the president's slate isn't entirely squeaky clean. The ambitious president is desperate to attain a second presidential term; under the present constitution presidents can only rule for one term. In an unprecedented move, he briefly managed to assume the presidency of the ruling Colorado party (whilst also being president of the country). In this five-minute flash he announced plans for a referendum to allow him to stand for a second term. His actions have led to widespread suspicion and public condemnation.

The government's April 2006 report on the economy revealed that job opportunities have increased and poverty has decreased. The population is skeptical of these claims, branding the President as a *japu* ('liar' in Guaraní).

Since July 2005 US special forces (including military doctors) have been based in Paraguay, officially to undertake training and humanitarian exercises. While some members of the community think that the US presence is a positive move, others are suspicious of their intentions, especially given the presence of the neighboring Bolivian gas reserves and the world's largest freshwater reserves, the *Guaraní Aquifer*, in the tri-border area of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina.

Since the formation of Mercosur, the region's economic bloc, Paraguay has complained that

its needs are frequently disregarded by Brazil and Argentina.

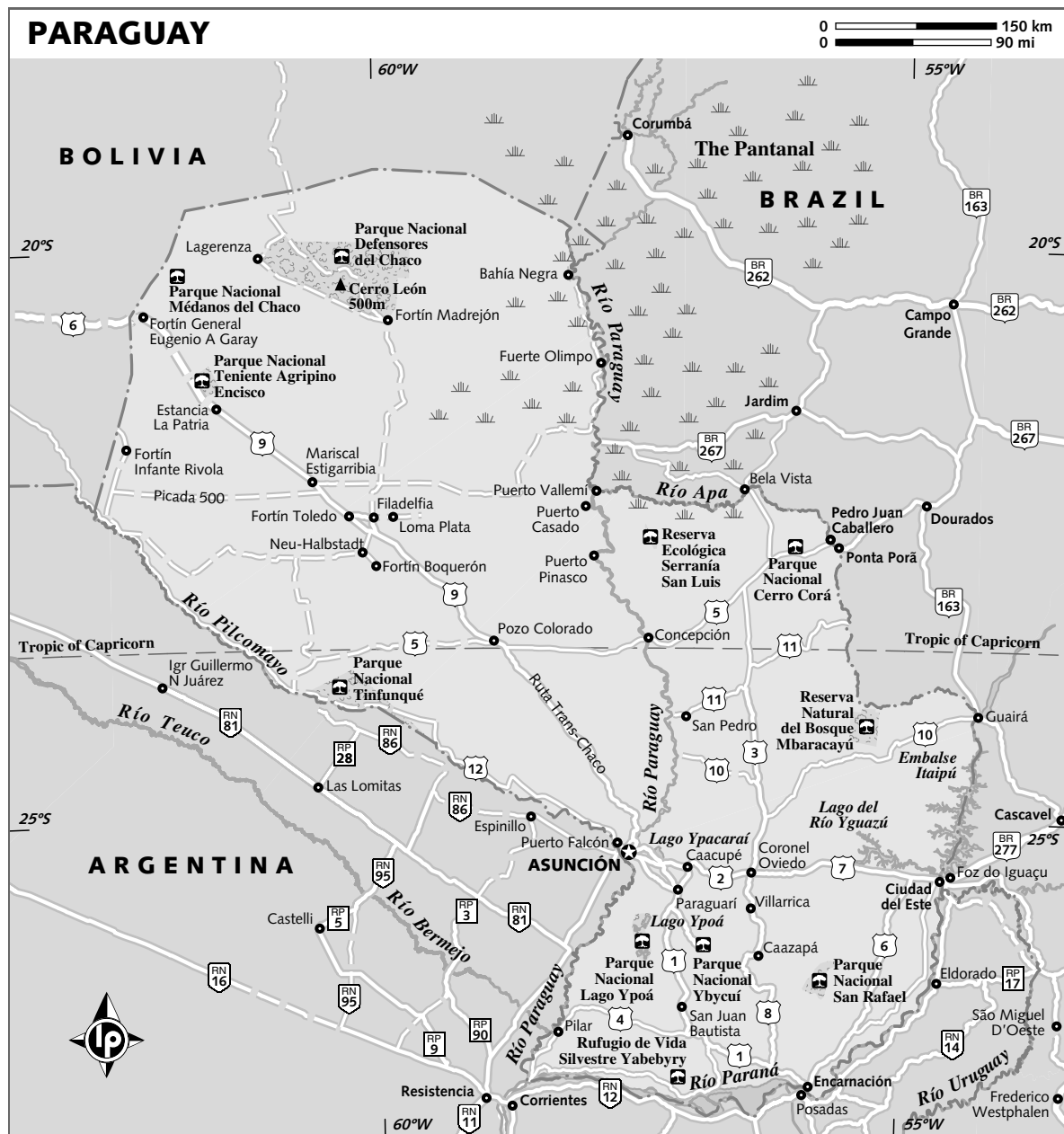
HISTORY

When 350 Spaniards from Pedro de Mendoza's expedition fled Buenos Aires and founded Asunción in 1537, Guaraní cultivators dominated what is now southeastern Paraguay. Eager to strengthen themselves against the Chaco's hostile hunter-gatherers, the Guaraní absorbed the conquistadors by providing them with food and an abundance of Guaraní women. This mixing resulted in a *mestizo* (mixed Indian and Spanish descent) culture of Guaraní food, customs and language and Spanish politics.

Asunción was the most significant Spanish settlement east of the Andes for nearly 50 years before Buenos Aires was fully established. During the colonial period Paraguay covered much of northern Argentina and western Brazil.

In the early 17th century, Jesuit missionaries created *reducciones* (settlements) where Guaraní were introduced to European high culture, new crafts, new crops and new methods of cultivation. Until their expulsion in 1767 (because of local jealousies and Madrid's concern that their power had become too great), the Jesuits were remarkably successful. They deterred Portuguese intervention in the region and are credited with protecting the Guaraní from bands of ruthless slavers from the Portuguese colony of São Paulo. The Jesuits were less successful among the Guaycurú, the indigenous groups of the Chaco.

Within a few years of Paraguay's uncontested independence from Spain in 1811, José



Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia emerged as the strongest member of a governing junta. Until his death in 1840, the xenophobic and sinister 'El Supremo' sealed the country's borders to promote national self-sufficiency, expropriated the properties of landholders, merchants and even the church, thus establishing the state as the dominant political and economic power.

Like most of his successors, Francia ruled by fear. His secret-police force jailed and tortured his opponents, many of which met their end in Francia's most notorious dungeon, the 'Chamber of Truth.' After escaping an assassination attempt in 1820, El Supremo had his food and drink checked for poison, allowed no one to get closer than six paces and slept in a different bed every night.

By the early 1860s Francia's successor, Carlos Antonio López, ended Paraguay's isolation by building railroads, a telegraph system, a shipyard and a formidable army. His megalomaniac son, Francisco Solano López, succeeded him and declared war simultaneously on Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay in 1865. This disastrous War of the Triple Alliance proved to be one of the bloodiest and most savage in Latin American history. Allied forces outnumbered Paraguayans 10 to one, and by the end of the campaign boys as young as 12 years old were fighting on the front lines. In five years Paraguay had lost half of its prewar population and 26% of its national territory.

In the early 1900s tensions arose with Bolivia over the ill-defined Chaco border and in

1932 full-scale hostilities erupted. The exact reasons for the Chaco War are uncertain, but Bolivia's new desire for a sea port (via the Río Paraguay) and rumors of petroleum deposits in the area were likely factors. The tenacity and guerrilla tactics of Paraguayan troops overcame Bolivia's numerically stronger forces and the Paraguayans made it as far as the lower slopes of the Andes. A 1935 cease-fire left no clear victor but more than 80,000 dead. A treaty awarded Paraguay three-quarters of the disputed territory.

After the Chaco War, Paraguay endured a decade of disorder before a brief civil war brought the Colorado party to power in 1949. A 1954 coup installed General Alfredo Stroessner, whose brutal 35-year, military-dominated rule was characterized by repression and terror. Political opponents, real or imagined, were persecuted, tortured and 'disappeared,' elections were fraudulent, corruption became institutionalized and the country became a safe haven for Nazis and other international criminals. By the time Stroessner was overthrown, 75% of Paraguayans had known no other leader.

Even today the Colorado party maintains political control despite having provided nothing but miscreant leaders who've benefited from economic corruption, been thrown in jail and sought asylum in Brazil. In 2001 ex-Central Bank official Luis Ángel González Macchi, who was caught embezzling millions of dollars, was appointed caretaker president.

In April 2003 Nicanor Duarte Frutos, another Colorado party member, won the presidential election with 37%, lower than any other past party member. The ex-journalist claimed he'd 'break the stronghold of the elite' while dogmatically claiming to be 'the one who directs.' While the country's economy is making marginal improvements only, he's

facing tough challenges and is becoming increasingly controversial.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Paraguayans proudly speak at least two languages, boast about their beef and *fútbol* (soccer) teams, and accept that they live in the most bribe-hungry country outside of Africa. Paraguay is saturated with corruption; its people (and politicians) know it, live with it and, often (in the past at least), die by it. It's no wonder Paraguayans prefer to focus on the strength of their *fútbol* teams and the quality of their beef when it comes to comparing themselves to their neighbors, especially Argentina.

Don't let the headlines fool you. Paraguayans are famously laid-back. Sipping *tereré* in the 40°C shade while shooting the breeze, interrupted only by a passing horse-drawn cart, takes the better part of a day. Paraguayans are rightly renowned for their warmth and hospitality.

Lifestyle

Paraguay is the second-poorest South American country (after Bolivia) with 32% living below the poverty line and some 16% of the population's 6,506,464 people unemployed. However, it's not uncommon to see souped-up Mercedes Benz' whizzing around town. Aside from the shacks inhabited by subsistence farmers, and the ultra-well-to-do, most Paraguayan homes are somewhere between semimodern two-story affairs and crumbling colonial mansions. Nothing is more contrasting than the wealth and poverty in Asunción.

The disparity between the lifestyle of Guaraní cotton-pickers and prosperous Mennonite landowners is enormous. Living side by side, the less conservative of the Mennonites enjoy German-made appliances and new trucks,

THE POMBERO

Guaraní folklore has many mythological figures, but none is so fun and prominent as the Pombero. This mischievous little imp-like creature is said to be muscular, short and hairy and comes out at night (the Guaraní translation of Karai Phyahre means Lord of the Night). His presence is used to explain anything from strange sounds and missing items, to unexplained misfortunes, such as a child tripping over, or a woman's skirt blowing up. It is said that he seduces (some say rape) women. Despite his nocturnal habits, adults often use his 'existence' as a warning to children not to wander, especially during siesta. It is believed that the only way of appeasing or befriending the Pombero is to leave gifts out for him, such as rum, tobacco leaves or a sweet surprise.

while their counterparts live hand to mouth, sleeping in semipermanent shacks.

The Paraguayan siesta is the most infectious slice of Paraguayan life. Even the disciplined Mennonites have adopted the afternoon break, albeit limited by loud horns reminding workers to get back on the job. In some communities the siesta may extend from noon to sunset, making the early morning and dusk the busiest times of day.

Population

Some 95% of Paraguayans are considered *mestizos* – most speak Guaraní as their first preference and Spanish as their second choice. The remaining 5% are descendants of European immigrants, including Mennonite farmers, as well as indigenous tribes mostly living in the Chaco. Small but notable Asian, Arab and Brazilian communities are found, particularly in the southeast of the country.

More than 95% of the population lives in eastern Paraguay, only half in urban areas. The government reports a literacy rate of 94%, an infant mortality rate of 2.5% and an average life expectancy of 75.1 years. Some 37.7% of the population is under 15 years old.

SPORTS

Paraguayans are *fútbol*-mad. It's not uncommon to see large groups of men crowded around the *pancho* (hot dog) stand watching the Copa Libertadores on a communal TV. The most popular teams, Olimpia and Cerro Porteño, often beat the best Argentine sides. Tennis, basketball, volleyball, hunting and fishing are also popular.

RELIGION

Ninety percent of the population claims to be Roman Catholic, but folk variants are common. Most indigenous peoples have retained their religious beliefs, or modified them only slightly, despite nominal allegiance to Catholicism or evangelical Protestantism.

ARTS

As many intellectuals and artists will tell you, the Government gives little funding to the arts. Many artists, musicians and painters have left the country to perform or work elsewhere. Nevertheless, the country boasts some well-known figures.

Paraguay's major literary figures are poet-critic and writer Josefina Plá and poet-novelist

Augusto Roa Bastos – winner of the 1990 Cervantes Prize (he died in 2005 aged 87). Despite many years in exile, Bastos focused on Paraguayan themes and history drawing from personal experience. For example, *Son of Man* is a novel tying together several episodes in Paraguayan history, including the Francia dictatorship and the Chaco War. Contemporary writers include Nila López, poet Jacobo A Rauskin, Luis María Martínez, Ramón Silva Ruque Vallejos, Delfina Acosta and Susy Delgado. (Interested travelers should visit Cafe Literario in Asunción, p802, for a summary and brief run-down – printed on the menus!)

Roland Joffe's 1986 epic film the *Mission* is a must-see even if you're not a Jesuit buff.

Theater is popular in Asunción, with occasional offerings in Guaraní as well as Spanish. Numerous art galleries emphasize modern, sometimes very unconventional artworks.

Paraguayan music is entirely European in origin. The most popular instruments are the guitar and the harp, while traditional dances include the lively *polkas galopadas* and the *danza de la botella*, with dancers balancing bottles on their heads.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

The country is divided into two distinct regions, east and west of the Río Paraguay. The east is a well-watered plateau of savanna grasslands with patches of subtropical forest that extends to the Río Paraná (borders with Brazil and Argentina). The west is the Gran Chaco, a marshy bird habitat near Río Paraguay and a dusty, thorny forest further northwest toward Bolivia.

Wildlife

Wildlife is diverse, but the dense rural population is pressuring southeastern Paraguay's fauna. Mammals in danger of extinction include giant anteaters, giant armadillos, maned wolves, river otters, Brazilian tapirs, jaguars, pampas deer and marsh deer. One modest but notable wildlife success has been the re-discovery in the mid-1970s of the Chacoan peccary, which was thought to be extinct for at least half a century, and its nurture by conservationists.

Bird life is abundant, especially in the Chaco. Paraguay has 365 bird species, including 21 species of parrots and parakeets, jabiru and wood storks, plumed ibis and waterfowl,

among many others. Many reptiles, including caimans and anacondas, inhabit the riverine lowlands.

National Parks

Even the Secretaria del Medio Ambiente (Secretariat of the Environment, SEAM) is a little vague as to how many official national parks it has. At last count there are 24 officially declared parks and several other reserves protecting a variety of habitats. Few of these have infrastructure for camping, but you can enter several for day visits and hiking.

The five covered in this edition:

- Cerro Corá (p813)
- Defensores del Chaco (p815)
- Parque Nacional Teniente Agripino Enciso (p815)
- Médeanos del Chaco (p815)
- Ybycuí (p808)

Because of corruption, economic pressure and traditionally weak political will, park development is constantly disrupted. With every new politician a totally new team and name for the national park management arrives. Thus, the parks depend heavily on outside funding and guidance from nonprofit organizations like the Nature Conservancy.

The bodies responsible for the maintenance of national parks and ecotourism are **SEAM** (☎ 021-615812; www.seam.gov.py; Av Madame Lynch 3500, Asunción; 🕒 7am-1pm Mon-Fri) and **Secretaría Nacional de Turismo** (Senatur; Map pp798-9; ☎ 021-494110; www.senatur.gov.py; Palma 468, Asunción; 🕒 7am-7pm). Private nature reserves come under the auspices of **Fundación Moisés Bertoni para la Conservación de la Naturaleza** (☎ 021-608740; www.mbertoni.org.py).

Environmental Issues

Like many developing countries, Paraguayans are not known for their environmental awareness; the term 'lax' is being generous. Litter (especially plastic bags) covers just about everything it can be blown over and to – from streets and creeks, to grasslands and even the Chaco.

Much of the eastern rainforest has been logged for cropping, especially soy bean and wheat crops, to the benefit (some say) of the large-scale, wealthy farmers. The construction of the Itaipú hydroelectric plant was not without controversy (see p810).

That said, many people are worried about the future of – and alleged US interest in – the

country's natural resources, including the world's largest water reserve under Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina (Acuífero Guaraní).

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Paraguay's only international airport is in Asunción. Direct international flights from Asunción are limited to neighboring countries: Buenos Aires, Argentina; La Paz and Santa Cruz, Bolivia; São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Iquique and Santiago, Chile.

Boat

Boats cross into Asunción and Encarnación from Argentina, but immigration procedures are more complicated if entering by boat. With patience and stamina, unofficial river travel from Concepción to Isla Margarita on the Brazilian border is possible. See p812 for details.

Bus

Negotiating Paraguayan borders can be schizophrenic; on the bus, off the bus, on the bus... Ask the driver to stop at immigration (locals don't always need to) and be sure your papers are in order. Note that some bus companies claim to travel further into Brazil than border towns, but actually change buses after crossing the border. See p810 for border crossings into Brazil; p329 for border crossings into Paraguay from Brazil.

GETTING AROUND

Buses dominate transportation with cheap fares and reasonably efficient service. Journeys from the Brazilian or Argentine border to Bolivia (and everywhere in between) take 30 hours or less, depending on the start and end destinations. Boats are used between Asunción and central cities along the Río Paraguay.

Air

Flights save time but cost more than buses. **Transportes Aéreos Mercosur** (TAM; www.tam.com.py)

DEPARTURE TAX

If flying, anyone who has spent more than 24 hours in the country must pay US\$20 (cash only) before boarding.

has daily flights from/to Buenos Aires; Cochabamba and Santa Cruz (Bolivia); São Paulo; and Santiago; as well as Cidade del Este (US\$40, 50 minutes). Bolivian carrier LAB shuttles between La Paz, Santa Cruz and Asunción. **Varig** (www.varig.com) has daily flights to Foz de Iguazú, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The recent addition **Brazilian GOL** (www.voegol.com.br) heads to Brasilia and Buenos Aires.

Boat

See p803 for details of boat travel up the Río Paraguay.

Bus

Bus quality varies. No buses go from start to end without picking up someone (or something). *Servicio removido* makes flag stops; *servicio directo* collects passengers only at fixed locations; *común* is a basic bus that stops at fewer locations; *ejecutivo* is a faster, deluxe bus with toilets, a drink service and videos. It's best to travel during the day and always ask for a ticket or receipt. Larger towns have central terminals. Elsewhere companies are within easy walking distance of each other. If you want a choice of seats buy your ticket early. If you want the best price, wait until the driver starts his engine and start bargaining.

Car

Your own wheels come at a cost, but can be worth it if there's a few of you. Flexibility is your main advantage, although buses go most places accessible to a car. **National Car Rental** (☎ 021-492157; www.national.com.py; cnr Yegros 501 & Cerro Corá) in Asunción charges from US\$35 per day (excluding insurance and mileage beyond 100km). Better deals are available for longer rentals.

Hitchhiking

Hitching is relatively safe in Paraguay but solo women should exercise caution. You usually won't have to wait very long for a *lleva* (lift), but beware of the afternoon heat and carry water. Most drivers will not ask for any money.

Taxi

Most taxi fares are metered. Drivers legally levy a 30% *recargo* (surcharge) between 10pm and 5am, and on Sunday and holidays.

ASUNCIÓN

☎ 021 / pop1.2 million

It's hard to get your head around Asunción. At heart she is beautiful, with a sprinkling of original colonial and beaux-arts buildings, international cuisine, shady plazas and friendly people. Her more-recent and modern demeanor boasts new, seemingly endless suburbs, ritzy shopping malls and smart nightclubs.

But her sophistication hides blemishes: the Río Paraguay backdrop and its shanty shacks, dengue fever-carrying mosquitoes, diesel-spewing buses, stark utilitarian architecture and oppressive heat and humidity.

Like a vain woman hiding her age but succumbing to middle-age spread, Asunción claims to have 1.2 million people, yet seems to hold many more – her sprawling suburbs have joined with neighboring towns. Despite her flaws, she's well worth getting to know.

ORIENTATION

Asunción's riverside location and the haphazard growth in the 19th and 20th centuries has created irregularities in the conventional grid, centered on Plaza de los Héroes. Names of east-west streets change at Independencia Nacional. North, along the riverfront, Plaza Constitución contains the Palacio Legislativo. Below the bluff and subject to flooding sprawl *viviendas temporarias*, Asunción's shantytowns. Much of the action, including more upmarket accommodation options and glitzy shopping areas, now takes place in the smarter suburbs to the east of the center.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Books SRL (Villa Mora shopping center, Av Mariscal López 3971) New English-language books and magazines.

Guarani Raity (www.quanta.net.py/guarani; Las Perlas 3562) Books in and about Guaraní.

Cultural Centers

Asunción's international cultural centers offer reading material, films, art exhibitions and cultural events at little or no cost.

Alianza Francesa (☎ 210382; Mariscal Estigarribia 1039)

Centro Cultural de España Juan de Salazar

(☎ 449221; Tacuary 745)

Centro Cultural Paraguayo-Americano (☎ 224831; Av España 352)

GETTING INTO TOWN

Asunción's **bus terminal** (☎ 551740; cnr Av Fernando de la Mora & República Argentina) is several kilometers southeast of downtown. Bus 8 (US40¢) takes the most direct route to the center, but buses 10, 25, 31 and 38 also end up on Oliva. From the airport, hop on a bus headed for the center via Av Aviadores del Chaco, or grab a cab (US\$15).

Centro Cultural Paraguayo Japonés (☎ 607276; cnr Av Julio Correa & Domingo Portillo)

Instituto Cultural Paraguayo Alemán (☎ 226242; Juan de Salazar 310)

Emergency

Fire Department (☎ 131)

Medical Emergency (☎ 204800)

Police (☎ 911)

Internet Access

Numerous *locutorios* (small telephone offices) offer decent internet access for around US\$1 per hour.

Cyber SPC (Chile 862) Cool, clean and friendly.

Cyberking (cnr Oliva & 14 de Mayo) Convenient and reliable.

Laundry

Most laundries charge around US\$1.25 per kg; others charge per piece or per basket.

Lavabien (Hernandarias 636) Drop-off and self-service. US\$2.70 per basket.

Lavandería Shalom (15 de Agosto 230) US\$1.80 per basket for good ol' wash and dry.

Maps

Most maps in Paraguay don't have a scale and are out of date, but Senatur sells a road map (US\$4) and a 'political map' (US\$3.20).

Medical Services

Hospital Bautista (☎ 600171; Av Rep Argentina) Recommended private hospital.

Hospital Privado Francés (☎ 295250; Av Brasilia 1194) Better services than the Hospital Central.

Money

Northeast of Plaza de los Héroes *casas de cambio* (foreign currency exchange houses) crowd Palma and side streets. Moneychangers on the 2nd floor of the bus terminal give acceptable rates.

Banco Sudameris (cnr Cerro Corá & Independencia) Twenty-four-hour ATM.

Inter-Express (☎ 440613; Yegros 690) The American Express representative. Note: they don't change traveler's checks, but replace stolen cards, checks etc.

Lloyds Bank (cnr Palma & Juan O'Leary) Twenty-four-hour ATM.

Post & Telephone

Copaco (cnr Oliva & 15 de Agosto; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Paraguay's main telephone company (previously known as Antelco). Can make local and long distance calls.

Main post office (cnr Alberdi & Paraguay Independiente; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Information

Secretaría del Medio Ambiente (SEAM; ☎ 615812; Av Madame Lynch 3500; ☎ 7am-1pm Mon-Fri) Has the only reliable national park information. The office is reachable via bus 44A from Oliva and takes at least 20 minutes. Rides with rangers to hard-to-reach parks are occasionally available.

Secretaría Nacional de Turismo (Senatur; ☎ 494110; www.senatur.gov.py; Palma 468; ☎ 7am-7pm) Extremely friendly but best to be specific about what you require. Excellent website.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Consider insect repellent a new cologne because dengue fever is a problem in Asunción. Muggings have been known to happen even in broad daylight so keep your pockets light. Police call the area between Palma and Río Paraguay the 'Zona Roja,' meaning don't schedule a predawn stroll there. Be aware of wandering on public holidays and Sundays when the city is deserted in many places; travelers have reported muggings.

SIGHTS

Everyone's favorite, **Museo del Barro** (☎ 607996; Grabadores del Cabichui s/n; admission US\$90¢; ☎ 8am-6pm Thu-Sun), is east of the center in a slick modern neighborhood. It displays everything from modern paintings to pre-Columbian and indigenous crafts to political caricatures of prominent Paraguayans. Take bus 30 from Oliva and alight at Av Molas López; the museum is to the south off Callejón Cañada in a contemporary building.

The free anthropological and archaeological **Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero** (☎ 441696; Av España 217; admission free; ☎ 8am-5:30pm Mon-Fri) displays indigenous tools, ceramics and weavings, plus superb photographs and maps showing where each item comes from.

DOWNTOWN ASUNCIÓN



PARAGUAY

INFORMATION			
Alianza Francesa.....	1 E4	Palacio de Gobierno.....	23 B1
Argentine Embassy.....	2 G3	Panteón de los Héroes.....	24 C2
Banco Sudameris (ATM).....	3 C3	Vip's Tour.....	25 C4
Brazilian Consulate.....	4 B2		
Centro Cultural de España Juan de Salazar.....	5 D4	SLEEPING	
Centro Cultural Paraguayo-Americano.....	6 F3	Asunción Palace Hotel.....	26 A2
Copaco.....	7 B2	Hotel Embajador.....	27 C2
Instituto Cultural Paraguayo Alemán.....	8 F3	Hotel Miami.....	28 D3
Inter-Express (Amex).....	9 C3	Hotel Preciado.....	29 D4
Lavabien.....	10 A2	Pension Da Silva.....	30 E3
Lavandería Shalom.....	11 B2	Plaza Hotel.....	31 D3
Lloyds Bank (ATM).....	12 B2	Residencial Itapúa.....	32 D4
Main Post Office.....	13 C2		
Secretaría Nacional de Turismo.....	14 C2	EATING	
Touring y Automóvil Club Paraguayo.....	15 E4	Bar San Roque.....	33 E3
		Café Literario.....	34 D3
		Confitería Bolsi.....	35 C2
		Confitería El Molino.....	36 F3
		Excelsior Mall Food Court.....	37 B4
		Heladería Amandau.....	38 C2
		La Flor de la Canela.....	39 E3
		La Vida Verde.....	40 B2
		Lido Bar.....	41 C2
		Michael Bock.....	42 B1
		Monte Libano.....	43 B2
		Nick's.....	44 C3
		Restaurant Latino.....	45 E4
		Supermercado España.....	46 F3
		Taberna El Antojito.....	47 A2
		Talleyrand.....	48 E3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Cámara de Diputados.....	16 C2		
Cámara de Senadores.....	17 C2		
Casa de la Independencia.....	18 B2		
Catedral Metropolitana.....	19 C2		
Catedral Metropolitana Museum.....	(see 19)		
Centro Cultural Manzana de la Rivera.....	(see 22)		
Immigration.....	20 D3		
Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero.....	21 E3		
Museo Memoria de la Ciudad.....	22 B1		



PARAGUAY

DRINKING ☑		SHOPPING 📦	
Asunción Rocks.....	49 E3	Folklore.....	54 D3
Britannia Pub.....	50 D4	Rochester Camera Shop.....	55 C3
Club 52.....	51 E3	TRANSPORT	
Pirata Bar.....	52 B1	Bus top for Bus 8.....	56 C3
ENTERTAINMENT 🎭		Bus Stop for Bus 25.....	57 A2
Centro Cultural Manzana de la		Bus Stop for Bus 38.....	58 B3
Rivera.....	(see 22)	Bus Stop for Bus 42.....	59 D6
Centro Cultural		Buses to Museo Boggiani.....	60 D2
Paraguayo-Americano.....	(see 6)	Empresa Godoy.....	61 A1
Cine Atenea.....	(see 37)	National Car Rental.....	62 C3
Teatro Municipal.....	53 C2	Rysa.....	63 D3
		Transportes Aéreos Mercosur.....	64 B2

To Jardín Botánico (6km);
Camping Municipal (6km)

To Guyra Paraguay; Shopping del Sol;
Trigo Del Sur; Paulista Grill; Quattro
D Heladeria; SEAM; Hospital Bautista;
Hospital Privado Francés (3km);
Museo del Barrio (4.5km); Aeropuerto
Internacional Silvio Pettrossi (20km);

To Villa Mora Shopping Center;
Coyote; Museo Boggiani

To Bus Terminal
(3km)

Mercado
Cuatro

The well-organized **Museo Boggiani** (☎ 584717; Coronel Bogado 888; admission free; 🕒 8am-noon Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat) houses much of the feather art collection of Italian ethnographer Guido Boggiani, who conducted fieldwork with the Chamacoco Indians of the upper Río Paraguay. It's well worth the 45-minute bus ride from downtown at Av Mariscal López at Haedo (between Montevideo and Tacuary) on Líneas 27, 45 or 19.

The **Museo de Historia Natural** (Jardín Botánico; park entrance US30¢, museum admission US40¢; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) is notable only for its spectacular display of insects – including a butterfly with a 274mm wingspan. From downtown, the most direct bus is 44-B ('Artigas') from Oliva and 15 de Agosto, which goes right to the gates.

Every second Sunday a train departs the Botanic Gardens (10am) to Areguá, returning at 5pm. Tickets can be purchased from the old train station at Plaza Uruguay (US\$20).

PARAGUAY

WALKING TOUR

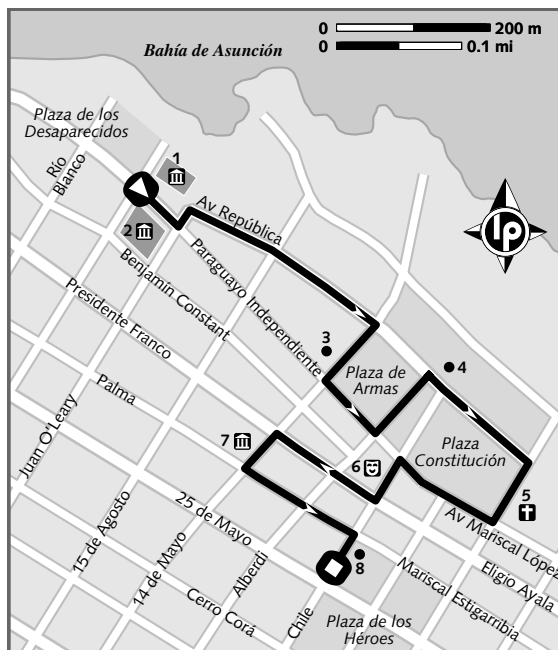
A good way to get to know the historical elements of the city is to head off on foot on this walking tour. Note that Sunday and public holidays aren't the choice days to do this trail – the center is as dead as the sights' colonial protagonists – and travelers have reported muggings.

Start at the **Palacio de Gobierno (1)**, on Paraguayo Independiente near Juan O'Leary. Across the street is the free **Centro Cultural Manzana de la Rivera (2)**; (☎ 442448; Ayolas 129; 🕒 8:50am-5pm), a complex of eight colorful and restored houses. The oldest is Casa Viola (1750), where the Museo Memoria de la Ciudad houses a history of Asunción's urban development.

Turn left into Juan O'Leary and immediately right (southeast) along Av Republica. Turn right at Plaza de Armas to the **Casa de La Cultura (3)**. From 1767 until 1810 this was the Royal School Seminary of San Carlos, built by the Jesuits. Nearby is the new and modern Congreso Nacional.

Head around the plaza to the Cabildo (4), an antique Jesuit house which was the headquarters for the Spanish Governors and later, for the dictator, Dr Francia. It is now the Museum of the Congreso Nacional.

Continue to the southeast end of Plaza Constitución to the 19th-century **Catedral Metropolitana (5)**; admission free; 🕒 11-11:30am Mon-Fri) and



WALK FACTS

Start Palacio de Gobierno
Finish Panteón de los Héroes
Distance 1.8km
Duration two hours

its nearby **museum** (admission US70¢; 🕒 7:30am-noon Mon-Fri). Return on the southern perimeter of the plaza, left into Chile and first right into Presidente Franco to the **Teatro Municipal (6)**, built in 1889 (reinaugurated in 2006). Head a block northwest, then turn left into 14 de Mayo where Asunción's oldest building, the **Casa de la Independencia (7)**; (☎ 493918; www.casade laindependencia.org.py; admission free; 🕒 7:30am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12:30pm Sat), is located. This was built in 1772 and is where Paraguayans declared independence in 1811. The quaint museum features furniture, coins and copies of speeches, although explanations are in Spanish only. Turn left at Palma back to the Plaza de los Héroes, where a military guard protects the remains of Francisco Solano López and other key figures of Paraguay's catastrophic wars in the **Panteón de los Héroes (8)** – the changing of the guard happens every eight days at 10am.

TOURS

Francisco Camacho (☎ 370835; francam@supernet.com.py) An excellent multilingual guide. Prices start at around US\$100 per day, but it's worth considering if you're short of time. Can help with accommodation if required.

Guyra Paraguay (☎ 227777; Comandante Franco 281) Organizes monthly bird-watching trips with English-speaking guides.

Vip's Tour (☎ 441199; www.vipstour.com.py; cnr México 782 & Moreno) Organizes a smorgasbord of day trips from US\$15 to US\$200 (minimum two people).

SLEEPING

Plenty of cheap, acceptable(ish) crash-pads clutter the chaotic area around the bus terminal for around US\$5. If you're spending more than one night in town, hop on a local bus headed to the 'Centro,' where you'll find many affordable, clean but worn options. Accommodations are slightly more expensive in Asunción than the rest of the country but won't bust anyone's budget.

Camping Municipal (Jardín Botánico; campsites US\$1.50) Shady, friendly and secure with ferocious ants and mosquitoes (don't go without repellent). It's 5km northeast of downtown in the botanical garden; take bus 44-B ('Artigas') or 35 from Oliva.

Pension Da Silva (☎ 446381; Eligio Ayala 843; per person US\$6) *The pick for value, convenience and hospitality. A family-run house with an indoor-outdoor colonial ambience. The exquisite exterior doesn't have signage – ring the bell.*

Hotel Embajador (☎ 493393; Presidente Franco 514; s/d US\$7/10) Rough and faded but with some character and barely passable rooms; the high ceilings are indeed the highlight.

Residencial Itapúa (☎ 445121; Moreno 943; per person US\$10) Another signless *residencial* (budget accommodations) in an unlikely neocolonial brick building. It's flowery and worn with a variety of rooms, some with fans.

Hotel Miami (☎ 444950; México 449; s/d US\$13.50/19; 🚽) A very bland hospital-type hallway, but it's clean and has a security door. Helpful, friendly staff. Popular among local wedding parties so book ahead.

Plaza Hotel (☎ 444772; www.plazahotel.com.py; Eligio Ayala 609; s/d US\$16/25; 🚽) On Plaza Uruguaya, this modernized and reliable hotel is great value with a basic buffet breakfast but stiff mattresses.

Trigo del Sur (☎ 602389; Mayor Infante Rivarola 653; s/d US\$25/35; 🚽) Not the most Paraguayan of experiences, this British B&B-style place is perfect if that's what you're after.

Hotel Preciado (☎ 447661; Azara 840; s/d US\$27/33; 🚽 🚿 🛁) This modern number has air-con and a pool – but also a reputation for being

a liberal facility. If its nightly rhythms (and we're not talking sleep patterns here) are not up your alley, think again.

Asunción Palace Hotel (☎ 492151; www.geocities.com; Av Colón 415; s/d with breakfast US\$30/40; 🚽) There's everything but the Spanish colonel. The colonial atmosphere creates a wonderful ambience of bygone days – pity about the ubiquitous '80s-style decor. Be careful at night – it's on the dodgy edge of town.

EATING

Asunción's food is reflected in its diverse cultures: sophisticated local, Asian and international foods abound and vegetarians are catered for. Everything from *surubial ajo* (garlic catfish) and Korean *kim chi* (Korean-style pickled vegetables) to night-time under-a-buck *panchos* (hot dogs) and burgers are available around the city center and beyond. Supermarkets are well stocked. On Sundays it's best to head to one of the large shopping centers such as **Mariscal Lopez** (cnr Qiesada 5050 & Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 9am-10pm) or **Shopping del Sol** (cnr Aviadores del Chaco & Prof González; ☎ 9am-10pm).

City Center

Excellent cheap Korean fare can be found on and around Av Pettirossi between Av Peru and Curupayty, or try the *asadito* (roasted meat on a stick with mandioca) stands (US\$90¢) on street corners.

Michael Bock (Presidente Franco 820; snacks US\$50¢-52) An excellent German bakery with excellent German goods.

Monte Libano (Estrella near 14 de Mayo; swami US\$1.20) Wrap your laughing gear around these luscious Lebanese *swamis* (meat and spice wrapped in Lebanese bread). A Peace Corps paradise.

Excelsior Mall Food Court (Chile near Manduvirá; mains US\$1.50-3) Open when most restaurants are not (like Sunday evening), the air-conditioned upstairs food court offers fast-food versions of various ethnic cuisines.

Lido Bar (cnr Chile & Palma; mains US\$2-5) A diner-style local favorite, with sidewalk seating opposite the Pantheon, that serves a variety of Paraguayan specialties (excellent *sopa paraguaya* – cornbread with cheese and onion) in generous portions for breakfast and lunch.

Confitería Bolsi (Estrella 399; mains US\$2.80-5.30) More than a *confitería*, this traditional place (it's been going since 1960) serves everything from sandwiches to curried rabbit and garlic

pizza. Try the *surubí casa nostra* (a superb selection of different pasta types and flavors on one dish).

La Vida Verde (Palma; per kilo US\$3.50) Assess your mood by one of the 32 quirkily sculptured emotional 'faces' on the wall – 'satisfied' is how you'll feel after this eating experience. A delicious daily buffet of Chinese vegetarian delights (although they bend the rules a bit).

Taberna Española (☎ 441743; Ayolas 631; lunch US\$4.50, dinner US\$7) The energetic ambience of this 'food museum' with dangling bottles, cooking implements and bells is only the backdrop for good-value Spanish set-price meals.

Near Plaza Uruguaya

Confitería El Molino (Av España 382; snacks US\$1-2; ☎ 7am-9pm) With bow-tied waiters and gourmet-style pastries and biscuits, this is one of the sweetest *confiterías* around. Great for *minutas* (short orders), snacks and excellent *licuados* (blended fruit drinks).

Café Literario (cnr Mariscal Estigarribia & México; ☎ 4-10pm) Cool air, music, books (of course) and all that jazz. This artsy, comfy café-bookstore is a great place to read, write or imbibe. Excellent *café con lechés* (coffee with milk; US\$1.80).

La Flor de Canela (☎ 498928; Tacuary 167; mains US\$3-9) The food is more genuine than this smart place's faux Inca sculptures. A safe choice if craving *ceviche* (marinated, raw seafood).

Talleyrand (☎ 441163; Mariscal Estigarribia 932; mains US\$6.90-9) International *haute cuisine* for people with their noses *haute* in the air. Lovely food, lovely white cloths, lovely prices.

Supermercado España (cnr Av España & Brasil) Stocked with everything from colored flip-flops to bulk peanuts to chocolate bars, this chain is a good place to stock up if you can't make it to the shopping centers.

SPLURGE!

Bar San Roque (☎ 446015; cnr Tacuary & Eligio Ayala; mains US\$3.20-8) Head back in time to this restaurant with warm turn-of-the-20th-century atmosphere. Since 1905 this fine family has been serving out-of-this-world traditional Paraguayan dishes. The counter displays fresh goods from the family farm – macadamia nuts to fruits – and the wine list is as impressive as the decent menu of pasta to meat dishes. As many locals will attest, a culinary must with service to match.

East of the Center

There are eateries and humming fast food outlets in the main shopping centers including Shopping del Sol and Mariscal Lopez.

Quattro D Heladeria (cnr Av San Martin & Andrade; US\$1.20 per scoop) We're not sure what the four Ds stand for in Spanish (or Italian) – but the ice cream here is divine, delightful, delicious and delectable in anyone's language!

Paulista Grill (cnr San Martine & Mariscal Lopez; buffet US\$14; ☎ 10am-midnight) Dripping slabs of delicious meat (veggies can have the salad buffet). Popular for those in the more upmarket east, and worth going to if you're in the area.

DRINKING

Bars charge a cover price (more for men!) and can be crowded at weekends. Several late-night hotspots line the 900 blocks of Estigarribia, but most of the flashy clubs are a short cab ride east of downtown on Av Brasilia.

Britannia Pub (Cerro Corá 851; ☎ Wed-Sun) Casually hip with an air-conditioned international ambience and outdoor patio, the 'Brit Pub' is a favorite among foreigners and locals alike.

Asunción Rocks (Mariscal Estigarribia 991; admission US\$3; ☎ 10pm-6am) The spot for late-night after-parties, but not totally uncool before 1am.

Pirata Bar (cnr Benjamín Constant & Ayolas) Popular, pirate-themed club playing American and English beats.

Mouse Cantina (cnr Patria & Brasilia) This MTV-esque dancehall is ultra-popular among the upper-echelon.

Coyote (cnr S Martinez & Sucre) Starts late, ends late – the latest place for the younger local hip crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

Downtown cinemas are notorious for showing cheap porn and low-budget action-adventure flicks on reels that rarely make it through a screening. More reliable, though less endearing, are the cinemas of Asunción's shopping malls, such as the four-screen **Cine Atenea** (Excelsior Mall, cnr Manduvirá & Chile; tickets US\$2.50) and the **Cinecenter del Sol** (Shopping del Sol, cnr Aviadores del Chaco & Prof González; tickets US\$2.50). Check *Tiempo Libre* (a free weekly) for showtimes.

Music & Theater

Asunción has several venues for live music and theater; the major season is March to October. Check *Tiempo Libre* for showtimes.

Centro Cultural Manzana de la Rivera (☎ 442448; Ayolas & Paraguay Independiente)

Centro Cultural Paraguayo-Americano (☎ 224831; www.ccpa.edu.py; Av España 352)

Teatro Municipal (cnr Alberdi & Presidente Franco) Check the listing outside for showtimes.

SHOPPING

Asunción offers Paraguay's best souvenir shopping – the ground floor of the Senatur tourist office has the best of the best from around the country. Shops along Palma near Av Colón offer everything from digital cameras to leather bags for your *tereré* thermos at reasonable prices. The open-air market at Plaza de los Héroes is stocked with *ao po'i* or *lienzo* (loose-weave cotton) garments and other indigenous crafts. The Mercado Cuatro is a lively trading lot occupying the wedge formed by the intersection of Av Doctor R de Francia and Pettrossi, stretching several blocks.

Folklore (☎ 448 657; Mariscal Estigarribia 397) The place for *ñandutí* (lace), leather goods and *tereré* cups.

Rochester Camera Shop (632 Nuestra Señora de la Asunción) Has an impressive selection of cameras and accessories and offers a one-hour film-processing service.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Aeropuerto Internacional Silvio Pettrossi (☎ 645600) is in the suburb of Luque, 20km east of Asunción. It's easily reached by buses displaying 'Aeropuerto' signs heading out Av Aviadores del Chaco.

Paraguay's only national airline is **Transportes Aéreos Mercosur** (TAM; ☎ 645500; www.tam.com.py; Oliva 761).

The only scheduled domestic flights within Paraguay are between Asunción and Ciudad del Este (US\$40 one way, 50 minutes, daily). Tickets should be reserved and purchased at least one day before.

Direct international flights to and from Asunción and the following cities in neighboring countries are regularly available. Prices are for one-way fares and are subject to change.

Buenos Aires, Argentina US\$109 to US\$289, four daily.

Santa Cruz, Bolivia US\$334, one daily.

Santiago, Chile US\$269, one per day Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

São Paulo, Brasil US\$195 to US\$304, three daily.

Boat

Several cargo boats take passengers up the Río Paraguay. Two have regular departures from Asunción to Concepción (US\$9, 30 hours). Check the changing schedules. At the time of research the *Cacique* departed on Wednesdays at 7am and the *Aguape* every 15 days (check the schedule at Agencia Marítima, ☎ 031-42435). The *Aquidaban* heads on from Concepción to Vallemi (Tuesday around 11am, arriving Wednesday; US\$12) and the *Cacique* heads to Vallemi on Thursday mornings (although this can depend on when it arrives from Asunción), arriving in Vallemi on Friday afternoon. The *Aquidaban* heads to Bahía Negra on Saturdays (US\$33, 2½ days). You can pay a bit more for a double-occupancy *camarote* (cabin) or hang in your hammock below deck with the other passengers and their unbelievable assortment of cargo – ranging from chickens to motorbikes. *La Filomena* is a more upmarket option with two small *camarotes*. Speak to the owner, **Lilian Paiva** (☎ 031-42000). It's possible for adventurous travelers to float as far as Brazil (see p812).

Bus

Some companies such as Rysa and Empresa Godoy maintain convenient offices on Plaza Uruguaya and around town. Otherwise the bus terminal is the place for tickets. Bus 8 runs downtown along Cerro Corá to the terminal, as does 25 from Av Colón and Oliva, 38 from Haedo, and 42 from Av Doctor R de Francia.

Destination	Duration (hr)	Cost (US\$)
Buenos Aires, Argentina	18-21	32-64
Ciudad del Este, Paraguay	4½-6	6.20
Concepción, Paraguay	4½-6	6-8
Cordoba, Argentina	20	35.30-44
Curitiba, Brazil	18-20	26.50
Encarnación, Paraguay	5-6	6.20-12.30
Filadelfia, Paraguay	8	12.30
Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil	6	10.60-12.30
Montevideo, Uruguay	20	62-67
Pedro Juan Caballero, Paraguay	7½	14
Posadas, Argentina	5	9.70
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	18-22	49.50-53
Santa Cruz, Bolivia	30+	44-53
Santiago, Chile	28	62
São Paulo, Brazil	18-20	44-53

GETTING TO ARGENTINA

Crossing into Argentina via launch from Puerto Itá Enramada, southwest of downtown, to Puerto Pilcomayo (Argentina) is possible. Launches leave every half-hour from 7am to 5pm weekdays, and irregularly from 7am to 10am on Saturday. You must visit the office at the port for your exit stamp before you leave Asunción.

GETTING AROUND

The noisy, bone-rattling Kamikaze-like city buses (US\$40¢) go almost everywhere, but few run after 10pm. Nearly all city buses start their route at the western end of Oliva.

Taxis are metered and reasonable (around US\$20c per minute), but tack on a surcharge late at night and on Sunday. A taxi to the bus terminal costs about US\$5.30.

AROUND ASUNCIÓN

Hop on a rickety and noisy local bus and prepare yourself for a taste of rural and historical Paraguay. Humble communities dominated by colonial buildings observe long siestas, disturbed only by occasional ox- or horse-drawn carts clacking up cobbled streets that extend from or surround the capital city. The tourist industry plugs the area as the 'Circuito Central,' which includes the weaving center of Itauguá, the lakeside resorts of Areguá and San Bernardino, the shrine of **Caacupé** and colonial villages like **Piribebuy** and Yaguarón. You can hire a cab to drive you through the whole circuit (US\$40 for up to four people), but you'll get more flavor on the bus (around US\$1). The circuit's highlights are described below in order of the author's preference.

SAN BERNARDINO

☎ 0512

Renowned as the elite escape for the privileged of Asunción, tranquil 'San Ber' offers the lot for top relaxation – pubs, discos and upmarket hotels and restaurants line the shady cobbled streets of Lago Ypacaraí's eastern shore. Despite its reputation, there's plenty for budget travelers as well. It's the perfect place to dance the night away with vacationing Asunciónites, or just chill in the shade by the pool. Unfortunately, you won't want to swim in the lake –

it's filthy. In summer a pleasure boat takes passengers for short cruises on the lake (US\$9, three people minimum).

Visitor information, including an area map, is available at **Casa Hassler** (☎ 2974; Vache at Hassler).

Travelers rave about the camping and hostel **Brisas Del Mediterraneo** (☎ 232 459; www.campingparaguay.org; 📍), just over 2km from the town center on Ruta Kennedy, with shady trees and perched on the edge of the lake. It offers excellent facilities, suitable for kids of all ages. A more basic – and landlocked – camping option is **Camping Elohim** (☎ 233191; campsites US\$2, r per person US\$5), a pleasant grassy garden at the back of a family-run shop, 1.5km from San Bernardino. There's good grassy areas for a tent, or a converted (windowless) garage for bed-loving bods. If you can't be bothered walking, catch the bus to Altos or Loma Grande – it's signed on the right-hand side of Camino a Altos.

Hotel Balneario (☎ 232252; Hassler at Asunción; s/d US\$11.70/17.50) is overpriced with basic rooms in a great central location. On the lakeside of the plaza is the worn and romantically Victorian **Hotel del Lago** (☎ 232201; cnr Av Carlos Antonio Lopez & Teniente Weiler; s/d incl breakfast US\$13.50/23.30; 📍 📍), full of antique furniture – each room is different. The **Alemana Panadería & Confitería** (Colonos Alemanes below Estigarribia) has basic sandwiches, buttery baked treats, ice cream and a full restaurant upstairs.

From Asunción, Transporte Villa del Lago (bus 210) and Transporte Cordillera de los Andes (bus 103) run frequent buses to San Ber (US\$70¢, 1½ hours, 48km); ask the driver to drop you near the plaza.

AREGUÁ

☎ 0291

As sweet tranquility goes, this is it. Areguá is renowned for an eclectic mix – strawberries and artisans. The town's main artworks are ceramics, displayed *en masse* along the main street, although these increasingly cater to the contemporary tastes of bright garden gnomes and Disneyesque objects. More tasteful are the cobbled historic streets with exquisite colonial homes, a church perched on the hill, the odd laid-back café, and position by the lake. All this makes for a pleasant leisurely visit, especially on a Sunday, when a tourist train runs (fortnightly) from Asunción (see p800).

Paraguay's renowned sculptor German Guggiary has a studio here. Other contem-

porary pieces are on sale at El Cántaro on Mariscal Estigarribia, two blocks from the train station.

Accommodations can be found at **Hotel-Restaurant Ozli** (☎ 32389; hotelozli@hotmail.com; Av Mariscal Estigarribia; s/d US\$7.80/13.50; 🚽), which is located approximately 50m from the main beach. The rather plain rooms are nothing to write home about but you can sit in a lovely garden, enjoy use of the kitchen, and chat to the friendly owner. Café food is available all day.

YAGUARÓN

Yaguarón's 18th-century **Franciscan church** is a landmark of colonial architecture. The nearby **Museo del Doctor Francia** (admission free; 🕒 7:30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) was the first dictator's house and is interesting for its period portraiture and statues.

Across from the church is a nameless restaurant with mediocre food and basic (fairly grotty) accommodations (per person US\$5.80). Ciudad Paraguari bus 193 (US\$70¢ 1½ hours, 48km, every 15 minutes) departs Asunción from 5am to 8:15pm.

ITAUGUÁ

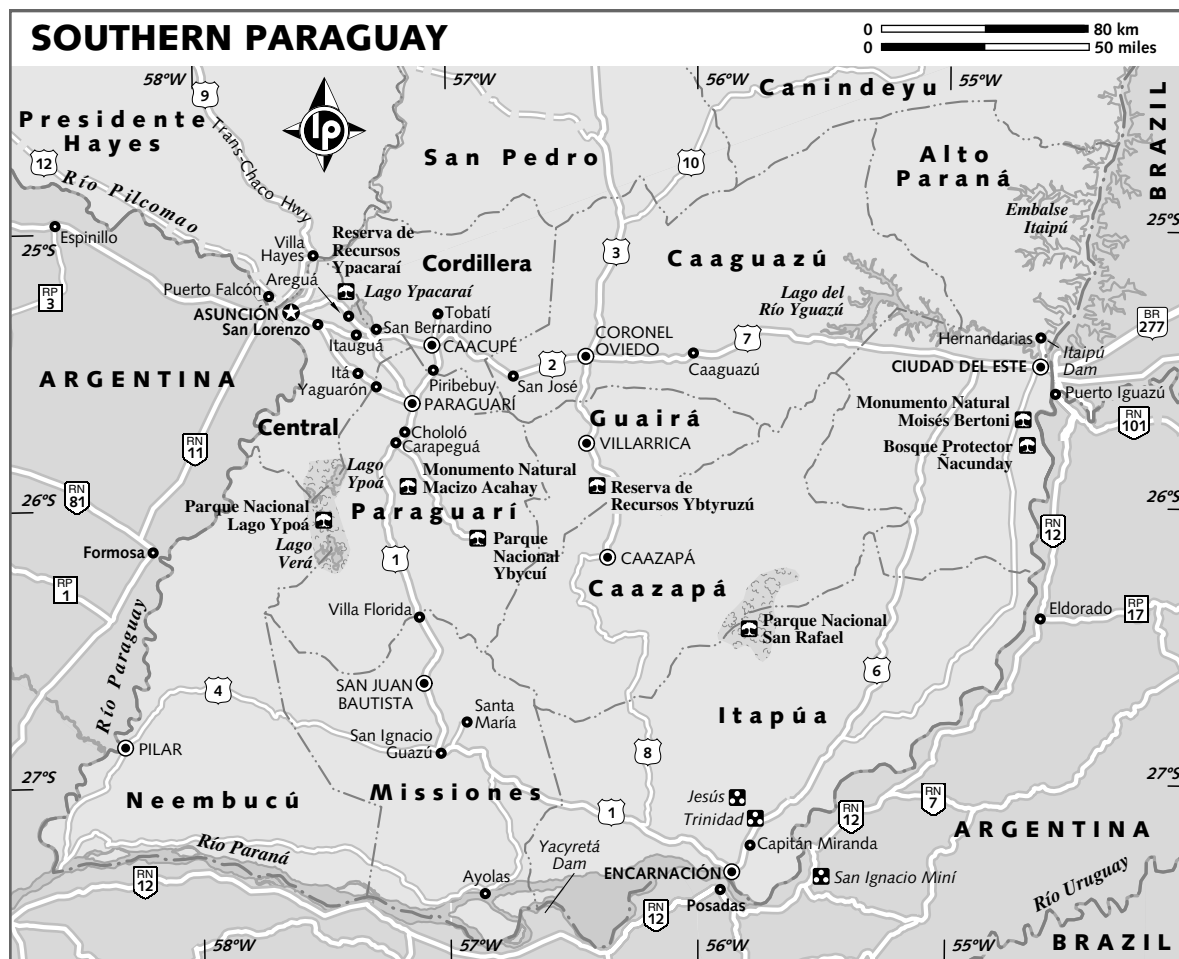
For the women of Itauguá, weaving multi-colored spiderweb *ñandutí* ('lace' – *nandu* is spider in Guaraní) is a cottage industry from childhood to old age. These exquisite pieces range in size from doilies to bedspreads; smaller ones cost only a few dollars but larger ones range upward of US\$50. In July the town celebrates its annual **Festival de Ñandutí**.

The town feels like an extension of Asunción as much is now on Ruta 2. Two blocks south of the highway is the **Museo Parroquial San Rafael** (admission free; 🕒 7am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri). It displays Franciscan and secular relics, and early *ñandutí* samples. From the Asunción bus terminal, buses leave for Itauguá (US\$50¢, one hour, 30km, every 15 minutes) day and night.

SOUTHERN PARAGUAY

Paraguay's southernmost region – east of the Río Paraguay – is home to some of the country's most important historical sites. The Jesuit ruins, national parks, the largest dam in the world, and one of the continent's busiest

PARAGUAY



border crossings make this an eclectic and fascinating area to visit.

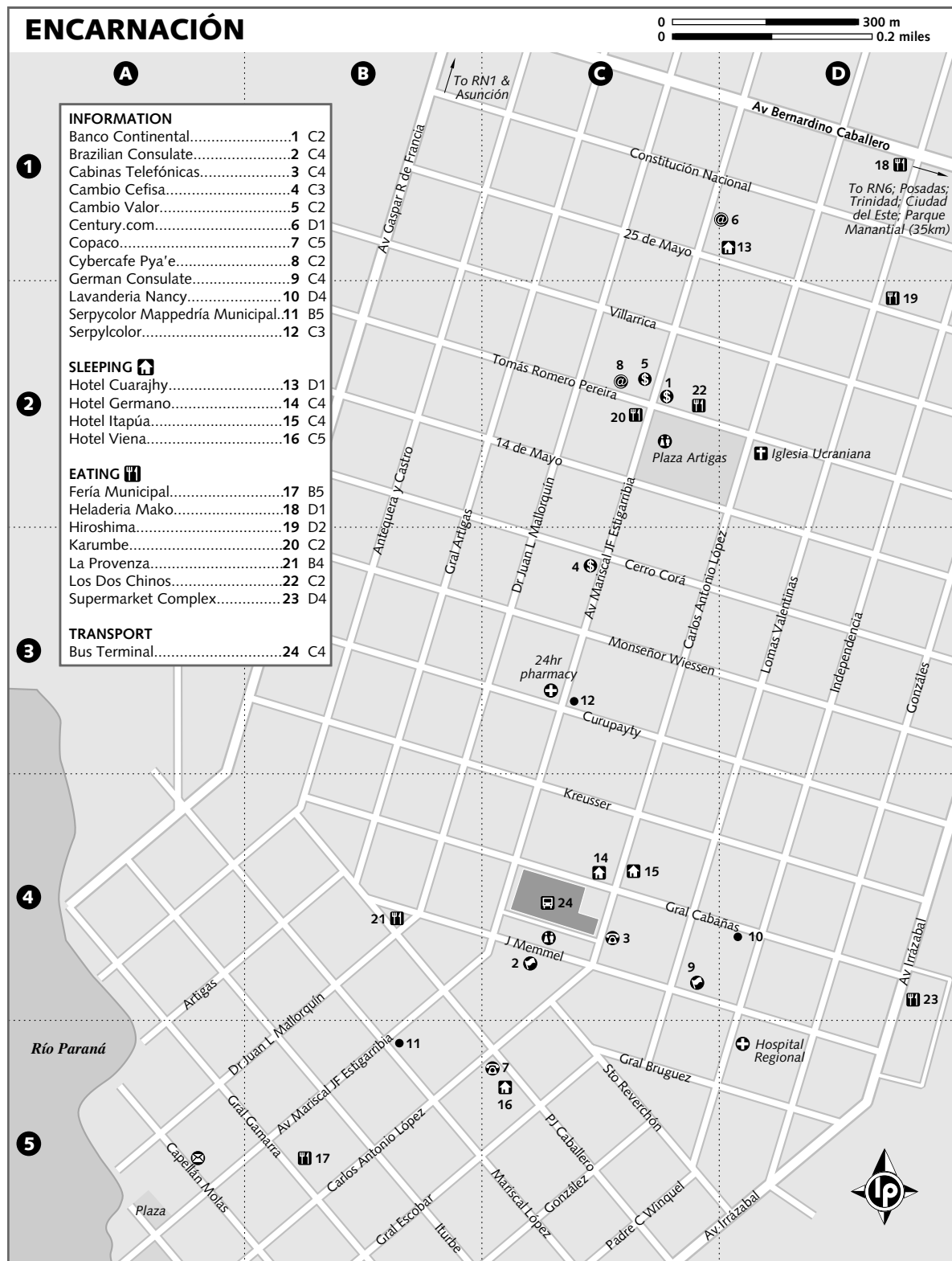
ENCARNACIÓN

☎ 071 / pop 69,700

Encarnación is a cut-rate shopping center, the heart of the Paraguayan Carnival and the gateway to the nearby Jesuit ruins at Trinidad

and Jesús. The old center used to function on the lower ground near the river. When the nearby Yacyretá Dam was constructed, businesses and offices relocated to higher ground in preparation of the flooding which was (and is yet) to occur. Years later, the sluice gates have not yet been opened. Currently occupying the old town among decaying public

PARAGUAY



buildings is a massive tawdry bazaar. Among the chaos is the Fería Municipal market, great for a cheap eat. On higher ground, the pleasant and functional modern town has excellent shops, a pleasant plaza and modern facilities.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Many internet places are in Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia between Constitución Nacional and 25 de Mayo.

Century.com (Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia btwn Constitución Nacional & 25 de Mayo; per hr US60¢; ☎ 7am-12:30am)

Cybercafé Pya'e (Tomás Romero Pereira; per hr US70¢; ☎ 8am-midnight; 📶)

LAUNDRY

Lavandería Nancy (Gral Cabans near Lomas Valentinas) Will get the mud from your seams in less than 24 hours.

MONEY

Several banks, including Banco Continental, are on or near Plaza Artigas and have 24-hour ATMs.

The following moneychangers are recommended for swapping currencies.

Cambio Cefisa (cnr Cerro Corá & Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia)

Cambio Valor (Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia 1405) Changes traveler's checks.

TELEPHONE

Cabinas Telefónicas (Carlos Antonio López 810; ☎ 7am-10pm) Across from the bus terminal.

Copaco (cnr PJ Caballero & Carlos Antonio López; ☎ 7am-10pm)

TOURIST OFFICES

City maps (but little else) are available at the tourist office, located at the immigration office at the border.

Sleeping

There are plenty of clean, reasonably priced places to choose from in Encarnación.

Parque Manantial (☎ 075-32250; entry US\$1.80, camping US\$1.80, pool per day US\$1.80; 📶) On Ruta 6, 35km out of Encarnación near Hohenau is this camping paradise. If you can avoid the weekend (touristic) crowds, you'll have to yourself the 200 hectares with swimming pools and forested walking tracks. Horse-riding (US\$6.20 per hour) is available. Jump

on any bus heading to Ciudad del Este or Hohenau. From the sign it's another 500m. An excellent base for the Jesuit ruins.

Hotel Itapúa (☎ 205045; Carlos Antonio López 814; s/d US\$3/4; 📶) For cheap digs try the large and impersonal Hotel Itapúa.

Hotel Viena (☎ 205981; PJ Caballero 568; per person US\$4; 📶) Delightful colonial verandah-styled place with the simplest of simple rooms.

Hotel Germano (☎ 203346; cnr Gral Cabañas & Carlos Antonio López; per person with/without bathroom US\$8/4; 📶) Across from the bus terminal, Hotel Germano is neater than a Japanese origami figure. The best value in town with spotless rooms and helpful staff and a favorite with the Peace Corps.

Hotel Cuarajhy (☎ 202155; 25 de Mayo 415; per person US\$10; 📶) Smells like a courtesan's perfume parlor and feels a bit like a hospital, but central and friendly with a pizzeria below.

Eating

Encarnación has some of the best eats in Paraguay. Budget meals are available around the bus terminal anytime, in the Fería Municipal for lunch and at night around Plaza Artigas.

Los Dos Chinos (Tomás Romero Pereiras; 2 flavors US\$50¢) A top delight that Italians would drool over.

Heladería Mako (cnr Lomas Valentinas & Av Bernardino Caballero) Delicious pastry delights (go at midday when they're fresh), great coffee and magazines make this well worth the trek uptown.

Hiroshima (☎ 203505; cnr 25 de Mayo & Lomas Valentinas; set lunch US\$3, mains US\$1.80-9.50) This signless Japanese community center is deservedly a local favorite – unbelievable udon and top tofu dishes. Food fit for a Japanese Crown Prince.

Karumbe (cnr Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia & Tomás Romero Pereira; meals US\$3-5) Popular with the locals for a drink and a good indulgence – from pasta to meat dishes.

La Provenza (☎ 204618; Dr Juan L Mallorquín 609; mains US\$3.50-5.25) A more upmarket and international eatery on the edge of the older part of town.

An excellent unnamed hole-in-the-wall eatery is located near the corner of Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia and Kreussel. It looks more like a lounge room than a café, but serves up cheap Korean and Japanese fare (US\$3.50).

You can stock up with goodies at the huge supermarket complex located on Av Irrazábal and J Memmel.

GETTING TO ARGENTINA

Local Servicio Internacional buses (US\$50¢) cross to Posadas in Argentina via the Puente San Roque. You must get off the bus at the border immigration offices at both ends of the bridge for exit and entry stamps. Buses don't always wait – take your pack and keep your ticket to catch the next one.

Although launches (US\$50¢) cross the Río Paraná to/from Posadas, there are no immigration procedures on this route; don't risk the Paraguayan authorities, fines and paperwork. For information on travel from Argentina to Encarnación, see p88.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses run from Encarnación to Asunción (US\$8 to US\$12, five hours) and Ciudad del Este (US\$6.20 to US\$6, four hours).

TRINIDAD & JESÚS

Set atop a lush green hill northeast of Encarnación, **Trinidad** (admission US\$90¢; ☎ 7am-7pm summer, 7am-5:30pm winter) is Paraguay's best-preserved Jesuit *reducción* (settlement). Although it has been a Unesco World Heritage site since 1993, travelers shouldn't expect the usual information and conveniences. The closest bathrooms are in the nearby Hotel León, where meals, refreshments and spacious rooms with bathroom (s/d US\$5/7) are available. Camping (US\$1) is also possible outside the ruins.

Easily accessible **Jesús** (admission 90¢; ☎ 8am-6pm), 12km north, is the nearly complete reconstruction of the Jesuit mission that was interrupted by the Jesuit's expulsion in 1767. Especially trained and excellent local guides speak English, German and Spanish and are for hire for a donation (US\$5 to US\$7 per hour is fair).

From Encarnación, frequent buses go to Trinidad (US\$1, 28km) between 6am and 7pm, but any bus headed east along Ruta 6 to Ciudad del Este or Hohenau will drop you off there. Although there is the odd direct bus to Jesús from Asunción (ask at the terminal), it's easier to catch a bus to Trinidad. Walk 80m to the crossroads – you'll see the sign to Jesús and wait for the Jesús–Obligado bus which passes hourly (US\$70¢). It will drop you at the ruin's entrance.

PARQUE NACIONAL YBYCUÍ

This popular and beautiful national park preserves one of eastern Paraguay's last stands of Brazilian subtropical rainforest. It has steep hills dissected by creeks with attractive waterfalls and pools. The dense forest hides the animals, but if you're lucky you'll get a sneak peak at the stunningly colorful butterflies, including the metallic blue Morpho.

The entrance-cum-**visitors center** (☎ 7am-4pm) is 25km from Ybycuí village. The **Salto Guarani** waterfall is near the **campground** (campsites per person US\$1), which has showers and bothersome insects; bring your own food. Below it, a bridge leads to a pleasant creekside trail with a wealth of butterflies, but watch for snakes (although to date no-one has been bitten). The trail continues to **La Rosada**, an interesting iron foundry destroyed by Brazilian forces in the War of the Triple Alliance. Check out the well-organized **museum** (admission free). Longer hikes head to some stunning waterfalls, including **Salta Mbocharuzu** (4km). There are spare rooms in the rangers' house below the campground, if camping ain't to your liking.

In Ybycuí village, 30km from the park, **Hotel Pytu'u Renda** (☎ 0534-364; Av Quyquyho s/n; r per person US\$7) has decent rooms and a restaurant.

Empresa Salto Cristal has hourly buses from Asunción to Ybycuí village (US\$2, three hours) from 4am to 6pm. Unfortunately, it is not possible to do return day trips to the park via bus. Buses leaves for the park at 10:15am, 11am and 2pm each day from the Ybycuí terminal on Monday to Saturday, but don't return again until the following morning at 7:30am and 8am. (The schedules tend to be a moveable feast – check at the bus station.) An alternative is to arrange a return trip with a taxi.

CIUDAD DEL ESTE

☎ 061 / pop 223,350

You-name-it-they-got-it. The central streets of Ciudad del Este are like a giant, tacky electronic city market. Originally named after the former dictator, the town struggles to shake off its reputation as one of South America's most corrupt cities. The busy border crossing can seem intimidating, but authorities are clamping down on the human pack-horses who hump suspicious boxes across the international bridge. Away from the area of cheap electronic goods, cigarettes and liquor, the city is pleasant enough with some excellent eateries if nothing else.

Orientation

On the west bank of the Río Paraná, across the Puente de Amistad from Foz do Iguacu, the downtown area of Ciudad del Este is compact and easily managed on foot.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Cibertronic Compacom (cnr Aves de los Pioneros & Adrián Jara; per hr US\$1) Slow connections. Also has telephones.

LAUNDRY

Lavanderia (Camilo Recaldo s/n, near Capitán Miranda) It will clean 'em how you need 'em.

MONEY

Street moneychangers lounge around the Pioneros de Este rotunda.

ABN AMRO (cnr Av Adrián Jara & Nanqwa) ATM.

Banco Sudameris (cnr Av Monseñor Rodríguez & Curupayty) Also changes currency.

POST

Post office (cnr Av de los Pioneros & Oscar Rivas Ortelado) Across from the bus terminal.

TELEPHONE

Copaco (cnr Av de los Pioneros & Pai Pérez)

Tele Hola (Capitan Miranda s/n)

TOURIST OFFICE

Tourist office (☎ 508688; cnr Av Bernardino Caballero & Rogelio R Benitz) In the Ministry of Alto Paraná (sign the book at the front and ask to be directed). It claims to be opening an information kiosk next to the supermarket Arco Iris (corner Av de los Pioneros and Av Adrián Jara).

Sleeping

Ciudad's midrange places are definitely worth the extra couple of bucks, especially once you sample the mega-value breakfast buffets, which are included in the price.

Hotel Tía Nancy (☎ 502974; cnr Garcete & Cruz del Chaco; s/d/tr US\$8/11.70/14) Near the bus terminal, this friendly place has dark rooms but is perfectly adequate for a tranquil transit stop.

Hotel Caribe (☎ 512460; Emiliano R Fernández s/n; s/d US\$10/13.50; ♻) A bit of grit for the gritty budget traveler.

Hotel Mi Abuela (☎ 500348; Av Adrián Jara; s/d US\$13/18) Not exactly your grandmother's house, in an '80s-style building, with dark

PARAGUAY



rooms around a small courtyard. Central location.

Hotel Munich (☎ 500347; Emiliano R Fernández 71; s/d US\$15.50/19.50; 🍷) Enthusiastically recommended for its comfortable and spacious rooms with cable TV. Helpful owner will give you the rundown.

Hotel Austria (☎ 504213; www.hotelrestauranteaustria.com; Emiliano R Fernández 165; s/d US\$18/21.20; 🍷) Like its neighbor Hotel Munich, this is another clean European number with more floors, bigger baths and bigger prices.

Eating

The cheapest options are the stalls along Capitán Miranda and Av Monseñor Rodríguez. Otherwise, Asian-cuisine fans dig in.

Bovolo (Av Boquerón 148; US\$2-4) Follow your nose to this delicious place for coffee and freshly baked biscuits.

New Tokio (cnr Av de los Pioneros & Av Adrián Jara) Come hungry and pile your plate for US\$2.70 per kilo. It's on the mezzanine of the Arco Iris supermarket.

Kokorelia (Av Boquerón 169; mains US\$4-12) Fresh and good if you're cravin' Asian.

Hotel Austria (☎ 500883; Emiliano R Fernández 165; mains US\$5) In line with the hotel, these European plates ain't skimpy. Good hearty fare.

Lebanon (cnr Av Adrián Jara & Abay, Edificio Salah I, 2nd fl; mains US\$5-10) For something more exotic and upscale, Lebanon serves scrumptious Middle Eastern fare for lunches only. Half portions available.

Arco Iris (cnr Av de los Pioneros & Av Adrián Jara) One of the few non-electronic-filled supermarkets around – everything from noodles per kilo to Cornflakes.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 30km west of town on Ruta 2. **TAM** (☎ 506030; cnr Curupayty & Ayala) flies between Ciudad del Este and Asunción three times daily.

BUS

The bus terminal is about 2km south of the center on Av Bernardino Caballero. City buses (US\$40¢) with 'Terminal' signs run to and from all day, including along Av Monseñor Rodríguez to immigration and Foz de Iguazú.

Taxi fares are about US\$2.70 from the bus terminal to downtown. There are frequent buses to Asunción (US\$7 to US\$10, five hours),

GETTING TO BRAZIL OR ARGENTINA

The border with Brazil (Foz do Iguazu) is at the Puente de la Amistad (Friendship Bridge). Immigration is at both ends of the bridge. Buses to Foz do Iguazu (US\$1) pass by immigration (until 8pm), as do nonstop buses to Puerto Iguazú, Argentina (you have to go via Brazil to reach Puerto Iguazú – no Brazilian visa necessary; US\$1). It's probably more convenient to walk or take a taxi to immigration and catch the bus from there. If you catch a bus to immigration, make sure you disembark to obtain all necessary exit stamps – locals don't need to stop. For information on travel from Brazil to Paraguay, see p329.

Encarnación (US\$6.20 to US\$7.10, five hours) and Concepción (US\$12.30, 9 hours); less frequently to Pedro Juan Caballero (US\$12.30, 7½ to nine hours) in the north. Daily buses run to São Paulo, Brazil (US\$32 to US\$44, 14 hours); and Buenos Aires, Argentina (US\$37, 20 hours).

ITAIPIÚ DAM

Paraguay's publicity machine is awash with facts and figures about the Itaipú hydroelectric project – the world's second largest (China's Three Gorges Dam now scores the honors as the largest). A visit to this massive dam (damned interesting, even for engineering ignoramuses) will reveal an amazing array of statistics; Itaipú's generators supply nearly 80% of Paraguay's electricity and 25% of Brazil's entire demand. In 1997 it churned out a staggering 12,600 megawatts. Not surprisingly, the world's largest exporter of hydro-power showcases its achievement through an image of the dam on the 100,000 guaraní bill.

While project propaganda gushes about this disconcerting human accomplishment, it omits the US\$25 billion price tag (mostly from over-invoicing) and avoids mention of environmental consequences. The 1350-sq-km, 220m deep reservoir drowned Sete Quedas, a set of waterfalls that was more impressive than Iguazú.

Free **tours** (🕒 8am, 9:30am, 1:30pm, 2:00pm & 3:00pm Mon-Sat, extra tour 10:30am Sat, 8am, 9:30am & 10:30am Sun) leave from the **visitor's center** (☎ 061-599 8040; www.itaipu.gov.py), north of Ciudad del Este

near the town of Hernandarias; passports are required. **Light shows** (☎ 061-599-8040; admission free; 🕒 7:30pm Fri & Sat spring-autumn, 6:30pm Fri & Sat winter) require reservations.

From Ciudad del Este, Transtur and Taururú Pucú buses traveling to Hernandarias (US\$40¢, every 15 minutes) depart from southwest of the traffic circles, two blocks down from Av San Blás and Av de los Pioneros. Get off as the road forks off the main highway to Hernandarias. You'll see the entry on the highway opposite the turn-off (ask the driver).

REFUGIO BIOLÓGICO TATÍ YUPÍ

Nineteen kilometers past the Itaipú Dam visitors center (3km past Hernandarias) is the beautiful **Refugio Biológico Tatí Yupí**, over 2200 hectares of natural forest and streams. It was established as one of six protected areas resulting from the Itaipú Dam project's compensations, to protect the animals which sought shelter there (a zoo was also established) and to recuperate formerly deforested areas. This tranquil place – with its excellent camping facilities – is worth visiting for a day or two. Bicycles and horses are thrown in for fun. And we'll be damned – it's all free! There's a well-organized visitors center and small kiosk. Note: no alcohol is allowed. If you plan to visit, you must get permission from the Itaipú Dam visitors center, showing all official documents.

To get there, catch any bus from Hernandarias or a taxi from the Itaipú Dam visitors center (the center does not provide transport). From the reserve entrance, it's another 8km drive along the dirt road to the visitors center and campsite. You can try your luck with a ranger or walk.

NORTHERN PARAGUAY & THE CHACO

The Gran Chaco is *the* place to escape the crowds and experience raw wilderness. This vast plain – roughly divided into the Low Chaco (west of Asunción), Middle Chaco (the Mennonite region) and High Chaco (low density thorny scrub to the north) – encompasses the entire western half of Paraguay and stretches into Argentina and Bolivia. During the rainy season large tracts become swampy

plains, while in dry weather it's an arid dust-bowl with harsh thorn forest.

Although the Chaco accounts for over 60% of Paraguayan territory, less than 3% of the population actually lives here. Historically it was a refuge for indigenous hunter-gatherers; today, several indigenous groups continue to live here – some have their assigned regions, following the assignment of land in the middle Chaco to the Mennonite communities in the 1930s. Close to the Río Paraguay, *campesinos* (rural dwellers practicing subsistence agriculture) have built picturesque houses of palm logs while army bases and cattle *estancias* (extensive grazing establishments) inhabit the denser thorn forests of the high Chaco.

Over recent years Brazilian settlers have moved into northeastern Paraguay, deforesting the countryside to plant coffee and cotton and squeezing out the existing population, including the few remaining Aché. Both the regions in the northeast and northwest are renowned for trading in contraband goods.

Controversy hit the area in 2000 when the Moonies (Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church) purchased 360,000 hectares of the Chaco, including the entire town of Puerto Casado, for an estimated US\$15 million.

Each September sees the Trans-Chaco Rally, a three-day world motor-sport competition, said to be one of the toughest on the planet.

CONCEPCIÓN

☎ 031 / pop 45,068

Concepción is highly underrated. This easy-going city on the Río Paraguay has poetic early-20th-century buildings, pleasant eateries and a laid-back ambience. 'Action' is a trotting horse hauling its full cart of watermelons and other goods along the paved reddish streets, or a boatload of people and their cargo arriving at the port. The river is an important transportation route, and upriver on weekends, locals gather on its sandy beaches.

If you don't catch the sleepy syndrome, sights include the **Museo del Cuartel de la Villa Real** (cnr Marie López & Cerro Cordillera; admission free; 🕒 7am-noon Mon-Sat), a beautifully restored Hispánico-Paraguayo building that exhibits historical and war paraphernalia. Several stunning **mansions**, now municipal buildings, stand out in Estigarribia. If mechanisms are more likely to rev you

up, the open-air **Museo de Arqueología Industrial** along Agustín Fernando de Pinedo features an assortment of antique industrial and agricultural machines. The **market** is about as authentic as you'll get, complete with its crude *comedor*. Crafts can be found in Plaza Agustín Pinedo. For a leisurely meander across the river, catch a local rowboat (US\$40¢).

Information

Some banks have ATMs but don't accept foreign cards.

Cyberc@t (Franco near Garay; per hr around US\$1) Has a quick connection in a quiet, air-conditioned space.

Tourist information station (Dirección de Juventud, Deporte y Turismo, Av Colonbino in the 'Polideportivo'; turismo@concepcion.gov.py) Trying hard to get Concepción on the map, hands out basic town maps highlighting historic buildings.

Sleeping & Eating

Hospedaje Puerta del Sol (☎ 42185; per person US\$3.85) The owners are the sweetest part of this otherwise basic place, and it's handy to the port.

Hotel Center (Franco near Yegros; s US\$3.85-7.80, d US\$7.80-11; ☎) The dial phones (out of a *Lost in Space* re-run) set the tone for this outdated, rather dingy dive. Costs more with air-con.

Hotel Frances (☎ 42383; cnr Franco & CA López; per person US\$7.70; ☎) Whet your appetite in every respect at this pleasant place – great pool, buffet breakfast (and restaurant) and a handy *heladería* two blocks away.

Heladería Amistad (cnr Presidente Franco & Concepción) Coming here for ice cream, soda and snacks is a local pastime. Don't miss the fruit salad sundaes (US\$1.20).

Restaurante Toninho y Jandiri (cnr Mariscal Estigarribia & Iturbe; almuerzo US\$3.50) This place is worth the pressure on both stomach and purse.

Come to this Brazilian *churrasqueria* (restaurant featuring barbecued meat) for plentiful portions of meats and fish served on sizzle-plates.

Locals flock to down-to-earth rivals **Pollería El Bigote** (Presidente Franco) and **Pollería Bulldog** (cnr Presidente Franco & Garay; portions US\$1.80) for the rotisserie chickens.

To stock up for visits to the nearby Cerro Corá national park, let loose at the supermarket, **Maxi Hipermercado** (cnr Mariscal Francisco López & Julia Estigarribia).

Getting There & Away

BOAT

The most traditional (but not the most comfortable) way to get to or from Concepción is by riverboat. *Cacique* (☎ 42621) boats to Asunción leave Sunday at 6am (US\$9, 30 hours). Boats heading upriver to Puerto Vallemí (US\$10.60, 24 hours) or as far as Bahía Negra (US\$15, 2½ to three days) include the *Aquidabán* (Tuesday at 11am), *Cacique* (Thursday) and *Guaraní* (every second Monday). Check schedules and boats – both change. Ask around the old port about heading as far north as Isla Margarita (aka Puerto Esperanza) on the Brazilian border. Be careful in the blocks near the port; muggings have occurred. See p803 for details on getting to Concepción.

BUS

The bus terminal is eight blocks north of the lone stoplight, which is as close to the center as Colectivo Línea 1 (US\$35¢) will take you. Car or motorcycle taxis cost about US\$2.70; *karumbes* (horse-carts) are twice as much fun and cost less (US\$1.80) – confirm your price before you are 'taken for a ride'!

UP THE LAZY RÍO PARAGUAY

Creature comforts takes on a new meaning in the Pantanal. South of Concepción river commerce is lively, but further north as the pace s-l-o-w-s cargo exchanges become wildlife sightings: caimans, capybaras, monkeys and birds galore, including jabiru, herons, egrets, spoonbills, even macaws. Bed is usually below deck on a humble hammock (rented for around US\$1 per day, or you can bring your own) and you need to claim your territory – it gets crowded. Some boats have basic cabins (around US\$5.30 per night). It's best to bring your own food. Watch or secure your belongings – travelers have reported some light-fingered monkey behavior. Upriver from Vallemí is Isla Margarita (aka Puerto Esperanza), where you may be able to disembark and catch a skiff to Porto Murinho, Brazil, which has bus connections to Corumbá. Fuerte Olimpo is the last place to obtain an exit stamp, but check this status with an immigration office, especially if you head further north to Bahía Negra.

Several buses pass through Pozo Colorado (US\$3.50, 1½ hours) en route to Filadelfia (US\$10.60, five to six hours) and Asunción (US\$10.60, five to six hours). Several services head to Pedro Juan Caballero (US\$4.40, four hours). There's a daily departure at 12:30pm to Ciudad del Este (US\$13, nine hours).

PEDRO JUAN CABALLERO

☎ 036 / pop 64,100

Literally across the street from Ponta Porã in Brazil is the nondescript former shopping border town of Pedro Juan Caballero ('PJC'). Don't aim to get stranded here on a weekend or public holiday as it ain't all 'party hearty'; the only real reasons to shack up here are en route to/from Brazil or to visit the attractive Parque Nacional Cerro Corá.

Information

Money-exchange houses are numerous. Other tourist facilities:

Cibercafé (cnr Mariscal López & Mariscal Estigarribia; per hr US70¢) Has good internet access and pool tables.

Immigration (Naciones Unidas 144; ☎ 8am-noon Mon-Sat) Locals cross the border freely, but to continue any distance you must visit the immigration office.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel La Negra (74603; Mariscal López 1342; s US\$6-10, d US\$11.70-15.50) A shrine to cheap hotels – walk through the family room-cum-chapel to less pure but passable rooms, with slightly grimy and peeling walls.

Hotel La Siesta (☎ 73022; cnr Alberdi & Francia; s/d incl breakfast US\$15.50/33; 🍷) The glitz has lost its shine in this '80s number, but it's the best of the cheapies.

Restaurant Eiruzú (☎ 73162; Hotel Eiruzú, cnr Mariscal López & Estigarribia; mains US\$3.50) Has an ambitious menu with good local and international dishes.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is a few blocks east of the border on Calle Francis. Frequent services leave for Concepción (US\$4.80, four hours) and Asunción (US\$10.60 to US\$12.30, 7½ hours), and four daily buses to Ciudad del Este (US\$12.30 to US\$14, 8½ hours). National Expreso goes daily to Brazil to Campo Grande (US\$4.50, five hours) and Brasilia (US\$21 to US\$43, 24 hours). Nasa has daily services to Buenos Aires (US\$48). Connections to many more Brazilian destinations are available in Ponta Porã.

GETTING TO BRAZIL

Entering Ponta Porã, Brazil from Paraguay consists of crossing one side of the street to the other, where the only difference is that prices are charged in a different currency. In fact, it's so simple that if you are traveling further into Brazil, you might forget one extremely important thing – getting an exit stamp in your passport. To do this, head to Immigration (Naciones Unidas 144; ☎ 8am-noon Mon-Sat). Also ensure you do this before jumping on a bus, which head to various Brazilian cities.

PARQUE NACIONAL CERRO CORÁ

Parque Nacional Cerro Corá is now etched onto the map as one of Paraguay's natural treasures. This park, only 40km west of Pedro Juan Caballero and accessible from Concepción, protects an area of dry tropical forest and natural savanna in a landscape of steep, isolated hills. Cultural and historical features include pre-Columbian caves, petroglyphs and the site of Mariscal Francisco Solano López's death at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance.

The park's **nature trails** head to rivers, waterfalls and a small natural *mirador* (viewpoint), Cerro Muralia (325m). Rare birds and a zoo-worth of animals – including tortoises, armadillos and monkeys – can be spotted (rumor has it that there's even a jaguar, but this is based on footprints only). There's a camping area (lather up on insect repellent) and a small **visitors center-museum** (admission free) with (stuffed) animal displays and maps. Behind this building there is a comfortable cabin with all the mod cons where guests can bunk for a small donation.

Buses running between Concepción and Pedro Juan Caballero (US\$1, 45 minutes) will stop at the park entrance; walk 1km to the visitors center – beyond this are the sights and sites. The helpful staff can tell you the bus schedule for your return trip. One-way taxis from Pedro Juan Caballero are pricey at US\$35.30.

FILADELFIA

☎ 0491 / pop 5000 (colony)

If Filadelfia were a painting, it would have been done by surrealist Salvador Dalí. This neat Mennonite community, the service and

administrative center of Fernheim, resembles a suburb of Munich plonked in the middle of a red desert. Geometrically perfect homes line the streets in an orderly grid, with dusty roads and miles of Chaco wilderness extending endlessly beyond. The town lacks a real center; its soul is the giant cooperative which trades the cream of the Paraguayan crop – dairy products. Although there are indigenous day laborers from nearby pueblos, most of the town's inhabitants are European descendants, and *Guten tag* is a regular greeting. It's a captivating, if not a little strange, experience.

For information on the Mennonites, and everything from 15th-century coins and stuffed jaguars to colorful Nivaclé head-dresses, visit the **Unger Museum** (Hindenburg s/n; admission free; ☎ 7-11:30am Mon-Fri) opposite Hotel Florida. Tours are possible in Spanish, German and English; or just get the keys from the helpful and knowledgeable owner, Sr Hartmut Wohlegemuth, at Hotel Florida.

Orientation & Information

Filadelfia's dusty streets form a neat grid whose Hauptstrasse (main street) is Hindenburg. Perpendicular Av Trébol leads east to Loma Plata and west to the Trans-Chaco and Fortín Toledo.

Filadelfia has no tourist office, but Hotel Florida shows a video on the Mennonite colonies, will help organize transportation and runs the local museum.

The well-stocked **Cooperativa Mennonita** (cnr Unruh & Hindenburg) supermarket has excellent

dairy products and might change cash, but the Mennonites deal in barter more than hard currencies. Copaco and the post office are at the same corner.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping (campsites free) In shady Parque Trébol, 5km east of Filadelfia, but there is no water and only a pit toilet.

Hotel Florida (☎ 32151; hotelflorida@telesurf.com.py; Postfach 214; dm US\$5.50, s/d/tr US\$20/30/40; P ☎) As orderly as a German train schedule and by far Filadelfia's nicest accommodation, including the cheaper rooms. Nonguests can also use the pool (US\$1.40 per hour).

Churrascuría Girasol (Unruh; buffet US\$6.80) Apart from Hotel Florida's restaurant, try Girasol, which serves delicious all-you-can-eat Brazilian *asados* (barbeque).

Getting There & Away

There's no bus terminal, but companies have offices along and near Hindenburg. There's a daily service to Asunción (US\$11.50, seven hours, 480km), Concepción (US\$11.50, eight hours, not Sunday) and Mariscal Estigarribia (US\$3, 1½ hours), which is where you must get your exit and entry stamps (see opposite).

Getting between the colonies by bus is tricky, but not impossible. A local bus connects Filadelfia with Loma Plata (25km) at 8am and 7:45pm daily. Some buses stop in Loma Plata after Filadelfia en route to Asunción (usually one morning bus) and one (Estel Turismo) continues to Neu-Halbstadt, 35km

MENNONITE COLONIES IN THE CHACO

Some 15,000 Mennonites inhabit the Chaco, living (as they are keen to promote) in harmony with some 30,000 indigenous people. According to their history, Canadian Mennonites were invited to Paraguay to settle what was believed to be harsh and unproductive territory, in return for their rights – religious freedom, pacifism, independent administration of their communities, permission to speak German and practice their religious beliefs (such as adult baptism). In 1927 this group formed the Menno Colony around Loma Plata. A second colony, Fernheim (capital Filadelfia), was founded in 1930 by refugees from the Soviet Union, followed by Neuland (capital Neu-Halbstadt), founded by Ukrainian Germans in 1947.

Other Mennonite communities are elsewhere in Paraguay, but those in the Chaco are renowned for both their perseverance in the 'Green Hell,' and subsequent commercial success; their cooperatives provide much of the country's dairy products, among other things. Most adults speak 'Low German' only, but the younger generation speak Spanish as well, and some farmers speak Guaraní.

Although Mennonites in the Chaco appear to be more liberal than those elsewhere, there are concerns that material prosperity has spawned a generation more interested in motorcycles than traditional values. Alcohol and tobacco, once absolutely verboten, are now sold more openly.

GETTING TO BOLIVIA

The bus journey up the Ruta Trans-Chaco to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, takes 30 hours (US\$32) in optimal weather, much more in the wet (think twice if there's rain). The bus will normally take the Picada 108, and occasionally, in wet weather only, the Picada 500. All buses stop at **Mariscal Estagarríbia** (🚗 24hr) in the wee hours of the morning, where you must get your exit stamp, before crossing into Bolivia at **Fortín Infante Rivola** (this is a border post only – no entry/exit stamps are available) before heading to **Ibibobe** (Bolivia), approximately 60km away, for formalities. Buses leave daily. Bring food and water, your dust rag in dry weather and your shovel in the wet. The easiest option is to leave from Asunción, but a riskier possibility is to reserve your ticket with **Stel Turismo** (☎ 0491-32520, Anni Martinez, Filadelfia) and catch the bus in Mariscal Estagarríbia. See also p183. If you're heading out on your own, the immigration formalities can be completed at either Ibibobe, Bolivia, or Boyuibe, Bolivia.

away. During the school year there are early morning and noon buses connecting the colonies; ask locals for specifics. Hitchhiking is worth a try.

AROUND FILADELFIA

Loma Plata

☎ 0492 / pop 8800 (colony)

The Menno Colony's administrative center is the oldest and most traditional of the Mennonite settlements. It's also the best place to organize Chaco adventures. Its excellent **museum**, in a complex of pioneer houses, has a remarkable display of original photographs and documents chronicling the colony's history, plus original artifacts and furniture. Ask for the keys at the **Office of the Mennonite Colony** (☎ 52301; 7-11:30am & 2-6pm Mon-Fri), where you may be able to arrange tours of the colony and surrounding reserves. Ask for Walter Ratzlaff who is willing to negotiate backpacker prices.

Tours to the Chaco or surrounding area can be arranged through the friendly and knowledgeable guides **Hans Fast** (☎ 52422, 0981-203375; fast@telesurf.com.py; Spanish- and German-speaking) or **Walter Ratzlaff** (☎ 52301, 0981-202200; German- and English-speaking). Refer to www.desdelchaco.org.py for more information on the Chaco.

Hotel Mora (☎ 52255; Calle Sandstrasse 803; s US\$9.50-11, d US\$14-16 📍 🚗) has appealing, spotless rooms around a grassy setting. The owners will help arrange tours to the nearby wilderness, including the recommended Laguna Capitán. The excellent **Chaco's Grill** (mains US\$3.20-4.25, buffet US\$5.60) serves quality meats Brazilian style.

Neu-Halbstadt

☎ 0493 / pop 1700 (colony)

Neu-Halbstadt is the center of Neuland Colony. Nearby **Fortín Boquerón** preserves a sample

of trenches dating from the Chaco War. South of Neuland are several indigenous reserves, where many Lengua and Nivaclé have become settled farmers. Neu-Halbstadt is a good place to buy native handicrafts such as bags, hammocks and woven goods.

Hotel Boquerón (☎ 240311; h_boqueron@telesurf.com.py; d US\$18; 📍 🚗), across from Supermercado Neuland, is best known for its restaurant, which fires up a luncheon grill on weekends.

One bus from Asunción to Filadelfia continues to Neu-Halbstadt and there is a bus from Filadelfia at 6pm, inconveniently returning at 5:30am the following day (US\$1.80, one hour).

NORTHWESTERN NATIONAL PARKS

Once the province of nomadic Ayoreo foragers, **Parque Nacional Defensores del Chaco** is a wooded alluvial plain; isolated **Cerro León** (500m) is its greatest landmark. The dense thorn forest harbors large cats such as jaguars, pumas, ocelots and Geoffroy's cats, which survive despite threats posed by poaching.

Defensores del Chaco is a long 830km from Asunción, over roads impassable to ordinary vehicles and there's no regular public transportation. It's worth talking to TACPy in Asunción (see p819) about trips they may have on offer. In the too hard basket? A more feasible and equally interesting option is to visit **Parque Nacional Teniente Agripino Enciso**, which boasts a comparatively sophisticated infrastructure including an interpretation center and a visitor's house (with electricity, air-con and water), and is more easily accessible from Filadelfia or Loma Plata. Another excellent possibility is **Parque Nacional Médeanos del Chaco**, although like the Defensores, this should not be attempted alone and you should never

wander at night – threats include anything from jaguars to contrabandists. For tours to these areas, contact Hans Fast or Walter Ratzlaff (see p815). To do the area justice, trips of three days and nights are recommended (US\$130 per day for three people, excluding food and accommodation).

PARAGUAY DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Though worn and of a distant era, hotels and *residenciales* (guesthouses) are usually *muy limpio* (very clean). Camping facilities, while less common, are cheaper and in remote areas you can usually pitch your tent anywhere if you ask the locals – but beware of tent-eating ants! In the Chaco, formal accommodations are sparse outside the few towns, but *campesinos* may offer a bed. It's worth carrying your own mosquito nets in these areas. For information on visiting working *estancias* (ranches), contact TACPy (p819) in Asunción.

ACTIVITIES

Organized activities for the budget traveler are limited in Paraguay, but biodiversity makes it a notable destination for nature-watching, particularly bird-watching. River activities such as fishing and swimming are also easy and popular and horse-riding opportunities abound on *estancias*. Limited hiking opportunities are possible in National Parks, especially Cerro Coña (see p813).

BOOKS

For more about Paraguay's notorious wars, pick up Harris Gaylord Warren's *Rebirth of the Paraguayan Republic*, or Augusto Roa Bastos' novel *Son of Man*. For a look into Paraguay's heinous dictators, check out Bastos' book *I the Supreme* about Francia, or Carlos Miranda's *The Stroessner Era*. For a more anthropological slant check out Pierre Clastres' *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* or Matthew J Pallamary's novel *Land Without Evil*. Mark Jacobs' *The Liberation of Little Heaven and Other Stories* is a collection of fictional Paraguayan shorts.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open 7am to 1pm or 2pm, without siesta time. Most shops are open weekdays and Saturday from 7am to noon and

from 2pm or 3pm until 7pm or 8pm. Banking hours are 7:30am to noon weekdays, but *casas de cambio* keep longer hours. Restaurants normally open for lunch and dinner (7pm until late) with a break in the afternoon. Cafés keep varying hours and, although not early starters, will be more likely to open for breakfast, coffees and snacks.

CLIMATE

Because of Paraguay's intense summer heat, winter months (May to September) are preferable. The weather is variable and nightly frosts are not unusual.

Southern Paraguay's climate is humid, with rainfall distributed fairly evenly throughout the year. In the east, near the Brazilian border, it averages an abundant 2000mm a year, declining to about 1500mm near Asunción. Since elevations do not exceed 600m, temperatures are almost uniformly hot in summer – the average high in December, January and February is 35°C (95°F), with daily temperatures ranging between 25°C and 43°C (77°F to 109°F). Winter temperatures are more variable and can reach freezing or hover at 6°C (42°F), though the average high in July, the coldest month, is 22°C (71°F).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Paraguay's economy is in flux, but it's still a relatively safe country. Don't wander around on your own late at night in Asunción and border towns. Several years ago there were reports of armed robbery on buses traveling at night, although this seems to have dissipated. Muggings are common. Don't display valuables – snatching occurs frequently on local buses. The Chaco is hostile and desolate with limited infrastructure – it is recommended that you go with guides. Poisonous snakes are common in certain areas, but mosquitoes are a likelier nuisance. Beware of strong currents when swimming in rivers.

DRIVER'S LICENSE

Most car-rental agencies will accept a home driver's license, but it's wise to back it up with an International Driver's License.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Paraguay

For information about Visas see p819. For locations of these embassies see individual city maps.

Argentina (Map pp798-9; ☎ 021-498-582; Palma 319)

Bolivia (☎ 021-227213, 203654; America 200)

Brazil Asunción (Map pp798-9; ☎ 021-448084; General Díaz 521; 3rd fl); Ciudad del Este (Map p809; ☎ 061-500984; Pampliega 205; ☎ 7am-noon Mon-Fri); Encarnación (Map p806; ☎ 071-203950; Memmel 452); Pedro Juan Caballero (Mariscal Estigarribia west of CA López; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat) The Encarnación branch is best visited in the morning; the Pedro Juan Caballero branch is near the border in Ponta Porã.

Canada (☎ 021-227207; Profesor Ramírez at Juan de Salazar)

Chile (☎ 021-662756; Capitán Nudelman 351)

France (☎ 021-213840; Av España 893)

Germany (☎ 021-214009; Av Venezuela 241)

Paraguay (☎ 067-724-4934; Av Presidentes Vargas 120, Pedro Juan Caballero; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri) Near the border in Ponta Porã.

UK (☎ 021-612611; Av Boggiani 5848)

USA (☎ 021-213715; Mariscal López 1776)

Paraguayan Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Paraguay has representatives in neighboring countries (see those chapters for details) and in the following countries:

Canada (☎ 613-567-1283; 151 Slater St, Suite 501, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3)

France (☎ 01 42 22 85 05; 113 Rue de Courcelles, 76017 Paris)

Germany (☎ 0228-356 727; Uhlandstrasse 32, 53173 Bonn 2)

UK (☎ 020-7937 1253; Braemar Lodge, Cornwall Gardens, London SW7 4AQ)

USA (☎ 202-483-6960; 2400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Paraguay's celebration of Carnival (February; dates vary) is liveliest in Asunción, Encarnación, Ciudad del Este and Villarrica. Caacupé is the most important site for the Roman Catholic *Día de la Virgen* (December 8).

Other curious events:

Día de San Blás (Day of San Blás) Celebration of Paraguay's patron saint; February 3.

Election of Miss Paraguay Held in Asunción in March.

Rally Transchaco Transchaco car race held during the first week of September.

FOOD & DRINK

Parrillada (grilled meat) is popular, but nourishing tropical and subtropical foodstuffs play a greater role in the typical Paraguayan diet. Grains, particularly maize, and tubers like

manioc (cassava) are part of almost every meal. *Chipas*, made with manioc flour, eggs and cheese, are sold everywhere, as are cheap and filling *empanadas* (pastry stuffed with either chicken, cheese and ham, or beef). During Easter's Holy Week, the addition of eggs, cheese and spices transforms ordinary food into a holiday treat.

Paraguayans consume massive quantities of mate (herbal tea), most commonly as ice-cold *tereré* (iced mate) and generously spiked with *yuyos* (medicinal herbs). Roadside stands offer *mosto* (sugarcane juice), while *caña* (cane alcohol) is the fiery alcoholic alternative. Local beers, especially Baviera, are excellent.

The following are some other common foods you'll likely encounter:

Bori-bori Chicken soup with cornmeal balls.

Locro Maize stew.

Mazamorra Corn mush.

Mbaipy he-é A dessert of corn, milk and molasses.

Mbaipy so-ó Hot maize pudding with meat chunks.

Mbeyú or torta de almidón A grilled manioc pancake resembling the Mexican tortilla.

Sooyo sopy Thick soup of ground meat, accompanied by rice or noodles.

Sopa paraguayana Cornbread with cheese and onion.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Paraguay is a rather old-fashioned country, with conservative views. Public displays of affection are uncommon between heterosexual couples, and invisible between same-sex couples. More gay bars are appearing in Asunción.

HEALTH

Paraguay presents relatively few health problems for travelers. The private hospitals are definitely better than public and those in Asunción are the best. Beware of Dengue fever in Asunción's suburbs and other wetland areas in the southeast. It's not advisable to drink the tap water, even though it is said to come from wells. In the Chaco it can be undrinkably salty. Be sure to carry sunscreen, a hat and plenty of bottled water at all times to avoid becoming dehydrated. Condoms are available in most pharmacies. For more information, see the Health chapter (p1090).

HOLIDAYS

Government offices and businesses in Paraguay are closed for the following official holidays.

Año Nuevo (New Year's Day) January 1
Cerro Corá (Heroes Day) March 1
Semana Santa (Easter) March/April – dates vary
Día de los Trabajadores (Labor Day) May 1
Independencia Patria (Independence Day) May 15
Paz del Chaco (End of Chaco War) June 12
Fundación de Asunción (Founding of Asunción)
 August 15
Victoria de Boquerón (Battle of Boquerón) September 29
Día de la Virgen (Immaculate Conception Day)
 December 8
Navidad (Christmas Day) December 25

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet is *muy popular* in cities, but limited in smaller towns. An hour of use costs less than US\$1.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Guaraní Dictionary (www.uni-mainz.de/~lustig/guarani/diccion.html) Basic Guaraní language tools.
Lanic (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/sa/paraguay/>) Excellent collection of links from the University of Texas.
Office of Statistics, Surveys & Census (www.dgeec.gov.py) Interesting statistics from Census of 2002.
Paraguayan Current Events (www.paraguay.com) Links to news stories about Paraguay in English.
Paraguayan Search Engine (www.quanta.com.py) Spanish-language search engine.
Senatur (www.senatur.gov.py) Official tourist information homepage with excellent information.

LEGAL MATTERS

Under no circumstances can you legally possess, use, or traffic illegal drugs in Paraguay. Penalties are severe – long jail sentences and heavy fines.

MAPS

The *Guía Shell* (\$8.50) road atlas is sold at most Shell gas stations and at **Touring y Automóvil Club Paraguayo** (TACPy; opposite) offices. It includes a general 1:2,000,000-scale country map, and a map of Asunción with street index at 1:25,000. The **Instituto Geográfico Militar** (IGM; ☎ 021-206344; Artigas 920, Asunción) sells 1:50,000 topographical maps.

MEDIA

The following is a list of Paraguay's more important newspapers:

ABC Color (www.abc.com.py) Asunción's daily paper made its reputation opposing the Stroessner dictatorship.
Neues für Alle Asunción's German community publishes this newspaper twice-monthly.

Rundschau Weekly.

Ultima Hora (www.ultimahora.com) An editorially bold independent daily with an excellent cultural section.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the *guaraní* (plural *guaraníes*), indicated by 'G'. Banknote values are 1000, 5000, 10,000, 50,000 and 100,000 *guaraníes*; there are rare 50, 100 and 500 coins. The perennial change challenge occurs in Paraguay – keep plenty of change and small notes as you go along – it comes in handy. Traveler's checks can be cashed at *casas de cambio* (3% to 5% commission).

ATMs & Credit Cards

ATMs in Asunción, Encarnación and Ciudad del Este are connected to Visa, MasterCard and Cirrus networks. Some even dispense US dollars. You may stumble upon an ATM in other towns but they are rarely linked internationally – get cash from those in the three major cities listed.

Plastic is rarely accepted outside Asunción, and even there, only in midrange to top-end hotels, restaurants and shops.

Exchanging Money

Casas de cambio are abundant in Asunción and border towns and change cash and sometimes traveler's checks (3% to 5% commission); try banks in the interior. Some *cambios* will not cash traveler's checks without the original proof of purchase receipt. Street changers give slightly lower rates for cash only and can be helpful on evenings and weekends.

Exchange rates at press time:

Country	Unit		Par G (guaraní)
Australia	A\$1	=	4048
Canada	C\$1	=	4721
euro zone	€1	=	6724
Japan	¥100	=	4513
New Zealand	NZ\$1	=	3553
UK	UK£1	=	10020
United States	US\$	=	5364

PHOTOGRAPHY

Most Paraguayans will gladly smile for the camera, if you ask before shooting. Professional-quality color print and slide film is available in Asunción, Encarnación and Ciudad del Este. Two good places in Encarnación to stock up on print and slide film:

Serpylcolor (Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia & Curupayty)
Serpylcolor mappedia municipal (Av Mariscal JF Estigarribia & Mariscal López)

POST

Sending a letter to the USA costs about US\$1.25 and it's US\$1.65 to Europe. Essential mail should be registered for a small fee.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Avoid buying crafts made from wood (such as *lapacho* and *palo santo*) or endangered species like armadillos, jaguars, pumas and other exotic animals. Visitors interested in natural history and conservation should contact the **Fundación Moisés Bertoni** (☎ 021-608740; www.mbertoni.org.py; Prócer Carlos Argüello 208, Asunción), a nonprofit conservation organization that also arranges tours to reserves it helps manage, including Mbaracayu and Tapytá.

TELEPHONE

Copaco (formerly Antelco), the state telephone company, has central long-distance offices throughout the country. Private *locutorios* (phone offices) have sprung up everywhere, often with internet service as well. Despite deregulation, international calls still run over US\$1 per minute, even with lower nighttime rates.

For phone codes use the following: country code (☎ 595) – when calling Paraguay from another country drop the '0' in the area code; international operator (☎ 0010); and International Direct Dial (☎ 002).

TOILETS

You're likely to see more jaguars than public toilets – they're rare! Most bus terminals have one – for a small fee you get a smelly loo and a wad of paper. It's best to go when you can in restaurants, hotels or museums. Most restaurants will charge you a nominal fee if you don't buy anything. Carry your own toilet paper and don't throw it down the pipes. Few buses have one that won't spill over onto your shoes, but drivers will usually stop and let you go if you ask nicely.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The government-run **Senatur** (www.senatur.com.py) has tourist offices in Asunción and one or two other cities. They may lack colorful brochures but the staff do what they can to answer your questions (in Spanish). **Asociación**

de Colonias Mennonitas del Paraguay (☎ 021-226059; acomepa@rieder.net.py; Republica de Columbia 1050, Asunción; ☎ 7-11:30am, 2:30-6pm) has brochures about Mennonite communities. **Touring y Automóvil Club Paraguayo** (TACPy; Map pp798-9; ☎ 021-215010; www.tacpy.com.py; Av Brasil & Cerro Corá, Asunción; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) can help make reservations for overnight visits (US\$20 to US\$100 per person, per day including meals) to 15 working **estancias** (www.turismorural.org.py).

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Infrastructure for disabled travelers is negligible and unfortunately there are really no services for disabled travelers or for people with special needs.

VISAS

Visitors from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA need visas. Others only need a valid passport. Get your visa in advance, either in a neighboring country or at home. Visas may be requested and obtained in the same day at most consulates. You will need two passport photos and two copies of each of: your passport; your entry stamp to Paraguay; your ticket (proof of onward travel); and credit card or traveler's checks (proof of sufficient funds). The cost is US\$45 in cash for single entry or US\$65 for multiple entry (30 to 90 days). Be sure to get your passport stamped on entering the country or you may be subject to fines upon leaving.

For information about immigration points (such as Mariscal Estigarribia en route to Bolivia), entrance or exit stamps or visa paperwork, visit the **Immigration Office** (☎ 021-446673, 021-492908; Ayala & Caballero; ☎ 7am-1pm Mon-Fri) in Asunción.

VOLUNTEERING

Estancias are probably your best bet for spontaneous volunteering options, most of which is hard farm-type labor. Another alternative for forthcoming opportunities is to check out the website on the **South American Explorers** (www.saexplorers.org) bulletin board. Teaching English is popular, although usually organized with volunteer organizations outside Paraguay (see p1073).

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Paraguay is a reasonably safe country for women but solo travelers should take care, especially at night and on buses. Modest dress is important.