

# PARAGUAY

*“To step outside of my comfort zone and experience something entirely different was very rewarding: living in the middle of Paraguay’s serene landscape, drinking terere (traditional tea-like beverage) with my host family, laughing with friends over a Spanish joke for the first time, or coming home at 2:00 in the morning to find a herd of cows eating my front lawn! Paraguay—a country where a monkey can fall into your arms while on a walk; a country with people who are never in a hurry, even when fighting in crazy traffic; a country steeped in culture with wonderful people who know how to relax and respect traditions, how to dance, have fun and enjoy the beauty of life. Every photo, every memory brings a smile to my face and a flutter in my heart when I think of all the incredible times I had.”* *Teresa Koen, sojourner from Australia*

Landlocked Paraguay is bisected by Rio Paraguay. West of the river, the hot infertile plain known as the Gran Chaco is sparsely settled and less explored than the Amazon. Ninety-eight percent of the population lives instead in Paraguay’s more verdant eastern half. Until recently, the government isolated Paraguay both politically and economically, and though the country was once a colony of Spain, more Paraguayans are fluent in Guaraní, the native language, than they are in Spanish. Recently, however, Paraguay began to shake off its self-absorption, and the capital, Asunción, is modernizing. Yet Guaraní still sell feathered headdresses as well as bows and arrows on Asunción’s plazas, and life throughout the country preserves an old-fashioned pace and courtesy.

## **Community Service Program**

AFS’s Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Paraguay by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Paraguay have worked on projects concerned with the environment, community development, childcare, health and education. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

## **AFS & Your Experience**

AFS Paraguay has been in existence since 1962. AFS volunteers in 23 communities across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the year, AFS-Paraguay hosts approximately 50 participants from as many as 15 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

## **Orientations**

Participants are met at Asunción's airport by staff and volunteers and escorted to a two-day orientation that covers safety tips, AFS rules, the Paraguayan family and more detailed information on project placements. Participants then travel by bus or car, accompanied by a chaperon, to their host communities where they receive three weeks of language instruction and work only half days.

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Paraguay will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as new information and ways of looking at things, while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

## **Living in Paraguay**

### **Living arrangements**

Participants in AFS-Paraguay's Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Paraguayan families typically have conservative lifestyles.

### **Diet and Meals**

Paraguayans are accustomed to large meals at lunch and dinner, but breakfast is quick and light (milk, coffee or tea and bread). Meat is prominent in all national dishes. Vegetarians are difficult to place. Corn, rice, potatoes and wheat are important staples, as are fruits in season. *Sopa Paraguaya* is considered the most traditional dish; it is a corn flour cake made with eggs, milk, cheese and onions. Paraguayan families eat their main meal of the day together, and on Sunday the extended family gathers for dinner. It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods or to prepare separate food for themselves.

### **Health Precautions**

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Paraguay (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

### **Safety and Support**

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Paraguayan. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

### **Travel**

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

### **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas

are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

### **Program Prices**

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website [www.afscanada.org](http://www.afscanada.org) or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

## **Country Information**

### **Geography and Climate**

Paraguay is located in central South America. It is bordered by Argentina to the south and Southwest, by Bolivia to the north and Northwest and by Brazil to the east. The eastern region of the country is mountainous with large rivers and lakes. Asunción, the capital, is located in this region and is the economic hub of the country. The western region has fertile farmlands and forests and vast unexplored expanses. Its ecosystem is virtually untainted.

Paraguay lies south of the equator, with summer during the months of September through June. The weather is generally hot, dry and dusty. The rainy season is June through September.

### **Population**

Paraguay has a population of 4.9 million. About 98% of the people are located in the eastern region, and almost half of them live in urban areas. Asunción has a population of approximately one million.

### **Language**

There are two official languages in Paraguay: Spanish and Guaraní. Most Paraguayans either speak or understand both languages.

### **Government**

Paraguay is a democracy with three branches of government: the executive, consisting of the President and Vice President, each elected for five years, and their cabinet; the legislative, consisting of a bicameral Congress; and the judiciary, consisting of the Supreme Court, composed of nine magistrates.

## Religion

Roman Catholicism is the religion of the country (90%), with minor representation of Mennonite and other Protestant denominations.

## Launching your AFS experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience. Make every effort to improve your Spanish language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Paraguay, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Paraguay. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Paraguayans will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

## How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at [www.afscanada.org](http://www.afscanada.org). If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

## Quick Facts

Country data	Size	397,300 km <sup>2</sup> (153,401 mi <sup>2</sup> )
	Population	5,884,491
	Official language	Spanish and Guaraní
	Government	Constitutional republic
	Currency	Guarani divided into 100 centimos
AFS Paraguay website	<a href="http://www.afs.org.py">http://www.afs.org.py</a>	