

# 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.

## **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 students 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.

## **Landing in Paraguay**

When you land in Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Paraguay staff and volunteers who will take you to your first Paraguayan orientation.

## **Arrival Orientation**

During the two-day orientation, you will learn the basics of Paraguayan culture, Spanish language and safety. Volunteers and staff will teach you tactics for dealing with your new home country. After the orientation, depending on where your host family lives, you will travel with a chaperon by bus or car to your host community, where you will meet your host family.

## **Living in Paraguay**

### **Lifestyle and Family Living**

Paraguay is steeped in tradition. It proudly keeps alive its native arts, crafts, music, instruments and dance. The original inhabitants of eastern Paraguay were semi-nomadic native Americans of various tribes collectively known as Guaraní because of their common language.

In the 16th century, the first Europeans settled in Paraguay and created flourishing Spanish colonies. The native Indian population gradually absorbed the Spaniards, who in turn adopted Guaraní food, language and customs. Colonization also meant that Jesuit missionaries were sent to “civilize” the

Indians. This early history, mixed with turbulent political development, expansion, civil wars and dictatorship, evolved into a peaceful, leisurely paced life, sometimes seemingly preserved from an earlier time.

About 95% of the people in Paraguay are *mestizos*, a word that describes people of mixed European and Native American descent, and most are bilingual in Spanish and Guaraní. Paraguayans are very hospitable, and conversation is a national pastime.

In families, supervising the children and managing the household are typically the responsibilities of wives, while husbands are more occupied with work outside the home. Paraguayans are usually protective of their children, especially daughters; for example, teenage males have much more liberal curfews than their sisters have. Parents expect to know when their children are going out and where they are going. Most social activities, vacations and weekends are family events.

AFSers to Paraguay must be prepared to live under conditions very different from those at home. Sometimes host families will not have modern facilities, and the level of material comfort can be much lower than that of the typical wealthier household. Few homes have air conditioning, washing machines, dishwashers or microwave ovens.

Paraguayan host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their family lives.

The majority of placements are in small towns, but all of them have easy access to larger cities. Almost all families have pets that spend at least part of the time indoors. It is quite common for at least one family member to smoke.

### **Dress and Appearance**

In general, it is wise to bring casual clothing. Participants are also encouraged to bring one or two nice outfits (dress shirts and ties for men, skirts and blouses or dresses for women) for special occasions. Cotton clothing is suggested for the hot and humid weather. Bring jeans, shorts (for sports), a raincoat, an umbrella and a swimsuit. Sweaters, pullovers and a warm jacket are necessary for cooler days. Remember that most homes do not have central heating.

### **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*, considered the most traditional dish, 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.

### **School**

School is one of the best places to meet people and make friends during your time in Paraguay. It gives opportunities for intensive practice of Spanish and helps to immerse you into the culture and community.

School is in session from March to October, Monday through Friday, with a two-week winter break in July. Classes run from 7:00 a.m. to noon, or 1:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Some schools require attendance at both morning and afternoon sessions. Most students attend private schools and are placed in the senior year. Most schools require uniforms. Students should bring US\$100 to cover the cost of the uniform and any books they may need to purchase.

There are 11 mandatory subjects including chemistry, fine arts, geography, history, Latin, math, philosophy, psychology and Spanish. Students remain in one classroom, while teachers move from

room to room. Interactions between students and teachers are formal and respectful, and students are expected to participate fully in class. There are few textbooks; classes stress theory. In some courses, such as psychology and philosophy, students form study groups. Homework is assigned daily, and each subject requires reports, oral quizzes and exams.

AFS students can obtain a written report on their academic activity if they attend all classes, complete assignments and pass the exams.

### **Teen Life**

Paraguayan teenagers like to go out together as a group; they play sports, have picnics, go to parties or a movie, take walks or hang out in parks.

### **AFS Activities**

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Paraguay will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide 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 young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

There will be a two-day mid-term orientation held at an impressive Jesuit ruins, which will focus on evaluating the program for each student.

Before your home return, you will participate in an End-of-Stay orientation, which is about looking back at your sojourn and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future. This event will be held during a trip to a local destination of special interest.

### **Language**

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

### **Travel**

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Paraguay, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Paraguay. We strongly discourage travelling on your own or with friends.

### **Spending Money**

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to join, but they may pay for some of your personal activities. When you do things with your friends or alone, such as going to a movie or taking special lessons, the expense is your responsibility.

Young Paraguayans are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money. AFS recommends that participants bring US\$600 in traveller's checks for spending money for the semester program, and US\$1,200 for the year program. Spending more money than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

### **Safety and Support**

Paraguay is a safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country. Host families, as well as AFS Paraguay, educate students to enable them to have a safe and rewarding experience.

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.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medical purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Paraguay may have additional rules.

### **Health Precautions**

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

If you need any 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.

### **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**

The location of Paraguay is 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.

## 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 those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Paraguayan words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Paraguay, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Paraguay and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Paraguay. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Paraguayan. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS Paraguay will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Paraguayan people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country. We wish you a wonderful experience!

## Curiously Paraguay

- ☼ Dueling is legal in Paraguay as long as both parties are registered blood donors.
- ☼ Itaipu Dam, on the Parana River between Paraguay and Brazil, is the largest hydroelectric complex in the world.

## 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

Student age (upon arrival)	15 years to 18 years 6 months	
Country data	Size	397,300 km <sup>2</sup> 153,401 mi <sup>2</sup>
	Population	5,884,491
	Official languages	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>	