

Uruguay Is The Ultimate Wellness Travel Destination For 2024



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The landscapes and coastlines can't be beat.



Beautiful, panoramic views of coast and sea, lush green landscapes, waterfall vistas... this is Uruguay. The small South American country has a coastline stretching more than 400 miles, with 10 percent of its lands made up of forest. While almost half of the Uruguayan population resides in the capital city of Montevideo, smaller, sleepier towns exist both in the interior and dotting the coastline. And while many come to the country to enjoy the pristine beaches during the summer months, including the primary tourists from the neighboring countries of Argentina and Brazil, it has all the makings of becoming a wellness hot spot in the coming years, rivaling its current wellness It Girl cousin, Costa Rica.

“Uruguay’s increasing popularity as a wellness and rejuvenation destination can be attributed to its unique blend of rustic authenticity and natural beauty,” says Isabella Channing, founder of [The Shack Yoga and Wellness at Vik Retreats](#), whose Uruguayan properties comprises Estancia Vik, Playa Vik, and Bahia Vik (all in different parts of the city of José Ignacio). Raised in New York by her Uruguayan mother and American father, Channing moved to Uruguay more than a decade ago, opening a yoga studio before joining forces with Vik Retreats. “Unlike many tourist hotspots, Uruguay retains an untouched quality. Its pristine lagoons, diverse birdlife, endless stretches of untouched beaches, expansive skies, and open landscapes create an environment where one can’t help but feel intimately connected with nature.”





Vik Retreats



Lola Méndez, a Uruguayan-American journalist and dual citizen who lived in Uruguay for nearly two years, says that there's a lot of potential for Uruguay to become a well-known wellness destination, and that new offerings are becoming available for those looking to connect more with the country and themselves. "Uruguayans are becoming more in touch with spirituality and wellness practices and thus [wellness] experiences like gong baths are slowly becoming more available," Méndez says. (Gong baths are a type of sound bath, which is a form of meditation, where participants listen to the sound and vibrations of gongs, chimes, and other musical instruments.) Méndez points to accessible (and affordable) offerings that are mostly locally known, like massages, yoga studios, vegan cafes, waterfall hikes, organic wineries, hot thermal springs, and even amethyst caves.

Said offerings, coupled with Uruguay's general way of life, sets the tone for the country to expand into more wellness tourism. "The reverence for the natural world is deeply ingrained in the culture of Uruguay, where it's customary for people to go outside and watch the sunset, horseback ride, and take in the natural scenery," says Sarah Kennedy, operations expert at luxury tour operator Black Tomato. "There are deep multi-generational ties to the traditional way of living that have been in families for many years and across generations. Every Uruguayan is incredibly proud to be Uruguayan — it's extremely important for them to take care of their country, and environment, for the next generation." This preservation attitude towards the country's natural resources have left the coastline immaculate and the interiors verdant — and the tourists who have found themselves here are inspired by the beautiful scenery, where they're allowed to fully immerse themselves and disconnect from their everyday lives.

"Uruguay is also one of the most effortlessly chic Latin American countries, and Faro de José Ignacio is a long-standing favorite to well-heeled Latinos with a similar feel to the Hamptons or Nantucket — the offerings [of this city] are elevated and refined, having helped establish the country as a spa and wellness destination," says Kennedy.

Channing agrees. “[José Ignacio], where I’ve made my home and raised my family, embodies a ‘natural sophistication,’” she says. “It serves as the quintessential example of what Uruguay offers in terms of wellness. The unspoiled surroundings of José Ignacio have inspired the creation of wellness programs aimed at helping each individual discover their unique path to well-being.” Channing’s The Shack Yoga and Wellness at [Bahia Vik](#) (in José Ignacio), for instance, allows guests to unwind amidst four pools, relax by the ocean, or tailor their own wellness journey. The property also offers specific group retreat dates (outside of a regular stay), where a typical day starts with outdoor Vinyasa yoga, followed by time in an infrared sauna. You can then opt for a Shamanic Energy Healing session or a deep tissue massage. (The next group [retreat dates](#) are December 1 - 6, 2023 and April 20 - 25, 2024.)

But there are plenty of other places to explore Uruguay’s burgeoning wellness escapes as well — from Punta del Este to Maldonado to Carmelo to Colonia del Sacramento. Méndez recommends [Big Bang Nature Stays](#), located outside of Punta del Este. “The eco-conscious domes face the beach and are ultra cozy with luxurious glamping amenities such as king-sized beds, fireplaces, and more,” she says. “The rustic on-site restaurant serves farm-fresh meals, yoga classes are offered in a bohemian dome shala, and there’s a wood-fire outdoor tub which is the perfect place to stargaze.”

In Maldonado, you can explore the forest reserve of [Arboretum Lussich](#), one of Méndez’s favorite spots. She notes that when Croatian merchant Antonio Lussich bought it in 1896, he worked to reforest the area, and introduced an invasive species of eucalyptus, which you can now find (and smell) all over the country — including in Carmelo, where fragrant eucalyptus envelops [Carmelo Resort](#), an “amazing” stay recommended by Kennedy, nestled in the country’s premier wine region, and boasting a “woodsy, cozy feel with multiple pools and offerings ideal for spa days.”

In Colonia del Sacramento, you can stay at the [Sheraton Colonia Golf & Spa Resort](#), where you can take in the beautiful landscapes (and play a round of golf), relax at their spa, or enjoy their beach. “Our property is designed to cater to the unique needs and preferences of each type of traveler, offering a variety of wellness experiences,” says Fabricio Anselmi, general manager of Sheraton Colonia Golf & Spa Resort and born-and-raised Uruguayan. He points to the natural beauty of the country, alongside things like thermal springs and the opportunity to partake with in traditional local practices like energy healing and plant medicine, that would make it ideal for travelers looking for a respite. Not only that, but he also points to the diverse cuisine and “conscious eating” of Uruguay, one that is connected to that of the [resort’s offerings](#), that emphasizes “lean meats, abundant fruits and vegetables, and the inclusion of wine.”

All the experts point to Uruguay hosting a diverse traveler set — from solo travelers looking for an escape to couples looking to deepen their connections to families prioritizing their time together. And as the destination continues to gain popularity, the tourism dream is that the continued emphasis on wellness as a lifestyle, rather than just an offering, will resonate with tourists.

“Uruguay’s appeal goes beyond panoramic views,” says Channing. “Here, wellness is a lifestyle. The untouched landscapes and sustainable practices resonate with eco-conscious travelers. The wellness retreats, combining yoga, meditation, spa treatments, and more, are set against a backdrop that is nothing short of mesmerizing. The country’s culinary offerings, based on sustainability and mindfulness, foster a healthful, balanced life. Our hope is that as wellness becomes pivotal, more will turn to Uruguay as their holistic haven, experiencing the rejuvenation and reconnection it uniquely offers.”