

Podcast 099 – In which I realise why Paraguay has few guidebooks dedicated to it

{INTRO: Extract from a video I took at Iguazu Falls (Argentina Side)}

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

All being well, I should be somewhere in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu right now, when this pod goes live. This means, clearly, I've recorded this episode in advance, so I can't honestly tell you if I've done anything interesting, or if I have any housekeeping that needs explaining. I was made aware of a minor issue with my last episode, which has now been rectified and the problem should never recur – my own fault of having so many files with the same name. It's also been suggested my vocal resonance wasn't up to my usual standard, which to be honest I felt when I was recording it. No idea why; it was 2pm on a Wednesday afternoon so I shouldn't've been having troubles, but there we go.

Anyway, the lack of housekeeping is all probably just as well, since this episode looks like it'll run longer than I'd anticipated. And to think it was originally going to be entirely focussed on Paraguay? How things change!

So, when we last heard from our purple-haired dungaree-wearing barefoot backpacker (who was wearing sandals, let it be known), they were about to leave Buenos Aires but had just been mugged. How will they cope with this new sudden development?

{section separation jingle}

Apparently by ignoring it.

During my time in Buenos Aires, I'd been pondering where and when to go next. I'd toyed with the idea of both visiting another Argentine city nearby (Rosario), and, completely oppositely, heading to Paraguay's Chaco region for a couple of days of looking at flat grassland and going 'welp, there's a cow' a lot. I'd checked prices of flights to Iguazu Falls, and looked into National Parks in the north of Argentina. In the event I decided my most effective plan would be to do what I was originally going to do anyway, and head to the north to visit the Jesuit ruins, about which more later. This involved me catching an overnight coach from the bus station – it was a 14 hour journey to the small town of San Ignacio – but my understanding of South American coaches was that they were supposed to be pretty good. The route ends at Puerto Iguazu, and is the longer, but cheaper, way of getting to the huge waterfalls at Iguazu Falls; I did ponder going there first but that would have meant some awkward backtracking.

Of course I had to get to the bus station first, and as you know, the area around bus and train stations isn't always the best, and that's what happened. There is one important thing to note, by the way, and that is ... I was travelling with two phones. My new phone, which I was using to take photos and videos on, and my old phone, which still had my SIM card in. It was my new phone that was nicked, by a passing opportunist. I say 'new phone'; I'd bought it just before my trip to Vietnam a year ago, and I'd still not got round to transferring everything from my old phone to it. I think that's a by-product of ADHD. Also, I'd never really felt comfortable with that phone, it had a few weird traits that I couldn't get used to. So in fact the only thing that was lost in the incident were photos and videos from my journey thus far (and as you heard last time, Montevideo isn't the most photogenic city anyway), and a handful of pictures from a hike I'd done the week before that I'd forgotten to transfer to my computer before I left home.

In fact, the main issue with the incident was in the melee and confusion, I'd managed to lose a fight against gravity and ended up crashing to the floor in such a way that bent my glasses and gave me a big cut and bruising just above my eye. I have selfies from my second week on this trip. But not many. Obviously the locals were

quite kind to me, helping me up, finding a policeman and stuff, and I explained everything as best I could with the help of Google Translate, but in truth there wasn't a lot that could be done, except just head onwards with my trip, as if nothing had happened. It was just one of those things I couldn't do anything about, the moment had passed, so all I could do was go onwards and continue my trip. By the time I reached San Ignacio it wasn't really on my mind save the knowledge there was a huge bruise on my face and that made me a little self-conscious. As it happens, no-one asked. Maybe it matched my hair. Who knows.

The secondary issue was when I got to the coach. It was supposed to have Wi-Fi. It did not have Wi-Fi. I had to spend about £7 in roaming charges on my old phone going through all the websites and apps that I'd got on my newer phone and changing all the passwords. And I learned that some websites make it very difficult to do that. Google. But I think I got everything changed, everything relevant, anyway, I don't think anyone cares about my Untappd presence. It took two hours. My takeaway from the whole incident is that I was vaguely irked at having to spend two hours doing admin.

The coach itself, apart from the lack of Wi-Fi, and the fact the overhead light at my seat didn't work, was rather plush. I'd bought the seat online, which was a slight faff as the website wasn't entirely user-friendly, but that may have been my lack of Spanish coupled with too much choice of bus operator and no real equivalent of Skyscanner to compare them all. The price was about £60, which on the one hand felt relatively expensive for a bus ride, on the other, it's a journey of about 650 miles and in terms of price, distance, and time, that's comparable with, and marginally better than, travelling on National Express from London to Inverness. And this coach (Rio Uruguay, a bus company I seem to become very familiar with on this trip) was considerably better than National Express. The seat reclined. Like, not quite flat, but certainly quite a long way.

The ride was comfortable. I was upstairs at the back; the website allowed us to choose our seats. For no additional cost, if I recall correctly. The seats themselves, one each side of an aisle, so I didn't have a seatmate to myther, had curtains next to the aisle for additional privacy. There were TV screens every so often up the coach but they weren't intrusive. I even managed to get some sleep, which is impressive given I was probably a bit full of adrenaline.

It didn't feel too long before I was approaching journey's end. I made a mental note of where the coach stopped in the town of Posadas, because I'd have to pass back through here later that day, but for now, it was San Ignacio and the first of the Jesuit Ruins.

{section separation jingle}

Now. When I first looked at backpacking in South America, back in around 2012, I noticed entries in the guidebook about the Jesuit ruins in Paraguay. I always thought they'd be interesting to see, partly because although the UK has lots of ruins, and ruins are the same everywhere more-or-less, we don't have this type of ruin. But partly also because they're a UNESCO World Heritage Site that no-one really ever visits, so I'd be able to visit somewhere historically significant and yet still well Beyond The Brochure, as it were. Looking into them in more detail though, it seemed that they'd be tricky to get to, especially without a knowledge of Spanish, since they didn't appear too simple to get to by public transport.

But what exactly are they and why are they worth visiting? Well, around 1600, and relatively not long after the Spanish Empire began colonising this part of what was later to become South America, Jesuit missionaries began to emigrate here in fairly decent numbers. It seems they were originally invited by one of the local archbishops (in Asunción, what is now the capital of Paraguay), with the approval of the King of Spain, in order to help Christianise the native Guarani people. Western history also suggests the King wanted to improve the lot of the Guarani who were at the time being treated somewhat badly by the colonisers; since the colonisers were also Spanish and ultimately under the behest of the King of Spain, your mileage may vary on that one.

Indeed, when the Jesuits came, they built not just churches, but whole communities, complete with schools, workshops, and houses, creating what you might call these days a 'Company Town'. This was done to educate and reform the Guarani, who'd previously been a somewhat semi-nomadic people, and, the Spanish would argue, 'civilise' them. Which involved giving them nicer places to live, teaching them literacy (in Spanish, of course, not their own language), culture (European), and of course all about Jesus Christ. These towns were also designed to be self-sufficient, thus replacing their agricultural system. Improving and advancing the lives of a less-developed people, or colonially imposing a foreign mindset and destroying traditional culture? That's not a question for this blog to answer.

Anyway, several of these towns were built in the 17th and 18th Centuries, on either side of the Parana River that would later become the border between Paraguay and Argentina. They tended to be planned out in a similar manner, with the church being the most dominating structure, other work and educational buildings close by, and the Guarani houses built a little way off, separated of course from the rest of the town by a large plaza and other open space. The estimated population of these towns was a couple of thousand people, so not huge but certainly bigger than most of the villages that had existed here up to this point.

The towns lasted until the Jesuits were expelled from South America in 1768, at which point without their dominant landlords, they were quickly abandoned and left to ruin, with any remaining riches reappropriated. Quite why the Jesuits were expelled is again beyond the scope of this blog, but the short version is that other Catholic kingdoms (particularly Portugal and France) were jealous and afraid of their apparent power and influence so launched a disinformation campaign to get the Pope to do something about it. If that sounds familiar, well yes it is.

They were inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1984 (Argentina) and 1993 (Paraguay); the Paraguayan ones are the only UNESCO sites in that country. Many of them have firework displays and/or sound-and-light displays after sunset in the summer months, if it's not raining, but I didn't get to see one. There's actually quite a few across the whole wider region, mainly in NE Argentina (Misiones Province), SE Paraguay (Itapúa Department), and SW Brazil (the state of Paraná), although many are tucked away in small villages and the only way to get there is either by car, or by arranging a tour with a local company or guide, and I'd say that's really only useful if you have a real solid interest in Jesuits or South American history. I visited three that were relatively convenient - San Ignacio Mini in Argentina, and Santísima Trinidad del Paraná (The Holy Trinity of Paraná) and Jesus de Tavarangue in Paraguay. In that order.

They look really close to each other on a map - in fact in a straight line it's only a shade over 20km between San Ignacio Mini and Santísima Trinidad del Paraná. However to get from one to the other involves going through the twin cities of Posadas and Encarnacion; the journey takes several hours by bus and is quite messy. I know this, because that's what I did. Because I'm bloodyminded and I could.

The first of the sites I visited, San Ignacio Mini, called 'mini' to differentiate it from the similarly-named, but larger, 'misiones' in the far SW of Paraguay, is in the small town of San Ignacio, about an hour north-east from Posadas by bus. Of the sites, this one felt like the largest in area. It's accessed via a walk that meanders behind one of the colonial buildings that still stands today; this now holds a small museum (included in the entry fee) that covers the site and its archaeology. Almost entirely in Spanish, be noted. The cost of entry to the ruins, for foreigners, is a relatively steep 13,000 Pesos, or £10, tho it's valid for 15 days and also includes entry to a couple of other nearby smaller ruins.

The path to the site goes through a small woodland, with ruined buildings and stone blocks visible on either side. These appear to be what remain of the Guarani houses. This opens out into a huge plaza, an open space, roughly square, now covered with grass, that around which the majority of the buildings would have stood. Indeed, what you get a very strong sense of, not just here but in all of the ruins, is space. Everything is set out in a kind of a block pattern, and there's huge open areas between the buildings meaning you have the impression that when this was occupied, there'd've been a lot of room to walk around in; you wouldn't have felt 'enclosed' by buildings in the same way you would in a modern Western city centre.

That's not to say the buildings wouldn't have been impressive; indeed one particular building was designed to be the main focal point of the town. This is, of course, the church. There's a large centre aisle - around 75m long - and very wide (about 25m), with corridors and other rooms off the side. The front of the church is still indicated by the remains of two large brick walls that clearly formed an arched doorway. They're several humans high, have columns, and still present quite a bit of decoration on the portico. Beyond the doorway the building was clearly very long and still has sections of the original mosaic floor. At the far end the altar can still be discerned with stone steps leading up to it. On my visit, and presumably in perpetuity, the walls of the church were being held up with scaffolding. A sign near the entrance points out the town council and other important people would have been sat in front of the altar, the other mission members off to the side, and the musicians and choir pretty much dead centre.

Many of the buildings, especially the frontage of the church, are made from a red sandstone which makes them easy to carve into quite impressive patterns. Much of the archway has been lost but you can still see a fan-like pattern at the top of the entrance, and Greek-style columns built into the walls., complete with floral décor at their tops. There's also a large Jesuit logo still visible at waist-height on the rightmost arch.

The remains of other buildings around the rest of the square are also visible. Some of these were governmental, while some were workshops. There was also a college, with what amounted to an on-site hall of residence, next to the church. Surrounding the whole site are trees, which give it a sort of 'park' vibe. The area directly behind the church was designated as a 'vegetable garden', as the town was intended to be as self-sufficient as possible.

The town also contains a cemetery, apparently divided into four sections by two tree-lined streets. These sections were for men, women, children, and infants. Because in death, as in life, everyone is deemed to need to be separated by dubious metrics.

The second site I visited was Santísima Trinidad del Paraná, in the small Paraguayan town of Trinidad. I'll talk about Trinidad itself, and how to get there, in a bit, but let's first talk about the ruins. They're in the centre of the town, although the town's not really big enough to have a centre to be honest. The tickets are available from an office on the edge of a tree-strewn plaza and not absolutely clearly marked, but there's at least one security guard sat on a chair who can point you in the right direction (and who makes sure you're not trying to enter the site without one - which would be very easy to do, given the entrance is on the other side of the plaza and hidden by foliage!) - indeed you can see much of the outlying buildings anyway from paths that run alongside the fence. The ticket costs 40,000 Guaraní, and it includes entry to two other sites - nearby Jesus de Tavarangue which was on my list anyway, and San Cosme y Damián which is an hour the other side of Encarnacion so absolutely wasn't.

The site is pretty large - UNESCO say it covers 8 hectares which makes it about the same size as Buckingham Palace and very slightly smaller than Alcatraz. Like the others it's very square, in the sense that not only are most of the buildings rectangular, but if you look at it from above it looks like they could all fit onto the squares on a chessboard quite easily. Possibly related, it was one of the last of the Jesuit Misiones to be built - it dates from the early 1700s rather than from the previous century, so could be seen as one of the most developed.

Again the entryway runs alongside the ruins of native houses, before opening out into a large plaza. At the far end of the plaza is the main church. This has the most impressive ruins, although here it's not the doorway that remains. Rather it's the area around and behind the altar - several huge brick walls are still in situ, with rounded tops and a couple of imposing archways in the passages to the side of the central aisle. The altar itself is carved from one large piece of stone, and you can make out the remains of what appear to be human figures on it. Near the altar are steps leading down into a small crypt. There's not a lot in the crypt, but it exists, and it's nice and cool. The church also contains a gargoyle on the ground by the entrance, a large baptismal font, and off to one side there is the remains of a huge pulpit, carved with flourishes.

The bulk of the ruins of the surrounding buildings - workshops, houses, a school - are made up of the external walls, many of which are connected together with archways, and some internal walls giving a decent impression of the basic framework of the buildings. Obviously none of the have intact roofing. In terms of layout and location, they're all rectangular, long and thin, and built along straight lines, perpendicular to each other, around large plazas, now covered in grass. And birds that don't like you getting too close; something that also happened at nearby Jesus de Tavarangue. Part of what were the workshops have been given over to other stone remains and detritus found in excavation and archaeology which have yet to be processed or worked out what they were from.

One interesting building located off-centre, not present at the other sites I visited, is a square brick tower, quite a decent size, and raised on a terrace of about six levels of stone steps. The maps on site suggest this is a bell-tower, but you're not permitted to enter it. Next to it is a smaller church, that looks like it would have had an arched walkway alongside, facing the tower.

Inside the ticket office is a very small museum (exhibits labelled in Spanish), and a room where you can watch a 10 minute video (available in Spanish, English, and I think German) about the Jesuits, the Misiones in Paraguay, and a bit about the archaeology and recovery of the sites.

The same video was available to be seen at the third of the sites I visited, in the village of Jesus de Tavarangue. This is the trickiest of the three to get to under your own steam; the village itself is about 10km down a country lane from Trinidad, and the ruins are at the far western end of the town. Honestly, it's probably easier to hire a taxi from Trinidad. So I did. Total cost of getting to the ruins, waiting time, then back to Trinidad and onward to the next town of Hohenhau was 120,000 Guaraní, or about £12. My guidebook said there's an infrequent

bus that does the trip from Trinidad, but I didn't want to take that chance.

Anyway. The ruins here are much smaller, but somehow feel more preserved and interesting. The main church here is a very similar size to that in San Ignacio, being the same width (just under 25m) and at 70m only a couple of metres shorter. It's quite well framed, with very tall external walls remaining, and a frontage where you can still make out the décor on the three portals. According to the literature, the design of this church was consciously copied from the Sanctuary of Loyola, the shrine in Loyola, Spain, that commemorates the birthplace of Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit movement. There is also a slight Moorish influence to some of the décor (again, reflecting the diversity of Spanish architectural styles), which makes this particular church unique amongst the Jesuit sites in South America.

One of the interesting features are the two pulpits either side of the aisle about halfway along - most churches obviously only have one. This was apparently to foster debate and to also reinforce the Word, as they felt having two people talking about a topic would make the audience more engaged and remember more of what was said. A bit like a podcast having two hosts rather than one.

There's not as much else to this site, or at least not as much that remains in terms of other buildings. Next to the church are, in succession, the priest's house, the school, the kitchen, a gate to the gardens, and then the workshops. On the opposite side of the plaza are the basic earthworks to the Guarani houses, set quite a way away from the church and associated admin buildings. A couple of km away is a quarry, from where they would have sourced the stones for the buildings.

What's nice about this site is the ticket price includes an audio guide in several languages, including English, which is useful when all the signs are in Spanish. I did mean to do a bit of Spanish learning before this trip. Honest.

{section separation jingle}

Getting to Trinidad was a little wee adventure. The bus from San Ignacio was quite crowded, and it took a while to get a seat. We arrived in Posadas bus station, which is some way out of town, and I had a choice to make - walk into the centre, take the train across the border, go through the centre of Encarnacion, the sister town in Paraguay, and find the bus station, or just get the bus that goes directly between the bus stations. Normally I'd've chosen the latter, to get a feel for the places, but honestly, I was a bit tired and possibly still on edge chemically, so I went for the bus. It was only a couple of quid, and a bit of a no-brainer. I don't recall much about the bus trip, save that we had to pass through Argentinian emigration and Paraguayan immigration - the latter was to cause whatever the opposite is of admin issues later, but Present Nel was just happy to have entered another new country, and being one step closer to having visited 100 countries by their 50th birthday. I also recall getting off the bus about 10 minutes' walk too late, because the bus didn't terminate at Encarnacion's bus station and it not being obvious when we passed it.

Encarnacion bus station is not very big. The main building is about the floor area of a house, and laid out a bit like a plus sign. There's no arrival or departure board, no signage, you just have to guess where and when your bus is going to land. The bulk of it is bus company offices, some of which display timetables, but generally with no indication which stand they use. Nor if they're the only buses going in that direction. A few people sit around selling pastries and things, and one old man sat on a bench with a very old-fashioned ticket machine. Slightly outside the station was a standalone air-conditioned booth containing an ATM, from which I excitedly drew out 1.3 million Guarani - I always get a bit giddy when I can talk about being a literal millionaire, even if that's only £130.

To be honest though, I found the bus station a bit stressful and felt it doing things to my social anxiety because I didn't really understand what I needed to do nor how long I needed to wait for. An hour and a half, as it turns out; the bus I needed was going to the eastern town of Ciudad del Este and there's more of them in the mornings. Whether I could have caught an earlier one had I got off the bus from Posadas in the right place is a question for a parallel universe. Anyway, I got to Trinidad eventually, after the slowest bus ride imaginable (cost: 20,000 Guarani, or about £2) ; by now it was about 4pm so I figured the ruins would be a next-day task.

There's not much else in Trinidad other than the ruins. It very much had the vibe of a few roads in the country, punctuated with the occasional building. On the western side was what can best be described as 'a weird beepy thing' - some kind of radio transmitter I think. Next to it was a strange ufo-shaped building that Google Maps had helpfully told me was the "Mirador Astronómico de Trinidad". Whatever it was, it looked

closed and slightly derelict, being located in a rough field of shrubbery and weeds. And small rodents. And more birds that screeched at you. I left quite speedily, not gonna lie.

I had three nights in the Trinidad area. I wasn't intending to, but this whole trip was very much planned to be a 'let's see what happens on the fly' adventure rather than a 'I need to have everything booked' one. My first night was spent at a guesthouse, or Pension, in Trinidad called Pension Maria. I had wanted two nights but they were booked up. It felt quite 'square', architecturally, built over several floors, with pretty large and comfortable bedrooms containing ensuite bathrooms. There's a small restaurant (big enough for four or five tables) in the reception area which offers an evening food menu and a small breakfast buffet. In addition, it was a very short walk from the entrance to the ruins. One thing to note is this was my first experience of the German influence of this region - it was the primary foreign language of the staff - and this was much more apparent in neighbouring Hohenau, 10km NE of Trinidad along the main road to Ciudad del Este.

This was where I overnighted next, in what effectively acted as a small resort complex called Parque Manantial. It's a little way off the main road, hidden in the trees; it has a large restaurant and shop, a pool, and plenty of open space. The room I was in was a family room with four single beds, and was right next to the pool; the impression I got was that all the rooms were a similar standard price. Breakfast is a large buffet style; evening meals aren't terribly exciting, being standard gastropub fayre (I had a Paraguayan steak sandwich).

Hohenau has a very Germanic influence - its name is German and probably means ('high point above the floodplain') - and indeed German was the second language of the resort, rather than English - this influence is older than the stereotype, the city having been founded by German colonists in 1900. Although Wikipedia does helpfully tell me the most famous resident was one Josef Mengele. Make of that what you will.

The town has an open-air beer/restaurant place near the hotel which on my visit was celebrating Oktoberfest. You could buy tokens from a stall and use them to pay for beer (locally-brewed craft beer too!), pizza, or all manner of other pub snacks and food. I had three 'pints' (500ml glasses) and it cost about £5.20 so it was pretty cheap; all my beers and my pizza and snack came to a total of 135k Guarani. They also spoke decent English there, which was a great help as my German's not up to much these days.

Note that the roads around the hotel were very much country lanes with close and overhanging trees on the edge and not much in the way of pavements. In addition, several, including the best way from the hotel to the pub, have absolutely no street lighting. Fortunately they also had very little traffic.

While in Hohenau I plotted my next stage of the trip - I knew I'd be going to Iguazu Falls, but I needed to finalise for how long and what else to do in Paraguay. After a chat with a couple of friends online, they suggested that what I actually should be doing was resting because I'd had a long day of travel after a semi-traumatic experience, so I took a second night at the resort and did pretty much absolutely nothing on the second day except sit by the pool and do cryptic crosswords. And drink Paraguayan beer. And tell my flatmate back home to throw a book at a spider that had invaded her bedroom, and that I'd deal with it when I came back in a week. To be fair, it was a very big spider.

{section separation jingle - is this where the Break is?}

{section separation jingle}

Now, my next stopping point was somewhere I've been interested in going ever since I started looking at South America, and felt more realistic to visit than Bolivia, yes. I've always had a passion for waterfalls, from small rapids in countryside streams (Yorkshire's full of them), through fast-paced cascades in rainforest settings (Ghana and Vanuatu), all the way up to world-famous sites like Victoria Falls. And in the far NE corner of Argentina, and SW corner of Brazil, is one of the world's most notable - Iguazu Falls. Victoria Falls has a bigger drop and Niagara a greater flow but Iguazu as whole covers a wider area than both and the whole complex is made up of around 275 individual drops. Indeed its name itself is a giveaway to its power - coming from the Guarani or Tupi language and made up of the combination of "y" (kinda pronounced 'ih'), meaning "water", and "üasú" ('wa-su), meaning "big". As such it was always going to be on my hit-list while I was in the area.

The thing with visiting Iguazu is, because like both Victoria and Niagara, it's located on an international boundary, there's a choice to be made about which side you want to see it from, because the view and the experience is different from both. Interestingly, I've only ever seen the other two falls from one of the sides -

Niagara from Canada and Victoria from Zambia, so it'd've been very on-brand for me to only see Iguazu from Argentina.

The difference between the two sides of Iguazu in a nutshell is: hydrologically and geologically, the Brazilian side has most of the river volume, but not as many of the actual many falls. What this means is, viewing the falls in their entirety is much easier from this side as you get a much wider vista, but you don't get to see many of the falls themselves in much detail. Generalist, rather than specialist. Whereas the Argentinian side has less of the river volume, but contains around 80% of the individual falls (out of around 270). What this means is, viewing the falls in their entirety is much harder from this side as you get a much narrower vista, but you get to see many of the smaller falls themselves in closer detail. Specialist, rather than generalist.

This plays out in the way you approach visiting the falls – I'll talk more about this later, but the short version is there's less to actually *do* on the Brazilian side; it's simply a case of walking along the river for a short way and going 'wowzers', whereas the Argentinian side is a much bigger area, and you'll spend longer there exploring it, just that most of it is rainforest.

I figured though, I had the time, and I didn't think Paraguay needed an extra day, so I saw both. As I'll talk about shortly, it's pretty easy to visit both sides while based in either, so the other decision I had to make was which of the border towns serving the falls should I base myself in. And, for reasons I can't quite explain, but I think just because it involved less financial admin, I chose to stay in Puerto Iguazu, on the Argentinian side. It seemed relatively easy to visit both sides of the falls from there, and the town itself seemed quite comfortable and vibrant, without being too large and overwhelming. In fact, in many ways it felt like a backpacker hub.

I stayed in a private room in what vibes as a casual backpacker hostel; one of those places that looks someone's just casually put up a wooden shack and then spent the rest of the day drinking beer and playing guitar, shirtless in the sun. To give you some idea on its luxurious nature, the ceiling light fitting fell off halfway through my visit; we had to stick it back on the wooden beam with cable clips. They did my laundry though, so that was useful.

It was about a 15 min walk west of the town centre, close to the Tres Fronteras clifftop and where there's a small ferry to Paraguay. It's called Tres Fronteras for, well, blindingly obvious reasons; the Parana and Iguazu rivers meet here and each of them is an international border, so from the clifftops on each of the three countries (Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay), you can clearly see the other two. Paraguay's is the most remote, the viewing spot lying around 8-10km south of the centre of Ciudad del Este, and thus slightly more awkward to get to. I only saw it from the Argentinian side, but it was quite the tourist and selfie spot, complete with street sculptures, a viewing platform, a couple of restaurants and cafes, and of course the ubiquitous 'I heart Puerto Iguazu' sign. On the evening I went, the whole place was full of teenagers and young adults, mostly taking selfies.

But as to the falls themselves, I visited the Brazilian side first, for no particular reason other than I had to make a decision one way or the other. I bought my ticket online, the day before; though it's a timed entry you can change the time on arrival if you're running late. Or early, I guess. My ticket, as a foreigner, cost \$100 Real, or about £13 - it seems since I went, prices have risen to \$117 (£16).

Getting to the Brazilian side from Puerto Iguazu is pretty simple. There's an hourly bus from the bus station which leaves on the half-hour, the first is at 7.30am and the last bus is at 4.30pm. You can buy tickets on the bus but I got mine from the Rio Uruguay ticket desk (they're the company that run the service) - it's the same price, which at the time of my visit was 10,000 Pesos return. It takes roughly an hour, and you have to disembark at Argentinian Emigration. But note at the time of my visit, Autumn 2024, the bus *does not stop* on entering Brazil, and you do not get your passports stamped. So if you theoretically need a visa to enter Brazil, you don't need one to visit Iguazu Falls on a day trip. The journey back is identical; an hourly bus back to Puerto Iguazu that again does not stop at Brazilian emigration. They do stop at Argentinian immigration though, and on entry to the country you have to also slide any bags through an x-ray machine.

This means that I've not officially been to Brazil. I'm still counting it though!

At the entrance to the falls, there's a couple of shops before a wide airline-security-style queuing system that leads to a bus stand. Once you're through, you board the next available bus, which takes you on the long road to the falls. This bus has four designated stops; most people disembark at the third of them. This is the access point for a walk alongside the river, and all the way along there are views out to any number of smaller

cascades.

The path is around 1,500m long, but takes far longer than you expect to walk it, partly because there's so many other people doing the walk, but mainly because you're going to want to stop at every possible lookout point and admire the view. And take pictures. You can see the river pretty much the whole way, despite it weaving through the rainforest - it's at the bottom of a steep bank, so though the road is close by, it's high above to the left, well beyond the trees, so you don't notice it. It's undulating, but not terribly steep. There are stairs rather than ramps for some of it, so it's not really fully accessible, though it's smooth enough to be barefoot on (which one young lady was).

The path runs on the opposite of the river to most of the smaller falls, which means you get a much better overview of them than you do from the Argentina side. Doing so shows you just how vast the falls are, and how many there are. Although on the map this feels like a one-and-done walk to just the Devil's Throat, it's very much more than that.

Despite the large number of people, it's very easy to see a small amount of wildlife as you walk,. Obviously birds are everywhere, but there are also small land critters that are more than happy to be photographed. These include what I believe to be coati - a sort of South American raccoon.

The path ends at a small restaurant, shop, and toilet complex built under columns and almost into the rock. From here a second path heads out into the water, crossing on a boardwalk built above it, and ends on a large rock from where you get a very close-up view of the main body of the falls themselves - the Devil's Throat.

The Devil's Throat itself is, strictly speaking, the canyon formed in the rock after the falls, but when you talk about it, most people are referring to the waterfall at the start. The majority of the Iguazu River flows over this cliff edge and into the canyon; the drop is just over 80m and the width of the fall here is around 150m. And it sounds and feels like it. It is a massive wall of water rushing down from above, and is really why you come here. The way the path is situated means you get to see it head-on; it's a direct view of the whole vista. Looking the other way you can see the river flowing downhill, over and around hundreds of small rocklets. You can also see a myriad of things in the clear water, including coins and the occasional unfortunate mobile phone. How annoyed would you be with yourself if you come all this way to take pictures and then drop your camera?

There's a lot of people here - this is why you come to this side of the falls, after all, and for many people this is the only thing they've come to see. The paths here are rammed with people; there's really not a lot you can do about it, except maybe time your trip for the ends of the day or on a weekday in off-season, although I visited on a Tuesday in October which is certainly not peak tourist season, yet there were still hundreds of people here.

Apart from the walk along the river to the falls, and of course the Throat itself, there's not much else to do or see on the Brazilian side. One of the most popular though is the boat trips. These are extra costs, not included in the entry fee, and if memory serves are more expensive in and of themselves. They start at the second of the stops the bus from the entrance takes, with a short walk down a rainforest trail to the river, then take you in boats past many of the falls and almost down the Devil's Throat itself. You get very wet doing this - there's lockers you can store a change of clothes and your bags in at the boat terminal, and it suggests wearing waterproof or bathing gear, and carrying a dry bag. Amusingly one of the questions in the FAQ is 'can I do the boat trip barefoot'; it was almost as if they knew I'd be looking. The answer, by the way, is, yes, but it's not recommended because of the floor of the rainforest trail being twiggy. I did not do a boat tour because, let's face it, I'm not a water-creature.

Also at the second bus stop, but on the opposite side of the road, there's another rainforest trail. I did walk down here because I am a forest-creature. This is signposted as the Banana Path, and is a 1,360m trail that goes to another part of the river which is much calmer and quieter - the Iguazu River here is very meandery and the falls are in the middle of one of the loops. The path is quiet, and is kind of an anti-climax at the end as it goes to a log cabin with average views out over the river, and an awful lot of midges, to the extent it's quite uncomfortable to stay that long. It is quite nice to walk through the trees though, and on my visit I saw thousands of butterflies, of many different colours and varieties, including a whole pack of them just sat on the ground.

There is another rainforest trail at the first bus stop, the Poço Preto Trail, which goes for an 18km round-trip, and I do wonder who on earth takes it because by the time you've gone there and back, most of your day's

already gone. I imagine it's also not that much different to the Banana Path, in that it ends at another quiet part of the river, rather than anywhere near any of the falls.

Having seen the falls once, I went back to Puerto Iguazu for a beer and a sleep, before part two the next day, visiting the Argentinian side and seeing how the experience differed. The act of getting there is the same - there's regular buses from the bus station - every 20 minutes, same price. This time I bought my ticket on the gate, because I had enough Argentinian Pesos in cash, it was my last full day in the country, and the currency is essentially worthless outside Argentina because it's awfully hard to exchange. Because no-one wants it. I don't remember how much it cost, but I think it was either 30,000 or 40,000 Pesos; it was a round 10,000 number anyway. It doesn't really matter because according to their website, the price for foreigners has now risen to 45,000 Pesos, or about £34.50. Compared with the Brazilian side it's a lot more expensive - you get a lot more, for sure, but it's another example of how much more expensive Argentina is compared with its neighbouring countries, just like I found with the Jesuit Missions.

Unlike the Brazilian side, the site is very much non-linear, with things to see every which way. Everything, even including the Devil's Throat, is walkable. That said, you don't have to - included in the entrance fee is a return ticket on a small cute tourist train (sadly with diesel engines) that runs the several km up to the main event. They're 'timed' (in the sense you're supposed to be on a specific train) and you get assigned a carriage, but like with all best laid plans everywhere, it doesn't end up working like that in practice.

The train is made of several carriages. These are small, wooden, and open-sided above the waist, but with a roof standing on struts. The doors open and close like gates. It gives quite an old-fashioned vibe that would have been completed had the engines been steam ones. They aren't. The train is supposed to run at no more than 5km/h, but given it overtook me while I was walking back, I assume it went faster. It runs through the rainforest alongside the river, though you can't see it for the trees.

At the end of the train ride, there's little else to detain you except take the trail to the eponymous Devil's Throat. This is a 1,100m walk along a zigzagging boardwalk that stretches far out into the river. It passes over lots of the different channels the water flows through, and over and past rocks and small islands that delineate them. There's also a lot of clumps of trees visible as you walk, almost giving the vibe of a flooded forest.

Despite all the other parts and hikes on this side of the falls, this is the bit that everyone comes to see. As such, even the boardwalk path is a constant stream of people walking in both directions. It makes it awkward to stop and take pictures of the river's flow, but people do. And of course despite the widening of the path at the Throat itself, despite the theoretical one-way system in operation around the block designed so everyone can get a view of it from several directions and viewpoints, it's a somewhat chaotic mass of bodies standing by the fence for probably longer than they ought to be, taking pictures and selfies of everything and in everyway. If you're tall you can stand a row or so back and take pictures with an up-stretched arm, but then you're partly in the way of people walking behind you to find a better position.

That description might all sound negative and over-touristy, however remember that some places are popular for a reason. Once you manage to push your way to the metal fence and look out at the falls, you're greeted with one of the most spectacular sights you're going to see. Although your mileage may vary as to whether the view from the Brazilian side is better. Do both, and let me know your thoughts.

It's a wall of water. It's a stereo soundscape of rushing and crashing. It's a misty spray that makes your pictures a bit grey - indeed it makes it a little hard to see through the screen to what you're taking a picture or video of, so you just have to hope you've got the right angles, even if there was no-one else in the way. Everything you own will get slightly damp, but in person it adds to the effect; I was very conscious of making sure my phone did not slip out my hand. But you can feel the power of the water and it's so easy to just lose yourself in time.

But then you'd be in the way. So it's time to move on to somewhere a little quieter.

There are two other trails you can take, both of which take you closer to the smaller waterfalls that stretch along the cliffside. These are the ones you can see at a distance from the Brazilian side, but here you get to see them in much more detail. They're called the Upper and Lower Trails, and they pretty much do exactly what they say on the signposts. The Upper Trail runs along the top of the falls, so you see them from above and watch the water flow along and then down them. Conversely the Lower Trail view them from below, so you can see the actual cascading of the water straight-on. They both are worth the trek, as it's quite interesting to see the same falls from different angles. The majority of both trails are on purpose-built boardwalks.

The waterfalls they go past are quite powerful in and of themselves, and even if the Devil's Throat didn't exist, they'd still very definitely be worth seeing. Each of the individual falls has its own name, including Salto Dos Hermanas (two sisters), Adan y Eva (Adam and Eve), and a couple named in memory of National Park Rangers who have died on the job.

The Upper Trail is the longer of the two, at 1,550m, and is the only one of the two that's fully accessible (no stairs, just ramps). It heads South, in the direction of the Devil's Throat (and you can see the spray coming off it in the distance), and includes a side-trail to the San Martin waterfall, overlooking the namesake island. You used to be able to get onto the island itself but this doesn't seem to be an option at the moment (and hasn't for a while). The Lower Trail is a little shorter, at 1,400m, and has more steps, but also takes a direct route to the river so goes past a couple of falls only otherwise visible from the Brazilian side (Lanuz and Alvar Nunez), before heading past San Martin island and being able to view the waterfalls on the Upper Trail from a distance.

Again I didn't snack at any of the many restaurants or shops on site, and nor did I take a boat trip - I'd actually say, given the number of rainforest and waterfall trails here, that's probably better off being booked from the Brazilian side where you'll have more time.

{section separation jingle}

After Iguazu, I had two more days in Paraguay before I came back home. But let me briefly go back to my journey to Iguazu from Hohenau via Ciudad del Este. I had trouble catching a bus on the Monday morning, mainly because it wasn't entirely obvious where I needed to stand, and two passed me before I managed to get on one - this turned out to be a small minibus that had seen far better days, but it got me the five hours up the road to Ciudad del Este for only 100,000 Guarani, or about £10. Remember that number. The journey wasn't exactly exciting, because scenically Paraguay isn't the most exciting country in the region, but we did stop a couple of times in towns where people got on to sell snack food and drink. I miss that convenience sometimes.

Ciudad del Este (you don't need a Spanish degree to figure out the meaning; in fact, Wikipedia tells me 'Parana' is related to a Guarani word meaning 'river', so one might render the name in England as the less inspiring 'Easton (or Eastham) on Avon') ... it's an interesting place. It's the second largest city in Paraguay and is about 50% street market. It lies close to Argentina, and directly on the Brazilian border, the other side of the Parana river from Foz do Iguacu, and regardless of the political situation, the border is 'somewhat porous'. My understanding is there's a degree of freedom of movement between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina in this tri-border area, though the movement of goods is more free than perhaps the authorities might ideally like. There's one road in the city heading east-west, that runs over the bridge into Brazil, and this road is absolutely rammed with traffic in both directions. On the Paraguayan side, it's also lined with market stalls, shops, and people, selling everything from knock-off clothing to jewellery to mobile phones, possibly even ones acquired from street thieves in Buenos Aires (I didn't look, but it was tempting!).

I only passed through it twice, on the regular bus from the central bus station to Puerto Iguazu, that runs through Brazil. It costs around 5,000 Peso or 30,000 Guarani; I do recall it was cheaper to pay in Guarani, and it takes ... however long it gets stuck in traffic for in Paraguay, plus about 35 minutes in Brazil, plus however long it takes to get through Argentinian passport control. Roughly an hour and a half in total, but it's not something you could create a full and detailed timetable for. That said, there are bus stops all along this route - even in Brazil, theoretically - so you could try; it's a normal city bus rather than an intercity express service.

I'd got my entry stamp in Encarnacion, so you'd've thought I'd've needed to get an exit stamp here. Apparently not - despite telling the conductor I'd like to stop at the border, the driver completely ignored this and drove straight through. What? We also drove straight past Brazilian immigration, and it'll come as no surprise to learn therefore we also sailed past Brazilian emigration on the way into Argentina. In terms of country counting, does it count if you literally transit without even being stamped in? We did all have to get off the bus at the Argentina frontier though, where we did get processed and, as per, have our bags x-rayed. Technically I was now officially in two countries at the same time, having unofficially passed through a third. Given her job, my flatmate would have had an aneurysm

Not having an exit stamp for Paraguay was a problem inasmuch as I'd planned to take the ferry from Puerto Iguazu back to Paraguay on the Thursday, so I could visit the nearby Salto del Monday, the not-Iguazu-but-still-impressive waterfalls south of Iguazu that everyone forgets about, and I figured they might be unimpressed if I turned up with no evidence of having left the country in the first place. I was also working on the assumption

that if the bus passed straight through Paraguayan emigration, it would also pass through immigration. And while I felt slightly tense on the bridge going back, we did indeed merely use the immigration terminal as a bus stop, and soon we were on our way to the bus station. Note that the majority of people walking across the bridge on both trips didn't seem to be stopping at the frontier either, so it would have been easy to ... disappear, or as easy as it is to disappear with purple hair, I guess.

Once back at the bus station, I caught the next coach to Asunción. They seem to be pretty frequent (they certainly were from Encarnación), although the admin of the service felt rather casual – certainly none of this 'make sure you have your ticket available for inspection before you board'; I don't think I even got issued with a ticket. The cost of the journey, which to be fair had they made up on the spot wouldn't have been entirely a surprise, was 100,000 Guaraní. So whether that's a standard price for long-distance services, I don't know. I raise that point because what I got for that was far more than a broken seat on a bus with less than adequate suspension. Instead I got something akin to the coach I was on in Argentina – a wide comfy seat that almost went flat, a light that worked (not that I needed it), and a TV screen close by that I could have plugged headphones into to watch a series of completely unconnected movies dubbed in Spanish with English subtitles – *Baby's Day Out*, *Taken*, and *White Chicks*, for the record. Again, people came on at various towns to sell snack food, like sandwiches and fruit, which was gratefully bought.

Paraguay ... let's be honest, it looks like Leicestershire. It's perfectly fine, functional, green, slightly hilly, rolling farmland, it's just, I mean I'm sure it's really pretty and different to someone from Kansas or Switzerland, but to me it didn't make me look out the window and go 'coo, that's pretty'. Note though that this part of Paraguay is kind of the pretty bit, well, save a couple of small villages in the far south-west by the river that are apparently great spots to just sit and chill out by. More than 60% of Paraguay is covered by the Chaco; gaucho country, flat plains where the only villages are estancia ranches, ex-Mennonite colonies, or military establishments, with very few buses and almost no shade. It's relatively flat, very dry, and contains about 3½% of the population. There's a bus from Asunción into Bolivia that takes 24 hours, the vast majority of it through the Chaco, including much of the night. It's hard to judge whether the Chaco at night is more aesthetic than the Chaco in the day. It'd be a cooler temperature, at least. It's a great place for birdwatching, apparently. It's also home to that famous animal, the 'is that a llama or an alpaca' / 'what the heck is a' guanaco?! There's a reason I chose not to take three days out my trip to go visit. Well, that, and the price for tours for one person were over a grand. I did look.

The trip took somewhere in the region of six hours, though this included an hour stuck in Asunción traffic over the last 8-10km. I'd've been quicker walking. And in fact as the bus station is in the SE suburbs of the city, still a couple of miles from the centre, I did indeed do just that; power-walked to my hotel along the main road. It was an introduction to the city, for sure; perfectly safe, bit polluted, a bit ugly, not terribly notable. Whether it was a good introduction is an exercise best left to the listener.

{section separation jingle}

I've been sitting here pondering how to write this last section on Asunción. I only had two nights there so my impressions are going to be guided by that, plus it was incredibly hot on my visit and my hotel had aircon, so I was very much popping out and popping back in again. But from my time there I can honestly say that, of all the cities I've been to in South America, Asunción is very definitely one of them.

It's, perhaps surprisingly, one of the oldest cities in South America, being founded officially in 1537; its name (in full, *Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*) coming from its founding date of the Assumption of Mary, 15 August. I've said before and I'll say it again, Iberian-origin Catholics are very focussed, single-minded, and dedicated when it comes to naming pretty much any geographic feature. It seems to have developed as it was a strong enough fortification to provide safety for Spanish colonialists during their fights with the indigenous populations. It lies on the Paraguay River, a name later applied to the country but one which no-one seems to know the precise meaning of, save that the end part of it means 'water'. As in 'Iguazu'. If you learn nothing else from this pod, you can go away remembering at least one word in Guaraní.

Wikipedia tells me it's built on seven hills, which would make it one of Those cities, like Rome, Amman, and Sheffield. I don't remember it being an overly *steep* place, but certainly some of the roads were on a slope. It's built on a very tight grid pattern, and the junctions lack road name signs, which means, given the buildings tend to be quite uniform, or at least indistinctive, means it's quite an easy city to get lost in.

I also had trouble defining a 'city centre'. On my walk in from the bus station I passed by a large indoor

marketplace covering several blocks, but this felt a little way outside what looks like it should have been the central area to really function as one. Yet that central area consisted mainly of the same kind of neighbourhoods as the rest of the city, just with a couple more hotels. Streets of low-rise buildings, many one storey, others two or three with the ground floor given over to shuttered garages, all with plain flat concrete walls (albeit not necessarily beige, quite a few were plain red, or plain blue, or plain orange), quite dusty, often laden with graffiti tags. Uniform rectangular windows that looked like squinting eyes. Almost all of it looked residential; the occasional shop felt quite out of place and it was rare to see more than two or three in a row. Some of the buildings at the crossroads seemed a bit more fancy, or at least more than just plain, with rounded windows, balconies, and the rare piece of architectural flourish. The pavements ... existed, more or less, if you could weave yourself in between the trees and the telegraph poles, stretching whole masses of cabling above head height along the road.

I'm sure there's a lot of important sites in the city. I'm sure there's a handful of decent museums. I'm sure there's nice spots to sit and look out at the landscape. Well, I'm less sure about that given in one direction is cityscape and the other direction is the river and then the chaco. And there is, by the riverside, the obligatory 'I heart Asunción' sign, and in a better setting than many, being on a green square by a dual carriageway between the river and the Presidential buildings. But that it's one of the nicest spots in the city is telling. I didn't find it the most aesthetic city I've been to. It's probably not in the top thousand. I only find it prettier than Salford because it's new to me and Salford is full of the same things I've seen elsewhere in the UK on a regular basis, but ... yeh. I mean to the north of the city is a large ecological reserve, the Reserva Ecológica Banco San Miguel, but online reviews are mixed as to how ecological and sound it really is, while the only green spaces larger than a plaza are the Nu Guazu Park and the Botanical Gardens, both some 5-6 miles from the defined centre of the city. I wendled a few moments looking at weird sculptures in Plaza de Armas, near the Parliament Building, but that was about it.

In addition, the area known as Villa Morra, where there are more shops and cafes than the city centre and would be worth staying in if that's all you wanted to do, is itself 4 miles from the city centre and the rest of the touristy sites, small museums, and the few pretty buildings, so not really convenient.

About the only thing I did in the city of a touristy nature was a visit to the Cathedral. This at least looks like a cathedral, unlike the one in Buenos Aires, being a brilliant white building fronted with arches and a couple of towers, each topped with crosses. It's next to the Catholic University too, which is a bit of a giveaway. It's not terribly notable inside, being relatively plain for a Catholic Cathedral - I mean it's still ornate but it's definitely no Westminster Cathedral. It's also quite small inside, smaller than you might expect, and doesn't take more than a few minutes to take in the archways, the three-tiered altarpiece with biblical figures, and the few wall decorations. It is however quite a cool place, in comparison with the overbearing heat outside. Central continental heat, no shade, it's exactly why siestas exist. And why the city feels so quiet. Well, one of the reasons.

My hotel was on the edge of the city centre, but you'd've never known it by its look or its location. The Hotel Amalfi is a three-storey white concrete building with black frontage and flourishes, which I guess at least makes it stand out. It was comfortable, with a decent sized room and bathroom, an affordable minibar with drinks and snacks, and a view from the window to rival most Premier Inns I've stayed in. This latter observation is not a selling point; it was a plain white wall. I had breakfast both mornings I was there, which was in the small dining area just off the main through-corridor. It wasn't a terribly memorable breakfast, consisting mainly of fruit and bread/jam. The one impression I had of the hotel was that it was incredibly quiet - almost as if I was the only person staying in it. I think at one point I heard someone go into the room opposite mine on the corridor, but I honestly couldn't tell.

This sense of uneasy quiet followed me around, in fact. It was one of those cities that was probably really safe, it just felt slightly ... creepy? Like, I couldn't help but feel that it was quiet and slightly empty for a reason; quite unlike Montevideo weirdly, where there were fewer people but there I didn't quite have the same senses. I wasn't occasionally looking over my shoulder to see if anyone was following me or anything, because I pretty much knew they weren't. But here, here I was quite a bit more aware of my surroundings and definitely had heightened senses. Not in a 'this is a very obviously dangerous place' way, but more in an 'exploring an abandoned themepark not knowing if there's an evil property developer around the corner' way. Scooby Doo, rather than The Warriors.

It didn't stop me going to the pub in the evenings, but it did make me more present when I was walking back home in the dark; concentrating better, planning my route so I knew exactly when to turn, that sort of thing. It's

not a terribly well-lit place, and it's even emptier in the night than the day. But you may be pleased to know I survived without issue. And to be fair, Asunción isn't generally rated high on lists of 'unsafe cities in South America', which tend to be dominated by Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. It's just it gives off 'vibes', that the similar-looking Montevideo did not. And I don't quite understand why.

I mentioned beer. Of course I found a couple of craft bars in the city; it would be remiss of me not to. One of them was "Die Mannschaft Bar", a large, grand, open-plan building that, as you can expect from the name, was a dedicated German beer house. Because of course Asunción would also have a German beer house; we already know the links between the two countries. It had an array of bottles and taps, although fewer of both in practice than the menu suggested. The walls were lined with beer coasters, posters, and images of German culture and society. They even had live football on the TV screens, although from the Paraguayan league not the Fatherland. I think I'd arrived not long after opening time of the day so it was quite empty.

Another, on a parallel street, was called "Simon Dice". This was more of a, I don't know, dive bar type place, with neon signs and street art on the walls. It was a lot busier and livelier, but presumably because I'd arrived later in the evening, and had to squeeze into a seat by the long bar. It's actually a brewpub, and many of the beers they serve are their own. I seem to have bought a Kolsch and a red ale, to which I gave average scores; Paraguayan beer in genera; I seem to have rated as 'average, drinkable, nothing special'. I also ate here; one of the blogs I'd read suggested this was a good spot for chicken wings and they were right.

Obviously I'm going to sample local beers, but one of the other reasons for doing so was this was my last night and despite my best efforts I still had a not-insignificant amount of Paraguayan Guarani left in cash. I knew it would be difficult to change it back in the UK so I wanted to spend as much of it as I could, while still making sure I had enough to catch the taxi to the airport the next day. I'd budgeted the taxi to be about 220 Guarani which would have left me with about a tenner to spend at the airport etc if I needed it, and if I didn't it wouldn't be worth changing anyway. Sadly, the taxi was about half that, so if anyone needs about £20 of Guarani, hit me up. I'm unlikely to make a journey all the way back to Paraguay to make use of it, and while I'll obviously go to neighbouring Bolivia one day, there's virtually nothing on the Paraguayan side of the border for several hours. Except chaco. And there's nothing to buy in the chaco.

My conclusion here is there's a reason why Paraguay rarely has whole guidebooks devoted to it. Everywhere Is Indeed Interesting, but not necessarily for very long.

{end pod jingle}

Well, that's about all for this episode. Join me next time for an episode on Festivals. I know it's going to be on festivals because I'll've also recorded and scheduled it before I left. Until then, keep a tight grip on your phone, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.

Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}