

# URUGUAY PLANS TO DIVERSIFY ITS TOURISM SECTOR



Uruguay is investing in the diversification of the tourism sector, hoping to reach four million visitors during this year and register again 2017's figure, explained Carlos Fagetti, director of National Tourism.

"2017 was a historic year, a peak year, when more than four million visitors arrived. In Uruguay, we have three million inhabitants and this implies an important result," said the official at the Colombian Association of Travel Agencies and Tourism (ANATO) in Bogotá.

**Fagetti said this number shows a great advance for the tourism sector of the country, which fifteen years ago only received 1.9 million visitors.**

Argentina is the country that contributed the most with 2.5 million tourists, followed by Brazil (500,000), Europe (130,000) and Colombia (27,000).

To meet their goals, the Ministry of Tourism allocates an annual budget of 20 million dollars to the sector, an amount of which more than 50% goes to the promotion abroad.

Fagetti pointed out that after arriving at the Carrasco airport in Montevideo, visitors walk along a coastal corridor with "high quality beaches" that flow into the historical center, where cultural and gastronomic tourism can be enjoyed.

"In the historical center of Montevideo you can find gastronomy, the Carnival Museum, squares; there is a ballet season at night, opera, theater, and Phil Collins will be there in the next days, with Roger Waters performing in the last months of the year," added the official.

The director said that the Carnival of Uruguay is also held in there, in which visitors can go to listen to candombe and murga recitals, with nightclubs opened for the younger audience.

In Punta del Este, the Government seeks to use luxury hotels and a "garden city" view to attract tourists with bigger "purchasing power", who are also introduced to water activities.

"We are also offering a very strong nautical activity with wild and gentle beaches for surfing, kitesurfing, or boarding sailboats and enjoying nautical activities in general," he added.

In addition to these activities, the Uruguay tourism sector offers nature tours in regions such as Rocha, where the protected area of Cabo Polonio is located and visitors can observe sea lions, or tour an area

of more than 200,000 hectares covered by diverse flora.

“In Colonia, which is a city founded by Portuguese people, located in front of Buenos Aires, there is a historical center that is also a World Heritage Site and is up the Uruguay River, crossing the Corridor of Painted Birds,” the official stated.

For the public that wishes a moment of relaxation, the region of Paysandú offers thermal baths; while in Canelones, tourists can follow a wine tourism route to live the “experience of the whole process of winemaking and the entire processing phase” of the alcoholic drink.

LGBT tourism has its place in the country, being one of the pioneers in that sector, with laws that allow same-sex marriage, which has led the country to be described as a “gay-friendly” destination (welcoming to gay people), according to the “Spartacus” magazine.

**In the same way, convention tourism sector is making its way in Uruguay with last year’s inauguration of a “complex for exhibitions and conferences in Punta del Este”,** which is added to the Antel Arena complex in Montevideo “that will allow the hosting of cultural, sports and congress activities with the best quality and technology.”

In addition to these measures, the Government encourages the foreign investment of businessmen by ruling a VAT exemption for construction materials and hotel equipment, while tourists who pay using a credit card are entitled to a tax refund.

“In the last ten years, the available rooms have been increased because of a very good investment promotion law, which now totals around 16,000 beds in 4 and 5 star hotels,” said Fagetti.

With these programs, the authorities of the southern country hope to improve the commerce balance, which in 2017 was 1,300 million dollars, as well as increase the 11,000 direct jobs generated by tourism.

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