



Lunch is served at La Susana. Photos courtesy of La Susana.

WHERE TO EAT

The question is where *not* to eat, as the food – all kinds of cuisines and at all price points – is just so good.

La Caracola

Address emailed after booking; +598-94-223-015

A beach club on a small island from the folks behind local favorite La Huella. You have to take a private boat to get here, and your just rewards are wonderful snacks, light seafood meals, and cleric, a white wine sangria. The fee is \$180 per day, and you need to book well in advance.

Marismo

Ruta 10, km 185; +598-42-486-2273

A special, candle-lit spot that can be difficult to find in the dark but is worth the journey for braised lamb and the grilled catch of the day. The atmosphere is magical. Book well in advance.

La Susana

Ruta 10, km 182.5; +598-44-862-823 / +598-95-192-555

A casual beach club and restaurant that serves everything from grilled snapper and pizzas to Norwegian vodka produced by the Vik family. A festive bamboo bar in the sand draws all kinds. Children frolic freely, larger groups spread out, and the party lasts well into the night.

La Olada

Ruta 10, km 181.5; +598-44-862-745 / +598-99-337-908

Soft candlelight sets the stage for a delicious meal of fresh salads, pastas, and grilled meats at this quiet spot inland. Ubiquitous wood-fired pizzas make for delicious appetizers, and the whole place feel very homey in the best possible way. (Those are the owner's dog and cat meandering about.)



La Huella

Calle de Los Cisnes; +598-44-862-279

Widely regarded as a gastronomic mecca, the beachside spot deserves its reputation and should be everyone's first stop. The setting is magical — soft music, neutral colored wood decks, and candlelight set the scene by night — as are the crispy octopus and line-caught sea bass. Creative sushi dishes, wood-fired pizzas, and housemade dulce de leche ice cream were other consistent winners. And I should know, because I literally ate seven meals in a row here.

Almacen el Palmar

Plaza de Jose Ignacio; +598-44-862-102

One of my favorite meals in Uruguay. From delicious poppy seed rolls with tapenade to perfectly grilled fish and Provençal pastas by gregarious chef Jean Paul Bondoux, who wanders freely around the patio and dining room. Almacen is an all-day affair, with freshly baked croissants and breads available in the morning and wonderful cheeses in the adjacent deli throughout the day. Dinner, served indoors on the lovely, canopied outdoor patio, is a must.

Namm

Ruta 10, km 185; +598-486-2526

I am ever the fan of Japanese food, and this place serves the freshest sushi (and grilled meats) I've had anywhere. The wooden bungalow setting adds to the overall experience.



Beach chic. Photo courtesy of El Canuto.

WHERE TO SHOP

Santas Negras

Camino Eugenio Saiz Martinez and Los Lobos; +598-44-862-262

The mid-century modern, two-story boutique just outside town has been lovingly curated by Paula Martini (wife of La Huella owner Martin Pittaluga) and Patricia Torres, who filled it with vintage furniture, decorative objects, featherweight cashmere sweaters, and playful jewelry that works well at the casual, evening barbecue parties they host out back. Don't miss the atmospheric café patio for delicious cappuccinos, capirinhinas, and panini.

Mutate

Café de la Place (in front of Plaza Jose Ignacio); +598-44-862-703

Stocks great vintage and designer clothing for men and women.

El Canuto

Calle de Los Cisnes; +598-44-862-028

The place for caftans, lingerie, and other beach basics.

Alium

Costa Jose Ignacio, Garzón; +598-99-128-672

A great design-led shop further inland in Garzón.

Talabarberia Benitez

Calle Maldonado and Calle 25 de Agosto, San Carlos; no phone.

The old-school gaucho supply shop in the village of San Carlos is *the* place to source a wide assortment of leather chaps and silver adornments.

The Jose Ignacio Supermarket

I love to go to the grocery store to take in the local color, and this one sells everything: beach basics (chips and salty snacks), refined deli fare, meats, cheeses, fruits, and vegetables.

WHAT YOU'LL KNOW ON THE LAST DAY THAT YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN ON THE FIRST

Bring Cash — and Lots of It

This is not neighboring Argentina where everything is cheap. It's a relatively pricey area with very few cash machines. US dollars are generally welcome.

Pack Light — Really Light

Think haute-hippie hideaway, where high season temperatures can soar past 100 degrees and there is no need for anything fancy. I overpacked by a wide margin and could have made do with a bathing suit, sarong, T-shirt, shorts, and sneakers (mandatory for horseback riding).

Take Great Care When Booking Restaurants

You don't want to miss a meal in Uruguay. The restaurants and cafes are fantastic — at all price points. Area specialties include delicious grilled fish, sushi and ceviches, steak (of course), and housemade *helado* (ice cream). Places book well in advance — especially hotspots like La Huella, Garzon, and Marismo. Not that you're at risk of going hungry, considering how many under-the-radar gems you'll find everywhere. Among my favorites were La Olada, Parador al Almacen, Namm, and La Susana — all casual and festive, serving traditional, often wood-fired fare. This is the kind of food and drink that makes everyone happy, so book in advance if you can.

HOW TO GET THERE

It's very easy from the United States, with direct flights to **Buenos Aires International Airport (EZE)** on both American Airlines and Aerolineas Argentinas. You'll have to transfer to BA's smaller airport, **Jorge Newbery (AEP)**, which can be a pain, especially if there's traffic, to catch a flight to **Punta Del Este (PDE)** on Aerolineas Argentinas, Pluna, or Buquebus. The drive to Jose Ignacio from Punta Del Este is approximately 45 minutes.

Another option is flying into **Carrasco International Airport (MVD)** in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, via Miami on American Airlines. The drive to Jose Ignacio is approximately 90 minutes, and rental cars must be booked well in advance.

VISAS

While there are no visa requirements for either Argentina or Uruguay, you will need to pre-pay a [reciprocity fee](#) if you travel through Argentina.

WHEN TO GO

I can't imagine there is a wrong time to go to Uruguay, but spring and fall — shoulder seasons leading into winter and summer — are completely delightful. With bright blue skies, temperatures averaging in the mid-70s, and an absence of crowds, March and April are the perfect times to explore — and to secure bookings at all of the area's stellar restaurants. The winter holidays bring throngs from Argentina and Brazil, but nothing feels over-run, as there are no glitzy mega hotels catering to the St. Tropez club set. That said, these people like to party — very late into the night — so it's all about invitations to house parties and elaborate asados feasts of local beef (the best I've ever tasted — period), assorted vegetables, and locally caught *corvina negra* (white drum fish).