

Paraná



Since seceding from São Paulo state in 1853, Paraná has been endlessly compared to its larger neighbor to the north. Indeed, Paraná shares with São Paulo a slew of superlatives, rating among Brazil's highest standards of living, most productive economies and best educated populations.

Paraná's enviable position near the top of these lists is due to many factors. But one is undoubtedly its ancestry, which is mostly German, Italian, Polish and Ukrainian. These hardworking European immigrants established an economy based on small family farms, as opposed to plantations, resulting in a relatively equitable, democratic social order. Add to that a thoughtful approach to economic development and a progressive stance on social issues, and you have the pleasant, prosperous place to live that Paraná is today.

The capital, Curitiba, exemplifies the state's successes. Travelers can take advantage of efficient public transportation as they admire the city's innovative architecture and outstanding urban parks.

Outside of Curitiba, the state of Paraná boasts geological and ecological wonders that will delight any heart. Ilha do Mel and Parque Nacional Superagüi include large swathes of unspoiled rain forest and pristine coastline. Sunbathers and surfers sigh for these beaches, which are the least developed and most idyllic in all of southern Brazil. From the coast, the stunning Serra do Mar stretches up to the Planalto, the high plain that is further inland.

And all the way across the state, straddling Brazil's border with Argentina, is perhaps Paraná's most amazing asset. The power and the splendor of Iguazu Falls has always earned the awe and admiration of travelers, from indigenous tribes to Jesuit missionaries to modern-day tourists.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hear the roar and feel the spray from the **Garganta do Diabolo** (p326), the mother of all waterfalls at Iguazu Falls
- Dance the *fandango* (folk dance) in the remote village of **Barra do Superagüi** (p324), in the Parque Nacional do Superagüi
- Watch the sunset from **Farol das Conchas** (p321), the lighthouse on Ilha do Mel
- Marvel at the ancient 'stone city' of **Vila Velha** (p317)
- Attend a concert at Curitiba's unusual **Opera de Arame** (p317), constructed completely of steel tubes and glass



■ POPULATION: 15 MILLION

■ AREA: 43,910 SQ KM

History

Like the rest of southern Brazil, Paraná was neglected by the Portuguese colonists; even a brief gold rush in the 17th century withered when bigger finds were discovered in Minas Gerais. When the state seceded from São Paulo in 1853, the economy was based on cattle and *erva maté* tea. The government encouraged immigration from Italy to develop the economy. Italians were followed by waves of Germans, Ukrainians and Poles.

Curitiba had been little more than a stage stop in the cattle trade. But with immigration and railroad construction, the city grew at a remarkable rate, developing into one of the country's richest cities.

Climate

Both the coast and the area around Iguazu Falls are semitropical regions dominated by the Mata Atlântica (Atlantic rain forest). Summers are hot and humid; winters are mild. Curitiba, which lies on an upland plain, is significantly cooler than the coast.

National Parks

Parque Nacional do Superagüi (p324) is part of a huge, 4700-sq-km reserve of the Mata Atlântica, including a few largely uninhabited islands and miles of mangrove swamps. The famous falls are surrounded by the 1550-sq-km Parque Nacional do Iguazu (p327), which also protects the ecosystem of the Mata Atlântica.

Getting There & Around

Curitiba is the state's transportation hub, with bus and air services to every major city in Brazil. A passenger train links Curitiba with the coastal town of Paranaguá. Foz do Iguazu also has a small international airport, as well as direct bus service to São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and every big city in the South.

CURITIBA

☎ 0xx41 / pop 1.76 million

Curitiba is not particularly sophisticated nor sexy, but its residents enjoy a quality life unparalleled in other parts of the country. With the help of a vibrant local economy,

