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14 July 2025

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La Plata: A Planned, Cultural, and Lively City

Just over 50 kilometers from Buenos Aires lies La Plata, the capital of the province of the same name and one of Argentina's most unique cities. Founded on November 19, 1882, by then-governor Dardo Rocha, La Plata was designed from the ground up as a planned city, with a geometric layout that still stands out today: a grid of streets, diagonals crossing from end to end, and plazas distributed every six blocks.

Engineer Pedro Benoit, the mastermind behind the original design, envisioned a modern city for its time, with green spaces, wide avenues, and organized public buildings. This layout not only improved transit and ventilation but also gave La Plata its nickname: the "City of Diagonals."



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Among its main landmarks is the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, one of the tallest in the Americas, begun in 1884 and completed in 1999. Across from it stands the City Hall, a European-style building that houses the city's administrative offices. Another notable site is the Curutchet House, the only work in Latin America by Swiss architect Le Corbusier, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

La Plata is also a hub for education and science. The National University of La Plata, founded in 1905, attracts thousands of students from across the country and abroad. Around it thrives a vibrant cultural scene with museums, theaters, and independent art spaces. The La Plata Museum, for example, is one of the most important natural science museums in South America, while the Dardo Rocha Passage, a former railway building, hosts exhibitions, concerts, and independent film screenings.

Green spaces are part of La Plata's identity. The Paseo del Bosque is one of the city's main parks, featuring lakes, walking paths, and the Planetarium. Another highlight is the República de los Niños, an educational park that recreates a miniature city for children and is said to have inspired Walt Disney.

The city is easily accessible from Buenos Aires by highway, train, or bus, offering a calm, organized, and historically rich experience. With a blend of planned architecture, academic life, and a steady cultural offering, La Plata remains an attractive destination for visitors and for those who choose it as a place to live or study.

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Dance as Identity: A Journey Through Uruguay's Traditional Dances

Montevideo — In Uruguay, dance is more than just a form of entertainment: it is a living expression of history, cultural diversity, and collective spirit. From the neighborhoods of Montevideo to the vast rural plains, the country's traditional dances have withstood the test of time, constantly evolving while preserving their essence.

Among the most iconic is the candombe, an Afro-Uruguayan tradition born in the 19th century and recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. With its powerful drumming — chico, repique, and piano — and emblematic figures like the Gramillero, the Mama Vieja, and the Escobero, this dance takes center stage each year during Montevideo's "Llamadas" parade in Carnival.



Another cornerstone of Uruguay's musical identity is the tango, which, although it shares its origin with Argentina, holds deep roots in Montevideo's portside neighborhoods. With its melancholic music and elegant steps, tango lives on in milongas, theaters, and dance schools, keeping alive the spirit of a city where it was born.

Closely related is the milonga, a rustic cousin of tango with a quicker tempo and rural origins. Also connected to the gaucho culture, milonga is danced in social clubs and public parks like Parque Rodó, where generations come together to move to the rhythm of guitars and improvised verses.

In rural areas and on national holidays, the Pericón Nacional stands out as a symbol of unity and tradition. Created in 1887 by Gerardo Grasso, this choreographed dance — performed with handkerchiefs and led by a "bastonero" (dance caller) — is still taught in schools and performed during official celebrations. Other folk dances such as the chimarrita, chacarera, malambo, and zamba enrich the cultural landscape, each shaped by Creole, African, and European influences.

The list extends with the Uruguayan polka, a local adaptation of the European polka with rural flair, and the cielito, a popular 19th-century group dance accompanied by song. Even the plena, originally from the Caribbean, has found a space in Uruguay with a local version adapted to national tastes.

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Today, these dances remain vibrant in carnivals, regional festivals such as the Fiesta de la Patria Gaucha in Tacuarembó, and community gatherings where dance continues to serve as a powerful expression of cultural identity. In Uruguay, to dance is to remember, to resist, and to celebrate.

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Harbour Island's Pink Sand Beach: A Blush-Tinted Paradise Born from the Sea

On the eastern edge of Harbour Island, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the shore in a gentle embrace, lies one of the Caribbean's most surreal natural wonders: a three-mile stretch of soft, pink-tinted sand that has captivated travelers, scientists, and dreamers alike.

Known simply as Pink Sand Beach, this Bahamian treasure has earned global acclaim, including a spot on The Travel Channel's "World's Best Beaches" list in 2005, where it was crowned "Best Sand Beach" for its unique hue and pristine beauty.



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But the beach's signature blush isn't a trick of the light—it's the work of foraminifera, microscopic coral-like organisms with vibrant pink or red shells. When these creatures die, their shells are crushed by waves and mixed with white sand and coral fragments, creating a rosy shoreline that glows brightest where the tide kisses the land.

The nearby Devil's Backbone reef, a haven for marine life and divers, plays a key role in sustaining the foraminifera population. These tiny architects of color live beneath rocks, in sea caves, and along the reef's underside, quietly shaping one of the world's most photogenic coastlines. Unlike many tropical beaches, the sand here remains cool underfoot, making barefoot strolls a delight even under the midday sun. The beach's width—ranging from 15 to 30 meters—offers ample space for solitude or seaside adventure.

Harbour Island itself, affectionately called "Briland" by locals, is a blend of colonial charm and barefoot luxury. With fewer than 2,000 residents, the island offers a laid-back atmosphere where golf carts outnumber cars and pastel-colored cottages line the streets of Dunmore Town, the island's historic heart.

Visitors can enjoy horseback rides along the beach, dine on fresh conch salad at beachfront cafés, or explore the island's boutique shops and art galleries. Accommodations range from luxury resorts like Pink Sands and Coral Sands to cozy guesthouses tucked among hibiscus and palm trees.

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Environmentalists highlight the beach as a model of eco-sensitive tourism, where natural beauty is preserved through community stewardship and sustainable practices. The island's residents and businesses have long championed efforts to protect the reef and shoreline from overdevelopment.

Whether you're chasing the perfect sunrise photo, snorkeling among coral gardens, or simply sinking your toes into the cool pink sand, Harbour Island offers a sensory escape that feels both timeless and otherworldly.

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El Dorado: The Golden Dream That Drove Conquerors and Still Captivates the World

For centuries, explorers scoured the rivers, jungles, and mountains of South America chasing a glittering illusion: El Dorado, the fabled city of gold. But the truth behind the legend is far more layered—and infinitely more human.

It all began with a ritual, not a city. Among the Muisca people of the Andean highlands (in what is now central Colombia), a newly crowned chief was said to coat himself in gold dust and plunge into the sacred waters of Lake Guatavita. Spanish invaders, dazzled by the symbolism and blinded by ambition, transformed this into the myth of a hidden metropolis brimming with untold riches.



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The legend mutated quickly. From a man to a city, from a city to a kingdom—El Dorado became everything the conquistadors wanted it to be. Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, Sir Walter Raleigh, and countless others launched expeditions across treacherous terrain. What they found instead? Suffering, resistance, and cultures they scarcely tried to understand.

Today, El Dorado is no longer marked on maps but etched into memory, literature, and pop culture—from Voltaire's Candide to animated films and video games. For some, it's the ultimate metaphor for unattainable desire. For others, it's a cautionary tale of colonial greed disguised as discovery.

"Calling it a city of gold was never about gold," says Colombian historian Luisa Méndez. "It was always about power. The riches were imagined. The violence? Very real."

In a world still reckoning with colonial legacy, El Dorado remains a mirror—reflecting both the allure of myth and the truths we often ignore.

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Venezuelan Chicha: A Sweet Legacy from the Shores of Paria to the Streets of Today

Long before it became a creamy street favorite served with cinnamon and condensed milk, chicha venezolana was already a cultural cornerstone—its earliest mention dating back to Christopher Columbus's third voyage, when he arrived at the coast of Paria and was offered "wines of different colors" by the Indigenous peoples. Those "wines," as later clarified by anthropologist Ocarina Castillo, were in fact chichas, fermented or not, made from maize and roots.

In pre-Columbian Venezuela, chicha was crafted from maíz, yuca, ocumo, and other starchy roots, often blended with fruits and vegetables. Each Indigenous community had its own name for the drink, which ranged from light and refreshing to highly fermented ceremonial brews used in rituals to appoint caciques, according to 16th-century chroniclers.



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Thicker versions of chicha were known as atol, and when bordering on a meal, they were called mazamorra—a term still used today in parts of Latin America. Another variant, mazato, was sweetened with honey and later panela, especially in the Andean region, where rice eventually replaced maize.

The introduction of rice into Venezuelan cuisine came during the 17th century, though Jesuit missionaries had already noted local rice cultivation in Guayana. The transition from maize to rice marked a culinary shift, giving rise to the modern chicha de arroz, now a staple in homes, schools, and street carts across the country.

Today's chicha is often made with precooked rice flour and milk, served chilled and topped with cinnamon or condensed milk. It's not just a nostalgic treat—it's a nutritious beverage enjoyed by children, elders, and everyone in between. According to Frank Portillo, production manager at Lácteos San Simón, their ready-to-drink chicha aims to be both affordable and nourishing, packaged in long-life Tetra Brik containers.

From its ritualistic roots to its commercial reinvention, chicha remains a symbol of Venezuelan identity, blending Indigenous tradition, colonial adaptation, and modern convenience.

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