



OVERSEAS

Haven Report

**Costa De Oro, Uruguay:
Uruguay's Best Coastal Value...**



Costa de Oro, Uruguay: A haven with affordable, first-world beachfront living

By Christian MacDonald

Uruguay is a country that's known the world over for the beautiful beaches that run the entire length of its coast. And without a doubt, the country's best value in beach property is the Costa de Oro... a 30-mile stretch of shoreline with uninterrupted golden sands, whose name translates to the "golden coast."

What's more, the Costa de Oro also contains some of Uruguay's best coastal towns for full-time retirement living.

Aside from beautiful beaches and livable, shady towns, the Costa de Oro offers something that most of the Atlantic coastline does not: incredible sunsets, thanks to the general east-west orientation of its shoreline.

But best of all, you're in Uruguay; a haven that offers a peaceful, genuinely laid-back culture, along with a notable absence from the world's conflicts...a place where expats can obtain residency easily and even a second passport.

Uruguay has a solid (and still-confidential) financial center, with an economy that actually grew during the recent worldwide recession. It's a country that continues to draw investors from the world over, seeking a financial, and political, safe haven.

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Live and Invest
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And it's also a country with abundant ground water, mild weather, and a surplus of renewable electricity from hydro power.

So when you put it all together, you get quite a package: A beautiful coastline with first-world infrastructure, a solid democracy with a healthy financial system, and shady seaside towns where the beachfront homes start at just US\$75,000.

Truly a package that's hard to beat.

Getting the lay of the land

Uruguay is located on lower South America's eastern seaboard, wedged in between Argentina and Brazil. The country shares a land border with Brazil, and is separated from Argentina by a wide river, Río de la Plata.

The capital city of Montevideo—the southern-most capital in the western hemisphere—is home to almost half of Uruguay's 3.3 million residents.

Roughly the size of the American state of Missouri, Uruguay is the second-smallest country in South America after Suriname. (Third smallest if you count French Guiana – an overseas region of France rather than a country.)

The Costa de Oro begins about 22 miles (36 km) from the capital of Montevideo, and spans the distance between the rivers Arroyo Pando and Arroyo Solís Grande. In total, it occupies about 30 miles (48 km) of coastline.

Located within the Uruguayan department of Canelones, this stretch of coast hosts some 26 seashore destinations or *balnearios* as they're called in Uruguay. They vary in character from small, undeveloped beaches to pleasant towns suitable for year-round living.



Sitting quietly between two mighty neighbors

Technically speaking, the Costa de Oro is not on the sea, but rather on the Río de la Plata where it joins the ocean. But since the river is over 90 miles (145 km) wide at this point, it certainly *looks* like the ocean. The only difference you'll see is that the water can become less than "ocean-blue" when rains bring runoff down the river.

The principal cities in the area are Atlántida and La Floresta. Both have good public transportation to



Pretty, river side homes along the sweeping shoreline

Montevideo and the international airport, as well as to points eastward along the coast.

A gentle climate with four seasons

Uruguay enjoys four distinct seasons. Average high summertime temperatures run to about 82°F (28°C), with lows in the mid-60s (F). In the winter, highs will usually approach 60°F (16°C), while lows can occasionally go down into the 30s (F). Frost is rare, and it never snows.

The average 41-inch (1041 mm) annual rainfall occurs fairly uniformly throughout the year, with no wet or dry season, although rain in the midsummer months of January and February is fairly unusual.

Thanks to pleasant sea breezes, most people don't need air conditioning in the summer but most everyone will need heat in the winter.

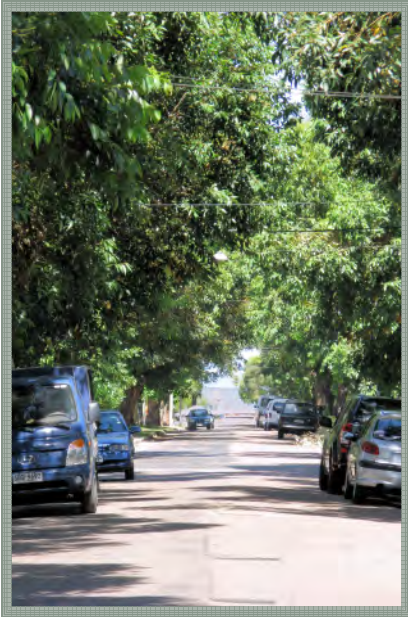
The Costa de Oro comes to life

At different times in its history, Uruguay has been part of Spain, Portugal, and Brazil...with its final war of independence fought against Brazil, with the help of Argentina.

Today's Uruguay is a stable democracy, with a directly elected president, two legislative chambers, and an independent judicial system. The rule-of-law prevails here, and the country enjoys the lowest level of corruption in Latin America.

The Uruguayan people are mostly of Spanish and Italian ancestry, with Italians having by far the most cultural influence. There is almost no Native American presence in Uruguay, and few people of African descent.

In the 1800s, the Costa de Oro was considered a worthless stretch of land. It consisted mostly of moving dunes, which in some places extended for miles inland from the sea. Two of the area's first



The right kind of shady

development initiatives were dune-forestation projects at Atlántida and La Floresta, resulting in today's abundance of shady pines, eucalyptus, and sycamore trees.

By 1910, the area was starting to get the attention of Montevideo's wealthy families who were looking for a country getaway or seaside retreat. By the late 1930s, development began to increase dramatically as the first land subdivisions were planned. Even at that time the area was drawing the attention of

European investors, looking for a sound place to invest outside of Europe as WWII began.

A forgotten treasure left back in time

This stretch of coastline was at its heyday, with Montevideo's elite, up until the 1950s. Then the prestige and glamor of Punta del Este began to draw wealthy vacationers further along the coast. It remained popular, however, with the middle-class community who could afford a vacation home on the Costa del Oro but not at Punta del Este.



Sunsets are best east-west

But its popularity is on the upswing again, as expats and North American second-home owners come to take advantage of the attractive lifestyle and excellent property values along this golden coastline.

Yet Costa de Oro still retains the feeling of a place that's been left back in time...with the charm and character of a 1950s seaside resort.

It sounds like Spanish...

The official language of Uruguay is Spanish; the language of all official business and government interaction. The particular dialect of Spanish is known as *Rioplatense* which refers to the cultures around Rio de la Plata...principally from Uruguay and Argentina.

Here are a few basic terms used in Uruguay, and throughout this article:

- *Arroyo* is a term used in Uruguay for a stream, creek, or small river.
- *Rambla* is the name given to the beachfront road. It's similar to the term malecón in other Spanish-speaking countries, or Beira Mar in Brazil. In most of Uruguay, private property starts on the inland side of the rambla...in order to keep the beaches open to the public.
- *Balneario* is a term that refers to a seaside village or town, used mostly when it's a resort destination. Balnearios can vary in size from a sandy beach access with a hot dog stand, to a sizeable town suitable for year-round living.
- *Parrilla* is a large, permanently installed, wood-fired barbecue grill. Almost every house in Uruguay has one (as do many restaurants) as do a surprising number of apartments.

The dialect will sound strange to the untrained ear. There are a number of different phonetic sounds, and even some verb conjugations that aren't used elsewhere... not to mention a fair number of Portuguese words, and an Italian cadence.

If you're planning on attending a language school in conjunction with your move to Uruguay, then my advice is to attend a school here in Uruguay not in one of the more famous Spanish-study countries like Guatemala or Ecuador. That way you'll be learning the version that you'll need. Even if you already speak Spanish, a brief course will do wonders for your local comprehension.

Your first need for Spanish may be while looking at real estate ads on the internet or visiting properties with a Spanish-speaking realtor. To help with this, I've put together a dictionary of real estate terms for Uruguay. You can have a look at it [here](#).

Getting to know the Costa de Oro

The Costa de Oro is anchored by two main towns: Atlántida and La Floresta. Of the two, La Floresta was the first one to see actual development, but Atlántida ended up larger and with more full-time residents.

Along this section of Uruguay's coast, the shoreline runs approximately east-west, rather than north-south...it reminds me of living in Connecticut. So if you wanted to drive to Brazil, you'd start off driving to the east with Montevideo, to the west. This orientation provides for some spectacular sunsets along the Costa de Oro, along with the sunrises that you'd expect on the Atlantic seaboard.

This is not an area of highrises. In fact, I can only think of a few apartment buildings (over four stories) on the entire Costa de Oro; so most of the available properties are houses, rather than condos.

To get a better picture of the shoreline, follow this [link](#) to see a brief video of the beaches in Salinas, Atlántida, and La Floresta.

The real estate on the Costa de Oro is inexpensive by any standard, with a nice selection available for under US\$100,000.

The average cost of all of the properties I saw—many of them beachfront—was only US\$822 per square-meter. That's less than you'd pay in some poor, run-down neighborhoods of Montevideo or Panama City. But while still inexpensive, the properties in this area are appreciating nicely.

A coastline, town, and property tour

We'll begin our tour at the end of Costa de Oro that's closest to Montevideo, and travel east towards Punta del Este and Brazil. The property examples I've used were available as of Aug. 1, 2011. You can also follow this link to see a list of all my [Costa de Oro property prices](#).



An east-west orientation

The Costa de Oro starts at **Arroyo Pando**. It's a small stream that widens to look like a glassy river at the point where it crosses the final dunes heading to the sea.

The first settlement you come to is **Neptunia**. Unlike most of the Costa de Oro, Neptunia is not a vacation-home destination, but rather a working fishing village. On any day of the week, you can see the fishermen coming and going from the open water, or on the sandy shore repairing nets, or just taking a break. It's mostly a somewhat-poor area of smaller homes.



En route to the sea at Arroyo Pando

But next you'll come to **Pinamar**, a *balneario* that offers nice beaches and a pleasant residential setting. It is named for the tall pines that run all the way to the waterline. Pinamar has about 2,600 full-time residents, but few commercial enterprises. The nearest collection of shops and services is next door in Salinas.

Salinas has a handful of amenities for the longer-term resident...such as a gym, day care center, and hardware store. And near the highway (maybe a half-mile back from the beach) you'll find even more shops, eateries, and services. The generally calm waters off the coast in this area make it popular for families with small children. Salinas also has a bus terminal on the beach, where you can catch the bus to or from Montevideo.

- ▶ Right on the beachfront *rambla* in Salinas, [Voilà Inmobiliaria](#) has an inviting property at an amazing price: It's a 125-square-meter house with four bedrooms and two baths. There's a fireplace in the living room and another in the kitchen to serve as an indoor *parrilla*. This property is ready to "lock and leave", with window protection and an alarm system. The asking price is only US\$75,000. Contact [Voilà](#) directly for more information.
- ▶ Also on the *rambla*, I found a neat, 12-year-old bungalow for sale. This 100-square-meter house has two bedrooms sharing a single bath, with granite countertops in the kitchen and a fireplace in the living room. The property includes spacious, landscaped grounds, with a double carport and a covered BBQ area out back, for the asking price of US\$78,000. For further information, contact [Fuentes Inmobiliaria](#).
- ▶ This next property is the best beachfront value I saw on the entire trip... with a newly reduced price of only US\$382 per square-meter, or US\$36 per square-foot! It's a real eye-catcher on the waterfront in Salinas. Built on a grand scale, this 510-square-meter manor has graceful arches across the front surrounded by broad, nicely landscaped grounds. The house has six bedrooms, three bathrooms, an office, and a family room and is offered fully furnished for the asking price of US\$195,000. For further information, contact [Julieta Inmobiliaria](#).



Magnificent Salinas home for sale for only US\$195,000

Marindia is a quiet town on the coastal road, with long stretches of beach and few homes. It's hilly, so properties have unobstructed views over the dunes to the water. Marindia also offers a clinic, supermarkets, Internet cafés, a lawyer, bars, a vet, and a pharmacy. I also found a movie rental store and a bakery to round out the services here.

El Fortín de Santa Rosa is a shady and pleasant tree-lined residential area. There's no "downtown" here, but follow this link to see the old [Hostería Fortín de Santa Rosa](#). It would be a great place to stay in the area, and the restaurant is well worth a visit.

Villa Argentina is just a few minutes from neighboring Atlántida, and is a small village with a handful of seaside homes. It's best-known for the giant eagle constructed on the beach, known as "*El Águila*" (which is Spanish for "eagle"). *El Águila* is actually a house of sorts, and the eyes of the eagle are windows in the main salon looking out over the sea.



Watching you, watching me

The eagle was built by Italian businessman Natalio Michelizzi, one of the area's pioneer developers. He built it as a personal refuge in 1937, for painting, writing, reading, and entertaining friends. And as it turned out, he needed a personal refuge shortly thereafter, when England blacklisted him for suspicion of running an operations base for Nazi spies from inside the eagle. In 2003 *El Águila* was restored by the municipality, and today it's open for visitors.

Atlántida, the centerpiece of Costa de Oro

For me, it was the trees.

That's what set Atlántida apart from other more-popular towns on the Uruguayan coast, like Punta del Este or Piriápolis. From the moment I drove into town on my first visit, I was impressed by the tall, mature shade trees lining Atlántida's streets. Lush and green, they frame the perfect setting for the large, stately homes in Atlántida's downtown.

Still more trees line the shady, beachfront parks that conceal cafés, outdoor barbecues, and allow only glimpses of the popular beaches beyond.



Welcoming beachside eatery

And Atlántida is still evolving for the better. Today, visitors enjoy more restaurants, outdoor cafés, and tasteful shops than they did just a few seasons ago. You can now shop along a new pedestrian walkway in Atlántida's downtown, and there's even wheelchair access to the beach.

Located about 28 miles (45 km) east of Montevideo and 50 miles (80 km) west of Punta del Este, Atlántida is 20 minutes from the international airport, with good public transportation available to both the airport and the city. Its permanent population of around 4,600 grows to over 20,000 during peak periods in the summer.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, summertime Atlántida is an upbeat, bustling seaside town, popular with local residents, vacationers, and day travelers from Montevideo. The beaches are golden and sandy as they follow the curves of the shoreline around

The gentle and the rough

The beaches separated by the point in Atlántida are called Playa Mansa and Playa Brava. In Spanish, the terms *mansa* and *brava* refer to the character of water, and mean "gentle" and "rough," respectively, while *playa* means "beach."

Due to the east-west geography, you'll find that many of Uruguay's beach towns have a point, with the ocean rough on one side, and gentle on the other. So you'll see the names Playa Brava and Playa Mansa over and over, as you travel the coast.

the point. The sheltered waters are typically calm, with light wave action and little undertow.

Atlántida's sidewalk cafés and restaurants are especially busy on the weekends, and fill the air with smoke from their wood-fired grills, sizzling steaks, chorizo, chicken, and grilled vegetables.

Oddly, one of the nicer outdoor cafes in town is McDonalds, where people sit under cafe umbrellas and enjoy cappuccinos and pastries. Gone are the garish yellow arches and the sign proclaiming the number of burgers served.

Atlántida Expat Meeting

Atlántida has a routine English-speakers meeting attended by local expats. It's well-attended, with between 18 and 30 people at most meetings. It's held on the first and third Thursday of each month, at the Don Vito restaurant in Atlántida

Atlántida reminds me of a bygone era. This is partly due to the stately, larger homes that have been there for so long. And also due to landmark historic buildings that still stand, like the huge, boat-shaped *Edificio El Planeta*—formerly the Planeta Palace Hotel—built by one of the city's founders.

Atlántida is self-sufficient, with a local movie theater, several hardware, drug and grocery stores, along with churches, a country club, and clinics. Its modern supermarket, *Tienda Inglesa* (English store) is complete with everything you could want, including many hard-to-get imported items...not to mention hardware and electronics.

To give you a better idea of what's around town, here's a handy [directory of services](#) around Atlántida. Of course if you need to do any big-city shopping, the capital of Montevideo is just a short distance away.

But all in all, Atlántida is a good bet for full-time living on the Costa de Oro.

Fishing is popular along this part of the coast, and Atlántida is no exception, with its own yacht club and fishing club.

In the winter things quiet down, and some shops and restaurants close for the season while some others open only on weekends. Atlántida doesn't become a ghost town as do some resorts, but you certainly won't find the same level of activity as you would between the summer months of December through February.

The History of Atlántida

Named for Plato's mythical continent of Atlantis, Atlántida was founded in 1911 by a group of doctors and medical students who

Atlántida was once the occasional home of the famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who spent many months here in secret with his mistress Matilde Urrutia. His three-story home overlooks Playa Mansa, and was more recently a museum. In fact, it was up for sale two years ago for US\$140,000.



"Love is so short, forgetting is so long." Pablo Neruda

had undertaken a reforestation project in the area. Electricity came in 1918, and by 1920 it had what was believed to be the largest 18-hole golf course in South America. It soon became a popular spot for Montevideo's wealthy to build their summer residences.

But it really started to expand in the mid-1930s, when Italian-born businessman Natalio Michelizzi came for a stay as a tourist, and fell in love with the town.

He constructed the landmark hotel Planeta Palace—built in the shape of a ship—as well as Atlántida's first casino. In 1939, he bought up all the undeveloped land in the area, and began selling lots. His vision was to build a resort to compete with Punta del Este, founded 32 years earlier and 50 miles up the coast.

Atlántida remained a destination for Uruguay's wealthy elite until the 1950s, before it lost its prestige to the glamour of Punta del Este, which by then had come into its own. After that, Atlántida became more of a middle-class destination; one that retained its luster, but was no longer "in vogue."

Today however, that's rapidly changing as a new group of settlers—including a fair number of North Americans—discover the value of this overlooked seaside treasure.

Considering its beauty, its beaches, and its prices, you won't find a better deal than Atlántida.

Discover Atlántida's property scene

Here are a few properties I saw on the market there:

- ▶ The first home is a 200-square-meter house built in 2000, with double-brick wall construction. It has four bedrooms, two bathrooms, heating, air conditioning, and alarm system. This tastefully finished house is listed at US\$180,000 with [Costacapas Propiedades](#).

New construction and the investor

Just outside Atlántida, I looked at the only new construction condos that I found on the entire Costa de Oro. They were asking US\$135,000 for a brand-new, two-bedroom, 50-square-meter oceanfront unit. That's a whopping US\$2,700 per square-meter, in an area where an oceanfront house can go for less than US\$400 per square-meter.

But the good news is that they're almost sold out. This signals a change to people's perception of the area, which bodes well for the sector's potential.



Oceanfront condos selling for US\$135,000

- ▶ [Voilà](#) has a raised rancher on an elevated lot with ocean views from the terrace. It is a well-maintained 1970s-vintage home, with 140-square-meters including three bedrooms, a single bathroom, and a double carport underneath the house. Offered fully furnished, the asking price is US\$135,000.
- ▶ Two blocks from the water in Atlántida, I found a 47-square-meter, single bedroom and bath apartment listed for sale with [B&V Inmobiliaria](#). The apartment faces the plaza with a partial ocean view. The asking price is US\$65,000.

Las Toscas is a beach area that begins just after you round the point in Atlántida heading up the coast on the Playa Brava side. It feels like part of Atlántida, and shares its downtown.

- ▶ [Inmobiliaria Fuentes](#) has a clean cabin, in move-in condition three blocks from the water in Las Toscas. New in 2000, it has 120-square-meters of living space, with two bedrooms, two baths, a garage, and carport for the asking price of US\$100,000.
- ▶ I also found a waterfront house for sale listed with [Voilà](#). It features an impressive fireplace, open on all four sides, between the dining and living areas. The 160-square-meters of living area includes four bedrooms, two baths, and a large eat-in kitchen. The good-sized backyard is surrounded by a brick wall. The asking price is US\$145,000.

A look at Parque del Plata

Parque del Plata lies at the end of the beachfront *rambla*, where it turns inland along *Arroyo Solís Chico*. It is a quiet area, with good boating on the wide river and the sea, and has its own yacht club.

There are a couple of stores in Parque del Plata, including a small supermarket. But for anything but the basics, you'll need to head to Atlántida, about five minutes away by car... somewhat longer by bus.

What I like about Parque del Plata is that it has frontage on two bodies of water, the *arroyo* and the sea. So there are plenty of waterfront properties here, and lots of good views.

- ▶ Right on the water at Parque del Plata, realtor [Martha Iturralde](#) has an attractive, two-story brick house for sale. Built in 1990, it's in impeccable condition, with three bedrooms sharing a single bath, maid's quarters, and a one-car garage. The fenced yard has a BBQ area, and the asking price is US\$140,000.
- ▶ On the water overlooking Arroyo Solís Chico, I found a beautiful older home on the market with [B&V Inmobiliaria](#). Built in 1960, the house has 300-square-meters, all finished with original, well-maintained hardwoods. The house includes a great room, four bedrooms, two baths, and a classic old kitchen and maid's quarters. The grounds are landscaped and there's a caretakers cabin, as well as a garage and carport. The asking price is US\$160,000

- ▶ Here's a super building lot, right on the beach. It's a lot of 1,597-square-meters (over one third of an acre) for only US\$75,000. Follow the link to take a look at the [photos and the plot plan](#).

Once you hit Arroyo Solís Chico, you'll need to return to the highway about a mile inland to get to the nearest bridge. On the other side of the *arroyo*, you'll find Las Vegas, followed by La Floresta.



Arroyo Solís Chico, from Parque del Plata's waterfront

La Floresta, the area's "verdant grove"

La Floresta is located on the sea, some 34 miles (54 km) from Montevideo. The shady, quiet, and clean streets provide a pleasant residential setting for its bright, sandy beaches.

La Floresta reminds me of a smaller, quieter version of Atlántida... with many of its desirable features, but offering a more-genteel ambiance.

Like Atlántida, La Floresta began with a dune-forestation project. It was born when Montevideo banker Miguel Perea came to the

The storm of '23

In the winter of 1923 a damaging storm hit the Costa de Oro, bringing high winds and rough waters. During the storm, three steamships ran aground at La Floresta, within 1.5 miles of each other. The German boat *Rugia* hit the sandbar at Arroyo Sarandí. The English ship *Tuscany* ran aground in Solís Chico, while the German *Montfurland* hit just a thousand yards from Hotel La Floresta. More than 20 ships were involved in the effort to re-float the three vessels.

area in 1909, and began planting eucalyptus and pine trees on the miles of sandy dunes extending inland from the coast. By 1911 it was attracting nature buffs and swimmers, and had been dubbed with its name, whose literal translation means "verdant grove" (Perea had planted over a million trees by 1918.)

Perea built and inaugurated the town's tallest building in 1915, the Hotel La Floresta, whose casino operated until the early 21st century. Electricity finally got to town in 1936, and street-paving started in 1945. Many of today's residents of La Floresta are descended from the first settlers.

Present-day La Floresta offers the new settler a pleasant seaside town of tasteful, higher-end homes on large lots. Its shady streets, lined with tall trees, host a number of restaurants and cheerful sidewalk cafes.

A movie theater operates in the original Hotel La Floresta, and the town has the only senior center that I've seen in Uruguay...and one of the few country clubs in the area. You'll also find a couple of clinics, a gym, and a small selection of restaurants and cafes.

- ▶ If you've always wanted a wooden cabin, there's a perfect one in La Floresta. Built in 2002, it's in move-in condition with nicely finished wood inside and out. This 130-square-meter hideaway sits on 1,000-square-meters of landscaped and fenced grounds with a pool, and a combined guest cabin and BBQ facility out back. Inside, there are three bedrooms and a single bath. The asking price of this [Costacapas](#) listing is US\$88,000.

- ▶ Also in La Floresta, right on the seaside dunes, I found a two-story, brick, thatched roof house for sale. Listed with [Voilà](#), it has 150-square-meters with three bedrooms, two baths, and a one car garage and BBQ area out back, for the asking price of US\$120,000.

At the edge of town you'll cross the bridge where Arroyo Sarandí empties into the sea, and enter the village of Costa Azul.

Costa Azul and the quiet beaches beyond

Costa Azul is primarily a summertime destination, but there are a handful of full-time residents. Its population of 862 people, however, can increase tenfold during January and February. It's a small, pleasant town with two fine-sand beaches.

Here you'll find a handful of shops, including a clothing store, beauty salon, and the ever-present homemade-pasta shop. You'll also enjoy a few large parks and shady streets. To me

the town conveys an exclusive feeling, like a little-known upscale hideaway.

After Costa Azul, the character of the Costa de Oro changes to a more-rustic environment. You'll still find markets and bakeries, but this is the end of the line for well-paved streets, curbs, and manicured lawns.

Fishing anyone?

Fishing is a popular sport all along the Costa de Oro. But the point between Costa Azul and the adjacent Bello Horizonte is particularly famous for being one of the best areas to catch *Corvina*, also known as Sea Bass.

From this point onward, you'll come to a succession of smaller seaside *balnearios* as you drive along the waterfront, until you arrive at *Arroyo Solís Grande*.

- ▶ Less than a block from the water in Costa Azul, I found an attractive, spacious home on the market with [Voilà](#). With 300-square-meters of spacious living and kitchen areas, four bedrooms, three baths, and maid's quarters, you'll have plenty of room for family and friends. There are also pleasant guest and entertainment quarters (with kitchen and bath) in a separate building. You can opt to buy it furnished for US\$250,000... or unfurnished for US\$235,000.
- ▶ In Bello Horizonte, there's a two-story property on the beachfront *rambla*, with 170-square-meters of living space. There are three bedrooms, one bathroom, and a central indoor fireplace. Outdoors, the small yard is fenced and planted with trees, with a two car garage and BBQ area. The asking price for this property is US\$75,000 - you can obtain further information from [CostaCasas](#).
- ▶ CostaCasas has the perfect beachfront hideaway for someone who wants to be on the sea but not among the crowds. In tranquil **Santa Ana**, it sits over the *rambla* with just enough altitude to enjoy great water views over the beach dunes. The 1996-vintage, 164-square-meter house is in move-in condition, with three bedrooms, two baths, and on the second floor, the perfect viewing terrace. List price for this property is US\$155,000. Get further information from [CostaCasas](#).

Once you get to the village of **Jaureguiberry** and **Arroyo Solís Grande**, you've reached the end of the Costa de Oro. As you continue northeastward towards Piriápolis and Punta del Este, the pace of development picks up again, with a hefty increase in property prices.



Jaureguiberry - the last outpost on the Costa de Oro

Renting a home on the Costa de Oro

The Costa de Oro is primarily an area for vacation rentals. Many landlords rent their property out during the high season months of January and February, and use the property themselves during December and March.

You can rent these properties in the low season, and it's normally very inexpensive. I've seen large homes go for US\$500 per month. But at that price, you'd have to vacate the property in the high season so the owner could rent it at high-season rates. Off-season rates are almost never given on the Internet; you need to negotiate them case by case... just about any offer will be considered.

It's actually more difficult to find a long-term, unfurnished rental here. But when you do, the price is fairly reasonable.

Note rental prices are quoted locally in Uruguayan pesos using the currency symbol "\$." (The international currency code for Uruguayan pesos is "UYU.") The U.S. dollar amount is given here as a reference only, based on the exchange rate of July 2011.

Here are a few rental examples:

- ▶ The first property is a brand new, 100-square-meter, two-story house for rent in Parque del Plata. It includes three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and covered parking for US\$712 (\$13,000 pesos) per month on an annual lease. For more information, contact [Voilà](#) and ask for listing 0e0caa482at.

- ▶ In Pinamar, you can rent a house built in 2000, with 145-square-meters of living area, including three bedrooms and two baths for US\$1,100 (\$20,000 pesos) per month on an annual lease. This home has air conditioning and an alarm system, along with covered parking. Contact [Inmobiliaria Julieta](#) and ask for listing 218caa513-ps.
- ▶ In a quiet residential neighborhood, two blocks from the beach in Parque del Plata, there's a quaint little bungalow for rent. With 80-square-meters of living space, it comes with two bedrooms sharing a single bathroom. Outside there's a spacious and fenced back yard with covered BBQ picnic area and one-car garage. Monthly rent is US\$658 (\$12,000 pesos). For more information, contact [Inmobiliaria Moreno](#) and ask for listing 0f8caapp1085.

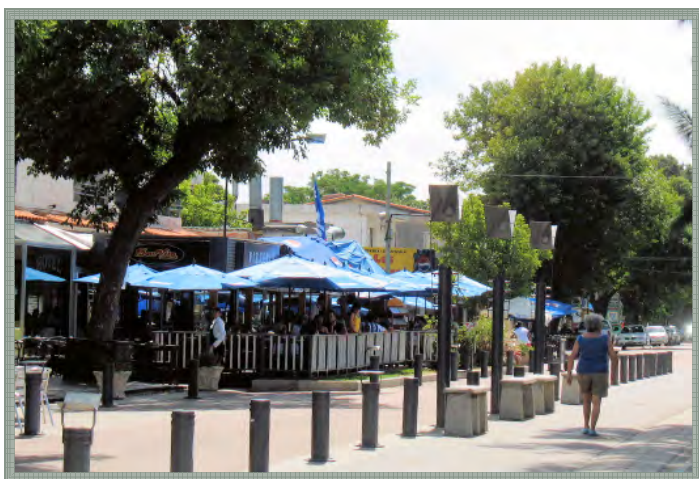
A straightforward property purchase

The process for buying property in Uruguay is fairly simple. Property registries are well-organized, and histories are well-documented. Also, Uruguay has no restrictions on foreign ownership.

Financing is available to foreign residents, but difficult to obtain for non-residents. However, developers often offer financing on new projects...even to non-residents.

Here are the basic steps to the process:

Convey your offer: Your real estate agent will normally do this by phone, directly to the seller or the seller's agent. No money changes hands at this time, and you haven't signed anything yet. There may be some haggling over the phone, but at the end of the call, you'll have hopefully agreed on a price.



Clean sidewalks, clean air, clean living

Find an escribano: An *escribano* in Uruguay is the person who performs all title verifications and publically records the property transaction. Unlike notaries in much of Latin America, escribanos are not impartial public officials. Instead, they represent you in the sale. So choose your *escribano* as you would an attorney.

A recommended escribano

For excellent service, contact Juan Fischer, managing partner of Fischer & Schickendantz. He has a knowledgeable staff of English-speaking attorneys and escribanos who frequently work with Live and Invest Overseas readers.

Contact Juan [here](#) with any questions

A good *escribano* will also act as your escrow agent, disbursing funds to everyone at closing, and paying any required taxes. If you're not a fluent Spanish-speaker, find an *escribano* who speaks English.

Prepare the Boleto de Reserva: Your *escribano* will first contact the seller directly, to confirm the terms of the sale. Next they'll prepare a *boleto de reserva*, which is a sales contract. The *boleto* records the buyer and seller, sales price, desired closing date, commissions, and any specific terms of the sale.

At this time, you'll normally make a 10% deposit. This deposit should only be given to your *escribano*...never to a real estate agent or a seller...even though they may be happy to take it!

Final Closing

The *escribano* will verify that the title is clear going back 30 years, and will prepare the final deed. In Uruguay this is called the *escritura de compraventa*, or simply *escritura*. You and the seller will sign the *escritura*, and the *escribano* will disburse all funds and reconcile the taxes and fees.

Finally, the *escribano* will record your deed at the property registry.

Sometime after closing, you'll typically get a large collection of folders containing the property's entire history—all the way back to the original blueprints.

Property Transaction costs

The buyer pays part of the real estate commission (3%), and another 3% to their *escribano*, along with several other fees and expenses. A good rule of thumb is to allow for around 8.5% of the sales price if one uses a realtor, and about 5.5% if not.

Long-Term Living In Uruguay

Read all about visas, residency, and citizenship options in Uruguay [here](#).

PASSPORT

Relocation assistance

If you're relocating to Uruguay, you'll likely be interested in the services of [CCM Soluciones](#)... especially if you don't speak Spanish. They are a relocation assistance company, who can help you with any settling-in chores that you're facing...from hooking up your phone, to getting your driver's license, to finding an elementary school for the kids...even learning Spanish.

For more information, contact founder [Andrea Cavallo](#).

After a period of between three and five years, residents are eligible for Uruguayan citizenship and a passport. Under Uruguayan law there is no limit to the number of citizenships you can hold.

Importing your household effects...

As a new resident, you can bring your household effects to Uruguay duty-free. You can either wait until your final residency is granted, or you can bring them as soon as you apply.

Most people do the latter. But to do so, you need to put up a guarantee against any possible duties that you'd owe in the event that your residency was turned down. To provide the guarantee, you can leave a deposit with Customs, buy a special Certificate of Deposit (CD) in your own name at the bank, or use government-sponsored insurance.

...and your pets

Uruguay is a pet-friendly country, where animals are treated humanely. Pets are welcome, and there's no quarantine period when you arrive.

Animals will need to be accompanied by a USDA-approved health certificate, attesting to rabies vaccination, general health, and a

tapeworm shot for dogs. The animal's exam must be conducted within 10 days of your departure for Uruguay. See more information at the [US Embassy website](#). (For other countries check your home country's embassy in Uruguay.)

Costa de Oro enjoys a low cost of living

Please note: the prices quoted in this article are based on an exchange rate of 18.25 Uruguayan pesos per U.S. dollar.

The Costa de Oro possibly has the lowest cost of living on the Uruguayan coast, as well as the lowest property prices.

To live here, I'd allow – per couple - at least US\$1,300 per month if you own your own home and US\$2,100 per month if you're renting.

But these numbers are based on my own list of common expenditures, so yours will vary. You should have a look at the budgets I used, and then modify them for your own tastes and lifestyle. You can follow this link to see my [Costa de Oro sample budgets](#). For grocery items, I made a list of common items and what they cost. The prices came from the *Tienda Inglesa* (English Store) in Atlántida, in late July.

To be honest *Tienda Inglesa* is one of the most costly national grocery stores in Uruguay, but they carry everything you could possibly want, including imported items. Also, it's right in Atlántida, which is where most Costa de Oro residents would probably go, even if it costs a bit more.

If you don't mind the trip, you could save money (and have a good time) by shopping the street markets in Montevideo, some 25 miles away.

Follow this link to have a look at the [Costa de Oro Shopping List](#).

Owning a car

You can buy a car easily enough, but plan to spend almost twice what you'd spend in the United States for the same vehicle. (Of course if you sell it, you'll also get twice as much.) I've had no luck at all



Montevideo street market

negotiating car prices here at a dealer, but I have gotten them to include things like registration fees and other extras.

If you plan on buying a car, here's how the costs will break down, I've used my own actual expenses, for a diesel SUV:

Owning a Car			
Item	UYU (Pesos)	US\$	Remarks
Car registration	1,732	95	Based on a US\$23,000 SUV
Insurance	1,500	82	Liability coverage on a US\$23,000 SUV
Maintenance	760	42	
Fuel per month	2,000	110	Retiree usage, not for commuting
Car total	5,992	329	

Gas per gallon	UYU 28.70	US\$ 5.96	As of August, 2011
Diesel per gallon	UYU 27.80	US\$ 5.77	As of August, 2011

The tax picture in Uruguay

Uruguay is a fairly tax-friendly country, and you'll only pay income tax on Uruguayan-source income. Income you generate from abroad—including internet work you do in Uruguay—is not subject to income tax.

The tax that you can't avoid however is the **Value Added Tax**. The tax is always referred to in Latin America by its Spanish acronym—IVA—and pronounced "EE vah". It's basically a sales tax, and it runs between 14% and 22%.

This sales tax is never added on at the register, and will always be included in the marked price of an item...so you tend not to notice it as you would in the United States.

Property taxes run from 0.25% to 1.2% of the assessed value of the property. Property owners also pay a **school tax** with a rate of approximately 0.1% to 0.3%...except for rural properties.

Income tax will be charged to foreign residents at a rate of 12% of your Uruguayan-source income only. There is also a rental income tax of 12%, but it's in lieu of the regular income tax, not in addition to it.

The best buy in Uruguay

Look to the wine industry for one of the best deals going in Uruguay, with many wines produced right here in the department of Canelones. The Merlots and Cabernets are notable. But the Tannat grape—brought by Basque settlers in the 19th century—is something that you're unlikely to find anywhere else.

Red wines will outnumber whites by 10-1 on most restaurant menus, but you'll still find a good variety of whites to choose from at reasonable prices.



The great Irurtia Tannat winery

The **capital gains tax** rate is 12% for individuals, and will be collected by the notary when you sell a property. But due to the way the gain is calculated, it can vary. I recently sold a property with a US\$35,000 gain, and paid less than US\$100 in capital gains tax.

Getting hooked up and staying connected

Getting yourself plugged into life in Uruguay is easy, and much like it would be in any developed country.

Bank accounts can be easy or difficult, depending on where you open your account. The easiest—oddly—is the Uruguayan government bank, [Banco de la República](#) (BROU). I opened an account here with my passport in just a short time.

And best of all, you can even open an account as a non-resident at BROU. They also have a good web interface, and don't charge ATM fees. Conveniently, you can use your account for direct-debit of all your utility bills.

At Citibank, I was asked for quite a bit more paperwork...and at HSBC, I was refused an account altogether for being a U.S. citizen.

Telephones normally come with the property, but not always. If you need new telephone service, it's not a problem. Unlike many countries, there are no black market sales of phone lines, no waiting

lists, and no bribing of officials to get one. Phone numbers are plentiful and you can have it working in less than 48 hours.

All calls within Uruguay are local calls, and the landline provider is the government company [ANTEL](#).

Cell phones are reliable around the country, with several different service providers. Unlike in the United States, you own your cell phone in Uruguay, and you can get service from whoever you want. You can use a prepaid card or any number of plans...and there is no charge for incoming calls. Providers include: Ancel, Movistar, and Claro.

Internet service is inexpensive and reliable. I can't recall ever losing my internet service during the past five years. **Mobile Broadband** is available as well, with good coverage. If you add mobile broadband to your existing hard-wired account, it's pretty cheap...I pay about US\$6 per month.

Cable TV is widely available in Uruguay (unless you're in a remote area), and the basic package is just over US\$36 (\$655 pesos) per month. For that price you'll get to watch some English-language movies and TV shows like *Law and Order*, *Dr. House*, or *CSI*. But to get actual first-run English broadcasts from networks like CNN or Fox, you'll need to pay US\$44 (\$800 pesos) or more.

DirecTV packages go from US\$44 to US\$56 (\$799 pesos to \$1018 pesos) depending on the technical extras you want, such as record/pause/rewind, or on-demand movies. Premium channel packs are extra.

Uruguay offers quality healthcare for all

Everyone in Uruguay is entitled to quality medical care via the national healthcare system...and this includes foreign residents. There are no restrictions on this system, and I've even known non-resident visitors who've used it.

If you'd prefer the extra services that the private system offers, you can also join one of the many higher-end private hospital associations. The cost for these is reasonable, plus you'll have fewer people waiting and more-pleasant conditions.

Remember that your options for initial signup in private health plans will be fewer after you reach age 60, and will diminish further as you pass 65 and 70. Most plans require a physical, at any age, but many will accept pre-existing conditions.

I joined a private plan at *La Asistencial* (in Maldonado), the cost is US\$57 (\$1047 pesos) per month. The best plan they offer is the VIP plan, for US\$154 monthly (\$2814 pesos) for which you get a private room, a special waiting salon, guaranteed appointments, and lower co-pays. At *La Asistencial* there are no age restrictions, and your premium is not based on age.

If you just walk into the Emergency Room for treatment in a private hospital, plan on spending around US\$85, which will include doctor fees and lab work.

Many Uruguayans and expats believe that the [British Hospital](#) is the best medical facility in Uruguay; it's located about 30 miles (48 km) from Atlántida. For your sole provider—where you'd go for serious illness or major surgery—I'd consider British Hospital. Outside of this facility, you can have trouble finding English-speaking medical professionals.

Smaller medical clinics, emergency centers, and ambulance services do exist in the Costa de Oro area but they are less sophisticated. Have a look at [Médica Uruguay](#), which offers good coverage. [SAPP](#) has four facilities on the Costa de Oro; in Parque del Plata, La Floresta, Salinas, and Atlántida, and Centro Clínico del Este has a facility in Villa Argentina.

If it's a **veterinarian** you're looking for, you'll find one on Calle 22 and Gral Artigas, in Atlántida.

Your exploratory visit to Costa de Oro

The best time to come to the Costa de Oro is in the summer, between November and early-April. The best months are January and February. This is when I'd come for your first visit.

If you're considering the Costa de Oro for full-time residence, you may want to plan a visit for July as well...to see what the winter is like. You won't see ice or snow, but you won't be sunning yourself on the beach, either.

The best flight services to Montevideo are the nonstop flights from Miami or Panama City, with Miami providing better connections. Montevideo also has a nonstop service to Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile.

There's an international airport at Punta del Este, but service is limited and seasonal... except for flights to Argentina, which fly all year.



Atlántida Beach in high season

Airfares vary with the season. As I write this, the best roundtrip fare to Miami is US\$762 on Taca, with American charging US\$1222 for their nonstop service. If you're coming from New York, you can go on Copa (Continental) for US\$919.

Try to avoid connecting in Buenos Aires unless you're going there. If you go via Buenos Aires, allow for the frequent flight delays when making connections. Also, be prepared to pay a US\$130 visa fee if you pass through the long lines at immigration.

When you land at Montevideo airport, there's a super-convenient money exchange right at baggage claim...with the worst exchange rates in the country! Once you pass through customs, you'll find an ATM with much better rates.

Rental Cars are available at the airport, and can be booked online. I've never been asked for an international driver's license, but I think it's prudent to have one, just in case. If you get one, make sure to get the *Interamerican Driver's License* rather than the *International Driver's License*. They're available in the United States from [AAA](#) (US\$15) or in Canada from [CAA](#) (CAD \$15).

For your first exploratory trip to Costa de Oro, I'd recommend renting a car to get around. Once you've settled on a favorite location, the bus may serve to get you there in the future.

Buses run frequently through the area, with a service to Montevideo and the airport. Going the other direction, you can travel to Piriápolis or Punta del Este. Buses are clean, punctual, efficient, and inexpensive...and many have rest rooms and Wi-Fi.

Taxis in Uruguay are well-kept, and always use meters. They're a great way to get around Montevideo, but that's not so true on the Costa de Oro. They're available in the area, but they're not plentiful enough to be able to flag one down just when you need one. Generally you'll need to call for a pickup.

Some special places to stay and eat

Costa de Oro does not offer a wide selection of fine dining or 5-star hotels. For a good choice of luxury accommodations, you'd need to head for Montevideo.

For lodging, there are a number of smaller hotels, posadas, and hostels along the Costa de Oro. Two establishments in particular caught my attention. They're not modern, upscale hotels but rather classic old establishments from the 1930s.

One is the [Rex Hotel](#) in Atlántida. It's on the beachfront, but also an easy walk to all the amenities of downtown. And for another trip back in time, try the [Hostería Fortín de Santa Rosa](#), nestled in the well-shaded and quiet beach town of the same name.

You may also want to try the [Hotel Centenario](#), [Hotel Argentina](#), the [Niagara Inn](#), the [Saint Moritz](#), or the [Hotel Piroška](#), run by a family of German expats.

For dining, the restaurant at the [Hostería Fortín de Santa Rosa](#) (mentioned above) is well worth a visit.

If you're going to use your cell phone with a local carrier, you'll need to register it at the customs office in the airport. If it's from the US, it may need to be unblocked, which can usually be done at the cell phone shop where you're getting your local service.

And in Atlántida, don't miss the Don Vito restaurant and *parrillada*. It's probably the most popular restaurant in town, and it's also home to the local, monthly expat meeting. Their *brochette de pollo* was the best I've had in Uruguay; and I've ordered hundreds since I've lived here. (A *brochette de pollo* is made with large pieces of juicy chicken breast, done on a skewer with slices of red bell pepper, onion, and thick bacon...cooked to order over a wood fire on the *parrilla*.)

Aside from Don Vito, you'll find plenty of dining options in Atlántida, both downtown and on the water.

In La Floresta, try the waterfront *Las Terrazas del Mar*, located in La Floresta's first hotel. Or downtown, you may want to visit *El Trol* or *Lo de Lalo*.

Is Costa de Oro for you?

If you're looking for the glamour of hanging out with the international jet set, life in a new highrise, or spotting movie stars in the local cafe, then there are better places in Uruguay to settle down.

But if you want uncrowded beaches, tree-lined streets, cheerful cafés in clean and pleasant towns... and some of the world's best property values, then the Costa de Oro could well be the place for you. ■



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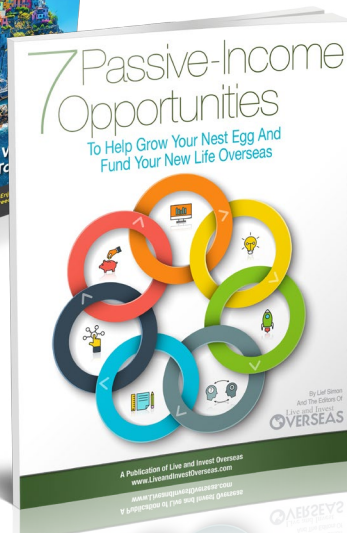
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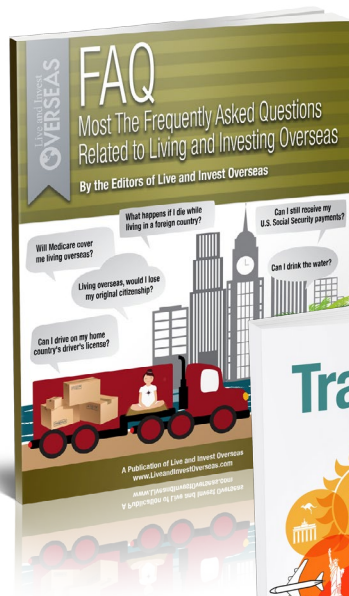


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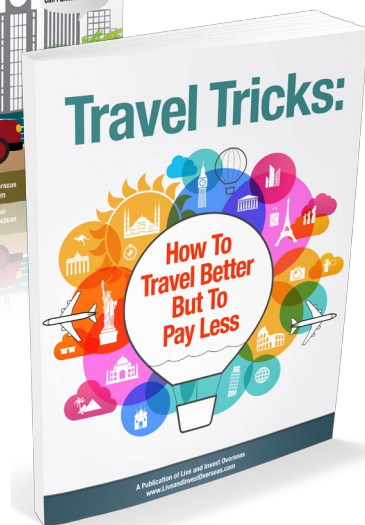


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