

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Uruguay

Population: 3.33 millions (#135 out of countries)

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Geography
Area: 176,215 square km. Uruguay is in southern South American and borders Argentina, Brazil and the South Atlantic Ocean. The climate is warm and temperate; plains and small hills cover most the terrain. Several large rivers flow through Uruguay including the Rio Negro and the Uruguay River; the latter forms the boundary with Argentina. High winds, droughts, floods, and rapidly changing weather are natural hazards. The primary environmental issues are water pollution and waste management. Uruguay is divided into 19 administrative departments.

Population: 3,494,382 (July 2009)
Annual Growth Rate: 0.466% (2009)
Fertility Rate: 1.92 children born per woman (2009)
Life Expectancy: 73.1 male, 79.72 female (2009)

Peoples
White: 88%
Mestizo: 8%
Black: 4%

Languages: Spanish (94%), other (6%). Spanish is the official language. Portunol or Brazilero (a mix of Spanish and Portuguese) is spoken in some areas along the Brazilian border. Other languages spoken are immigrant languages with fewer than 100,000 speakers such as Italian, Portuguese, German, and Russian. **Literacy**: 98% (2003)

History
In 1726, the Spanish founded Montevideo as a military stronghold which later developed into an important trading center. For a short period in the early 19th century, Uruguay was claimed by Argentina and controlled by Brazil until independence occurred in the 1820s. Social, political, and economic reforms in the early 20th century brought about greater development and modernization. Marxist guerrilla groups fought against the government in rural areas in the late 1960s and resulted in government controlled by the military from the 1970s to 1985. Economic reforms in the past several decades have stabilized and developed Uruguay.

Culture
Uruguay is the most secular nation in South America. In 2007, same-sex civil unions became recognized by government. Catholics have historically influenced culture and form a nominal majority. There are several styles of native music and a rich literary history. Uruguayans typically eat meat in abundance and share common cuisine with much of the Mediterranean. The national drink is an alcoholic drink called Grappamiel and made from sugarcane and honey. Another widely consumed traditional drink is made from the yerba mate plant and called mate. Alcohol consumption rates are slightly less than the United States and smoking rates are comparable to other Latin American nations.

Economy
GDP per capita: $12,600 [27.2% of US]
Human Development Index: 0.865
Corruption Index: 6.9
Uruguay has one of the most developed economies in South America. Although the economy grew throughout most of the past

two decades, significant economic hardships occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s resulting in higher unemployment, shrinking GDP, and inflation. Uruguay has been more successful dealing with the global financial crisis in the late 2000s than many nations due to reforms and good government management. Services employ 76% of the workforce and produce 68% of the GDP whereas industry employs 15% of the workforce and produces 22.5% of the GDP. Agriculture accounts for less than 10% of the workforce and GDP, but is a significant driver of the economy as food processing is the largest industry and meat, rice, and leather products are primary exports. Other important industries include machinery, transportation equipment, and petroleum products. Primary trade partners include Brazil, Argentina, and China. Along with Chile, Uruguay experiences the lowest rates of corruption in South America.

Faiths
Christian: 81.4%
Jewish: 0.3%
Atheist/Agnostic: 17.2%
Other: 1.1%

Christians
Denominations Members Congregations
Catholic 2,300,000
Latter-Day Saints 92,117 162
Jehovah's Witnesses 11,265 161
Seventh-Day Adventists 6,981 49

Religion
Although most the population is nominally Catholic, Uruguay has one of the higher percentages of atheists and agnostics in South America. Those who identify as Catholics constitute 45% of the population, whereas 28% of Uruguayans believe in God but do not have a religious affiliation.[1] Many Christian groups have reported slow growth in recent years.

Religious Freedom
Persecution Index:
The constitution grants religious freedom which is upheld by the government. Many Christian and Catholic holidays are recognized by the government. Religious instruction is banned in public schools but permitted in private schools.[2] Missionaries operate freely in the country.

Largest Cities
Urban: 92%

Montevideo, Salto, Ciudad de la Costa, Paysandu, Las Piedras, Rivera, Maldonado, Melo, Tacuarembo, Artigas.

All 10 largest cities have a congregation. 57% of the population lives in the 10 largest cities.

LDS History
The first congregation was organized for North Americans in 1944. The Uruguay Mission was organized in 1947 and the following year there were 14 congregations. During the late 1950s approximately 500 converts joined the Church annually.[3] The Uruguay Mission assisted in the opening of other South American nations, particularly Paraguay and Peru.[4] The Church experienced growth in Uruguay prior to most of Latin America and was noted by Church President David O. McKay to have experienced the most rapid international growth since the organization of the British Mission in the 1830s.[5] Some well-known television personalities joined the Church in the late 1980s.[6] Fifty years following the creation of the first mission, a second mission was created in 1997, named the Uruguay Montevideo West Mission. The new mission served half the national population and provided opportunity for each congregation to have a set of missionaries.[7] The president of Uruguay attended the Montevideo Uruguay Temple open house in 2001.[8]

Membership Growth
LDS Membership: 92,117 (2008)
There were 14,800 members in 1967.[9] In 1976, membership reached 19,804. Membership continued to increase steadily to 40,700 in 1986, 61,000 in 1994, and 69,000 in 1998. By 2000 there were 74,929 members. Membership reached 80,550 in 2002 and 90,292 in 2007. Since 2000 membership growth rates have steadily increased between 2% and 4.5%.

Uruguay has the second highest percentage of nominal LDS members in any nation with over one million inhabitants after Chile (2.6%, or one member per 38 people), although only about 0.5% of Uruguayans are active Latter-day Saints..

Congregational Growth
Wards: 107 Branches: 55
The first stake was created in 1967 in Montevideo. In the 1970s, 11 additional stakes were organized in Montevideo, Rivera, Paysandu, Salto, Melo, Minas, Paysandu, and Santa Lucia. Two additional stakes were created in Durazno and Artigas in 1980 bringing the total of stakes to 14. Stakes in Minas, Paysandu, and Santa Lucia were discontinued in 1989 and returned to district status. In the 1990s, four stakes were created in Mercedes, Las Piedras, Maldonado, and Montevideo, and the stake in Paysandu was reinstated in 1997. In 2003, the Tacuarembó Uruguay Stake was organized. Districts functioned in Colonia, Florida, Rocha, and Trienta y Tres in early 2010. When a second mission was organized in 1997, the Uruguay Montevideo Mission retained nine stakes or districts and the new mission included 10 stakes or districts.[10]
In late 2009, there were approximately 350 missionaries serving in the two missions.

In 1990, there were 116 congregations, 61 of which were wards. Congregational growth was strong in the 1990s, increasing to 144 in 1996 to 176 at the end of 1999. By 1998, there were 15 stakes and five districts.[11] Although wards increased from 92

in 2000 to 99 in 2004 and 107 in 2007, the number of branches has declined from 79 in 2000, to 63 in 2004, and 55 in 2007. Total congregations decreased from 171 in 2000 to 162 in 2009.

Activity and Retention
President Hinckley visited in 1997 and spoke to 250 missionaries, 1,264 priesthood holders, and 11,000 members in three meetings.[12] The Montevideo Uruguay Temple groundbreaking had 900 in attendance.[13] There was a slight decrease in the ratio of members to congregations from 422 in 1990 to 416 in 1999. However this ratio increased to 568 at year-end 2008. This ratio likely increased due to increased standards for the organization of independent congregations. This resulted in many unreported congregations which function as appendages to larger congregations. Difficulties with member activity and convert retention also account for some of the increased member to congregation ratio.

The percentage of active membership and church attendance vary by location. Montevideo has congregations with the most in attendance. In Montevideo, missionaries reported that in 2009, the smallest wards had 70 attending meetings weekly whereas most wards had over 100 active members. It is rare for congregations outside of Montevideo to have more than 100 attending weekly. In early 2010, the strongest branch in the Colonia Uruguay District had around 50 attending weekly but did not have sufficient local leadership to staff the branch presidency.

Some congregations have seen a major decline in member activity. One of the wards in the Paysandú Uruguay Stake once had 100 active members and in late 2009 had 500 members on the records and between 30 and 40 people regularly attending.

Active membership appears to be no greater than 17,000 nationwide, or 18% of total membership.

Language Materials
Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish, English
All LDS scriptures and an LDS-edition of the Bible are available in Spanish. Most Church materials are available in Spanish.

Meetinghouses
Most congregations meet in Church-built meetinghouses. Small, new, or dependent branches and groups often meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings.

Humanitarian and Development Work
Humanitarian projects occur, but the developed economy lessens Uruguayan needs. Many projects are conducted by local members. 3,200 members participated in a nation-wide city cleaning activity in 2003.[14]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom
The Church maintains positive relations with the government. There are no restrictions on missionary work and foreign missionaries serve freely.

Cultural Issues
Uruguay is South America's most secular and liberal nation and many are disinterested in religion. . Declining growth rates and poor convert retention over the past 15 years may partially reflect cultural issues. Some native, widely consumed drinks are forbidden by Church teachings and potential converts may struggle to abstain from these and other prohibited substances in the Word of Wisdom. Alcohol and tobacco addictions pose challenges for some investigators, converts, and less active members.

National Outreach
LDS missions have excellent national outreach as two missions cover just 3.5 million people. Every urban location with over 10,000 inhabitants has a congregation or assigned full-time missionaries. All administrative departments have a congregation. Small towns and rural communities remain less reached by the Church. Efforts to conduct missionary efforts and establish congregations in these locations will depend on local member efforts.

Missionaries report that the numbers of full-time missionaries have risen in both missions in the late 2000s. Mission leaders have worked on trying to start additional congregations on the outskirts of larger cities which operate as groups or dependent branches. The Church is well positioned to proselyte not only in larger cities, but in small cities and rural towns through full-time missionaries and local ward or branch member missionaries. Low activity rates and limited member participation in rural areas limit the effectiveness of outreach.

Member Activity and Convert Retention
The increase of over 150 members per congregation in just a decade reflects the continuation of quick-baptism tactics of missionaries and the inability for many congregations outside Montevideo to retain converts and develop local leadership in sufficient numbers. Dependent branches or groups meet in several locations, particularly on the outskirts of larger cities. These congregations tend to suffer from low activity rates and insufficient local leadership to staff independent units.. Although membership growth has doubled in the past 20 years, the number of stakes has only increased by 50%.

Low convert retention and high member inactivity likely contributed to two-decade delay between the organization of most Uruguayan stakes and the construction of Uruguay's first temple. Attendance during the open house and dedicatory sessions of the Montevideo Uruguay Temple were one-third and one-tenth of the nominal Uruguayan Church membership in 2000, respectively.

Ethnic Issues and Integration
The homogeneity of the Uruguayan population has resulted in few ethnic integration issues in the Church. The greatest integration issues in congregations appear to be socio-economic.

Language Issues
Although some speak Riverense Portunol along the Brazilian border, the near-universal use of Spanish as a first and second language simplifies the Church's outreach. Any members or investigators desiring to study and read materials in their native language can often obtain a large amount of these materials as nearly all native languages spoken in Uruguay have most Church materials available. The formation of non-Spanish speaking congregations appears unlikely as virtually all Uruguayans are fluent in Spanish.

Leadership
The Church has developed strong, local leadership which practice a wide range of professions without significant overlap with Church employees. Several Uruguayan Church leaders served as regional representatives prior the position's discontinuance in 1995. Uruguayan members have served as area seventies.[15] In 1990, a regional representative elected as National Deputy helped to raise the Church's profile and dispel misconceptions.[16] Uruguayan members have also served as mission presidents.[17] Uruguayan Francisco J. Vinas has served in the first and second quorums of the Seventy and as an Area president. Elder Walter F. Gonzalez of the Presidency of the Seventy is also a native Uruguayan.

Temple
Uruguay belongs to the Montevideo Uruguay Temple district. The Buenos Aires Argentina Temple served Uruguay prior to the completion of the Montevideo Uruguay Temple. The temple was announced in November 1998 and dedicated in 2001. 24,801 attended the open house prior to the dedication and 7,655 attended the four dedicatory sessions.[18] Starting in November 2009, many members in the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple district began attending the temple in Montevideo due to renovation of the temple in Buenos Aires. In 2010, seven endowment sessions a day were scheduled from Tuesday through Saturday. It appears that Uruguayan use of the temple is modest and likely heavily dependent on Montevideo stakes for staffing.

Comparative Growth
Uruguay and Chile have the most extensive mission outreach in South America, as all large cities have stakes and nearly all small cities have congregations. Uruguay has one of the longest Church histories in Latin America and one of the highest percentages of LDS members. Activity rates appear similar to other Spanish-speaking South American countries, although church attendance appears to be about one fifth of nominal membership..

Evangelical Christians have also seen strong growth and have twice as many adherents as Latter-day Saints.[19] Seventh-day Adventists have seen modest membership growth and little increase in congregations over the past decade. Jehovah's Witnesses have also seen modest membership growth.

Future Prospects
Mounting inactivity resulting from converts not retained over the past half century continues to slow the Church's progress. Some dependent branches or groups may become independent congregations. Some of the stakes in the Montevideo area may divide in the near future once more branches grow into wards. Additional stakes outside of Montevideo appear unlikely due to few active members. Some stakes in rural areas may return to district status if active members move away and reactivation efforts do not come to greater fruition.

Encouraging congregational self-sufficiency, focusing on the development of regular gospel habits in the lives of local members, fostering self-sustaining local member-missionary efforts, and raising the standards for prospective converts to ensure that lasting conversion has occurred before baptism will be essential future directions if convert retention and congregational growth rates are to experience sustained increases from their present levels.

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