

Asunción, Paraguay

“It’s a place to go if you believe the most meaningful part of travel is meeting people.”

Stepping off the plane in Asunción, the Paraguayan capital, is like opening an oven: The heat fogs up your glasses and the air smells of diesel smoke and grilled meats.

The colorful buses racing through the city, where I lived for two years, inevitably have to slow down for the mango and lapacho trees in the roads — the custom is to pave around them, rather than cut them down.

Paraguay is sometimes seen as a transitional place between the rain forests of Brazil and the Bolivian salt flats. Backpackers tend to skip it for its flashier neighbors. But for me, travel is not about taking pictures of famous things: It’s about the people. And Paraguay is the sort of place where multiple people will offer — if not beg — to drop you off or pick you up from the airport. That embrace can be felt even among visitors.

