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Big water. That's what *y-guasú*—the name given to the falls by the indigenous Guaraní people—means. As you approach, a thundering fills the air and steam rises above the trees. Then the jungle parts. Spray-soaked and speechless, you face the Devil's Throat, and it's clear that *big* doesn't come close to describing this wall of water.

NEED TO KNOW

When to go: If you can take the heat and humidity, visit in the rainier months (Nov.–Feb.) to see the falls at their most magnificent.

Border crossings: Americans crossing to the Brazilian side need visas. These cost \$120 and are issued in about three hours from the Brazilian consulate in Puerto Iguazú—as opposed to several days at the consulate in Buenos Aires, which also has a reputation for refusing visas to travelers who don't have onward tickets from Brazil.

Some have gotten around the visa issue by working with a Brazilian travel agent or local taxis, hotels, or tour companies (Argentine and Brazilian) that have “arrangements” with border control. Though the practice is well established, it is illegal. There have been crackdowns and on-the-spot fines of hundreds of dollars.

Taller than Niagara, wider than Victoria, Iguazú's raging, monumental beauty is awe-inspiring. The falls consist of some 275 separate drops—in the rainy season there are as many as 350—stretching along nearly 2 miles (3 kilometers) of cliff. They cascade more than 200 feet with a deafening roar at a bend in the Iguazú River, where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet.

National parks in both Argentina and Brazil protect the falls and surrounding flora and fauna. Exploring their jungle-fringed trails can take two or three days: you get right alongside some falls, gaze down dizzily into others, and can take in the whole spectacle from afar. You're sure to come across lizards, emerald- and sapphire-colored hummingbirds, clouds of butterflies, and scavenging raccoonlike coatis. You'll also glimpse monkeys and toucans if you're lucky.

EXPLORING

Argentines and Brazilians can fight all day about which side is better, but the two are so different that comparisons are academic. To really say you've done Iguazú (or Iguazú), you need to visit both. The Argentine side, where the falls are called Cataratas de Iguazú, offers a better up-close experience, with lots of self-guided trails (you're going to get wet). It's also home to two-thirds of the star attraction: the 270-foot-high falls known as Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat).

But (and this is a big *but*) the Brazilian side, where the falls are called Foz do Iguazú, offers the best photo ops, including what's likely to be a fantastic shot of Garganta do Diablo, as it's known over here.

This side also has more organized activities—hiking; rafting; Zodiac, boat, and helicopter rides—and non-falls sights such as the immense Itaipú Dam and the Parque das Aves (Bird Park).

Argentina's Parque Nacional Iguazú is divided into two areas, each organized around a train station: Estación Cataratas or Estación Garganta del Diablo. (A third, Estación Central, is near the entrance.) Paved walks lead from the main entrance past the visitor center, called Yvyrá Retá (Country of the Trees) in Guaraní. Colorful displays explain the region's ecology and human history. To reach the park proper, you cross a small plaza containing a food court, gift shops, and an ATM. From the nearby Estación Central, the gas-propelled Tren de la Selva (Jungle Train) departs every 20 minutes.

Much of Brazil's Parque Nacional Foz do Iguazú is protected rain forest—home to rare panthers and flora but off limits to you. Buses and taxis drop you at a vast plaza alongside the entrance building, where there are ticket booths, an ATM, a snack bar, a gift shop, and a currency exchange. The small visitor center next to the turnstiles has geological models explaining how the falls were formed.

Double-decker buses run every 15 minutes between the entrance and the trailhead to the falls, 7 miles (11 kilometers) away, stopping near private tour operators. The trail ends in the Porto Canoas service area. There's a posh linen-service restaurant with river views, and two fast-food counters with tables overlooking rapids leading to the falls.

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