

# ALMOST FAMOUS

*Wine and dine your way through Uruguay's up-and-coming wine region*

WRITTEN BY MICHELLE LYN PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA GARZÓN





Nestled in the heart of South America, tucked between Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay is a country rich in beauty, culture and gastronomy. A bit off the beaten path, it remains shrouded in mystery for most tourists outside of Latin America. But, with the recent launch of his state-of-the-art winery Bodega Garzón, Argentine billionaire Alejandro P. Bulgheroni is putting Uruguay on the map, creating even more reasons to visit this secluded land of onetime obscurity.

The first time Bulgheroni ventured into Uruguay's Garzón region, he "felt the magic of the land." He then purchased 10,000 acres and hasn't looked back since. Just over 100 miles outside of Uruguay's capitol city of Montevideo, Garzón consists of a verdant, rolling landscape with terroir similar to that of Tuscany. Convinced that the soil had ideal conditions to grow grapes, Bulgheroni tapped Italian winemaker Alberto Antonini to come on board, bringing his vision for Bodega Garzón to life. Some 10 years—and one-hundred million—later, and the stunning winery, now open to the public, may single-handedly boost year-round tourism for the entire country.

The first winery in the world seeking LEED certification for its entire facility, Bodega Garzón is a leader in both sustainability and design. Hidden among acres of lush, green vineyards, the exterior is grand, with clean lines, glass and stone giving it a contemporary look, and landscaping that is oriented to enhance biodiversity. The thoughtful architecture incorporated pre-existing rock formations into the modern design, which adds interesting juxtapositions throughout the winery. Emanating five-star luxury, Bodega Garzón's brand of warm Latin hospitality is without pretension. The winery welcomes visitors for tours, private meals, events, and, most importantly, the opportunity to taste elegantly constructed wines at very reasonable price points.

Until Bulgheroni decides to open a hotel on the property, the ideal way to visit the Garzón region is to make the chic beach town of José Ignacio your home base. The former fishing village, less than an hour from Bodega Garzón, evolved into a hideaway for celebs after nearby hot spot Punta del Este (the St. Tropez of the South as it's often called) became overcrowded. Drawing Latin America's jet-set crowd to the coast for years, José Ignacio is reminiscent of the Hamptons. December through March (summer in Uruguay), the town is chock-full of socialites rubbing elbows while eating grilled fish and asado with their toes in the sand.

The centrally located Posada del Faro is a swanky inn in José Ignacio, complete with complimentary bicycles and a self-service honor bar at the pool. A tad more secluded, Casa Suaya is a luxury boutique hotel with stone wall suites and thatched roof bungalows. Facing the grassy sand dunes of Brava Beach, and just outside the center of town, Casa Suaya is ideal for quiet morning strolls along the beach as you head into town for cafe con leche.



(previous page) Entrance to Bodega Garzón. (this page, clockwise from top left) A private wine cellar at Bodega Garzón; rolling hills and vineyards at Bodega Garzón; lobby entrance to the winery; the dining room at the Bodega Garzón's restaurant.

Also a burgeoning culinary destination, José Ignacio's most popular restaurant, Parador La Huella, is ranked near the top of Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list. Led by chef Alejandro Morales and inspired by culinary techniques from Spain (shellfish), San Francisco (bread) and Latin America (flame-grill), this upscale beach shack is super chic and laid-back at the same time, with simply grilled seafood taking center stage as diners linger late into the night. Another José Ignacio favorite, Marismo is a magical, candlelit spot tucked into the woods, just off the main road. The sandy ground reminds patrons of the beaches nearby as they settle into rustic tables surrounding a fire pit. Here, at his remote, romantic flagship resto, local surfer chef Federico Desseno serves perfectly grilled dishes.

Just 30 minutes inland from José Ignacio is the town of Garzón. Sleepy, with dirt and gravel roads, it is most commonly known for Hotel and Restaurant Garzón, helmed by acclaimed Argentine chef Francis Mallmann. Mallmann's establishment is the town's main attraction, bordering one edge of the modest plaza that anchors it. Pulling up for dinner, guests might be greeted by a bonfire out front, with the evening meal grilling over an open flame spit. Glasses of Tannat, Uruguay's most famous red wine, pair perfectly with piping hot empanadas, one of Mallmann's specialties. Once seated, diners are privy to a once-in-a-lifetime

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experience, where they can watch Mallmann and his apprentices work together in the kitchen through a large window in the cozy dining room, which feels more like a living room.

If a trip to pueblo Garzón isn't in the cards, Mallmann's cuisine can also be experienced back at Bodega Garzón, where he designed the open-flame focused kitchen and trained the culinary team running the stylish restaurant on his friend Bulgheroni's property. Leisurely afternoons at the winery can easily be spent indulging over long lunches, while evenings are perfect for sipping signature wines (Tannat and Albariño) on the verandah while waiting for dinner.

The Garzón region is the kind of place where one revels in the luxury of experiencing the best food, wine and hospitality Uruguay has to offer. Now, thanks to Bodega Garzón, it can all be enjoyed year-round.