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- Not for Resale -



Mileages

The smaller the country, the bigger the treasures!

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Uruguay. We're not sure what to expect. Remembering it from 1995 we'd clearly noticed it was 'the poor family-member' of Argentina. Lots of nice old cars and buildings too, but no money for maintenance. How would Argentines economical downfall have effected Uruguay? Argentines pulled out their bank accounts at Uruguayan banks.

But first we have to cross from Brazil into Uruguay. Brazilian customs agent tells us he has no idea what in the world we are supposed to do with the little paper we had to fill in when coming into Brazil from Argentina. At this border there is no federal. He is doing freight, and has no intention in doing something 'involved' with federal. Here is his suggestion about the

little filled in paper which you are supposed to turn in upon leaving the country (Expect a fine of several hundreds of dollars when it turns out you've lost it!): "Tirar a la Rio!" In other words: "Just throw it in the river"! (the river being the border between Brazil and Uruguay). As long as we make sure to get a nice *Welcome stamp* in our passports from the Uruguayan customs he is

not foreseeing any trouble as far as some one would "miss" our carefully filled in papers. Uruguayan customs is poorly housed at a cater closet sized customs building and even a typewriter seems to be something of a far away future. They have to make up their own special handwritten temporary import document for our Dodge and Fifth Wheel. We just hope all the stamps and signatures make it official enough for the custom agents at the Uruguayan— Argentinean border. Artigas will be our home base for trips to Agate and Amethyst mines. Uruguay has some real special ones.



Latest News !!!

Grimaldi claims to have a possible place for our stuff on its boat sailing ... August 4th! In stead of August 16 !!!

We hurry out of Uruguay.

Agates by the ounce!

There are loads of Agate mines at Artigas surroundings. With a (free) guide from the tourist office we'll go visit one of them. Every now and then the guide points out a farm telling us it is actually a mine. The dark piles scattered on the fields are the Agates. All these stones are to be shipped to China. They will be *crushed* and made *powder* to mix with the clay to become ceramics! At this region it's the main income. Some farms look more like tiny little villages nowadays. Like newly rebuild: La Bolsa. (The Bag!). An 8 building village, including a school and a police post. They are not only mining Agates at the mine we are visiting, but also Amethysts. Big piles of "sorted out" Agates lay in between empty oil drums, old "used to bees" farming machines, cars and parts there of, weighing scales of which the iron parts are rusted and the wooden parts partly rotted. To us there is no logic what so ever to be find that goes for the stone for one pile or the other. No pattern in forms, sizes, color nor drawing of the Agate lines. Non.

Killerbees have build a nest between some light colored stones. Cows

move around in their own slow way and graze so close to the stone as if it looks they are eating them.

The mine mountain with it's precious contents isn't to be handle softly or with care. Big shovels just scrape away, digging holes big enough to park cars inside. (which some miners do) Mountain contents are thrown into the back of a very, very old truck which takes it all down to the fields below to be sorted out. The mine shafts are dark, lighted only by one or two peers. Inside the ticking of a hammer on metal is to be heard. It indicates clearly that inside more seriously business is done. Miners in this region often are Brazilians, known for their skills and quality of working with the hard material of the mountains inner circle. They estimate the man needs another 14 days before the block he is working on, by hand(!) with a hammer and a long *beitel*, is free and a stand alone. The block contains a big Amethyst. Big enough to let a grown up man's arm disappear in it. One of the two peers, meant to lighten the working place is put inside the block so we can have a look a the marvelous purple color of it.

Work is hard and living poor. There aren't any toilets near the mine. There is only one, at the *house* where the miners eat and sleep. It has a kitchen and a dorm with 9 beds. A young couple with toddler has its 'own' corner. One of the miners has his bed at the so called storage room. The pieces of amethyst they find and of which they think are not big enough for the dealers are sold here on the spot. They lay assorted by color, going from very light purple to deep dark, only found in Uruguay, purple. The real big, interested pieces are cleaned, treated and sold elsewhere. That's our next stop. The big sawing machine outside indicates the size of the stones on display for sale inside the shed. Specially the colors are real eyecatchers.

Last stop is at the workshop of a man with over 30 years of experience of stone business. Here we find the most GI-GANTIC stones we'd ever seen. And not just one or two. No! The majority of stones he and his men are working on are big, bigger or biggest! The place is a mess (Under statement). Between plastic and iron drums, wooden planks, kids toys, underneath washed

clothes there a bulbs of black plastic. They turn out to be the stones. Higher and wider than the kids. Fabian thinks of a coffin of one, and later on discovers the lid of it. He is completely right; these two parts used to be one stone.

The stones aren't cheap. Euro 5,000 isn't uncommon. More neither. Looking around we wonder where the money goes. It certainly isn't used for a nice clean work environment. Nor reliable and comfortable transportation.



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The
most important journey
you can make in life,
is
meeting people
halfway.

Worldfamous ... in ... Artigas!

Remarkable day, today. It would have been already just for being today, as we are traveling for 900 days. But there is more.

We have a radio interview. Today! Call that timing, or what? Some one of the local radio station; Alternativa talked Klarin into it. "No hablar mucho Español", Klarin warns him. "No problem. I speak English" the *local loco* says.

Fine. Unfortunately he 'forgets' to tell us it's not he who will be interviewing us, but one of his female colleague's. And when she starts talking, the words come out exceeding the speed limit *and* of course it's Castellano. Repeatedly we'll have to ask to slow down a little and repeat the question.

There not the most simple ones. Alternative is a very serious radio station, highly concerned with the community. They have a lot of interviews on social subjects like health-

care, politics, economical things etc. We are here to talk about how travel effects ones life. How did we come to this? What's the value of the lessons learned? What is there to learn from or to learn to?

We've managed to get around with our knowledge of the Spanish language so far but when it comes to technically nice sentences or philosophical talks, that's a bit to much for us.

Klarin manages most of the interview quiet well however. He takes his time and repeats much of the question so he gains time in putting an answer together.

After the interview, driving around in the city, we notice he'd done well by the amount of waving people and even the next day while shopping people ask us :

"Are you the traveling family?"

We are (World) famous

At Artigas, Uruguay

