


URUGUAY : The Gravel paradise

My experience traveling the country by bike



By : *Daniel Chaverri*. Spain 

If you love gravel riding and adventure, Uruguay is undoubtedly your destination. A gravel lover's paradise. Had you ever thought of it? Me neither, until I discovered it. Uruguay is a traveler-friendly country, safe, with spectacular landscapes and friendly, hospitable people. Besides, you don't even have to bring your own bike; at Prandissimo you can rent a good price mid-high class bike with an excellent service.

Let me tell you about my experience. I'm passionate about cycling in general and the concept of "bikepacking" in particular. I had some days off in December (cold in Spain), and I was craving cycling and adventure, preferably in a country with a warm weather. I discovered Prandissimo online, which was crucial, since I could rent a gravel bike there without having to transport my own; and then I made sure that Uruguay was a safe country for cycling (and it was). So, I bought some flight tickets and I went. After visiting Montevideo, my first destination was Prandissimo in La Barra (Punta del Este), where I met Franco, Silvia, and Martín. Fran adjusted my bike perfectly. Nine days of cycling and adventure lay ahead. So I started pedaling. Below, I describe my stages.

Daniel Chaverri



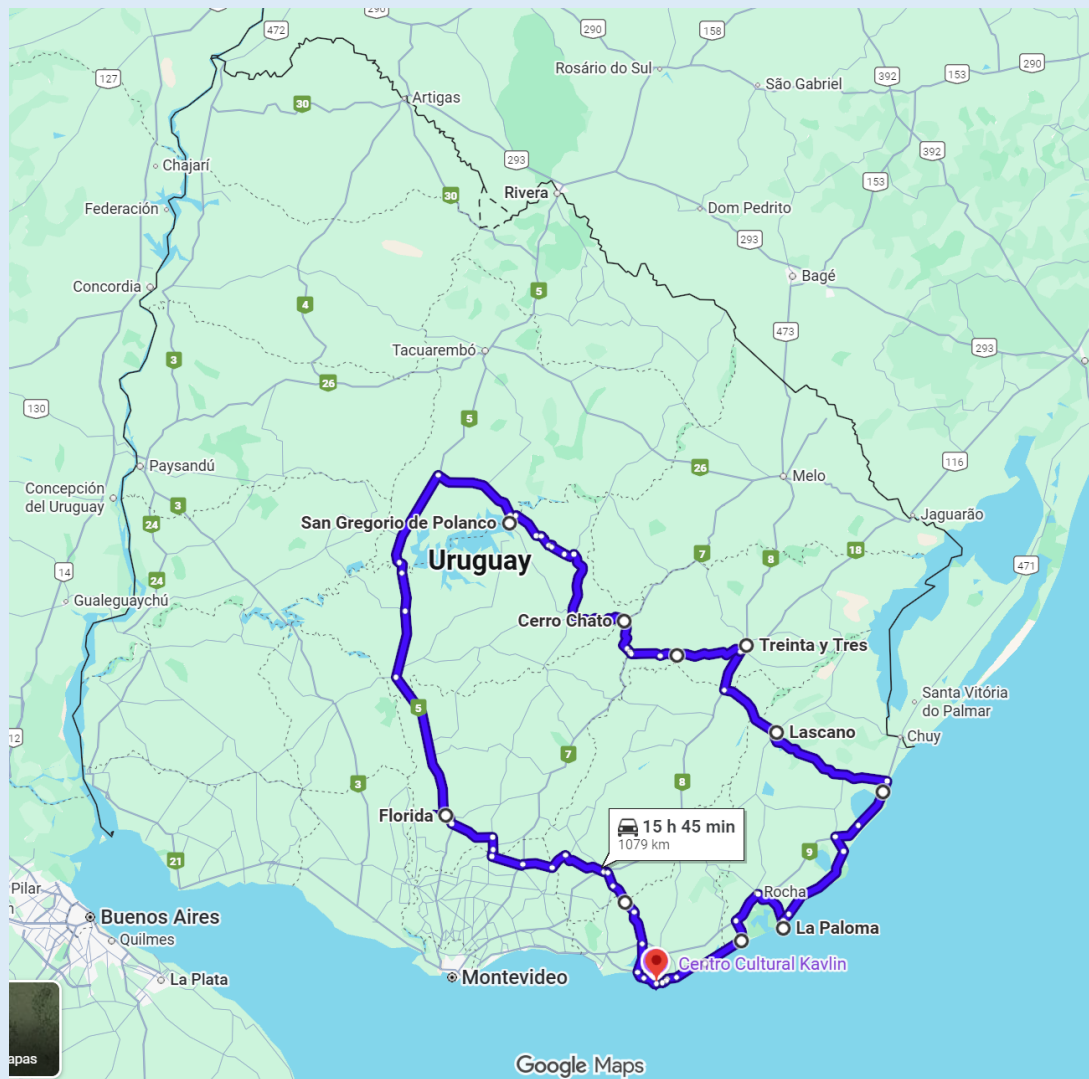
With Franco moments before starting my trip, in Prandissimo.



The bike perfectly adjusted and loaded.

ROUTE

Here's the complete route on Google Maps. Around 1100km divided into 9 days, which I'll briefly describe below. I used the MAPS.ME app throughout my stay because it allows you to travel without 4G/5G data coverage and offers good alternatives for cycling..



<https://maps.app.goo.gl/39Suq9kNKLop7vLT9>

Stage 1: 80km. Punta del este - La Paloma.

Route 10, good road with little traffic, runs parallel to the sea until Las Garzas. There, I advise you to continue straight on the road that leads to Laguna Rocha (a protected area) and not on the road that skirts above Laguna Rocha. All the maps will indicate you go that way since the road theoretically ends at the lagoon. But this isn't the case; most of the year you can cross the connection between the lagoon and the sea on foot, and if not, there is a boat transfer available by prior arrangement. I've included a photo with the phone number to call. From Las Garzas to La Paloma, it's all perfect for gravel biking. The entire stage is flat.

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Route 10 parallel to the sea.



The gravel road from Las Garzas to La Paloma is perfect, like almost all the gravel roads in Uruguay.



Bar Lobato, on the shore of Laguna Rocha, where you can have a soft drink and take the raft.



Telephone number to hire the raft if necessary.



Sunset in La Paloma.

Stage 2: 120km. La Paloma - La Coronilla

Route 10 and Route 9. Almost entirely highway with little traffic, except for the final stretch on Route 9 where traffic increases as it approaches the border with Brazil. Flat stage.



Lighthouse in the city of La Paloma



Bike lane on Route 10 during the first 20km of the stage



River at Puente Valizas



Sunset in La Coronilla

Stage 3: 150km. La coronilla - Treinta y Tres

The gravel adventure begins. Route 14, the first 80km are all gravel with no towns until Lascano. From Lascano to Treinta y Tres, the road is in good condition. A demanding and leg-breaking stage.



Route 14. "Sterratto" or ruta en tosca.



Until Lascano 80km of sterrato.



It is highly recommended to be well-supplied with food and drink along Route 14.



City of Treinta y Tres where the stage finish

Stage 4: 100km . Treinta y tres - Cerro Chato

We started on Route 19 to Valentines. 76km of gravel road with no towns. Route 19 is similar to Route 14. Don't forget to bring plenty of supplies and patience. From Valentines to Cerro Chato, the road is in good condition. A leg-breaking stage. I recommend staying at Posada del Míster. Exceptional service and maximum comfort..



Route 19. Tough and lonely.



Route 19. Spectacular landscapes with cattle everywhere.

Stage 5: 126km . Cerro Chato - San Gregorio

We started the day again on Route 19, a 45km stretch of gravel road, quite deteriorated this time due to roadworks. Later, we followed a mix of paved and unpaved sections to San Gregorio Polanco. A spectacular place with river beaches perfect for a refreshing swim.



Gravel road in perfect condition in San José de las Cañas. Alternative detour after passing Capilla de Ferruco to avoid the Cerrezuelo road (route 6) for a while.



Beautiful views and sunsets in San Gregorio Polanco on the banks of the Rio Negro.



Bathers on the banks of the Rio Negro enjoying the sunset.

Stage 6: 115km . San Gregorio- Paso los toros

The entire route follows well-maintained but challenging roads along routes 43 and 5. I recommend stocking up on food and drinks in the village of Achar. If you can afford it, I highly recommend staying at the Hotel Boutique FK, located in the former Paso de los Toros Tonic Water Factory. They offer a guided tour of the old factory, which is highly recommended. You can also enjoy a refreshing dip in their swimming pool.



Monument to the Bull in Paso de los Toros



Santa Isabel Church in Paso de los Toros



Hotel FK – Museum of the Tonic Water Paso de Los Toros



Hotel FK. Where the Tonic Water was born. Guided tour highly recommended

Stage 7: 153km. Paso los toros - Florida

This leg of the journey is entirely on well-maintained roads along Route 5. The main town we pass through is Durazno; a stop to visit its cathedral is highly recommended. Once you reach your destination in Florida, if you'd like to stay in a historic hotel, I recommend the Hotel Español. It's 100 years old and has been preserved almost exactly as it was when it first opened. It's like stepping back in time with all the comforts of today.

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Tribute to Cristobal Colón in Independence Square in Durazno.



Florida Cathedral in Plaza de la Asamblea.



Entrance hall and reception area of the Hotel Español in Florida. A journey back in time 100 years.

Stage 8: 112km. Florida - Minas

This route follows Route 12, passing through the towns of San Ramón and Tala. You can shorten the route by taking a well-maintained track called Rio Viejo before reaching San Ramón.



Bathers in the town of San Ramón



Streets of San Ramón



Cathedral of Minas



Plaza de la Libertad in Minas

Stage 9: 80km. Minas - Punta del Este

The stage with the most elevation gain. Unusual climbs for this country with gradients of up to 10%. A road route winding through mountains and verdant landscapes. I recommend hydrating in Pueblo Edén. Arrival in Punta del Este via the highway. Punta del Este boasts spectacular bays and beaches.



Mountain roads in the Minas region. Route 12.



Arriving at Punta Ballena



Punta del Este beaches.



With Prandissimo's friends (Silvia, Franco and Martín) upon my arrival.

I encourage you to visit and explore Uruguay by bicycle, it's quite a discovery.

