

HIDDEN URUGUAY: OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Lesson 1 — What Is Hidden Uruguay?

Week 1 | 40 minutes | suggested level 8th Grade English | A1+ A2+ | 13–14 years old

1. Purpose of the lesson

This is the launch lesson of [Hidden Uruguay: Off the Beaten Track](#). Its purpose is to create curiosity about Uruguay as a tourist destination and, more specifically, to challenge the assumption that the places worth visiting are necessarily the most famous ones.

Rather than beginning by explaining the final project, students first encounter photographs, postcards, maps and, if available, short natural soundscapes. They observe, interpret and question what they see. This creates a genuine need to find out more.

Throughout the lesson, students move progressively from observation to interpretation, from interpretation to discussion, and from discussion to inquiry and personal interest. These first questions will later become useful when students begin researching possible destinations.

The lesson also establishes an important principle for the project: students do not need to know the 'final answer' immediately. Being unsure about a destination is acceptable and can become the starting point for inquiry.

2. Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- identify and describe basic geographical and tourism features of a place;
- express a preference about a place and give at least one reason;
- formulate a question about a destination;
- participate in a structured collaborative speaking activity.

3. Student-friendly success criteria

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to say:

- *I can describe what I see.*
- *I can say what I think and explain why.*
- *I can ask a question about a place.*
- *I can say which place I would like to investigate and why.*
- *I can listen to my classmates and take my turn.*

4. Language and content

Key vocabulary

destination, landscape, coast, beach, countryside, village, town, river, lagoon, forest, hill, remote, peaceful, crowded, traditional, spectacular, unusual, famous, hidden, special, adventurous

Useful language

- *I can see...*
- *There is / There are...*
- *It is...*
- *It looks...*
- *I think... because...*
- *It might be...*
- *I wonder...*
- *I am not sure because...*
- *I would like to investigate... because...*
- *A teenager might like it because...*

At this stage, fluency, participation and meaning are more important than grammatical accuracy. The teacher should repeat the ideas correctly after students finish speaking rather than interrupting students constantly to correct errors.

5. Materials and teacher preparation

- Sets of 8–10 photographs or tourism images of Uruguayan destinations, mixing familiar and lesser-known places for each group.
- a map of Uruguay;
- optional postcards or tourism posters;
- optional short natural soundscapes such as waves, birds or wind;
- projector/display and speakers if available;
- board and markers;
- sticky notes or small slips of paper;
- destination cards for the classification activity;
- a small visual vocabulary bank for students who need language support;
- exit-ticket slips or a digital equivalent.

6. Development of the 40-minute lesson

0–5 minutes — Warm up: Creating curiosity

Teacher

If possible, before students enter, the teacher displays several contrasting photographs or tourism images of Uruguayan places. Ideally, the selection includes both familiar destinations and places students may not immediately recognise. A map of Uruguay should be visible, but the names of the destinations should not initially be provided.

If available, the teacher can play a very short natural soundscape — waves, birds, wind or countryside sounds — while students are setting up. The teacher does not begin by explaining the complete project.

“Today we are going to start with a problem I have. Look carefully at the images around the room. Choose one place that catches your attention. Write three words, one emotion, or one question about it.”

Students are given approximately one minute of silent observation. The teacher then asks what caught their attention, what they can see, and how the place makes them feel.

At this stage, the teacher accepts individual words and short phrases. If a student says 'beach', for example, the teacher can naturally recast this as 'Yes. I can see a beach.' Useful vocabulary is added to the board as it emerges. Set phrases may be written on board to help students produce their ideas.

Students

Students observe the images silently and select one that attracts their attention. They write three words, an emotion or a question, and then briefly share their ideas with a partner. Possible student responses include:

- *I can see a beach.*
- *There are many trees.*
- *It looks peaceful.*
- *I think it is beautiful.*
- *I wonder where it is.*

Purpose of the stage: the opening activates prior knowledge and creates curiosity without requiring students to already know destination names or specialised vocabulary.

5–13 minutes — Project Zero: See–Think–Wonder

Teacher

The teacher selects one photograph and highlights it by pointing at it, sticking it in the center of the board, etc. showing it prominently. Then writes SEE, THINK and WONDER on the board in the form of a chart. The thinking routine is introduced explicitly:

“We are going to look at this place like investigators. First we SEE. Then we THINK. Finally we WONDER.”

The teacher models the distinction:

SEE: I can see sand and small houses.

THINK: I think it is a quiet place.

WONDER: I wonder who visits this place.

The teacher explains that SEE refers to something directly observable, THINK is an interpretation or inference, and WONDER is a question or something students want to discover.

- *What can you see?*
- *What do you think?*
- *What do you wonder?*
- *What makes you think that?*
- *What can you see that gives you that idea?*

Students first work individually. The teacher then invites pair comparison and records some ideas under the three board headings.

Students

Students individually complete I SEE..., I THINK... and I WONDER.... They then compare their responses with a partner, listen to different interpretations and explain their own reasoning.

Possible responses include:

- *I can see sand.*
- *There are trees.*
- *I think it is peaceful.*
- *I think it might be near the coast.*
- *I wonder how people get there.*
- *I wonder what people can do there.*

Purpose of the stage: students begin to distinguish evidence from interpretation and to understand that questions are an important part of project work.

13–20 minutes — Famous, Hidden or Not Sure?

Teacher

The teacher shows several destination photographs or cards and introduces three categories: FAMOUS, HIDDEN / LESS KNOWN and NOT SURE.

“You don't need to know the correct answer. Make your best decision and give a reason.”

The teacher clarifies that hidden in this project does not mean secret or invisible. It refers to a place that may be less well known, less visited or less talked about than Uruguay's most famous tourist destinations.

I think ____ is famous because many people know it.

I am not sure about ____ because I have never heard of it.

Students classify the destinations. If they disagree, the teacher asks what evidence or information would help them decide.

Students

Students examine each destination, choose a category and justify their decision. They listen to alternative opinions and may change their classification if another student provides a convincing reason.

Possible responses include:

- *I think it is famous because...*
- *I think it is less known because...*
- *I am not sure because...*

Purpose of the stage: students begin to problematise the idea of fame and develop the habit of giving reasons for their decisions.

20–28 minutes — Kagan Round Robin: Every voice matters

Teacher

The teacher forms groups of four and explicitly teaches the turn-taking structure before the task begins.

“Everyone will have a turn. Student 1 speaks, then Student 2, Student 3 and Student 4. Nobody speaks a second time until everyone has spoken.”

Each group receives several destination cards. Students must choose one card, classify the place and give a reason. The teacher keeps useful sentence frames visible and circulates to monitor participation, reasons, turn-taking and students who need additional language support.

If a student simply says *'I don't know'*, the teacher models *'I am not sure because I have never heard of it.'* or any other alternative. If a student dominates the group, the teacher intervenes and makes sure that all members contribute.

If groups finish early, the teacher adds a second round: students choose one less-known place and explain why a teenager might want to visit it.

Students

Students work in groups and take turns to speak about the destination cards. The group classifies the cards, gives a reason and listens to the other group members.

Possible responses include:

- *I think this is Cabo Polonio, it is famous because many people know it.*
- *I am not sure about this place because I have never heard of it.*
- *A teenager might like it because you can go hiking.*
- *It looks adventurous.*

Purpose of the stage: Round Robin distributes participation and establishes from the beginning that project work requires every student's contribution.

28–34 minutes — What makes a place worth discovering?

Teacher

The teacher brings the class together and writes *WHAT MAKES A PLACE UNFORGETTABLE?* Students first think individually for approximately 30 seconds and then discuss the question with a partner.

- *Why do some places become famous?*
- *Does a place have to be famous to be worth visiting?*
- *What makes a place interesting for teenagers?*
- *What can a place offer besides beautiful scenery?*

As students contribute, the teacher keeps a record of their ideas on the board. The teacher then reveals the broader project challenge, but avoids giving a long explanation of every future stage.

“Over the next six weeks, you are going to become tourism researchers, writers, speakers and podcast producers. Your team will eventually choose a lesser-known Uruguayan destination and create a tourism podcast for an audience. What hidden places in Uruguay should teenagers discover?”

Students

Students think, discuss and contribute ideas about what makes a place memorable or worth visiting. They begin to understand that fame is not the only criterion for value or interest, and they listen to the project challenge.

Purpose of the stage: this discussion gives conceptual meaning to the project and connects students' emerging ideas to the authentic final product.

34–38 minutes — My Hidden Uruguay

Teacher

The teacher writes *I would like to investigate _____ because _____* and asks students to choose one place they would personally like to know more about.

Additional support may include:

I would like to know more about...

I am curious about...

I think teenagers might like... because...

Several students are invited to share. The teacher locates some of the destinations on the map and responds positively to unfamiliar suggestions. The teacher explicitly explains that students are not yet choosing final team destinations; they are collecting possibilities.

Students

Students complete the sentence individually, share selected ideas orally and listen to classmates' suggestions. They may discover destinations they had not previously considered.

Purpose of the stage: students make a personal connection with the project without prematurely fixing the final destination choice.

38–40 minutes — Exit Ticket: From curiosity to inquiry

Teacher

The teacher distributes a small paper slip or digital exit ticket. The task is completed individually so that the teacher obtains evidence from every student.

1. *One place in Uruguay I would like tourists or students to discover is _____.*

2. *One thing I want to know about this place is _____.*

Your second sentence is especially important. A good project begins with a good question.

Students are given approximately 90 seconds to complete both prompts. The teacher projects the digital board or collects the tickets before students leave. After class, the questions can be grouped into recurring themes such as location, activities, transport, history, culture, nature or accessibility.

Students

Students independently complete both prompts and post/hand the ticket to the teacher before leaving.

Possible responses include:

- *One place is Pueblo Edén. I want to know what you can do there.*

- *One place is Valle del Lunarejo. I want to know what animals live there.*

Purpose of the stage: the exit ticket transforms general curiosity into an individual inquiry question and gives the teacher diagnostic information for future lessons.

7. Formative assessment

This is primarily a diagnostic/launch lesson. The teacher is not looking for grammatical perfection. The purpose of assessment is to identify students' starting points and decide what support will be needed next.

- Can the student describe something they observe?
- Can the student distinguish observation from interpretation?
- Can the student express an opinion?
- Can the student formulate a question?
- Can the student participate in structured interaction?

The exit ticket is particularly valuable because it provides individual evidence while much of the lesson involves pair and group interaction.

8. Differentiation and scaffolding

For students who need more support

- Provide visual vocabulary rather than a word-only list.
- Keep sentence frames visible throughout the lesson.
- Allow partner rehearsal before whole-class speaking.
- Accept one-word observations initially and gradually expand them into sentences.
- Group students strategically so that support does not become one student answering for another.

For students ready for greater challenge

- Ask for two reasons instead of one.
- Ask students to compare two destinations.
- Require an evidence-based interpretation using because.
- Ask for a more specific, researchable question.
- Ask students to explain why a destination may appeal to a particular teenage audience.

9. Project Zero and Kagan: pedagogical purpose

See-Think-Wonder

The routine should function as a thinking structure, not simply as three headings on a worksheet. The teacher protects the sequence from observation to interpretation to questioning. The key question is, 'What makes you think that?' so students learn to support their ideas with arguments. WONDER questions should be recorded because they can later become research questions.

Round Robin

The purpose of Round Robin is not simply to make students take turns. It establishes shared participation and shared responsibility from the beginning of the project. Every student contributes before anyone contributes a second time. The teacher should monitor whether this actually distributes participation rather than allowing confident students to speak for others.

10. Continuity with Lesson 2

The lesson should end with students feeling that they have started a process rather than completed an isolated lesson. The teacher should keep the students' WONDER questions, the exit tickets, the list of possible destinations and the vocabulary that emerged during the lesson.

11. Teacher reflection after the lesson

- Which destinations generated the most curiosity?
- Which vocabulary was already available and which was missing?
- Did students understand the difference between SEE and THINK?
- Were students able to justify an opinion with because?
- Did Round Robin genuinely distribute participation?
- Which exit-ticket questions could become useful research questions?
- Which students may need additional language scaffolding in Lesson 2?