

Electric vehicles evs montevideo

The Tesla Model 3 parked at AutoImport, a car dealership in the seaside port of Punta del Este, Uruguay, appeared flawless, except for one detail: The driver's touch screen was set to China Standard Time.

"It's the local time and weather from the place it comes from," Ramiro Duer, owner of AutoImport, told Rest of World. "China is 11 hours ahead."

Duer has been importing Teslas to Uruguay for a year, undertaking a complex process that starts in China -- where half of all Teslas are manufactured. His business underscores how people in countries where Elon Musk's company does not have an official presence have found creative ways to get their hands on the electric vehicle. The China time zone, weather settings, and foreign-language maps on the dozens of Teslas in Uruguay -- a small South American nation of 3.4 million -- serve as a constant reminder of the lengthy journeys the vehicles undertook to get to its shores.

"Customers are happy with these cars," said Duer. "Families, single people, even elderly -- one of our clients is 86 years old."

Uruguay, a small country with a robust public charging network, tax cuts for EVs, and minimal bureaucratic hurdles for car imports, has become a natural landing pad for Teslas.

The country has been transitioning to green mobility for over a decade. More than 6,500 EVs were imported between 2020 and the first half of 2024, or 191 cars per every 100,000 inhabitants, according to a public information request by Rest of World.

Every year, between 55,000 and 60,000 cars are sold in Uruguay, Christian Nieves, national director of energy at the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining, told Rest of World. "Now, 7% of those cars are EVs but we hope to reach 10% soon," he said.

UTE, Uruguay's government-owned energy company, has invested more than \$2 million in charging infrastructure, and plans to make at least one charger available every 50 kilometers (around 30 miles) -- or 370 across the country -- by the end of 2024. Nearly 8,200 Uruguayans have signed up with UTE to charge their vehicles, Federico Ragni, UTE's director of development and electric mobility deployment, told Rest of World.

Emmanuel Romano, an industrial engineer living in Paso de los Toros, in central Uruguay, said he owns one of the three EVs in the town of 13,000 people. He bought the Tesla from AutoImport and usually stops to charge it at a public charger when he drives to the capital Montevideo, around 270 kilometers away.

Romano's neighbors, particularly children, look at his Tesla with fascination. "I don't like attention, but it sparks interest," he told Rest of World. "It's a novelty."

"Uruguay has always been ahead of the curve [in South America]," Mart?n Canabal, an Uruguayan industrial engineer, told Rest of World. In 2022, he bought a Tesla in San Francisco, where he lived at the time, and drove it from Alaska to South America when he moved back home. He's a fan of Elon Musk, who he believes is "changing the world."

According to Uruguay XXI, the government agency in charge of promoting exports and investments, Uruguay has imported nearly 80 Teslas between 2020 and July 2024 -- of which 50 are from the U.S. The number might be higher: AutoImport alone has imported at least 80 Teslas in the past year. Drawn by lower costs, Duer has sourced his fleet from China. "Their prices are absolutely competitive," he said.

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