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Home Life in Uruguay

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WOULDN'T it seem odd to take your daily exercise by walking around the block on the tops of houses? Yet this is a feasible thing in Uruguay, South America.

In Uruguay we find homes quite unlike our American domiciles. They are all one story habitations and are spread out over a large area. Each has a flat roof, hence one may step onto one's neighbor's roof from his own and continue his stroll around the block on top of the houses.

All of the houses are stone or brick structure, so fires are very rare. The houses are built right up to the street, and one may step out of his front door onto the main sidewalk. The buildings all carry out the idea of bismetric balance, most of them having a door in the center with French windows on either side, which open into balconies.

These balconies are quite a romantic feature of a Spanish home. It is a convention in Uruguay that the Spanish lad never enters his sweetheart's home before they are engaged. So the Spanish lover must do his wooing outside the house, the girl being no nearer than the balcony. Thus, many a moonlight night finds a suitor leaning against the balcony which separates him from his lady love.

A small, tile-floored hall leads from the front door into the interior of the house. A large living room is usually situated in the front of the house, and the patio is in the center of the home. This patio serves as a kind of a garden. It is a large room with a tile floor and is entirely filled with potted plants, including ferns, flowers and flowering shrubs. A movable glass roof, called a claravoya, covers this room and serves as a protection against storms, at the same time allowing the warm sun rays to enter. The patio is a recreation room for the whole family. It is an ideal place, in fact, about the only place, for the kiddies to play. Here the family gathers together to read, study or to enjoy the flowers, birds or sunshine. Sometimes there is a small fruit garden at the back of the house which supplies the family with fresh fruit. High stone walls separate one's garden from his neighbor's, so it is not possible to climb over.

The rooms in Uruguay homes are all large, with very high ceilings, which makes them exceedingly difficult to heat, for they have no furnaces. Also, fireplaces are unknown. They rely on the heat from the sun, which comes in through the patio or the windows in the front of the house. As there are usually several rooms which do not open off from the patio, and hence have no light in them, heating is a difficult matter. There is much dampness, especially in the winter. The natives solve the problem by putting on more clothes, but foreigners prefer to use small electric heaters. How many of our American housewives would enjoy getting meals bundled up in sweaters and coats?

Being a housewife in Uruguay is a much more tiring task than in our own country. The one story houses necessitate having the nine or more rooms spread over a large area, and the housewife, in going from one part of the house to another, must waste a great many steps. Even the garbage must be carried from the kitchen through the whole length of the house, to be collected at the front door.

In some estates the kitchens are not connected to the houses at all, but are separate structures behind the house proper. This makes it necessary to carry the cooked food through the open and into the house to be served. This seemingly makes no great difference to the Spanish people for they pay little attention to sanitation.

Some gas is used for cooking, but most of the kitchens are equipped with charcoal stoves. There is no running water. The people dislike to use warm water of any kind, even to wash dishes or mop floors.

Due to the unhandy arrangement of the house, it is necessary to have one or more servants, and the natives do not consider one very high in the social scale unless he has at least two servants. The number of maids, of course, depends on the size of the family and its financial standing.

The servants are, as a rule, quite satisfactory, even though they receive relatively low wages, ranging from twelve to twenty dollars per month, depending on their previous experience. A national law requires that they have twenty-four hours off each week. The laundry work is usually sent out, although sometimes it is done in the home and hung on lines on the roof to bleach and dry.

It is sometimes rather difficult to get servants who are thorough in their cleaning processes. There are usually about nine rooms to dust and clean. The bedrooms have no closets, but contain large, old-fashioned wardrobes, which are quite nice in design. It is rather interesting to note that there is a piano in every house.

In Uruguay, the bathtub is considered personal property and is moved from house to house with its owner. Occasionally, one can persuade the last occupant of the house to leave his tub for the new tenant, but not often. There is no running water and all hot water used must be heated by a charcoal heater in the bathroom.

In South America, the servant girl does all the marketing for the kitchen in the line of staple goods. The mistress of the house never goes to the store. The fresh fruits, vegetables and meats are brought to the door each morning by peddlers. The foods are relatively cheap, so people don't bother to have vegetable gardens.

We may consider these Uruguay homes rather unusual in many respects, but they are real homes and shelter many happy people. Undoubtedly they consider American homes peculiar in many ways, too, yet "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home."

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Magic Mending

I like to go to bed and sleep
Till waked by Mr. Sun,
So that my busy little cells
Can get their mending done.

My mother darns the stockings
I wear out at my play,
But even she can't mend the cells
I wear out every day.

Yet skillful little weavers
Repair them in the night,
I'm weary when I go to bed,
I wake up fresh and bright.

And so I like to sleep and sleep
Till waked by Mr. Sun,
So that my busy little cells
Can get their mending done.

Rispa Goff Howell