

After page 14

the little one, but even that came with a Uruguayan twist. The spaghetti was distinctly eggy and yellow, akin to oriental egg noodles.

Thetallerinesor Uruguayan noodles we had at Bar Hispano the night before were similar. This was another restaurant close to our hotel, and a chance discovery. As I walked past this joint on my initial exploration of the neighbourhood, I thought to myself, "I bet this place serves up great food." Not because it looked fancy, in fact it was no frills and unpretentious, but there was something about the fading 50's styled signhanging over the door and the locals gathered around the tables, tucking into giant portions of food. It's where we were introduced to the artery-clogging delights of milanesa con papas (essentially a thin, breaded cutlet and chips, topped with a fried egg) and where the staff doted on my little boy and served up extra large helpings of meringue pies.

Rambling down La Rambla

In an attempt to walk off all the food we'd been having, we made our way towards La Rambla, the seaside promenade that hugs the coast for over 30

kilometres, making it the longest continuous pavement in the world! Suffice to say we didn't walk its entire length, but what little we did helped paint a picture of the lives of everyday Uruguayans.

Groups of avid anglers sat patiently upon rocky piers, their fishing poles bobbing up and down as they huddled into their coats, sipping mate. Teenagers gossiped upon the seawall, taking selfies as giant cargo ships dominated the horizon behind them. Cyclists raced past families out on their afternoon stroll, a mate case, a quintessentially Uruguayan accessory slung from their shoulders.

Bidding adieu

Accustomed to flying in and out of countries or at most, driving through land borders, our trip back to Buenos Aires deemed worth reporting as we were taking the ferry back. The Buquebus ferry felt more like a floating hotel rather than a mode of transport. A grand staircase, befitting a scene from the *Titanic*, rose up to the upper floor, flanked on both sides by glass encased lifts. Beyond stretched a well-stocked duty-free shopping zone that would put most city airports to shame. Porters were at hand to help with luggage; the staff, unfailingly polite, held doors open



Plaza Independencia

and got up off their seats to make way for the aimless wanderings of a toddler. A well-kitted play area was at hand to keep the children occupied. In business class you could stretch out in plush, reclining seats. It's the sort of luxury you'd expect on the overnight ferries plying the Mediterranean, but unwarranted for a two-hour journey, in my opinion—hence my surprise at the lavish nature of the vessel. As the ferry sliced across the waves, cutting a wide, frothy arc through the sea, I noted the one thing that made it all that bit more surreal: an entire ferry load of people was shuffling around the lush, carpeted floors, sipping wine and lounging over the banisters, in disposable shoe covers, handed to us upon boarding. Suddenly it felt more like a scene from *Contagion*, rather than from the *Titanic*.

Next stop

Iguazu Falls, Argentina/Brazil!

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Ciudad Vieja

BURN THE WATCHTOWER

After page 16

"liberate" parts of Syria. The nightmare that is Erdogan hasn't stopped the EU repeating its mistakes across Africa. The EU is increasingly involved with authoritarian regimes that act either as origin countries for migrants, or transit zones. The level of unsavoury vary from Morocco's almost urbane repressiveness to Egypt's strategic powerplays to Sudan and Eritrea. Eritrea is a paranoid fascist nightmare dressed in a flag — it has indefinite conscription, and snipers at the border whose job is to shoot people trying to leave. Sudan is an internationally condemned rogue state — but if Libya can be partnered with...

The EU's aid in development and

security cooperation gives increased clout to each of these countries to pursue their individual, suspect agendas. Morocco, for example, hopes to use the EU's migration paranoia as leverage to gain international legitimacy in its seizure of the Western Sahara. Sudan, meanwhile, has the simple — supposedly unthinkable — goal of moving away from its pariah status. This is a country on the US terror list. Whether we agree that Sudan deserves to be ostracised or not, the EU appears willing to normalise relations with the country just to reduce migration.

Not only is this a ridiculous betrayal of the EU's self-image as the liberal heart of the world (now that the USA is out of that game), it's also dumb. The EU is trading short term reductions in refugee

flows for support to repressive regimes — furthering the possibility of deteriorating social conditions in its partner states, the sort of conditions people try to flee from. Some refugees now, or more refugees later?

It's no secret that authoritarian leaders in the West have been using the fear of refugees to bolster their base and create increasingly repressive states. This same fear of the black and the brown body gives authoritarian leaders in transit and origin countries power as well — pay us, help us, and we'll stop these people reaching your shores. The EU is so paranoid of disintegrating and losing to the populists within its own borders, they are willing to cut devil deals with those outside.

It's easy to forget that a refugee is

someone, fundamentally, in search of a safe haven. The politics of refugees should be how best to provide them with the aid they need. We have learned many depressing truths about politics this decade, but here is possibly the barest and most disgusting lesson — the disposed don't matter, except as bargaining chips, except as tools.

It seems that only authoritarians want refugees around. They come in so handy.

*With thanks to Niki Papadogiannakis and Marie Gemarius De Kepper for their advice on this article. The writer is an artist and an MA candidate in International Migration at the University of Kent. Read more of this sort of thing in *Disconnect: Collected Short Fiction*.*