



Welcome to Venezuela

"I had such an awesome time and made such great friends that that time just flew by. By the time that I left I was speaking Spanish like a native, and now I'm confident enough to speak the language to anybody!"

Offering the most varied and striking terrain of almost any South American country, come to gorgeous Venezuela to see the Andes shrouded in snow, the tantalising Caribbean beaches where jungle tumbles down to the shore, the indescribable depths of the endless Amazon jungle, and the eerie beauty of Gran Sabana with its flat topped mountains. Experience Latin American fiesta spirit as you dance the night away in one of Venezuela's traditional live music bars, sample outstanding fresh fish as you watch the Caribbean sunset, spot river dolphins, caimans, or even big cats near the Rio Orinoco – all this and more awaits you in this irresistible destination!

Know your History

Pre-Columbian

In ancient times, Venezuela was paradise for the Indians who lived on its beaches, in its tropical forests, and on the gentle grassland of the llanos. There were three main groups: the Carib, Arawak, and the Chibcha. They lived in small groups and all of them practiced some degree of farming; the land, however, was bountiful enough so that this was not always a necessity. They could easily hunt, fish for, and gather their food. The most advanced of the three were the Chibcha who lived on the eastern slopes of the Andes. Though they never developed large cities, their agricultural skill was formidable: they terraced parts of the Andes and built sophisticated irrigation channels to water their crops.

Colonisation

Christopher Columbus was the first European to visit Venezuela. He came in 1498 during his third voyage to the New World and landed on the Peninsula de Paria. Following the coast, he explored the Rio Orinoco Delta and concluded that he had found much more than another Caribbean island. More explorers came a year later, and it was Alonso de Ojeda who gave the country its name. Arriving at Lake Maracaibo, he admired the stilted houses that the Indians had built above the lake and called the place Venezuela – "Little Venice". A year after that the Spanish established their first settlement, Nueva Cadiz, which was later destroyed by a tsunami. Early colonisation in Venezuela was much less rampant than it was in other parts of South America and the colony was ruled with a loose hand from Bogota. It was much less important to the Spanish than the mineral-producing colonies of western South America, but Venezuela would later surprise the world when massive oil reserves would be discovered.

Independence

Venezuela may have been a quiet outpost on the edge of the Spanish Empire but it gave birth to the man who would one day turn that empire on its head: Simon Bolivar. With the help of British Venezuela Plaza Bolivar mercenaries, Bolivar and his followers campaigned against the Spanish tirelessly, marching across the Andes and liberating Colombia in 1819, Venezuela in 1821, and Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia in 1825. Much of his army was composed of native Venezuelans. Independence did not prove easy for the new nation. Civil strife, wars, and dictatorships raged in the country well into the next century. Though some dictators sought real reform, most milked their positions for personal gain. Border disputes with the British colony of Guyana erupted in the 1840s, and although they never boiled over into full-fledged warfare, Venezuela still disputes the border to this day.

1900s

In the early 1900s, the conflict-ridden nation finally began to get on its economic feet with the discovery of oil, and by the 1920s, Venezuela was beginning to reap the benefits. Unfortunately, most of the wealth remained with the ruling class and the plague of dictators continued until 1947 when Romulo Betancourt led a popular revolt and rewrote the constitution. The first president-elect in Venezuela's history took office the same year, the novelist Romulo Gallegos. Unfortunately, he was ousted by another dictator and the country did not experience a non-violent presidential succession until 1963. For the next 25 years, things went comparatively well. An oil boom in the mid-1970s saw enormous wealth pour into the country, though, as always, the vast lower class benefited little. Oil prices dropped in the late 80s and once again the country was thrown into crisis. Riots swept through Caracas and were violently repressed, and two coup attempts took place in 1992.

2000 – Present

In 2005, most of the political opposition boycotted the elections, meaning Hugo Chávez of the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) took power. Once in power, the MVR voted to merge itself with the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, and in 2000 and 2007, the National Assembly voted for Chávez to have the right to rule by decree. These lasted many months, despite most rulings of this nature lasting a short time. Chávez has also aligned himself with other right-wing South American countries – Bolivia, Argentina and Honduras included. Alongside all this, the nation's stability and future are uncertain.

Money Talks

Venezuela's economy is based, for the most part, on petroleum. The petroleum sector accounts for around a third of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), roughly 80% of export earnings, and over half of government operating revenues. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Venezuela had the strongest economy in South America, attracting many immigrants. However, during the collapse of oil prices during the 1980s meant the economy contracted. In 2007, the economy grew by 9% thanks to the rising oil prices and government expenditures. During the presidency of Hugo Chávez, the percentage of people below the poverty line has decreased from 48.1% in 2002 to 30.2% in 2006.

Exports

The majority of Venezuela's exports are: steel, aluminium, transport equipment, textiles, apparel, beverages, and foodstuffs. Agriculture only accounts for around 3% of GDP, 10% of the workforce,

but around a quarter of Venezuela's land mass. From the agricultural sector, it exports rice, corn, fish, tropical fruit, coffee, beef, and pork, but it is not self-sufficient in most areas of agriculture – Venezuela imports around two thirds of its food needs. The majority of this comes from the US (around one third of imports), including wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, animal fats, and vegetable oils.

Money

The national currency of Venezuela is the Bolívar fuerte (VEF), which came into circulation in 2008. Although ATMs are generally widespread in towns and cities, it is harder to withdraw money in the more rural areas. Traveller's cheques are best banked in the cities before leaving for the more isolated regions, and they may incur a small charge.

Get Culture Savvy

Venezuelan culture is a mixture of three main cultures: European (Italian and Spanish), African and indigenous. The indigenous influence is found mostly in the country's cuisine (such as arepas), in the vocabulary and in many place names. The capital of Caracas is named after the tribe of indigenous people that lived in the valley where the city now stands. The Italian and Spanish influence was of course the heaviest, and in particular the influence of the regions of Andalucía and Extremadura from which most of the colonial people came. Examples of the Spanish and Italian influence is easily found in the religion, language, architecture, music, food (pasticho, fabada asturiana, fideos napolitanos) and other aspects of Venezuelan culture. Slaves brought to work in colonial Venezuela from Africa also made significant contributions to the country's culture, particularly in music, as well as food, religion and language.

Influences

Venezuela was also enriched by other European cultures during the 19th Century, especially the French. Most recently, the large cities and oil-rich regions saw a large influx of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese immigrants, alongside American influences. Adding to the already complex cultural landscape, the fact that baseball (competing with soccer) is the country's national sport demonstrates that the country's culture has been particularly influenced by the USA.

Arguably, class difference is more important than racial difference in Venezuela, though class is also heavily inflected by race. Tropical and Afro-Venezuelan rhythms are enjoyed in all social circles, whenever there is a fiesta, wedding, quinceañera (15th birthday) party or other festive occasion. A significant part of the population from all social classes listens to pop music, including American pop. Heavy metal lovers are a minority. The difference between urban and rural areas is also important, as it is elsewhere in the world. Curiously, youngsters from low income families are the keenest on brand name clothes while middle class ones tend to give less importance to the labels.

Food

Due to its position in the world, its diversity of industrial resources and the cultural multiplicity of the Venezuelan people, Venezuelan cuisine often varies greatly from one region to another but its cuisine, traditional as well as modern, has strong ties to its European ancestry (Italian, Spanish, and French). The most common foods by region can be broadly classified as follows:

Eastern states (Oriente), south-eastern states (Guayana) and northern states

(Caribe)

A wide gamut of fresh- and saltwater fish, seafood and crustaceans; tubers such as potato and yam; cereals such as corn, rice and pasta (Venezuelans are the second biggest pasta consumers in the world after Italy); beef – especially in the southern Llanos, where several sorts of soft, white cheese are also produced (such as guayanés, de mano and crineja); fresh vegetables and fruit (lettuce, tomatoes, plantains).

Western states (Occidente)

Common meats include goat (usually prepared with tomato) and rabbit; extensive use of plantain and a variety of cheeses. Dishes are influenced by the local tribes as well as by Colombian cuisine.

Central region

Mainly poultry, beef, pork, fish (stewed or boiled), pasta (a predominant staple), rice, and salads. Influences from Europe (Italy in particular) as well as from other Venezuelan regions is readily noticeable.

Llanos

Beef and game (deer, chigüire, lapa, morrocoy, etc.), mostly grilled or roasted; corn (in the form of cachapas), cheese and other milk derivatives.

Andean region

Potatoes and other tubers, wheat; beef, lamb and chicken; not much fish as the region doesn't have a coastal line – the exception being trout, which is raised on fish farms. Dishes show European and native Andean peoples' influences.

Potatoes, tomatoes, onions, lettuce, aubergines, squashes and courgettes (commonly called calabazines) are common sides to the Venezuelan diet.

Religion

Roman Catholicism is by far the dominant religion in Venezuela, and has been adopted by most indigenous people – only those living in isolated regions still practice their ancient tribal beliefs. The Protestant church has a significant presence, and recently has been gaining some ground, attracting adherents from the Catholic Church. An unusual and obscure pantheistic sect, known as the Cult of María Lionza, exists in the northwest and combines pre-Hispanic indigenous creeds, African voodoo and Christian religious practices.

Art & Literature

As far as Venezuelan literature is concerned, it started developing during the days of colonial subjugation. Different types of poetry and archives formed the basis of the literature during the 1700s. The 18th Century opened a new chapter of Venezuelan literature. Slowly, a large number of eminent poets, authors emerged in the country such as Teresa de la Parra and Arturo Uslar Pietri.

The music of Venezuela originated after the country won its independence from the Spaniards. The music of Venezuela was the product of intermingling of the African, Spanish and native music. Gaita is one of the important traditional music styles of the country and is mainly performed during the

festival seasons. Joropo is the national dance of Venezuela although salsa is one of the most popular dance forms in this country. Folk music of Venezuela also forms an important part of Venezuelan culture.

Learn the Lingo

We recommend the Lonely Planet's Latin-American Spanish phrasebook to bring along with you to Venezuela. The Spanish spoken in Spain is slightly different from the Spanish spoken in Venezuela. People in Venezuela for example, do not pronounce the letter S at the end of a word.

Remember:

The letters **LL** together are pronounced as **Y**

The letter **J** is always pronounced as **H**

The letter **V** is soft, so pronounce it as **B**

ENGLISH	SPANISH	ENGLISH	SPANISH
Greetings		Numbers	
Hi	Hola	1	Uno
Goodbye	Adios	2	Dos
Pleased to meet you!	Mucho gusto!	3	Très
How are you?	Como estas?	4	Cuatro
Good morning	Buenos días	5	Cinco
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes	6	Seis
Good evening/night	Buenas noches	7	Siete
8	Ocho		
About Yourself		9	Nueve
My name is...	Me llamo...	10	Diez
I am from England	Soy de Inglaterra	11	Once
I don't speak Spanish	No hablo Español	12	Doce
I don't understand	No entiendo	13	Trece
What's your name?	¿Cómo se llama usted?	14	Catorce
15	Quince		
In the Shop		16	Dieciséis
I would like.../I want...	Quiero	17	Diecisiete
How much does it cost?	Cuánto vale?	18	Dieciocho
Please	Por favour	19	Diecinueve
Thank you (very much)	(Muchas) gracias	20	Veinte
Yes	Sí	100	Cien
No	No	500	Quinientos
1000	Mil		
In the Restaurant			
Chicken	Pollo		

Vegetables	Vegetales	
Beef	Res	
Meat	Carne	
Cheese	Queso	
Fish	Pescado	
Tomato sauce	Salsa de tomate	
Beer	Cerveza	
I am a vegetarian	Soy vegetariano	

Lay of the Land

Venezuela occupies most of the northern coast of South America on the Caribbean Sea. It is bordered by Colombia to the west, Guyana to the east, and Brazil to the south. Mountain systems break Venezuela into four distinct areas: the Maracaibo lowlands, the mountainous region in the north and northwest, the Orinoco basin, with the Llanos (vast grass-covered plains) on its northern border and great forest areas in the south and southeast and the Guiana Highlands, south of the Orinoco, accounting for nearly half the national territory.

What's the Weather like?

Although the country lies wholly within the tropics, its climate varies from tropical humid to alpine, depending on the elevation, topography, and the direction and intensity of prevailing winds. Seasonal variations are marked less by temperature than by rainfall. Most of the country has a distinct rainy season; the rainy period (May through November) is commonly referred to as winter and the remainder of the year as summer.

Average yearly rainfall amounts in the lowlands and plains range from a semiarid 430 mm in the western part of the Caribbean coastal areas to around 1,000 mm in the Orinoco Delta. Rainfall in mountainous areas varies considerably; sheltered valleys receive little rain, but slopes exposed to the northeast trade winds experience heavy rainfall. Caracas averages 750 mm of precipitation annually, more than half of it falling from June through August.

Biodiversity

Around half of Venezuela's 890,000 km² is forested. Almost all of these forests are south of the Orinoco River in the Guayana region – this region includes the states of Delta Amacuro, Bolívar and Amazonas. Over 80% of Venezuela's indigenous groups live in the Guayana region, and the forests provide essential economic, social and ecological services. These forests also mean that Venezuela ranks in the top 20 countries in the world for its number of endemic plants, amphibians, birds and reptiles.

North of the Orinoco River, around the major population centres, 80% of the estimated deforestation has occurred in the last 40 years. In the past, the urbanisation of the north benefited Guayana's forests as it concentrated the majority of the population away from the region. However, because of the decline in oil prices in the 1980s and the recent global economic crisis, pressure on the forests has increased. There has been a mass migration of people from the northern cities to seek new opportunities in the Guayana region and its forests. As well as this, there is increased emphasis on

developing the southern half of the country for gold and diamond mining. Thankfully, there is not much of a logging market as an extra threat to the forests – less than 1% of Venezuela's GDP comes from logging.

Flora

Venezuela boasts a huge array of flora – from cacti in the desert to epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants) in the rainforest. Several thousand species of orchid bloom throughout the year across the country, and a large variety of fruiting trees are also populous in Venezuela. Species of flower growing on the flat topped mountains of the Gran Sabana are often endemic to a single plateau.

The spread of natural vegetation is profoundly varied in each of the zones – the rainforests in the lower Maracaibo Basin house tropical flowers and the Llanos is predominantly grasslands. The areas that receive little annual rainfall are dominated by xerophytes (a plant able to survive with little available water, such as the cactus) and mimosa (an evergreen tree); the tierra templada (subtropical zone) was originally covered by forest, but has now become Venezuela's principle agricultural region, and the temperate region's wild vegetation tends to be sparse and scrubby.

Much of Venezuela's flora is closely associated with traditions and hold cultural significance. The moriche palm, for example, grows in the swamps of the Orinoco delta and is known as the "tree of life" by the Warao Indians. The tree provides essential materials for every day food and materials and thus is considered in high regard.

Fauna

Venezuela has a large number of both endemic and rare species of animal – including the jaguar, puma, capybara, manatee, howler monkey, sloth, and two species of freshwater dolphin. It is also home to the rarest otter in the world, the Giant Otter, or "water-wolf". The country's bird population consists of over 1,200 species – including the condor, Hoatzin (guacharaca), flamingo, pelican, several varieties of parrot, macaw (guacamayo), and Toucan as well as a rare nocturnal species called the Oilbird (guacharo). Reptiles include five species of caiman, the Common Iguana, rattlesnake, boa and the Anaconda – the largest snake in the world.

Thanks to their relative isolation from human disturbances, Venezuela has one of the most diverse ranges of animals in the world. The forests are home to tapirs, sloths, anteaters, a variety of monkey, and tropical birds such as the Cacique, Crested Coquette, heron, Umbrella Bird, Manakin, Cock-of-the-Rock, parrot, macaw, and Aigrette. In the mountains, the dominant species include puma, Margay, Vampire Bats and deer, whilst semi-wild horses, donkeys and cattle roam the plains, and over 32 species of eagle soar above. Venezuela's rich marine habitats mean an abundance of pelican, heron, flamingo and Muscovy duck. Reptiles include the Coral Snake, Bushmaster and crocodile (mostly found in the lowland rivers). There is also a vast array of fish, shellfish, tortoises and Sand Tortoises.

Good Books

Guidebooks

- Latin American Spanish Phrasebook, 2003
- Venezuela (Lonely Planet Country Guide). Thomas Kohnstamm et al & Jens Porup

- Culture Shock! Venezuela. Kitt Baguley

Teaching Guides

- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Elementary Students of English 2nd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 9780521529327
- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Students of English 3rd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 9780521532891
- Lessons from Nothing: Activities for Language Teaching with Limited Time and Resources (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers). Bruce Marsland. Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN 9780521627658
- Games for Children (Resource Books for Teachers). Gordon Lewis & Gunther Benson. Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 9780194372244
- Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching 2nd Edition. Diane Larsen-Freeman. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 9780194355742

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