

# The Central North



Though Venezuela's Central North dangles no iconic traveler's mecca (like Angel Falls) and no transcendent nomadic rites of passage (like Roraima), this dense area – all within an earshot of Caracas – is rife with both aquatic and earthly delights and boasts one of the continent's most stunning and unforgettable landscapes: the magical Archipiélago Los Roques.

Located about 175km off the coast, this otherworldly collection of islands and cays, a national marine park, offers some of the most glorious beaches and underwater wildlife you'll ever see anywhere, a dazzling don't-miss for anyone in the country. Though honeymooners, sport fishers, divers and sun-and-sand addicts flock to its shores year-round, it remains advantageously off the radar, helping to maintain its rustic appeal.

Back on land, six national parks carpet the landscape in all directions from Caracas. Most notably is Parque Nacional Henri Pittier, where the endearing towns of Choroní and Puerto Colombia still retain their colonial feel, while the enticing beaches and coves along the park's coast (some accessible only by boat) attract heaps of *venezolanos* and backpackers. Here too are some of the country's best festivals, heavily influenced by Afro-Venezuelan culture – the occasional spontaneous party and drum session might pop up when you least expect it. Amid the mainland's comely hills and valleys are several hidden gems, easily reached on day trips from Caracas. The pretty 19th-century German town of Colonia Tovar, which lies scattered along the upper reaches of a mountainside, is an Alpine oasis, seemingly straight out of the Black Forest. The world's second-hottest thermal waters are toward the west at Las Trincheras, a rustic mini-resort that can make for a blistering good time. And don't forget the important battlefield of Carabobo – Venezuelans certainly never will – where national hero Simón Bolívar clinched Venezuelan independence, helping birth the modern-day countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Bolivia.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Immerse yourself in Venezuela's aquatic Eden, the stunningly beautiful **Archipiélago Los Roques** (p86)
- Walk off the hearty sausages in the German-themed town of **Colonia Tovar** (p100)
- Take in a fat dose of Venezuelan patriotism at **Campo Carabobo** (p111)
- Beach-hop the days away in idyllic **Parque Nacional Henri Pittier** (p101)
- Scorch off a skin layer in the piping-hot springs of **Las Trincheras** (p112)



