

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotels are not hard to come by in Venezuela and there are budget and midrange options in most towns (though Caracas is conspicuously short on quality budget accommodations). Popular tourist areas like Isla de Margarita and Canaima can become quite full on major holidays, but it is almost always possible to find a vacant room. Campgrounds are rare, but camping on the beach is popular – just be cautious and don't leave your tent unattended. Venezuela has almost no youth hostels.

Places to stay can legally charge a 16% VAT (value-added tax) on top of the room price, though few budget hotels or *posadas* (small, family-run guesthouses) actually do it. The

PRACTICALITIES

- Venezuela uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electrical current is 110V, 60 cycles AC throughout the country. Plugs are the US type (with two flat prongs).
- The two leading Caracas newspapers, *El Universal* and *El Nacional*, have country-wide distribution; both have reasonable coverage of national and international affairs.
- Many hotels have cable TV and English-language stations.
- Radio Nacional de Venezuela (RNV) is the government-operated national radio station, heard on several dials throughout the country. The news-only Radio Caracas Radio (RCR; 750am) is perhaps the most storied national station, at odds with the government on and off throughout the years.

prices listed in this book have included this tax already. Most top-end hotels will accept payment by credit card, but this is rarely an option in budget places so make sure you have cash.

Hotels in the popular holiday destinations increase their rates during holiday periods (see p271). On the other hand, in the slow season it's possible to bargain, both in the budget and five-star hotels.

Budget

In this book, budget category generally covers places where a double room costs about BsF150 or less (this rises to about BsF200 in areas like Caracas and Gran Roque). Budget places to stay have a variety of names, such as *hotel*, *residencia*, *hospedaje*, *posada* and *pensión*. The last two are meant to be small, family-run guesthouses as well. Budget countryside *campamentos* (literally 'camps') can be anything from a rustic shelter with a few hammocks to private rooms and bathrooms.

Budget hotels tend to be grouped together in certain areas, usually around the market

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and bus terminal and in the backstreets of the city center. Most of the cheapies have a private bathroom, which includes a toilet and shower. Venezuelans love TV, so most budget hotels provide TVs in the rooms. As most of the country lies in the lowland tropics, rooms have either a fan or air-con, but there's no hot water.

Few budget hotels have single or twin rooms, but many do have *matrimoniales* (rooms with a double bed intended for couples). This type of room usually costs the same for one person as for two, so traveling as a couple significantly reduces the cost of accommodations. Single travelers are at a disadvantage.

Many cheap hotels double as 'love hotels' (that rent rooms by the hour), and it may be impossible to avoid staying in one from time to time.

Midrange

In this guide, midrange covers the places where double rooms and/or *matrimoniales* generally cost between BsF200 and BsF400.

Many of the midrange hotels nestle conveniently in city centers – you'll often find a few of them in the environs of the local Plaza Bolívar. Some of them can be booked online and paid for by credit card.

Although sometimes lacking in character, midrange hotels usually provide better rooms and more facilities than budget establishments, and virtually every room will have a TV, often with cable. They will almost always have private bathrooms and air-con.

Midrange hotels in tourism destinations with a lower number of accommodations, such as Canaima or Los Roques, or those in Caracas, can have prices on par with top-end hotels in the rest of Venezuela.

Top End

Any hotel with double rooms costing BsF400 or more is considered top end. By and large, top-end hotels are outside downtown areas,

in greener and wealthier residential suburbs, sometimes quite a way from the center.

Standards of these hotels vary, but you can expect central air-con, hot water, a reception desk open around the clock; and proper facilities to safeguard guests' valuables. An increasing number of these hotels have wi-fi/internet connections in rooms or in a business center, and you can usually book these hotels online.

Prices vary greatly and don't always reflect quality. You can normally grab quite a good double with facilities for somewhere between BsF300 and BsF500, except in Caracas and Isla de Margarita, where prices are generally higher. Los Roques also has higher prices, but due to development restrictions (it's in national parkland), there are no five-star accommodations – though the bill might look like it comes from a world-class hotel. Only Caracas and Isla de Margarita, and to a lesser extent Puerto La Cruz and Maracaibo, have a choice of five-star hotels. Sometimes top-end hotels have much lower weekend rates.

ACTIVITIES

Venezuela has much to offer those who love the great outdoors. Mérida (p153), in particular, is known as Venezuela's adventure-sports capital.

Fishing

Los Roques (p88) is renowned as one of the world's finest areas for game fishing, particularly for bonefish. You can also go piranha fishing in the *hatos* (large cattle ranches typical of Los Llanos; p182) and trout fishing in the mountain lakes around Mérida.

Hiking & Trekking

Many of Venezuela's 40-odd national parks provide a choice of walks ranging from easy, well-signposted trails to wild jungle paths. Parque Nacional El Ávila (p82), near Caracas, offers some of the best easy walking trails, while Mérida's surrounds (p155) offer fabulous opportunities for high-mountain trekking. Other hiking possibilities include Parque Nacional Guatopo (p93), Parque Nacional Henri Pittier (p101), Sierra de San Luis (p127), Parque Nacional Península de Paria (p225) and – one of the most adventurous and fascinating treks – to the top of Roraima (p253) and the alternative Auyantepui route (p248) jaunt to the top of Angel Falls (Salto Ángel) via Jimmie Angel's crash site.