



Venezuela

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Best Places to Eat

- Granja Natalia (p982)
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- Madera Fina (p987)
- El Canto de la Ballena (p984)
- La Casa Bistro (p975)

Best Places to Stay

- Posada Casa Sol (p993)
- Tepuy Lodge (p1010)
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- Posada La Casita (p1006)
- Alquimia Paria (p999)

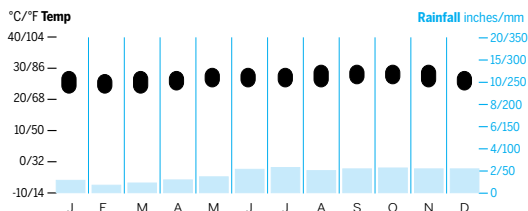
Why Go?

Spectacular Venezuela, home to some of South America's most incredible landscapes, rightly has a terrible image problem at the moment. Hyperinflation has led to a dramatic drop in living standards and issues with the supply of basic goods, while personal safety, particularly in Caracas, is worse than anywhere else on the continent. And yet, visiting Venezuela is both possible and remarkably cheap, with dollars instantly making even backpackers feel wealthy. Safety is a serious concern, of course, but sensibly managed it should be no deterrent to a trip.

The rewards if you do go are, frankly, immense. Few countries in the world have this degree of natural beauty: Andean peaks, Caribbean coastline, idyllic islands, grasslands teeming with wildlife, the steamy Orinoco Delta and the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls. This is true trip-of-a-lifetime stuff, and right now you'll have it pretty much all to yourself.

When to Go

Caracas



May–Nov Salto Ángel and the Gran Sabana waterfalls gush, swollen with rainy-season flow.

Oct–Nov Low-season travel means empty beaches before the Christmas holidays.

Feb/Mar The whole country vacations during Carnival, with special festivals in some cities.

Connections

Caracas is Venezuela's main transportation hub, with buses and flights radiating out to much of the country. There are four border crossings to Colombia, with the coastal Maracaibo to Maicao route being the most heavily used by foreign travelers, followed by the Andean route between San Antonio del Táchira and Cúcuta. Only one main road connects Brazil and Venezuela; it leads from Manaus through Boa Vista in Brazil, to the border crossing at Santa Elena de Uairén and continues to Ciudad Guayana. Brazil can also be accessed via remote southern Amazonas and onward to Manaus along the Río Negro. There is no border crossing between Venezuela and Guyana, you have to transit through Brazil.

ITINERARIES

One Week

One week will barely scratch the surface, but you can get a taste. Make your way to the colonial city of Ciudad Bolívar and explore the historical district along the mighty Río Orinoco. From there, fly to the lagoon-side village of Canaima, skirting the iconic tabletop *tepui* mountains. Take a boat tour to the base of Salto Ángel (Angel Falls), and spend the night in the jungle. Then head to the beach either at Puerto Colombia or Los Roques.

One Month

Take in the Andes and some extreme sports in Mérida, then make your way east across Los Llanos on a wildlife tour. Fly to Canaima and visit Salto Ángel from Ciudad Bolívar and follow up with an outdoor adventure to the Orinoco Delta or a weeklong trek to Roraima. Then get some sand in your shoes as you sunbathe and snorkel in the islands of Los Roques, or along the virgin beaches of the Peninsula de Paria.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Arepa** A grilled corn pancake stuffed with cheese, beef or other fillings. Ubiquitous fast food, often eaten for breakfast.
- ➔ **Pabellón criollo** The Venezuelan national dish of shredded beef, black beans, rice and plantains.
- ➔ **Polar beer** If there were a national beverage, it would be these icy minibottles of brew.
- ➔ **Coffee** Aromatic espresso shots of homegrown liquid heaven, served in little plastic cups at the *panadería* (bakery).
- ➔ **Chocolate** Not widely exported, Venezuelan chocolate is some of the best in the world.

AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Bolívar Fuerte (BsF)
- ➔ **Languages** Spanish; dozens of indigenous languages
- ➔ **Money** Use the black market to change money. Never use ATMs or official exchange offices.
- ➔ **Visas** US and Israeli citizens need visas, which must be obtained in advance.
- ➔ **Time** GMT minus 4½ hours

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 912,050 sq km
- ➔ **Population** 30.4 million
- ➔ **Capital** Caracas
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎ 171
- ➔ **Country Code** ☎ 58

Official Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	BsF4.50
Canada	C\$1	BsF4.80
Euro	€1	BsF7.18
New Zealand	NZ\$1	BsF4.06
UK	UK£1	BsF9.86
USA	US\$1	BsF6.35

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Budget lodging** US\$5
- ➔ **Dinner mains** US\$2
- ➔ **Salto Ángel three-day tour** US\$200