

# VENEZUELA

---

## Overview

Located on the north coast of South America, with 3,200 kilometers of littoral facing the Caribbean Sea, Venezuela has a surface of 916,700 square kilometers and an estimated population of nearly 21 million. It is a democratic and representative Republic whose territory is politically and administratively divided into 20 States, two Federal Territories, a Federal District, and 72 islands forming the Federal Dependence.

**PEOPLE:** 67% of the population is mestizo, 21% are of European descent (mainly Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and German), 10% are of African descent and 2% are considered indigenous.

**LANGUAGE:** The official language is Spanish, but numerous local dialects, such as Castilian, are spoken.

**RELIGION:** 96% of Venezuelans are Roman Catholic, while the other four percent are Protestant and other religions.

**CLIMATE:** In Venezuela there are no "seasons" as such, but rather "periods": one rainy, from May to November; and the other dry, from December to May. The average annual temperature is 69° F. Many sights, such as Angel Falls, are more remarkable during the rainy season.

**CURRENCY:** Venezuela's monetary unit is the bolivar (VEB)

**ETIQUETTE & BEHAVIOR:** Venezuelans may stand very close to you and may touch your arm or jacket. Be sensitive to this and try not to move away as you may offend someone. When pointing, do not use only your index finger, instead, use your entire hand. Maintain eye contact when talking to people. While in public, do not eat and walk at the same time.

**FOOD:** Venezuelan cuisine is extremely varied because of the diverse cultural influences the country has been subjected to over four centuries.



Pabellon criollo

At Christmas and national celebrations the **hallaca** is paramount as Venezuela's national dish, it's a stew of chicken, pork, beef and spices used as a filling in a pie-like dough of maize, which is then wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in boiling water. Another favorite, **pabellon criollo**, is a combination of rice, black beans, shredded beef and **tajadas** (sliced and fried ripe plantains). A typical and popular Venezuelan dish is **mondongo**, a soup-like stew which uses specially processed tripe as a main ingredient. **Arepa** is traditional Venezuelan bread made from maize and served either fried or baked. Dinner is usually eaten late, around 9:00pm.

## Venezuelan Ecosystems

Venezuela is an ecotraveler's paradise. It is a land of many contrasts: Amazonian rain forests; La Gran Sabana with its mystical Tepuys, reputed to be among the oldest rock formations on Earth; waterfalls, including Angel Falls, the world's highest at 3200 feet; high Andean mountains with peaks reaching more than 16,000 feet; spectacular birds and wildlife in the Great Plains of "Los Llanos"; and the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean surrounding Venezuela's uninhabited islands along more than 1800 miles of coastline.

Venezuela is blessed with incredible tropical biodiversity. In a country roughly the size of Texas, nearly 1,300 species of birds can be found, 44% of the total species found in all of South America and a remarkable 1/6 of the world's recorded species. In addition, there are 30,000 recorded species of flowering plants as well as exotic wildlife, from monkeys, caimans, capybaras, jaguars, and tigers to giant anteaters and tropical snakes.

Fifteen percent of the nation's territory is comprised of 43 National Parks. Canaima is one of the few remaining untouched secrets of this world. It is a place so preserved that visitors can only arrive by plane. Part of Canaima National Park offers spectacular scenery of tropical forests, savannah, and the famous Laguna de Canaima. Another feature of Canaima National Park is Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world. With an uninterrupted water drop of 3,212 feet, it is fifteen times higher than Niagara Falls. There are other waterfalls, notably Hacha Falls and El Sapo Falls, which are within hiking distance of Canaima Camp.

Los Roques National Park is an archipelago of more than 100 tiny islands surrounded by coral reefs, approximately 80 miles off the coast of Caracas. Because it is a National Park and access is very limited, the natural beauty of the islands remains relatively untouched.

The Venezuelan Government and the Venezuelan Eco Tourism Association have initiated various programs to help preserve Venezuela's natural environments. Responsible tourism is one of the most vital tools in advancing the cause of preservation.

## Simón Bolívar (1783-1830)

Simón Bolívar, also known as El Libertador, was one of South America's greatest leaders. In the early nineteenth century, Bolívar organized and led South American military forces to liberate Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru from Spanish rule. He was also influential in helping to create a Latin American identity. Bolívar was born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1783 to an aristocratic family. Following his parent's untimely death, Bolívar went to Europe to complete his education. While in Europe, he met and married his wife, María Teresa Rodríguez del Toro. Unfortunately, within a year of returning to Venezuela, María Teresa died of yellow fever. Distraught and heartbroken, Bolívar returned to Europe in 1804.



While traveling around Italy and France, Bolívar studied philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau, and became fascinated by the changing political scene surrounding Napoleon I. While in Paris, Bolívar met German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, who suggested that Venezuela was ripe for independence from Spain. Shortly after, Bolívar proclaimed his duty to set South America free. Upon returning to Venezuela, Bolívar joined forces with Francisco de Miranda, in opposition to Spanish rule and spend the next 20 years fighting to free Venezuela and other South American countries. In 1821, Bolívar lead the Venezuelan independence movement to victory at Campo Carabobo. On December 17, 1830, Bolívar died of tuberculosis. Presently in Venezuela, Bolívar's legacy is carried on, parks in every town bear his name, a city is named after him, and the country's currency bears his name.

## Spanish Cheat Sheet

Please: <i>por favor</i>	Where is the: <i>Donde está el _____</i>
Thank you: <i>gracias</i>	Bank: <i>el banco</i>
Hello: <i>ola!</i>	Post Office: <i>el correo</i>
Goodbye: <i>adios/hasta luego</i>	Telephone: <i>el teléfono</i>
Yes: <i>sí</i>	No: <i>no</i>
My name is: <i>Mi nombre es...</i>	What is your name? <i>Cual es su nombre?</i>
Do you speak English? <i>Habla usted ingles?</i>	Restaurant: <i>el restaurante</i>
How much does it cost? <i>Cuanto es?</i>	Bus Station: <i>la estación de autobuses</i>
What time is it? <i>Que hora es?</i>	Taxi: <i>el taxi/el libre</i>
Ladies Toilet: <i>el baño para mujeres</i>	Mens Toilet: <i>el baño para hombres</i>
Airport: <i>el aeropuerto</i>	Police Station: <i>la estación de policía</i>
I am American: <i>Soy northeamericana(o)</i>	Metro Station: <i>la estación de metro</i>

<b>Weekdays</b>
Monday: <i>el lunes</i>
Tuesday: <i>el martes</i>
Wednesday: <i>el miércoles</i>
Thursday: <i>el jueves</i>
Friday: <i>el viernes</i>
Saturday: <i>el sábado</i>
Sunday: <i>el domingo</i>

<b>Numbers</b>
one <i>uno/una</i>
two <i>dos</i>
three <i>tres</i>
four <i>cuatro</i>
five <i>cinco</i>
six <i>seis</i>
seven <i>siete</i>
eight <i>ocho</i>
nine <i>nueve</i>
ten <i>diez</i>