



# COUNTRY BRIEFING: VENEZUELA



## Merida & the Andes

Set in the Andes, with a spectacular backdrop of five snow-capped mountains known as the 'five white eagles', at a height of 1,645 metres Merida has a lovely temperate climate and a relaxed and vibrant feel. Visitors flock here to climb mountains, ride horses, hike, paraglide, mountain-bike and ride on the world's highest and longest cable car. The area above the Merida valley is characterised by the paramo (high plain) - a stark but beautiful landscape brightened by the flowers of ground-hugging plants and dwarf shrubs, surrounded by streams full of trout, deep blue glacial lakes and small Andean villages. One of our favourite accommodation finds is the Hosteria Los Frailes, a converted monastery built in 1643 which provides a fantastic base for exploration.

## The Llanos

Driving out of the mountains, in an incredible journey of changing environments, you enter the Llanos, an area of wide skies, slow rivers and plains stretching to every horizon. This is Venezuela's Wild West, a land of hardy llanero cowboys. They are fiercely proud of their hard lives and their rich folklore is revealed in legends and stories often told through songs accompanied by the cuatro guitar and the Venezuelan harp.

The wildlife in the Llanos is prolific, especially in the dry season when animals gather around the shrinking watering holes. There are regular sightings of armadillos, capybaras, caimans, orinoco crocodile, scarlet ibis, jabiru storks, flamingos, burrowing owls, iguanas, red howler monkeys, anacondas as well as the more rare pink dolphins, river otters, giant anteaters, pumas, and ocelots. With over 300 species of birds to be spotted this is an excellent place for twitchers.

## Los Roques

For pure relaxation you won't find a much better place in the world than Los Roques, an archipelago of around 42 pristine coral islands, just a 30 minute flight from Caracas. It is an area full of beautiful turquoise lagoons, whiter than white sand beaches and is the Caribbean's largest and longest established marine park. There is fabulous snorkelling and great scuba-diving to be had in

the crystal clear waters. Gran Roque is the only inhabited island, just a small fishing village with a few car-free sandy streets, restaurants and posadas offering simple but comfortable Mediterranean-style accommodation and fantastic home-cooked meals, in particular amazing fresh fish dishes.

## Orinoco Delta

For a taste of the jungle head for the Orinoco Delta where the mighty river meets the Atlantic. Covering an area of over 40,000 sq km it is a stunningly beautiful region of wild forests, humid jungles and mangrove swamps. The maze of channels and creeks which form the delta are best explored by motorised canoe. Surrounded by lush vegetation you can spot wildlife, including a huge variety of birds, as well as pass by small communities of Warao Indians scattered along the riverbanks. Meaning 'people of the boat' they are shy people who have inhabited the delta for over 12,000 years, living in rectangular, stilted houses called palafitos. Their ancient culture has changed comparatively little in recent times chiefly due to the isolation and difficulty of travelling in the delta.

## Angel Falls

Venezuela is, of course, most famously known for Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world. To access it you fly into the small Pemón Indian town of Canaima which lies by a beautiful tannin-stained lagoon with soft-beige beaches. It is a stunning place with the Rio Carrao tumbling spectacularly over six waterfalls into the lagoon below. Angel Falls itself lies in a canyon so remote it wasn't discovered until 1935 by the American Jimmy Angel. Plunging 979 metres down a vertical cliff from Auyan-tepui, it is a truly awe-inspiring sight especially from the air as you fly over breathtaking landscape with views of the surrounding table top mountains. It really is one of the unmissable sights in Venezuela.

I have touched on some of the many highlights that Venezuela offers the traveller. This is certainly a country not without its trials, but nature lovers and those looking for something a little bit different will be richly rewarded.

**Nikki Seymour Mead**  
Venezuela Specialist

### WEB PLUS

[www.audleytravel.com/frailes](http://www.audleytravel.com/frailes)

Find out more about the Hosteria Los Frailes at [www.audleytravel.com/frailes](http://www.audleytravel.com/frailes)

xx high res to come  
from Jim



*Venezuela is a country of incredible natural beauty and contrasts from beach to jungle, mountain to plain, Indian culture to wildlife.*

## Best of Venezuela

Here is our suggested itinerary for experiencing the best of Venezuela, of course we can tailor your trip to your interests and budget. Prices for this tour start from £2,600 per person based on two people travelling. For further details please call Nikki on 01869 276 244.

**Day 1** Fly from UK to Caracas

**Day 2** Fly to Merida

**Day 3** City tour including cable car ride

**Day 4** Travel to the Paramo and overnight in converted monastery

**Day 5** Travel to Los Llanos

**Day 6** Wildlife excursions

**Day 7** Wildlife excursions

**Day 8** Fly to Caracas

**Day 9** Fly to Los Roques

**Days 10-12** Relax, snorkel and sunbathe

**Day 13** Fly from Los Roques via Caracas to Puerto Ordaz

**Day 14** Fly to Canaima

**Day 15** Flight over Angel Falls and motor-canoe trip on Canaima Lagoon

**Day 16** Day at leisure

**Day 17** Fly Canaima - Caracas for your international flight

**Day 18** Arrive in the UK

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1 Los Roques

2 Orinoco Delta

3 Angel Falls

4 Hosteria Los Frailes

5 Howler monkey, the Llanos