

VENEZUELA



Country Dialling Code (Tel/Fax): ++58

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Capital: Caracas **Time:** GMT - 4

Background: Venezuela was one of the three countries that emerged from the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830 (the others being Colombia and Ecuador). For most of the first half of the 20th century, Venezuela was ruled by generally benevolent military strongmen, who promoted the oil industry and allowed for some social reforms. Democratically elected governments have held sway since 1959. Current concerns include: drug-related conflicts along the Colombian border, increasing internal drug consumption, overdependence on the petroleum industry with its price fluctuations, and irresponsible mining operations which are endangering the rain forest and indigenous peoples.

Location: Northern South America, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, between Colombia and Guyana

Map References: South America, Central America and the Caribbean

Area: total: 912,050 sq km, land: 882,050 sq km, water: 30,000 sq km

Climate: tropical; hot, humid; more moderate in highlands

Terrain: Andes Mountains and Maracaibo Lowlands in northwest; central plains (llanos); Guiana Highlands in southeast

Natural Resources: petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, gold, bauxite, other minerals, hydropower, diamonds

Population: 23,542,649 (July 2000 est.)

Nationality: noun: Venezuelan(s), adjective: Venezuelan

Ethnic Groups: Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Arab, German, African, indigenous people

Religions: nominally Roman Catholic 96%, Protestant 2%

Languages: Spanish (official), numerous indigenous dialects

Economy: Venezuelan officials estimate the economy contracted 7.2% in 1999. A steep downturn in international oil prices during the first half of the year fueled the recession, and spurred the CHAVEZ administration to abide by OPEC-led production cuts in an effort to raise world oil prices. The petroleum sector dominates the economy, accounting for roughly a third of GDP, around 80% of export earnings, and more than half of government operating revenues. Higher oil prices during the second half 1999 took pressure off the budget and currency; the bolivar is widely believed to be overvalued by as much as 50%. Despite higher oil prices, the economy remains in the doldrums, possibly due to investor uncertainty over President CHAVEZ's reform agenda. Implementing legislation for the new constitution will not be passed until the second half of 2000, after a new legislature is elected. With the president's economic cabinet attempting to reconcile a wide range of views, the country's economic reform program has largely stalled. The government is seeking international assistance to finance reconstruction after massive flooding and landslides in December 1999 caused an estimated \$15 billion to \$20 billion in damage.

Industries: petroleum, iron ore mining, construction materials, food processing, textiles, steel, aluminum, motor vehicle assembly

Currency: 1 bolivar (Bs) = 100 centimos

Railways: total: 584 km (248 km privately owned), standard gauge: 584 km 1.435-m gauge

Highways: total: 96,155 km, paved: 32,308 km, unpaved: 63,847 km (1997 est.)

Waterways: 7,100 km; Rio Orinoco and Lago de Maracaibo accept oceangoing vessels

Ports and Harbors: Amuay, Bajo Grande, El Tablazo, La Guaira, La Salina, Maracaibo, Matanzas, Palua, Puerto Cabello, Puerto la Cruz, Puerto Ordaz, Puerto Sucre, Punta Cardon

Airports: 366 (1999 est.) Airports - with paved runways: total: 122, over 3,047 m: 5, 2,438 to 3,047 m: 10, 1,524 to 2,437 m: 32, 914 to 1,523 m: 58, under 914 m: 17 (1999 est.) Airports - with unpaved runways: total: 244, 1,524 to 2,437 m: 10, 914 to 1,523 m: 93, under 914 m: 141 (1999 est.)

Heliports: 1 (1999 est.)

Visa: required by all except the following nationals of: EU countries (except Greece who do require visas), Australia, Canada, USA and Japan.

Duty Free: 200 cigarettes and 25 cigars; 2 litres of alcoholic beverages; 4 small bottles of perfume; new goods up to a value of US\$1000.

Health: a yellow fever vaccination is not required as a condition entry to Venezuela but vaccination is advised for all travellers. Malaria risk exists throughout the year in rural areas. Mains water is normally chlorinated, and whilst relatively safe may cause mild abdominal upsets.

HOTELS•MOTELS•INNS

CARACAS

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EMBASSY SUITES CARACAS, Av. Francisco de Miranda en Av. El Campo Alegre, Caracas, Venezuela .Tel: 58-212-700-4200, Fax: 58-212-267-3761, <http://embassysuites1.hilton.com>

EUROBUILDING HOTEL & SUITES, Calle La Guairita, Hotel Eurobuilding Mezzanina. Chuao.Caracas- Venezuela. Central Caracas: (58)(212) 902.11.11 Fax: (58)(212) 902.21.89, reservas@eurobuilding.com.ve, <http://www.eurobuilding.com.ve>

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HOTEL LA FLORESTA, Avenida Ávila. Sur Altamira.Caracas - Venezuela, Tel: +58 212 263 1955, Apartado postal número 68209, <http://www.hotellafloresta.com>

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