**Venezuela Facts and Culture**

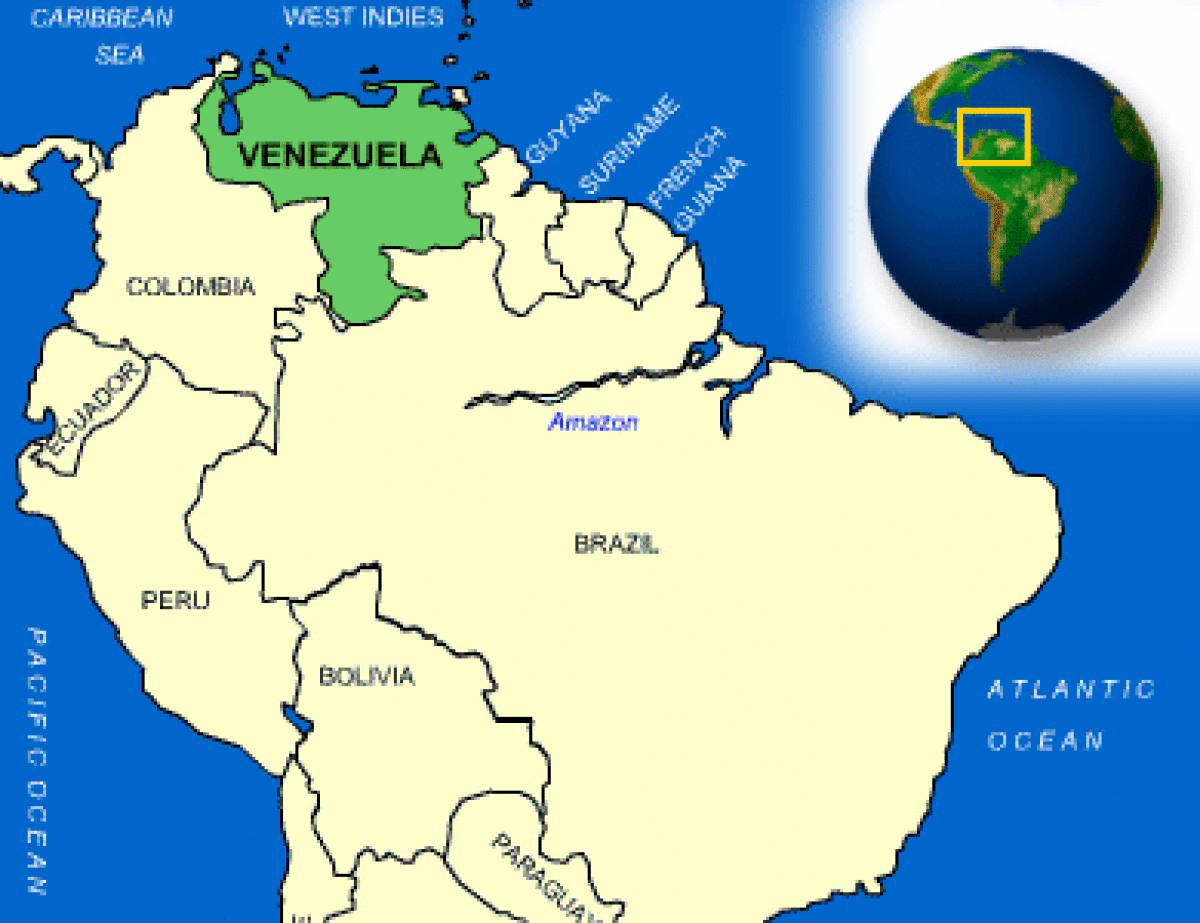
* [Food and Recipes:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipes.htm) The largest meal in Venezuela is eaten between noon and 3 PM. Many Venezuelans go home to eat lunch with... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipes.htm)
* [Family:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/family.htm) To Venezuelans, the family is at the center of their lives. Most spend a great deal of their free time... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/family.htm)
* [Fashion:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/fashion.htm) Venezuelans take pride in their clothes and appearance. Being neat, clean, and properly groomed is important. Venezuelans may wear traditional... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/fashion.htm)
* [Visiting:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/visiting.htm) When a visitor arrives at a home or business, a small cup of strong thick coffee is usually offered. Table... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/visiting.htm)

**Venezuela Facts**

Venezuela stats

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital | Caracas |
| Government Type | federal republic |
| Currency | VEB |
| Population | 28,459,085 |
| Total Area | 352,143 Square Miles 912,050 Square Kilometers |
| Location | Northern South America, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, between Colombia and Guyana |
| Language | Spanish (official), numerous indigenous dialects |

Map of Venezuela



**Geography**

**Terrain and geography**

Venezuela is located on the northern coast of South America, between 0 degrees 5’ and 12 degrees 15 N, and 59 degrees 45’ and 73 degrees 09 W. It covers 352,150 square miles. The capital, Caracas, is situated in the magnificent Avila Mountains on the north coast at about 2,700 feet above sea level, giving the city a permanent springtime climate.

The Orinoco River and various mountain ranges, all branches of the Andes chain, divide the country into a number of distinct regions.

South of the Orinoco, which is the third longest river in South America, are located the wild and largely unexplored Guayana highlands. This area comprises over half of the area of the country and is rich in mineral resources and in developed and undeveloped hydroelectric power. In the Gran Sabana area, erosion has caused unusual formations characterized by rugged relief and flat-topped, cliff-edged mountains called "tepuis," the Pemon Indian word for mountain. These sandstone mesas form part of one of the oldest geologic regions in the world, and they have the highest percentage of endemic flora of any formations on earth. Roraima, one of the most famous of the tepuis, was the setting for "Lost Worlds." Arthur Conan Doyle never actually visited the area, so the reader cannot expect realism in his adventure story, but his characterization of the "tepuis" reflects widely-held beliefs, and the "tepuis" continue to be endlessly fascinating.

Another section of the Guayana highlands is the mysterious and remote Amazonas region, home to various indigenous groups such as the Yekuana, Yanomami, and Piaroa. Although carrying the name of the great river to the south, most of this area lies in the Orinoco drainage basin. The remaining portion of the Orinoco waters go to the Amazon, marking one of the great anomalies of nature—a river called the Casiquiare that crosses the watershed between the Orinoco and Rio Negro (which connects to the Amazon) and joins two of the great rivers of the world. It is possible to travel by water from the Orinoco through the Casiquiare and Rio Negro and to the Amazon. Legends of this route were the basis for many famous explorations by Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries.

North of the Orinoco is a great expanse of lowlands that occupies approximately one third of the national territory, known as the "llanos" or plains. During the dry season the entire area is almost desert-like. But during the rainy season, flooding rivers make the area a maze of water. Alexander von Humboldt, visiting the area in the early 1800s, referred to it as an ocean covered with seaweed. This area contains "hatos" or working ranches, some of which have turned to ecotourism. Visitors can enjoy wildlife viewing from boats or vehicles, sighting capybaras, ocelots, monkeys, tapirs, caimans, and exotic and extensive bird life—more than 350 species have been recorded in the region, including scarlet ibis, or corocoros, with their spectacular plumage. Visitors can also fish for piranha which, despite the dictionary definition, do not usually attack humans.

Spurs of the Andes Mountains run along each side of the Maracaibo basin and part of the seacoast. The bulk of Venezuela’s population traditionally has lived in these northern highlands, attracted by the temperate weather and fertile soil. The city of Mérida is very near Pico Bolivar, Venezuela’s highest mountain and a popular spot for climbing. The longest cable car (teleférico) in the world runs from Merida to Pico Espejo high in the clouds above. It can be warm and sunny in Merida and snowing on Pico Espejo, some 3,100 meters (10,170 feet) higher.

A tropical coastal plain stretches along most of Venezuela’s 1,750-mile coastline. This narrow strip of land between mountains and sea widens in the west to form the Maracaibo basin. The climate is uniformly hot and humid. The area around Maracaibo is inhabited by the Guajiro and Yukpa indigenous groups, and you can still see them in their native dress. At the Laguna de Sinamaica, there are traditional houses made of papyrus and thatch, and built on stilts in the water. When Amerigo Vespucci arrived in 1499, he came ashore at this point and named it Venezuela, or little Venice.

The Orinoco defines much of Venezuela, rising from its headwaters deep in Amazonas, and traveling 2,150 kilometers (1,335 miles) to the Atlantic in the Orinoco Delta region. As it travels east and north, the Orinoco widens, splits and reforms. The Delta is a vast region marked by islands and large rivers (small in comparison to the Orinoco), and is home to a large number of birds, making it a birding paradise. The Warao Indians inhabit this area, still using their native language and existing in a manner that has not changed greatly over the centuries.

**Geography - note**

on major sea and air routes linking North and South America; Angel Falls in the Guiana Highlands is the world's highest waterfall

**Venezuela Geography**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Location | South America |
| Total Area | 352,143 Square Miles 912,050 Square Kilometers |
| Land Area | 340,560 Square Miles 882,050 Square Kilometers |
| Water Area | 11,583 Square Miles 30,000 Square Kilometers |
| Land Boundaries | 3,103 Miles 4,993 Kilometers |
| Irrigated Land | 4,073 Square Miles 10,550 Square Kilometers |
| Border Countries | Brazil 2,200 km, Colombia 2,050 km, Guyana 743 km |
| Coastline | 1,740 Miles 2,800 Kilometers |
| Geographic Coordinates | 8 00 N, 66 00 W |
| Terrain | Andes Mountains and Maracaibo Lowlands in northwest; central plains (llanos); Guiana Highlands in southeast |
| Highest Point | 5,007 Meters |
| Highest Point Location | Pico Bolivar (La Columna) 5,007 m |
| Lowest Point Location | Caribbean Sea 0 m |
| Natural Resources | petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, gold, bauxite, other minerals, hydropower, diamonds |
| Time Zone | UTC-4.5 (half an hour ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time) |

**Venezuela Weather and Climate**

**Climate and Weather**

tropical; hot, humid; more moderate in highlands

**Venezuela Environmental Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 |
| Natural Hazards | subject to floods, rockslides, mudslides; periodic droughts |
| Irrigated Land | 4,073 Square Miles 10,550 Square Kilometers |
| Environmental Issues | sewage pollution of Lago de Valencia; oil and urban pollution of Lago de Maracaibo; deforestation; soil degradation; urban and industrial pollution, especially along the Caribbean coast; threat to the rainforest ecosystem from irresponsible mining operations |
| Environment - International Agreements | party to: Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands   signed but not ratified:: none of the selected agreements |

**Venezuela Population Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Population | 28,459,085 |
| Population Growth Rate | 1.44% |
| Urban Population | 93.5% |
| Population in Major Urban Areas | CARACAS (capital) 3.242 million; Maracaibo 2.31 million; Valencia 1.866 million; Barquisimeto 1.245 million; Maracay 1.115 million; Ciudad Guayana 799,000 |
| Nationality Noun | Venezuelan(s) |
| Nationality Adjective | Venezuelan |
| Ethnic Groups | Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Arab, German, African, indigenous people |
| Languages | Spanish (official), numerous indigenous dialects |
| Rate of Urbanization- annual rate of change | 1.7% |

**Venezuela Medical Information**

Medical care at private hospitals and clinics in Caracas and other major cities is generally good. Public, government-funded hospitals and clinics generally provide a lower level of care and basic supplies at public facilities may be in short supply or unavailable. Cash payment is usually required in advance of the provision of medical services at private facilities, although some facilities will accept credit cards. Patients who cannot provide advance payment may be referred to a public hospital for treatment. Private companies that require the patient to be a subscriber to the service or provide cash payment in advance generally provide the most effective ambulance services. Public ambulance service is unreliable. U.S. citizens should be aware that due to the currency restrictions in effect in Venezuela they might find it difficult to receive wire transfers from abroad, whether through a bank or Western Union. Such wire transfers cannot be used reliably as a source of emergency funds. U.S. citizens traveling to Venezuela may also find it difficult to obtain certain prescription drugs, particularly name brands, and should ensure that they have sufficient quantities of all medications for the duration of their stay.  
  
Dengue fever is common in Venezuela, as it is in other tropical and subtropical parts of the world. Also called "breakbone fever" due to the muscle and bone pain it causes, dengue fever is a mosquito-borne viral illness. There is no vaccine available for prevention, and there is no specific treatment available. However, it is usually a self-limited illness. Typical symptoms are fever, pain behind the eyes, and body aches. More serious cases involving bleeding and shock do occur; the fatality rate is one or two per ten thousand cases. Seek medical care if you believe you are seriously ill, as supportive care greatly reduces the risk of dying. Avoiding mosquito bites by using insect repellant or clothing to cover skin is the best prevention.  
  
Chagas disease also occurs in Venezuela and in other parts of South America. Chagas is a parasitic disease carried by the triatomine insect or "kissing bug" or "chipo," as it is called in Venezuela. It is difficult to treat and can cause permanent heart damage and lead to death. The Pan American Health Organization estimates that 1,500 new cases of the illness are recorded in Venezuela each year and that 789 people die from the disease every year. It is uncommon for travelers to contract Chagas disease, but those staying in older adobe and thatch buildings or sleeping out in the open are at risk. In Venezuela, Chagas disease occurs mostly in the rural states of Trujillo, Lara, Portuguesa, and Barinas, but cases have been reported throughout the entire country and sporadic outbreaks occur in Caracas. It can be transmitted either through the bite of the "chipo" or through ingestion of food contaminated with the insect's feces. Outbreaks in Caracas have been traced to non-commercially prepared fruit juices. Symptoms vary and are often undetectable, but when symptoms occur they often include fever, fatigue, body aches, diarrhea, and vomiting. Those experiencing these symptoms should seek medical care immediately. Avoiding insect bites by using insect repellant or clothing to cover skin is the best prevention.  
  
Malaria is present throughout the states of Amazonas, Bolivar, and Delta Amacuro, and rural areas of certain municipalities within the states of Sucre and Monagas. Chemoprophylaxis with atovaquone/proguanil, doxycycline, or mefloquine is recommended in addition to insect precautions.  
  
Leishmaniasis, another insect-borne parasitic disease, is present in some areas. Insect precautions are recommended.  
  
Schistosomiasis, a water-borne parasite that penetrates intact skin, is present in some areas. Avoiding contact with fresh water in pools, streams, and lakes is recommended.

**Venezuela Health Information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Health Expenditures (% of GDP) | 5.2% |
| Death Rate/1,000 population | 5.23 |
| Obesity- adult prevalence rate | 30.3% |
| Hospital Bed Density/1,000 population | .9 |
| Physicians Density/1,000 population | 1.94 |
| Infant Mortality Rate/1,000 population | 19.75 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Female/1,000 population | 16.14 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Male/1,000 population | 23.18 |
| Underweight - percent of children under five years | 2.9% |
| Total Fertility Rate | 2.37 |
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births | 92 |
| HIV Aids Deaths | 3,800 |
| HIV/AIDS Prevalence - note | no country specific models provided |
| Drinking Water Source: unimproved | 7.1% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of rural population improved | 75.3% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of urban population improved | 94.3% |
| Sanitation Facility Access: unimproved | 9.1% |
| Sanitation Facility Access - percent of urban population improved | 93.6% |
| Sanitation Facitlity Access - percent of rural population improved | 56.9% |
| Major Infectious Diseases - degree of risk | high |
| Food or Waterborne Disease (s) | bacterial diarrhea and hepatitis A |
| Vectorborne Disease (s) | dengue fever and malaria |

**Venezuela Crime**

**Crime Information**

Venezuela and its capital, Caracas, have among the highest per capita murder rates in the world. According to the VVO, a rate of 122 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the Capital District and a rate of 100 per 100,000 inhabitants in the state of Miranda, which incorporates most of the greater Caracas metropolitan area, were recorded in 2012.As noted above, the vast majority of murders and other violent crimes go unsolved. Armed criminal gangs often operate with impunity throughout the urban areas. Poor neighborhoods that cover the hills around Caracas are extremely dangerous. These "barrios" are seldom patrolled by police and should be avoided. They are off limits to U.S. Embassy employees.Armed robberies are common in urban and tourist areas throughout Venezuela, even areas presumed safe and visited by tourists. Crimes committed against travelers are usually economic crimes, such as theft and armed robbery. Incidents occur during daylight hours as well as at night. Many criminals are armed with guns or knives and will use force. Jewelry of all sorts, even inexpensive but flashy jewelry, and expensive electronics attract the attention of thieves. Travelers are advised to leave jewelry items, including expensive-looking wristwatches, at home. Gangs of thieves will often surround their victims and use a chokehold to disable them, even in crowded market areas where there is little or no police presence. Theft from hotel rooms and safe deposit boxes is a problem, and theft of unattended valuables on the beach and from cars parked near isolated areas or on city streets is a common occurrence. A guarded garage or locked trunk is not a guarantee against theft. Pickpockets concentrate in and around crowded bus and subway stations in downtown Caracas. Subway escalators are favored sites for "bump and rob" petty thefts by roving bands of young criminals. Many of these criminals are well dressed to allay suspicion and to blend in with crowds using the subways during rush hour. Travelers should not display money or valuables.  
  
Kidnappings: Kidnappings, including "express kidnappings" in which victims are seized in an attempt to get quick cash in exchange for their release, are a serious problem. One common practice is for kidnappers to follow potential victims into building garages and kidnap them at gunpoint, although the majority of kidnappings occur while traveling in vehicles. Kidnappings of U.S. citizens and other foreign nationals from homes, hotels, unauthorized taxis and the airport terminal do occur, and are more frequently being reported to the embassy. As a recent example, in March 2012, a U.S. citizen, currently residing in Caracas was traveling home in his vehicle when he was overtaken and then blocked by a single vehicle. Several armed men exited the blocking vehicle and forced the victim out of his car and into a separate vehicle. The kidnappers held the victim while driving throughout Caracas conducting other kidnappings and robberies. The victim was eventually released unharmed.“Virtual kidnappings,” in which scam surveys are conducted to collect contact information on minors, which is then used to call parents for ransoms without the children being taken, and “inside kidnappings,” in which domestic employees are being paid large sums of money for keys and information in order to enter and kidnap children for ransom, have also been reported to the embassy. U.S. citizens should be alert to their surroundings and take necessary precautions.  
  
The Embassy also has received reports of robberies during nighttime and early morning hours on the highways around and leading to Caracas. Reports have specifically involved cars being forced off the La Guaira highway leading from Caracas to the Maiquetía International Airport, and the "Regional del Centro" highway leading from Caracas to Maracay/Valencia. Once the victims are stopped on the side of the road they are robbed. The Embassy recommends avoiding driving at night and in the early morning when possible.  
  
Police responsiveness and effectiveness in Venezuela vary drastically but generally do not meet U.S. expectations. U.S. travelers have reported robberies and other crimes committed against them by individuals wearing uniforms and purporting to be police officers or National Guard members. Police investigations into kidnappings have revealed that police officers have been involved, and corruption within police forces is a concern. U.S. citizens are encouraged to stay away from police activity, as they may be handling an investigation of a crime.  
  
The Embassy is aware of several instances where women lured U.S. men to Venezuela after establishing “relationships” with them over the Internet. Some of these men were robbed shortly after they arrived in Venezuela. Others were recruited to act as narcotics couriers or “drug mules.” In three instances, the U.S. citizens were arrested at the airport with narcotics in their possession and served extended jail terms in Venezuela.   
  
Don’t buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, you may be breaking local Venezuelan law, too.  
  
Incidents of piracy off the coast of Venezuela remain a concern. While the majority of reports involve local fisherman, foreigners have been targeted in previous years. Some of these attacks have been especially violent, including the murder of a U.S. citizen on his boat in November 2008 and the killing of a French yachter in September 2008. Previous violent attacks include the severe beating of a U.S. citizen in 2002, the fatal shooting of an Italian citizen in January 2004, and a machete attack on a U.S. citizen in 2005. U.S. citizen yachters should note that anchoring off shore is not considered safe. Marinas, including those in Puerto la Cruz and Margarita Island (Porlamar), provide only minimal security, and U.S. citizens should exercise a heightened level of caution in Venezuelan waters. Public safety announcements, directives and specific information concerning piracy can be found at the U.S. Coast Guard Homeport website. Boaters may also consult the U.S. Coast Guard website for additional information on sailing in Venezuela.  
  
In addition to security concerns, yachters should be aware of registration and other required permits in order to anchor in Venezuelan marinas. U.S. citizens docking in Venezuela are strongly encouraged to check with local authorities regarding the proper documentation for their vessels and themselves.  
  
Furthermore, rules governing the sale of fuel to foreign sailors in Venezuela vary by state. U.S. citizen yachters should inquire about specific state procedures prior to attempting to purchase fuel in any given location.  
  
Private aircraft companies and operators are strongly encouraged to consult with the Venezuelan Civil Aeronautical National Institute regarding current Venezuelan laws and regulations, such as those pertaining to tail markings, registrations, and other required authorizations. Failure to comply with national or local requirements can result in arrest and criminal charges, as well as property seizures.

**Venezuela Penalties for Crime**

**Criminal Penalties**

While you are traveling in Venezuela, you are subject to its laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. In some places you may be taken in for questioning if you don’t have your passport with you. For example, in Venezuela it is illegal to take pictures of sensitive installations to include the presidential palace, military bases, government buildings, and airports. Just as in the United States, driving under the influence can land you immediately in jail. Criminal penalties will vary however. There are also acts that might be legal in the country you visit, but still illegal in the United States. You can be prosecuted under U.S. law if you buy pirated goods. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime prosecutable in the United States. Drug trafficking is a serious problem in Venezuela and treated as such by Venezuelan authorities. Convicted traffickers receive lengthy prison sentences, usually eight to ten years. If you do something illegal in Venezuela, your U.S. passport won’t help. It’s very important to know what’s legal and what’s not where you are going.  
  
Security within Venezuela’s prisons is lax to nonexistent. Prison populations are largely under the control of prison gangs with little or no interference from prison authorities. Drugs and weapons are freely available, and prison authorities generally do not provide even basic protections and amenities, including food, so individual prisoners must deal with gang leaders through payments or other mechanisms just to survive. Additionally, the Embassy has received reports from U.S. citizens incarcerated in Venezuelan prisons claiming to have been beaten as well as having had their medication withheld.  
  
Based on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, bilateral agreements with certain countries, and customary international law, if you are arrested in Venezuela, you have the option to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the nearest U.S. embassy of your arrest and to have communications from you forwarded to the nearest U.S. embassy.   
  
Consular Access: Although Venezuela is a signatory to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the Venezuelan government sometimes fails to notify the U.S. Embassy when U.S. citizens are arrested, and/or delays or denies consular access to arrestees. Therefore, U.S. citizens cannot assume a consular officer will visit them within 24-72 hours of an arrest.

**Venezuela Life Expectancy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life Expectancy At Birth | 74 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Female | 77 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Male | 71 Years |
| Median Age (female) | 27 Years |
| Median Age (male) | 25 Years |
| Median Age | 26 Years |

**Venezuela Literacy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Predominant Language | Spanish (official), numerous indigenous dialects |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| Literacy Female | 93.1% |
| Literacy Male | 93.8% |
| Literacy Total | 93% |

**Venezuela Education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Education Expenditures - percent of GDP | 6.9% |
| Literacy - female | 93.1% |
| Literacy - male | 93.8% |
| Literacy - total population | 93% |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| School Life Expectancy - female | 15 Years |
| School Life Expectancy - male | 13 Years |
| Total School Life Expectancy - (primary to tertiary) | 14 Years |

**Venezuela Age of Population**

Age 0-14: 28.6 %Age 15-24: 18.8 %Age 25-54: 39.5 %Age 55-64: 7.3 %Over 64: 5.8 %Highcharts.com

**Classroom**

All children must wear a uniform to school. And under the current political emphasis on education, school meals are provided in every nationally funded school, called a “Bolivarian” school. In order to improve the general education level of its citizens, the Venezuelan education office requires that school last much of the day, from 8:00 in the morning until later afternoon, with up to three meals provided, depending on the actual length of the school day in each school.  
The school canteen is open most of the school day, and the students are responsible for keeping the area clean and tidy. Parents can arrange for a prepaid amount to be available for their child to take advantage of each day or week. The canteen offers a variety of healthy sandwiches, salads, stews, fruit drinks, and lunch meals that include beef, pork chops, chicken, and fish.

**Education Culture**

Education in Venezuela has improved significantly during the past several years under a new government direction. In the past, most of Venezuela’s profits from their oil industry, which is the country’s biggest money-maker, have gone to a relatively small part of the population. About 80% of the people were living at the poverty level. By contrast, in 2006 over 40% of the national budget was focused on improving conditions for the poor, including improving education. And just as important is a shift in the attitude of Venezuelans in general, for in areas where government changes have not improved education, often local communities are taking charge of the schools and together are fixing up school buildings, providing teachers, and in general making sure that their children will get a good education.  
Schooling is required and is free for children from ages seven to fourteen years old. Venezuela has 20,000 elementary schools, but only 2,000 secondary and technical schools. After the age of fourteen, fewer than 50% of students continue on to complete their secondary education.

The emphasis on getting children into schools and keeping them there longer has been working, however. Between 1999 and 2002 the total number of children attending school increased by 1.5 million.

Some private schools do exist, but they are usually attended by the children of wealthy families or children of international businessmen. Interestingly, if the children are from a country other than Venezuela, sometimes the teacher will allow the students to bring their home-country textbooks so the students can maintain consistency with their previous studies.

Elementary school begins with a year of preparatory subjects and is roughly equal to first grade in the United States. All students must complete this year before they can advance to the six main years of elementary school. Following elementary school is secondary school, which is divided into two parts. The first three years consist of general studies, but the final two years focus on more specialized learning in an area of interest.

The school day is usually five hours long, and children attend in shifts. Some begin early in the morning and go until about 1:00, while others begin in the early afternoon and attend until 6:00 in the evening.

Not only are the children benefiting from the increased emphasis on education, so are their parents. In a country plagued with illiteracy, more than 1.5 million adults have been taught to read and write in the last decade. Adult literacy now stands at just over 90% and continues to rise.

**Learning**

The language of Venezuela is Spanish. In addition to Spanish, elementary schools teach mathematics, reading, science, and social studies, among other basic subjects. Education is a very important part of Venezuelan life under the direction of President Hugo Chavez. Although President Chavez is politically controversial, he has done much to improve the education and other social conditions of his country’s people. For example, not only do children attend class during the day, but so also do many parents in the evenings after work attend the same schools, where they are taught to read and write by hundreds of volunteers throughout the country.  
In areas that have been difficult to access with the new emphasis on education, “educational missions” have been organized, each one named after a hero from the country’s history. These innovative missions, directed by highly motivated and skilled educators, are making steady progress against the poor education that had become so prevalent.

As money is more available for schools, and as the basics of seats, decent classrooms, working bathrooms, and the like are provided once again, more advanced tools can be added, such as computers and overhead projectors. But these are still relatively rare, especially in rural schools.

Families must buy their own books, arrange for transportation, and cover basic daily expenses such as food.

Instead of being given a letter grade or a percentage, Venezuelan students are often marked out of twenty. On this scale, ten is a passing mark.

Deaf and hearing-impaired people use Venezuelan sign language. State-run schools for deaf people have been operating since 1937, and many go to college or university with a sign language interpreter.

**To School**

Although some private schools have their own school-owned bus systems to transport kids to and from school, kids will usually walk or ride a public bus to school, depending on the local circumstances. They will catch their bus between 6:00 and 6:30, and arrive at school around 7:00. At the end of the day, students return home the same way they came.

**Venezuela Government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital Name | Caracas |
| Country Name | Venezuela |
| Local - Long | Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela |
| Full Country Name | Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela |
| Local - Short | Venezuela |
| Government Type | federal republic |
| Capital - geographic coordinate | 10 29 N, 66 52 W |
| Capital Time Difference | UTC-4.5 (half an hour ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time) |
| National Holiday | Independence Day, 5 July (1811) |
| Constitution | 30 December 1999; amended 15 February 2009 |
| Legal System | civil law system based on the Spanish civil code |
| Suffrage | 18 years of age; universal |

**Venezuela Government and Politics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Government Executive Branch | chief of state: President Nicolas MADURO Moros (since 19 April 2013); Executive Vice President Jorge Alberto ARREAZA Montserrat (since 19 April 2013); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government; former Executive Vice President Nicolas MADURO Moros assumed presidential responsibilities after the death of President Hugo CHAVEZ Frias on 5 March 2013 and became Acting President while preparations for elections took place; he won a national election on 14 April 2013 and started a six-year term   head of government: President Nicolas MADURO Moros (since 19 April 2013); Executive Vice President Jorge Alberto ARREAZA Montserrat (since 19 April 2013)   cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the president   elections: president elected by popular vote for a six-year term (eligible for unlimited terms); election last held on 14 April 2013; note - this was a special election held following the death of President Hugo CHAVEZ Frias on 5 March 2013; the next scheduled election expected in late 2018 or early 2019 pending official convocation by the country's electoral body)   note: in 1999, a National Constituent Assembly drafted a new constitution that increased the presidential term to six years; an election was subsequently held on 30 July 2000 under the terms of this constitution; in 2009, a national referendum approved the elimination of term limits on all elected officials, including the presidency   election results: Nicolas MADURO Moros elected president; percent of vote - Nicolas MADURO Moros 50.61%, Henrique CAPRILES Radonski 49.12%, other 0.24% |
| Legislative Branch | unicameral National Assembly or Asamblea Nacional (165 seats; members elected by popular vote on a proportional basis to serve five-year terms; three seats reserved for the indigenous peoples of Venezuela)  elections: last held on 26 September 2010 (next to be held in 2015)  election results: percent of vote by party - pro-government 48.9%, opposition coalition 47.9%, other 3.2%; seats by party - pro-government 98, opposition 65, other 2 |
| Judicial Branch | Supreme Tribunal of Justice or Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (32 magistrates are elected by the National Assembly for a single 12-year term) |
| Regions or States | 23 states (estados, singular - estado), 1 capital district\* (distrito capital), and 1 federal dependency\*\* (dependencia federal); Amazonas, Anzoategui, Apure, Aragua, Barinas, Bolivar, Carabobo, Cojedes, Delta Amacuro, Dependencias Federales (Federal Dependencies)\*\*, Distrito Capital (Capital District)\*, Falcon, Guarico, Lara, Merida, Miranda, Monagas, Nueva Esparta, Portuguesa, Sucre, Tachira, Trujillo, Vargas, Yaracuy, Zulia  note: the federal dependency consists of 11 federally controlled island groups with a total of 72 individual islands |
| Political Parties and Leaders | A New Time or UNT [Omar BARBOZA]; Brave People's Alliance or ABP [Antonio LEDEZMA]; Christian Democrats or COPEI [Luis Ignacio PLANAS]; Communist Party of Venezuela or PCV [Oscar FIGUERA]; Democratic Action or AD [Henry RAMOS ALLUP]; Fatherland for All or PPT [Simon CALZADILLA]; For Social Democracy or PODEMOS [Ismael GARCIA]; Justice First [Julio BORGES]; Movement Toward Socialism or MAS [Nicolas SOSA]; Popular Will or VP [Leopoldo LOPEZ]; The Democratic Unity Table or MUD [Ramon Guillermo AVELEDO]; The Radical Cause [Daniel SANTOLO]; United Socialist Party of Venezuela or PSUV [Hugo CHAVEZ]; Venezuela Project or PV [Henrique SALAS ROMER] |
| International Law Organization Participation | has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; state party to the ICCT |
| International Organization Participation | Caricom (observer), CD, CDB, CELAC, FAO, G-15, G-24, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICCt, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ITSO, ITU, ITUC, LAES, LAIA, LAS (observer), Mercosur (associate), MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, OPEC, PCA, Petrocaribe, UN, UNASUR, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, Union Latina, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO |
| Politicial Pressure Groups and Leaders | Bolivarian and Socialist Workers' Union (a ruling party labor union); Confederacion Venezolana de Industriales or Coindustria (a conservative business group); Consejos Comunales (pro-Chavez local cooperatives); FEDECAMARAS (a conservative business group); Union of Oil Workers of Venezuela or FUTPV; Venezuelan Confederation of Workers or CTV (opposition-oriented labor organization); various civil society groups and human rights organizations |

**Venezuela Economy Data**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GDP - Gross Domestic Product | $407,400,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - official exchange rate | $367,500,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - real growth rate | 1.6% |
| GDP Per Capita | $13,600.00 (USD) |
| GDP by Sector- agriculture | 3.7% |
| GDP by Sector- Industry | 35.5% |
| GDP by Sector- services | 60.8% |
| Population Below Poverty Line | 37.9% |
| Inflation Rate | 29.8% |
| Labor Force | 13,300,000 |
| Labor Force By Occupation- agriculture | 7.3% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- industry | 21.8% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- services | 70.9% |
| Unemployment Rate | 12.1% |
| Fiscal Year | calendar year |
| Annual Budget | $50,120,000,000 (USD) |
| Budget Surplus or Deficit - percent of GDP | -9.8% |
| Public Debt (% of GDP) | 32% |
| Taxes and other revenues - percent of GDP | 28.1% |
| Major Industries | petroleum, iron ore mining, construction materials, food processing, textiles, steel, aluminum, motor vehicle assembly |
| Industrial Growth Rate | -8% |
| Agriculture Products | corn, sorghum, sugarcane, rice, bananas, vegetables, coffee; beef, pork, milk, eggs; fish |
| Currency Code | bolivar (VEB) |
| Child Labor - % of children ages 5-14 | 8% |
| Child Labor - # of children ages 5-14 | 404,092 |
| Commercial Bank Prime Lending Rate | 18% |

**Venezuela Economy**

**Economic Overview**

Venezuela continues to be highly dependent on the petroleum sector, which accounts for roughly one-third of GDP, around 80% of export earnings, and more than half of government operating revenues. Despite higher oil prices at the end of 2002 and into 2003, domestic political instability, culminating in a disastrous two-month national oil strike from December 2002 to February 2003, temporarily halted economic activity. The economy remained in depression in 2003, declining by 9.2% after an 8.9% fall in 2002. In late 2003, President CHAVEZ committed himself to $1 billion in new social programs, money the government does not have.

**Venezuela Exports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exports | $64,870,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Exports | petroleum, bauxite and aluminum, steel, chemicals, agricultural products, basic manufactures |
| Top Export Partners | US 45.1%, Netherlands Antilles 12.8%, Dominican Republic 2.8% |

**Venezuela Imports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imports | $31,370,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Imports | raw materials, machinery and equipment, transport equipment, construction materials |
| Top Import Partners | US 32.1%, Colombia 8%, Brazil 6.2%, Germany 4.6%, Mexico 4.4%, Italy 4.1% |

**Venezuela Flag**

The seven stars represent the seven provinces that began the fight for independence. The emblems on the arms symbolize the unity of the 20 provinces(a wheatsheaf with 20 ears), the struggle for independence (flags and weapons) and liberty ( a running horse). The cornucopias stand for the country's wealth and prosperity, and the wreath of laurel and palm is a symbol of glory and peace. In March 2006 Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez proposed changes to the flag which include a white horse  
galloping left instead of right, an additional star, a bow and arrow  
representing Venezuela’s indigenous people and a machete to represent  
the labor of workers,  
Parliament approved the changes to the  
200-year-old flag design, including the addition of the eighth star to honor  
the province of Guayana.

**Venezuela Flag Description**

Article 3.   The National Flag is inspired by the flag  
adopted by the Congress of the Republic in 1811.  It  
consists of the colors yellow, blue and red, in united, equal and  
horizontal stripes, in the preceding order from top to bottom,  
and, in the midst of the blue stripe, eight five-pointed white  
stars placed in an upwardly convex arc of a circle. The National  
Flag used by the Presidency of the Republic and by the National  
Armed Forces, as well as those hoisted upon national, state, and  
municipal public buildings, shall include the Coat of Arms of the  
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at the edge of the yellow stripe  
near the hoist.  The National Flag used by the Merchant  
marine shall bear only the eight stars

Venezuela flag



**Venezuela Interesting Facts**

* An ice cream shop in the city of Mérida in the Andes holds the world record for the most ice cream flavors. The 641 flavors include trout, garlic and black bean.
* At Christmas, Venezuelan families gather together to enjoy a holiday meal of hállaca, cornmeal dough stuffed with meat, green pepper, tomatoes, raisins, olives, garlic and parsley, steamed in banana leaves.
* Deaf and hearing-impaired people use Venezuelan sign language. State-run schools for deaf people have been operating since 1937, and many go to college or university with a sign language interpreter.
* Dr. José Gregorio Hernández was Venezuela's most famous doctor. He treated the poor for free and even bought them medicines with his own money. After his death at the turn of the century, people began to pray to him when they were sick. Venezuelans have petitioned the Vatican to have him declared a saint.
* In December, some Venezuelans make life-sized dolls that represent the problems of the past year. They burn these dolls at midnight on New Year's Eve, to symbolize a new beginning for the next year.
* Instead of being given a letter grade or a percentage, Venezuelan students are often marked out of twenty. On this scale, ten is a passing mark. Some students are also marked out of nine.
* It is a tradition in some parts of Venezuela to steal the Christ Child from a nativity scene. When the Christ Child is found again, there is a celebration marking his return.
* It is thought that Carib people discovered oil and that Spanish explorers found them using oil when they arrived in Venezuela. However, oil was not a major part of the economy until the beginning of the 20th century.
* Lake Maracaibo in western Venezuela is the largest lake in South America. It is joined to the Caribbean sea by a narrow body of water, and the waters are partly salty. In 1922, a huge oilfield was discovered near the lake.
* Luis Aparicio is widely thought to be the best baseball player in the history of Venezuelan baseball. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.
* Most Venezuelans have a television set. The most popular programs include telenovelas (soap operas) and beauty pageants. Venezuelan telenovelas are also hits in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru.
* One of the most famous women in Venezuelan politics is Irene Sáez. Not only was she elected governor of the State of Nueva Esparta, but she has also won the Miss Universe beauty pageant. She has created a new national party called IRENE (Integración Representación Nueva Esperanza).
* One of the most famous women in Venezuelan politics is Irene Sáez. Not only was she elected governor of the State of Nueva Esparta, but she has also won the Miss Universe beauty pageant. She has created a new national party called IRENE (Integración Representación Nueva Esperanza).
* One of Venezuela's most talented painters, Armando Reverón, was also known as the “Hermit of Macuto”. He was given this nickname because he refused to socialize with anyone except his wife and one of the models for his paintings.
* Simón Bolívar is called the Great Liberator, and Venezuelans are extremely proud that he was born in Venezuela.
* The boundaries of Venezuela on Venezuelan maps differ from those shown on maps from other South American countries. This is because some land is claimed by both Venezuela and by Guyana. The boundary was determined by an international tribunal in 1899, but the Venezuelan government disagreed with the decision and still claims part of Guyana.
* The government distributes literacy training materials across the country, and encourages Venezuelans who can read and write to teach others who do not have these skills.
* The highest waterfall in the world, at 807 meters, is Angel Falls in Canaima National Park in southwest Venezuela. It is named after an American pilot and explorer, Jimmy Angel, who spotted the falls from an airplane in 1935 and later crash-landed nearby.
* The name “Venezuela” actually means “Little Venice”. The Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, noticed houses built on stilts in the water. This reminded him of Venice, Italy, where canals run through the city.
* Venezuelan families like to eat out and meet friends in restaurants. This may be why Caracas has more restaurants per inhabitant than any other Latin American city.
* Venezuelans have won international competitions in water-skiing and motorcycling. There are also many talented boxers, such as Morocho Hernández and Morochito Rodríguez, who have competed in the Olympics and other international competitions.
* The world's highest waterfall is Angel Falls. It is 3,212 feet high.
* When a child loses a tooth they put their tooth under their pillow. While they are asleep, a mouse will take the tooth and bring some coins.

**Venezuela Lost Tooth Traditions**

El Ratón Pérez leaves money as a gift. He takes the tooth . All child hope to find the next morning a money, candy or gift where they left the teeth.

**History of Venezuela**

*Statue of Simón Bolívar Palacios in Caracas*

THE TERRITORY THAT BECAME Venezuela lay outside the geographical boundaries of the great pre-Hispanic civilizations of Central and South America. And although it was the first locale in which Christopher Columbus set foot on the mainland of the New World, Venezuela was of only marginal consequence within the Spanish American empire during most of the next three centuries. It was not until the late eighteenth century that the colonial region that encompassed present-day Venezuela provoked, thanks to growing agricultural and trading activity under the auspices of the Caracas Company, more than minor interest from the Spanish crown.

Venezuela’s historical significance perhaps reached its peak during Spanish America’s struggle for independence during the early nineteenth century. In 1810 it became the first colony formally to declare its independence. Venezuela also provided Latin America with its greatest hero of that era, and perhaps of all time, in Simón Bolívar Palacios. Bolívar, known as "The Liberator," played the leading role in expelling the Spanish colonial authorities not only from Venezuela, but also from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. He died in 1830, tragically broken after having seen his dream of Latin American unity shattered by the realities of regional caudillismo (rule by local strongmen, or caudillos).

Venezuela remained marginal primarily because it lacked deposits of gold, silver. or the precious stones that constituted Spain’s fundamental interest in the New World. No useful purpose existed during colonial times for the petroleum--dubbed "the devil’s excrement" by early Spanish explorers--that oozed out of the ground near Lago de Maracaibo. Venezuela’s growing prosperity toward the end of the colonial era was based instead on its flourishing production and trade of cocoa. When the ravages of Venezuela’s independence struggle combined with a collapse in the international market to put an end to Venezuela’s cocoa "boom," coffee became the nation’s principal export. This second phase in Venezuela’s agricultural export economy lasted nearly a century, until petroleum became king with the popularization of the internal combustion engine in the early twentieth century.

The petroleum industry in Venezuela began under the control of foreign firms. Beginning in the 1930s, it gradually came under the government’s authority. The nationalization of the remaining assets of the foreign oil firms in 1976 represented the culmination of full government control. Nonetheless, the government had little effect on the international price of crude oil, despite the efforts of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela was a founding member. Fluctuations in the price of oil during the 1970s and 1980s exercised a commanding impact on the political as well as the economic life of the nation.

In strictly political terms, Venezuela’s republican history exhibits a seeming incongruity between the instability and dictatorial rule of the period prior to 1935 and the stability of its post-1958 democracy. Scholars have posited a variety of explanations for this fortuitous transformation, most of which cite the usefulness of vastly increased petroleum revenues in allowing the state to address the demands of virtually every politically active sector of society. The marked decline in petroleum revenues during the 1980s therefore placed significant strains on this political system, which for over two decades had been the envy of the other nations of Latin America.

**Venezuela History Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Venezuela Year in History | Venezuela Timeline |
| 1498 | **Christopher Columbus landed in Venezuela** Christopher Columbus landed in Venezuela which is inhabited by Carib, Arawak and Chibcha peoples. |
| 1500 | **Nueva Cadiz was established on Isla de Cubagua** Nueva Cadiz was established on Isla de Cubagua off the coast of Venezuela after Columbus discovered rich pearl oyster beds nearby. |
| 1509 | **The Spanish colonized the area of Nueva Granada (modern Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela)** The Spanish colonized the area of Nueva Granada (modern Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela). |
| 1521 | **Spanish colonization begins** Spanish colonization begins on the north-east coast. |
| 1541 | **Earthquake and tidal wave** An earthquake and tidal wave finished off the settlement of Nueva Cadiz on Isla de Cubagua off the coast of Venezuela. |
| 1749 | **First rebellion against Spanish colonial rule** First rebellion against Spanish colonial rule. |
| 1800 | **Civil war** Venezuela was torn by civil war. |
| 1811 | **Venezuela became the first South American country to declare independence from Spain** Venezuela became the first South American country to declare independence from Spain. |
| 1812 | **Earthquake** Earthquake destroyed 90% of Caracas killing about 20,000 people. |
| 1819 | **Battle of Boyaca** General Simon Bolivar defeats royalist forces in the Battle of Boyaca and the Republic of Colombia (also known as Gran Colombia) is proclaimed on December 17, consisting of Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. |
| 1821 | **Battle of Carabobo** In the Battle of Carabobo, Bolivar defeated the royalists outside of Caracas. |
| 1822 | **Battle of Pichincha** At Battle of Pichincha, Bolivar secured the independence of Quito (Ecuador) from Spain. It formed Gran Colombia with Venezuela and Colombia. |
| 1829 | **Venezuela secedes from Gran Colombia** Venezuela secedes from Gran Colombia and becomes an independent republic with its capital at Caracas. |
| 1859 | **The Federal War began** The Federal War began in Venezuela. Ezequiel Zamora (1817-1860) led the Federalist Army until his assassination on Jan 10, 1860. |
| 1860 | **Ezequiel Zamora was assassinated** Ezequiel Zamora (1817-1860), leader of the Federalist Army in Venezuela, was assassinated. |
| 1863 | **The hostilities of the Federal War ended with negotiations for the Treaty of Coche** The hostilities of the Federal War ended with negotiations for the Treaty of Coche, singed on May 22. This was the biggest civil war Venezuela had had since its independence. |
| 1870 | **Guzman Blanco ruled Venezuela bringing the civil wars to an end** Guzman Blanco ruled Venezuela bringing the civil wars to an end. |
| 1870 | **Venezuela governed by Antonio Guzman Blanco** Venezuela governed by Antonio Guzman Blanco, who attracts foreign investment, modernizes infrastructure and develops agriculture and education. |
| 1899 | **An international tribunal in Paris** An international tribunal in Paris ruled on a border dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana (Guyana). Britain received most of the claim for the Essequibo region, close to 111,000 square miles. Venezuela was represented by 2 US judges and the chairman of the panel was Russian jurist Frederic de Martens. Venezuela rejected this decision in the 1960s. |
| 1899 | **Cipriano Castro served as president of Venezuela** Cipriano Castro served as president of Venezuela. |
| 1914 | **Venezuela’s 1st oil gusher was drilled near Lake Maracibo** Venezuela’s 1st oil gusher was drilled near Lake Maracibo. |
| 1929 | **Venezuela was the world’s largest exporter of oil** Venezuela was the world’s largest exporter of oil. |
| 1947 | **President Romulo Gallegos is overthrown** President Romulo Gallegos, Venezuela’s first democratically elected leader, is overthrown within eight months of his election in a military coup led by Marcos Perez Jimenez, who forms a government with backing from the armed forces and the US. |
| 1954 | **The Caracas Convention** The Caracas Convention established ground rules for political sanctuary in Latin America. |
| 1957 | **A student strike** A student strike began at the Central Univ. of Venezuela (UCV) against the electoral fraud of the dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez. This soon led his downfall. |
| 1973 | **Venezuela benefits from oil boom** Venezuela benefits from oil boom and its currency peaks against the US dollar. Oil and steel industries nationalized. |
| 1998 | **Hugo Chavez elected president** Hugo Chavez elected president. |
| 1999 | **Severe floods and mudslides** Severe floods and mudslides hit the north, killing tens of thousands of people. |
| 1999 | **Venezuelans approve new constitution** Venezuelans approve new constitution. |
| 2001 | **49 reform laws implemented** President Chavez promotes 49 new reform laws which the government has introduced, including land and oil industry reforms, under powers which did not require them to be approved by the National Assembly. |
| 2003 | **Signatures demanding referendum** Petition with more than three million signatures demand referendum on Chavez's rule. Electoral body rejects petition saying it fails to meet technical requirements. |
| 2006 | **Arms deal with Russia** President Chavez signs a $3 billion arms deal with Russia, including an agreement to buy fighter jets and helicopters. |
| 2006 | **Hugo Chavez relected** Hugo Chavez wins a third term in presidential elections with 63% of the vote. |
| 2008 | **Colombian armed forces cross-border** Diplomatic crisis after Colombian armed forces make cross-border raid into Ecuador, a Venezuelan ally. Farc rebel leader Raul Reyes killed. Mr Chavez mobilizes troops along Venezuelan-Colombian border. |
| 2010 | **Economy shrinks** Economy shrank by 5.8 % in last three months of 2009, according to the central bank. |
| 2012 | **President Chavez wins a fourth term** President Chavez wins a fourth term with 54% of the vote on an official turnout at about 81%. |
| 2013 | **Nicolas Maduro** Nicolas Maduro elected president. |
| 2013 | **President Chavez dies** President Chavez dies of cancer |

**Venezuela Holidays and Events**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Display Date | Title |
| Annually | **Dancing Devils of Corpus Christi** Central Coast Region During the annual celebrations of the Feast of Corpus Christi in the small communities of the central coast of Venezuela, dancers disguised as masked devils dance backwards in penitence as an official of the Catholic Church carries forth the Blessed Sacrament. At the climax of the celebration the devils surrender to the Sacrament symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. The dancers or ''promeseros'' (promise-keepers) are lifelong members of a confraternity that transmit the historical memory and ancestral traditions of the communities. |
| July 5th | **Independence Day** |
| July 24th | **Birth date - Simón Bolívar**  Birth date - Simón Bolívar , South American revolutionary, was born in Caracas, Venezuela on July 24, 1783. |
| December 25th | **Christmas** The Christmas season begins with the *Misa del Aguinald* (Mass of the Gift) held each morning around 5 am. Church bells ringing and children setting off firecrackers alert villages that the hour of Mass has arrived. *Aguinaldo* (Holiday Music) is also played.  Christmas dinner includes *hallacas* (cornmeal pie stuffed with pork, chicken, olives, raisins, wrapped in banana leaves and boiled), *pan de jamón* (long bread filled with ham and raisins), *pavo* (turkey*), pernil de cochino* (pork dish), *dulce de lechoza* (cold dessert of green papaya and brown sugar), and *ponche crema* (cream punch with or without liquor).  Children receive Christmas gifts from El Niño Jesus (the Christ child), who leaves them under their beds.  In some areas on New Year ’s Eve, children create a life-size effigy of the apostle Judas and solicit money for the poor. At midnight they burn Judas with fireworks. |

**Venezuela Meals and Food**

Recipes from Venezuela

* [Milanesa Uruguaya - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/-milanesa-uruguaya.htm)
* [Arepas Rellenas Con Guiso de Carne - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/arepas-rellenas-con-guiso-de-carne.htm)
* [Arroz Con Bananas (Rice with Bananas) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/arroz-con-bananas-rice-with-bananas.htm)
* [Cachapas - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/cachapas.htm)
* [Venezuelan Black Beans and Rice - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/venezuelan-black-beans-and-rice.htm)
* [Venezuelan Meat Stew - Soup](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/venezuelan-meat-stew.htm)
* [Venezuelan Peppers with Shrimp - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Venezuela/recipe/venezuelan-peppers-with-shrimp.htm)

**Venezuela Recipes and Diet**

Venezuela food and meal customs

**Diet**

Instead of bread, most Venezuelans eat arepas. Arepas are fried or baked corn or wheat pancakes, often filled with meat, eggs or cheese. They are so popular that there are food stands, called areperas, that specialize in making arepas. Similar foods include cachapas (sweet corn pancakes usually filled with cheese), tequenos (fried dough combined with cheese), empanadas (hearty cheese-filled pastries) and pan de jamon, long bread filled with ham, olives and raisins.

Meat is another important part of Venezuelan cuisine. One common dish, sancocho (a meat and vegetable stew) is usually served with arepas and toasted cassava. One of Venezuela's national dishes is pabellon criollo, which is made with flank steak, black beans, rice and fried plantains (cooking bananas). Mondogo is another popular dish. It is a thick soup made from tripe and vegetables.

Guavas in syrup with cream cheese, and strawberries with cream are common Venezuelan desserts. Majarete, a coconut custard, and quesillo, an egg custard, are favorite desserts. Locally grown fresh fruits include papayas, watermelons, mangoes, bananas, pineapples, guavas, oranges and strawberries.

**Meals**

The largest meal in Venezuela is eaten between noon and 3 PM. Many Venezuelans go home to eat lunch with their families. Venezuelans eat a light supper at 8 PM or later.

Food in Venezuela

[](http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/maxW_1200/images/photos/ve/venfood.jpg)

[[http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/exH_50/images/photos/ve/venfood.jpg](http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/maxW_1200/images/photos/ve/venfood.jpg)](http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/maxW_1200/images/photos/ve/venfood.jpg) [[http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/exH_50/images/photos/ve/food.jpg](http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/maxW_1200/images/photos/ve/food.jpg)](http://d2z7bzwflv7old.cloudfront.net/cdn_image/maxW_1200/images/photos/ve/food.jpg)

**Venezuela Languages**

**Languages**

Spanish (official), numerous indigenous dialects

**Language Translations:**

**Greetings in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Do you speak English? | Habla usted ingles? |
| Do you speak Spanish? | Habla usted espanol? |
| Excuse me | Dispenseme |
| Fine / Good | Bien |
| Good afternoon | Buenas tardes |
| Good evening | Buenas tardes |
| Good morning | Buenos diás |
| Good night | Buenas noches |
| Goodbye | Adios |
| Happy New Year! | ¡Felíz año nuevo! |
| Hello | ¡Hóla! |
| How are you? | Como esta usted? |
| I'm pleased to meet you | Encantado de conocerle |
| Merry Christmas | Feliz Navidad |
| Please | Por favor |
| See you later | Hasta luego |
| Thank you | Gracias |
| Welcome | Bienvenido |
| What is your name? | Como se llama? / Deme su nombre |
| Yes / No | Si / No |

**Days in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sunday | Domingo |
| Monday | Lunes |
| Tuesday | Martes |
| Wednesday | Miercoles |
| Thursday | Jueves |
| Friday | Viernes |
| Saturday | Sabado |

**Months in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| January | Enero |
| February | Febrero |
| March | marzo |
| April | Abril |
| May | Mayo |
| June | Junio |
| July | Julio |
| August | Agosto |
| September | Septiembre |
| October | Octubre |
| November | Noviembre |
| December | Diciembre |

**Colors in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Black | Negro |
| Blue | Azul |
| Green | Verde |
| Orange | Anaranjado |
| Pink | Rosado |
| Red | Rojo |
| White | Blanco |
| Yellow | Amarillo |

**Numbers in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One | Uno |
| Two | Dos |
| Three | Tres |
| Four | Cuatro |
| Five | Cinco |
| Six | Seis |
| Seven | Siete |
| Eight | Ocho |
| Nine | Nueve |
| Ten | Diez |
| Fifty | Cincuenta |
| one Hundred | Cien |
| One Thousand | mil |

**Venezuela Clothing and Fashion**

Venezuelans take pride in their clothes and appearance. Being neat, clean, and properly groomed is important. Venezuelans may wear traditional clothing with French and Italian styles.

**Dating, Family and Children Venezuela**

**Family and Children**

To Venezuelans, the family is at the center of their lives. Most spend a great deal of their free time with their families. Three generations of people may live together in the same house or apartment, and elderly people are usually treated with respect. Grandparents, or abuelitos, often look after young children if both parents work outside the home.

Some people in the coastal regions of Venezuela live in houses on stilts called palefitos. Larger cities have modern housing developments and apartment buildings. Some of the indigenous peoples have unique types of housing. Yanomami people live under a large circular roof called a yano. One yano can hold up to one hundred families. Each family has its own place within the yano

**Venezuela Gestures and Greetings**

**Greetings**

Many Venezuelans use affectionate nicknames with people that they do not know well. For instance, it is not strange to be called “my love” (mi amor) by an acquaintance. Many nicknames are given on the basis of a person's appearance. When shaking hands, Venezuelans use the appropriate greeting for the time of day - 'buenos dias', 'buenas tardes', or 'buenas noches'.

**Gestures**

A firm handshake is a common greeting among acquaintances and strangers. Venezuelans communicate with various hand gestures to emphasize a point. Pointing with one's index finger is considered rude. It is polite to maintain eye contact throughout a conversation.

**Visiting**

When a visitor arrives at a home or business, a small cup of strong thick coffee is usually offered. Table manners are Continental style (the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating). When eating it is considered polite to leave a small amount of food on your plate when you have finished eating. When finished eating, place the knife and fork diagonally across the plate with the prongs facing down and the handles facing to the right.

**Cultural Attributes**

Venezuelans tend to be tolerant of cultural and racial differences. Venezuelans tend to have a more relaxed view of time. They even say that they are on Venezuelan time (hora venezolana).

Venezuelans consider it important to finish conversations, even if it means they arrive a little later at their next destination. Venezuelans are proud of their country and heritage.

**Venezuela Church and Religion**

Most towns and communities in Venezuela have a patron saint. The saint's day will be celebrated in the community with a large fiesta. Some Venezuelans venerate María Lionza. According to legend, she was the daughter of a Spanish conquistador and a princess from one of the indigenous tribes. She is sometimes portrayed as a beautiful woman riding an animal called a tapir, sometimes as a young girl wearing a crown. Her followers claim that she can heal people and perform miracles. She is also believed to protect animals and the natural environment. Every year many Venezuelans make a pilgrimage to her shrine, Montanas de Sorte de María Lionza, in the state of Yaracuy, especially on Día de la raza (Race Day) in October.   
  
The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, or public order, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.  
  
The Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Ministry of Interior and Justice is mandated to maintain a registry of religious groups, disburse funds to religious organizations, and promote awareness and understanding among religious communities. Each group must register with the DJR to have legal status as a religious organization. Requirements for registration are largely administrative, with the additional provision that groups serve the community's social interests.   
  
A 1964 concordat governs relations between the Government and the Vatican and provides the basis for government subsidies to the Roman Catholic Church. All registered religious groups are eligible for funding to support religious services, but most money goes to Catholic organizations. The Government continued to provide annual subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor, although the subsidies were reduced in some states. The Government continued to fund the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV) at reduced levels. Other religious groups are free to establish their own schools

**Students Life in Venezuela**

**Mornings**

Children must leave early for school in Venezuela, which means that getting ready in the morning is usually simple and fast. Many schools begin as early as 7:00 or 7:30. A favorite bread called arepas is made with corn flour, water, and salt and is very popular at all meals.

**School**

Although some private schools have their own school-owned bus systems to transport kids to and from school, kids will usually walk or ride a public bus to school, depending on the local circumstances. They will catch their bus between 6:00 and 6:30, and arrive at school around 7:00. At the end of the day, students return home the same way they came.

**Classroom**

All children must wear a uniform to school. And under the current political emphasis on education, school meals are provided in every nationally funded school, called a “Bolivarian” school. In order to improve the general education level of its citizens, the Venezuelan education office requires that school last much of the day, from 8:00 in the morning until later afternoon, with up to three meals provided, depending on the actual length of the school day in each school.  
The school canteen is open most of the school day, and the students are responsible for keeping the area clean and tidy. Parents can arrange for a prepaid amount to be available for their child to take advantage of each day or week. The canteen offers a variety of healthy sandwiches, salads, stews, fruit drinks, and lunch meals that include beef, pork chops, chicken, and fish.

**Student Learning**

The language of Venezuela is Spanish. In addition to Spanish, elementary schools teach mathematics, reading, science, and social studies, among other basic subjects. Education is a very important part of Venezuelan life under the direction of President Hugo Chavez. Although President Chavez is politically controversial, he has done much to improve the education and other social conditions of his country’s people. For example, not only do children attend class during the day, but so also do many parents in the evenings after work attend the same schools, where they are taught to read and write by hundreds of volunteers throughout the country.  
In areas that have been difficult to access with the new emphasis on education, “educational missions” have been organized, each one named after a hero from the country’s history. These innovative missions, directed by highly motivated and skilled educators, are making steady progress against the poor education that had become so prevalent.

As money is more available for schools, and as the basics of seats, decent classrooms, working bathrooms, and the like are provided once again, more advanced tools can be added, such as computers and overhead projectors. But these are still relatively rare, especially in rural schools.

Families must buy their own books, arrange for transportation, and cover basic daily expenses such as food.

Instead of being given a letter grade or a percentage, Venezuelan students are often marked out of twenty. On this scale, ten is a passing mark.

Deaf and hearing-impaired people use Venezuelan sign language. State-run schools for deaf people have been operating since 1937, and many go to college or university with a sign language interpreter.

**After School Activities**

Extracurricular activities in Venezuela are largely nonexistent. The few schools who may sponsor art or science clubs following school are large national schools rather than community-based schools.     
Some private schools tend to offer more after-school activities than public schools, such as basketball, soccer, language clubs, band, orchestra, gymnastics, and karate.

**Student Free Time**

 Venezuelans love *futebol* (soccer), which is their favorite sport. However, they are also fond of baseball, basketball, and boxing. Coastal or river areas enjoy water sports.   
Venezuelans are friendly and love to party. They mix play with their school and with their work. They are creative and social with one another. Unfortunately, many families are poor and require that their older children work after school or drop out of school altogether in order to help support the family.

**Evenings**

In Venezuela, the close relationship of families and friends tie communities and the nation together. Families are very important. Thus, much of the time at home in the evening is spent with family, either working, celebrating, or just plain socializing. Families are very protective of their children, especially of the girls. As grandparents get older, they often move in with their children and help as they can with raising the grandchildren.

**Education Culture**

Education in Venezuela has improved significantly during the past several years under a new government direction. In the past, most of Venezuela’s profits from their oil industry, which is the country’s biggest money-maker, have gone to a relatively small part of the population. About 80% of the people were living at the poverty level. By contrast, in 2006 over 40% of the national budget was focused on improving conditions for the poor, including improving education. And just as important is a shift in the attitude of Venezuelans in general, for in areas where government changes have not improved education, often local communities are taking charge of the schools and together are fixing up school buildings, providing teachers, and in general making sure that their children will get a good education.  
Schooling is required and is free for children from ages seven to fourteen years old. Venezuela has 20,000 elementary schools, but only 2,000 secondary and technical schools. After the age of fourteen, fewer than 50% of students continue on to complete their secondary education.

The emphasis on getting children into schools and keeping them there longer has been working, however. Between 1999 and 2002 the total number of children attending school increased by 1.5 million.

Some private schools do exist, but they are usually attended by the children of wealthy families or children of international businessmen. Interestingly, if the children are from a country other than Venezuela, sometimes the teacher will allow the students to bring their home-country textbooks so the students can maintain consistency with their previous studies.

Elementary school begins with a year of preparatory subjects and is roughly equal to first grade in the United States. All students must complete this year before they can advance to the six main years of elementary school. Following elementary school is secondary school, which is divided into two parts. The first three years consist of general studies, but the final two years focus on more specialized learning in an area of interest.

The school day is usually five hours long, and children attend in shifts. Some begin early in the morning and go until about 1:00, while others begin in the early afternoon and attend until 6:00 in the evening.

Not only are the children benefiting from the increased emphasis on education, so are their parents. In a country plagued with illiteracy, more than 1.5 million adults have been taught to read and write in the last decade. Adult literacy now stands at just over 90% and continues to rise.

**Venezuela Sport and Recreation**

Venezuelans enjoy baseball Soccer, is also popular, especially in the Andean region. Venezuelans like to spend vacations at the beach or on one of Venezuela's many large freshwater lakes, where they enjoy water-skiing, surfing, snorkeling, scuba diving, swimming and fishing. Some Venezuelans enjoy watching bullfights, or corridas de toros.

A unique pastime in Venezuela is a game called bolas criollas, or Venezuelan bowling. This team game is played outdoors on a flat surface. One player throws a target ball three or four meters away. The players take turns trying to throw their balls as close as possible to the target ball. The team that throws the highest number of balls close to the target ball wins.

Popular children's games include marbles, kite-flying and dominoes. One popular game called trompo is played with a wooden top. Some children play carrucha, making homemade cars out of wooden boxes, or pelota de goma, a version of baseball played with a rubber ball, using a fist for the bat