

Venezuela



An adventure into a
country without tourists
and in free fall....

July 2018



Caracas – arrival / stop-over



We arrived half an hour late into Caracas, but custom clearance and immigration went swiftly. Ben and his girlfriend picked us up and transported us to our hotel **Villa Playa Grande** some 3 km from the airport. A very basic airport hotel type. We sat down over a couple of beers with Ben to sort out the changes in the program. The main thing being that 2 domestic flights had been cancelled all together. This meant that we had to be driven from Caracas to Barcelona and to Mochima National Park instead of flying. It also meant that the return flight from Ciudad Bolivar to Caracas had to be made by car instead of flight. 10 hours driving minimum....

We were informed that inflation has been some 40,000 % over last years and the availability of local cash was very scares at best. Also, no internet and few services in operations once you leave the main cities. Security and safety are very important and one does not walk-about alone and certainly not flash about expensive cameras, jewellery. Cars, looked when driving through cities. We were advised not to leave the hotel on our own this first evening. We stayed put and had dinner and a couple of beers at the hotel and went to be early.





Mochima National Park

A magnificent marine National Park on the Atlantic coast



Our driver picked us up at 05:00 AM already after we had had breakfast and drove us to another pick-up point (1 hour away) – where another car picked us up and transported us to the **Posada Mochima Lodge** outside of **Barcelona** on the Atlantic coast. The distance some 400 km took us some 6 hours and we arrived just before lunch. The only thing worth seeing on the way was a couple of small villages where we stopped to watch how they processed Cassava into bread – which we also purchased and brought with us. A lot of military and militia along the way with check-points stopping and going through vehicles at random. They were positioned at every main road connection. You really sense there it is a Military controlled country.

We had been upgraded at the lodge to a really nice executive suite with balcony and see view. We had a quick shower and set-out for a boat-trip out **on the Atlantic Ocean in the archipelago to search for the Dolphins.** We were lucky and ran in to a group of 50-100 individuals and followed them for a while. Lunch (hamburgers and french-fries) was brought along to be taken - out at sea. Late afternoon we just relaxed around the premises and watched the world-cup soccer game between Brazil and Belgium. We had dinner at the restaurant having fish and rice + some nice snacks and the good local beer (Polar). A small group of Russians were also checked in and partied a bit. We went to bed quite early still being jet-lagged.

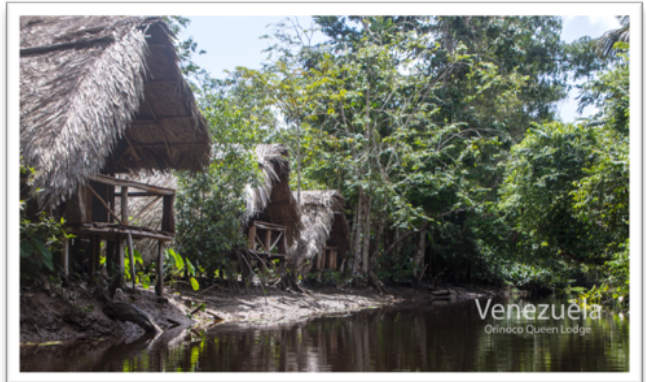




Orinoco river delta (1)

On day 3 we left at 07:45 by car to go to Orinoco river and our lodge Orinoco Queen. It was scheduled to be a 4-hour drive. It took us 5 ½ to get to Boca de Oracoa where we boarded a speedboat to take the last 1 ½ stretch to get to the Orinoco Queen lodge. We had to pass through a couple of sudden heavy rainfalls and had to cover our luggage and ourselves with a big sheet of plastic. We drove up the Orinoco river and eventually arrived at our lodge. We were greeted not only by the manager, but also by a local group of Venezuelans who were on vacation. They greeted us with local rum and seemed to have been drinking since early morning. Nice group though, speaking only a few words of English.

We checked-in to our cabin on the river. This is a very simple establishment up in the middle of the jungle with no electricity. The generator is turned on for a few hours in the evening only. Clemence the manager and guide did however speak some English fortunately. We asked him to come to our cabin and pick out some clothes and things from the bags which we had brought along to distribute. This made him very happy. We had lunch – Spaghetti and sauce – very filling and quite ok. After lunch we set-out to explore the surrounding river-canals for a couple of hours. This included a stop at two different Warao groups of indigenous people.



This was the highlights as we got to distribute all the clothes that we had brought along. They seemed very pleased with this. Nice, friendly but very shy people living their traditional lives well outside and without too much interference from other people. At the last stop we were invited to taste the “grub” which they eat as a snack delicatessen. This is a huge fat maggot which they chew and swallow alive. We saw how the chief ate a couple but declined to try ourselves. Back to the lodge for a change of clothes and dinner. They served the catfish which we picked up on the way along the river, purchased from some local fishermen. No beer or wine available at the lodge due to no tourists coming to the lodge at moment. Apart from the odd group of local Venezuelans visiting from time to time, the last foreign group was 2-3 months ago.





Orinoco river delta (2)

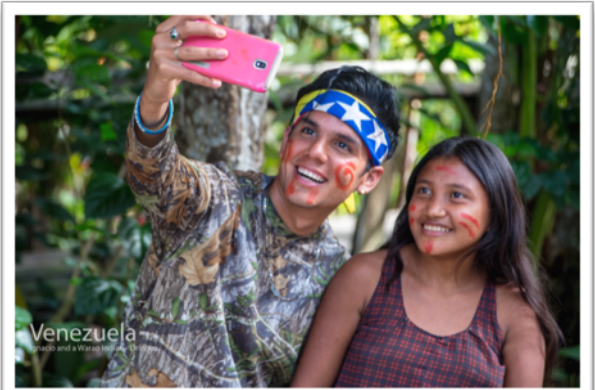
After dinner we went out for a night tour. Our guide, Clemente, who also speaks decent English (god bless) is an expert guide having been the manager of the lodge for many years now. The place is owned by another guy – Victor – whom we meet many times also during our short visit serving us with everything including local rum. **We saw a python, an owl and the dangerous brown monkey spider during the night tour.**

We started up the second day by taking an early morning tour at 06:00 AM for about 2 hours. Best time of day to catch the birds before it gets too hot. We had a good run this morning, although some of the birds are a bit too far away for a good picture. We saw, **Blue Macao (large parrots), Hoatsin, Howler monkeys, Yellow tailed snake, Akore, Amazonia parrots, Humming birds and more.**

After coming back-in it was only for a quick change of clothes putting on rubber boats and off we were again, this time for a jungle waking tour. Very muddy and difficult to make any headway due to the rough terrain. We were given a “survival course” by our guide on what plants, roots and things were edible in the jungle should one get lost. Back to the lodge again for lunch and then off for a canoe ride before finally packing up and getting ready to leave.



We had to travel again back the same way by speed-boat for 1 ½ to the same drop-off spot **Boca de Oracao**. A prearranged driver picked us up here and was ready to transport us the ca: 3-hour drive to Ciudad Bolivar. We had been upgraded to stay at Casa Grande in the old town instead of the La Cumbre where we first were planned to stay. This – **Casa Grande** – was a lovely old house turned into a boutique hotel. We were of course the only people staying here. They did not seem to have people staying either on a regular basis. Food was prepared for us in the nice restaurant. Really spooky being completely alone. We had a couple of beers also on the roof terrace and watched the sun go down.

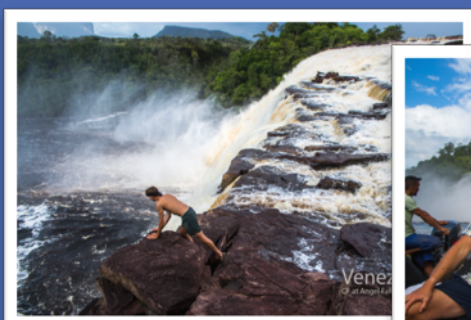
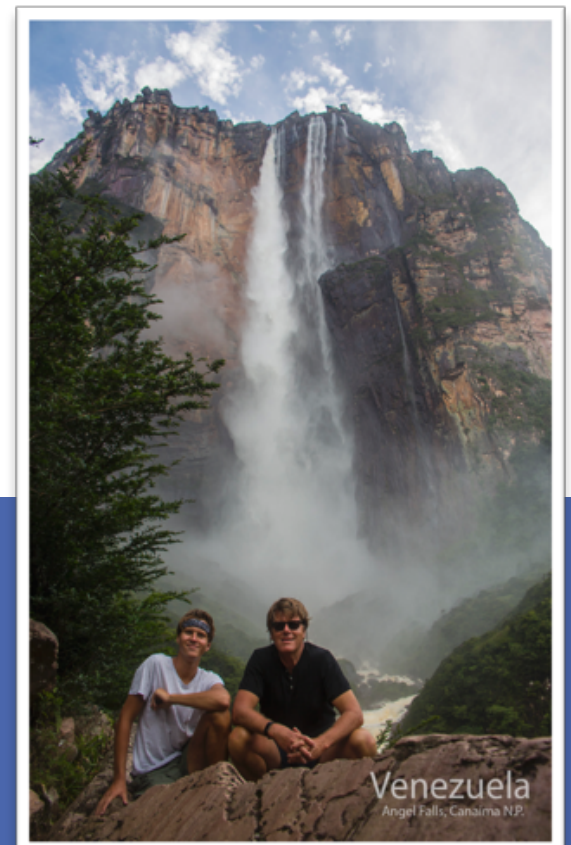




Canaima N.P. – Angel Falls (1)

Started with breakfast and checked-out. We were met by a local guide who transported us to the local airport. He helped us changing some local money and also to check-in. Only small propeller planes arriving/departing from the airport. All other flights stopped all together. We had to pose for some selfies with the local staff as they had not seen foreigners in 2-month at the airport! Everything went very smooth. We had to leave one bag of luggage as the plane had no more space. It was only a 4-seater prop plane so the pilot, CF and myself. The 4th seat and the remaining space was filled up with cargo and our luggage. Off we went for a nice **1-hour flight into Canaima National Park where we had a lovely view of the landscape.**

We were met by Tony our local guide (a Pemón indian) at the tiny airport, paid our 10 USD entrance fee and left for the camp. We pushed him to talk to the pilot/s at the airport and try to arrange so that we could charter a flight and make a fly over of the Angel Falls. There were several turns and prices discussed when we eventually went ourselves to the airport and negotiated a fee directly with the pilot. The usual fee is 120 USD per person and a minimum of 4 people. We managed to get him to take us for 350 (only the two of us). He started off by **flying low over the Sapo waterfalls and following the Carao river and a 15-minute flight to the Angel Falls. He made 3 or 4 turns so that we could get a good look at the falls and also take pictures. The whole trip lasted 40 min.** Back to the airport where our guide picked us up for an immediate **tour on the Lagoon and walk under Sapo Waterfalls.** An amazing experience especially since the water levels were very high. Dinner at the camp and a walk around to see the small village where we stayed and then to bed.



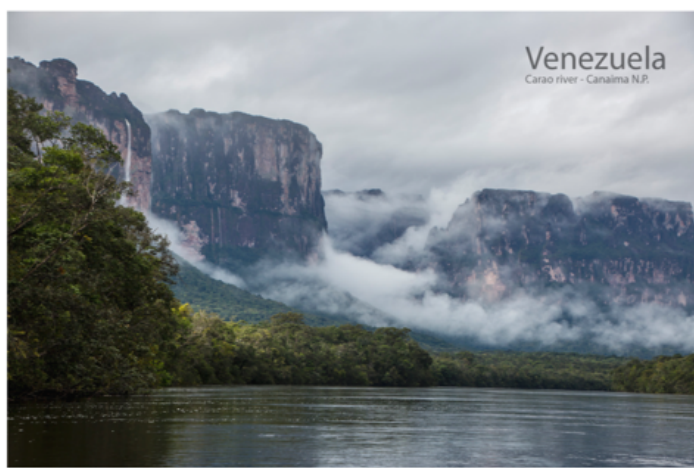


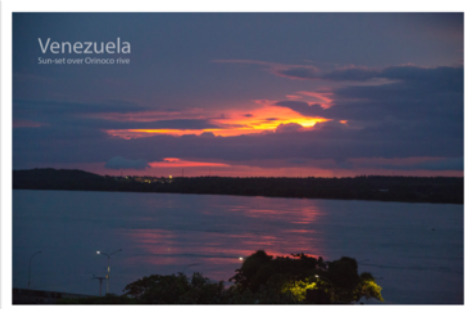
Canaima N.P. – Angel Falls (2)

Next day we took off at 09:00 AM fully packed and staffed with people to cook and service us as we were now approaching the Angel Falls overland. The boat ride in a Pirogue canoe with a 40 hp engine the whole trip took us almost 5 hours including a lunch break on the way. One passage on the river we had to get off and walk as it was too shallow to go in the boat. We also made a stop to visit a Pemón settlement along the way. They were practicing slash-n-burn in order to make way for planting some Cassava, pineapples etc. We left our luggage and only brought camera and a few small things for the walk up to where the waterfall comes down. This is a 1 hour hike up a slippery trail. The view-point at the falls was astonishing. We were apparently lucky that the weather was quite clear. It is either foggy or rainy – which makes it difficult to get a clear view of the fall.

We then walked back down and crossed the river where our very basic camp was set-up. The prepared dinner for us on an open fire and we slept in hammocks with mosquito nets. Pitch dark and the rain kept pouring down all night and well in to the morning. After breakfast at 06:30 AM we packed-up and headed back down again. The trip back down-river was 1 hour shorter.

Lunch and then off to the airport for transport to Ciudad Bolívar. The flight went on time and we were picked-up at the airport by Hector who had driven us earlier in the week. Now we had to manage another long drive (+5 hours) before checking in at a small **Posada on the beach in Boca de Uchire**. Lovely location right on the beach, but it was a place where you apparently bring your own stuff such as food, towels etc. This was not what we had in mind and packed for. It would have helped if your tour organizer had informed and planned a bit better. Again, no beer or drinks available. We got a home cooked meal by the owner and dined together with our two drivers. One who had driven us from Ciudad Bolívar (Hector) and one who had come from Caracas to pick us up and drive us the following day back the final stretch to Caracas (3-hour drive).





Canaima → Ciudad Bolívar - Caracas

Started with breakfast and checking out. We arrived in Caracas at 11:00 AM and were met by our tour-organizer again – Ben Rodriguez. He took us around and showed us Caracas. A lot of precautions were had to be taken as regards not to bring any expensive cameras, watches or other valuables who could attract attention. I only took my mobile but was advised to keep it in my pocket as much as possible. We had a look at the Simon Bolivar museum, his birthplace and a few other important sites. Finishing off the down-town visit with a coffee (excellent) at one of the local cafes. I have never seen so many military or militia in one place. They seemed to be prepared and geared up for something happening. There were random body searches on people without any questioning or real call for. We ended our tour with a lunch at one of the best restaurants in town: Tarzilandia Bar & Restaurant, my treat. Excellent meat, good beer and nice settings. The bill ended at ca: 14 USD for 4 people.

Off to the airport and check-in. Huge ques getting through passport control. We arrived in Lisbon on the following morning and spent a couple of days there before going back to Sweden.

