DISCLAIMER

The Country Orientation Guides are provided as a service for faculty travelling to international destinations for teaching purposes. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in the Country Orientation Guides, neither the Office of Training nor the Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University can accept responsibility for any errors that may appear in information, editorial content, maps, text, representation, or illustrations as printed. The publisher does accept any responsibility for content of editorial. Additional copies of this publication may be obtained in the Office of International Affairs at the Fischler School of Education and Human Services in North Miami Beach.
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Welcome
Dear Colleagues,

Thank you very much for accepting to teach in Venezuela!

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) at the Fischler School of Education and Human Services has prepared this country guide to provide you with basic and general information on the country you are about to visit.

This guide is intended to help you prepare for your trip. As you travel in the country, please let us know if you find that there are details that need to be added or changed so that we can keep our guides updated. Although we have tried to make it as comprehensive as possible, all of us know that our world moves very rapidly and changes happen everyday; however, we have tried our best to include all of the details you need to make sure you are comfortable in your new environment.

This information has been compiled with the help of the Office of Strategic Initiatives and Global Enterprises for Academic Development (SIGEAD), and the contribution from the OIA team members and our Field Associates and Regional Liaisons around the world. To all of them, and to you, thank you very much for helping these programs become as successful as they are today, and as a result, for making a difference in our students' lives, wherever they are located.

Have a wonderful experience and please be sure to meet with us upon your return so we can discuss your experience and solicit your input for future cohorts. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be any assistance to your prior to your departure, or while you are teaching.

Bon voyage!

Anthony DeNapoli, Dean of International Affairs
Alejandra Parra, Associate Dean of International Affairs
## NSU Emergency Contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact at the Office of International Affairs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Anthony DeNapoli, Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office-954-262-8733</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cell-954-661-6241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:denapoli@nova.edu">denapoli@nova.edu</a></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alejandra Parra, M.A., Associate Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office-954-262-8674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell-954-448-3405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:aleparra@nova.edu">aleparra@nova.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Liezette Abel-Ruffin, Caribbean Liaison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office-954-262-8639</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cell-954-629-1698</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:abell@nova.edu">abell@nova.edu</a></td>
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## Travel Office Numbers

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<td>Travel Office (ONLY after contacting airline or hotel directly)-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-800-809-8858</td>
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<td>There is a charge of $20 if you contact this number.</td>
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Passport Issues

A passport is an internationally recognized travel document that verifies the identity and nationality of the bearer. A valid U.S. passport is required to enter and leave most foreign countries. Only the U.S. Department of State has the authority to grant, issue, or verify United States passports.

The Passport Services Office provides information and services to American citizens about how to obtain, replace or change a passport.

To obtain a passport for the first time, you need to go in person to one of over 9,000 passport acceptance facilities located throughout the United States with two photographs of yourself, proof of U.S. citizenship, and a valid form of photo identification such as a driver’s license.

Acceptance facilities include many Federal, state and probate courts, post offices, some public libraries and a number of county and municipal offices. There are also 13 regional passport agencies, and 1 Gateway City Agency, which serve customers who are traveling within 2 weeks (14 days), or who need foreign visas for travel. Appointments are required in such cases.

You will need to apply in person if you are applying for a U.S. passport for the first time:

- If your expired U.S. passport is not in your possession;
- If your previous U.S. passport has expired and was issued more than 15 years ago;
- If your previous U.S. passport was issued when you were under age 16;
- Or if your current valid U.S. passport has been lost or stolen.

*To obtain more information on obtaining a passport please visit

http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/first/first_832.html

*To renew an existing passport please visit

http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/renew/renew_833.html
Weather Information
For weather information on specific countries please visit:
http://worldweather.wmo.int/

Central Intelligence Agency-The World Factbook

The World Factbook provides valuable geographic and demographic information. For more information on individual countries, please visit:

TSA Travel Tips

Make Your Trip Better Using 3-1-1

3-1-1 for carry-ons =

- 3 ounce bottle or less (by volume);
- 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag;
- 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin.

One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. 3 oz. container size is a security measure.

**Consolidate** bottles into one bag and X-ray separately to speed screening.

**Be prepared.** Each time TSA searches a carry-on it slows down the line. Practicing 3-1-1 will ensure a faster and easier checkpoint experience.

**3-1-1 is for short trips.** If in doubt, put your liquids in checked luggage.

**Declare larger liquids.** Medications, baby formula and food, breast milk, and juice are allowed in reasonable quantities exceeding three ounces and are not required to be in the zip-top bag. Declare these items for inspection at the checkpoint.

**Come early and be patient.** Heavy travel volumes and the enhanced security process may mean longer lines at security checkpoints.

**TSA working with our partners.** TSA works with airlines and airports to anticipate peak traffic and be ready for the traveling public.
Useful Phone Numbers
Sources of information include:

U.S. Dept. of State Travel Advisory: tel. 202-647-5225 (manned 24 hr.)

U.S. Passport Agency: tel. 202-647-0518

U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler's Hotline: tel. 404-332-4559

Lost & Found
Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen, and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. To report a lost or stolen

American Express - To protect your information, you can only report a lost or stolen card by calling American Express Customer Service at 1-800-992-3404. Outside the United States call, collect 336-393-1111.

Diners Club - Call Diners Club Customer Service at 1-800-234-6377. Outside the United States call, collect 702-797-5532.


If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via Western Union. Call tel. 1-800-325-6000 www.westernunion.com.

Identity theft and fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you have lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are Equifax (tel. 800-766-0008; www.equifax.com), Experian (tel. 888-397-3742; www.experian.com), and TransUnion (tel. 800-680-7289; www.transunion.com). Finally, if you have lost all forms of photo ID, call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you have filed.
Here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

- **Register so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:** Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at [https://travelregistration.state.gov](https://travelregistration.state.gov). This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.

- **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.

- **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.

- **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.

- **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department web site at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html) has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.

- **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

- **Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at [http://travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov). Also, note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.
U.S. Customs Restrictions – What You Cannot Bring Back With You

Some items may not be brought into the U.S., or may only be brought in under certain restrictions. For information on U.S. customs regulations and procedures, see the Customs and Border Protection booklet “Know Before You Go,” available at http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg.

Customs and Border Patrol Top 10 Travelers Tips

1. Have all required travel documents for the countries you are visiting, as well as identification for re-entry to the U.S.
2. Declare everything you are bringing in from abroad, even if you bought it in a duty-free shop. This merchandise is also subject to U.S. duty fees and other restrictions.
3. Be cautious when buying something from a street vendor. Keep in mind that the merchandise may be counterfeit and/or unsafe and you might have to surrender it to U.S. Customs and Border Protection when you get home.
4. Know that the things bought abroad for personal use or as gifts are eligible for duty exemptions. If you are bringing them back for resale, they are not.
5. Know the difference between prohibited merchandise (such as ivory, tortoise shell products, absinthe, and counterfeit items) and restricted merchandise.
6. Be aware that many foreign-made medications are not FDA-approved, and you cannot bring them into the U.S. Also, when traveling abroad, bring only the amount of medication you will need during the trip.
7. Do not bring any Cuban-made products into the U.S., not matter where you purchased them.
8. Do not bring any food into the U.S. without first checking to see if it is permitted. Also, any and all live birds and bird products, whether for personal or commercial use, may be restricted and/or quarantined.
9. Understand that CBP officers can inspect you and your belongings without a warrant. This may include your luggage, vehicle, and personal searches, and is meant to enforce our laws as well as protect legitimate travelers.
10. Read our helpful brochure, “Know Before You Go,” before traveling. Print copies may be requested online, or view the web version at www.cpg.gov under the Travel section.
Venezuela

Country Overview

Venezuela is a medium income country whose economy is dominated by a substantial oil industry. The political climate in Venezuela is highly polarized and volatile. Violent crime is a continuing problem. Assaults, robberies, and kidnappings occur throughout the country. Scheduled air service and all-weather roads connect major cities and most regions of the country.

Venezuela’s tourism infrastructure varies in quality according to location and price. An estimated 27.9 million people lived in Venezuela as of 2008. The population is young, growing, and urbanized. The population growth rate is 1.6% per year, and roughly, 50% of Venezuelans are under the age of 25. According to the 2001 census, almost 90% of the population lives in urban areas. Metropolitan Caracas, the country's largest city, has an estimated 3.2 million inhabitants.

Venezuela is proud of its tradition as a melting pot, and the majority of its citizens have a mixed racial heritage of Caucasian, African, and American Indian elements.

Venezuela is exceptionally rich in biological diversity and pure natural beauty. With 43 national parks and a score of other natural monuments and protected areas, it is a fabulous destination for nature lovers, bird-watchers, and adventure travelers. There is great windsurfing, scuba diving, fishing, mountain biking, mountain climbing, hiking, trekking, and river rafting. Venezuela has the world's tallest waterfall, Angel Falls; the world's highest and longest tramway in the Andean city of Mérida; and miles and miles of white-sand Caribbean beaches.

Banking

Banking hours - Banking hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Office hours for some businesses are from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. or from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 m and 2:00 p.m. to 5.00 pm. Banks are usually open Monday to Friday. It is best to obtain local currency where possible before travelling, and bolivars should be exchanged before exiting Venezuela. There are ATMs in the cities (however some travelers have experienced problems using them), and most credit cards, including MasterCard/Eurocard, American Express and Visa, are accepted in major cities. Diners Club has more limited acceptance. Visitors are also warned that there is a serious problem with credit card fraud.
Currency - Venezuela's new currency is the Bolivar Fuerte (VEF), which replaced the Bolivar (VEB) in January 2008. The revaluation means that Bs. 1,000 becomes Bs. F. 1. It is divided into 100 centimos. A transition period will continue until 2009. US dollars are the most favored foreign currency so it is best to have cash and travelers cheques in US$. Foreign currency and cheques can be changed at bureau de change offices found in most larger cities and tourist destinations. Some banks (e.g. Banco Mercantil) will now buy US dollars for bolivares or sell bolivares against a foreign credit card; some major hotels will also swap US dollars for bolivares.

Communication
Language - Spanish is the official language of Venezuela. Although most hotels and tourist destinations have staff and guides with at least some command of English, it is not widely spoken amongst the general population.

Internet - There are Internet cafes all over Venezuela, particularly in tourist destinations. Rates run 2,200Bs to 6,600Bs ($1-$3) per hour.

Postal Service - Ipostel is the national mail service. It is considered neither swift nor secure for international correspondence. Generally, a letter or postcard takes 10 to 20 days to reach most parts of the United States and Europe. There are branch post offices in most cities and tourist destinations, and some malls even have Ipostel offices. Still, your hotel is usually your best bet for buying stamps and mailing a letter. Feel free to mail home postcards and letters, but avoid using Ipostel for anything of value or importance. In the event that you need to mail anything of value or personal import, call any of the following international courier services: DHL (tel. 0800/225-5345 or 0212/205-6000; www.dhl.com), FedEx (tel. 0800/463-3399 or 0212/205-3333; www.fedex.com), or UPS (tel. 0212/204-1353; www.ups.com).

Telephone & Fax - The international country code for Venezuela is +58 and the outgoing code is 00. City/area codes are in use, for example Caracas is (0)212. Mobile telephone GSM networks cover Caracas but are sparse outside of the city. There are public phones all around most cities and major tourist destinations. You will even find public phones in places as remote as Canaima and Los Roques. Most work with magnetic-strip calling cards that are readily available in stores all over the country. Look for signs or stickers advertising CANTV calling cards. A local call costs 50Bs to 100Bs (2¢-4¢) per minute. Calls to cell phones or between competing phone companies can be much more expensive. Your hotel is usually your best bet for sending and receiving faxes,

Documents Needed
A valid passport and a visa or tourist card are required. Tourist cards are issued on flights from the U.S. to Venezuela for persons staying less than ninety days. Persons traveling for reasons other than tourism, however, should consult the Venezuelan Embassy or nearest Venezuelan
consulate regarding possible visa requirements for their specific purpose of travel. Venezuelan immigration authorities may require that U.S. passports have at least six months validity remaining from the date of arrival in Venezuela. Some U.S. citizens have been turned back to the United States if their passports will expire in less than six months. Passports should also be in good condition, as some U.S. citizens have been delayed or detained overnight for having otherwise valid passports in poor condition.

U.S. citizens residing in Venezuela should be careful to obtain legitimate Venezuelan documentation appropriate to their status. There have been numerous cases in the last several months of U.S. citizens who, having employed intermediaries, received what they believed to be valid Venezuelan resident visas and work permits. They were subsequently arrested and charged with possessing fraudulent Venezuelan documentation. ONIDEX, the Venezuelan government agency responsible for immigration documents, has informed the Embassy that the only valid resident visas are those for which the bearer has personally signed at ONIDEX headquarters in Caracas.

For current information concerning entry, tax, and customs requirements for Venezuela, travelers may contact the Venezuelan Embassy at 1099 30th Street, NW, Washington DC 20007, tel: (202) 342-2214, or visit the Embassy of Venezuela web site at http://www.embavenez-us.org/. Travelers may also contact the Venezuelan consulates in New York, Miami, Chicago, New Orleans, Boston, Houston, San Francisco, or San Juan. Additional information about vaccination requirements for travel to Venezuela, as well as to other international destinations, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or via CDC's Internet site at http://www.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx.

Electricity
Electric current is 110 volts AC (60 cycles). U.S.-style flat-prong plugs are used. However, three-prong grounded outlets are not universally available. It is helpful to bring a three-to-two prong adapter.

Emergencies
Emergencies - Venezuela has an integrated emergency network (police, fire, ambulance). To reach it, dial tel. 171. You can dial 171 from any pay phone, without using a calling card. Do not expect the operator to speak English.

Embassies & Consulates - Americans living or traveling in Venezuela are encouraged to register with the U.S. Embassy in Caracas through the State Department’s travel registration web site so that they can obtain updated information on travel and security within Venezuela. Americans without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy to contact them in case of
emergency. The Consular Section is open for American Citizen Services from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Monday through Friday, excluding U.S. and Venezuelan holidays. The U.S. Embassy is located at Calle Suapure and Calle F, Colinas de Valle Arriba, Caracas. The telephone number during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) is (58) (212) 975-6411. In case of an after-hours emergency, callers should dial (58) (212) 907-8400. The Embassy’s web site, http://venezuela.usembassy.gov/, contains complete information about services provided and hours of operation.

A part-time consular agent in Maracaibo provides services for U.S. citizens in western Venezuela. The agent is available to the public every Monday from 8:15 am to 12:15 pm, at the Centro Venezolano Americano del Zulia (CEVAZ), Calle 63 No. 3E-60, Maracaibo; telephone 58)(0261) 793-2101 or 793-3488.

**Hospitals** - Medical care at private hospitals and clinics in Caracas and other major cities is generally good. Public 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.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the CDC’s web site at http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the World Health Organization’s (WHO) web site at http://www.who.int/en. Further health information for travelers is available at http://www.who.int/ith/en.

**Police** -- Venezuela has a host of overlapping police departments but no specific tourist police. Depending on the circumstances, you may encounter metropolitan police (policía metropolitana), municipal police (policía municipal), investigative police (policía técnica judicial), the National Guard (guardia nacional), or transit police (policía de tránsito). Their
uniforms and specific responsibilities vary. Corruption and indifference are widespread. Venezuela has an integrated emergency network (police, fire, ambulance). To reach it, just dial tel. **171**. However, the operator may not speak English.

**Holidays**
The following are official holidays in Venezuela:

- January 1 – New Year’s Day
- February – Carnival
- March and/or April – Holy Thursday, Good Friday
- April 19 – Declaration of Independence
- May 1 – Labor Day
- June 24 – Battle of Carabobo
- July 5 – Independence Day
- July 24 – Birth of Simon Bolivar
- October 12 – Day of Indigenous Resistance
- December 25 – Christmas Day

**Safety**
Violent crime in Venezuela is pervasive, both in the capital, Caracas, and in the interior. The country has one of the highest per-capita murder rates in the world. Armed robberies take place in broad daylight throughout the city, including areas generally presumed safe and frequented by tourists. A common technique is to choke the victim into unconsciousness and then rob them of all they are carrying. Well-armed criminal gangs operate with impunity, often setting up fake police checkpoints. Kidnapping is a particularly serious problem, with more than 1,000 reported during the past year alone. Investigation of all crime is haphazard and ineffective. In the case of high-profile killings, the authorities quickly round up suspects, but rarely produce evidence linking these individuals to the crime. Only a very small percentage of criminals are tried and convicted.

Travel to and from Maiquetía Airport, the international airport serving Caracas, can be dangerous and corruption at the airport itself is rampant. Travelers at the airport have been victims of personal property theft, as well as mugging and “express kidnapping” in which individuals are taken to make purchases or to withdraw as much money as possible from ATMs, often at gunpoint. The Embassy has received multiple, credible reports that individuals with what appear to be official uniforms or other credentials are involved in facilitating or perpetrating these crimes. For this reason, American citizen travelers should be wary of all strangers, even those in official uniform or carrying official identification. There are also known drug trafficking groups working from the airport. Travelers should not accept packages from anyone and should keep their luggage with them at all times.

Because of the frequency of robberies at gunpoint, travelers are encouraged to arrive during daylight hours. If not, travelers should use extra care both within and outside the airport. The
Embassy strongly advises that all arriving passengers make advance plans for transportation from the airport to their place of lodging. If possible, travelers should arrange to be picked up at the airport by someone who is known to them. The Embassy has received frequent reports of armed robberies in taxicabs going to and from the airport at Maiquetía. There is no foolproof method of knowing whether a taxi driver at the airport is reliable. The fact that a taxi driver presents a credential or drives an automobile with official taxi license plates marked “libre” is no longer an indication of reliability. Incidents of taxi drivers in Caracas overcharging, robbing, and injuring passengers are common. Travelers should take care to use radio-dispatched Taxi or those from reputable hotels. Travelers should call a 24-hour radio-dispatched taxi service from a public phone lobby or ask hotel, restaurant, or airline representatives to contact a licensed cab company for them.

A list of transportation services used by members of the U.S. Embassy community is available on the U.S. Embassy web site at http://venezuela.usembassy.gov/. The Embassy does not vouch for the professional ability or integrity of any specific provider. The list is not meant to be an endorsement by the Department of State or the Embassy. Likewise, the absence of any individual or company does not imply lack of competence.

While visiting Venezuela, Americans are encouraged to carry as little U.S. currency on them as possible and to avoid wearing expensive or flashy watches and jewelry. Due to the poor security situation, the Embassy does not recommend changing money at the international airport. Visitors should bring a major credit card, but should be aware of widespread pilfering of credit card data to make unauthorized transactions. Travelers’ checks are not recommended as they are honored in only a few locations. It is possible to exchange U.S. currency at approved exchange offices near major hotel chains in Caracas (personal checks are not accepted) and at commercial banks with some restrictions. Due to currency regulations, hotels cannot provide currency exchange. There are ATM machines throughout Venezuela. Malfunctions are common, however, and travelers should be careful to use only those in well-lit public places. ATM data has also been hacked and used to make unauthorized withdrawals from user’s accounts.

Popular tourist attractions, such as the Avila National Park, are increasingly associated with violent crime. Americans planning to participate in outdoor activities in potentially isolated areas are strongly urged to travel in groups of five or more and to provide family or friends with their itineraries prior to departure.

Cross-border violence, kidnapping, drug trafficking, smuggling, and cattle-rustling occur frequently in areas along the 1,000-mile long border between Venezuela and Colombia. Some kidnap victims have been released after ransom payments, while others have been murdered. In many cases, Colombian terrorists are believed to be the perpetrators. Colombia's National
Liberation Army (ELN) has had a long history of kidnapping for ransom, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are active in the kidnapping trade. Common criminals are also increasingly involved in kidnappings, either dealing with victim's families directly or selling the victim to terrorist groups.

In-country travel by U.S. Embassy employees, both official and private, within a 50-mile area along the entire Venezuela/Colombia border, is prohibited. The State Department warns American citizens not to travel within a 50-mile area along the entire Venezuela/Colombia border. U.S. citizens who elect to visit areas along the border region with Colombia despite this warning, apart from the Colombian terrorist threat, could encounter Venezuelan military-controlled areas and may be subject to search and arrest.


Political marches and demonstrations are frequent in Caracas and often pass without incident. Nevertheless, travelers should be aware that violence, including exchanges of gunfire, has occurred at political demonstrations in the past. Demonstrations tend to occur at or near university campuses, business centers, and gathering places such as public squares and plazas. Marches generally occur on busy thoroughfares, significantly impacting traffic. Most major tourist destinations, including coastal beach resorts and Margarita Island, have not in the past been generally affected by protest actions. The city of Merida, however, a major tourist destination in the Andes, has been the scene of frequent student demonstrations, some of them violent, including the use of firearms.

Travelers should keep informed of local developments by following the local press, radio and television. Visitors should also consult their local hosts, including U.S. and Venezuelan business contacts, hotels, tour guides, and travel organizers. As circumstances warrant, the Embassy sends out messages to U.S. citizens who have registered on-line. These messages are also posted on the U.S. Citizens page of the Embassy’s web site at http://venezuela.usembassy.gov/. U.S. citizens traveling or residing in Venezuela are advised to take common-sense precautions.
and avoid large gatherings and demonstrations, no matter where they occur.

Harassment of U.S. citizens by pro-government groups, Venezuelan airport authorities, and some segments of the police occurs but is quite limited. Venezuela’s most senior leaders, including President Chavez, regularly express anti-American sentiment. The Venezuelan government’s rhetoric against the U.S. government, its American culture and institutions, has affected attitudes in what used to be one of the most pro-American countries in the hemisphere.

Venezuela and its capital, Caracas, have one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world. Virtually all murders go unsolved. The poor neighborhoods that cover the hills around Caracas are extremely dangerous. These areas are seldom patrolled by police and should be avoided. 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 money-oriented 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 attracts the attention of thieves. Travelers are advised to leave jewelry items, especially 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 rental 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.

"Express kidnappings," in which victims are seized in an attempt to get quick cash in exchange for their release, are a problem. Kidnapping of U.S. citizens and other foreign nationals, from homes, hotels, unauthorized Taxi and the airport terminal has occurred. U.S. citizens should be alert to their surroundings and take necessary precautions.

The Department 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 Maquetía International Airport, and the "Regional del Centro" highway leading from Caracas to Maracay/Valencia, at which point the victims are robbed. The Department recommends avoiding driving at night and in the early morning where possible. Drivers traveling on highways during nighttime and early morning hours should exercise caution.

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.

Incidents of piracy off the coast of Venezuela remain a concern. Some of these incidents have been especially violent, including 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 exercise a heightened level of caution in Venezuelan waters. Please consult the U.S. Coast Guard web site at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-o/g-opr/g-opr.htm for additional information on sailing in Venezuela.

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. Failure to comply with a state’s particular requirements can result in arrest and criminal charges.

The Embassy is aware of several instances where women lured American 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 Americans were arrested at the airport with narcotics in their possession and served extended jail terms in Venezuela.

Time Zone
The time zone in Venezuela is – 4:30 hour GMT or +0:30 hours EST. Venezuela does not observe Daylight Savings Time.

Transportation
Airports – The international airport is in Caracas and located about 30 km from the center of the city.

Taxis – In Venezuela, there are different types of taxis including the standard style of the US, to collective taxies, which are minibuses that follow established routes.

Rental Car – The major rental car companies are available however getting around Caracas can be difficult. Traffic jams are prevalent and drivers can be irresponsible. It is recommended to take a taxi during your stay.

Water
Although the water is considered safe to drink in most urban areas, it is recommended that visitors stick to bottled water to be on the safe side. Ask for agua mineral sin gas (noncarbonated mineral water).
**Academic System**

**Structure of School System**

**Pre-Primary**
Type of school providing this education: Educación preescolar  
Length of program in years: 3  
Age level from: 3 to 6

**Basic**
Type of school providing this education: Educación Básica  
Length of program in years: 9  
Age level from: 6 to 15  
Certificate/diploma awarded: Certificado de Educación Básica.

**Diversified Secondary**
Type of school providing this education: Educación Media Diversificada  
Length of program in years: 2  
Age level from: 15 to 17  
Certificate/diploma awarded: Título de Bachiller

**Vocational Secondary**
Type of school providing this education: Educación Media Profesional  
Length of program in years: 3  
Age level from: 15 to 18  
Certificate/diploma awarded: Técnico Medio

**K-12**
Pre-school education is the first compulsory stage of education. Basic education is the second and lasts for nine years, divided into three cycles and leading to the Certificado de Educación Básica. Secondary education (educación media) is divided into two options: 1. Diversified, to train "bachilleres" in Science, Art and/or Humanities (two years). 2. Professional, to train middle technicians "Técnicos medios" (three years). Studies are divided into industrial, agricultural, commercial and administrative, and health sectors.

**Higher Education**
Higher education is provided by public and private universities and public and private university institutes and colleges (providing pedagogical, polytechnic, technological, ecclesiastical or military instruction). Public universities (national) are of two types: a) autonomous institutions and b) experimental institutions. All these institutions are grouped in two sub-systems: 1) Institutes and University Colleges, mainly for short courses of study (two-and-a-half to three
years) leading to the award of the title of "Técnico superior"; 2) Universities, mainly for long courses of study (five or six years), leading to the award of the "Licenciado" or an equivalent professional title (e.g. Ingeniero). Courses of study are in the following areas: Basic Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Health Sciences, Social Sciences, Educational Science, Humanities, Fine Arts and Letters and Military Sciences. Access to higher education is organized by the Oficina de Planificación del Sector Universitario (OPSU) and includes three stages: Prueba de Aptitud Académica; Preinscripción Nacional y Asignación de Aspirantes to higher education institutions. Most institutions submit candidates to their own selection procedures. In some institutions, preparatory, general or basic courses form part of the admission process.

**Professor/Student Relationship**

The student/teacher relationship in most Latin American countries is more formal than it is in the United States. However, the relationship can be very amicable and respectful. Professors are open to diversity of thought and are flexible and democratic in their decision-making.

**Teacher Education**

**Training of pre-primary and primary/basic school teachers** - Since 1993, basic education teachers are trained in three years at teacher training schools, pedagogical institutes or universities. In-service training is provided through Centros regionales de Apoyo al Maestro (CRAM).

**Training of secondary school teachers** - Secondary school teachers are trained at the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador (including its teacher training institutes) as well as other universities, pedagogical institute and university colleges. Courses last for four to five years. The title awarded is Licenciado en Educación or Profesor de Educación Secundaria. In-service training for teachers is offered by special training centers.

**Etiquette**

**Cultural Orientation**

The family is the cornerstone of the social structure and forms the basis of stability for most people. The individual derives a social network and assistance in times of need from the extended family. In villages, it is common for members of the extended family to live close to
one another, often on the same block. Nepotism an accepted practice and is considered a good thing, since it implies that employing people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.

**Business Practices**

This is a country where networking is important since it broadens your base of personnel who might have a connection you need. As with many Latin cultures, Venezuelans are risk averse, which makes it important that they know and trust the people with whom they do business. Venezuelans prefer face-to-face meetings to doing business by telephone or in writing, which are seen as too impersonal. It takes time to develop relationships. Appearances matter to Venezuelans. Dress well and try to stay in a reputable hotel. Senior positions in business are predominately held by the upper class, so it is important that you pay attention to the hierarchy and show appropriate deference and respect to those in positions of authority.

A firm handshake, with direct eye contact and a welcoming smile are the standard greeting. When shaking hands, always use the appropriate greeting for the time of day - 'buenos dias', 'buenas tardes', or 'buenas noches'. When meeting groups always introduce yourself to the eldest person first. When leaving, say good-bye to each person individually. Since this is a formal culture, address people by their academic or professional title and their surname until invited to move to a first-name basis.

Appropriate business attire is expected. Men should wear good quality, conservative, dark colored business suits. Women should wear stylish suits or dresses. They should be elegantly dressed, including make-up, jewelry and manicures.

**Protocol**

If invited to a dinner party, send flowers, particularly orchids, in advance of the event. Do not give handkerchiefs since they are considered unlucky. Gifts are generally opened when received. Always send a handwritten thank you note as it marks you as a person with class.

If you are invited to a Venezuelan's house, arrive 15 to 30 minutes later than invited. Arriving on time or early shows that you are too eager, which is interpreted as greedy. Smart casual dress is usually acceptable. Never decline an offer of coffee, as it is a symbol of hospitality to Venezuelans.

**Tipping**

Some restaurants automatically add a 10% service charge. If you feel the service was particularly good, you should leave an additional 5% to 10%. If they don't add the service charge, tip as you would at home. Similarly, tip the hotel staff as you would at home. Since most taxi drivers do not use meters and are almost always overcharging foreigners, it is not customary to tip them. If you feel you are getting an extremely good deal, or beyond-the-call-of-duty treatment, by all means, tip your driver.
References


