

VENEZUELA

"I liked my family a lot, I love them, and I am happy because I have a family in another country. I hope they can visit me in the United States. There were sometimes problems, but there were more happy experiences than bad. My community was better than what I was expecting. All were very affectionate, and I feel that I have many new friends. The local AFS chapter in Venezuela is very good. I tried not to have expectations. However, I had them and all were completed. I also realized that there is a lot more of the world than my home in North Carolina." Amy Sandler, participant from the United States

Venezuela's varied terrain encompasses Caribbean beaches, tropical rainforests, perennially snow-capped mountains, parched deserts and fertile farmland. Even so, 83% of Venezuelans live in northern cities, making their country the most urbanized nation in Latin America. Because oil production is Venezuela's chief industry, urbanization intensified during the 1970s when international petroleum prices quadrupled. The surging export income, however, failed to benefit all Venezuelans, which has led to political and social tensions. Nonetheless, most Venezuelans are laid-back, friendly, young (half the population is under 18) and unpretentious. In fact, they use "tú" (Spanish for "you" in the familial and intimate sense) more freely than Spanish-speakers anywhere else, who usually opt for the more formal "usted." They also love to dance; even toddlers try salsa and meringue. And although Venezuela starts its workday an hour or two earlier than most other nations, unhurried workers often take extended lunch hours, sometimes returning home. In Caracas and other cities, this creates four traffic-clogged rush hours every workday.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS in Venezuela has been in existence since 1959. AFS volunteers across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Venezuela

Your flight will arrive in Maiquetía, about half an hour from Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. As you get off the plane, you will be received by AFS volunteers and staff.

Arrival Orientation

After three or four weeks, you will have a two-day arrival orientation. The main goal of the arrival orientation is to share information and review expectations.

Living in Venezuela

Lifestyle and Family Living

Venezuelans are generally very affectionate and expressive, and their families are close-knit. In a typical Venezuelan family, the wife usually has a job, supervises the children and manages the household while the husband is involved with work outside the home. Children are expected to help with the household chores, to make their beds in the morning before leaving the house and to keep their bedrooms tidy.

Families are protective of their children, particularly the girls. There are often clear hierarchical relationships among sisters and brothers. Older sisters and brothers are expected to protect and help educate the younger ones.

When grandparents grow old, it is common for them to move in with the younger generation. Sometimes, when grandparents are ill or need medical care, they move into nursing homes.

Many Venezuelan families have pets (dogs, cats, birds, etc.) that they may treat with great affection. It is not common, however, to let pets sleep on people's beds.

Television can be turned on all day, and in some families it is kept on during meals.

Venezuelan young people are expected to consult with their parents before going out. Venezuelan parents expect their children to know and respect family rules. It is not common for young people to move away from their family home when they graduate from school. Instead, they usually live with their parents until they marry.

Dress and Appearance

Venezuelan teenagers dress casually. In general, it is wise to bring light clothing, T-shirts, jeans and a couple of nice outfits for special occasions. If you are in touch with your host family before your leave, you can ask them for clothing suggestions.

Diet and Meals

In most Venezuelan families, food and meal times are important in everyday life. Dinner is often a family event and is served at a set time. It is common to praise the food and converse during and after meals; usually each family member talks about his or her day at school or work. It is not common to eat snacks between meals.

Leaving food on your plate is only acceptable if the meal has been served in big portions. After helping yourself to food, it is polite to finish everything. Most families also consider it polite to ask for permission to have second helpings.

School

The Venezuelan school system is based on 11 years of formal education: nine years of elementary school (compulsory) and two of secondary school. University is an additional five years of study. Secondary school is divided into two areas of study: sciences and humanities. This is intended to lead the student to a vocational field. There are no optional subjects, and all students choose a specialty field and study all subjects. In Venezuela, the grading system is based on continuous evaluation, with no final exams.

For the most part, schools offer few extracurricular activities. AFS volunteers, however, have established relationships with local community organizations that allow students to take part in sports, aerobics, music and the arts. The most popular sports are baseball, basketball and boxing.

Teen Life

During weekdays, young people gather at each other's homes to talk, listen to music, drink coffee and so on. During weekends, they like to go to movies, go dancing or go to a friend's house for a party. It is common for teenagers to be taken and picked up by their parents at the end of the night.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Venezuela will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

Each local chapter organizes activities for participants and host families throughout their stays. These can include informal gatherings, field trips, sports events, picnics and weekend excursions. The organized activities vary from region to region and chapter to chapter. Your local chapter may also ask you to give a presentation about your home community and country, so it is recommended that you bring information material from your country.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Venezuela, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Venezuela. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

About US\$1,500 in traveler's checks, when carefully budgeted, is more than enough spending money for an entire year. Host families pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

Venezuela is a relatively safe country, and you will be fine if you use the same precautions you use in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Venezuelan. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Venezuela may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Venezuela (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your own doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee **and** do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa

fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Venezuela lies at the northern extreme of South America, bordered by Colombia to the west, Brazil to the south, Guyana to the east, and the Caribbean Sea to the north. In area, the country is just over 900,000 km² (351,000 mi²), divided into 23 states. Its borders seem to hold all of South America in miniature: fine stretches of the Andes Mountains, huge areas of Amazonian rainforests, fertile plains known as *llanos*, miles of Caribbean shoreline and even a small desert. The nation also has a few geographical superlatives, including the world's highest waterfall and South America's biggest lake. Elevations range from sea level to 2,500 m (8,200 ft) in the Guiana Highlands and up to 5,007 m (16,427 ft) in the Andes mountains.

The temperature varies little during the year, and most parts of the country maintain an average above 25°C (77°F). The capital, Caracas, has an average annual temperature of 22°C (72°F), which varies by only 4°C (8°F) over the year. However, temperatures drop with altitude. The mountainous regions can get cold, especially at night, and there is even snow in the highest parts of the Andes.

Like all tropical countries, Venezuela has only two seasons, the dry season, known as *verano*, and the rainy season, known as *invierno*, which are marked by differences in rainfall rather than in temperature. Generally, the dry season is from December to April/May, and the rainy season lasts for the rest of the year.

Population

The population of Venezuela is approximately of 23.5 million; the majority is *mestizo* (mixed Indian, African and Spanish heritage).

Language

Spanish is the official language of Venezuela. However, Venezuelan Spanish differs in pronunciation from Spanish as spoken in Spain. There are also some variations in vocabulary. Venezuelans call their language *Castellano*.

Government

Venezuela is a federal republic with a congressional system and has been a democracy since 1958. The president, elected by direct vote for a non-renewable term of five years, is head of state and appoints a council of ministers.

Religion

Most Venezuelans belong to the Catholic Church, and a great number follow religious tradition. It is common to go to church on Sundays and on special occasions such as Christmas, Easter and for weddings.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Venezuela, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Venezuela and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Venezuela. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Venezuelan. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS Venezuela will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Venezuelan people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Venezuelan

- ☀ When the first European explorers arrived in Venezuela, the houses reminded them of homes in Venice, so they called the region "Little Venice," or in Spanish "Venezuela."
- ☀ The longest and highest mountain-ascending gondola suspended from a rope takes passengers up 3,124 m. (10,250 ft.) to the top of Pico Aspejo (elevation 4,764 m. or 15,629 ft.) in Mérida City, Venezuela.
- ☀ The world's highest waterfall is Salto Angel on Venezuela's Carrao River. The falls plummets nearly a kilometer (979 m. or 3,212 ft.).
- ☀ The Miss World beauty pageant has been won more often by women from Venezuela than from any other country.

How to Apply

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Student age (upon arrival)	15 years 5 months to 17 years 6 months	
Country data	Size	912,050 km ² (566,383 mi ²)
	Population	23,542,649
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Federal republic
	Currency	1 Bolivar (Bs) = 100 centimos
Useful website	http://www.venezuelatuya.com/	
AFS Venezuela website	http://www.afs.org.ve	