



Venezuelan Security Report

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Section 800 - Intelligence



Tel: +44 (0) 845 004 8000

Email: intelligence@allmode.org

Website: www.allmode.org

Offices in uk | Dubai | China | Singapore

Contents

- General Background on Venezuela.....Page 3 – 5
- Documents Required for Venezuela.....Page 5 – 6
 - Visas
 - Health
 - Currency
 - Language
- Embassies and Consular addresses in Caracas.....Page 7
- Security Overview.....Page 8 – 9
- Types of Crime.....Page 9 – 11
- Terrorism.....Page 11 – 12
- Piracy Against Yachts.....Page 13 – 14
- Allmode Recommendations.....Page 15 -16

General Background on Venezuela



Port of Entry :

- Carupano
- Cumana / Puerto Sucre
- Puerto La Cruz
- Carenero

Offshore Islands of Entry:

- Margarita
- Los Testigos
- Los Rogues

Venezuela is in theory a vast and beautiful country with much to offer the tourist. With over a 1800 miles of coastline and around 80 offshore islands, Venezuela could offer the yachting population a very diverse and enlightening experience both offshore and onshore. Geographically, it has the third largest river in South America, the Orinoco, to explore and the Angel Falls, found in the mountainous region, which is the highest waterfall in the world, at 807 metres. But despite this, the number of visiting cruisers is in decline. Concern over security in the country is the prime factor for this decline and the constant political unrest and instability since February 1999, when Hugo Chavez Fraix was elected as President until his death in March 2013 and endemic corruption with the security forces, which blights many South American countries, all contribute to this concern, which is well founded. Chavez's successor, his vice-president Nicholas Maduro has vowed to continue with his policies.

Most recently, unrest has been triggered by the pressures on the cost of everyday living and although there are price controls on some items, such as fuel, beef, chicken and coffee, this is all about to change and past history has shown that Venezuelan's are known for their violent and numerous protests. It is estimated that around 60% of households are regarded as poor. Only this month, has the President voiced the prospect of increasing fuel prices for Venezuelan's. This has raised concern that everything else will follow suit and most Venezuelan's are struggling economically as it is.

Venezuela has relied almost exclusively on its petroleum industry and has failed to see the benefits of growing and protecting the tourist industry as a viable industry. Included in this is the benefits and potential income from the yachting industry.

Many locals and the authorities adopt an attitude that everyone should be aware of the security situation in the country and accept that it is what it is and will not change for the better. Many middle and upper class, well-educated Venezuelans have emigrated and the country is regarded by many, as having a 'Brain Drain' attributed to a repressive political system, lack of economic opportunities, steep inflation, a high crime rate, and corruption. Indeed, the fact that Venezuela is bordered by Columbia and Brazil, makes it unavoidable that the drug related crimes and problems of gang culture will cross their borders and increasingly, this gang culture is being witnessed in the highly populated urban areas around Caracas, the capital city. Caracas has been awarded the criminal threat level as Critical, according to the US State Department and has the highest murder rate in the world, with Caracas itself regarded as the deadliest city in the world.(more on this in the Crime section).

Even if crew and tourists do not intend to visit the main cities, the criminal culture and attitudes have filtrated to many of the islands and as locals struggle to provide for their families, criminal activities are seen as an alternative livelihood. Wealthy looking tourists and their property are seen as fair game and it is worth noting, that even long term residents and fellow cruisers from the country, have said recently that, *'Local boats are armed to the teeth and ready to defend themselves. Don't come unless you are prepared to do the same.'*

Ritchie Laesker from the Venezuelan Marine Supply (Vemasca) chandlery has been quoted to say, *'Due to the general situation in the country, it would be a little irresponsible to invite yachties to visit...'*

Allmode will provide the necessary information on what risk is and report on any relevant crime and requirements needed for yachts to make an informed decision. We will add our recommendations where we see fit.

Document Requirements for Venezuela

Arrival and Departure Procedures:

When you arrive into one of the Ports of Entry or Islands of Entry (see map pg 3) you will be required to *clear in* and this must be done in the following sequence;

1. Customs
2. Immigration
3. Port Captain

For each process, you will require ;

- Ship's papers
- Crew list with all passport details
- Clearance from the previous port

Following this, you will be issued with a Cruising Permit.

Foreign vessels can stay in Venezuela for 18 months, but the crew (including the Master) can only stay for up to 90 days. However, this can be extended by some local agents, but at a hefty price. (These are only found in marinas)

Moving from one Venezuelan state to another, it is necessary to clear both out and in of each state visited with both Customs and Port Captain.

Immigration clearance is only required when entering and leaving the country.

Be aware that the rules often change and that individual port captains may adjust the rules to fit their needs and interpretation of the law. It has been reported that so called "national" clearance, when travelling between states, is no longer required, but this seems to depend on officials in each port.

There is no clearance at weekends.

It may be necessary to have an official pilot for entry into Maracaibo, La Guaira and Ciudad Bolívar. It is not recommended to clear into Maracaibo as yachts are charged the same price as large commercial vessels.

If wishing to stop at any of the Venezuelan islands between Isla de Margarita and Bonaire, this should be stated when clearing out of Isla de Margarita. A mention will be made on the clearance paper that permission had been granted to stop at puntos intermedios. This may not always be acceptable to other officials but more and more yachts are visiting La Blanquilla without any difficulties as the local Coast Guard becomes accustomed to foreign yachts.

It is possible to visit Los Roques independently, without having to visit the Venezuela mainland. (above advice from Noonsite.com)

It is worth noting that Isla Orchilla is a military base and should not be approached as there is a restricted area. Las Piedras (Punto Fijo) is a Port Authority base and entry is prohibited. Approx. 25 NM NW of Las Piedras lies the small island of "Los Monges" which is also a Military base.

Visas

Most countries do not require their citizens to acquire an advanced visa. (Check with the Venezuelan embassy before you travel). The majority of visas are given on arrival. You will need to carry a certified copy of your passport and we would suggest that you make multiple copies of these, as you will be required to show them at the many checkpoints that you may need to go through, if you venture onto land.

Health

- *A Yellow Fever vaccination is required before arrival.* Many countries require that you show proof of this vaccine on your return from Venezuela.
- Precautions and prophylaxis against Malaria are highly recommended.
- Bilharzia or Schistosomiasis is a parasite that lives in water and this is common in Venezuela, so avoid swimming in rivers. The parasite can stay undetected in your body for some time, before you show any symptoms.
- Rabies can be found in dogs, bats, and other mammals in Venezuela, so it is recommended that groups in the outdoors or likely to come into contact with such animals, get vaccinated against it.
- Hepatitis A and Typhoid can be contracted by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

Currency



The official currency in Venezuela is the Venezuelan Bolivar Fuerte (Bs. F) which is made up of 100 céntimos (¢). Notes are issued in denominations of Bs. F2, Bs. F5, Bs. F10, Bs. F20, Bs. F50 and Bs. F100. Coins come in 1¢, 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, 50¢ while the 1¢ is rarely used.

Language

The official language of Venezuela is Spanish. However there are more than 40 indigenous languages also used throughout the country. English, Portuguese, Italian Chinese and Arabic are the most common foreign languages spoken in Venezuela.

Embassies and Consular Addresses in Caracas

British Embassy

Torre La Castellana, Piso 11
Avenida Principal de la Castellana (Av. Eugenio Mendoza),
Urbanización La Castellana
Caracas

Email : ukinvenezuela@fco.gov.uk

General Enquiries +58 (0) 212 319-5800

Consular Section

Torre La Castellana,
Piso 11,
Avenida Principal de la Castellana (Av. Eugenio Mendoza),
Urb. La Castellana
Caracas

Email: Consular.Venezuela@fco.gov.uk

Emergency +58 (0) 212 319-5800

United States Embassy

Calle F con Calle Suapure,

Urb. Colinas de Valle Arriba,

Caracas, 1080

Telephone: +58(212)975-6411

Security Overview

As stated earlier, Venezuela is regarded as the deadliest country in the world with the criminal threat level at **CRITICAL**.

According to the Venezuela Violence Observatory (VVO), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the murder rate in Caracas in 2011 was 91.71 per 100,000 inhabitants and this figure has risen since. Nationwide, this equates to at least 19,336 people killed in 2011 and 21,692 killed in 2012.

To put this into prospective, a comparison can be made with neighbouring Columbia, which has a homicide rate of 31 per 100,000 in 2012 and Mexico, with a homicide rate of 24 per 100,000. More worrying still, is that a report published in February 2010 revealed that 91% of all homicides go unpunished.

Population size is not a factor in these figures, as Mexico has 4 times the population as Venezuela.

What is more worrying for foreign visitors is not the alarming statistics which prove that Venezuela is a dangerous country to visit, but the nature of the crimes and the violence used in them. Most violent crimes in Venezuela involve the use of firearms, which the perpetrators are more than willing to use against any form of resistance, without the fear of repercussions. Like Brazil, Venezuela has an endemically corrupt police force and judicial system and gangs work this to their advantage. Many street crimes, such as muggings and robberies from motorists, both parked and stopped at lights, go unreported, despite the fact that the majority of them involve firearms. Victims do not see the point, as nothing will come of them reporting the offence and the stretched police force are slow to respond. This will become an even greater problem in the following years, as the Government budgets get squeezed, due to the economic problems facing Venezuela.

The government budget in 2013 cut funding for public safety and internal security by 38% and cut the budget for the judicial system by 17%. These cuts also include plans to lay off around 3,100 National Police Officers, responsible for criminal investigation and prosecutions. At a time when crime rates are rising, this is a worrying development and can only lead to a worsening security situation within the country. Look at Mexico and Brazil to see how drug cartels will take advantage of such vacuums and how future political bodies find these groups difficult to control.

The 'Barrios' (poor areas) of Caracas provide a safe haven and a base for such gangs, similarly to the way the favelas do in Brazil. Many of these areas are no-go areas for the police, who themselves have a high mortality rate, with at least 1 policemen killed on duty a day.

Such organised crime is not restricted to the mainland of Venezuela, but has infiltrated many of the islands that are a favourite place for cruisers. Many anchorages along the Cumana coastline are considered unsafe. Some marinas offer security, whilst others don't, so research is needed as to what security resources are available at particular marinas. The further away from the Venezuelan coastline you go, the safer you could be, with Isla Los Roques and Isla Blanquilla(as it has the Guardia Nacional sited here) considered to be the safest islands, but not without the usual criminology associated with Venezuela. However, what you cannot forget, is if you are visibly wealthy and don't appear to have security

measures put in place, you will become an obvious target. There is never any room for complacency in a country like Venezuela.

Types of Crime

Street Crime ;

Muggings and pick pocketing is very common all over Venezuela, especially in the urban sprawl of the capital and the main cities in the north of Venezuela. Although you may not consider these unusual in major cities, what makes these crimes different in Venezuela, is that they are nearly all accompanied by violence and the use of guns is common place. Any resistance will undoubtedly end with injury or at worse, death. Certain 'Barrios' are not safe places to visit, even in the daytime. Sabana Grande may have cheap hotels, but it is not a safe area to stay. Even walking around the Avila National Park can end with robbery at gunpoint.

Beaches are another place of this sort of street crime, even on the islands off Venezuela. Isla Los Margarita has a terrible reputation for such robberies.

Car-jacking is an increasing problem day and night and car-jackers will target expensive looking vehicles, especially 4 x 4's. Armed gangs regularly ram vehicles from behind or try to stop them by bogus incidents or requests for help. They are then robbed at gunpoint and in some instances, the vehicle is also taken.

Robberies are frequent on public transport with robbers changing modes of transport to evade capture.

Reports have surfaced about vendors giving out pamphlets on the street, that have been impregnated with potent and disorienting drugs, which then permeate your skin and leave you in a drugged state, making you more susceptible to other crimes against you, some extremely serious, which you will not have any recollection of.

Linked with this is the common and increasing incidents of drinks or food being spiked with drugs such as rohypnol. Never accept food or drink from on the street would be our advice.

Street crimes become more prevalent after dark and Allmode would not recommend that any tourist venture out after dark, without the appropriate security in place.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping has become a major criminal business in Venezuela, run by sophisticated and well organised gangs. Most 'real' kidnappings take place after dark, but no time is safe, as people have been kidnapped outside their homes leaving or returning from work or from their place of work or tourist facilities such as hotels and restaurants. Many 'doormen' to such establishments may be paid by gangs to inform on the presence of high wealth clients, who they can extort larger sums of ransom money from. The Venezuelan authorities find it difficult to track the real total number of kidnappings, but a report in 2012 suggests that 583 kidnappings occurred in that year. However, it has been estimated by experts in their field, that around 70% of kidnappings go unreported. Around 40% of kidnappings occur in Caracas.

Express Kidnappings – it is known that gangs operate what is known as express kidnappings in wealthy neighbourhoods and business areas of Caracas. This has become

such big business, that it is now spreading to wealthy resorts where the same tactics are adopted. Gangs will kidnap a targeted person and hold them for the time it takes for a ransom to be paid. The average ransom demand being around \$50,000, but recent demands for prominent businessmen have reached \$6 million.

Alternatively, a targeted person is kidnapped and driven around the city calling at as many ATM's as possible to extract instant cash for the gangs, before being released. However, changes to Venezuelan law and banking practices have now restricted the amount of cash that any one person can withdraw in a day, therefore making the former method of express kidnapping the most lucrative.

'Virtual Kidnappings' and 'inside kidnappings' are on the rise. These are when family and friends are informed that a relative has been kidnapped, using details about that person, to convince the relatives that it really has happened, before demanding a ransom for their release. Similarly, inside kidnappings are when an insider, such as a domestic help, sells information about an employer, to help facilitate a kidnapping.

The money involved in kidnapping is becoming extremely profitable to the gangs and the lack of fear of reprisals does not help matters. The VVO estimate that between 9,000 to 16,000 kidnappings occur annually, with an average of 5 per day in Caracas.

Drugs and Narco-terrorism

The proximity of the Colombian border and the length that it is, obviously gives rise to a booming drug smuggling business for Venezuela and all the criminality that this inadvertently brings. Venezuela is a major drug transit country, on route to the Caribbean market and beyond. The US was the biggest importer of drugs from Venezuela in 2011 and this number is on the rise, with the market now extending to Europe. The Venezuelan authorities simply do not have the resources to police the border areas and this has also given way to a lucrative 'Black market' in fuel and food across the Colombian border, mostly controlled by the drug cartels.

ATM scams

Try to refrain from using International Credit cards, except for emergencies, as card fraud is becoming very common and sophisticated. Using ATM machines can be risky and gangs can rig machines to copy card details, or simply work in gangs to rob people after withdrawing money. It would be advisable to only use machines in reputable hotels.

Insurance.

The Foreign and Commonwealth office (FCO) are currently advising against all travel to within 50 miles of the Colombian border and advise against all essential travel to the remainder of Zulia, Tachira and Apure States. The FCO travel advice for the remaining areas of Venezuela are not to travel unless essential. This may have certain implications when seeking insurance for travel within the region. Allmode would advise that you discuss the appropriate insurance with your Broker before transiting or visiting the region.

Crew advice for transfer.

The Main Airport within Venezuela is Maiquetia Simon Bolivar Airport. The road between Maiquetia Airport and Caracas is renowned for being dangerous, due to the risk of violent crime. It is advised that you do not travel on the road during the hours of darkness due to the reduced number of cars on the road which will increase the risk of crime.

If you are due to arrive at the airport late at night or early in the morning, the recommendation would be to stay at the airport hotel.

It has been known for random drug and security checks to take place Maiquetia airport, in some cases passengers have been asked to accompany an officer to the local hospital for an x-ray. Please ensure that you arrive at least 3 hours before your departure time if you are due to board an international flight, this will allow plenty of time for any necessary checks to take place. It will be the National Guard that will carry out the checks, however be aware of bogus security officials. If you are in any doubt then seek advice from other airline or airport staff.

When travelling to and from the airport, it is advised that you arrange to be met by friends, business contacts or tour groups. If this option is not possible then the advice is to travel by licenced taxi. Be aware of bogus taxi-drivers. Do not accept offers from taxi drivers in the arrival hall and do not board a taxi which appears to contain passengers. You will find a licenced and official taxi rank just outside of the arrivals hall. Official taxis will have yellow number plates.

Should you wish to drive, be aware the roads in Venezuela are poorly maintained, which means driving in the region can be dangerous. Police and National Guard checkpoints are common throughout the country. Drive slowly through these and stop when ordered to.. Ensure that that you carry your driving licence, (British driving licences can be used for up to 1 year), insurance papers and passports with you at all times. Failure to produce these documents if asked for may lead to your vehicle being seized by the police. You should also ensure that your vehicle carry's a spare tyre, wheel block, jack wrench and special reflector triangle. Seek local advice before you set off on a journey and allow plenty of time for travel. Caracas in particular is well known for experiencing traffic jams. Local road users often ignore any road rules which are stated and their vehicles are often in very poor condition. It is not uncommon for local drivers to drive whilst under the influence of alcohol.

Crime Threat in Venezuela			
Rating	Level	Threat Description	Threat Assessment
LOW	5	An attack is unlikely	
MODERATE	4	An attack is possible, but unlikely	
SUBSTANTIAL	3	An attack is a strong possibility	
SEVERE	2	An attack is highly probable	Level 2 for crime
CRITICAL	1	An attack is imminent	

Terrorism

Venezuela is the home of continuous operations by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (known as FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) along the border region between Venezuela and Columbia. Both groups are known as terrorist groups internationally and have many supporters in these regions. The Foreign office of both Britain and America advice against all travel to these border regions. Other terrorist groups to have known links with Venezuela are the Basque terrorist group ETA and the Lebonese-based terrorist group, Hezbollah, both of which are accused of using Venezuela as a base to train and launder terrorist money.

Terrorism Threat in Border Regions			
Rating	Level	Threat Description	Threat Assessment
LOW	5	An attack is unlikely	
MODERATE	4	An attack is possible, but unlikely	
SUBSTANTIAL	3	An attack is a strong possibility	
SEVERE	2	An attack is highly probable	Level 2 for terrorism
CRITICAL	1	An attack is imminent	

Terrorism Threat in the rest of Venezuela including the islands.			
Rating	Level	Threat Description	Threat Assessment
LOW	5	An attack is unlikely	
MODERATE	4	An attack is possible, but unlikely	
SUBSTANTIAL	3	An attack is a strong possibility	Level 3 for terrorism
SEVERE	2	An attack is highly probable	
CRITICAL	1	An attack is imminent	

Piracy against Yachts

The navy of Venezuela is officially called the Bolivarian Navy of Venezuela. Their purpose is to defend the naval sovereignty of the country, including inland waterway security. It also serves to prevent illegal activities in the Venezuelan borders and collaborates with international organizations to safeguard international waters from criminal activities. Part of the Naval responsibilities have been assigned to the Coast Guard (guardia costa), but bearing in mind the length of the Venezuelan coastline, their resources are stretched. At present, the Coast Guard service has;

Four Spanish-made offshore patrol vessels with one on order-

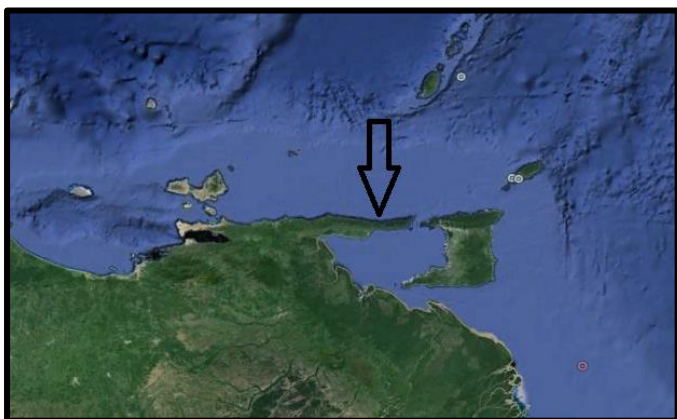
- GC-21 *Guaicamacuto*, in service
- GC-22 *Yavire*, in service
- GC-23 *Naiguata*, in service
- GC-24 *Tamanaco*

Coast guard ships-

- Four USCG Point-class patrol boats, as of 2006.
- 16 Gavion-class patrol boats.
- Damen Stan 2600 vessels, built in Venezuela, similar to the United States Coast Guard's Marine Protector class, as of 2008.

Resources of the Coast Guard are also under scrutiny, as attention is switched away from maritime security, to border control security between Columbia and Brazil. Furthermore, the Coast Guards are more concerned with the drug trafficking issues from the Caribbean, to Venezuela and vice versa, to warrant placing their resources on issues relating to the safety of Yachts. As was stated earlier, the Venezuelan government does not rate marine tourism as high on its agenda and therefore resources to this area reflect this.

Reported Piracy Incident



Although the Venezuelan Coast Guard are patrolling the eastward coast along the Paria Peninsula, this has not stopped incidents of piracy against cruising yachts. In **November 2013** the SY Explorer was on a passage from Trinidad to Puerto La Cruz, when it was boarded by five men armed with revolvers about 5nm off the

Peninsula. They violently attacked the crew and stole everything they could, ransacking the yacht in the process. Many of the crew had to be treated for the wounds that they sustained.

In **September 2013**, a Dutch sailor was killed as he tried to repel armed robbers on his yacht, which was anchored off Marina El Concorde, Margarita Island.

Updated accurate reports of attacks against cruising yachts is difficult to obtain, as many incidents are not reported officially, just written about in sailing blogs. Regular reading of such blogs gives an insight into the regularity of robberies from yachts, as they are a 'soft' target for robbers, who are armed and dangerous.

Piracy Threat against Yachts			
Rating	Level	Threat Description	Threat Assessment
LOW	5	An attack is unlikely	
MODERATE	4	An attack is possible, but unlikely	
SUBSTANTIAL	3	An attack is a strong possibility	Level 3 for piracy
SEVERE	2	An attack is highly probable	
CRITICAL	1	An attack is imminent	

Allmode Recommendations

In the light of the information contained within this report, Allmode would recommend that anyone planning to visit Venezuela, whether this be via air, land or sea seek detailed security information regarding specific locations that they may wish to visit. These can be vetted by our team and a detailed risk assessment can be drawn up.

Allmode would also recommend that close-protection personnel or maritime security officers be employed by high wealth clients, due to the high risks involved in visiting such a dangerous country. Again, Allmode can assist on this matter or offer further advice in this regard.

Close consultation needs to be obtained with Insurance Companies with regards to travelling to Venezuela.

A Risk assessment is an essential part of any passage plan and aims to help mitigate the risk that the Vessel and Crew may be exposed to.

Risk is assessed as the potential loss, damage or destruction of an asset, as a result of a threat exploiting vulnerability.

The **Threat** from piracy is one whereby there is an intention to take a vessel by hostile action onto someone or something by exploiting the vulnerabilities, intentionally to obtain, and possibly accidentally damage or destroy the assets through hostile action.

or a terrorist group is one whereby there is an intention to inflict harm by a hostile action onto someone or something by exploiting the vulnerabilities, intentionally or unintentionally to obtain, damage or destroy the assets.

The **Assets** are the people, property and information involved in the process. These can be both tangible assets, such as cargo, ship and personnel and intangible assets, such as reputation and proprietary information, including critical company records and databases.

The **Vulnerability** is the weaknesses or gaps in security that can be exploited by threats to gain access to the assets. This is a quantifiable figure, which we gain by using the matrix completed within this report, with information from the Pre-Transit Questionnaire. (See Vessel Vulnerability Matrix)

THREAT (T) + ASSETS (A) + VULNERABILITY (V) = RISK (R)

By using the above definitions, Allmode will assess a passage as falling into one of the following categories.



For further information or security intelligence please contact:

General Enquiries: info@allmode.org

Intelligence Support: intelligence@allmode.org

IOM Head Office Phone: +44 (0) 845 004 8000

Website: www.allmode.org



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