
The Unique Culture Of Venezuela

Introduction

Did you know Venezuela is two times bigger than the state of California? Venezuela, named the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela since 1999, is located on the northern coast of South America. The country has a continental mainland and numerous islands in the Caribbean Sea. Before the arrival of Columbus, Venezuela was inhabited by a number of indigenous groups, including the Caracas, Arawak, and Cumanagotos. Caracas, the capital, was founded in 1567. Venezuela has a very unique culture, community, and holidays and traditions.

Did you know that Venezuela is home to almost 30 million people? Spanish is the official language and is spoken by almost everyone. Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution but Catholicism is one of the most important religions in the culture. About 96 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Venezuelans tend to be quite fashion conscious and take great care of their appearance, urban people mostly dress in current European styles. Fashion often takes looks over comfort. For example, stylish leather jackets or boots may be worn in hot weather. Their most famous food is the arepa. An arepa is a cross between a pancake and a tortilla that can be filled with many ingredients or turned into a dessert. Overall, Venezuela's culture is full of many interesting traits.

Customs and Traditions

Venezuela is one of the biggest countries in the world, it is even bigger than Texas! For men, a firm handshake is a common greeting and parting gesture among friends and strangers, and it may come with a pat on the back. Women exchange greeting and parting kisses on the cheek with both men and women, no matter how close the relationship. Among close friends and family, both men and women greet with an abrazo (a full embrace while patting each other on the back) as well. Venezuelans generally use their hands during conversation to communicate or make a point. Pointing with the index finger is considered rude, motioning with the entire hand is more polite. Venezuelans enjoy visiting friends and relatives. Friends may visit unannounced, and such visits can last two hours or more. People typically invite only close friends to their homes.

Educated urban couples tend to have one or two children, while poorer urban couples generally have three or four. Rural families may include as many as five or six children. Preserved Spanish colonial homes can be found in major cities, especially those located in the interior of the country. Such buildings are spacious, with large rooms, central patios, and balconies. They were built using bahareque, a technique of adding mud to bamboo walls. Official public holidays in Venezuela include New Year's Day, Carnival, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Declaration of Independence Day, Day of Workers, Battle of Carabobo, Independence Day, Simón Bolívar's Birthday, Day of Indigenous Resistance, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and New Year's Eve.

Politics and Economy

Venezuela is a republic with a president who serves a six-year term and may be re-elected an unlimited number of times. The president is both head of state and head of government. The National Assembly is a unicameral body made up of 167 members, 113 of whom are elected by popular vote. Venezuela is a member of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), and oil is the main part of the economy. It accounts for all export earnings and nearly half of all government revenues. Oil revenues have allowed the country to develop a modern infrastructure. However, oil has also made Venezuela subject to global market changes; when oil prices drop, the entire economy suffers.

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