

Fundación Aldeas de Paz

IMPORTANT Travel INFORMATION

There are several ways to travel from Caracas to your volunteer placement location at Aldeas de Paz in Santa Elena. However based on our experiences and those of past volunteers we recommend the following 2 options:

► **Luxury Bus directly to Aldeas de Paz in Santa Elena**

OR

► **Domestic Flight to Puerto Ordaz or Ciudad Bolivar and direct Bus to Aldeas de Paz**

Arriving at Caracas Airport:

Your international flight should arrive **before 12:00 noon**, so you can catch the bus to Santa Elena the same day. (3:30 pm and 4:30 pm) In the airport your first stop will be Immigration where you will show your passport and be given a 3 month tourist entry stamp. (Extendable later on) You will fill one form for customs and another one to be given the tourist entry stamp, so before queuing take them from the travelers desk in the area of immigration. At the moment, autumn 2009, you have to fill a third module about the swine flu.

Following Immigration, you will pass through customs and then walk into the main terminal. If you previously booked the pick-up service and after passing through Immigration and Customs, Omar or Walter your driver, will be waiting for you with a board in his hands showing both your name and the name of his company, "**Pleasure Viajes**". Omar and Walter speak perfect English and are extremely helpful, very friendly and patient. They can send a non English speaking driver at times. However, if you arrive late, the drivers wait for you even for hours and stand with you for at least one hour in the bus terminal to make sure that everything is ok while assisting you to purchase your bus ticket.

Hotels

Near the airport: In case you don't have enough time to make it to the bus terminal in time or you want a slight break from traveling, spend the night in a hotel:

- **Posada Il Prezzano** in Catia la Mar, tel. ++58 +212 - 351 2626; (single/double room with AC, Bs. 200,-)
- **Hotel La Parada**, http://www.hotel_la_parada@hotmail.com; Av. Atlantida, calle 10, catia la Mar, tel. ++58+212-3512148; ++58+414-1142228; Fax ++58 +212-3527486 (single/double room with AC, TV cable, airport pickup included single-Bs. 275,- /double-Bs. 370,-)

In downtown Caracas: A hotel in an excellent neighborhood is:

- **Hotel La Floresta**, <http://hotellaforesta.com>; Av. Avila, Plaza Sur, Altamira, Caracas, Tel. ++58 +212 - 263 1955 (Fax: ++58 +212 - 2674477) email: hotellaforesta@cantv.net/gerencia@gmail.com (hot water, breakfast incl., safe & clean with AC: single Bs. 235,- /double Bs. 260,-)

Remember, the Pick-Up Services are also available to help you make your way to a hotel in the city, but also must be arranged in advance. Give yourself at least 2 hours to get from the airport or Posada 'Il Prezzano' to the bus terminal.

From the Airport to Bus Terminal “Terminal de Oriente”:

3 Options:

- Airport Pick-up service **Recommended!**
- Official Taxi
- Shuttle Bus

Airport Pick-up Service

If you look for "Peace of Mind" you may want to hire a professional airport Pick-Up Service: After passing through Immigration and Customs, Omar your driver, will be waiting for you with a board in his hands showing both your name and the name of his company, "Pleasure Viajes". Omar and Walter speak perfect English and are extremely helpful and patient. They bring you to the bus terminal "Terminal del Oriente" and assist while purchasing your bus tickets etc. or to the hotel of your choice if you need to spend a night before catching the bus.

“Pleasure Viajes”: oswaldopleasure@hotmail.com or wungefug@cantv.net (International call: 0058 212 4819796 (0058 414 1321837); Caracas call: 4819796 (1321837); from elsewhere in Venezuela: 0212 4819796 (0414 1321837))

Important Advice: Book ahead and give them your complete travel details in your first mail! Make sure you ask for a confirmation of your booking - you can write in English.

Airport Pick-up prices are:

Airport - Caracas Hotel: USD\$ 75,-
Hotel - Bus Station: USD\$ 25,-
Airport - Bus Station: USD\$ 100,-

Another Pick-Up Service and Accommodation:

“Nelson’s Place”: Nelson's place is the name international travelers, educators, writers, conference speakers and others have given to a nice and cozy 50 meter suite style apartment in a small family building in the heart of mid-town Caracas, Venezuela, the commercial-business-tourist area of Sabana Grande. Nelson, the owner will send a trustworthy driver that will pick you up at the airport (40 km away) for a US\$40 fee, avoiding you the typical airport hassles. Nelson is on top of the arrival, making sure that all runs smoothly. The per night rate for Nelson's room is forty dollars US\$40 for up to two guests. nelven@gmail.com nelsoneas@hotmail.com

Official Taxi

Another option is to hire an official taxi directly from the airport. **Do not accept offers of transport in the arrivals hall.** Official taxis (with yellow license plate) line-up at the official taxi rank immediately outside of the airport building. Official taxis cost Bolivar 200,- and are safe and reliable. Let them know that you are interested in going to "Terminal de Oriente" (the bus station located on the far side of Caracas).

Shuttle Bus

Choosing to take a taxi is obviously much more convenient than taking a bus because you don't have to worry about being in a crowded space with a number of fellow passengers for the two hour ride. From the airport there is a shuttle bus that goes into the center of town. Upon entering the terminal, simply ask around for the bus to get to the center of town (it is located outside the domestic flight terminal). In the domestic terminal there is a kiosk that sells tickets for the shuttle, which costs around Bolivar 25,-. Though you may have reservations, this is in fact a very safe, cheap and reliable way to get into the center of town. Nevertheless, we do not recommend taking the shuttle after dark. From the final bus stop a taxi ride to the "Terminal de Oriente" will cost around Bolivar 35,-

From Caracas to Santa Elena:

Direct luxury buses to Santa Elena

The fastest, cheapest, and most convenient way to from Caracas to Santa Elena is by bus. Luxury are equipped with new, stretch reclining seats, air conditioning, a bathroom, and DVD system. Several companies operate ultra-modern buses to Santa (Bolivar 130,-) It is generally not possible or necessary to book a bus ticket in advance. Just get terminal to buy your ticket well before the bus departure time if at all possible to make absolutely that you will get a seat. Three buses are leaving from Caracas to Santa Elena. While the 3:30 pm 4:30 pm buses travel directly from Caracas to Santa Elena, the night bus at 10:15 pm will bring you halfway to San Felix/Puerto Ordaz where you will arrive the next morning early enough to get on the "Turgar" or "Expresos los Llanos" bus (daily at 9:00 am - same Terminal) which bring you directly to Santa Elena.



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Important Advice: Please call 0414 - 8704895 just before you get on the bus so we know that you are on the bus and when to expect you in Santa Elena! Buy a CANTV phone card and call from CANTV phone boots in the bus terminal.

Bus Departure - Timetable				
Destination:	Caracas to Sta Elena	Sta Elena to Caracas	Caracas to San Félix or Puerto Ordaz	San Felix or Puerto Ordaz to Sta Elena
Name of Bus Company:	direct Bs 130,-	direct Bs 130,-	halfway Bs 70,-	halfway Bs 70,-
"Expresos Los Llanos"	4:30 pm	7:30 pm	10:15 pm	9:00 am
"Expresos Occidente"	3:30 pm	1:00 pm	6:30 pm	7:30 am

Important Advice: You will more than likely be stopped at a routine military check-point once or twice along the way to Santa Elena. At these check-points you are sometimes just asked for your passport, and at other times are required to show the entire contents of your bags. Don't panic. As mentioned, these stops are customary. This is a chance to stretch your legs. To put your mind at ease some more, **the bus stop in Santa Elena is the last stop**. So there is no need for concern every time the bus stops along the way. Stay on until the end!

The trip passes by much faster than you would expect! Please keep in mind that these buses are much more sophisticated and comfortable than buses in Europe or North America, for example. You can easily relax: the seats are very comfortable and can be turned into sleepers. Movies are regularly shown, and the buses frequently stop for snacks and meals along the way.

Carry a good book with you, perhaps also some music, and enjoy the marvelous scenery and impressive landscapes from the comfort of your window seat. Bring warm clothes or a blanket with you - the buses are notoriously freezing as the drivers tend to go nuts with the air conditioning. Ear plugs also don't hurt. You may find the need to block out the sounds from the DVDs.

Domestic flight to Puerto Ordaz or Ciudad Bolivar and bus to Santa Elena

Arranging a domestic flight (45min) to Puerto Ordaz or Ciudad Bolivar (1,5h/US\$ 80-120/ 16:50pm daily) are alternative transportation options. From these towns, you can catch the bus to Santa Elena (8h/Bs.70,-/ 20:15pm daily) or instead, book a small plane (but only from Ciudad Bolivar) to Santa Elena by Rutaca (US\$ 150,- ow) **Airlines:** We recommend you book your in-country flight in your home country with your travel agent or through the internet. **Aerpostal:** <http://www.aerpostal.com>, Tel. 0800 284 66 37; **Rutaca:** <http://www.rutaca.com> **Aserca:** <http://www.asercaairlines.com>, Tel. 0800 648 83 56; **Avior:** <http://www.avior.com.ve>

On arrival in Santa Elena

If you arrive in Santa Elena in the morning or during the day the busses stop at the bus terminal, a bit outside of town.

Important Advice: There are several little shops in the terminal from where you can **call 0414 - 8704895** - Aldeas de Paz staff will come and pick you up. If you already have bought a CANTV phone card, there are CANTV phone booths in the entrance hall which you can use in case the shops are closed.

If you arrive later in the evening the bus leaves the terminal behind and last stop is in town, usually in front of "Hotel José Gregorio" from where you can **call 0414 - 8704895**

General Travel Tips

Money

The currency of Venezuela is the Bolivar (Bs) It comes in notes of Bs 50,- 20,- 10,- 5,- 2,- It is best to change about US\$100 into Bolivar before traveling. Strict currency controls remain in place in Venezuela and the actual changing rate is 2,15 Bolivar for 1,- US\$. Bolivar can be obtained through banks and some travel agencies in your country. (You may need to order Bolivar in advance from your local bank) This will enable you to have cash to pay for your bus ticket and to purchase food. Any other money that you are planning on spending in Venezuela should be brought with you in large bills in cash, for example US\$100,- or Euro€ 100,-. In most towns and all major Venezuelan cities, credit cards are accepted in shops and hotels.

PVF Donation payment on arrival

We ask that when you pay the remainder of your volunteer donation on arrival to Aldeas de Paz in Santa Elena you pay with cash US\$ or Euro€. Alternatively you can transfer the remainder to the foundations account in Spain so you don't need to travel with cash money. This transfer has to take place at least a week in advance of your arrival because of the time needed for processing the bank transfer.

ATM,s

Mostly credit cards are accepted at Venezuela's ATM's and over the counter bank transactions. All bank transactions in Venezuela will result in Bolivar calculated by the official changing rate: US\$ 1,- results in Bolivar 2,15.

Venezuela has foreign currency restrictions

However, there exists a "Parallel or Black Market Exchange" where the Dollar has almost three times the official value when changed into Bolivar! These widely practiced but officially not allowed money changes are done by Taxi drivers, shop owners and travel agents.

Official Exchange Rate: Bolivar 2,15 for 1 US\$
Parallel or Black Market Exchange Rate: Bolivar 5,- to 6,- for 1 US\$

For actual "parallel changing rates" see:

<http://dolarparalelo.blogspot.com> <http://bonosvenezuela.blogspot.com>

<http://liberal-venezolano.net/blog/dolar> <http://www.notidolar.com>

or try to "google": "*parallel dollar Venezuela*"

Changing money in Caracas

Bureau de change at the Caracas airport, will exchange US dollars or Euro for Bolivar's, as will some major hotels. (US\$ 1,- = Bolivar 2,15) Some banks in Caracas will buy US dollars for Bolivar or sell Bolivar against a foreign credit card. US\$ travelers' cheques are accepted at most Italcambios offices in Caracas. Banks and Bureau de Change can be found in all major cities where you will be able to withdraw money and change up travelers' cheques if you need to. There will also be ATMs, which will accept most major credit cards. You can easily change cash money on the "Parallel or Black Exchange Market " with local shop owners, taxi drivers and money changers.

Changing money in Santa Elena

Please be advised that ATMs in Santa Elena **do not accept debit cards** but only credit cards. "Banco Industrial" in Santa Elena pays Bolivar's against a foreign credit card. You can also do the transaction via the counter in the bank (safest option). All bank transactions will result in Bolivar. Local banks in Santa Elena **do not** change travelers' cheques at all. You can easily change cash money on the "Parallel Exchange Market " with local shop owners and money changers.

Travel Tip

If you do need to use your card, especially in an ATM, put your card into the machine and press cancel to make sure you get it back before going on to enter your PIN. If it is safe to proceed, cover your PIN so there is no chance of anyone or anything seeing it. Official rates apply: 1,- US\$ = 2,15 Bolivar.

Safety

Venezuela is by far safer than other countries in the region. The border with Columbia is far away from Santa Elena on the opposite side of the country. The Peace Villages home base is in Santa Elena which is located on the south eastern border with Brazil, an extremely peaceful and safe region.

IMPORTANT: Santa Elena is a very safe town of about 25.000 inhabitants. It is the regional capital and the heart of the Gran Savannah region which consists of a protected and well guarded national park with numerous security checkpoints all the way through it. Also the bus trip from Caracas to Santa Elena is absolutely safe and reliable!

General Safety Precautions

- Don't walk around alone after dark
- If your luggage is ever searched by the police make sure you are present
- Don't leave unlocked valuables in your hotel room or the bus
- Do not openly display money and don't carry valuables
- Walk confidently, directly and at a steady pace
- If someone approaches you, look over them and walk on, try not to stare at them
- Walk on the side of the street that is facing the traffic

Water

The water at Aldeas de Paz is okay to drink. However, if you are planning on doing Excursions or going camping, it is advised that you bring water purification tablets or drops.

Clothing / Footwear

The Cooperative Living House is located on the side of a mountain, about a 35 minute walk from downtown Santa Elena. With this in mind, please pack appropriate clothing and footwear.

Work Schedule

Each volunteer's work schedule is self determined and depends on what type of experience each person is looking for. All programs, such as the Preschool, Ecological Construction, Conservation, NGO Management and Therapeutic Horse Riding, are ongoing throughout the year, thus enabling each volunteer to choose what they are interested in and create their work schedule accordingly. In addition to volunteer work, each volunteer living in Cooperative Living is expected to help cook twice a week and complete their weekly house chores.

Climate

In Venezuela, there are essentially two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season typically lasts from April to September, and the dry season lasts from September to March. No matter the season, each day is hot and the sun is very strong. At night, it can get fairly cool, so remember to pack one or two sweaters and a couple pairs of pants. This is also a good way to protect your skin from the mosquitoes and puri puri that come out at night.

Packages

If you are planning on receiving packages while you are here, please be advised that it takes about a month to ship from North America to Venezuela. Personal items and items for the children can be sent to the following address:

Your Name C/O Fundación Aldeas de Paz
POST RESTANTE
Av. Brazil, 275 Centro Pacaraima; Roraima;
CEP 69345 000 Brazil

Don't forget - crucial things to bring

Please also check the "What to bring" information on our website:

http://www.peacevillages.org/volunteering_what_to_bring.htm

- Toilet paper for the journey on the bus. (There will be no toilet paper in the airport, bus station, or on the bus)
- Lots of bug spray!!! (add antihistamine and cortisone)
- Feminine hygiene products for the ladies (can also be bought in Santa Elena)
- Flashlight or headlamp is a necessity for walking up or down the mountain at night
- Spanish dictionary
- **Mosquito net with fine mesh**
- A first aid kit can also be a good idea to bring

Important documents include:

- Your passport – You cannot go anywhere without this and in some countries you cannot even enter National Parks without one.
- Airline tickets and a copy of your flight itinerary.
- Insurance certificate and policy document – these are very important for you to be aware of what you are and are not covered for on your trip. They are also necessary to have when making a claim.
- Travelers' cheques receipt numbers - you must keep these separate.
- Vaccination card - you may be asked when entering a country to prove that you have had required vaccinations.
- A copy of all credit card and bank account numbers, as well as international contact numbers to cancel lost or stolen cards.
- Your pre-departure info with useful and emergency contact numbers.

For all of the above, make sure you have a duplicate copy of these for backup. Leave one set of copies at home with your next of kin and another set in your luggage, away from the original copies.

Important Phone numbers

House	: English & Spanish speaking	0289 - 416 0820
		0289 - 414 5721
Coordinator	: English & Spanish speaking	0416 - 787 2499
Manfred	: English & Spanish speaking	0414 - 870 4895