

TRAVEL TO CIUDAD BOLIVAR VIA THE LLANOS : Mark & James

n.b. travelled in late February

1. Caracas to San Fernando de Apure

Expresos de los Llanos (460 Bs, 8 hour journey, the coach broke down once for 30 minutes). The road, which is in good condition, is bordered by many Fincas and Hatos (ranches). Before it became dark we were able to see the vast flat plains, home to the numerous cattle. However, the views of the countryside were much more impressive later on the journey.

The bus station at S.F. had a cafe with various booths selling sweets and papers and there were even clean toilets.

We walked from the bus station into the town centre. It is a straightforward 10 minute walk to a plaza containing a large fountain. There are many hotels surrounding the plaza. We stayed in Hotel La Torraca on Paseo Libertador (484 Bs double: shower, TV, restaurant & Bar).

2. San Fernando de Apure to Puerto Ayacucho

Small bus / large Jeep (25 people) leaves the bus station at midday. The journey takes 8 hours (with a stop for a flat tire) and costs 600 Bs.

The road is of variable quality. Until the Santos Luzardo National Park (between Cinaruco-Capanaparo Rivers) it is tarmacked but in poor condition, through the Park it is little more than a dirt track. After crossing the Orinoco at Puerto Paez, the road is of high quality.

There were 3 or 4 drive on/off ferries for river crossings, the largest and last being the Orinoco. There were also several impressive new bridges.

I doubt that this journey would be possible during the wet season.

Puerto Ayacucho

Gran Hotel Amazonas: this appears to be some form of German colony. The swimming pool and all day bar and restaurant might compensate, however it is expensive at 930 Bs double. I would recommend the Hotel Tobogan next to the bus station, much better value at 550 Bs double.

3. Puerto Ayacucho to Ciudad Bolivar

There are 2 bus lines that operate this route, however it didn't seem to matter from which booth we bought the ticket. The bus station has a seated area and a cafe which is open from early morning till late night.

The small bus (30 people) left at 8 a.m. Buses leave before and after this. The journey took 12 hours. We broke down 3 times and finally our coach driver retired and placed us on another bus. These delays totalled 1 hour i.e. the journey is probably timetabled (given the existence of a timetable) at about 11 hours.

The Orinoco is rarely seen. However, the road generally follows its course, stopping at all the major river towns on route. The bus often picks up or drops off indians seemingly in the middle of nowhere. This journey was certainly our most enjoyable. The scenery until Caicara is fantastic. It is characterised by the vast plains we'd previously seen whilst travelling south from Caracas to Puerto Ayacucho. There were fewer cattle than we'd witnessed on the plains to the north. In addition this region is home to rocky formations that jut from the plain, like mini tepuis, and these are often surrounded by small areas of picturesque forest. Beyond Caicara the plains appear drier and flatter and less interesting. 1 hour after Caicara we changed buses and could no longer see anything through the blackened windows of the new bus.

Ciudad Bolivar

Ciudad Bolivar coach station (Terminal de Pasajeros, Av. República at corner of Sucre) is excellent. It has a seated area that is served by an all-night cafe. It is safe to sit here with all the other travellers waiting for their late night connections. [If you follow Avenida Sucre, then continue on Moreno de Mendoza, you will reach the historic city centre in 2.5km.]

We took a taxi, 80Bs (I reckon it should be 60 Bs), to Hotel Canaima, Av. Upata, which is very close to east end of airport. Hotel Canaima costs 605 Bs double, TV, shower and a poor quality restaurant but the red bean soup was excellent. The hotel staff were very friendly and were able to provide us with scales that helped us to pack our rucksacks in accordance with the Aereotuy 10kg limit. Furthermore the hotel receptionist will provide early morning calls. We arranged ours for 5.00 am. As we left the hotel we thanked the receptionist and apologised for waking him up so early. We had no option as the hotel doors were locked and it was nearly 6.00 am.

Post Office : from the airport walk down Av. Tachira, opposite the airport entrance. After 10 minutes you will reach the post office situated on the right hand side of the avenue. You can buy aerograms here. You can even send a telegram to England, but at 16Bs a word it is expensive.

CANTV : continue walking away from the airport along Av. Tachira, 5 minutes further on from the post office turn right along Av. 5 de Julio. The CANTV office is 2 minutes away on the right side of the road. n.b. we needed 3 hours to get a line to England to confirm that James's house was empty. [Avenida Tachira goes from the airport NW about 3km towards the old centre where it joins Av. Cumana, a few blocks from the riverfront called Paseo del Orinoco.]

4. Ciudad Bolivar to Caracas

Many buses travel this route. We travelled with Rapidos de Guayana whose early morning bus is the first to leave at 6 am. I am not convinced that it would necessarily be the first to arrive in Caracas. We arrived at 5 pm. This 11 hour journey incorporated 4 scheduled stops (inc. El Tigre and Anaco), no breakdowns and cost 315 Bs.

NOTES ON MORROCOY : Mark and James. March, 1991.

1. Caracas to Morrocoy

- a) Travel to Valencia. From the Nuevo Circo, bus Bs.84, 2h 30min. Seems to be a very regular service. We were lucky and got straight on a bus that left 5 minutes later.
- b) Valencia bus station. Cafés and shops are adjacent to a fairly well organised station. You must pay Bs.2 to enter the departure section of the bus station.
- c) Travel to Tucacas. Por Puerto Bs.50, 1h 15min. You get dropped on the highway and must walk through Tucacas to the harbour. Many supermarkets, cafés, hotels and it's easy to buy food for your stay. We bought 2 large containers of water, 18 litres for Bs.240. This is very expensive. However, they'd sold out of plastic water containers and we had to purchase the large glass bottles (valued at Bs.210).

2. Cayo El Sombrero (one of the farthest, most expensive to reach)

The cost for a small open boat or lancha is Bs.1100. This covers as many passengers and gear as will fit, 4 to 8 people, depending on the boat. Ask for the puerto.

El Sombrero island reputedly has the best beach and breeze. We crossed the island and camped on the far side from where the boats moor. The beach is cleaned every day, has many toilets, is regularly visited by icecream sellers (Bs.40-70 per icecream), and a little shark selling fish and chips. There are many palms to sling a hammock from. (I'd take a hammock if I went again.) Monday to Wednesday was the best, and Thursday to Sunday the busiest.

We preferred our side as there is a stronger wind which kept us cool and decreased the number of insects (few mosquitoes at this season, but some flies). Also the beach is protected by a coral reef. The sea within the reef, named La Piscina, is ideal for swimming, snorkelling and playing around (we were rarely out of our depth). Most of the coral is dead, however there are many fish and the snorkelling was excellent.

We arranged for our boat man to meet us on Friday morning at 9am, but changed our mind and were able to hitch a lift with another couple (I imagine this is always quite easy to arrange in holiday season). Boatmen are always quite happy to bring you more food if you stay awhile but, unless you require fresh food, there's no point as you can easily load the boat with a wheelbarrow from local supermarkets, we did!

3. Tucacas - Caracas.

- a) Por Puerto to Morón: Bs.30, 45 min.
" " from " to Valencia: Bs.30, 30 min.
- b) Bus from Valencia to Caracas: Bs.84, 2h 45 min.