

FETE'S NOTES (cont'd) CANAIMA, KAVAK, AUYANTEPUI

Trip by bus to airport was fine as usual - expect that max. wait until a bus is full is 15 mins. At airport, a few problems as the woman had to ask around about my INPARQUES permit, but no problems in the end. To check-in, Canaima has it's own special check-in desk - with a red carpet and all that (no kidding!!). Avensa are obviously expecting you to be spending loads of money in their hotel. Check in no problems. The Avensa desks on excursions are for flights only. A few people try to sell you other excursions from Canaima Excursions, showing you selections of poor-quality photographs, and trying to persuade you that they cost more at Canaima (load of balls - they're probably on commission). Best to see what there is when I get there.

Flight only half full, and flight announcements were in both English and Spanish, though I could understand the Spanish much better (and my Spanish is not that good). This flight does not go anywhere near the Angel Falls. During the flight, an Avensa rep. comes round with some fairly useless info about the Avensa Angel Falls flight.

Canaima airport terminal is a little shack - look out for the aeroplanes that didn't make it - there are quite a few wreckages scattered around the runway! All the luggage goes to the Avensa desk at the Avensa Campamento Canaima, so either jump on the transport (two carriages, pulled by a tractor) or walk the five minutes down the track (helps you get your bearings). At the hotel, reps throw lots of pieces of paper at you about their tours - grab them all, and one should be from Makunaima souvenirs, which is the best map of the camp around. The leaflets tell you the basics about each company's excursions. It's better to translate the Spanish yourself than to read their translation as it's terrible. The reps for the tours are people who know most about the place. Once they've given you the spiel about the tours and all that, you can start talking about doing things that don't cost money (like walking to the places their tours go). They will also know about where to camp, or where you can hire a Hammock. There will be a huge queue at the hotel check-in so don't bother asking them anything until everyone has gone.

Forms of payment.

In canaima, the excursions people take credit cards (AMEX, VISA and M/C), and you can change dollars and travellers' cheques at the avensa office, but it would be better to change money before arriving.

Outside of canaima, it's strictly cash only - Bolivars recommended. People, or at least shops normally have change, so

don't be too worried about carrying lots of small change

List of excursions

Angel Falls flight

8 seater Cessna - 2500Bs (more exciting, less comfort, and higher likelihood of airsickness)

DC3 - 2750Bs - supposedly a classic type of plane, with a lot of room for the passengers, and rather smoother - less exciting though.

Kavac Cave - flight in Cessna, including Angel Falls - 5100Bs, including lunch, soft drinks and trip to cave

Sapo Fall - ½ day - 1000Bs

Yuri Fall - ½ day - 1400 Bs

Mayupa Falls - ½ day - 1400 Bs

Orchid Island - 1 day - 2600Bs

Wareipa - 1 day - 3000Bs

Rio Caroni - ½ day - 1500 Bs Goes to beach called La Candelaria

The sabanero - ½ day - 1200Bs

Wareipa - 3d, 2n - 10,000Bs

2d, 1n - 5,000Bs

Winter excursions (June - November)

El Encanto Falls - 1 day - ???

Angel Falls - 5 days - 8,000Bs

or 4d, 3n - 10,000Bs, min 6

Also Kamarata Valley excursion, and you can arrange to sleep a night in the forest in you really want to, and pay a fortune for the privilege

(All info in the pamphlets. All the trips might look fairly similar - and I think that they are)

These excursions are for the tourists, who are paying about £50 per night per person in the hotel, and are not really geared towards a no frills traveller. If there's nothing else going on, you'll probably end up doing something with them.

Campamento: pilot's comment about the place - "Biggest monopolistic ripoff he'd come across" £50 per person for first 2 nights, and then it drops to £30. You can stay in a hammock in canaima for 250Bs. a night, but when you can buy a hammock in caracas for 700Bs, it's better to have your own!

Prices - very expensive, as everything has to be flown in. In the store, prices are 1½-2 X pvp. The bars in the campamento are a bit more expensive (fresco - 30Bs (25Bs in store), beer - 50Bs).

Sandwiches from the snackbar - 50Bs, not bad but not great. Meals at the hotel - dinner is 450Bs, and if it is a BBQ it is superb, otherwise it's passable. If you manage to chat up, or get chatted up by some people in the bar, they might have some spare lunch tickets (if they've been on an excursion), and this could save you a lot of pennies, if they don't except your money, but at least you have dinner with some new faces.

Water - there's 'agua potable' at the beach bar - it's tea coloured once gain. There's a loo by the beach bar and by the restaurant which I used a by bathroom - there's one in the guardia's hut but it seemed a bit of an inconvenience to use it the whole time. It's probably best not to go 'au natural' too much as you're in the middle of a resort.

Find the Guardia del Parque's office on the beach - towards the waterfalls, and 'check-in'. You can leave your pack here while you explore. Use the Makunaima map to find the store, where you can see what food you can get, and have a good chat with the shopkeeper as he knows what's going on in Canaima outside of the camp. I was heading off to Kamarata, and he told me an Indian was going that way tomorrow. I spent most of the afternoon looking for him - and in the process discovered most of canaima. At first I heard he was going to travel slowly, doing a lot of fishing (sounding even better), but when I found him, he told me he was fully laden with cargo, and couldn't take me. Shame. If you haven't any definite plans (always a good plan!), ask around to see what any locals are doing, and you might be able to travel with them - the port is above the waterfalls, and the road to it goes through the Indian settlement. In the settlement are a couple of shops - always good places to hang around at if you want to put your ear to the ground. Note - the people around Canaima speak very clear Spanish - either because they are used to dealing with tourists, and can probably speak English (still try to speak to them in Spanish if you can - it gains a lot of respect), or because they are Indian and it is their second language too.

Exploring on foot - there are two directions - going left or right. To the left, there is a faint trail that follows the coast, and this gives a better view of the falls. I disturbed a snake, so after I'd started my heart again, I went inland down a path and came across a CVG Edelca camp. Tried to cut back through the forest, but the trail petered out by several piles of white toilet paper, so I headed back via the road - via store.

Going right from the Guardia's can be more exciting. Take the road up the hill towards the port, and you can walk up river. I was there in Feb. - dry season, and you could walk almost all the way across the falls - over rocks that are underwater for

half of the year. You might come across a rather angry INPARQUES guard shouting at you from the bank. After he has established that you speak Spanish, He says 'es loco, esta muy peligroso', so you apologise and go back down. Cvg are building what looks like a hydroelectric scheme by the falls at the mo, which will probably have been completed when you are here. Also, you can scramble along the rocks to close to the bottom of the falls.

You camp beyond the guardia's hut, on the beach with ultrafine white, or even pink sand. Many locals are just in hammocks - could sling one yourself between some trees on the beach. Mosquito net recommended, but not an absolute necessity

Comments after about 8 hours in Canaima

When I arrived, I saw the landscape of tepuys and waterfalls, that I'd read so much about, and still didn't exist. I just wanted to say 'wow' the whole time, and wandered how to translate it when I met some Venezuelans. I have spent minutes just staring at the tepuys over the falls in amazement - I'm having to be very very strict with the photos that I take. Now, I want to stay up all night, staring at the stars, the palm trees, and follow the frogs hopping around the camp. The sound of the waterfalls is a little like the sea, but more continuous. My mind feels so alive that I'm drinking beers to try and dull it so I might get some sleep tonight.

It's a truly idyllic setting, quite well set up for the rich Avensa conformer. You can take a lot of advantages of the camp by camping without having to pay the extortionate rates - the fact that you're camping also provokes a lot of interest, and jealousy, when chatting.

17-2-91

Copy an Indian and bath in the lake - superb! Go on Wareipa trip - 45mins in trailer pulled by tractor across sabana, 1 hour upstream in boat up Rio Cucurital, to a small camp by Wareipa rapids - the river was quite low and we had to get out and walk a bit - sometimes the helmsman had to lift the engine out of the water to clear some rocks. In the dry season, the water level is about 3-4m below wet season level - and you can see the banks. Shame about the motor - lots of noise. At Wareipa, not much of a reception, so it was best to get swimming as soon as poss. It's still a novelty swimming in tea!. After a drink, go over the river for a walk in the 'jungle', up to another rapid where we swim for a while - both above and below it. Take a shower in one waterfall. Walk back for lunch. After a long siesta (and a good chat with some french, Italians, Venezuelans and Germans) go walking again, to another waterfall, with excellent views of the Auyan Tepuy (1000 columns), but wait for journey back for photos when sun is lower (might be risky in the wet season). Waterfalls

are quite fun for swimming - look out for frogs - their stage of development will depend on the time of year. On the way back, climbed to top of a little hill to take photo - needed three to get whole tepuy in! Earlier, had chatted to French P.E. teacher from Chamonix, and gave him some Merida info. They were staying the night, and I think all that was extra was a look at a diamond mine, and a chance to sleep in a hammock.

The journey back is quicker as it's with the current, and the Auyan looks totally fascinating in the reddening light as the sun sinks. End up driving back in the dark - with the new moon lighting the way. Go past a small hill on the way - a possible climb one afternoon for the view. At the excursions desks, ask if it's worth me doing anything else, and there wasn't really, except perhaps the Angel Falls flight, and walk lots.

Met John Cater (B.A. long haul pilot, having lots of hassles with Avensa as he should get special deals as he booked through B.A., but Avensa are bugging him about, and he doesn't speak Spanish. Go and eat dinner on my own and look at Lagoven map, and a guy sitting on the wall starts chatting to me about what I'm up to - ends up he knows a lot about the tepuis - helped with the Nat. Geog. article - and has spent between 14 hours and 47 days on top. Drew me a helpful map, and wanted to talk to him more but he had to dash. I'd started talking to him in Spanish and after about 5 mins when I was stumbling a bit, he said I could speak in English but I continued in Spanish until he persuaded me - he might well have been American himself anyway.

Comments - Wareipa was nothing special, except perhaps tepui views, and it's a lot of money - not that well organised.

18-2-91

As I starved yesterday, I went for breakfast today - ham and cheese and arepas and eggs and bread and coffee - not too bad for 210Bs. Went of Angel Falls flight afterwards. Air is the best way to see the place - if you're planning to spend a few days here, it's a good idea to do the flight early on, and you can see the place from the air. We flew right over the tepui, and was Salto Angel and el Gran Salto, though most of the water had probably vaporised before touching the ground. What the plane actually does depends a lot on the weather conditions. I didn't feel too great afterwards - I think a good tip to help avoid airsickness is an empty bladder, though I think that I had something else. Chat with John and family, and go swimming out to a sandbank, and get called back by guardias. About lunchtime, go and throw up in the loo - making it just in time, but I feel a lot better for it. Don't know what it was - the water, the dinner the night before (very salty fish, which my stomach did not like too much), the flight, or a combination of all three. Guardia gives me an alkaseltzer and asks for some whiskey.

Comments - lots of little things the guardias seem to stop you doing, but they can't stop you once you've done it. I asked one about where I could walk, and his reaction suggested that I could go anywhere.

Type of people - on the whole, people with quite a lot of money (done Los Roques too), but not your standard boring tourist - these people do actually have a pulse. Higher proportion of SLR's and non-Spanish speakers than elsewhere in Ven, and also a lot more coconut oil sunscreen and insect repellent, but all very friendly, in their own nationalistic way.

19-2-91 - walking trips

Kanguaripa Salto

Follow the jeep track towards Makunaima souvenir shop, but don't turn off (very close to shop) - go straight on and you soon hit the lagoon. Walk a bit further and you come to the salto, with no tourists, though a few Indian women from another village might be washing clothes in a pool. Carry on further to see some more rapids, and the waterfall into canaima lagoon from a different - fantastic. At one point, you can see 6 different tepuis. Out of view of everyone, including national guards (they often stand by their hut with binoculars scanning the horizon, but there's a beach here that is out of sight. Possible camp site. You can walk back along the edge of the lagoon, but I was still worried about snakes. Several people had assured me that there were no poisonous snakes, and I had seen a Boa (I'd compared notes with a guardia - they have about 30 different snakes in big jars by their office) which is not poisonous, but I was still happy to take the road.

Up the hill

Another good walk is up the hill to the right of the waterfall - you can see the path from the guardia's, and just go through the Indian camp to get to the start. Not a long climb, but it's very hot in the sun. Good views from the top of the laguna, the airport and the Nonoi tepuy (the fat, low one with a flat top). Wandering around on top, you might come across the wreckage of a small plane. There are a few paths on the top, but you're likely to get lost. So, if you don't fancy a scramble through thick vegetation down a 45° slope, be careful!

View from the beach bar is best at sunset - two groups of waterfalls. The furthest set has two falls - Sapo and Sapito. Nearest set has 4 falls - Waka (or Hacha), Wadaima, Keuchita and Uraima - Indian names

Tepui names - far left, wide and short with flat top = Nonoi

Big straight sided = Kusare

Big one to the left = Kurum

Little one = Kurabaina

The beach bar is the best place to hang around to meet people. People who work in the hotel drink here, and one Venezuelan couldn't stop shaking my hand he was so pleased to meet me - a bit of the hard-sought-for genuine Venezuelan friendship. If you are on your own and you don't scowl at everyone, you will act like a magnet to other people.

An alternative way to see the tepuys is to bring your own motorised hanglider. Locals couldn't take their eyes off it whereas I was much more fascinated by the tepuis, waterfalls, and multicoloured parrots that fly around the camp.

That night, the guards felt sorry for me, and gave me a bed to sleep in. My tent on the sand might have been marginally more comfortable, but the bathroom was handy.

Note - Nice little parasites that burrow into your feet. NIGUAS.

I had a cut on my big toe which went septic, and also some black dots underneath some other toes. As I was told by an Indian in Kamarata, these are parasites, carried around by dogs which burrow into you feet - you just dig them out with a needle. For my infected toe, I took a course of anti-biotics - also advised by this Indian in Kamarata - more about him later.

FINAL NOTE ABOUT CANAIMA

People might argue that it is better to go to other, less spoilt places in the tepuis or the gran Sabana, where there are no tourist. I agree that that does have its merits, but Canaima is a truly beautiful setting, and Avensa have managed not to screw it up too much, and is well worth the trip - the good facilities are a bit of a luxury, and the company is surprisingly interesting.

20-2-91 FLIGHTS

I was in Canaima. I had a ticket C.B. to Kamarata for 21-2-91 with Aereotuy. I had already investigated the possibilities and had tried to reconfirm my reservation with Avensa to C.B., and there seemed to be no problems, except that I needed to buy the ticket to confirm the reservation as they have no computer here - so a warning: a reservation in Caracas is totally meaningless in a village that is not connected, like Canaima or Kamarata. Aereotuy knew that when they told me I'd have to reserve a place for KAM - .C.B. in KAM, but Avensa were clueless about this.

Anyhow, yesterday, I went to buy my Avensa ticket, only to be told that the flight had been cancelled. Find the Aereotuy guide

(Cecilia), who's with daytrippers from C.B., but she can't really help as she didn't know a lot about TUY's flights. There's another flight to CAN from C.B. tomorrow (today), but it might be full. I could wait at the airport and ask cargo or other planes, but I had to get to KAM by 21st - so I asked Excursiones Canaima if I could go to Kavac, only for the flight - it was OK at 2000Bs.

Flight goes via Angel Falls, and included everything in the Angel Falls flight. At Kavac, no smoking once outside of the huts - they are very conservation conscious. About 1/2 hour walk to a place to swim, with a natural jacuzzi! Walk further upstream to a lovely pool, but then swim further up a very narrow canyon to a pool, with a fantastic waterfall gushing in - try diving off somerocks into the pool. On the way back, we went via another lovely waterfall. Have a meagre lunch (no beer), a little rest, a chance to buy some bad souvenirs, and the others leave.

Getting to Kavac is the expensive part, but it's a lovely place to stay. About 10 huts (5 lived in, 5 for tourists during the day), with more being built - all out of local materials - mud and palm. The whole place has been built up by the people of Kamarata (a much larger village 2 hours walk away), and they really have done a very good job of it - it is definitely Indian and not Venezuelan. Several flights come daily from C.B. and Porlamar with Aerotuy with daytrippers. They are very well looked after, but the people from Porlamar are paying \$180 for the privilege. They have a very good lunch of chicken, chops, salad, fruit salad and beer, and there's normally plenty spare, so you can probably get a free meal, and lots of it, if you play your cards right. If you are there under your own steam, you have to go with a guided party to the cave, and this will cost 500Bs.

You can pay for a hammock or a bed in Kavac, or you can sleep on the floor for free. There's a shower, which has warm water (complete luxury), and someone even apologised to us that there wasn't any breakfast. There's a small shop where you can get a few basics, and cold beer (50Bs.). After all the tourists have left, Kavac becomes a very picturesque, tranquil pueblito. The standard of craftsmanship that has gone into making the huts is very high - and it is great that the whole place has come about through Kamarata's own enterprise. Some time after the tourists leave, most of the locals leave too for their homes in Kamarata. Only about 15 people live in Kavac, though this is likely to increase. There is a Carro which takes people back and forth from Kavac to Kamarata, though it even costs the locals 300Bs., as petrol is so expensive. It's an easy walk, and best attempted towards the end of the day when it's cooler. There is a river at exactly half way, and another river just as you enter Kamarata

Kamarata.

KAM is a large Indian settlement, which is doing reasonably well from the tourist trade in Kavac, which they are expending. Flights go direct to KAM from C.B. with Aerectuy for 2000Bs. (a scheduled flight - not a daytripper flight). If you want to make a reservation to leave, you need to talk to the Aerectuy rep. when you arrive - Dionysius. A very helpful man in the town is Leano, who speaks very good English - he teaches at the school. He diagnosed what was wrong with my foot, and would have gone into the forest to find a natural antibiotal plant, if he hadn't had a lesson. He'll show you around the town, and answer any questions. It's very interesting talking to him about the attitude of the people to tourists, and the changing times. At the moment, the people in the village are still genuinely very friendly. The atmosphere is a little strange in some places though. One Indian in the village wanted to organise people a bit better, but no one was interested, so he went it alone and set up a shop (very well stocked) and is doing very well. I was offered a place in a "hotel", and you could buy a meal. There is good camping ground in front of the mission, by the volleyball court underneath the mango trees. There are various taps with drinking water around the place, and you can swim or bathe in the river.

Note on Aerectuy. Unlike Avensa, TUY seem very well organised. I two messages with guides, from Canaima and Kavac to C.B. for people flying the next day, and they got both of them. The guides and the reps in each town (there's even one in Kavac) are very helpful - it must be the Indian influence. I am going to try and send a letter to James and Mark via Aerectuy, from CCS to CBL, as this seems the only way of contacting them - will have to see if it gets through. Yes, it did.

MORE ABOUT FLIGHTS

A lot of the villages around the tepuis are only accessible by plane, so you have to fly to get there (or hike for 2 weeks!). The airfields are small and very informal, and the planes are operating more like coaches of por puestos. At any airfield, you could ask a pilot if he had places, and go with him to wherever he was going next - or wait for one to go where you want to go. You can hitch lifts on the daytripper planes that are not full, or on a cargo plane that is returning. You are still likely to have to pay a fair amount, but it is worth it - especially in the little single engine cessnas, which the pilots drive like cars.

E.G.:

I was in Kavac, wanting to get back to Caracas as quickly as possible. The first plane to arrive was an Aerectuy daytripper from Margarita which was full, but it was likely that another one

would be coming later that wasn't full and I could get a lift to Margarita. There would also be daytripper flights from C.B. The next plane was from Canaima, and was flying back empty to pick up another group - I would have gone with him, except that I would miss the only flight out of Canaima and be stuck there instead. The next plane brought in a load of cement and concrete reinforcing rods (and I thought they only used natural materials in Kavac), and was going to La Paragua, so I went with him. It was only a six seater, and without a full load it is very easy to handle. The air around the tepuis is quite turbulent, so the plane does get thrown around quite a bit. From the air is definitely the way to see this country. In a jet, it all goes past rather quickly. In a twin-engined 20-seater Aerotuy plane, you glide past the tepuis. But in one of these cessnas, it is a Sunday afternoon stroll. They fly low so the views are always fantastic, if the airsickness does not affect you too badly! From Kavac to La Paragua (NW of Canaima), we flew around the southern side of the Auyan Tepui - over a lot of the ground that we had walked over at the beginning of the hike, and then up the Cucurital river, passing over where I had been on the Wareipa Excursion. The rivers are deep black lines cutting through the forest. As we passed over the River Caroni, San Salvador came into sight - a horrific eyesore, where a diamond find caused mass destruction of forest just leaving ugly bare mud. We could see Canaima from the air, and as we approached La Paragua, yellow rivers came in from the west. The landing was exciting - with a sharp 90° turn before allowing about 5 seconds to line up with the runway. All this in just a cargo plane!

From La Paragua, it was easy to get a Por Puesto to C.B. (carefully avoiding the Libres who were charging more). We could have waited until the bus in the evening. Having lived in the country and in Indian villages for a couple of weeks, La Paragua was truly repulsive - a gold and diamond town, where everyone snarls at you - even when they are trying to be polite! It was great to leave, but there was a fairly thorough search at a National Guard post on leaving the town. Only a small quantity of gold or diamonds can be carried without documentation, but one guard was very interested in my medical kit and proceeded to taste my malaria pills and antibiotics. The ride to C.B. takes 2-3 hours, depending on the driver and how many Polars he drinks.

CANAIMA BY LAND.

From La Paragua, there is a ferry which goes south across the river La Paragua, and it seemed to have a fair amount of traffic heading for San Salvador. From the air, there was no obvious river crossing point. However, the Rio Caroni excursion from Canaima goes to a little Indian village called La Candelaria, on the west bank of the river, so if you could get to La Candelaria, you should be able to hitch a lift with this excursion.

PETER'S NOTES: Auyantepui trek.

A truly fantastic place to walk - takes over two days to get on top when laden, but you could spend a lifetime up there.

A guide is a complete necessity for the hike as the path is not clear, and involves quite a lot of climbing. These are found in the large Indian settlement of Kamarata. Our guide was called Justiniano who was great, but if you can't find him, ask Lino for advice.

I will describe the hike that we did which was a hard seven days. From this information, you should be able to sort out a hike that you want to do.

I met two friends off the Aereotuy flight from C.B. in the morning of 21-2-91. I had come from canaima, by flight and walking. An Indian called ^{Lino} soon started talking to us - he was extremely helpful, and is very intelligent - teaches at the school, and speaks very good english. He showed us around the village, where the shop was and where the Aereotuy rep. was. We said hello to the village chief (Lino might well be the next one), but had to wait a short while for Justiniano as he was away. After lunch, we met up with him and decided on the hike that my friends had been recommended - a 10 day hike that we planned to cover in 9 days. Justiniano charged 700Bs. per day, but we gave him 7000. We needed enough food for Justiniano too, though he did bring some casava and picante. The hiking is hard so you will need a lot of food. You can get porters if you want them, but we were all fit and didn't want them. Justiniano also wanted another Indian to come with us, in case someone had a problem and had to return, but we explained how we were all walking fit, having just completed walks in either Mérida, or up roraima, so that was O.K. We agreed to meet up in Kavac the following morning.

It's a 2 hour walk to Kavac from Kamarata - an easy walk but it gets hot - there's a river half way. Kavac is a good place to start from as it cuts 2 hours off the first day. If you arrive early enough, you might be able to scrounge some food off the Aereotuy daytrippers, which is superb. You can get expensive beers in the village, and can sleep on a floor for free, or pay for a hammock or bed. The water is hot, so a shower is lovely.

Day 1

Justiniano arrives in the carro from Kamarata - this carro shuttles back and forth quite frequently, but costs 300Bs. - takes about 1/2 hour. Justiniano had his own rucksack - made from wood, palm, string and plastic sheeting, sleeping bag, bowl and spoon, and walks in plastic wellies. Even though he is quite old, he is very fit and knowledgeable and knows the route well, having done it over 20 times. His sleepingbag is not very good, so it's a good gesture to lend him a sweater or something warm to sleep in.

If you have some kit that you don't want to take up the mountain, you can leave it with someone in Kavac. It's best to leave it here rather than Kamarata, as you might not go back to Kam, if you can hitch a ride on a plane out of Kavac.

The first day's hike is across sabana to begin with, crossing a few rivers, but always in the shadow of the tepui. It's very hot, and a hat is very recommended. It was the dry season so the path was hard, though I can see it getting quite boggy in

places in the wet season. We had lunch and a bath at the last river before you start to climb - about 4 hours out of Kavac. The climb is hard work and very hot in the sun. Eventually, you approach the stone wall, and climb the path over the rocks to the top - at last!! The views are already beginning to open out, and you've hardly started. It might take 2-3 hours from the river to here, and it's about another hour to a river and campsite called Guayaraca. The river is beautifully refreshing (fine for drinking, as is all the water on the tepui), and there are sites for tents. There is a lot of sand about - slightly pink - which is a reminder that the tepuis are made of sandstone. Some structures have been constructed where you could hang hammocks, or just use some plastic sheeting and sleep on the ground. The last option is the best option, as all the other sites are under huge rocks, so no protection from the weather is required. There is plenty of firewood, as there is at all the sleeping points. No great views from the campsite, but you are in the forest and the fantastic flora and fauna is beginning - several huge lovely purple orchids, and a few rather timid hummingbirds (colibri) darting around.

Day 2

This day's walk is a complete mixture of different types of vegetation - with forest, sabana, and a dense low form of vegetation. The variety of little flowers is huge. Stop for lunch half way - by a stream which goes under the path, and we would have missed it if Justiniano hadn't known it was there. A possible camping site close by. Soon after this point, the path climbs steeply - up a slope named after the Dantes that roam in the sabana below at night. After your second hard day's hike, you arrive at El Peñon - a huge rock with 10 beds cut in the sand underneath, in a perfect shelter. Wind is funnelled over the beds though so it can get a bit chilly. There's a stream about 5 minutes away - quite cool. This is where we left the tent as we learnt we wouldn't need it any more, and some food for the return journey - out of reach of rats. You can see the plateau below you where Guayaraca was, and the path across the sabana. Kamarata and Kavac are already out of sight to the left, but you can see other tepuis over the Guayaraca plateau.

Day 3

The day starts with a lot of climbing - firstly a steep path, and then over beds of roots, until you come to the final vertical wall, tens of metres high - we couldn't see the top as it was cloudy. After skirting the wall for a while, the path once again climbs steeply, and you need to use ropes a couple of times to get up (the ropes are there). There are a few rocks to shelter under, and we found a superb ledge, cut into the mountainside to have lunch. It was very close to the top, and scaling the final rocks on to the top of this tepui is great - be careful you don't slip or lose your footing in the excitement. The huge columns of rock are incredible - however did they come into existence. All rocks pitted, caused by water when the whole area used to be under a system of rivers - a long time ago. If it's cloudy, the towers look even more mysterious. On the rock to the right as you come up is a bronze statue of Bolivar (next to the weather instrument), brought up by University Central de Venezuela in 1936. Hence, this part of the mountain is known as Libertador. It is also the point where Jimmy Angel and his gang met a group of Indians coming up from Kamarata, which might also be a reason for the name. The views from this point, both into and out of the tepui are breathtaking - if it's not clear, wait until your descent.

There is a rock here that you can camp under, but we continued onto another rock known as El Osó (the Bear). To begin with, you walk over black rock, like the

surface of a golf ball, with lots of large pools of water, sand or earth. Each pool is alive with mosses or plants. You need to cross a vertical sided quebrada, which involves some careful climbing. Other crevices, many metres deep, you dare to jump over. The surface could be like the surface of the moon - I don't know because I haven't been there. Trail goes through some forest for a while, and you stop at a river to bathe and get water. The water on the top of the tepui is coloured red - like tea, but is still perfectly safe to drink - it tastes pretty good actually. El Oso is about 4 hour further, with a few beds in the sand. There is a trickle of water about 5 minutes away for drinking, and some pools in the "diaples" in the rocks for washing. As well as firewood, there is some special wood which is highly inflammable as it contains paraffin or something.

Day 4

A relatively short 4 hour hike to Borrachito (meaning 'little drunkard'), having left some more food behind. Some amazing shapes have been carved by waters in the rock and this day's trail passes through a fair amount of forest. It is alive with plants and birds. Hummingbirds will dart to within a foot of your head to look at you, and his facial expression says "who are you, I'm a colibri?". Often, you hear them before you see them.

Borrachito is on the banks of a lovely, deep red river - the Churun, which eventually passes over Angel Falls. The reflections of the mountains in the water with the red tint is unbelievable - after swimming around the corner a short way, allow the water to settle, and the images to appear. The actual cave is rather dark, though you can try sleeping on top. I found the bed at the top of the cave the most comfortable - there was also more smoke from the fire here, to help keep the buzzing insects out of my ears.

Day 5

After an hour of scrambling through forests, and crevices and holes in rocks, we came out on to the river again, at a site called Boca de Dragon, where the river disappears under rocks for a short while. The river bed is 30m wide of rock, but water covers little of it, if any. About an hour's walk downstream is a lovely waterfall, about 30m high, that we discovered and Justiniano hadn't seen before. He cut a very interesting trail by the side to get to the bottom of the falls. We tried walking further, but it did not seem possible without swimming, so we headed back to Borrachito.

Day 6

With lighter packs (without food), and the feeling that you are returning, we walked much faster on our return. We reached El Oso by midday, and went on to El Peñon. It was clear this time so the view of the gully you come up was fantastic, and this was when we went up to Bolivar's statue. To have enough time to get to El Peñon, you need to be at Libertador by 3pm, which means setting off from El Oso by 12.45pm. Leaving Borrachito by 8.30am should be fine.

Day 7

Get back to Guayaraca by noon, though I set off again fairly soon on my own at 12.30 to try and get to Kavac in time to get a flight. By 2pm, I'd reached the first river. It was a fantastic feeling - lying by that river, looking up at the tepui, all on my own in the middle of nowhere, where you are completely your own master. I carried on to Kavac, battling against the wind, losing the path at one point and

struggling through very difficult boggy grassland for 15 minutes, and eventually arrived in Kavac at 4pm - spotting the windsock first about 10 minutes out. There were no aeroplanes left, and even though one was coming at 4.30 to pick up some people for Canaima, but it was full. I was not too happy, but some beers and a warm shower cheered me up. The others arrived at 6.30 - they had come via Uruyen, a small village close to the path from Guayaraca, which has much less tourist influence. El Peñon to Kavac in one day is a lot, and I'd recommend taking it a bit more easily, unless you are in a hurry.

Day 8

A waiting game - to see if there are any places on the aeroplanes. They arrive quite late which worried us a bit. It seemed most likely that there would be planes going to Portezar, Ciudad Bolivar and Canaima, but we took a plane to La Paragua, which had just brought some cargo to Kavac. Fantastic flight, with the pilot driving his 6 seater Cessna like a car. Always flying below cloud level at low air speeds, the views are fantastic. We saw a lot of the area that we walked initially - up to El Peñon, but we didn't fly over the tepui - flying around the southern edge was just as good - especially for me as I had already flown around the northern edge when I came from Canaima. The plane follows the Cucurital river, which joins the Caroni. The scar of the diamond mining town San Salvador de Paul is an eyesore, but once it is past, there is plenty of forest to stare at once again. We could see canaima.

(Rest covered in Canaima bit)

Health.

1) Miguas are chiggers - sand fleas, have something to do with dogs, and burrow in to your feet. Very common in Canaima, but also found elsewhere. I had an infected toe caused by one (diagnosed by Lino) which his wife removed, using the end of a piece of grass as a most effective needle. He would have found some antibiotic leaf to rub in if he hadn't had to teach a lesson at the school. Later, found four black dots on the underneath of my toes, in what looked like blisters but turned out to be balls of puss. Removed them with a needle, leaving quite large holes, but no further problems with them. Took a course of antibiotics for the infected toe, which eventually cleared up - the hiking didn't really help matters.

2) Ticks - parasites that suck blood. They look like a small spider, and are probably picked up in the forest, and can get anywhere - I had a tick on my stomach and my toe, though someone else got one on his penis. When removing, it is very important to remove the whole animal, as they carry a lot of disease, and if you leave the head behind in you, it will get infected. Best method of removal is by twisting it like a cork - either using tweasers or by hand.

3) Malaria. There are cases of malaria in the area, but not a huge amount of mosquitos. Malaria is only present where there are other people, so on the tepui you should be OK. There are some biting insects, but not enough to warrant repellent, or sooty nets, unless you are particular fussy - the buzzing in your ears at night can get pretty annoying though. Each village in the region has a doctor, and about the only thing he knows about is malaria, so if you are worried go and see him. Some people take malaria tablets and some don't, so it's up to you.