Important Names & Addresses

The Learning Abroad Center provides a full range of services from preliminary program advising to assistance with re-entry. Do not hesitate to contact any of the Venezuela Learning Abroad Center staff with your questions. Prior to departure, please direct all questions to the Learning Abroad Center. Friends and family members should always contact the Learning Abroad Center, not the on-site staff, for assistance, even once you are overseas.

In the United States

Learning Abroad Center
Study, Work, Intern, Volunteer, & Travel Services
University of Minnesota
230 Heller Hall
271 19th Avenue S.
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0430
Phone: 612.626.9000
Toll Free: 888.700.UOFM
Fax: 612.626.8009
Email: UMabroad@umn.edu
Website: UMabroad.umn.edu

Venezuela Program Staff

Molly Micheels, Associate Program Director
Email: mollym@umn.edu
Phone: 612.624.3949

Holly Zimmerman LeVoir, Program Director
Email: zimme001@umn.edu
Phone: 612.625.9888

VENUSA (partner organization)
Rosa Corley—US Program Coordinator
Email: VENUSAcorley@yahoo.com
Phone: 561.358.8836
Fax: 561.515.3201

Emergencies

In case of emergency, contact the Learning Abroad Center at 612.626.9000 at any time. If it is after business hours, there will be a recording giving you a number to call. The Learning Abroad Center has someone on call to deal with emergencies and can contact the on-site director if needed.

In Venezuela

VENUSA College
49-49 Avenida Urdaneta
Edificio Guilam
Mérida, Venezuela
Phone: 58.274.263.7631
Fax: 58.274.263.3525
Francy González—On-site Coordinator

Telephone Codes

011  International access code from the US. The code from other countries will be different.
58  Venezuela country code used for dialing from outside Venezuela

Time Differences

Venezuela is 1.5 hours ahead of Minneapolis during the winter and 30 minutes ahead when the US is on daylight saving time.

Program Health & Safety

Program health and safety information is available at http://global.umn.edu/gosafe/index.html.
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Introduction

Purpose of This Handbook

Before you leave the country, make sure that you have read and understood the information in your Confirmation Checklist, the Health & Safety Online Orientation (available in your orientation checklist), and the information outlined in this handbook. These materials will guide you on a safe and successful learning abroad experience.

Valuable resources for your friends and family members can be found at UMabroad.umn.edu/parents. It discusses topics such as health and safety, program prices, logistics, and travel.

Overview of the Program

Study Abroad in Venezuela will provide you the opportunity to experience Venezuelan culture while learning in an academic setting. Classes with other US students are specifically designed to best benefit from your experience in another culture. They will take place at VENUSA, not on the Universidad de los Andes campus, allowing for an uninterrupted semester or summer term, regardless of the political situation at the university. The Mérida curriculum includes beginning, intermediate, and advanced Spanish language; Latin American studies; culture and history; and Caribbean and Spanish-American literature. Living with a family will greatly enhance your experience while abroad, and the cultural and social activities organized by the program will help you experience the country and socialize with Venezuelan students.

There are many similarities between Venezuela and the US, but in many ways Venezuelan society is not like our own. Although some differences may seem obvious, it is important to prepare yourself for your upcoming experience by reading the enclosed information carefully and by preparing for unexpected differences in the new culture. While the program can provide support for you on site, the ultimate success of your experience abroad depends on your ability and commitment to make the most of your time abroad and to successfully adjust to the differences you will encounter.

While you will receive much information directly from VENUSA, this guide is intended to acquaint you with certain customs and aspects of Venezuelan life. It also addresses academic issues and considerations that will be useful before, during, and after your stay in Mérida. This handbook is not comprehensive; you are encouraged to read other sources of information available concerning Venezuela and Mérida to prepare for study abroad.

The Learning Abroad Center provides a full range of services from preliminary program advising to assistance with re-entry. As you read through this handbook, feel free to contact the Learning Abroad Center at the University of Minnesota or your study abroad adviser with questions. ¡Buena Suerte!
Preparation & Planning

Documents

Passport
A valid passport is required to enter Venezuela. If you don’t have a passport, you should apply for one right away. Passports can take 4–6 weeks to process, so it’s important to begin this process early. In addition, you must have a passport before applying for your visa. More information is available at http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html.

If you currently have a passport, ensure that it will be valid for at least six months from the date you enter Venezuela. If not, you will need to renew it prior to departure.

Embassy Contact Info
Always keep your passport in a safe place. If your passport is lost or stolen, contact the local police, the American Consulate or Embassy, and the on-site staff. To identify the consulate or embassy nearest you, consult http://usembassy.gov.

Visa/Immigration Documents
A student visa is required for both summer and semester students entering Venezuela. US citizens must appear in person at the Venezuelan Consulate in Chicago in order to apply for their visa.

The Venezuela visa application is time-consuming. You will need to collect several pieces of documentation as part of your application — including a medical certificate and a police report. So, it’s important to start this process early because you will not be able to enter Venezuela without a visa.

Detailed information about the visa process is available on the “Visa Information Sheet” on your confirmation checklist. You can also view visa requirements on the Venezuelan Consulate in Chicago’s website: http://tramites.embavenez-us.org/preguntas/10/student-visitor-visa.

The Learning Abroad Center has a visa specialist to assist you with the visa process for your time in Venezuela. Please contact Mike Trost at trost055@umn.edu if you have questions.

Non-US Passport Holders
Students who are not traveling under a US passport may have to follow different visa procedures in order to enter Venezuela. Contact the Mike Trost (trost055@umn.edu) for assistance in determining the correct visa process.

Power of Attorney
We encourage you to consider designating someone as your Power of Attorney while you are abroad. Your Power of Attorney can act as your legal representative in a number of situations, including banking and tax issues. For more information, review the information at UMinneapolis.umn.edu/students/policies/finances/powerofattorney.

Safekeeping Important Documents
Copy all of your important documents and store the copies separately from the originals. Leave an additional copy with someone in the US and keep an electronic copy in a secure location.

Coordinated Group Travel
VENUSA is the Learning Abroad Center's partner organization for this program. Rosa Corley in VENUSA's Miami office assists all students in booking their travel to and from Venezuela. Students initiate this process by completing the Travel Request Form on their confirmation checklist.

Typically, students first fly to Miami and spend the night with other program participants at a hotel near the airport. Early the next morning, they fly as a group to Caracas and then on to either Mérida or El Vigía, a neighboring town. For safety purposes, a representative from VENUSA meets the group either in Miami or in Caracas and travels with them on to Mérida. The Travel Information Form on your confirmation checklist contains additional details.

Arriving Early
For safety reasons, students are strongly discouraged from arriving early to Venezuela. If you have extenuating circumstances, and cannot fly with the group, contact Molly Micheels (mollym@umn.edu) in the Learning Abroad Center to discuss your situation prior to making travel arrangements.

Staying After the Program
Students are welcome to stay after the program to travel and should book their flights accordingly.

Round-Trip Airline Tickets
Round-trip tickets are generally the best option, since you will need to submit a flight itinerary that shows your entry and exit dates as part of your visa application. In addition, one-way tickets can be expensive, and it may be extremely difficult to find a return flight to the US. Consult with Rosa at VENUSA if you are considering returning from a country other than Venezuela at the end of the program.

Packing

Packing Principles
Remember to pack light and to take clothing that needs minimum care. While Mérida does have spring-like weather year-round, nights can be quite cool, and many homes may not be heated. Keep in mind that some of the tours that VENUSA plans may be to higher altitudes, and warm clothing for these trips is suggested. Students at the university
dress similarly to students in the US, though possibly not as casual. Plan on layering clothing, since temperatures can change noticeably through the day. Venezuelans do not generally wear shorts in public, and you may receive unwanted attention (especially females) if you do so. Bring one semi-formal outfit for special events. Proper attire is required in the VENUSA building common areas.

Important Policies

Policies of the University of Minnesota and the Learning Abroad Center exist primarily for the protection and safety of Learning Abroad Center study abroad participants. The Learning Abroad Center expects all participants to read, understand, and adhere to the University of Minnesota and Learning Abroad Center policies, guidelines, and contractual documents. These include academic policies, finance and cancellation policies, health and safety policies, and student rights and responsibilities: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/policies.

FERPA

Under Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, and University policy, college students are considered responsible adults and are allowed to determine who will receive information about them. As a result, the Learning Abroad Center does not share academic, personal, or financial information with a third party (including parents, spouse, guardians, etc.) without the student’s written permission. As part of their application, all students designate two emergency contacts who will receive information only in the case of an emergency.

Official Communications

Your UofM email address is the official means of communication. Learning Abroad Center messages will be sent to your UofM email address.

Health & Safety

All participants were required to complete the Health Information sheet located in your confirmation materials. This information is used to advise the on-site director and the Learning Abroad Center and assist in making any necessary preparations. If there is any further information regarding your health that you would like to share with the program staff, please contact the Learning Abroad Center.

Bring all necessary prescription medications with you. You should carry a sufficient supply of prescription medications to last for the duration of your stay abroad, and carry a list of the generic names of all of your prescription medication. If you are bringing a large quantity of medication with you, you should also have a statement from your physician explaining the purpose of the medication. All medication should be kept in its original bottles. All prescriptions should be labeled with your name, the doctor’s name, and the name of the drug. If you wear prescription lenses, you should bring an extra pair of glasses or contacts with you in case of emergency. Keep in mind that it is illegal to ship medication overseas, and any packages that are held at customs abroad will require payment of a high import tax before they are released.

After you arrive, eat and drink lightly for several days until your system has had a chance to adjust to changes in climate and food. Adjusting to a new diet often causes mild intestinal upsets or diarrhea. If this occurs, let a staff member know. In the event you become ill, notify the on-site staff, who will assist in finding you the appropriate medical care. They are accustomed to dealing with students with similar problems; so don’t be afraid to ask for help. Venezuelan doctors have a very good reputation. In the event of an emergency, or if you are too ill to get out of bed, a doctor will be able to make a house call.

No special vaccinations are required to enter Venezuela or re-enter the US. However, for travelers who intend to spend extensive time in certain remote parts of the country, specific vaccinations may be recommended. Check out the Center for Disease Control website (www.cdc.gov) for more information on vaccinations. The Minnesota State Department of Health recommends diphtheria and tetanus booster for all persons who last received them ten or more years ago, regardless of whether you plan to leave the US.

Venezuela is a modern, semi-industrialized nation, and food in restaurants and homestays in Mérida and other cities is perfectly safe to eat. You should not eat food sold from street vendors. North Americans should be sure that the water they are drinking is either bottled or has been boiled. If you notice that your homestay family is serving water directly from the tap, you should either politely tell someone that you need boiled water or ask someone in VENUSA to talk with the family. Although VENUSA tells families that it is necessary to boil water, they sometimes forget, since it is not necessary for Venezuelans who are accustomed to the water.

For treatment of minor illnesses and accidents, there are numerous private clinics throughout the city of Mérida. A large hospital, which is part of the medical school of the Universidad de Los Andes, is also available in case of major illness or accident. Facilities are modern.

Safety

The Venezuela program has been approved by the University of Minnesota’s International Travel Risk Assessment and Advisory Committee (ITRAAC) despite the current travel warning issued by the US Department of State. See http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/venezuela-travel-warning.html. Approval was granted based
upon the following conditions and restrictions. Students on the Venezuela program are expected to abide by these guidelines. All students on the program must:

• follow all US State Department Warden Updates and Travel Warning notices as well as University of Minnesota, on-site partner, and local government recommendations including, but not limited to, those indicating Americans should avoid areas of the city and/or country generally or on specific dates and during specific times;

• never travel to Caracas and within 50 miles of the entire Venezuela/Colombia border;

• never travel to Colombia within the program dates without ITRAAC approval;

• submit an independent travel form outlining their travel plans, dates and contact details and confirm their emergency plans with the on-site staff prior to out-of-town travel;

• be vigilant of their surroundings at all times and in all locations, especially when entering or exiting their homes, hotels, host family cars, garages, and schools;

• practice good personal security when moving about and adhere to local cultural expectations of behavior and dress;

• never walk or travel alone under any circumstance (around Mérida, outside of Mérida, on beaches, historic ruins, and trails, etc.) but especially after dark

• avoid carrying large sums of cash or wearing jewelry and expensive-looking watches, and keep valuables such as mobile phones, credit and ATM cards out sight;

• use ATMs inside safer locations such as banks, and be aware of their surroundings when withdrawing money;

• never drive motor vehicles;

• use only legitimate radio-dispatched taxis at designated taxi stands or have a host family or on-site staff call a reputable taxi company directly;

• never participate in political marches and demonstrations and avoid any locations where demonstrations are forming. Even peaceful protests may suddenly turn violent.

As in most cities, safety should always be a concern for students. During the on-site orientation, the staff at VENUSA will give you a rundown of the city and advise you on where and where not to go.

Petty theft is very common in Mérida and Venezuela. Many past participants have had digital cameras stolen. If you go out at night, leave your digital camera at home and bring a disposal one with you. IPods are also a hot commodity in Venezuela. Use caution when walking around with expensive items in hand. Always carry your laptop in your backpack.

The Learning Abroad Center prohibits students from traveling to Caracas due to safety concerns. Recently, political unrest in Caracas, Venezuela, has intensified and been reported in the US and international media. Venezuela has a long tradition of active political participation; but the current activity is more violent and widespread than it has been in the past. While Mérida has experienced protests, the most violent protests have occurred in Caracas. Our program is located in the middle of the mountains, a 10- to 12-hour bus ride away. Students report feeling safe and comfortable in Venezuela and in the city of Mérida, in particular. In addition, we are closely monitoring the situation in Venezuela and are in contact with our on-site Venezuelan partners, the Venezuelan Consulate, and the US State Department to ensure a safe experience for students.

Drug Use

The Learning Abroad Center has a “no tolerance” policy on drug use on any Learning Abroad Center program. If you use drugs while in Venezuela, you will be expelled from the program, all credit will be lost, and there will be no refund of any kind. It is extremely dangerous for an American in Venezuela to be caught with drugs. If you are at a party where drugs are being used, you should leave immediately. If the police arrive, more than likely the only people to be arrested will be the Americans and there will be nothing the Learning Abroad Center can do to help you. Students who say, “I know my rights” are sadly mistaken. You leave all of your rights as a US citizen when you cross the border and you are subject to the laws and “rights” of Venezuela.

Health Insurance

All students enrolled at the University of Minnesota are required to have US health insurance. This includes students registered for education abroad. For more details and specific process information for students with University of Minnesota Student Health Insurance through the Student Health Benefits Office, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s US Insurance webpage: UM abroad. umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance/ ushealthinsurancerequrement.

In addition to your US health insurance, the University has contracted with Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) to provide comprehensive international travel, health, and security insurance. This coverage is mandatory for all students and included in the program fee. You are covered by CISI only for the dates of the program. If you plan to travel before or after your program you should extend your CISI coverage or purchase your own insurance.

CISI does not include any preventive care, and individuals are advised to consult their medical providers for any check-ups or preventive care prior to departure.

Your CISI card and insurance policy will be emailed directly to you. Carry the card with you at all times. If you have any
questions or need additional information about CISI, visit the Learning Abroad Center’s insurance webpage: UMabroad.umn.edu/students/healthsafety/intlhealthinsurance.

Relationships

For many of you, your stay in Venezuela will be your first time out of the US. Some of you may have the opportunity to make some very good Venezuelan friends. Venezuelans are typically hospitable, open, willing to talk, and not shy about striking up a conversation with a stranger. You are unlikely to ever be alone or feel isolated, especially if you can speak a little Spanish. Nevertheless, keep a few words of caution in mind. Meet people in public places during the day, preferably with a friend or two of yours. Do not give out your host family’s phone number or address freely because this can lead to problems for not only you but your host family as well. Agree to meet the person at a specific time and place.

Americans in Venezuela are easy to identify. We look and dress differently from Venezuelans, speak loudly in groups, carry backpacks, wear tennis shoes, and have an accent. Consequently, an occasion might arise where someone wants to become friends with you in order to obtain your money or your passport. This has happened in the past and is a serious problem. Use common sense and be cautious.

Entering into a relationship overseas should be approached with the same precautions as at home. The idea of a Latin romance can be tempting, but you should consider any relationship carefully, particularly when you are overseas. There are different cultural values and rules regarding dating and relationships. Proceed cautiously, realizing that you are only in the country for a short period of time. If you do enter into a long-term relationship, you should also see how the relationship functions in the US, where you are at home and no longer acting as a guest.

Many female participants are flattered by the masculine attention that they receive in a Hispanic culture. However, any individual should proceed with caution and only enter into a close relationship after knowing the partner for a sustained period of time. US women are often stereotyped as being an easy sexual partner, and each year women find themselves in difficult situations because they were not cautious. Do NOT go to the home or apartment of someone you do not know well, especially if there is drinking involved. The concept of date rape is almost unheard of in Venezuela and the general feeling is that if a woman goes home with a man, she is willing to sleep with him, regardless of her saying “no.” Avoid these types of situations. Most problems are alcohol-related, so be extremely careful when drinking in Venezuela. There have also been reports in many bars of drinks being drugged, so it would be a good idea to ask to have your drink opened while you are watching and do not accept a drink brought to your table and paid for by “an admirer.”

In any type of relationship, whether heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, you could end up with a sexually transmitted disease, AIDS, and/or pregnancy. This is not meant as a scare tactic, but rather for you to realize that it can and has happened. Know the person very well before developing a more intimate relationship and always demand that you both take necessary precautions.

Money Matters

The monetary unit in Venezuela is the bolívar fuerte; the exchange rate in March 2015 was approximately 6.3 bolívares fuertes to the US dollar. Check out www.xe.com for the latest information on exchange rates.

It is very difficult to obtain Venezuelan bolívares fuertes in the US, so the Learning Abroad Center suggests that you bring about $1,000–$1,500 US to have money on hand. When you arrive, you can use a debit card to withdraw bolívares fuertes from the ATMs.

An easy, safe, and cheap way to deal with finances in Venezuela would be to bring or have access to:

- US $1,000–$1,500 in cash
- A debit card for regular use
- A credit card for larger purchases and in case of emergency

Personal spending habits vary too greatly to state exactly how much it will cost to live in Venezuela. The amount you spend will be determined by your lifestyle and budget. In general, you should find that the cost of living is much lower in Venezuela than in the US. Past participants suggest that you bring $1,000–$3,000 per semester and $500–$1,500 per summer session.

A Special Note about Venezuelan Currency

Venezuelans cannot access US currency without approval from their government, which can be difficult to obtain. Therefore, many Venezuelans who want dollars in order to travel are willing to pay a premium for them, setting up a parallel market for US dollars.

As a result, the rate you can obtain by exchanging your dollars informally with your host family or another trusted person is better than the rate you can obtain if you exchange your dollars at a bank or withdraw money at an ATM. While the official currency exchange rate is approximately 6.3 bolívares for each US dollar, the “unofficial” rate is 250 bolívares per dollar—40 times the value. However, you must bring US dollars with you to Venezuela in order to take advantage of the unofficial rate. The downside to doing this, obviously, is that carrying cash can be risky. If you lose it or have it stolen, there is no recourse to get it back. That being said, past participants have felt strongly that we should let students know about this parallel market so that they can decide on their own if they are willing to take that risk in order to get an exchange rate that is so much better.
VENUSA is licensed by the government and, as such, is required to use the official exchange rate for all monetary transactions. No exchange of money at the parallel rate may take place on VENUSA property at any time.

**Debit Cards & Credit Cards**

For most students, a debit card is a very convenient way of obtaining money because you don't need to worry about banking hours or exchange rates. Make sure you have a four-digit PIN and verify that your magnetic strip is working, and that it works on the CIRRUS or PLUS systems. ATMs are easily accessible throughout Mérida and Venezuela.

It is also wise to bring a Visa or MasterCard. A credit card is the easiest and fastest way to get extra cash in emergencies. You may not want to use this often because of fees and interest. Be sure to obtain and memorize your PIN before leaving the USA and verify that your credit card works on the CIRRUS or PLUS system.

**Safeguarding Your Money**

Be careful with your money, especially in bus and train stations and when riding public transportation. A money belt worn inside your clothing or a pouch worn around your neck is recommended for safekeeping. In public places, purses should be tucked up under your arm or carried in front of your hip, and wallets should be carried in your front pocket. You may want to carry an extra copy of your picture identification and traveler's checks in this manner as well.

**Considerations during Planning**

**Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Issues**

Attitudes toward sexuality vary greatly from country to country. Some cultures are open about homosexuality, and strong gay communities exist in many cities. However, some cultures and peoples are intolerant of different sexual preferences, and strict taboos or laws against such relationships may exist. We encourage you to find out how different sexual preferences are viewed overseas and where your support may exist, so that your time overseas can be as enriching as possible. Consult your program guide or program sponsor for more information on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues in your country of choice.

For additional resources, you can contact the Office for Equity and Diversity at [www.academic.umn.edu/equity](http://www.academic.umn.edu/equity).

**Students of Color**

You may wish to consult the resources available at the Learning Abroad Center on issues related to students of color and learning abroad. Also, program-specific material may include information more specific to the host culture. If you have questions about the country in which you will be studying, do not hesitate to contact a Learning Abroad Center staff member.

For additional resources, you can contact the Office for Equity and Diversity at [www.academic.umn.edu/equity](http://www.academic.umn.edu/equity).

**Students with Disabilities**

Many of the disability accommodations or services that are provided at US universities may be different or unavailable overseas. Being in a new environment can also be stressful, and accommodations that you may not have needed at home may become necessary in an unfamiliar setting. Participants with any kind of disability, whether hidden or visible, should contact the Learning Abroad Center in advance to discuss their particular needs.

**Arrival Logistics**

There will be a group flight arranged through VENUSA. The Learning Abroad Center recommends that all students fly all the way to Mérida with the group. A representative from VENUSA will meet the group in Caracas and fly with them to Mérida. Contact VENUSA directly for more information about group travel.

From most parts of the US, flying to Mérida requires two days. The most convenient and safest way to make this trip is to stay overnight in Miami the first night and fly to Caracas and then on to Mérida the next day. You can book your hotel room in Miami through VENUSA. This tends to be cheaper than booking your own flight arrangements because there will be other VENUSA students staying at the hotel and you can request one of them as a roommate and therefore split the cost of the room. There is also an airport shuttle bus that takes guests back and forth to the airport for free.

You are allowed one checked bag (not to exceed 65 lbs.), one carry-on bag (not to exceed 17 lbs.), and one small personal
item (e.g. purse or backpack) on the flight from Caracas to Merida. If you do not have locks on your bag, have your bag wrapped in cellophane. This service is available in the Miami airport, near the SERVIVENSA check-in counter, for approximately $10 per bag. If you do not wrap or lock your suitcase, you may have things stolen from your suitcase.

Mérida’s location high in the Andes Mountains often makes it difficult for planes to land due to fog. Because of frequent heavy fog, you will be landing in the neighboring town of El Vigía. VENUSA will have a bus at El Vigía and will drive all participants to Mérida, which is about an hour drive. Upon arrival in Mérida, you will be taken to VENUSA where your host families will be waiting to take you “home.” You will receive more information on the trip to Mérida from VENUSA.

### Practical & Program Information

#### On-Site Staff

Francy Gonzales is the student coordinator in Mérida. She will help orient you when you arrive and is the person who you can turn to for any academic, housing, programmatic, or personal concerns.

VENUSA’s classes are taught by experienced, qualified professors. The faculty are primarily Venezuelan, and most have international backgrounds. All professors teach at other institutions, including the Universidad de Los Andes.

#### Housing

The program cost includes room and board with a Venezuelan host family. Staying with a family can be the highlight of your trip to Venezuela. The housing coordinator makes a point of choosing families who display friendliness and helpfulness toward students. Your family will be just as interested in learning about you as you are in learning about them, and they will introduce you to their friends and relatives. This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know Venezuela and its people. Make the most of it!

#### Rules of the House

The rules of the house will be explained to you upon arrival by your host family. These will include meal times, laundry, how to lock up, and other items addressed below which vary from house to house. Always remember that you are in a home and not a hotel. Courtesy and common sense should be your guide. Always ask your hostess when you have a question.

#### Electricity

The electric current in Venezuela is similar to that found in the US (110 volts, 60-cycle alternating current, single phase), so you do not need to bring converters for your hair dryers, electric razors, etc. The outlets are also the same as in the US. It is not unusual for the electricity to go out in Venezuela. This is especially true when there is a lot of rain. Planned power outages and blackouts to save energy are common. It is a good idea to bring a flashlight with batteries to prepare for these circumstances.

#### Water

Because of the climate, many homes do not have a large quantity of hot water. Some families may use an electric water heater, which will not heat the large volume you are probably used to. Showers and baths, therefore, should be taken sparingly. Boiled drinking water will be provided by the family.

#### Linens

Sheets and towels will be provided and changed once a week. However, it might be a good idea to bring your own towel for traveling.

#### Laundry

You will need to make arrangements to do your laundry. You should be able to find a local laundromat with very reasonable rates. Laundromats are not self-wash like those in the United States. You will drop off your clothing to be washed and pick it up several days later. You may also want to wash some hand washables in your home. It is possible that your family will offer to wash your things. If this is the case, you are expected to buy your own laundry soap, available in most convenient stores throughout Mérida.

#### Keys

Your family will provide you with keys to the house. If you lose them, you will be charged for changing the locks and making extra keys. Remember to return the keys when you depart.

#### Guests

It is recommended that you not take guests to your home, since it infringes on the family’s privacy. However, each family varies, and your host family may encourage you to invite guests. Your best bet is to play it by ear and make sure you discuss any plans for inviting guests with your family ahead of time. Overnight guests are not permitted.

#### Absence

While you are living with your Venezuelan family, observe the same rules of courtesy that you would when visiting any
home. If you will not be home for a meal, please let your host mother know (you will not be refunded for individual meals missed.) Inform your host family if you will not be returning home at night, since your family is concerned about your well-being and safety and may worry about you.

Communications

Mail
Your mailing address while in Venezuela is:
Your Name
VENUSA C.P.S.A.
Edificio Guilam #49-49
Avenida Urdaneta
Mérida, Venezuela

It takes anywhere from 10 to 30 days for airmail between the US and Venezuela. Mail that arrives after the end of the program will be returned to the sender because the post office does not forward international mail. Many returned students suggest that you don’t have packages sent to you in Venezuela. There will either be a high duty to be paid upon arrival or it may not arrive at all. Never send money or medication through the mail.

Telephone
Most people in Venezuela have cell phones. They have become the most affordable and popular way to make calls to the United States. VENUSA will soon be allowing students to rent Venezuelan cell phones for the duration of their study abroad. The cost will be less than $100 per term for phone rental and minutes depending on your calling habits. Most Venezuelans text message because a text message costs much less than a phone call. In Venezuela, you pay to rent the phone and then buy minutes for your phone. You only pay for your outgoing calls so you can receive calls and texts even if you do not have minutes left on your phone. Cell phones are also handy when you are traveling because they will work in most places throughout Venezuela and South America. Contact VENUSA for more information if you are interested in purchasing or renting a phone prior to departure. You may also get a phone when you arrive.

VENUSA has a public phone for your convenience. Public telephones are located in pharmacies and on the street (phone booths are gray). To make a call, use a Venezuelan phone card available for purchase in any pharmacy or street kiosk.

You may give your host family’s number to friends and family in the US and have them call you. You will only be able to make long-distance phone calls from your host family’s home if you use a phone card. Long-distance, direct-dial calls are prohibited. If you use the host family’s phone for long-distance calls, grades will not be released until the phone bill is paid. Venezuelan phone bills are not itemized as in the US and you may be over charged.

Email & Computer Access

VENUSA offers computer access to you on the program. The computer lab provides you with Internet and a study area. You are permitted to print class assignments only—Internet pages are not to be printed. Keep in mind that Internet services and connections in general are slower in Venezuela. In addition to the VENUSA computer lab, Internet service is offered at numerous local cyber cafes.

VENUSA has wireless Internet access throughout the school. Students are encouraged to bring laptops. Storage lockers are available at the school for your computer while you are at home or traveling. Bring your own lock. You will not have any Internet access in your homestays even if you bring your own laptop.

For ease in printing VENUSA also recommends that you bring a flash drive. Bring a USB cord if you plan to upload any digital photos.

Social Media

Not all countries share the same laws about freedom of expression that we have in the US. Students should keep in mind that derogatory comments, especially on social media, can result in legal claims and have extended legal implications even after a student has returned to the United States.

Academics

Courses

VENUSA offers a wide variety of courses in several disciplines to suit a range of academic needs, including Spanish, literature, Latin American studies, international business, cross-cultural communications, film criticism, and more. Most courses engage the city, people, and surroundings as a living laboratory. The course offerings will vary from term to term as they do in the US. Final course offerings will depend on student interest and are determined after arrival in Mérida. Although some courses are guaranteed, a minimum enrollment of three participants is required for certain classes.

A language pre-requisite is not required for the program; however, most of the Latin American studies courses are only taught in Spanish. Students with less than two years of Spanish will have a course selection limited to intensive Spanish and courses taught in English. Students with two of more years of Spanish will be able to choose from all course offerings.

Students on the fall or spring semester program take 15 credits, generally five classes. Summer Session participants with less than two years of Spanish may take intensive Spanish for 10 credits. Summer Session participants with more than two years of Spanish will take two to three courses for a total of six to ten credits.
Registration

All University of Minnesota Twin Cities students will be responsible for registering themselves using the University of Minnesota on-line registration system. Students from the University of Minnesota Morris, Crookston, or Duluth will be registered on their home campus. If you are not a University of Minnesota Twin Cities student, please contact your study abroad office to verify you are enrolled for study abroad. Non-University of Minnesota students will be registered by the Learning Abroad Center and can disregard these instructions. Prior to departure, you will receive all the necessary information for registration. Do not look for your class number to appear on the online class list. The numbers you need for registration can only be obtained from the Learning Abroad Center. If you register for a course that is listed online, you have registered for the wrong course and may be subject to tuition charges.

Register yourself as soon as you receive the emailed instructions. This ensures that you are guaranteed a spot in your study abroad program courses.

Complete your registration no later than two weeks prior to the start of the University of Minnesota term during which you will be studying abroad. Failure to complete registration may result in late registration fees and may delay or prevent financial aid disbursement. Contact helpingu@umn.edu or visit www.onestop.umn.edu with questions about financial aid.

If you do not register for study abroad, your grades cannot be processed. Failure to register before departing for study abroad may result in no credit for your study abroad program.

Before registration:

1. Meet with your academic adviser(s) and complete the Academic Planning for Study Abroad Form.

2. Check online for holds or required registration approvals that would prevent you from registering for classes and clear them before the registration date. Learning Abroad Center cannot remove holds on student accounts. To check for holds, go to www.onestop.umn.edu/onestop/Registration/Holds.html.

3. On-line registration requires that you have Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher, that you have registered at least once during the two previous terms, and that you have initiated your Internet account. If you have not initiated your Internet account, you will be prompted to do so when you enter the registration system.

4. Online registration is available Monday–Saturday 6:30 a.m.–2 a.m. and Sunday 12:30 p.m.–2 a.m., after your queue time.

Drop/Add

You must speak with the on-site staff prior to dropping or adding a class. You will have two weeks from the beginning of the program to drop/add classes. After the second week you will receive a “W” on your transcript if you drop, and you will need the approval of on-site staff as well as the Learning Abroad Center in order to add. Summer session students will have one week from the beginning of the program to drop the course. After this period you will receive a “W” on your transcript. While dropping courses, keep in mind that you must take at least 13 credits.

Transcripts

One transcript will be issued at the end of the program to all non-University of Minnesota students. The transcript will be sent to the address indicated on the transcript request form that you handed in before the beginning of the program. Please note that it may take approximately eight weeks after the program ends for your grades to appear on a University of Minnesota transcript.

Extracurricular & Volunteer Activities

There will be opportunities for you to discover Venezuelan culture through extracurricular activities. Some examples of what may be offered are cooking classes, dance lessons/performances, tambores presentation, karaoke, game & movie nights, parties, and special events arranged with native Venezuelans.

Students will also have the opportunity to be matched with a language partner while in Merida. This is normally a native Venezuelan who is taking English courses at VENUSA. Interested students are matched a few days after arrival. Having a language partner is a great informal way to improve your Spanish and interact with locals.
Life in Venezuela

Geography & Climate

Located on the northern coast of South America, Venezuela is a large country with a population of approximately 28 million. The land is larger than that of California, Oregon, and Washington combined (over 352,000 square miles). It is divided into 20 states, the Federal District around Caracas, two territories, and 72 islands. Its borders are the Atlantic Ocean and Guyana on the east, Brazil to the south, Colombia in the west, and the Caribbean to the north. The geography varies from the coastal region, to the Andean region of snow-capped peaks and temperate forests, to the tropical Maracaibo region, to the southern “Guyana Shield” and area of savanna and rainforest. The rainforests shelter Venezuela’s most exotic animals as well as some untouched tribes.

The coastal capital city of Caracas, with a population of almost four million, has a higher standard of living than any other Latin American city. Mérida is a much smaller city of approximately 350,000 people, built on a plateau at the base of the Andes Mountains.

Venezuela is quite demographically diverse, with about 58% of mixed race, 29% of European descent, 11% of African descent, and 2% native Indians. Approximately 75,000 Americans currently live in Venezuela.

The climate varies little, with an average temperature around 80 degrees. While Mérida is only 8 degrees north of the equator, its tropical climate is moderated by its high elevation, so temperatures in Mérida average around 70 degrees year-round. The only seasonal variations are a rainy season and a dry season. It rains almost every evening during the rainy season. People of Mérida call their climate “eternal spring.”

History of Venezuela

From CIA World Factbook

Venezuela was one of three countries that emerged from the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830 (the others being Ecuador and New Granada, which became Colombia). For most of the first half of the 20th century, Venezuela was ruled by generally benevolent military strongmen, who promoted the oil industry and allowed for some social reforms. Democratically elected governments have held sway since 1959. Hugo Chavez, president from 1999 to 2013, sought to implement his “21st Century Socialism,” which purported to alleviate social ills while at the same time attacking capitalist globalization and existing democratic institutions. His hand-picked successor, President Nicolas Maduro, continues Chavez’s socialist programs.

Resources:

BBC News – A chronology of key events in Venezuela’s history: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1229348.stm

Lonely Planet – a detailed history of Venezuela: http://www.lonelyplanet.com/venezuela/history


US Department of State – entry on Venezuela: http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/venezuela.html

Meals

Venezuela has its own style and flavor of food with many regional specialties. Most traditional dishes have been adapted from Spanish foods with tangy sauces that are generally not as hot as Mexican cuisine. Typical Venezuelan dishes you can expect to find include tequeños, a small bite-size appetizer made of white cheese wrapped in dough and deep-fried; and hallacas, a kind of boiled tamale with ground corn, filled with beef or chicken, and wrapped in banana leaves. To eat a hallaca, just unwrap it and discard the leaves. Two dishes made with corn are bolos de maiz, spiced corn puffs (deep fried); and arepas, flat white corn flour pancakes filled with butter, meat, or cheese.

The Venezuelan national dish is called pabellon criollo. It is served in three separate dishes: black beans with white rice; shredded beef mixed with tomatoes, onions and green peppers; and fried platanos (plantains, or cooking bananas).

Breakfast and dinner will be provided by your Venezuelan host family daily. You will be responsible for your own lunch. Lunches can be purchased inexpensively at the cafeteria at VENUSA or in a nearby cafe. A good rule of thumb regarding meals is to watch the way your family does things and follow suit; you will soon feel comfortable. It may be a good idea to take a small portion of food for the first serving to make sure it goes all the way around the table and to make sure you can eat what you take. If the head of the table is serving each person, wait until everyone is served before beginning to eat. Some families say grace before eating.

You should coordinate your meal schedule with your host family. For most Venezuelans, breakfast, or desayuno, is served between 8 and 10 and consists of toast and coffee. Lunch, or almuerzo, usually served between 12 and 1 p.m., is the big meal of the day. Lunch normally consists of soup, salad, rice, a main course of meat or fish, and fruit for dessert. The evening meal, la cena, is late, often around 9 p.m., and usually consists of sandwiches or something light.

Snacks, soft drinks, and beer are not expected to be provided by your host family and should be purchased on your own. You may be able to store breakfast foods at your house. There are also many panaderias or bakeries throughout the city, including at VENUSA, where you can buy a cheap breakfast.

Note: Venezuelans do not eat peanut butter, and it is very
difficult to find peanut butter in any Venezuelan store. It is possible to find it but is often very expensive and sometimes has been on the shelf for a long time. If you think you might miss peanut butter, bring your own.

Entertainment
Mérida is known for its many parks, mountain peaks, and statues. The Andean Club in Mérida organizes different trips and excursions to the mountains and peaks around the city. The University in Mérida offers cultural activities and events for their students and the public. There is also the Colonial Art Museum, which is three blocks from Plaza Bolívar, as well as the Archeological Museum on the main square. For poetry reading and art shows, there is the Museum of Modern Art. In addition, Mérida offers a significant variety of restaurants and is a famous center for bull fights. Movies in Mérida are inexpensive and provide a relaxing way to practice listening skills. There are also frequent film festivals and concerts to attend. Soccer is popular in Venezuela, and tickets, hotels, and travel are often sold out far in advance for major games (usually in Caracas). Baseball is by far the most popular sport, and there are local and regional baseball games that you can attend, as well as larger national games in Caracas.

Discos do not admit students under 18. There is no drinking age in Venezuela, and drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation is an accepted part of Venezuelan life. However, drinking excessively is severely criticized and there are rather harsh penalties for such things as drunk and disorderly behavior (in public, while driving, etc.). Be very careful if you choose to have a drink. Due to the high altitude, alcohol will affect you much more.

Alcohol
The Learning Abroad Center expects moderation and good judgment in the use of alcohol. Keep in mind that the consumption of alcohol may be more socially prevalent in other cultures, but excessive consumption is not appropriate. Drunkenness can seriously jeopardize student safety as well as damage relations with host families or communities. Monitor your approach to alcohol consumption; unfamiliar surroundings, high altitude, and the emotional strain of adjusting to another culture can sometimes cause alcohol to affect you differently. If excessive drinking becomes a problem in terms of a student’s safety, class attendance, academic performance, or relations with hosts or other students, it could, if sufficiently serious, be grounds for expulsion from the program.

Language
Spanish is the language of Venezuela, but in some outlying areas ancient Indian languages are still spoken. You may be able to use English in the markets and airports, but communicating in English may be more of a challenge in bus terminals and train stations. Generally, non-native speakers are well received in Venezuela if they attempt to speak Spanish.

Useful Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morning/day</td>
<td>Buenos días</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>¿Cómo está usted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is</td>
<td>Me llamo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Por favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>¿Habla usted inglés?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have been very kind</td>
<td>Ha sido muy amable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Gracias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>Demasiado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re welcome</td>
<td>De nada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I beg your pardon</td>
<td>Perdón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good-bye</td>
<td>Adiós/Chau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t understand</td>
<td>No entiendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Chamo/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hey/Hello</td>
<td>Epa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Chevere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Venezuelans are very patient with foreigners who try to speak their language. They appreciate an attempt at the language and would never correct your pronunciation or grammar unless you specifically asked them to, or if they cannot understand what you want to say. Always use the usted verb form when speaking with Venezuelans. The tú form is rarely used.

Lifestyles
Any anti-Americanism is impersonal and directed at the foreign policy of the US government. As an individual you will be judged as such, and how you act and react will determine your acceptance by the Venezuelans. Cultural differences can enrich our lives by confronting us with a different worldview and new approaches to solving problems, or they can lead to misunderstandings and irritation.

You may notice that the people of Venezuela use their social space differently than most people of the US. For example, while carrying on a conversation, it is common to stand a little closer. Handshaking, kisses on cheeks, and other physical contact are common between relatives, friends, and new acquaintances, regardless of age or sex. Handshaking may be done with the same person more than once a day. The abrazo is a hug exchanged between friends, both male and female, and signifies friendship, not passion. When meeting, greeting,
or saying goodbye to anyone in Venezuela, always give a kiss on the cheek and say buenos días, buenas tardes, or buenas noches, depending on the situation.

Actions by some Venezuelan men may be irritating to some US women. Whistling, tongue-clicking, and other sounds or comments may be heard when a young woman walks by. The best policy is to ignore such sounds or comments.

Political strikes are common in Venezuela, particularly at the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida. Provisions have been made to ensure that your courses through the University of Minnesota/VENUSA will not be interrupted by strike activity. In general, this activity is non-violent in nature and does not target Americans in any way. If you encounter any strike activity, you should just turn around and walk the other way. This is the easiest and safest way to assure that you are not affected.

The Venezuelan sense of courtesy leads to some of the most frustrating experiences students have in Venezuela. Typically a Venezuelan will respond politely to any request for directions, even if he or she has not the slightest idea of the correct route, simply because it would be rude not to help a stranger.

Be prepared to wait for an appointment, and do not be surprised or insulted if you are stood up. The Venezuelan concept of time is vastly different from ours. Since Venezuelans do not want to refuse anyone, they will often agree to appointments they cannot keep. This disregard for schedules does not apply to your classes.

Venezuelans regard family relationships and friendships as a top priority. An individual's actions are often governed by the family's attitudes and reputation. To students accustomed to a great deal of personal freedom and privacy, this closeness and concern for family reputation can be claustrophobic. It is not uncommon for a family member to come into your room and help you unpack, carefully looking at each item in your suitcase. This is not considered rude, but rather as a sign of interest in you; our idea of "personal space" may be completely foreign to your host family.

Your Venezuelan hosts will not expect you to behave exactly as they do, but they will appreciate your attempts to communicate with them in their own language, as well as your interest in their country and culture. Find out as much as you can about Venezuelan history and current affairs before you go so that you can discuss issues intelligently.

The Venezuelan population is predominantly Catholic.

Mini-buses are very popular among students, and the cost is approximately 25–30 cents. Mini-buses are usually plain, unmarked vans that are privately owned; van owners contract to service particular routes. You may also want to share a taxi with friends when going out, since this turns out to be rather inexpensive.

For travel over greater distances, you can choose bus, air travel, or make arrangements to hire a taxi with a group of students. Bus travel to Caracas from Mérida takes approximately 15 hours due to the mountainous terrain, while air travel takes less than an hour. Renting cars in Venezuela is strongly discouraged. The accident rate in Venezuela is very high, and after you have been there for a while you will understand why.

**Coming Home**

By the time you return home from Venezuela, you will have grown and changed significantly. You will probably find yourself experiencing reverse culture shock. Many students find that returning home is harder than leaving was. It is very normal to experience these feelings and you aren’t alone. You are encouraged to tap into the resources available in order to make the transition home easier.

To stay connected to your study abroad experience, you may want to:

- Become a Global Ambassador Intern: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry/internships.php](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry/internships.php)
- Become a classroom visit intern
- Serve as a past participant at pre-departure orientations
- Stay in contact with friends from your program

These are just a few ways to stay connected. More information can be found at: [UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry.php](http://UMabroad.umn.edu/students/process/reentry.php).

Stop by the Learning Abroad Center office any time. Staff enjoy talking to students who have returned from study abroad and would love to see your pictures and hear your stories.
Cultural Adjustment

The On-Site Experience

What happens when you suddenly lose clues and symbols that orient you to situations in everyday life? What happens when facial expressions, gestures, and words are unfamiliar? The psychological discomfort and adjustment period in a foreign country is commonly known as culture shock or cultural adjustment.

You will almost certainly experience some form of culture shock. It might hit you after two days, two weeks, or two months—timing varies widely for different people. Six common phases of cultural adjustment are listed below. These may be out of order for you, one phase may last longer than another or you may skip a step entirely.

Initial Fascination: On arrival your surroundings seem glamorous and exotic, you feel like the focus of attention and activity.

Initial Culture Shock: The initial fascination and euphoria fade as you settle in and you enter an emotional decline.

Surface Adjustment: After the initial “down” (a few days to a few weeks for most), you begin to truly adjust and settle into your surroundings. Language skills begin to improve, and you’ll feel less fatigued. Often you’ll be forming a small group of friends at this stage as well.

Feelings of Isolation: Difficulties in your new culture seem to stubbornly remain and you grow frustrated with the process.

Integration/Acceptance: After continued effort you find yourself more at ease with language, friends, professional, and academic interests. The culture you are living in is more easily examined. Differences between yourself and the society you live in become understandable and you come to accept both the situation and yourself in it, allowing you to relax and feel at home.

Return Anxiety: Just when you feel at home in the new country it’s time to go. Thoughts of leaving new friends raise anxiety similar to those felt before departure. You sense that you’ve changed as a person and apprehension grows when you think about people at home that may not understand your new feelings and insights, yet you may feel guilty for wanting to stay.

When in any of the above phases you may experience: changes in sleeping habits, feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, loneliness, depression, unexplainable crying, placing blame for difficulties on the program or host culture, homesickness, getting angry easily, increase in physical ailments or pain, compulsive eating, or lack of appetite.

Other symptoms may manifest themselves as well. It is important to understand these are part of a normal process of adjustment, however, if uncomfortable feelings persist for extended periods or seem unbearable, seek assistance from your program’s on-site support staff.

Cultural Adjustment Curve

Adjusted from Oberg (1960) and Gallahorn (1963)
Appendix

Packing List

Clothing & Shoes
- Shoes (men): water shoes, tevas/chacos, hiking shoes and/or sneakers, flip flops (for beach/shower only), dress shoes
- Shoes (women): sandals (casual & dressy), water shoes, tevas/chacos, hiking shoes and/or sneakers, flip flops (for beach/shower only), dress shoes
- Summer is rainy season, so rain boots are recommended
- Water shoes are very important if you plan on going to the beach. Sea urchins are no fun!
- Sweater, fleece, or sweatshirt (layering for high-altitude trips)
- Light jacket (for higher-altitude trips)
- Sweatshirt & pants
- Jeans, khakis, or lightweight pants
- Leggings
- Shorts & tank tops
- T-shirts
- Beachwear (water shoes, Tevas/Chacos, swimsuit, towel, flip flops, sun-block, hat/visor)
- Cotton shirts
- Dressy shirts/tops for evening attire
- Outfits for evenings out
- 2 summer dresses/skirts
- Bathrobe & pajamas
- Socks & underwear (plenty)

Travel Accessories/Other
- Map of Venezuela/guidebook (important)
- Reusable water bottle
- Travel alarm or watch
- Money pouch
- Rain jacket (important)
- Umbrella
- Two locks
  - 1 standard round dial lock for school locker
  - 1 smaller but sturdy lock for lockbox at homestay
- Laundry bag
- Small sewing kit/safety pins
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Travel towel/bed sheet
- Small daypack/backpack (for excursions and weekend travel)
- Purse with shoulder strap
- Sun hat/visor
- Sunglasses
- Mosquito net (for use when traveling)
- Water purification tablets
- Toilet paper (8–10 rolls: for use at public bathrooms and when traveling)

Note: There is a shortage of toilet paper & toiletries in Venezuela.

Electronics & Accessories
- Laptop/charger
- USB cable
- Flash drive
- Spare batteries
- Two-prong plug adapter (many outlets only have two prongs)
- Travel hair dryer/straightener
- Camera & accessories (waterproof cover, SD card, charger/batteries)

Note: Voltage converters are not necessary since Venezuela uses the same electrical current as the US.

Health & Personal Care Items
- Deodorant (important)
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Soap
- Makeup
- Lotion
- Toothpaste
- Feminine products (important)
- Razors
Shaving Cream
Sunblock (important)
Bug repellent
Hand sanitizer
Baby wipes (for use when traveling)
Small first aid kit & bandages
Condoms
Vitamins/probiotics
Contacts & contact solution (enough for entire time abroad)
Extra pair of eye glasses
Medications
  - Prescriptions (enough for full term abroad; pack in carry-on bag)
  - Ibuprofen, acetaminophen (fever reducers/pain relief)
  - Allergy medicine/antihistamine
  - Pepto-Bismol
  - Motion sickness pills

Note: You should bring enough prescription medication to last for your full term abroad. It's often not possible to find these abroad or to ship them from the US.

School Supplies/Reference
- English/Spanish dictionary
- 501 Spanish Verbs
- Notebook paper & folders
- Pens/pencils

Note: School supplies are difficult to find in Mérida.

Homestay Gifts
Bring a gift (or gifts) for your host family. A host family gift is a nice gesture to say thank you for hosting you. Think of it as a similar gesture you would do if you were invited to someone's house for dinner and you brought a bottle of wine or a bouquet of flowers. Sometimes it is hard think of an appropriate item.

Below is a list of good options:
- Fancy soaps or lotions
- Baseball hats
- Necklaces or bracelets
- Clothing or items with a University logo
- Jams made from Minnesota berries
- Local interest wall calendars/photo books
- Personal handmade items
- Candy (e.g., salt water taffy)