

Comment

A MILLION CORNERS OF THE SAME ROUND WORLD

Canaima Park - Venezuela

DAY 1 – PART I - ARRIVAL

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Lorna Vassallo has finally decided to share her travel diary with maltastar.com readers. She's been to Europe of course ... but not only. She's also been to South America, North Africa and Asia. She's the type to be more attracted to non-touristic places rather to touristic ones, take the bus rather than the coach and take a challenge rather than a rest. So, here we go, following Lorna, the keen traveller, week by week, while she speaks about one of the million corners of the same round world and ponder ... after all ... the world is a beautiful place.



CANAIMA PARK – VENEZUELA

VIEWES FROM THE SKY

The plane landed at Caracas airport at night. I arranged my tour at Canaima Park and started from the airport to Ciudad Bolivar on the ten o'clock bus. After quite some long hours of uncomfortable sleep and travel I found myself waiting for a four-wheel drive jeep and a man I didn't know at the bus terminus. The man turned out to be a woman who came to pick me up and took me for breakfast in a shabby *posada*. There I met some of the fellow-travellers that were to accompany me on my quest in the Gran Sabana region, south of Orinoco River.



At this stage I was still inquisitive as to how things would proceed. One thing led to another and I ended up, within an hour's time, acting as co-pilot on a four-seater bush-plane. He told us the story that made him lame and how three other people had died in the same plane crash. The flight was frightening enough – the plane not seeming to withhold the simplest and whitest of clouds and swaying at every single particle that came in its way. However, this fear (which, in itself, is part of the fun of course) soon turned into immeasurable pleasure when we three passengers caught the first glimpses of the table-top mountains (also known as tepuys) so characteristic of Parco Canaima. My heart leapt as we saw from above waterfalls and rainbows, red waters flowing and still. We yelled loudly at every single sight uncloaked through the thick

mist that made the scenery all too mysterious and the knowledge that we were but invading the reign of the anaconda.

LAGUNA CANAIMA

The first encounters with the people welcoming us there occurred and no sooner were we looking at the beauty of Laguna Canaima – a fresh, red water lagoon with a large wide waterfall on the other side, so near we would even have believed we could catch it with our own hands. And if this were not enough – three palms stood in the midst of it as if they were planted there by God himself. The guide told us that the waters of the Laguna came from the Rio Churun, which was in its turn an offshoot of the Rio Carrao. In the indigenous mythology the River Churun flowed from the tears of Churun, an indigenous girl who the devil had punished and who cried forever and ever – the river being her flow of tears.

I walked around the whole place – from one end to the other – taking pictures from different angles, totally bewitched by how beautiful natural beauty could be. A line of women and children were washing their clothes in the lagoon's water taking the opportunity to make a communal encounter of the event. They walked to the end of the beach and hung their clothes underneath the palm trees – which detail was soon captivated by my greedy camera. The cool water of the lagoon awaiting under the blue sky seemed to be an inversion of heaven and hell allowed by the gods of Canaima that made the fine dust and perspiration – proof of long travel – an asset as it stuck to our skin. The feeling of letting go and immersing ourselves into the waters seemed too much like a Venezuelan baptism in Nature's own womb. The red water (already explained to be much healthier than the transparent 'white-blue' water we are used to) and the possibility of the King of Canaima (the Anaconda) swimming beneath the surface was no draw-back to us eager and enthusiastic first-time viewers.



After a short swim, we were summoned to a cart pulled by a powerful truck which took us to 'our place of rest'. And time to rest it was! I realized that 3 days had passed since I had eaten, washed or slept decently. So, a shower was the first priority and then a good meal. However, rest had to wait as soon as I caught the first sight of two capuchin monkeys swinging from one hammock to another, a large red green macaw that seemed to guard the place and two green parakeets that ate from a plate on the table. All these creatures were used to patting and didn't really shrug off when approached by the group. Macaw and parakeets ate on the same table, while the crafty monkeys literally bribed us into giving them some of our food in exchange for every small

hug. And indeed, monkeys did prove to be the wittiest of God's creatures in the Gran Sabana, I had to learn a day later!

But however heavenly such a place looked it was time for a good rest. Only then did I learn that we would be sleeping outside for the three-day stay - That meant, of course, in a half-sitting posture, head lifted and legs suspended – but apart from the posture, the fact of being outside in the open-air made me think of myself as more of innocent hanging prey for the anaconda. The psychological challenge one has to go through in trying to accept the fact that some dangerous animal might creep up the poles and swallow him/her (hammock and all) was only attenuated by the fact that a tanned and perfectly muscled guide (dagger-in-belt) lay some metres away. The only private parts of the sleeping place were the showers. All the rest was unprotected by walls. I struggled quite a bit to balance my *amaca* which kept kicking me out of it by means of the laws of gravity to which I and my neighbour laughed and giggled. But some time later all of us (some twenty people) lay wrapped in the *amacas* like rows of butterfly cocoons. Although this looked a bit primitive little did we know it was luxury compared to what awaited us at our next stop.

