



VICHADA TRAVEL CHECK LIST 2015



This is a list of 20 useful things to bring with you or to have with you when you visit Puerto Carreño in Vichada, Colombia:

Yellow Fever Vaccination. It is good for 10 years. Bring your certificate with you, as some airline or border agents may ask to see it, and may in fact stop you from boarding the plane back home if you don't have it. The rules on this change all the time, but it's still a good idea. At present, Colombia is offering free yellow fever vaccinations at the airport and at the central bus terminal in Bogotá, so you can get it upon arrival as well.

Mosquito repellent. Bring a plastic bottle of liquid repellent. Don't bring pressurized spray cans, as they will explode in your suitcase. Anything left over we accept as a donation. I suggest you start to take vitamin B1 (Thiamine) tablets 14 days before departure and while in Vichada, as most people report a marked reduction in bug bites with Vitamin B. You can get Thiamine injections, usually best 7 days before you leave. This is totally optional.

After Bite. Only if bug bites bug you. Caladryl lotion is cheap and locally available for stings, bites, sun burns and rashes. Bees wax works too!

Sun Screen. I suggest plastic bottles or tubes of 30 SPF. Anything left over we accept as a donation.

Sun Hat. Whatever suits you, from a baseball cap to a cowboy hat. In the rainy season (May to November) have a plastic cover for the hat. You may wish to get one of those mosquito screen hat covers for when you are in the jungle from the camping section at your local hardware store.

Steel-toed Rubber Boots or Hiking Boots. If you have large feet, get the boots at home. It is hard to get sizes in excess of 11 (US) or 43 (Europe) in Colombia. Steel-toed boots are great for the rain forest and the many thorns. Think water-world. Snakes can't bite you through rubber boots. We happily accept rubber boots as donations as well, for the workers. Ankle-high hiking boots are good in the dry season and for some hikes in the wet.

Sweat Socks. I suggest you pack a couple of thick sweat socks to wear inside your boots, because rubber boots are notorious for causing blisters.

Sandals or Shoes. I suggest the cheap Velcro strap type. You can wear those when you are not in the forest or savannah. They can get wet, but are still tight on your foot. Flip flops break too easily. Running shoes are just too hot some days and hiking boots are simply safer and better.

Water Shoes. You can get cheap water shoes or fancy *Nike* ones, but the idea is simply that if you go swimming in one of the rivers you don't hurt yourself should you step on rocks, thorns, sting rays or sticks.

Long-sleeved Shirt and Long Pants. I recommend an old dress shirt you can button up, with a collar, light weight, with long arms. These are great against bugs and sun, but especially protect from scratches when you are in the jungle, as there are lots of plants with thorns or little needles that can make you itchy. Same applies to having some long pants. Maybe get the kind that zipper in the leg, so that they are both shorts and long pants.

Plastic or Rubber Raincoat. If you are visiting in the rainy season (May to December) a raincoat may be a good idea. There are cheap poncho style plastic raincoats that are light weight that you can buy in dollar stores.

Camera(s), Pen(s) and Notebooks. Cameras are a no-brainer, but pens and notebooks can come in handy for recording names, explaining things to others, sketching, or keeping a diary. There are internet cafés in Puerto Carreño, so you don't need to lug a laptop. I carry a small tablet or iPad.

Swim Suit. Optional for the ladies. The *Rio El Bita* and the *Orinoco* are great to swim in on hot days. We call it a piranha swim, because you get to share the river with crocodiles, anacondas, sting rays, pink dolphins, manatees, giant otters, piranhas and lots of other delicious fish with big teeth.

Colombian Pesos. It is very hard to exchange dollars or Euros in Vichada. However, there are exchange houses at the airport and around Bogotá that take most major currencies. The exchange rates are usually better away from the airport. Not all Colombian banks take foreign exchange. Most debit cards from chartered banks work in ATM's, but not the ones from credit unions or treasury branches. Credit cards are accepted in Bogotá but not in Vichada. Credit card prices will often be 10% higher than cash. Puerto Carreño has 4 banks with ATM's that except foreign debit cards.

Money Belt. These are great to store your cash in and to wear around your waist, out of sight. I recommend carrying cash, it's cheaper.

Garden Gloves. If you are planning on digging around in the soil, these may be a good idea. Also useful in the rainforest, as they are not as hot as other gloves. Lots of cheap 99 cent ones available in dollar stores, but more expensive if you are buying them in Bogotá.

Some things that you can get locally in Puerto Carreño, and which are worth having:

Tropical Poncho. These are very useful to keep dust out of your face when traveling, to wipe sweat out of your eyes, or to keep flies away from ears and nose, or to protect exposed skin from the sun. They are light weight and useful.

Machete. You might lose a digit or two swinging it, but it will make you feel like a real *llanero* (plainsman), and can come in handy in the rainforest or for filleting fish. Guys like me shave with their machete.

Rum and Beer. Local booze is excellent, and cures most anything that may be wrong with you or that bit you in the rainforest or out in the savannah.

Pharmaceuticals. Good idea to have some band aids and Aspirins / Advil / Tylenol and anti-allergy or anti-histamines in your suitcase. There are local pharmacies in Puerto Carreño where you can get most stuff, but if you have any prescriptions maybe fill them back home. If you are diabetic you need to advise us, because keeping insulin cool may be a problem, though we do carry coolers and have solar fridges.