

## VENEZUELA



Venture into Venezuela's lost world, the Canaima National Park, to trek and climb to the summit of Auyán-tepui. This imposing tabletop mountain is the precipice from which the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls, cascades to the earth. Then, abseil down this incredible natural phenomenon.

### Aim

The aim of this classic expedition to Venezuela is to climb the tabletop mountain (tepui) of Auyán-tepui and to abseil down the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls.

To get to the summit you and the team will first undertake a trek through the Canaima National Park, along the route which was charted in 1937 when American aviator and adventurer Jimmie Angel was forced to descend through the jungle on foot to reach civilisation after he crash-landed on the summit.

The 979m waterfall takes two days to rappel down over 13 abseil pitches, with out-of-this-world views over the jungle below and nearby tepuis. Watch this [BBC Extreme Mountain Challenge](#) Angel Falls episode for a closer look, or read 2018 teammate Daniela's [account of the Angel Falls expedition](#) on the Journal.

### Highlights

- Abseil off Auyán-tepui down the 979 metres of Angel Falls.
- Retrace Jimmie Angel's escape mission route to the summit.
- Experience the region made famous in Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*.
- Explore the Canaima National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Discover endemic flora and fauna on the ancient tepuis.
- Overnight camp halfway down the length of the falls!
- Complete your return journey by dug out canoe.

### What our teams say

*"An incredible trip in a lost world climbing rocks, crossing rivers, forests and jungles. Every day different scenery*

*and new adventures out of a fantasy book. Spectacular abseiling! My heart still skips a beat when I remember the moment I looked down the waterfall.” – Daniela Francovicchio, 2018 teammate.*

## Why Go

### Angel Falls

Far from the clutches of civilisation, the remote location of Angel Falls (Kerepakupai Meru) keeps it out of reach. Few people attempt the journey to reach it, and even fewer face the abseil down the total length of the 979m long drop, which makes it the highest waterfall in the world. It is 15 times higher than Niagara falls, and it will take two days and 13 abseil pitches to reach the bottom. You will need to have a head for heights as you rappel off into free air with the falls cascading to earth beside you. An expert team of guides will be supporting you as you descend. Plenty of patience will be needed as we get all the team members down each rope length – providing ample opportunities for reflection, contemplation, and time to simply enjoy the view.

### Auyán-tepui

To reach the abseil, you must first reach the top of the tepui. The geographical formations of the tepuis are some of the oldest in the world, with some estimated to be 1.5 billion – 2 billion years old. Coined the ‘islands of time’ by naturalist and explorer Charles Brewer-Carias, they are thought to be remnants of an ancient continent that broke apart to form South America and Africa.

The Auyán-tepui is one of the largest table-topped mountains in Venezuela, a colossal sandstone mantle towering above the rainforest below. It was made famous in Arthur Conan Doyle’s 1912 novel *The Lost World*. Due to the stark separation and difference in altitude, the tepui’s ecosystem on the 700km<sup>2</sup> tabletop has evolved independently from the jungle below. As such, you will encounter a variety of endemic plant, insect and animal species at the summit.

### Fantastical trekking route

While the epic conclusion of the abseil sets this expedition apart, it is the trekking phase which presents the infinite rewards of venturing deep into the Canaima National Park. Taking a rarely-trodden route from the low lying grasslands, up through tangles of jungle vegetation and rock to the stark and heart stopping view from the top of tepui, you will need a high level of fitness and all your willpower not to reach for your camera at every turn to make good time to the top of the falls. A porter team will assist you on the trek up, but teammates applying to this expedition must set out their level of fitness or plan to demonstrate their capability to carry up to 25kg, as the end phase of the trek is unsupported.

### Jimmie Angel

The falls owe their name to the aviator and explorer Jimmie Angel (1899-1956), an American pioneer in the early years of air exploration. There are many unverified stories concerning Jimmie’s first visit to Venezuela in 1921, but in 1937, he famously crashed his plane on a landing attempt on the top of the Auyán-tepui. He and his three companions were forced to abandon the plane to forge a route through the jungle on foot to escape. Stories of their adventure and successful return after 11 days trekking through the jungle spread, and falls were named after him in his honour.

The name of falls has been contested, with many Venezuelans of the opinion their most famous national landmark should bear a local name, the original Pemon term of Kerepakupai Meru, meaning ‘waterfall of the deepest place’.

## The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about our [Approach](#) here. The following is the outline plan for this epic Venezuela expedition – the ‘substance’ rather than the specifics. A fuller itinerary is provided in the Venezuela Expedition Handbook which is

available on request or upon application to join the team.

### **Teammates arrive**

You will be required to reach Simón Bolívar International Airport in Caracas on the first day of this expedition. You'll be met on arrival and transported to the nearby team hotel where your Secret Compass leader awaits. The expedition will officially start at 1700 with a safety briefing and talk through the expedition plan. Your first meal as a team will be dinner that evening.

### **On expedition**

Next, you'll take a land transfer to Ciudad Bolívar and a private small plane to Kamarata valley to reach a region just to the south of Auyán-tepui itself. You'll head to a remote lodge where you'll be greeted by your local team and porters. Once all the equipment is organised your trek will begin. You'll pass through the beautiful Kamarata valley, getting your first glimpses of the epic tepui. Your climb will then take you through thick jungles and across several escarpments and plateau. The route is very steep at times, and scrambling techniques will be used along with using fixed ropes to ascend. You'll reach the summit and camp right at the wall's edge.

It'll then take a further five days of trekking and exploring to reach the point where the abseil starts. During this time, you'll see spectacular waterfalls, pink sandy beaches, rock formations and rolling hills, along with the diverse wildlife that inhabits this other world. After a day of rest (where your guides will be setting up the abseil), you'll be briefed and trained on all aspects of the descent. You will start the rappel very early in the morning when the longest pitches will be made and from which you'll get the best views of the falls. You will camp on the rock face itself under a huge overhang, then continue the descent the next day.

### **Goal achieved**

Abseil over: great work! Once down on the ground again, your team will have an arduous trek through the jungle to meet the Churun river. After a night in hammocks, you'll take a curiara (motorized dugout canoe) to Canaima and stay in a jungle lodge right by the river. The next day you will board a flight to Ciudad Bolívar and then head back to Caracas. You'll enjoy the team's final-night celebratory dinner at a hotel near the airport and will be free to depart any time after breakfast the next morning on 30 January.

## **Fitness**

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. Team members should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. The biggest challenges on this expedition will be scrambling and trekking the very steep route to the summit; dealing with the extreme exposure of abseiling off Angel Falls; and sitting in your harness for long periods.

Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition's goal so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go. Teammates must be comfortable with the following.

### **Minimum fitness requirements**

- Daily activity: up to eight hours per day on tricky terrain. Abseil for at least two long days, over 750m of abseiling.
- Carry: up to 25kg per person.
- Abseil: off sheer vertical cliffs and at times over overhangs with no wall at all.
- Terrain: very varied. Through deep and dense jungles, marshy swamps and up very steep paths. You'll ascend with the aid of fixed ropes and scrambling techniques.
- Climate: temps around 26°C – 32°C with high humidity. Cooler at nights and at the summit with

temperatures to as low as 10°C. This part of Venezuela can be very wet.

## Abseil experience

This is one of the longest and most involved abseils in the world so previous experience of abseiling is necessary for this expedition. You must be completely confident of tying and clipping into anchors and using your rappelling equipment. If you have no prior experience this is not a problem as you will be able to learn these techniques prior to the trip: there are many climbing instructors that can run bespoke training sessions to teach you these required skills.

On arrival you'll need to be able to:

- put on a climbing harness.
- tie yourself into the system.
- clip yourself into a hanging anchor system and make yourself safe.
- rig your belay device (ATC or similar (NOT Fig 8), for abseiling.
- tie and use a French prussik knot.
- abseil an overhanging pitch so that you have no contact with the rock or wall.
- abseil with a 15kg bag attached via a daisy chain to your abseil device.

Applicants will receive a Handbook with further expedition information.

## Included

### Included

- Professional Secret Compass expedition leader with full medical and communications kits.
- Specialist abseil guides.
- All accommodation throughout.
- All food (snacks and meals) and soft drinks.
- All transport as outlined in itinerary including airport transfers.
- Special permits and permissions if required.
- Some technical kit (see kit list in Handbook).

### Not included

- International [flights](#)/ travel to and from the start and end points.
- [Travel insurance](#) (obligatory).
- Visas if required.
- Tips to local guides (discretionary).
- Alcohol unless provided by hosts with meals.
- Personal equipment (full kit list in the Handbook).

## Exped FAQ

On application to join this redefined classic expedition to Venezuela, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some expedition-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your question remains unanswered.

### I've never abseiled. Am I suitable?

Please see the Fitness tab, above. As long as you fulfil the fitness and abseil requirements in advance of arrival and have an adventurous spirit and are willing to work as a team, you should have no problems. There are many climbing instructors who can do introductory courses too if you want to build your confidence in using ropes and safety equipment. There are prerequisites for this expedition, see Fitness tab.

### **Has it been done?**

Yes, watch this [BBC Extreme Mountain Challenge](#) Venezuela episode with mountaineer Steve Backshaw for a closer look at these phenomenal falls (link might not work outside of the UK).

### **Can I arrive a day late?**

As The Plan outlines, there is a chain of transport to get teammates to the location where the expedition will commence, so start and end dates are not flexible.

### **Can I charge all my electricals?**

Once you start trekking there'll be no access to mains power. Please ensure that you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries, lightweight solar panels or power packs to avoid frustration.

### **Will there be telephone signal?**

There will be mobile signal in Caracas. Once the expedition starts you should plan on having no signal throughout the entire trip.

### **Is it safe to travel to Venezuela?**

Secret Compass have run this trip for several years now and we've found that the Venezuelans are some of the friendliest people in South America and welcome visitors. Venezuela is currently in the midst of an economic crisis and our trips generate much-needed income directly to the Venezuelan people we work with. We take a comprehensive approach to risk management, from pre-expedition planning to our highly qualified and experienced leaders on the ground – you can read more about our approach to risk [here](#). As with all our destinations we continually monitor the situation in-country up until and after departure, for the latest information, please [contact us](#). On rare occasions if the situation deteriorates in the area, and we may make the decision to alter the planned itinerary. When this occurs we have robust contingency plans in place including alternative itineraries – for information on how this may effect you, please read our [terms and conditions](#). Please get in touch if you require further details or have any specific concerns.

### **How can I find out more?**

Apply for this expedition team using the button below to receive your Expedition Handbook with fuller details. Secret Compass is then on hand to answer any questions or to firm up your place on the team. The Handbook contains a kit list for this expedition.