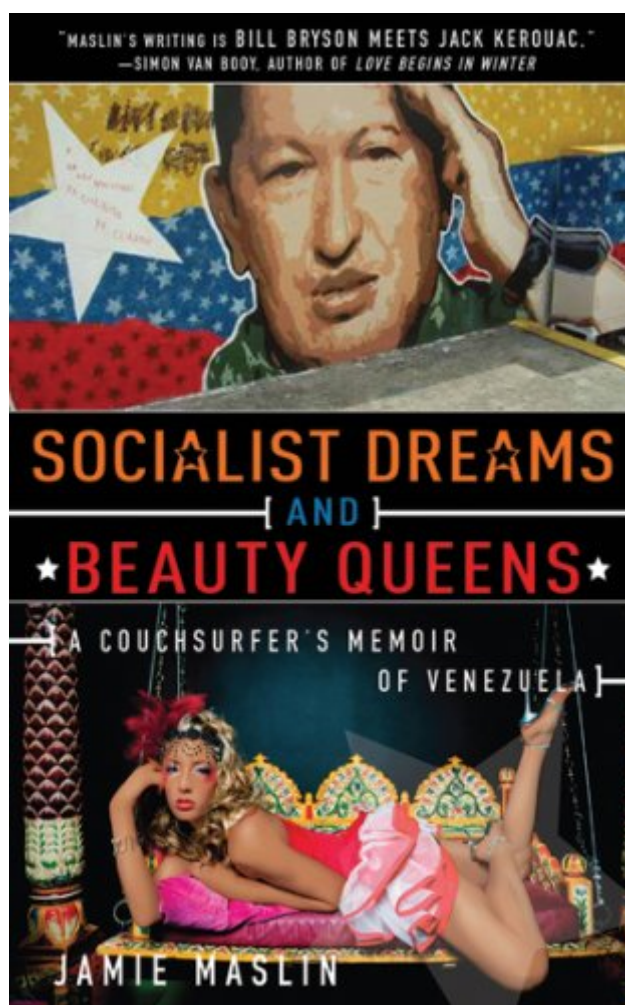


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Socialist Dreams And Beauty Queens: A Couchsurfer's Memoir Of Venezuela



Synopsis

Couchsurfer, hitchhiker, and rogue wanderer Jamie Maslin embarks on a couchsurfing adventure to the homeland of "firebrand," "populist," "anti-American" president Hugo Chavez: the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Alone in the crime capital of the world Maslin immediately finds himself in trouble; arrested by knife-wielding police officers and inoculated with an unwanted vaccination. After a terrifying start in Caracas, he soon leaves the teeming city and travels to the places tourists never see, staying on the couches of people he befriended online just days earlier, and meeting everyone from fervent social revolutionaries to the country's wealthy elite. He sets off in search of mile-high waterfalls, flat topped jungle plateaus, rolling deserts, and the famous lightning that appears suddenly in the sky with no rain or thunder. Visiting sprawling slums and opulent mansions, Maslin offers a fascinating and timely social, cultural, and historical introduction to a country increasingly in the headlines. Often irreverent, frequently informative, and habitually funny, this is the remarkable account of a young adventurer's journey through a breathtakingly beautiful and dynamic country where the politics of oil and social revolution are never far from the surface. 24 full-color photographs

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed his book about traveling through Iran so decided to purchase this one as well. It didn't disappoint. It's an interesting read about Venezuelan culture and his offbeat experiences. I particularly found the parts about him traveling through Caracas interesting. I found his description of the political situation in Venezuela very informative as well. He doesn't try to hide his political leanings, but is not preachy about them either, which I like. I would recommend this book as well as his other ones.

For an eco-tourist this book may have some value, but for most it is probably not a good book about Venezuela and Venezuelans. The choice of title becomes clearer when you discover the author is a latent socialist who admires Chavez and this was probably the main reason he traveled to Venezuela in the first place. Throughout the book he demonstrates his naivete on a regular basis along with his lack of understanding of the world. Learning a little Spanish would have helped him immensely, but that never seems to dawn on him. As was pointed out by other reviewers, his explanation and defense of the Chavez regime and its bombastic and paranoid rhetoric is laughable and should not be included in a travelogue. I was amused in several sections when he only showed his traveling ineptitude, but I literally fell on the floor laughing when he declares that a Brit invented television and the internet! However, you do get to know a little about the author and what makes him tick. If you are interested in knowing Jamie Maslin, then by all means buy the book. In my life I have met people like him, and all I can say is my normal reaction is to get as far away from them as fast as possible. On the other hand, if you are a socialist at heart and like to read about the travels of narcissistic individuals, this may be a good read too.

I enjoyed the read. Maslin has good talent writing about his adventures in Venezuela. Great details depict the lifestyles and geography of Venezuela. Although I feel it could do without his flawed views on the Chavez regime. Maslin seems to lean towards chavistas through parts of the book, without any real knowledge of the facts and what ACTUALLY occurred, such as when describing the "coup d'etat." This aside, I think this is a good read.

I've always been drawn to books where someone travels to a place I'm much too timid to go to and throws themselves into adventures with the people and the landscape. *Socialist Dreams and Beauty* succeeds on this front. Jamie Maslin does a good job with the characters he meets in Venezuela, and provides a thrilling and enlightening look at the tepuis, the high jungle plateaus that

loom over the world's tallest waterfalls. The book gets bogged down now and then when Maslin delves into the politics and social programs of Hugo ChÁvez. Talking about ChÁvez with the people he meets has its place in a book like this, but there's way too much political promotion here for it to stay interesting. Also, the author's anti-U.S. slant becomes wearisome, and reaches its nadir when he works in his (and ChÁvez's) belief in the 911 conspiracy theory involving Building 7. I guess I should have known something was up when I saw the prominent front cover endorsement from Oliver Stone....

Jamie Maslin does it again! In much the same vein as his previous book, *Socialist Dreams and Beauty Queens* is an honest, interesting, and funny read that is sure to delight any armchair traveller! Venezuela seems to be a most beautiful and dangerous place filled with staggering scenic views and a lot of political unrest. Maslin describes his experiences, both good and bad, with relish and humour. At one point, he is actually arrested and detained for not having proper documents on his person and learns first hand the corruption within the Venezuelan police force. Maslin also treats us to plenty of well-researched history, both past and current, about the places he visits or the charged conversations he has which mostly revolve around Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's most loved/most hated leader. Through Maslin's work, we get a sense of what Venezuela is like from an outsider's perspective, and he paints an astonishing picture of civil unrest, extreme poverty and opposing wealth from the oil industry. As well, Maslin describes his experiences couchsurfing. It is not only a means of traveling on a budget, but Maslin found that his hosts turned out, for the most part, to be excellent guides of the areas that he travelled to. Everywhere he went was met by generosity from these fellow travelers. It is a mixed bag when traveling like this, but as a fellow couchsurfer, I've also experienced first hand that this is by far the most adventurous (and now preferred) way to go! I highly recommend this book, especially if you are planning on traveling through Venezuela in the near future. No other travel guide will give you a more personal and hilarious portrait of what this country will offer you once you get there! Happy travels!

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