



I've always enjoyed travelling in Central and South America and had never been to Venezuela, so when I was looking for a beach vacation with a little bit of culture, I decided to visit Margarita Island. I stayed in El Yaque, an out-of-the-way beach paradise best known as a windsurfing destination. It was a more economical choice than the Playa el Agua area, and is only a short distance from the city of Porlamar, which offered great day-trip possibilities.

All travellers have their ideal ways of sightseeing. For some, it's on a tour bus getting a general overview of their new surroundings. For me—whenever possible—there is no better way to explore a new place than on horseback. I've been riding since I was 12 years old, when I attended a horseback riding summer camp and fell in love with it. Living in the city, it is difficult to pursue such a passion, so I always search for a horseback riding trip on every vacation I take.

Horseback travel offers a number of options for both seasoned and beginner riders. If you're new to it, you can relax in the saddle

and let your body comfortably sway from side to side, taking in the view from six feet above the ground. For more experienced riders, standing up in the stirrups and letting your horse gallop along allows you to feel the wind against your face and the adrenaline rush through your body as you experience the freedom of running over new terrain.

When I arrived on Margarita Island, the first thing I did was look for a horseback adventure. I was put in touch with a ranch in Macanao, on the west side of the island. The ranch offers two rides per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The afternoon option offered a more comfortable temperature and allowed me to take in the spectacular island sunset.

Immediately upon arrival at the ranch, I was struck by how dry this side of the island was. Amid the red rocks and huge cactuses, I felt like I was in the middle of the Arizona desert rather than on a tropical island. The ranch owner explained that it only rains about two days per year there.

We rode the horses up steep hills, taking in the spectacular ocean

view below. The deep blue water contrasted beautifully against the bright red rocks.

The ranch offers experienced riders the option of galloping their horses along the shoreline. I was thrilled at the opportunity and took my horse to the edge of the water to let him run free. The sea water splashing my toes and salty air hitting my face felt so refreshing.

Farther down the beach, I spotted a sea of pink. I galloped over to the area and slowed down once I realized what a treasure I had stumbled upon. Below me were thousands of beautiful pink conch shells littering the beach. As most of them were in near-perfect condition, I stepped down from my horse and picked up what would be my most precious Margarita Island souvenir.

During my seven days there, I also visited Porlamar, the largest city on the island, and the historic fort—Fortin de la Galera in Juan Griego—said to be the best spot on the island to see a spectacular sunset. But my horseback trip was by far the highlight of my vacation, confirming that travel by horseback is the way to go! ■