

Choroní, an introduction

On behalf of the Organizing Committee of NebulAtom, we would like to welcome you to Venezuela and Choroní. For those of us who have grown in this country, Choroní has always been there. As one returns, yet again, the absence of anticipation quickly dispels as one takes the mountain road; curiously, the experience is always different, never disappointing, always a bit too much. Its secret is perhaps the contrast between the mountain and the sea, historical cocoa plantations and freewheeling fishermen, intimate seclusion and partying, between a basic society and the overpowering urban invasion from the capital which is only three hours away. Anyway, there is plenty for everybody, all contained within a small, quaint, colonial town: great beaches (Playa Grande, Sepe, Oricao; Valle Seco); waterfalls (El Lajao, El Dique, Copey); boat rides; hikes (Chua cocoa plantation); good eating, and Afrocaribbean drums. In Choroní you will be staying at El Portete, a renovated cocoa hacienda, hosted by its owner, Richard Myerston. No better choice to represent Venezuelan hospitality. The scientific agenda that has been prepared for the 14-day meeting is intense and well packed, and the international and national participation amounts to 20 selected postgraduate students and postdocs. So unlikely enough, expectations ride high on this occasion. We would nonetheless like to give you some tips in order to help you prepare for your visit.

- As you exit customs at Caracas airport (Maiquetía), please make direct contact with well identified NebulAtom personnel who should know your name or have a list with your name included. Do not give out your name, always ask for it and do not allow yourself to be approached by anybody else, particularly dubious characters that offer currency exchange, transport, hotels, etc.
- If you want to change currency at the airport please ask for advice from NebulAtom personnel. In Choroní, the best way would be to do it through Richard Myerston, the Manager at El Portete. Please bear in mind that there is only one bank in Choroní (Banco Nacional de Descuento) with only one ATM that may run out of cash, and international credit/debit cards are not always accepted. So do bring some cash in US\$.
- The main beach in Choroní, Playa Grande, is a beautiful sandy cove with coconut palms. As you go for a swim or to play in the waves, there are some spots around its center, usually red flagged, where the undertow can be deceptively dangerous. If you are indeed caught by the vortex, you will not be able to do anything but ride it out, 10 meters at the most, and then swim back a bit further down the coast. **This is a warning that should not be taken lightly.**
- In Choroní you will probably see a few people bathing in the river which after swimming in the sea makes it a very pleasant change. If you would like to do this, please ask one of us to take you by car to one of good spots up the river.
- The sun is **very strong** in this part of the world. Sun protection, a hat, a cap, sunglasses, a tee-shirt are all **essential** as you go about.
- Cooled bottled water and the local beer, Polar, are everywhere. On the other hand, most refreshments and cocktails are usually served with lots of ice. This should not be a problem, but delicate stomachs should be aware as it is difficult to avoid. In case of any problem, do not hesitate to contact one of us. Furthermore, in Choroní they make a legendary cocktail, guarapita, made with sugar-cane spirit, passion fruit juice and sugar that can soon lead to uncontrollable effects. **It should be drunk with caution.**

- We will have Wifi at El Portete which would allow ubiquitous email, ssh, sftp, Skype, Messenger, online demos, etc. from laptops.
- In case of an emergency, please phone: (i) Claudio Mendoza (0414-270.8416); Richard Myerston at El Portete (0243-991.1255; 0414-345.7768; 0414-463.5463).

Well, we look forward to sharing this event with you. See you at Maiquetía airport!