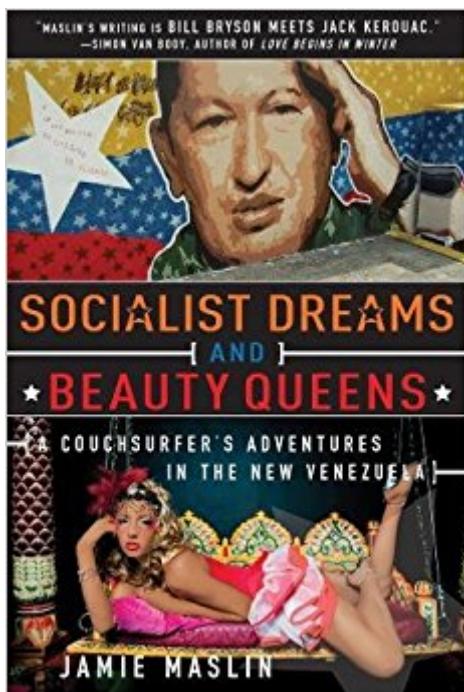


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Socialist Dreams And Beauty Queens: A Couchsurfer's Adventures In The New Venezuela



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.

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Customer Reviews

"A raw, uncut journey into the wilds of Venezuela...offers a rare commentary on a country most readers know little about....A complex portrait of Venezuela's people, poverty and promise."

• Kirkus Reviews An offbeat, tantalizing look behind the scenes of Venezuela. Oliver Stone Jamie Maslin has put together an exciting mix of

progressive politics and adventurous travelogue. Making his way through Venezuela, Maslin visits slums and country clubs, rainforests and Caribbean beaches, while coping with anti-Chavistas and the country's ubiquitous criminals, and learning why Hugo Chavez has so many loyal followers. A welcome antidote to the common mainstream media distortions peddled against Venezuela.

•William Blum, author of *Rogue State* and *Killing Hope*

Jamie Maslin is a writer and traveler. He has hitchhiked from England to Iran and couch-surfed all over Latin America. He lives in London, England.

I read this author's first book *Iranian Rappers And Persian Porn*, it was an interesting look at life inside Iran, and of what an interesting country it is. He discussed many areas of the country that many people myself included just aren't exposed to living in the West. You also get to know well, the people living there who he encounters. Just just superficially. There were hints regarding the author's very liberal political beliefs but overall he kept his opinions to himself. I had hoped *Socialist Dreams and Beauty Queens* would be similar to his first book, but this time about Venezuela, and in the beginning it was. Sadly Mr Maslin, soon becomes an enormous socialist, and a conspiracy theorist. The book came out in 2011, and so sadly the author who thought it was neat and wonderful all the fabulous programs Chavez instituted in Venezuela, didn't have the benefit of seeing what a complete disaster those programs have become for the country. In the author's mind anyone who pisses off America must be doing something right. He then runs down Obama (who while not my idea of a great president, is still the president of the most powerful country in the world, but not a king, or a dictator- unlike Chavez, and his successor, and therefore can't just do whatever he wants to) for not achieving everything he said he would do. Later the author loses all credibility when he hooks up with a couch surfing Australian who is a 9/11 nutter who claims to be an engineer working to explain how Tower 7 collapsed without having had significant fires or being hit by a plane. Young British and Australian writers who seem to love to discuss politics usually end up instead showing how ignorant they are of the world. They cite obscure sources to support and back up their claims and beliefs and overlook or ignore anything that doesn't support their narrative. Even in 2010 kidnappings are rampant and robbery and murder are daily occurrences but the author seems alright with this because Chavez is doing so many great things for the poor people of his country. In the case of British writers who are of a liberal bent, they don't seem to get that the sun set on the British empire a long long time ago (I felt the same about Simon Winchester and his book *Pacific*, which totally suffered from these same failings). They also don't seem to be particularly troubled by all the

damage Britain caused. In the case of Australia, and their liberal bent writers, I don't know if it is the isolation of the country, the history and origins of its people, or what, but Australia suffers from a Napoleon complex. Their land mass is as large as the USA, but their significance on the world stage is insignificant, and likely always will be. Back to the book. He does travel to some very interesting areas of the country, and his ability to explain what he is experiencing, and where appropriate give facts and details that may not be commonly known, were done to an excellent degree in this book, as well as his first book. The politics of the people he encounters who live in Venezuela and how life has changed for them is relevant, interesting and important. The author's politics, and not relevant to the story, are not of interest, and add nothing positive to the book. If he had left his politics out of this book, the book would have been far better.

A quirky yet insightful inside view of modern Venezuela. The writer has that droll sense of humor found in so many British travel writers.

Informative, readable and human.

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