



# Understand Colombia

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Buckle your seatbelts: Colombia is roaring out of the shadows and surging into the fast lane.

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An uneasy peace? How Colombia shook off the Spanish, the narcos and the FARC.

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Modern, progressive and life-affirmingly positive, Colombia is a society on the move.

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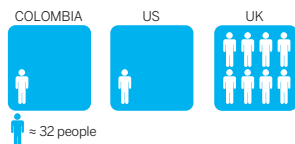
Colombia's cultural heritage is dominated by Márquez and Botero. But there is so much more...

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Snowcapped mountains, deep blue seas, mystical jungle depths: Colombia will surprise you with its variety.



## population per sq km



# Colombia Today

## A Country on the Rise

Colombia makes evangelists of all who visit it and few visitors leave with anything but a positive impression. And while the global economy sputters, Colombia is powering ahead full throttle as foreign investment and tourists pour in. The economy has been growing steadily for several years, and Colombia's finance minister projected a further 5% growth in 2012. While it's undeniable that for many rural poor life has yet to improve, Colombia today is racing ahead to become one of the hottest, most exciting destinations on the continent.

It wasn't always so. Until 2002 the country was riven by a war that saw the FARC (the leftist guerrilla insurgency) controlling much of the country while locked in combat with the government and right-wing paramilitary groups, such as the AUC (formed to tackle FARC ascendancy). There followed eight years of the hardline, but scandal-tainted presidency of Álvaro Uribe, who drove the FARC back into the mountains and jungles with a US-funded military offensive. The guerrillas' numbers plunged from 17,000 to 9000 as many deserted or were killed. Kidnappings and extortion also dropped markedly. In 2006, the 26,000 members of the AUC disarmed, albeit in a process condemned as too lenient by Amnesty International.

## The Pragmatic President

Harvard-educated Juan Manuel Santos took power in 2010, winning a landslide victory over an eccentric former mayor of Bogotá, Antanas Mockus. His presidency has been marked by a more pragmatic political style, but one underpinned by a continuation of his predecessor's intransigence toward the guerrilla. He has adopted a twin strategy against the FARC: by calling for a ceasefire ahead of talks, and simultaneously crushing the insurgents.

### Fast Facts

- » Population: 44,725,500
- » GDP growth (2010): 5.2%
- » Exports: coffee, coal, oil, gold, bananas, cut flowers, chemicals, emeralds
- » US foreign aid to Colombia (2009): US\$838 million
- » Unemployment: 11.8%
- » Life expectancy: 71 years (men), 78 years (women)
- » Internet country code: .co

## Top Books

- » *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez) Magic realist masterpiece.
- » *Calamari* (Emilio Ruiz Barrachina) Cartagena-set historical romance.
- » *Beyond Bogota – Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia*

- (Garry Leech) Essential reading for news that's not in the papers.
- » *Delirium* (Laura Restrepo) Explores personal and political madness in mid-80s Bogotá.
- » *Six Months on Minimum Wage* (Andrés Felipe Solano) Life in a Medellín factory.

## Top Films

- » *Todos Sus Muertos* (2011) Devastating critique of corruption and apathy in Colombia.
- » *Apaporis* (2010) Incisive documentary into indigenous Amazonian life.
- » *Perro Come Perro* (2008) Tarantino-esque gangster flick.