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**UNDERSTAND**
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**Map Legend** .................. 351
Welcome to Colombia! Cosmopolitan cities, looming mountains, colonial villages, verdant jungles and Caribbean beaches await. Pulling off this itinerary requires fifth gear and copious amounts of caffeine – good thing you’re in the land of coffee!

Take a day or two in Bogotá, admiring La Candelaria (its colonial center), the best of myriad museums, and world-class food and nightlife. Shake off the hangover a few hours north in the calming colonial villages of Villa de Leyva and Barichara, both miraculously preserved and picturesque. Take a day to walk the historic El Camino Real to Guane. Bus to San Gil to pick up the long bus ride to Santa Marta, from where you can access Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Tayrona – linger on the park’s otherworldly beaches for a few days. Continue southwest along the Caribbean coast to Cartagena, Colombia’s crown jewel – a postcard-perfect old city chock full of colonial romance. It’s another long bus ride (or a quicker flight) to Medellín, where again you’re faced with Colombia on overdrive: culture, cuisine and Club Colombia, paisa-style. Raise a toast to El Dorado and exit via Bogotá, bowled-over by Colombia’s hospitality.
The beauty of Colombia’s diverse landscapes is that you can choose to fully immerse yourself in just one – Caribbean beaches, wildlife-rich jungle or soaring Andean highlands – or you can go for the full monty! Hit the ground running with three or four days in Bogotá, Colombia’s Gotham, and don’t miss its Museo del Oro, one of the continent’s most fascinating museums, and the city’s atmospheric colonial center, La Candelaria. From there head north to Villa de Leyva. Explore its cobbled streets and enjoy some colonial charm for a day or two, then visit San Gil for hiking and rafting, making time for nearby historic Barichara. Pass through Bucaramanga to catch a long-haul bus to Santa Marta. It’s worth moving quicker than normal up to this point in order to free up some time for the sweaty, multiday trek to Ciudad Perdida or blissing-out for a day or two in the beach-riddled Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Tayrona, Colombia’s most popular national park. Next stop, Cartagena – you’ll need a few days to fully indulge this exquisite colonial city.

From the Caribbean, take a bus or fly south to spend a week exploring Medellín and the Zona Cafetera. Enjoy some time in the nature reserves around Manizales before testing your fitness among the spectacular peaks of PNN Los Nevados. Next stop, the breathtaking Valle de Cocora outside Salento. Want to take a piece of Colombia home with you? Visit a coffee finca (farm) near Armenia and stock up on single-origin coffee beans direct from the source.

Spend the night in Cali to experience the city’s hopping salsa joints. Travel down through colonial Popayán to the archaeological ruins at San Agustín and Tierradentro, two of the country’s most important pre-Columbian sites worth a few days. Return to Bogotá via the startling Desierto de la Tatacoa and catch a flight to Leticia, where a wildly different Colombia exists. Spend a few days exploring the three Amazonian ecosystems: terra firme (dry), várzea (semi-flooded) and igapó (flooded) along the Río Yavarí, the best spot in Amazonia to observe wildlife in its natural habitat. Fly back to Bogotá, or, from Tabatinga across the Brazilian border from Leticia, head deeper into the Amazon via adventurous river-boat rides to Manaus (Brazil) or Iquitos (Peru).
This is the ultimate beach adventure; Colombia’s northern coast and islands serve up slices of luminous Caribbean waters backed by an astonishing variety of landscapes.

Start out east of Santa Marta with a few days at **Cabo de la Vela** on La Guajira Peninsula, a striking panorama where the desert meets the sea at the top of the continent. Don’t skip South America’s northernmost tip, **Punta Gallinas**, where you can sleep in a hammock and feast on local lobster near towering dunes somersaulting into remote beaches.

Heading southwest, make your way to lovely **Palomino**, where you’ll find a crystal clear river running down from the majestic Sierra Nevada to a wild palm-studded beach. A short drive away is **Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Tayrona**, very popular among aspiring beach bums. Giant boulders frame pretty coves and you can ride horses through the jungle to the ruins of a pre-Hispanic settlement. Spend a couple of days, then pass through **Santa Marta** and take a break from the heat with an overnight side-trip to the charming mountain town of **Minca**.

Next spend a leisurely couple of days exploring the colonial splendor of **Cartagena** before getting your tanning plans back on track with a trip to **Playa Blanca**. Hit the road again and make your way to **Tolú**, where you can take a trip in the mangroves before boarding a boat to the **Islas de San Bernardo** for three days of white sands, crystalline waters and tiny fishing communities.

Suitably relaxed, make the arduous journey southwest via Turbo to spend a few days in **Capurganá** and **Sapzurro**, two cute beachside neighbors surrounded by jungle right on the border with Panama, which offer excellent diving.

If you’re hungry for more, take a flight via **Medellín** to **San Andrés** to experience Raizal culture with its British Caribbean roots. The next day, head over to **Providencia** to soak up the tranquillity and reflect on your journey, while reclining beside some of Colombia’s most idyllic stretches of sand.
Colombia’s ultimate off-the-beaten-path destination boasts tropical jungle, diving, whale-watching, world-class sportfishing and black-sand beaches. It isn’t cheap – all transportation is by small plane and boat – but it’s worth it. Start by flying in for a couple of days at Bahía Solano, where you can get used to the pace of El Chocó while lounging in a hammock at Punta Huína. After a spot of diving or a jungle trek, take a taxi south for a night in El Valle, where in nesting season you can observe turtles laying eggs and swim beneath a thundering waterfall. Hike south to Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Ensenada de Utría and take a row boat to the visitor center, where you can spend the night. During whale season you can spot the magnificent mammals playing in the inlet. Next hire a boat to take you to the friendly village of Jurubidá and visit the thermal pools hidden in the jungle. Yet another boat will take you to Nuquí for an overnight stay. From here you can pick up transport to Guachalito, a top-class beach with several comfortable eco-lodges. After three days, return to Nuquí to take a quick flight back to Medellín.

In this arabica-fueled region, hearts are pumped with caffeine as much as blood. Visiting coffee farms will keep you hyped for exploring the region’s highlights. Start by spending a few days in the nature parks around Manizales – Los Yarumos, Recinto del Pensamiento and Reserva Ecológica Río Blanco, the latter a bird-watching favorite. Indulge in a coffee tour just outside town at Hacienda Venecia, for an excellent overview of all things coffee. Return to Manizales to organize a hiking trip among snow-covered volcanic peaks in Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Los Nevados. Spend a night in the páramo (high-mountain plains) beside the mystical Laguna de Otún before heading down the mountain to Termales de Santa Rosa to reinvigorate tired muscles. Suitably revitalized, pass through Pereira to spend four days in coffee-crazy Salento, full of quaint charm and typical bahareque (adobe and reed) architecture. Take a classic jeep up to the impressive Valle de Cocora, one of Colombia’s most beautiful half-day hikes. Finally, make the short trip across the highway for a couple of days in slow-paced Filandia and toast your tour from its towering mirador (lookout), which offers some of the best views in coffee country.
Colombia: Off the Beaten Track

CAPURGANÁ & SAPZURRO
A pair of tranquil towns on the Panamanian border: relaxed Caribbean vibes and calm waters that lap at jungle-backed beaches. (p166)

PUNTA GALLINAS
Perched on arid cliffs overlooking the wild blue Caribbean Sea, this tiny Wayuu community is surrounded by some of the most remote beaches in Colombia. (p160)

MOMPOX
Isolated by changes in the flow of the Río Magdalena, this languid riverside town remains stuck in an era of narrow streets, colonial mansions and talented silversmiths. (p162)

PLAYA DE BELÉN
Tiny La Playa is not only one of Colombia’s best preserved colonial towns, it is also right on the doorstep of Área Natural Única Los Estoraques, a tiny nature reserve set around striking stone columns. (p119)

CHOCÓ HINTERLAND
Travel upriver in dugout canoes from the rarely visited beaches of the Chocó to remote indigenous communities and hidden waterfalls. (p257)
**ECUADOR**

**BRAZIL**

**PERU**

**Río Amazonas**

**Río Magdalena**

**Pasto**

**Cali**

**Villavicencio**

**San José del Guaviare**

**Obando**

**Neiva**

**Popayán**

**Florencia**

**Leticia**

**QUITO**

**DESIERTO DE LA TATACOA**

Hike around the striking barren landscapes, checking out fossils and towering cacti before indulging in a spot of stargazing in the evening. (p247)

**SAN CIPRIANO**

The only way in or out of this isolated Afro-Colombian town in the jungle is on one of the motorcycle-powered wooden carts that speed along the old railway line. (p268)

**MOCOA**

Entrance point to the Putumayo, a natural wonderland sandwiched between the Andes and the Amazon that is covered in dense forest punctuated by roaring waterfalls and isolated swimming holes. (p244)

**MACIZO COLOMBIANO**

Travel among the misty peaks and paramo-covered plateaus of this remote region straddling Cauca and Huila that is the birthplace of three great rivers. (p242)

**Silvia**

**Obando**

**Mitú**

**DESIERTO DE LA TATACOA**

Macizo Colombiano
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born. Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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