



# Medellín & Zona Cafetera

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## Why Go?

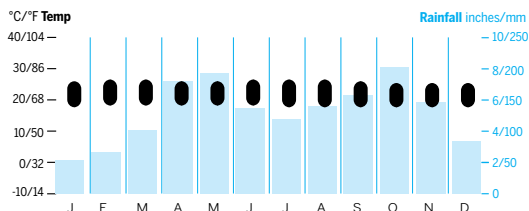
Welcome to *país paisa* – *paisa* country – a vibrant region made up of coffee plantations and flower farms, lush cloud forest, dynamic student towns and the busy city of Medellín. It is one of Colombia's most dynamic regions, and is not to be missed.

In Medellín, the country's second-largest metropolis, towers soar skyward in the center of a deep valley, concrete examples of the ambition that has placed the city at the vanguard of Colombia's revival. It is an attractive city that seduces most travelers instantly, with its just-perfect climate, great restaurants, museums, public artwork and thumping discos.

Further south is the Zona Cafetera, a rich tapestry of historic villages, charming coffee farms, fantastic nature reserves and grand mountain peaks. Coffee is more than a cash crop here – it is a way of life. You'll never look at your morning cup the same way again.

## When to Go

### Medellín



**Jan–Mar** Clear conditions expose the peaks of Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Los Nevados.

**Aug** The streets of Medellín explode with the vibrant colors of the Feria de las Flores.

**Oct–Dec** Coffee pickers mass on farms throughout the Zona Cafetera for the main harvest.

## National, State & Regional Parks

The big daddy of national parks here is Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Los Nevados, which soars at more than 5000m. Recinto del Pensamiento, Los Yarumos and Reserva Ecológica Río Blanco, near Manizales, boast beautiful species of orchids and butterflies. East of Pereira are the rarely visited Santuario Otún Quimbaya and Parque Ucumari. Further south, don't miss the stunning Valle de Cocora, near Salento, with its soaring wax palms.

### **i** Getting There & Around

Medellín airport is the main international hub of the area. Pereira and Armenia airports also both receive international flights. The region is well serviced by buses to Bogotá, Cali and the Caribbean coast.

Avoid long-distance road travel during torrential rains (most likely during April/May and September/October) as landslides are common.

## MEDELLÍN

24 / POP 3 MILLION / ELEV 1494M

Medellín packs the punch of a city twice its size. Situated in a narrow valley, the city's skyline reaches for the heavens, setting high-rise apartment and office buildings against a backdrop of jagged peaks in every direction. Its pleasant climate gives the city its nickname – the City of Eternal Spring – and the moderate temperatures put a spring in the locals' steps, at work and at play. It's a bustling city of industry and commerce, especially textile manufacturing and exported cut flowers. On the weekends Medellín lets its hair down, and the city's many discos attract the beautiful people.

The city sprawls north and south along the valley floor. Slums hug the upper reaches of the hills. True to its *paisa* (people of Antioquia) roots, Medellín affects an indifference to the rest of Colombia, and puts on metropolitan airs – the traffic officers wear Italian-style round, boxy hats; many discos prefer techno or reggaeton to salsa and vallenato; and the city looks overseas for the inspiration for its next great public-works project.

## History

Spaniards first arrived in the Aburrá Valley in the 1540s, but Medellín was not founded until 1616. Historians believe that many

early settlers were Spanish Jews fleeing the Inquisition. They divided the land into small haciendas (country estates), which they farmed themselves – something that was very different from the slave-based plantation culture that dominated much of Colombia. With their focus on self-reliance, these early *paisas* came to be known as hard workers with a fierce independent streak – traits they've exported throughout the Zona Cafetera.

Medellín became the capital of Antioquia in 1826 but long remained a provincial backwater, which explains why its colonial buildings are neither sumptuous nor numerous. The city's rapid growth began only at the start of the 20th century, when the arrival of the railroad, together with a highly profitable boom in coffee production, quickly transformed the city. Mine owners and coffee barons invested their profits in a nascent textile industry, and their gamble paid off. Within a few decades, Medellín had become a large metropolitan city.

By the 1980s the city's entrepreneurial spirit was showing its dark side. Under the violent leadership of Pablo Escobar, Medellín became the capital of the world's cocaine business. Gun battles were common, and the city's homicide rate was among the highest on the planet. The beginning of the end of the violence came with Escobar's death in 1993, and today Medellín is one of the most accessible destinations in the country.

### **👁** Sights

★ **Plazoleta de las Esculturas** PLAZA  
(Plaza Botero; Map p194) This public space in front of the Museo de Antioquia is home to 23 large bronze sculptures by renowned local artist Fernando Botero. For more Botero, check out the iconic **La Gorda**, in front of the Banco de la República in Parque Berrío. There are three more Botero sculptures in Parque San Antonio, including the **Pájaro de Paz** (Bird of Peace), which sits alongside its earlier incarnation that was destroyed in a terrorist bomb attack.

★ **Cerro Nutibara** LOOKOUT  
(Map p190) On top of this 80m-tall hill, 2km southwest of the city center, sits the kitschy **Pueblito Paisa**, a miniature version of a typical Antioquian township. Views across the city from the adjacent platform are stunning. Next to the lookout you'll find the **Museo de la Ciudad** (Map p190; admission COP\$1000;