

Welcome to Colombia

Soaring Andean summits, unspoiled Caribbean coast, enigmatic Amazon jungle, cryptic archaeological ruins and cobbled colonial towns. Colombia boasts all of South America's allure, and more.

Diverse Landscapes

Colombia's equatorial position affords it a diversity of landscapes. A slight tinkering in altitude takes you from sun-toasted Caribbean sands to coffee-strewn, emerald-green hilltops in the Zona Cafetera. Continue to climb and there's Bogotá, the bustling cradle of Colombia and third-highest capital city in the world. Go up another few thousand meters for snowcapped peaks, high-altitude lakes and the eerie, unique vegetation of the *páramo* (high mountain plains). The bottom drops out as the Andes give way to Los Llanos, a 550,000-sq-km swath of tropical grasslands shared with Venezuela.

Outdoor Adventures

Colombia's varied terrain is fertile ground for outdoor adventurers to dive, climb, raft, trek and soar. San Gil is the undisputed adventure capital, but Colombia boasts alfresco pleasures in all corners. Some of the continent's most iconic trekking is here: a multiday jungle walk takes you to the ancient ruins of the Tayrona Ciudad Perdida, while numerous ascents inside Parque Nacional Natural El Cocuy places intrepid hikers on the highest reaches of the Andes. Providencia's world-class reef spells aquatic heaven for scuba divers, and whale-watchers on the Pacific coast can see majestic humpbacks in the wild.

Ancient Culture

A wealth of ancient civilizations left behind a fascinating spread of archaeological and cultural sites throughout Colombia. The one-time Tayrona capital, Ciudad Perdida, built between the 11th and 14th centuries, is one of South America's most mysterious ancient cities, arguably second only to Machu Picchu. Also shrouded in mystery is San Agustín, where more than 500 life-sized ancient sculptures of enigmatic origin dot the surrounding countryside. And then there's Tierradentro, where elaborate underground tombs scooped out by an unknown people add even more mystique to Colombia's past.

Colonial Charm

Led by Cartagena's extraordinarily well-preserved old city, Colombia offers an off-the-radar treasure trove of cinematic cobblestoned towns and villages that often feel bogged down in a different century, content to carry on as they have since the departure of the Spanish without a care in the world. Unweathered Barichara and happily sleepy Mompoix feel like movie sets, impossibly unspoiled by modern progress; while whitewashed Villa de Leyva appears stuck in 16th-century quicksand – and these are just the villages that people *do* visit.



Why I Love Colombia

By Kevin Raub, Author

It was a much different country the first time I came to Colombia in the early 2000s, but the stellar hospitality of Colombians had me at arrival. Today, the security situation has improved dramatically, helping Colombia to become South America's phoenix from the flames. But that initial reception has always stuck with me: without a five-star tourism magnet – no Machu Picchu, no Iguazu Falls, no Patagonia – Colombia works harder for its money, and that begins and ends with the people, who ensure you leave with a different impression than the one you landed with.

For more about our authors, see page 352

Above: Cabo San Juan del Gulá (p151), Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Tayrona