



Colombia

Includes ➔

Bogotá	544
The Caribbean Coast	564
Amazon Basin	617
Understand Colombia	623
Survival Guide	628

Best Adventures

- ➔ Trekking to Ciudad Perdida (p572)
- ➔ Caving in Río Claro (p595)
- ➔ Exploring the Paso del Conejo circuit in PNN El Cocuy (p558)
- ➔ Rafting Río Suárez (p559)
- ➔ Journeying to Punta Gallinas (p574)

Best Festivals

- ➔ Carnaval de Barranquilla (p575)
- ➔ Festival de Música del Pacífico Petronio Álvarez (p605)
- ➔ Carnaval de Negros y Blancos (p615)
- ➔ Desfile de Yipao (p601)
- ➔ Feria de las Flores (p591)

Why Go?

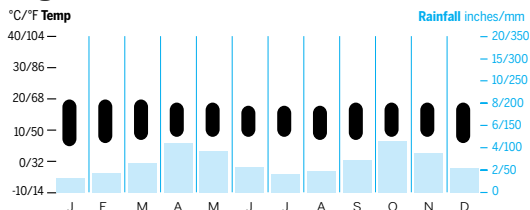
Colombia is an exhilarating cocktail of condensed South America with a shot of Caribbean thrown in. Boasting colorful traditions, striking landscapes and extremely hospitable locals, Colombia has an incredible variety of experiences to keep those magic travel moments coming thick and fast.

In one day it's possible to travel from glacier-covered Andean peaks to crystalline Caribbean beaches, or from immense sand dunes to lush tropical rainforest. Beyond the cinematic panoramas, Colombia is also a fascinating mix of the old and new, with impressive pre-Hispanic ruins and enchanting colonial towns vying for your attention alongside progressive cities with chic dining and vibrant nightlife.

Add in a rich mix of indigenous, Afro-descendant and European cultures and you'll discover why so many visitors rework their travel plans to return. Check your preconceptions at the door and uncover more than a few surprises in this accessible and utterly thrilling destination.

When to Go

Bogotá



Feb Sunny skies throughout the Andean and Caribbean regions are perfect for outdoor activities.

Aug & Sep The cultural scene blossoms, with festivals including Medellín's Feria de las Flores.

Oct & Nov Heavy rains send the crowds packing and prices drop; best trekking in the Amazon.

Connections

Sitting proudly at the top of the continent, Colombia is a strategic gateway between South and Central America. While there is no land crossing with Panama, it is possible to cross via ship or private yacht from Cartagena or by small boat from the idyllic Caribbean town of Capurganá.

Major land crossings include the borders with Venezuela at Maicao, in the arid Guajira, and Cúcuta, on the far side of the soaring peaks of the Cordillera Oriental. The main crossing point to Ecuador is at Ipiales in the southern mountainous region of Nariño.

Heading further south, there are adventurous river crossings into Brazil and Peru from Leticia in the Amazon.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Begin your whirlwind Colombian tour by walking the romantic streets of colonial Cartagena before heading along the Caribbean coast to cool off beneath the majestic Sierra Nevada at the jungle-clad beaches of Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona. Then head south for a day of high-adrenaline outdoor adventure in San Gil. Finish your trip in Bogotá, visiting the capital's fascinating museums and atmospheric nightspots.

Two Weeks

After completing the above, head south to San Agustín for horse riding among the impressive pre-Columbian statues scattered around rolling hills. Continue on to Salento to stroll through coffee plantations and learn to prepare the perfect cup. Crane your neck to admire towering wax palms in nearby Valle de Cocora before continuing onto Medellín to party with the *paisas* (people from northwest Colombia), Colombia's most outgoing residents.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Bandeja paisa** Artery-clogging tray of sausage, beans, ground beef, pork rind, avocado, egg, plantains and rice.
- ➔ **Ajiaco** Andean chicken soup with corn, many kinds of potatoes and a local herb known as *guasca*.
- ➔ **Aguardiente** Alcoholic spirit flavored with anise that produces wild nights and shocking hangovers.
- ➔ **Tamale** Chopped pork with rice and vegetables folded in a maize dough, steamed in banana leaves with many different regional varieties.
- ➔ **Chocolate santafereño** A cup of hot chocolate served with a chunk of cheese and bread.
- ➔ **Lulada** Refreshing iced drink from Valle de Cauca made from crushed *lulo* fruit and lemons.
- ➔ **Hormigas culonas** Large fried ants, unique to Santander.

AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Peso (COP\$)
- ➔ **Language** Spanish
- ➔ **Money** ATMs in most towns; credit cards widely accepted
- ➔ **Visas** Not required for citizens of most Western countries
- ➔ **Time** GMT minus five hours

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 1.14 million sq km
- ➔ **Population** 47 million
- ➔ **Capital** Bogotá
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎123
- ➔ **Country Code** ☎57

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	COP\$2164
Canada	C\$1	COP\$2283
Euro zone	€1	COP\$3423
New Zealand	NZ\$1	COP\$1917
UK	UK£1	COP\$4668
USA	US\$1	COP\$3026

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Dorm bed** US\$8
- ➔ **Set lunch** US\$3
- ➔ **Beer in a bar** US\$1.50-2
- ➔ **Local bus ride** US\$0.60

Resources

- ➔ **ProExport** (www.colombia.travel)
- ➔ **El Tiempo** (www.eltiempo.com)
- ➔ **Colombia Reports** (www.colombiareports.com)