

Bogotá



Cradled by cool Andean peaks and named after a nearby ancient site, Colombia's engaging capital is a city of 1000 neighborhoods – each adding a different take on a lively metropolis. On one hand, Bogotá is still slowly recovering from an enduring perception as a dangerous hot bed of drugs and street crime; at the same time it's a surprising leader in forward-thinking progressive projects. On Sundays 122km of roads are closed to cars and left for more than a million locals to enjoy on bikes, while the recently built TransMilenio bus system purposely connects posh 'fantasy land' neighborhoods in the north with working-class ones in the south.

Most visitors here gravitate to the cobbled historic center – La Candelaria – where senators lunch at restaurants housed in 300-year-old homes that reinvent themselves as drinks-only venues after hours for the lively (left) student scene. Most traditional attractions are here – radiating out from Plaza de Bolívar – and gorgeous Cerro de Monserrate is just east.

It's a very different scene up north, where you'll find boutique hotels, safe strolls after dark, and well-heeled locals piling into chic districts like Zona Rosa. The flip side of the city, of course, is the grittier south and southwest. These barrios get a bad rap, and some aren't altogether safe to visit, but areas like the cheerful Cuadra Picha club zone welcome all.

Then at night Bogotá's steady flow of drinks will make you light-footed. Try a hot mug of *canelazo* (aguardiente, sugarcane, cinnamon and lime), which comes sugar-coated and filled with the local spirit. Or indulge in the city's one great unifier and dunk a chunk of white cheese right into your hot chocolate. Hey, it's the one thing every *bogotano* seems to agree on.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ogle evidence of the country's El Dorado myths with the glittering displays in the **Museo del Oro** (p77)
- Add cheese to your hot chocolate – a Bogotá tradition – in a La Candelaria cafe, such as **La Puerta Falsa** (p83)
- Take a Sunday trek, among the pilgrims, up the towering **Cerro de Monserrate** (p76) for a sweeping view of the capital
- Ponder all things plump at the (free!) **Museo Botero** (p72)
- Hit Bogotá's club scene – there's one for everyone: camp drag shows at **Vinacure** (p88), live coastal-style vallenato shows at **Gaira Café** (p87) or a working-class club ghetto at **Cuadra Picha** (p88)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 01

■ POPULATION: 8 MILLION

■ ELEVATION: 2574M

HISTORY

Long before the Spanish Conquest, the Sabana de Bogotá, a fertile highland basin which today has been almost entirely taken over by the city, was inhabited by one of the most advanced pre-Columbian Indian groups, the Muisca. The Spanish era began when Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada and his expedition arrived at the Sabana, founding the town on August 6, 1538 near the Muisca capital, Bacatá.

The town was named Santa Fe de Bogotá, a combination of the traditional name, Bacatá, and Quesada's hometown in Spain, Santa Fe. Nonetheless, throughout the colonial period the town was simply referred to as Santa Fe.

At the time of its foundation Santa Fe consisted of 12 huts and a chapel where a mass was held to celebrate the town's birth. The Muisca religious sites were destroyed and replaced by churches.

During the early years Santa Fe was governed from Santo Domingo (on the island of Hispaniola, the present-day Dominican Republic), but in 1550 it fell under the rule of Lima, the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru and the seat of Spain's power for the conquered territories of South America. In 1717 Santa Fe was made the capital of the Virreynato de la Nueva Granada, the newly created viceroyalty comprising the territories of present-day Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador.

Despite the town's political importance, its development was hindered by the area's earthquakes, and also by the smallpox and typhoid epidemics that plagued the region throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

After independence the Congress of Cúcuta in 1821 shortened the town's name to Bogotá and decreed it the capital of Gran Colombia. The town developed steadily and by the middle of the 19th century it had 30,000 inhabitants and 30 churches. In 1884 the first tramway began to operate in the city and, soon after, railway lines were constructed to La Dorada and Girardot, giving Bogotá access to the ports on the Río Magdalena.

Rapid progress came only in the 1940s with industrialization and the consequent peasant migrations from the countryside. On April 9, 1948 the popular leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated, sparking the uprising known as El Bogotazo. The city was

partially destroyed; 136 buildings were burnt to the ground and 2500 people died.

Tranquil life in Bogotá was rocked again on November 6, 1985 when guerrillas of the M-19 revolutionary movement invaded the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and made hostages of the 300-plus civilians in the building. By the next day, 115 people were dead, including 11 supreme court judges.

In the past decade or so, Bogotá has made many surprising advances – murder rates are down by a reported 70%, and a host of progressive projects under successive mayors (eg the 300km of CicloRuta bike lanes).

CLIMATE

Bogotá is the third-highest capital in South America, after La Paz and Quito. It sits at an altitude of about 2600m; at this height altitude sickness can occur. You may feel a bit dizzy when you arrive. Take it easy for a day or two – it should soon go away. See p325 for more information.

The main dry season lasts from December to March, and there is also a second, less dry period with only light rainfall from July to August. The wettest months are April and October. The mean annual rainfall is about 1020mm.

The city's average temperature is 14°C year-round. The temperature drops to about 9°C at night and rises to around 18°C (higher on sunny days) during the day. In the rainy season there is less difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures.

ORIENTATION

Sprawling Bogotá stretches mostly north-south (and west in recent years) with the towering peaks of Monserrate and Guadalupe providing an easterly wall.

Locating an address in the city is generally a breeze. Calles run east-west, rising in number as you go north, while Carreras go north-south, increasing in number as they go west (away from the mountains). Handily, any street address also indicates the nearest cross streets; Calle 15 No 4-56, for example, is on 15th Street between Carreras 4 and 5.

The bulk of visitors stick with two major areas of Bogotá – Central Bogotá and Northern Bogotá.

Central Bogotá has four main parts: the partially preserved colonial sector La Candelaria (south of Av Jiménez and between Carreras 1