

Medellín & Zona Cafetera



Welcome to *país písá – písá* country. Settled by Europeans attracted by the fertile soil and moderate mountain climate, it is a region of coffee plantations and flower farms, lush cloud forest and vibrant student towns, and the busy metropolis of Medellín. It is a jewel in the crown of Colombia, and not to be missed.

In Medellín, the country's second city, towers soar skyward, with ambition matched only by its inferiority complex – Chicago to Bogotá's New York. It is an attractive city that seduces most travelers instantly, with its just-perfect climate, green spaces, great restaurants, museums and public art work, and thumping discos.

The three main towns of the Zona Cafetera are Manizales, Pereira and Armenia. The principal business interests here are coffee, manufacturing and university students – there are a dozen universities between the three towns. It is a region of fantastic biodiversity, and the nature reserves are stunning. The *písás* (people from the department of Antioquia) are sharp-eyed entrepreneurs, descendants of self-sufficient small farmers, not slave-owning plantation owners. They work hard and are proud of what they've achieved.

Parque Nacional Natural Los Nevados is a highlight of any visit here, a high-mountain refuge of mostly extinct volcanoes whose peaks soar above 5000m. You can visit the snow line from Manizales or spend the night on the *páramo* (high-mountain plains) in a tent or in the comfortable cabins of El Cisne. You can take a mountain-biking tour through the park, and there are mountaineering opportunities on the peaks for those suitably equipped.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the nature parks around Manizales – **Los Yarumos, Reserva Ecológica Río Blanco & Recinto del Pensamiento** (p223) – brimming with local orchids, hummingbirds and butterflies
- Bathe in the thermal springs at **Termales de Santa Rosa** (p230) as waterfalls crash nearby
- Sample the many fine restaurants and bars in **Medellín** (p210), and stroll along the bustling city's **Milla de Oro** (p205)
- Spend the night in **Río Claro** (p219), your hotel room open to the jungle, the river roaring below
- Crane your neck to see the tops of the majestic wax palms in the cloud forest of the **Valle de Cocora** (p237)



Climate

The climate in the region is a pleasant, permanent springtime. The altitude of the region varies from a low of 1410m in hot Pereira to a chillier 2150m in Manizales, with Medellín somewhere in the middle at 1494m. You will want to pack shorts and a hat for daytime, and trousers and a sweater for nighttime. And be sure to bring along an umbrella – when it rains here, it pours.

National, State & Regional Parks

The big daddy of national parks here is Parque Nacional Natural (PNN) Los Nevados, which soars above 5000m. Recinto de Pensamiento, Los Yarumos and Reserva Ecológica Río Blanco, outside of Manizales, boast beauti-

ful species of orchids and butterflies. East of Pereira are Santuario Otún Quimbaya and Parque Ucumari. Armenia's botanical gardens are well worth a visit, as is the stunning Valle de Cocora, and its majestic wax palms, outside Salento.

Getting There & Away

Medellín and Pereira airports both receive international flights. The region is well serviced by buses to Bogotá, Cali and the Caribbean coast.

Getting Around

You should have no problem getting around using the region's frequent, cheap bus services.

MEDELLÍN & ZONA CAFETERA

