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Tour Notes

The Secret Heart of Colombia

Tour Duration – 17 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●●○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Visit vibrant Bogota and the Candelaria neighbourhood
- ✓ Discover the subterranean Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá
- ✓ Explore atmospheric and picturesque villages that embody the Colombia spirit and culture
- ✓ Stroll the amazingly preserved colonial relics of Popayan's historic streets
- ✓ Learn about coffee cultivation in the Coffee region, the core of the Arabica-growing region
- ✓ Take in the breath-taking and unique landscapes of the Cocora Valley and Tatacoa Desert
- ✓ Marvel at the little-known archaeological mysteries of San Agustin
- ✓ Optional extensions: north to Cartagena, Santa Marta & Tayrona NP





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Tour Maps



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Comfortable hotel accommodation with private bathrooms
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size: Maximum 12
Start Point: Bogota – you can arrive any time on day 1
End Point: Bogota - for the main tour – evening departure on day 17
Cartagena if taking the Caribbean extension – depart anytime
Transport: Minibus or similar vehicle although this will be determined by the group size
Country Visited: Colombia
Extensions Santa Marta/Cartagena



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The Secret Heart of Colombia

Colombia is rapidly emerging from its reputation as the bad boy of Latin America to show its true colours as one of the most exciting corners of the continent. Put aside what you've read about Colombia's murky past: for those willing to step beyond the stereotypes, the country offers a breathtaking array of world class attractions that are sure to leave an enduring imprint on the souls of all who visit. On this overland journey of discovery we take a trip back into the past, exploring both the magnificent colonial heritage of the capital Bogota, Villa de Leyva and Filandia, as well as unearthing pre-Columbian culture at the extraordinary site at San Agustin. We spend time in the famed coffee zone, experiencing rural life set amidst a dazzling array of spectacular scenery and jaw-dropping natural beauty. One of the most bio-diverse nations on the planet, the entire trip offers sights, sounds, smells and tastes that will overwhelm even your highest expectations and leave you bemused as to why this is such an unfrequented corner of the Americas. Join us to explore Colombia and become a convert to the joys of this welcoming and enigmatic nation.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not merely passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies, it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK: we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. You will have a driver and an English-speaking guide from Day 1 to 16 and different English-speaking local guides from Day 17 to the end of your tour. Please note that for groups up to 3 travellers, a combined driver/guide will be used.

For the Cartagena/Tayrona extension the services of different local English-speaking guides will be used.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Bogota

Arrive in Bogota and transfer to the hotel, located in the historic heart of the city. The rest of the day is at leisure to either explore or relax. If you have arrived early you may wish to visit the interesting Gold Museum which is very close to the hotel, housing one of the most important collections of pre-Hispanic metallurgy in the world, offering an insight into this lucrative but controversial activity which has brought wealth, war and fortune-seekers to Colombia's shores for many centuries. Overnight at Hotel Casa de la Vega or similar. No meals are included today.

Bogota

Colombia's capital was established as a Spanish settlement by conquistadors in the 16th century, displacing the indigenous Muisca population that for 2,000 years had farmed the plateau on which the city now stands. Following independence from Spain in the 19th century it became capital of a federation of states that included Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela, eventually settling for being capital of just Colombia. As with many cities in Latin America, Bogota has a rich architectural heritage and nowhere is this more apparent than in the historic quarter of La Candelaria, with its cobbled streets winding between brightly coloured colonial buildings and its contrastingly wide boulevards. Once renowned as one of the most violent cities in the world, in recent years Bogota has undergone a tremendous and most welcome transformation as social policies



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have made the city a far safer place – forget what you have heard and come to experience the reality of a bustling, modern metropolis, imbued with vestiges of a rich cultural past.

Day 2: Bogota sightseeing

Spend the first full day on tour in Bogota exploring this vibrant city on foot and by vehicle. Firstly take a guided walk around La Candelaria – the historical centre of Bogota with colonial and baroque style buildings and cobblestone streets and plazas, and visit the Emerald Museum which catalogues the country's rise to being the world's largest emerald producer (make sure you bring ID) and then the San Francisco Church, a sixteenth century delight which still draws pilgrims as the oldest Christian site in the city. Continue to the Paloquemao for a visit to the bustling and colourful public market, essentially an authentic farmer's market on an epic scale: a genuine cornucopia of foods and eating places, wander through the myriad of stalls and perhaps sample an *arepa* or *pan de bono*. Continue for spectacular views of Bogota City from one of its mountainous peaks at the Monserrate monastery, a seventeenth century shrine to 'The Fallen Lord'. Overnight at Hotel Casa de la Vega or similar (BL)

Day 3: Bogota - Zipaquirá – Raquira - Villa de Leyva (Overall approximate driving time today: 4 hours)

Drive to the famous Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, carved into the tunnels of a salt mine, and experience the surreal journey into the heart of the mountain's holy site. From here, continue as far as the charming village of Raquira, famous for its handicrafts and pottery. After a short break to admire local craftsmen's skills, continue to the beautifully preserved and traditional town of Villa De Leyva, characterised by its clusters of white-washed colonial-style buildings and sweepingly elegant central square. Overnight at Hotel & Spa Getsemani or similar. (BL)

Zipaquirá

The 'Salt Cathedral' of Zipaquirá is both unique and extraordinary: it is carved into the walls of an ancient salt mine, once exploited by the Muisca Indians as early as the 5th century, 200 metres inside a mountain. Although not officially a cathedral, it attracts worshippers every Sunday, and its interior consists of winding passages and rooms, with fourteen small chapels representing the Stations of the Cross.

Starting off life as a small chapel for the miners, the construction of the present-day cathedral involved the extraction of 250,000 tons of stone from the mine. Colombia's most famous artists have contributed to the various side chapels which culminate in the soaring main church, with its 21 metre high roof and the focal point of an exquisitely carved 'floating' 15 metre-high illuminated cross. Deep below the religious edifice, the mining still goes on and a combination of tourism and salt-extraction makes Zipaquirá a relatively wealthy town. Nowadays the passageways throng with an eclectic mix of pilgrims and curious visitors, the former of which swell to number many thousand during Semana Santa, or the Christian Holy Week leading up to Easter.

Villa de Leyva

Nestling against the slopes of the high Andes which thrust colossally into the dramatic clouded slopes that loom it, Villa de Leyva is one of the most picturesque towns in Colombia, if not all Latin America, with gorgeously well-preserved colonial buildings, cobbled streets and a tradition of excellent handicrafts. Standing at over 2100m above sea-level, the town is an excellent place to while away a few hours exploring, watching the world go by from pavement cafes and getting lost in its circuitous backstreets. In particular, visitors are drawn to experience the huge central Plaza Mayor, reputedly the largest cobbled square in South America, where time seems to stand still: empty cobbled expanses, an idiosyncratic well and the surrounding terracotta-roofed buildings lend an air of the sixteenth century and a sense of abandonment. In fact, the town has maintained much of its original charm and tranquillity owing to a lack of mineral deposits nearby and the relative aridity of the surrounding desertified landscape.



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Day 4: Villa de Leyva Sightseeing

Spend the morning exploring Villa de Leyva, visiting the central plaza with its churches, restaurants and handicraft shops. Take a guided walk through its atmospheric streets, many boasting huge cobblestone paving that boast colourful bougainvillea spilling from balconies, patios, courtyards and white-washed buildings with pan-tiled roofs. Continue to the "Santo Ecce Homo" Dominican convent, constructed in 1620 by the Spanish from local stone, studded with a profusion of fossils. The site offers a real window on the colonial era and religious missions from Europe. Having passed through the delightful gardens, within you will find a dozen beautiful galleries adorned with religious art and impressively informative guide materials. Later, continue to the extraordinary Museo el Fósil, which houses the 7-metre-long remains of a crocodile-like ancestor, the Kronosaurus, dated between 100 and 150 million years old, and beached here when the whole area lay on the shores of a tropical sea. Finish the tour at the Casa de Terra Cotta, claimed by architect Octavio Mendoza to be the largest piece of pottery in the world. Explore the whimsical rooms inside, fashioned entirely from clay, baked hard by the sun. The afternoon is at your leisure to further discover this charming town. Overnight at Hotel Hotel & Spa Getsemani or similar (BL)

Day 5: Villa de Leyva – Tunja – Bogota – Girardot (Overall approximate driving time today: 5.5 hours)

Leaving Villa de Leyva behind, drive back towards Bogota taking an alternative scenic back-road via Tunja, capital city of the department of Boyacá. Stop at the most important monument in Colombian history: the Boyacá Bridge, a tiny, white-washed stone crossing which belies its national significance. On that site Simón Bolívar won his most decisive battle against Spanish settlers which directly paved the way for independence from the Spanish Empire and the establishment of 'Gran Colombia'. On arrival back in Bogotá, pay a visit to the foundation of Hogar de Paz and learn about their vital work to shelter and support adolescents with family difficulties by supporting them via community projects. Finally, continue south to Girardot. Overnight GH Relax Hotel Club el Puente or similar (BLD)

Girardot

Girardot is a city with over 100.000 inhabitants located on a plain beneath the Cordillera Oriental uplands, about 3 hours southwest of Bogotá. The modern city only dates from the nineteenth century; prior to that the region was rural, with goat farming the main agriculture.

Despite its relative proximity to the capital city, Girardot enjoys a year-round tropical and hot climate which attracts tourists from Bogotá especially on the weekend, escaping the capital's often high precipitation. The Parque de la Locomotora, home to the antique tourist train, is a pleasant spot near the river and the main plaza and modern cathedral, ideal for an ice cream and photography of the Magdalena River.

Day 6: Girardot – Villavieja/Tatacoa Desert (Overall approximate driving time today: 3.5 hours)

After breakfast start the journey to Neiva along the reliable tarmac of Route 45 which gradually gives way to narrower roads alongside which are villages with clusters of houses amidst scattered woodland approaching Villavieja, a little village close to the Tatacoa Desert. In the afternoon we take a trip through the arid scrub where we will pass the labyrinthine profusion of eroded dry gullies in ochres and greys which make for some stunning photographic opportunities. We continue to Neiva where we spend the night. Overnight at Hosteria Matamundo or similar (BL)

The Tatacoa Desert

The Tatacoa Desert is located very close to Neiva in the department of Huila. It is a striking landscape of eroded cliffs and gullies, sculpted by the infrequent, but sometimes substantial rain. Once you are amidst the surreal pinnacles of sand and soil and the copious canyons that wind where water once flowed chaotically, the dry, clear air becomes a real feature. Incidentally, this combination of air quality, lack of light pollution and location in close proximity to the equator, makes Tatacoa a great spot for stargazing – the skies above both the Northern and Southern hemispheres are spread out for all to see. Despite its appellation, Tatacoa isn't a true desert, although the thermometer states otherwise – it can hit 50°C at times! It's technically a semi-arid dry tropical forest, whose vegetation comprises of succulents and thorny bushes. The name Tatacoa is taken



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from an now extinct snake-like reptile which the Spanish discovered here; in its place there is still an impressive range of flora and fauna to watch out for: scorpions, snakes, cacti, and up to 72 different species of birds in the area, such as Great caracara, American kestrels, Blue ground-doves and Shining-green hummingbirds and the wonderfully-named and ubiquitous Pearly-vented tody-tyrants.

Day 7: Villavieja - San Agustín – Excursion to Rio Magdalena (Overall approximate driving time today: 5 hours)

We leave Villavieja in the early morning and drive through a vivid landscape, rising through dramatic mountain-scenery with the Rio Cabrera and then the Rio Ambica as constant companions. As the route winds around the edges of hills and wooded ridges, near the archaeological hotspot of Colombia –San Agustín. We spend the next two nights imbibing the splendour of the area and its archaeological wonders. In the afternoon we drive to the famous Rio Magdalena Strait. Here, the longest river in Colombia narrows to a raging torrent just two metres wide. Returning to San Agustín, we visit a 'trapiche' traditional factory producing unrefined panela sugar from sugar cane. The rest of the day is at leisure to relax or explore independently. Overnight at Akawanka Lodge or similar. (BL)

Day 8: San Agustín Archaeology

Spend today exploring the village of San Agustín and its Archaeological Park, which comprises three main sites: Las Mesitas, the Fuente de Lavapatas, and the Bosque de Las Estatuas, all of which will astound and bemuse you in equal part. The visit ends with a fascinating visit to the Archaeological Museum which will provide fascinating context to what was seen throughout the day. The rest of the afternoon is at leisure to enjoy the tranquillity of the hotel. Overnight at Akawanka Lodge or similar (BL)

San Agustín

San Agustín is an isolated village in the upland southern department of Huila, about 230km from the nearest population centre at Neiva. Originally founded in 1752 by Alejo Astudillo, the village has seen some dramatic moments of violence during the colonial era: successful attacks by indigenous people destroyed it entirely and it wasn't until 1790 that Lucas de Herazo y Mendigaña managed to re-establish a permanent village.

The climate here is gentle, averaging around 18 °C year-round which has clearly made it highly attractive to a series of different races and tribes through the ages. Amazingly, the extraordinary and unique abundance of archaeological sites that have survived beyond the pre-Columbian peoples' demise remain largely uncelebrated and the incredible culture which produced these religious relics in such profusion is as yet unnamed and still demands a huge amount of research. The larger area, known as San Agustín Archaeological Park, has several areas worthy of a lengthy visit: Las Mesitas is an amazing conglomeration of burial mounds, terraces, funerary structures and idiosyncratic squat stone statues; the Fuente de Lavapatas is a ritualistic site, unusually carved into stone bed of a stream where aced washing seems to have taken place; the wooded Bosque de Las Estatuas site is again a collection of a rich array of examples of stone statues from the area, with huge heads, hunched shoulders and unmistakably Mayan-Aztec-Inca-styled carved features. In recent years, the number of visitors has grown and the sites generate significant revenue to the economy. In 1995, UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site.

Day 9: San Agustín – Isnos - Popayan (Overall approximate driving time today: 4.5 hours)

After breakfast, continue to Popayan stopping at Village Isnos where nearby we will observe some impressive tombs and statues at Alto de Los Idolos, dating from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD. In all, 16 tombs and 17 sculptures were built on an ambitious man-made platform between two hills. The region's largest funerary statue, at 7m tall is also to be found there. Continue traversing the beautiful Puracé National Natural Park, named after the active volcano in this stunning mountainous region. Experience the unforgettable landscape of the Andean cloud forest where the road winds and climbs through lush vegetation which tumbles thick and steaming down the hillsides. On its fringes, pass through the little-known landscape of the Paramo: residing between exposed mountain-sides and forest, this wetland offers incredible biodiversity from



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over 200 orchid species, rare trees such as the Colombian Pine, Andean Oak and Wax Palm, and animals worth keeping a beady eye out for – like spectacled bears, cougars, howler monkeys, mountain tapir and the world's smallest deer, the pudu. The sharp-eyed visitor may also spot circling Condor in the skies above. We expect to arrive in Popayan – known as The White City – around midday. This afternoon, take a walking tour to discover what the city has to offer. Overnight at Hotel La Plazuela or similar (BL)

Popayan

Popayan is the capital of the Cauca department. Founded by the Spanish conquistador Sebastian de Belalcazar in 1537, the city is located in the Valley of Pubenza between the Western and Central Cordillera in the southwest of the country. In the early Spanish era, its central location and mines meant that it produced gold and silver coinage for the country. The old and historic centre of Popayan is considered one of the most beautiful and best preserved in Colombia as well as in all of Latin America. After suffering badly in the earthquake of 1983, the city has rebuilt substantially and boasts many cultural attractions. The oldest of these, El Morro del Tulcán, is an ancient pyramid of uncertain origins; elsewhere, European settlers have dominated the landscape: the bell-tower and Catedral Basílica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción lie in the central area, but the city is dotted by exquisite churches, dating back as far as 1546. The city was also awarded the status of UNESCO City of Gastronomy owing to its slavish dedication to local cuisine; a visit to one of the many eateries here is a must. The miniscule 'La Fresa' is a renowned example, selling scrumptious handmade potato and peanut empañadas.

Day 10: Popayan – Silvia – Timbio - Popayan

After breakfast we visit Silvia, where on Tuesdays, the indigenous Guambiano people come together dressed in their royal blue and fuschia native costumes to offer and buy their products at the market and to converse with one another. This takes place at the famous market in Silvia, which creates a special opportunity to see and meet these ancestral groups that are so fiercely proud of their culture. Depending on the length of the visit, we either have lunch in Silvia or back in Popayan, before we continue to Timbío, one of the few places where the silk production, which was initiated by the state about 40 years ago, still persists. Here, the entire production process – from cultivating the mulberry leaves to the production of the silk threads – is entirely in women's hands. We are welcomed by the strong women whoshow and tell us everything about their daily work on a tour through the mulberry fields, the nursery and pupating stations of the silk worms, as well as the final processing of the raw silk. After a delicious local snack and a visit of the local silk craft store, we head back to Popayán. Overnight Hotel La Plazuela or similar (BL)

Day 11: Popayan - Buga - Qimbaya (Coffee Region)

Today we leave Popayan and head towards the Coffee Region, where we stop in Buga, where the famous Basilica del Señor de los Milagros is located – founded to celebrate the miracle of the gift of a crucifix from the local river to a generous and pious old woman. We then continue on to our charming hotel in the coffee region. Overnight Hotel Vila Nora or similar (BL)

Day 12: Excursion Cacao Tour – Cacao Finca (approx.. duration 6 hours)

We leave our hotel towards the city of Armenia. In case of bad weather we change to Willy jeeps to make our way to Hacienda Evelyza, where we visit the plantation of different native and non-native varieties of cocoa. The owner of the Hacienda shares his profound knowledge of the cultivation, history and culture of cacao. During the tour through we taste various cacao fruits, and see how the grafts for no new seedlings are made. Finally we arrive at the main house where we experience the fermentation-, drying- and artesanal grinding-process. After tasting a delicious, selfmade hot chocolate, we return to our accommodation. Overnight Hotel Vila Nora or similar (BL)



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Day 13: Qimbaya – Alarcá – Manizales

Today we take it easy and enjoy the grounds of the finca in the morning, before we drive north towards Manizales. On the way we stop at a typical “trapiche”, where sugar cane is processed to raw sugar cane blocks called “panela”. Panela is used in every Colombian household and is a great alternative to white sugar. We either have lunch close by or continue to our final destination of Hacienda Venecia in the outskirts of Manizales. Overnight Hacienda Venecia or similar (BLD)

Day 14: Manizales – Half Day Coffee Process

Spend the morning learning about the fascinating life and culture of those who inhabit the coffee region and learn about the complex process that transforms the humble coffee bean into one of Colombia’s most renowned exports as well as enjoying tastings of the farm’s product (this tour is shared by other visitors to the Hacienda). This afternoon will be at leisure for you to relax or explore further. Overnight at Hacienda Venecia similar (BL)

The Coffee Zone

For most people, the area where coffee is produced forms the beating heart of Colombia, its cultural epicentre. Indeed Colombia, the third largest coffee producer in the world, grows more Arabica beans than any other nation on earth. To the first time explorer, the landscape itself seems magical: the sinewy roads through the rolling hillsides are laden with coffee plantations and each new turn offers you a fresh and spectacular panorama. The landscape produces crops teetering on the edge of plunging valleys which give way to broad terraces with dizzying views across this incredible scenery. Campasino (‘rural life’) continues unabated as it has done for generations: the locals harvesting coffee, plantains and many other fruits in this verdant and luxuriant land. Three departments make up the Triangulo Del Café: they run in a North-South line, following the Central Andean Cordillera. Caldas is the most northerly of the departments, followed by Risaralda and, most southerly, Quindío. The pristine snow-capped peaks of the Parque Natural Los Nevados gaze solemnly down from the east and the climate is accordingly one of extremes: cold air from the lofty ridges meets the warm humidity of the Rio Cauca, the region’s largest river. The watercourse has its source in the high mountains of Cauca, thence to its merging with the Rio Brazo and then the Rio Magdalena further north.

Day 15: Manizales – Honda (approx. driving 4 hours)

After a leisurely morning we leave Manizales and head to the quaint little city of Honda for two nights. Overnight Hotel Casa Belle Epoque or similar (BL)

Day 16: Honda

Today take a half day walking tour through this historic river town, founded in 1643, located directly at the Magdalena River. Visits include the market (plaza de mercado), the puente Navarro Bridge, some colonial houses and the “Museo del rio”. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight Casa Belle Epoque or similar (BL)

Day 17: Honda – Bogota Departure (approx. driving time 4 hours)

Today we drive back to Bogota via the central Andes mountains. Upon arrival and at a suitable time you will be transferred to the airport for your departure flight (B)

Optional Post Tour Extension – Santa Marta/Cartagena and Tayrona National Park

Day 17: Honda - Bogota – Santa Marta (Domestic flight)

Transfer to the airport for the internal flight to Santa Marta. On arrival transfer to the hotel and the rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight at Finca Barlovento or similar. (B)



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Santa Marta

Founded in Colombia on July 29, 1525 by the Spanish conqueror Rodrigo de Bastidas, Santa Marta is located between the Sierra Nevada, which contains the highest summits of the country and the Caribbean Sea. Therefore visiting this city is a great way to discover the variety of fauna and flora of the area, as well as the cultural and historical sites the city offers. Simón Bolívar died here on an estate called Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino on 17 December 1830 on the outskirts of the city. Santa Marta not only boasts excellent tourism infrastructure, but also acts as a great starting point to explore the untouched beaches of Tayrona National Park and the “Ciudad Perdida”, or Lost City, which lies at around 1300 meters above the sea in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

Day 18: Full Day Excursion - Tayrona National Park

This morning depart Santa Marta for Tayrona National Park and take the interesting coastal road eastwards until we reach the eastern entrance of the Park after about a 1 hour drive. From the Cañaveral area where the entrance is located, we start a hike through the tropical forest past idyllic palm fringed beaches until we reach Arrecifes (1h. approx). Here we take a short break to enjoy a refreshing natural juice. We continue our hike for a further 1 more passing by beautiful beaches like Arenillas, La Piscina and Cabo San Juan Beach, where we have time for some swimming and just relaxing to enjoy this stunning place. Late this afternoon return to the hotel. Overnight at Finca Barlovento or similar (BL)

***Note:** The walking is an easy grade with a height gain of around 150 metres in total but trails can be more challenging especially after rain so good footwear is recommended. Also please be aware that this section of coastline is subject to strong currents and tides. Therefore, swimming is limited to certain beaches and on occasions can close without warning if conditions dictate. Please note the park can be hot and humid and so we recommend that you take adequate water for the walk and also be well protected from the sun, ideally wearing a hat. It is also advisable to be wearing insect repellent for a visit to the park.*

Tayrona National Park

Tayrona has some of the most beautiful coastal scenery in South America, with palm fringed beaches and rocky headlands making it a superb place to explore. Traditionally home to the Kogui Indians, it is one of the most biologically diverse stretches of coastline in Latin America and contains several species of monkeys, wild pigs, and various species of reptiles and many birds.

Day 19: Santa Marta

Today is spent at leisure. Overnight Finca Barlovento or similar (B)

Day 20: Santa Marta – Cartagena (Overall approximate driving time is 4 – 5 hours)

After breakfast journey along the Caribbean coast to Cartagena where colonial chic meets Caribbean flair, old city walls and fortresses bear witness to gold treasures and pirates, and pebbled alleys, green plazas and colourfully painted facades carry us away and right into the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The perfectly restored historic town is a UNESCO world heritage site and is best explored slowly on foot, by horse carriage or by bicycle. On arrival the rest of the day is at leisure to start to enjoy the maze of cobbled streets. Later, perhaps enjoy a sundowner on the historic city walls and allow your gaze to wander over the terracotta roofs towards the shimmering expanse of the Caribbean Sea. Overnight at Hotel 3 Banderas or similar (B)

Cartagena

Cartagena, founded in 1533, is named after the Spanish home town of many of the sailors who settled here. It soon became a major trading port, not least in the commerce of slavery, and became the target of attacks from numerous pirates and privateers prowling the Caribbean Sea in the 16th and 17th centuries, and then later from the British navy. Cartagena is absolutely packed full of exquisite architectural gems and has been



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designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With horse-drawn carriages plying its streets and fantastic views out to the ocean, Cartagena is incredibly atmospheric and is rightly considered to be one of the highlights of a trip to Colombia.

Day 21: Cartagena sightseeing

After breakfast, take a half-day guided tour to see the most important monuments in Cartagena. Start at the Convent of La Popa (the highest point of the city) and continue to the Castillo de San Felipe, an immense fort filled with history and mysteries hidden in its stonewalled tunnels. Leaving the castle, visit the monument of Zapatos Viejos, the "Old Shoes". Certainly the most impressive monument is the gigantic defensive wall that surrounds the old city, and overlooks the sea and its well-preserved colonial architecture. During the rest of the visit you will see the city's churches, museums, plazas, restaurants, shops and jewellery stores. This combination of treasures makes Cartagena deserving of the title of UNESCO World Heritage Site: You will never forget this wonderful destination. The afternoon is at leisure to enjoy the city further or relax at the hotel. Note: During this tour, the visit to La Popa can be replaced by the visit to San Pedro Claver Convent. Overnight at Hotel 3 Banderas or similar (B)

Day 22: Cartagena at leisure or optional activities

Your last full day in Colombia can either be spent at leisure or alternatively you may wish to take a further excursion (not included) perhaps to Isla San Pedro de Majagua for swimming and snorkelling and to enjoy the fine beaches or perhaps take a cooking class in Cartagena preceded by a visit to the local market. There is also the option to visit the small active Totumo Volcano and bathe in its therapeutic mud pools. Overnight Hotel 3 Banderas or similar (B)

Day 23: Departure from Cartagena

Time at leisure until transfer to the airport on due time for your onward journey. (B)

Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure airport transfers
Transportation throughout the tour
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guide/tour leader from Day 2 to Day 16 on the main tour
Local guides on Pacific and Cartagena extension
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary
Internal flights on the Pacific Coast (Cartagena extension (single ticket Bogota – Santa Marta))

Excluded:

International flights to Colombia
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visa if applicable
Drinks
Tips (Discretionary)



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Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to the areas of Colombia that we visit. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals.

One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.



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Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Latin America. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. If you are travelling in a group tour, then around 5,000 to 10,000 pesos per person per day is reasonable for a guide, and probably about half of this for a driver. If you are travelling privately, then roughly double these amounts are reasonable.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Colombia's towns and cities are well equipped with ATMs

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted throughout Colombia

Local Currency: Peso (COP)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollar

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you on arrival

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.



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Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals do not require a visa for a short-term tourist visit to Colombia.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance. Contact details can be found by visiting the following websites.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Latin America, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. A yellow fever vaccination may also be advised.

The use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended, and we recommend that you take professional advice about malaria prophylactics.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

If your trip includes a visit to Tayrona National Park then you should ensure that you have been vaccinated against Yellow Fever, and bring your certificate with you. This may be checked by authorities when you arrive.



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Preparing for your tour

Climate

The best time to visit Colombia is in the summer months of December to March, and mid-June to mid-August. Please note however that rain showers can be experienced at any time in tropical Colombia. In particular the Pacific coast extension can be particularly wet and humid.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared and to be adequately immunized with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. Colombia is one of the most biodiverse nations on the planet so you may wish to take a pair of binoculars on the tour.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended. Lighter shoes or sandals are fine for travelling between destinations.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable. You will only be allowed to take 10kg if you are taking the Pacific Coast extension but it is possible to leave luggage in Medellin.

Daily driving times

Note that the approximate driving times in the itinerary are given in good faith, but should only be used as a guide. The driving times stated are overall driving times and do not take into account stops for sightseeing, comfort breaks or photo opportunities.

Electric Supply & Plugs

The electrical supply in Colombia is 110v, and plugs tend to have two vertical prongs. We recommend that you bring a multi-adaptor.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 2 November 2022.