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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 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 breathtaking and unique landscapes of the Cocora Valley and Tatacoa Desert
- ✓ Marvel at the little-known archaeological mysteries of San Agustin
- ✓ Experience the melting pot of cultures in vibrant Medellin
- ✓ Optional extensions: the tropical Pacific Coast or north to Cartagena, Santa Marta & Tayrona NP

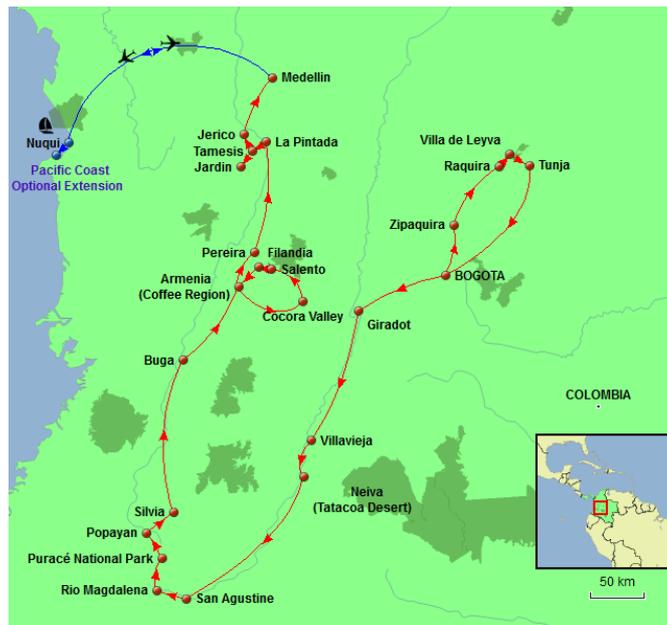




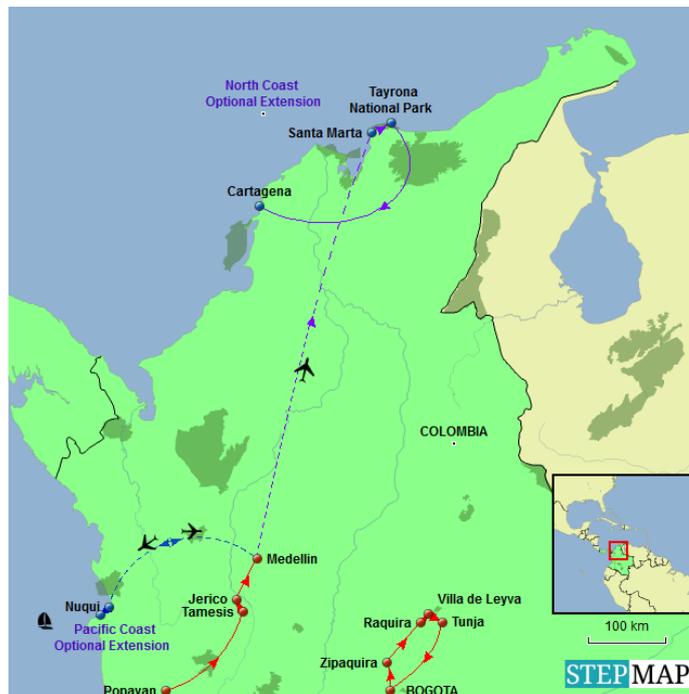
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## Colombia Maps

### Main tour with optional Pacific Extension



### Both optional extensions in blue





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## 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  
**End Point:** Medellin for the main tour and Pacific extension or Cartagena if taking the Caribbean extension  
**Transport:** Minibus or similar vehicle although this will be determined by the group size  
**Country Visited:** Colombia  
**Extensions** Pacific Coast or Santa Marta/Cartagena

## 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.

The Pacific extension is unguided and any arranged activities from the lodge will be accompanied by staff from the lodge itself. For the Cartagena/Tayrona extension the services of different local English-speaking guides will be used.



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# 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 Deco 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 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 Deco 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 Hospederia La Roca 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.



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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.

### **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 Hospedería La Roca 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 Hotel at GHL Style Girardot 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.



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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. Overnight in Villavieja at Hotel Yararaka 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 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 Agustin – 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 Agustin. 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 Agustin, 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 Agustin archaeology**

Spend today exploring the village of San Agustin and its Archaeological Park, which comprises three main sites: Las Mesitas, the Fuente de Lavapatatas, 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 Agustin**

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.



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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 sacred 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 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 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 – Buga - Salento (Coffee Region) (Overall approximate driving time today: 7 hours)**

After breakfast, depart Popayan, continuing towards the Coffee Region, stopping en-route in 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. After the visit, continue towards the coffee region with another short stop in Buga, where the famous Basílica 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.



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Later this afternoon arrive in Salento, located at the heart of the Coffee Region, our base for the next three nights. Salento, a picturesque village in the coffee zone, which, owing to its relative isolation, retains much of its traditional buildings and charm: colourful streets and a fascinating Aldea de los Artisanos where village craftsmen astound with the skills of their trade. Overnight at Salento Real or similar (BL)

### Salento

Salento is located in the Coffee Triangle, roughly 300 km west of Bogotá. Surrounded by beautiful landscapes, nature and ancient cultures, the region is a key player in Colombia's rich coffee culture. For anyone interested in nature and culture, Salento and the Quindío department will surely be a highlight of their trip.

### Day 11: Excursion in the coffee zone culture

Spend the morning learning about the fascinating life and culture of those who inhabit the coffee region. Visit the coffee plantations of a coffee finca close by 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 afternoon will be at leisure for you to relax or explore further. Overnight at Salento Real or similar (B)

### 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 12: Salento - Valle de Cocora – Filandia – Salento (Overall approximate driving time: 2 hours)

With breathtaking landscapes, the Cocora Valley is one of the most beautiful valleys in Colombia. Here, one can observe the impressive Palma de Cera – the 'wax palm', the official Colombian national tree and one of the tallest species of palm in the world. The valley is scattered liberally with these towering, skinny telegraph pole-like trunks, topped by small spherical explosions of palm leaves. We will take a leisurely 2 hour walk to immerse ourselves in the splendid scenery. On the way back to Salento, stop in the charming town of Filandia with its colourful examples of colonial architecture, atmospheric Bolivar square and numerous coffee shops. Upon return in Salento, there may be time to wander up the coloured stairs to the mirador to enjoy a spectacular view or try out the explosive local game of Tejo. Overnight at Salento Real or similar (BL)

### Valle de Cocora

The valley sits amidst the Central Cordillera of the Andes and is named after a Quimbayan princess, and means "star of water". Visitors come from afar to view the prolific Palma de Cera which scatters across the emerald dairy pastures on the floor of the valley. The presence of the tree is, at least in part, what led to the foundation of the Los Nevados National Natural Park: felling of palms is strictly illegal and a nursery for saplings has been established. Trekking, birdwatching and rafting on the Rio Quindío also attract visitors and local delicacies such as plantain fritters and trout have become a speciality of the valley.



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The climate is temperate and most days you can expect the mercury to hit the high teens centigrade. One key feature of the area is the excellent wildlife viewing: puma, mountain tapir, sloth and spectacled bear are amongst the mammals and the birdlife includes Yellow-eared parrots, Slaty brush-finch, Black-billed mountain-toucan, Condor, Quindio jay and over 15 species of hummingbirds can be seen. Locally, the latter species are encouraged with sugar-feeders and you will be entranced by their proximity if you pause for a coffee.

### **Day 13: Salento - Tamesis (Overall approximate driving time today: 5 hours)**

Journey this morning to Tamesis, a town in the southwestern region of Antioquia. The route follows well-cultivated rolling hills and offers constant photo opportunities. Pass through bustling towns like Pereira with the Rio Cauca a constant feature dominating the valley floor. Latterly, from La Pintada, the road climbs steadily and becomes more shaded by trees until you reach Tamesis at just over 1600m. On arrival, the rest of the day is at leisure to relax after the drive. Overnight at Hospedaje Vegas del Rio or similar (BL)

### **Day 14: Tamesis – Chocolate and Archaeology full day tour – Tamesis (Overall approximate driving time today: 1.5 hours)**

In the morning, visit an organic cacao plantation and learn more about the process of chocolate production, the harvesting and processing – from the tree to the cup. The family-run cacao farm produces organic chocolate and the owners passionately observe the traditional sustainable way of cacao farming. Take the opportunity to try your hand at making your own chocolate. This afternoon, enjoy spectacular views over the vastness of the Cauca River Valley and return to explore the idyllic mountain village of Tamesis, known as the Green Coffee Balcony, and renowned for its history, birdlife and waterfalls. Accompanied by a local guide, visit the archaeological sites. Tamesis is celebrated as one of the places with the greatest density of indigenous pre-Hispanic petroglyphs (rock art) in Colombia. Your expert guide will help you to observe different types of petroglyphs and to learn some of their significances. As a location which sees few foreign tourists, the locals are particularly welcoming and helpful. At the end of your tour, you return to Tamesis for the night. Overnight at Hospedaje Vegas del Rio or similar (BL)

### **Day 15: Tamesis - Jerico - Medellin (Overall approximate driving time today: 4 hours)**

After breakfast, drive to Jerico and take a walk in the town centre. Explore the historic centre of Jerico with its traditional facades and visit the village museum, which explains the pre-Columbian culture through a comprehensive exhibition of archaeological findings in the region. Visit a workshop of carriel, the typical leather bags used by local people. Continue to the Botanical Gardens and the Cristo Rey monument, a 27m high statue of Christ, erected to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Colombian civil War of a Thousand Days. From this lofty perch, enjoy the amazing views of the town and the surrounding mountains, valleys and rivers. Continue to the vibrant city of Medellin, our base until the end of the tour. Overnight at La Campana Boutique Hotel or similar (BL)

#### **Jerico**

Displaying a total of 16 chapels, Jerico is considered one of the most beautiful towns in Antioquia. The Paisa people are famously the most hospitable in Colombia and a stay here is truly a delight. Everywhere, the pueblo smacks of tradition: religious devotion is to the fore, no more so than in the dominant statue of Cristo Rey, whilst the Catedral Virgen de las Mercedes (in the main town square), Capilla San Francisco and Santuario del Inmaculado Corazón de Maria Jerico are especially splendid Catholic churches. Jerico is also famous for its love of the arts and crafts and for the manufacture of small leather goods: museums, and indeed art and pottery classes are all free here and there is a robust local school of artists. This sense of civic pride abounds – the houses are stunning (a local bylaw demands that all residents use at least three colours to decorate their facades!) and free history lessons are offered, such is the eagerness of the town to tell its tale. The surrounding area is heavily agricultural, farming coffee, avocados, oranges, cardamons, cattle – the list seems endless, whilst cowboys on horseback are a common sight in the streets. The main square, Parque Reyes, is the perfect spot to decamp to and watch the locals go about their lives.



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Equally, the food scene here is excellent, with scores of small, friendly cafés serving local dishes. Be sure to try out the 7 layered Postre Jericano, a delicious dessert-cake which alternates fruit and sponge soaked in rum.

### Medellin

Medellin, the capital of the department of Antioquia, is located in north western Colombia and lies cradled in the Aburra Valley, bisected by the Medellín River which runs north to south. With its year-round warm temperatures, it is also known as the “City of Eternal Spring”. With about 3 million inhabitants, Medellin is the second largest city of the country. Once in the grip of drug cartels, the transformation of the city and its inhabitants is nothing short of incredible: investment in education, health and a superb infrastructure has led to an explosion of positive cultural outcomes: voted in 2013 as the most innovative city in the world by The Wall Street Journal, and beating off Tel Aviv and New York, Medellin attracts a huge variety of international festivals: the Flower Fair, Food Festival, Poetry Festival, The Festival of Christmas Lights, The Medellín Film Festival and the International Poetry Festival, to name but a few. The city is also the hometown of the internationally acclaimed artist Fernando Botero, whose works adorn the cityscape, from the 23 statues in Botero Plaza to the exhibition of his paintings in Museo de Antioquia.

### Day 16: Medellin sightseeing

After breakfast, take in the important sights of the “City of Eternal Spring” (the city tour is approximately 4 hours). Explore downtown Medellin and the historic centre and listen to local musicians and the traditional Guasca music while visiting the Parque Berrío. Continue through the hustle and bustle of downtown Medellin to the famous Botero Plaza with an exhibition by Botero, whose inimical sculptures have become a landmark of the city. We then take the Metro Cable up to Santo Domingo, which had once been a notorious area of gang violence in Medellin. The cable car was constructed to make the inner city more accessible to people from the outskirts, and allows visitors a glimpse into the lives of the marginalised population. While enjoying the spectacular views, learn more about the transformation of Medellin from one of the most dangerous cities in the world into a fascinating melting pot of cultures with possibly the friendliest and warmest people in the world. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight at La Campana Boutique Hotel or similar (BL)

### Day 17: Departure from Medellin

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

## Optional post tour extension - Pacific Coast

### Day 17: Medellin – Nuquí (Domestic flight)

Take an internal flight from Medellin to Nuquí and on arrival transfer by way of a simple motor boat for around 45 minutes to your idyllic but rustic eco-hotel accommodation for the next 3 nights. Overnight at Hotel La Kuka. (BLD)

**Note – This is very much a retreat to nature and you will have limited or no Wi-Fi at all and phone signal is patchy in this remote part of Colombia.**

### Nuquí

Nuquí is located in the department of Chocó, in the Western part of Colombia between the mountainous area of Baudó and the Pacific Ocean. Nuquí has great ethnic and cultural diversity as well as a huge variety of flora and fauna. It is a good starting point for expeditions to the rainforest, perhaps to look for the 147 species of birds on offer here, with lodges offering a range of guided tours. Furthermore it is ideally situated for scuba diving: at certain times Humpback whales are your companions in the water, whilst turtles, dolphins and a plethora of fish species are very easy to encounter, despite there being no reefs.



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With an annual rainfall above 10,000 cm<sup>3</sup>, the 1,300 km long Pacific Coast of Colombia is one of the most humid regions on the planet. To the north, where the Baudó Range falls into the ocean forming exquisite coves and stunning headlands, the Colombian Pacific rainforest contains a truly impressive biodiversity. The southern part is less undulating and is characterised by a network of rivers, though some eye-catching cliffs punctuate the coastline. Mangroves border the beaches in the Colombian Pacific rainforest and lend the visitor enviable proximity to one of nature's most fascinating and prolific landscapes. This is the ideal destination for "eco-tourists" and those that simply enjoy a tranquil escape, immersed in the incredible array of natural wonders.

### **Internal flights to the Pacific Coast**

*Please note that the luggage allowance for the internal flights is 10kg, plus hand luggage. You can arrange for luggage to be left at the hotel in Medellin.*

### **Days 18 and 19: Pacific Coast at leisure**

Spent these days at leisure or take a relaxing walk to the Waterfall of Love or the local village (included with a bilingual guide). Alternatively, there are a host of other excursions to suit all interests and energy levels, all bookable from the lodge at extra cost. These include hiking in the rainforest, visiting the indigenous Chori tribe, canoeing the mangroves or Rio Terco, surfing, kayaking, paddle boarding or whale watching (seasonal: usually end of June – early November). Overnight at Hotel La Kuka (BLD)

### **Day 20: Nuqui – Medellin (Domestic flight)**

Transfer back to Nuqui by boat; then take the internal flight back to Medellin before the connection to your onward flight. If you wish, you can add extra nights in Medellin on request. (B)

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

### **Day 17: Medellin – 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 Casa Tayrona Los Naranjos or similar. (B)

### **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 Casa Tayrona Los Naranjos or similar (BL)



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**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 – 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 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 20: 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 21: 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)



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## Day 22: 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 (return ticket Medellin – Nuqui - Medellin) or Cartagena extension (single ticket Medellin – Santa Marta)

### Excluded:

International flights to Colombia

Any airport taxes

Travel Insurance

Visa if applicable

Drinks

Tips (Discretionary)

# Important Information

### Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). 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.



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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.

### **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.



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## 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.

### Visa Information

Visas are not required by most nationalities, including UK, EU and US citizens. However, we recommend that you check with your nearest embassy for the most up to date details.

### 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](http://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.



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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.

## 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.



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### **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 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

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