

Colombia

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Colombia stretches from Caribbean beaches to Amazon rainforest, Andean peaks, and Pacific jungle, all inside one country. Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali anchor the Andean interior, while Cartagena and Santa Marta open onto the Caribbean coast. The legend of El Dorado, a mythical king said to cover himself in gold dust, drew Spanish conquistadors here for centuries and still explains why Bogotá's Gold Museum holds the world's largest collection of pre-Columbian gold. After decades of conflict, Colombia has become one of South America's most visited countries, though safety still varies sharply by region.

Colombia suits travelers who want many different experiences in one trip: colonial architecture in walled Cartagena, salsa nightlife in Cali, coffee-farm stays in the coffee region, and multi-day treks to Ciudad Perdida or Caño Cristales. It works well both for first-time South America visitors who stick to the main cities and the coffee region, and for more adventurous travelers heading into the Amazon or the Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia.

Money & payments

Prices are quoted in thousands, so a coffee might cost 5,000 and a dinner 60,000 — the extra zeros feel unfamiliar at first, but the value is small. Cards are accepted at most restaurants and hotels in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena; keep cash for taxis, small vendors, and towns off the main tourist route. ATMs (cajeros) are widely available in cities — withdraw indoors at a bank branch or shopping mall rather than a street-corner machine, which is a more common target for theft.

Currency

CURRENCY	1 COP	1 COP
$	0.000272 EUR	0.000305 USD
COP	1 EUR = 3,677.1 COP	1 USD = 3,275.02 COP

Cards accepted in major venues

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range hotel, double room	150,000 – 350,000 $ €41 – €95
Dinner (mid-range restaurant) restaurant meal for one	40,000 – 90,000 $ €11 – €24
Inexpensive meal set lunch menu ("menú del día")	15,000 – 25,000 $ €4 – €7
Local beer	4,000 – 8,000 $ €1 – €2
Coffee	3,000 – 6,000 $ €1 – €2
Water 500 ml bottle	1,500 – 3,000 $ €0 – €1
Transit ticket	2,500 – 3,200 $ €1 – €1
Taxi (per km)	1,600 – 2,200 $ €0 – €1

Tipping

Tipping follows a system called propina voluntaria (voluntary tip): at restaurants, staff ask if you want to add a tip, usually around 10%, before bringing the card machine over — you can decline without any awkwardness. Taxis don't expect a tip; rounding up the fare is enough. Tour guides, especially on coffee-farm or multi-day hiking trips, rely on tips as a real part of their income, so budget for it.

Restaurant ~10%, often offered as "propina voluntaria" on the bill — you can decline	Optional
Taxi round up the fare	Not customary
Hotel 5,000–10,000 COP for porters or housekeeping	Optional
Tour guide 20,000–50,000 COP per person	Expected
Bar	Not customary

Electricity

Colombia uses Type A/B plugs at 110 V / 60 Hz, the same as the United States and Canada. Travelers from Europe or the UK need a plug adapter, and some higher-power devices may also need a voltage converter.

ELECTRICITY



Type A

ELECTRICITY



Type B

110 V · 60 Hz

Language

Spanish is Colombia's official language. Outside hotels, tour operators, and higher-end restaurants in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena, English is not widely spoken. Learning a few basic Spanish phrases helps a lot, especially in smaller towns and rural areas.

Useful phrases

Hello	Hola
Thank you	Gracias
Please	Por favor
Yes	Sí
No	No
Goodbye	Adiós
Excuse me	Disculpe
Sorry	Lo siento
How much?	¿Cuánto cuesta?
Where is...?	¿Dónde está...?
Help	¡Ayuda!
Cheers	¡Salud!

Staying connected

Prepaid SIM cards (Claro, Movistar, Tigo) are sold at the airport and in shopping malls; buying one requires your passport for registration. Coverage is strong in cities, the coffee region, and along the Caribbean coast, but drops in remote parts of the Amazon, the Pacific coast, and high mountain areas. An eSIM from an international provider is a simpler option if you don't need a local number.

Safety & emergencies

Most visits to Colombia's main cities and tourist routes are trouble-free, but petty theft, such as phone and bag snatching or pickpocketing on buses, is the most common problem in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena's Old Town. Use official taxis or ride-hailing apps rather than hailing a car on the street, and avoid displaying phones or jewelry openly on public transport. A small number of rural regions, mostly

near the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders and parts of the Pacific coast, still see armed-conflict-related activity; check current travel advisories before heading off the main tourist routes.

Emergency numbers

✱ GENERAL EMERGENCY
123

Health

Tap water is treated to safe standards in Bogotá and other major cities, but stick to bottled or filtered water in smaller towns, rural areas, and the Amazon. Pharmacies are common in every city, and pharmacists can often help with minor ailments without a doctor visit. Bogotá sits 2,640 meters above sea level, and some visitors feel mild shortness of breath or fatigue for the first day or two. Travelers heading to the Amazon or the Pacific coast should check with a doctor about yellow fever vaccination and malaria precautions before the trip.

Visas & entry

Citizens of the United States, Canada, the UK, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and most Latin American countries can enter Colombia without a visa. They receive up to 90 days on arrival, extendable once for a total of 180 days within a calendar year. Travelers from countries without a visa-free agreement, including China, India, and Russia, need to apply for a tourist visa online in advance.

> Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

Colombians are generally warm and informal, but a handshake or a light cheek kiss on one cheek is the standard greeting, even between new acquaintances. Dress modestly when visiting churches: no shorts, and cover your shoulders. Bargaining is expected in craft markets and with street vendors, but not in shops with marked prices. Ask before photographing people, especially in indigenous communities such as those encountered on the Ciudad Perdida trek or in the Amazon.

Holidays & opening hours

Colombia observes many public holidays, and several are shifted to the following Monday to create a long weekend even when the original date falls elsewhere in the week. Expect banks, offices, and many shops to close on these days, though malls and restaurants in tourist areas usually stay open. Shops generally open Monday to Saturday from around 9:00 to 19:00, with many closing for lunch in smaller towns; Sunday hours are shorter, especially outside the big cities.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
May 1	Labour Day
Jul 20	Declaration of Independence
Aug 7	Battle of Boyacá
Dec 8	Immaculate Conception
Dec 25	Christmas Day
movable — Nov	All Saints' Day
movable — May/Jun	Ascension Day
movable — Aug	Assumption of Mary
movable — Oct	Columbus Day
movable — May/Jun	Corpus Christi
movable — Jan	Epiphany
movable — Mar/Apr	Good Friday
movable — Nov	Independence of Cartagena
movable — Mar/Apr	Maundy Thursday
movable — Jul	Our Lady of Chiquinquirá Day
movable — Jun/Jul	Sacred Heart
movable — Mar	Saint Joseph's Day
movable — Jun/Jul	Saint Peter and Saint Paul

Getting around

- **By air**: distances and mountain terrain make flying the fastest way between distant regions — Bogotá to Cartagena, San Andrés, or Leticia in the Amazon can take a full day by road but only around two hours by air. Avianca, LATAM, and budget carriers Wingo and JetSmart cover most routes.
- **By bus**: an extensive intercity coach network connects almost every town, and it is the most common way to travel between nearby cities. Mountain roads mean journeys take longer than the distance suggests — Bogotá to Medellín is around 400 km by road but takes 8–9 hours to drive.
- **By taxi and ride-hailing**: Uber, InDriver, and Cabify all operate in Colombian cities and are the easiest way to get a fair-priced ride; in Bogotá, Uber trips are arranged in-app rather than flagged down on the street.

Driving

- **Key rules**: seatbelts are mandatory for all occupants, and using a handheld phone while driving is illegal. Night driving on rural mountain roads is best avoided — they are winding, poorly lit, and shared with slow-moving trucks.
- **Pico y placa**: most large cities restrict cars from driving on certain days based on the last digit of the license plate, aimed at easing congestion — check local rules before driving into Bogotá, Medellín, or Cali on a weekday.
- **Parking**: paid parking lots (parqueaderos) are common in city centers and generally safer than street parking; look for one with an attendant.
- **Fuel**: stations are normally attended — hand your card or cash to the attendant rather than pumping yourself. Card payment is widely accepted at fuel stations in cities, though carrying cash is safer in smaller towns.
- **Electric vehicles**: charging infrastructure is still limited outside Bogotá and Medellín, so renting an EV for a road trip is not yet practical in most of the country.

URBAN	RURAL	MOTORWAY
60 km/h	80 km/h	100 km/h

PETROL	DIESEL
Corriente, Extra	ACPM, Diesel

Drive on the right

No motorway vignette needed

Intercity highways use per-station toll booths (peajes), not a vignette. Pay cash at any booth, or use an electronic TAG (the Colpass network, sold under brands like FacilPass or GoPass) for faster passage. A rental car may already come with a TAG — ask when you pick it up.

Food & drink

Colombians eat their largest meal at lunch, typically a set menu called ejecutivo or corrientazo: soup, a main with rice, beans, and salad, and juice, all for a fixed, low price. Breakfast is light, often just arepas or bread with coffee, and dinner tends to be smaller than lunch. Meal times run later than much of Europe, with lunch from around 12:00 to 14:00 and dinner rarely before 19:00.

Each region has its own specialties. The Andean interior favors hearty, meat-heavy dishes built around rice, beans, and plantain, while the Caribbean coast leans toward coconut rice, fish, and seafood. Street food is common in every city: roasted corn, empanadas, and skewered meats from carts are a normal part of daily eating, not just a tourist experience.

Coffee culture runs deep, though the best export-grade beans have traditionally been sold abroad — look for a specialty café in Bogotá, Medellín, or the coffee region to try Colombia's own high-grade coffee. Fresh tropical fruit juices, made from fruits with no direct English name like lulo, guanábana, and maracuyá, are a highlight worth trying wherever you see a juice stand.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Arepa
Grilled or toasted cornmeal cake, eaten at breakfast plain or filled with cheese or eggs.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Empanada
Fried cornmeal pastry filled with meat, potato, or cheese.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Buñuelo
Deep-fried cheese bread ball, traditionally a Christmas treat now eaten year-round.

DRINKS

Tinto
Small cup of black coffee, part of Colombia's everyday coffee culture.

Aguardiente
Anise-flavored spirit, the country's most popular drink for celebrations.

Lulo juice · Jugo de lulo
Tart, refreshing juice made from lulo, a tropical fruit grown in the Andes.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Bandeja Paisa
Hearty plate of beans, rice, ground beef, chorizo, fried egg, plantain, and avocado, from the Antioquia region.

Ajiaco · Ajiaco santafereño
Bogotá's chicken and potato soup, flavored with the local guascas herb and served with corn, cream, and capers.

Lechona
Whole roasted pork stuffed with rice and peas, a festival specialty especially from Tolima.

Colombia – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning
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Where to explore

Colombia's essential stops fall into a few clusters. In the Andean interior, Bogotá is the high-altitude capital with the country's best museums, Medellín pairs a mild climate with cable-car transit and a booming food scene, and Cali is known across the country as its salsa capital.

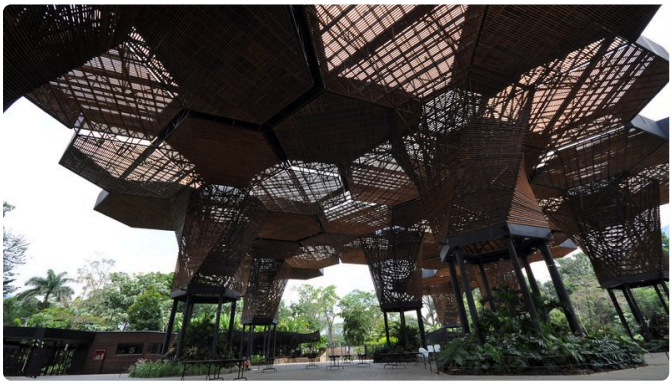
On the Caribbean coast, walled Cartagena is a UNESCO World Heritage city and the country's top Caribbean draw, Santa Marta is the gateway to Tayrona National Park and the Ciudad Perdida trek, and Barranquilla hosts one of the world's largest carnivals every February. The islands of San Andrés add a Caribbean beach escape with a distinct Creole culture.

For a slower pace, coffee-region town Salento is the base for visiting the wax palms of the Cocora Valley. Guatapé is known for its brightly painted houses and a nearby rock formation with sweeping views. Colonial Villa de Leyva centers on one of South America's largest cobblestone squares. Whitewashed Popayán is known for its Holy Week processions.

Colombia's Absolute Essentials

Colombia’s landscape spans from the Amazon River’s biodiversity to the high-altitude wax palms of Valle del Cocora. This collection features Medellín’s urban landmarks, including the 14-hectare Botanical Garden and the brick-built Metropolitan Cathedral. Natural wonders include the multicolored Caño Cristales river and the therapeutic mud baths of El Totumo volcano near Santa Catalina. Cultural sites like Cali’s Bichacue Yath sanctuary and Medellín’s illuminated Parque de Las Luces highlight the country's blend of environmental conservation and modern public architecture.





A Botanical Garden of Medellín

The Joaquin Antonio Uribe Botanical Garden of Medellín, more simply known as the Botanical Garden of Medellín, is a 14-hectare botanical...

(Unnamed Road), Jardin Botanico, Colombia
(6.27006, -75.56413)

Mo–Su 09:00–16:30

botanicomedellin.org



B Metropolitan Cathedral of Medellín

The Metropolitan Cathedral of Medellín, officially the Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception is a Catholic cathedral...

56-48 Carrera 49, Villa Nueva, Colombia
(6.25406, -75.56391)



C El Totumo Mud Volcano

El Totumo Mud Volcano is an active mud volcano located near sea level in northern Colombia in the municipality of Santa Catalina.

(Unnamed Road), Colombia (10.74451, -75.24125)



D Caño Cristales

The Caño Cristales is a river located in the Serranía de la Macarena, an isolated mountain range in Meta Department, Colombia.

Colombia (2.26417, -73.79439)



E Mirador Valle del Cocora

Overlooks the Cocora Valley, home to the Quindío wax palm, Colombia's national tree. The area features high-altitude cloud forests and serves as a gateway to Los Nevados National Natural Park.

Salento, Colombia (4.64072, -75.56685)



F Berrío Park

Berrío Park is an urban plaza located in the geographical heart of Medellín, Colombia.

51-51 Carrera 50, La Candelaria, Colombia (6.25004, -75.56817)



G Parque de Las Luces

Located in Plaza de Cisneros, this urban square features a forest of 300 light poles standing up to 24 meters tall. The installation illuminates the city center at night near the EPM Library.

53-6 Calle 45, Guayaquil, Colombia (6.24605, -75.57230)



H Amazon River

The Amazon River in South America is the largest river by discharge volume of water in the world, and the disputed longest river system in...

(-4.11494, -70.06272)

I Casa Elemento Viewpoint

Located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains near Minca, this viewpoint is known for its oversized hammocks offering panoramic views of the surrounding jungle and the Caribbean coastline.

(11.10460, -74.11675)



J Bichacue Yath - Arte y Naturaleza

An environmental sanctuary in the Pance region of Cali dedicated to moss conservation and environmental education. The site features artistic installations depicting mythical creatures integrated into the native forest landscape.

Colombia (3.45452, -76.63462)

bichacueyath.jimdo.com

Colombian Peaks and Volcanoes

Colombia's topography is defined by the Andes and isolated massifs. This list includes the Nevado del Huila, the country's highest volcano at 5,364 meters, and the active Cumbal stratovolcano in Nariño. In the north, the El Totumo mud volcano offers a unique geothermal feature near the Caribbean coast. Urban peaks like Medellín's Cerro El Volador provide protected green space, while remote ranges like the Serranía de Macuira and the Serranía de San Lucas harbor high-altitude cloud forests and diverse ecosystems.





A El Totumo Mud Volcano

El Totumo Mud Volcano is an active mud volcano located near sea level in northern Colombia in the municipality of Santa Catalina.

(Unnamed Road), Colombia (10.74451, -75.24125)

B El Volador hill

The Metropolitan Regional Natural Park Cerro El Volador is the largest natural park located within the metropolitan area of Medellín,...

(Unnamed Road), Cerro el Volador, Colombia (6.26803, -75.58166)

C Nevado del Huila

Nevado del Huila at 5,364 metres, is the highest volcano in Colombia, located at the tripoint of the departments of Huila, Tolima and Cauca.

Colombia (2.92921, -76.02804)

D Cumbal Volcano

Cumbal is a stratovolcano of the Caribe Terrane, located at the Nudo de los Pastos in Nariño, Colombia.

Colombia (0.95568, -77.88673)

volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm

E Serranía de Macuira

Serranía de Macuira is a mountain range in northern Colombia located in the municipality of Uribia, La Guajira.

Colombia (12.12919, -71.34072)

F Serranía de San Lucas

The Serranía de San Lucas is a forested massif in the Bolívar Department of northern Colombia that reaches heights of 2,600 m above sea...

Colombia (8.13647, -74.27976)

G Loma La Paja

Mountain peak located in the Boyacá department of central Colombia.

Colombia (5.62398, -72.66249)

H Cerro De Uchuvitas

High-altitude peak situated in the Boyacá department.

Colombia (5.54143, -72.60036)

I Cerro Murciélago

Prominent elevation in the Guainía department near the Inírida River.

Colombia (2.51085, -68.14832)

J Monte Siriape

Isolated peak in the Vichada department within the Orinoquía region.

Colombia (4.18167, -70.87639)

K Alto La Pedregosa

Mountain ridge located in the Caquetá department on the edge of the Amazon basin.

Colombia (1.69348, -75.39499)

L Alto La Culebra

Significant elevation in the northern Antioquia department.

Colombia (7.21444, -75.33250)

M Loma del Cuchillo

Hill located near the border of the Chocó and Antioquia departments.

Colombia (7.50000, -76.91667)

N Cerro de Leonera

Peak located in the Boyacá department of the Colombian Andes.

Colombia (5.68333, -73.20000)

O Cráter

Volcanic crater associated with the Cumbal volcano complex in the Nariño department.

(0.95040, -77.89674)

P Cerro Buenavista

High-altitude lookout point located near the Cumbal volcano in Nariño.

(1.01667, -77.81667)

Q Monachí

Part of the Serranía de Naquén range in the Guainía department.

Colombia (2.20854, -68.22296)

R Serrania De Naquen

Ancient mountain range in the Guainía department, part of the Guiana Shield geological formation.

Colombia (2.16666, -68.22332)

S Cerro Mapiripana

Distinctive peak located in the Guainía department near the Guaviare River.

Colombia (2.77624, -70.44733)

T Cerro Tabla

Flat-topped mountain formation in the Guaviare department.

Colombia (1.70811, -71.24719)

Colombian Coastal Treasures

This collection highlights coastal destinations and regional seafood hubs across Colombia. It features the sandy shores of Sisiguaca and the boat-accessible Playa Grande near Santa Marta. Culinary highlights include Caribbean-inspired seafood at Bianchas and Galapagos, while La Plaza de San Pedro provides a food hall environment with local dishes, pizza, and burgers. The list also includes Acopio de Pescado, a specialized market for fresh regional fish.



A Playa Sisiguaca

Sandy beach located on the Caribbean coast near Santa Marta.

Colombia (11.27104, -74.19962)

viajesantamarta.com/infoplayas/82-playa-sisiguaca.html

B Playa Grande

Extensive beach area near Taganga, accessible via a coastal hiking trail or local boat services.

Colombia (11.27116, -74.19686)

C Bianchas

Restaurant specializing in Caribbean and regional seafood cuisine, including traditional fish dishes.

(6.29103, -75.57163)

Mo–Su 07:00–21:00

restaurantebianchas.com, +57 4 4743774

D Galapagos

Regional restaurant featuring local fish preparations and traditional Colombian coastal flavors.

(8.42368, -76.78742)

E La Plaza de San Pedro

Food hall featuring a variety of vendors serving Caribbean cuisine, pizza, and burgers.

(11.22913, -74.17388)

Mo–Su 18:00–23:00

F Acopio de Pescado

Specialized shop and market for fresh regional fish and seafood.

(-0.61725, -72.38196)

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