



COLOMBIA HIGHLIGHTS

Colombia is the country that has everything you could need from a South America holiday.

Diverse people and landscapes make this a country rich in wildlife, landscapes and culture.

Hikers can choose to trek to glaciers on snow-capped peaks, or through steamy forest to hidden ruins, or to unique Paramó plains.

Cyclists can pedal over and around the Andean peaks that dominate, and adventure seekers can try anything from paragliding to canyoning.

Beach lovers can enjoy surfing and relaxing with a Colombian twist, or head to islands for a more Caribbean twist. Prefer wildlife? Try the Pacific coast and its whales and turtles, or perhaps the Amazon and its calls of the wild.

The cities are cosmopolitan and cultured, replete with incredible museums with enormous collections.

Below are just some more of the highlights that incredible Colombia can offer.

Bogotá and nearby

La Candelaria is the main attraction for most, with its colourful winding streets, coffee shops and artisanal stores. The Gold Museum (Museo de Oro) houses one of the world's most important and impressive collections of pre-Colombia work - a must-see among the many excellent museums here.

Bogotá's culinary reputation is growing, too, as international cuisine and local chefs combine the spectacular varieties of fruits and vegetables Colombia offers.

Culturally you will find good live music, excellent exhibitions and very hospitable people. Try the street fruits and juices as well.

Close by to Bogotá is The Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, an underground Roman Catholic church built within the tunnels of a salt mine 200 metres (220 yd.) underground.



Bogotá street scene

Some three hours away from Bogotá is Villa de Leyva. The cobble Plaza Mayor is the largest plaza in Colombia at 14,000 square metres.

Pacific coast

Spectacular and rarely visited, the Pacific coast offers excellent whale watching as well as walks and wildlife in the dense tropical rainforest that grows from the coastline.

The calm warm waters are replete with whales and newly born calves from June to October, and house turtles and an abundance of fish.

Plenty of migratory birds make this their home, too, and the forests are full of monkeys, sloths and more. Try an eco-lodge stay at **Nuqui**.



Spectacular mountains and people



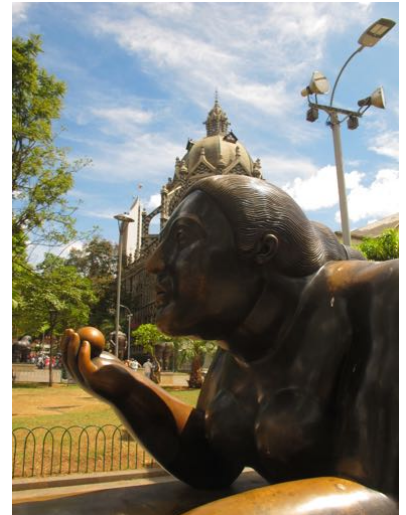
Medellín

Big, bustling and shaking off its Pablo Escobar past, Medellín is becoming the city to visit in Colombia.

Botero is one of Colombia's most famous artists. A visit to Plazoleta de las Esculturas to see 20 of his large bronze sculptures is essential, as is a look around the Museo d'Antioquia, showcasing his paintings and also fantastic Colombian modern art.

A good quality metro system makes Medellín very easy to move around. Public transport and telefericos can take you quickly up into the mountains for gorgeous views.

Medellín is also famed for its nightlife and **El Poblado** provides options for all tastes, or perhaps catch a free concert in **Parque de los Deseos**.



Botero sculptures, Medellín

Famous treks - Lost City / Los Nevados

Los Nevados rise from the fertile Cocora coffee region into a range of great bio-diversity.

The unique Paramó grounds await those that climb through cloud forests that are replete with the sounds of a myriad of humming birds. The Paramó and its frailejones are as delicate as they are special and only the privileged few get to see them. Push further on and you may glimpse the snow-capped, active and dramatic Nevado del Ruiz volcano.

We have a variety of routes that pass by ancient tombs of the indigenous folk who lived here before the farmers arrived. You combine camping with stays at remote 'fincas' where the people who work the land still cling onto their way of life.

The **Lost City trek** takes you into the steamy Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserve.

Your target is the Lost City, a collection of houses and ceremonial area, built by the Tayrona people between 1600-1650 to house around 2,000 people.

It's a stunning walk through one of the world's highest, most ecologically diverse coastal mountain ranges. The highest point is Pico Cristóbal Colón, the highest mountain in Colombia, at 5,790 metres and with permanent snow cover and 42 km / 30 miles from the coast.



Wax palm, Colombia's national tree, Cocora

Valle de Cocora

Gigantic Wax Palm trees thrust up to 60metres from earth to skyline from **Cocora**, one of Colombia's most popular and interesting sites.

This is the main coffee production in the country and also features great food, a lovely climate and some fantastic trekking and cycling.

Visit a coffee plantation, trek Los Nevados, enjoy the cloud forest and some incredible lodging in Cocora, an open green valley that gives way to spectacular and dominant Andean mountains.



Caribbean Coast

Parque Nacional de Tayrona

La Ciudad Perdida, 'The Lost City', is one of Colombia's most famous sites and challenging treks.

Palomino is fast becoming the place to stay on the coast. There are a number of accommodation choices overlooking the sea. Weary travellers are known to rest up here for days that turn into weeks, as good weather and chilled-out vibe are hard to break away from.

The main town is Santa Marta, which lulls to the sound of musicians and singers entertaining people drinking on café terraces, as the languid evenings lull you to enjoy Santa Marta's plazas and streets.



El Pueblito, Tayrona National Park

Within Parque Nacional de Tayrona, a sweaty hike up to 'El Pueblito', an indigenous village still inhabited on occasion, is the highlight for many. There are some lovely beaches to stay at and visit, the best being La Piscinita and Cabo de San Juan.

Cartagena de las Indias

Writers, painters and now travellers flock to Cartagena, a wonderful colonial port and symbolic of Colombia's upturn in fortunes.

Cartagena's **city wall** wraps itself around historic churches, plazas and narrow streets. Fruit sellers, dancers, musicians and more all give the city a vibrancy that is reflected in the colourful and famous literature of the area.

The old ways runs alongside the modern as the very best in 5* hotels and top-end restaurants sit on streets whose taxis are horse-drawn carriages. A trip to the dominating castle **San Felipe de Barajas** is well worthwhile.

Getsemani, a former no-go area outside the city walls, has a more 'barrio' (neighbourhood) feel and is a great place to wander at night time, looking for a lovely bar in which to have a drink, look at its street art

For those wanting a sense explosion, visit **Bazurto market** (take a taxi). Chaotic, enormous, frenetic and often smelly - this is the place for real travellers to see the underbelly of Cartagena, away from its glistening lights.

San Andres and Providencia

Located some 500 miles/800km from the Colombia coast, these two islands are more Caribbean than Colombian and have their own cultures and feel.



Providencia sea and views

Providencia is the more remote and smaller of the islands, but more than makes up with fantastic snorkelling by perfect reefs in turquoise seas, laid back people and beautiful beaches and some good diving.

You can hike to a stunning viewpoint, A full circuit of Providencia by bike lasts only an hour, but there are relaxing bars, fresh fish to eat and the sounds of the waves waiting around each corner.

San Andres is the busier of the islands because Colombians fly in regularly to take advantage of its duty free status. Head south away from the main town, also called San Andrés, and you'll find more relaxing places.

You have to fly to San Andres, and from here take either a 3-hour, and often bouncy, catamaran to Providencia, or take a 20-minute flight.



San Augustin

The hills around **San Augustin** are verdant and full of coffee plantations, sugar cane and fruit trees.

The smell of sugar cane production weighs on the crisp air in this heavily farmed region.

It's a great area for day hikes (or go by horse, or car) that lead you from one archaeological wonder to another: El Purutal, La Tablón and La Chaquira.



Making sugar cane (panela)

The parks Parque Arqueológico, Alto de los Idolos and Alto de la Guacas showcase giant ancient sculptures up to seven metres tall, some very humanlike, others rather monstrous.

Salto Mortiño waterfalls offer a beautiful viewpoint over the remarkable topography of this little-visited but worthwhile area of Colombia.

San Gil + Baricharra

Two towns close together and yet offering diametrically opposite experiences.

San Gil is the Colombia's adventure sport capital. Choose to raft the excellent Rio Suarez (grades 2-4+), climb rappel, kayak bungee - you name it, you can find it.

The nearby **Baricharra** is one of Colombia's best-kept colonial towns. Perched atop a hill overlooking the river Suárez, it has barely changed in centuries. People wander lackadaisically, sometimes eating the local delicacy of ants, mostly just passing the time.

There are lovely sunsets to enjoy and a 2-3 hour walk through villages on an old Inca path, called the **Camino Real**, down to the even sleepier village of Guane.

El Cocuy National Park

El Cocuy National Park is a trekker's ideal. Sweeping valleys, dramatic ice-capped peaks and basic but cosy refugios mean 3-8 days' of top trekking are possible.

You can choose to hike one, two of three parts of the basic W shape of treks available in this 3,000m² park, which features more than 15 peaks over 5,000m+/16,400ft+.



This means that the walks are high, starting at 3,800m+ and sleeping at that height, which also makes them a great challenge to relish.

You can reach the glacier on the dramatic El Pulpito (4,800m) and look down into a sacred indigenous Uwa burial site from the Cusiri pass (4,400m).

The views from the northern Lagunas Grandes de los Verdes over to the many snow-capped peaks that surround the Ritacaba peak are incredible.

Start or end your trek from either sleepy **El Cocuy**, or **Guican**, which has more facilities and some relaxing thermals springs to soak in.

Frailejones en El Cocuy National Park, Colombia



Amazon

Covering almost a third of Colombia's entire landmass, the Amazon is host to few people but a myriad of animals and plants.

You can wildlife watch on river trips, keeping an eye out for pink river dolphins, caiman, birds and reptiles.

The mystical and vast Lake Tarapoto, home to pink river dolphins, black caiman, anaconda and various other water-borne creatures makes for a fun excursion for a day, where fishing can be great fun and jaunts into the flooded *Varzea* forest ecosystem are possible.

Our tours aim to give a real cultural interaction with the indigenous community, with handicraft workshops, myths and legends, local rituals and dances, food preparation and more.

You can trek into the Amazon by day and by night, and we also head into Amacayacu National park, replete with primates.

"Whilst Amazon region of Colombia isn't normally considered when travellers think about visiting the Amazon, Colombia's vast Amazonian territory has some amazing and special experiences that can't be found anywhere else.

Puerto Nariño is a small town located 80km up river from the frontier town of Leticia. Puerto Nariño is a car-less and quiet town that provides a perfect spot to explore for a few days.



Tatacoa desert at sunrise