

Caffe Colombia

8 days | Bogota to Cartagena



Take in the highlights of Colombia in 8 captivating days, from the capital city of Bogota through to the charming and colourful colonial city of Cartagena. En route visit unusual and artisan towns of Zipaquirá and Raquira, wander around picturesque Villa de Leyva, learn about the production of some of the world's best coffee and appreciate the spectacular beauty of Cocora Valley and much more.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Bogota – Enjoy a tour of Colombia's capital city, taking in Paloquemao's Market, the colonial quarter of La Candelaria and the prominent Plaza de Bolívar. Also visit the Museo del Oro and Museo de Botero
- Zipaquirá – Marvel at the spectacular Salt Cathedral and Stations of the Cross, all hewn from the salt mine tunnels under the Halite Mountains
- Sutatausa – Admire the excellently preserved paintings in the town's colonial church, dating back to the 17th century
- Raquira – Visit this artist town, famous for its pottery colourful buildings and colony

of artisans. Nearby is the Monasterio La Candelaria, the first convent built in Latin America

- Villa de Leyva – Explore this colonial town and its beautiful architectural features, from wooden balconies and arches to heavy wooden and brass laden doors
- Filandia – Overlook the city from the Colinda Iluminada view point
- Cocora Valley – Sample the local cocktail of canelazo and plant a wax palm, Colombia's national tree and the tallest variety of palm tree in the world
- Salento – Visit this charming town with its preserved colonial bahareque architecture and streets lined with restaurants, bars and shops
- Hacienda Combia – Join a shared tour of this coffee farm, allowing you the opportunity to learn about the elements, conditions and the technical processes needed to go Colombian coffee
- Botanical & Butterfly Garden – Stroll through this garden home to over 1500 butterflies and a variety of local flora and bird species
- Cartagena – Join a walking tour including stops at the Convento de la Popa, the Castillo de San Felipe and a stroll through the markets of La Bovedas
- Food Tour – Join a culinary tour of Cartagena, stopping off at seven

authentic food stops to sample the local cuisine

What's Included

- 7 breakfasts and 3 lunches
- 7 nights standard accommodation (superior and deluxe hotels available on request)
- Airport arrival and departure transfer on day 1 and day 8
- Services of local English-speaking specialist guides
- Entrance fees to all sites and activities as described in the itinerary
- All relevant transfers and transportation
- Private services for all included activities (excluding tour of Hacienda Combia, which may be on a shared basis)

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Tipping – an entirely personal gesture
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- Domestic flights – South American airpasses are available with LATAM and other airline carriers when booked in conjunction with international flights, offering significant savings on domestic flights. Please ask a member of the team for more information.

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DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Bogota

Upon arrival at El Dorado International Airport you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure exploring Colombia's cosmopolitan capital city. There are plenty of al fresco dining options where you can sample the local cuisine, and a variety of welcoming bars to get your evening started. Overnight – Bogota. **Overnight - Bogota**

Day 2 : Bogota City Tour



Get acquainted with Bogota today with a guided sightseeing tour of the city. The morning starts early with a visit to the vibrant Paloquemao Market, one of the largest and important in the country. As you browse the variety of fruit, vegetables, cheeses and medicinal herbs on offer, you can also take this opportunity to people watch as you witness the interactions between seller and buyer. Here you'll have the opportunity to sample some exotic fruits and enjoy a small snack.

Leaving the market behind, continue on to the famous and well-preserved historical colonial quarter of La Candelaria. Wander through the streets and keep your camera handy as you'll want to capture this picturesque area on film. On your walk you'll pass such sights as the library of Luis Nagel Arango and the prominent Plaza de Bolivar, the heart of Bogota. Surrounding the square are impressive historical buildings, including the Cathedral, Congress Palace, Independence House, Palace of Justice and City Hall.

From Plaza de Bolivar you'll continue your exploration to Monserrate Hill, a forested mountain with a white catholic church sitting

on its summit. On a clear day you'll enjoy a stunning view over the city below and may even see the snow-capped peak of Nevado del Tolima in the distance. Next up is a visit to the Museo del Oro - where you can learn about the history of gold in Colombia, followed by Museo de Botero - displaying a selection of artwork from a variety of world-famous artists.

Overnight - Bogota (B, L)

Day 3 : Zipaquirá & Raquira



Bogota – Villa de Leyva. Today you bid farewell to Bogota and continue your Colombian adventure, driving out through the northern residential area of the city and through the fertile plateau to the small town of Zipaquirá. Here you can appreciate the extraordinary architecture of the Salt Cathedral – a local pilgrimage site, with its three naves, sculptures and cavernous pools. Your next stop will be the small town of Satatusa where you'll explore its quaint colonial church, which houses a selection of 17th century paintings by anonymous artists.

Following a stop for lunch, continue on to the artisan town of Raquira, famed for its pottery and colourful architecture. On the outskirts of town are a group of factories where the local community produces clay pots and decorations, where you'll have a chance to visit one to observe the process of creating these handicrafts. After you'll have free time to wander around the quaint and colourful town centre. Nearby is the Monasterio La Candelaria, which dates back to 1604 and was the first convent to be built in Latin America. Enjoy a short tour of this convent before continuing to Villa de Leyva in the late afternoon.

Overnight - Villa de Leyva (B)

Day 4 : Villa de Leyva



Villa de Leyva – Zona Cafetera. This morning you'll be taken on a walking tour of this attractive colonial town. Originally founded in 1572 Villa de Leyva has managed to maintain much of its original charm in its architecture, from its wooden balconies, arches and heavy wooden and brass laden doors. This quiet town has an easy going ambience that is quick to charm. After a break for lunch, drive to Bogota airport for your flight to the Zona Cafetera. **Overnight - Zona Cafetera (B)**

Day 5 : Zona Cafetera



Spend today getting to know the history and the culture associated with Colombia's production of coffee with a full day guided excursion. Your first stop will be the traditional small village of Filandia, which boasts colonial architecture, and the pretty and colourful Plaza de Bolivar. Stop off at a typical fonda, or restaurant-bar, to try the local liquor. Next head up to Colina Iluminada, a viewpoint set on a hilltop just outside of town overlooking the coffee triangle.

From Filandia, continue on to the spectacular Cocora Valley home to the wax palm – the country's national tree and the tallest variety of palm tree in the world. Upon arrival in Cocora Valley you'll have the chance to sample a warming local cocktail called canelazo, enjoyed across much of South

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America. Later embark on a guided tour of the misty forest to learn about the importance of conservation. You'll even have the chance to plant your own wax palm with the Ritual de la Palma. Here in Cocora Valley you'll also enjoy a traditional lunch of smoked trout.

Your day continues with a visit to the town of Salento. Dating back to 1842, this charming town was one of the area's first settlements and is home to centuries-old buildings housing restaurants, bars, handicraft shops and souvenir stores.

Overnight - Zona Cafetera (B, L)

Day 6 : Coffee tour & Butterfly Garden

Zona Cafetera – Cartagena. After breakfast you'll be transferred to Armenia to join a shared tour of the Hacienda Combia coffee farm. Made up of nine stops, this unique tour takes you through the elements, environmental conditions and technical processes required to grow the high quality of coffee that Colombia is renowned for.

Lunch will be provided before your next stop, the Botanical & Butterfly garden.

Stretching across ten hectares of Andean forest, this garden is home to 180 species of butterfly along with 850 varieties of local flora and 126 species of bird. Enjoy a walking tour here before being transferred to the airport for your flight to Cartagena.

Overnight - Cartagena (B, L)

Day 7 : Cartagena



Wake up in the colourful city of Cartagena this morning, home to beautiful colonial architecture, charming cobbled streets lined with artisan workshops and the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages. A walking tour today starts with a visit to the Convento de la

Popa, a 17th century convent set on a hilltop overlooking the city below, followed by a stop at the Castillo de San Felipe – a great fortress built in the 1600s under Spanish colonisation.

Continue your tour with a walk through La Bovedas, a series of 23 vaults built for military purposes in the 18th century to store munitions and provisions, and later even used as jail cells. Today these vaults are now house colourful craft market stalls selling anything from handicrafts and souvenirs, to jewellery and clothing. Your walking tour finishes with a stroll through the colonial streets of this charming city, admiring its many old houses, stunning balconies, hidden squares, buzzing plazas and more along the way.

This afternoon you'll get a real taste for the local cuisine by joining a walking tour taking in seven authentic food stops, each with a different delectable tasting. Escorted by a local guide you'll hear all about the city's culture, history and food in an epic culinary journey.

Overnight - Cartagena (B)

Day 8 : Goodbye Colombia

This morning your tour of Colombia comes to an end. After breakfast and hotel check-out you will be transferred to the Rafael Nunez Airport for your onward travel. (B)

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Colombia Country Guide

Colombia - Fact File

Official Name: Republic of Colombia

Capital: Santa Fé de Bogotá

Population: 44.5 million

Total Area: 1.1 million square kilometres

Official Language: Spanish, Quechua and Aymara

Religions: Roman Catholic 95%

Voltage: 110 volts, double flat-pin plug (same as USA)

Dialling Code: +57

Time Difference: GMT/UTC -4. For other time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com

Colombia - Visas

Please be advised that visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement is the responsibility of the traveller and not On The Go Tours, therefore it is essential that you check current visa requirements with the embassy before travel. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of departure from Colombia.

For stays of up to 90 days, USA, British, Irish, New Zealand and Australian citizens do not require a tourist visa to visit Colombia. Canadian citizens have to pay a reciprocity fee to enter Colombia, which can be paid upon arrival into the country. The fee is approximately \$88 CAD (OR 160,000 Colombian pesos), and this can be paid by international credit card, debit card or cash. If made in cash, the payment must be in Colombian pesos. You will receive an immigration card, which you must retain and show when you leave the country.

Please note that South African citizens need to apply for a visa online, we recommend one month in advance, and can take up to 10 working days to process. All visas must be applied for online, for visa requirements please visit:

http://www.cancilleria.gov.co/en/procedures_services/visa/requirements

Colombia - Climate

Colombia has an equatorial climate and therefore does not have dramatic seasonal changes. The best time for the country as a whole is December-March as it rains the least then.

The rainy season is May-July and October-December, when heavy rains can fall (though they're usually followed by bright sunshine). The elevation in the country ranges from sea level to 3,050 metres, so temperatures can vary greatly. Coastal cities have day temperatures from 23-32°C, with nights at about 17-27°C year-round. The inland cities' year-round day temperatures are generally around 17-27°C (nights can get down to 5-16°C in the winter). A sweater is needed along the coast at night and a jacket in the mountains

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(this includes Bogota, which lies at 2,650 metres).

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Colombia - Money

The official currency in Colombia is Colombia Peso.

For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.oanda.com or www.xe.com.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

US dollars (cash) are accepted for some purchases in Colombia (particularly when the dollar is strong) however, you will need pesos for most purchases. Even if you have the choice of paying for things in US dollars it will be in your favour to use the local currency.

US dollars and travellers cheques can be changed at casas de cambio (exchange bureau), banks and border crossings. Your tour leader will give you details of when and where best to change money. Casas de cambio are privately owned, usually have longer opening hours and attend to you faster than banks. The rate may be slightly lower but you must weigh this up against the convenience of not having to queue. In Colombia you get the best exchange rates in the cities of Bogotá and Cartagena where the casas de cambio offer about the same rate as the banks. Also, these places will quite often exchange other currencies and cheques. Hotels/restaurants will sometimes change US dollars, but at a much poorer rate.

Often the easiest way to obtain local currency is to use the ATMs ('cajeros automaticos') located in every city throughout the country. Visa, Plus, MasterCard and Cirrus/Maestro are accepted in most Colombian ATMs, as long as you have a four-digit pin number. Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

You should also be able to get a cash advance at the bank (usually only possible for Visa and sometimes Mastercard) although most banks

will require a copy of your passport and quite often take your photo.

In Colombia they can be very particular about the condition of the US dollar bank notes. You will quite often NOT be able to use notes which are torn or marked even slightly. If your notes are at all damaged you may use them in Ecuador, but probably NOT in Colombia, so save them until then.

Remember that once you leave Colombia you will generally not be able to use or exchange pesos (so please change all left over pesos at the border).

Colombia - Entrance Fees

Generally speaking most museums in Colombia cost between US\$2 and US\$5. There are many interesting museums to visit, but please bear in mind that many museums close on Mondays.

The many beautiful churches and cathedrals of Colombia are always free to enter, but flash photography is strictly forbidden, and opening hours vary greatly. There are sometimes cultural events going on and galleries/exhibitions which are free to enter. Your tour leader will give you more details on these.

Colombia - Shopping

Shop for hand-worked silver, emeralds, pottery, "chiva" pottery buses, leather, textiles, hammocks, wall hangings, gold, large mobiles (not the phone variety) and ponchos.

Each different region has its own regional handicrafts/ jewellery etc. so if you like something, buy it! You may never see it again (or if you do it will probably be more expensive). Bargaining is expected while shopping in the markets, but in shops it is usually considered rude to bargain. You may however ask for a 'discount' ("descuento" in Spanish).

Bear in mind that it can be very expensive and not always reliable to send packages home so try to buy only what you can carry home!

Colombia - Tipping

A 10% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Colombia. If

it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There should be no other charge on top of this. However, if IVA is said to be included on the menu then it should NOT be added onto the end of the bill. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50 cents. Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

Colombia - Local Transport

Taxis are recommended for all journeys within cities. Most taxis have meters if not you may have to haggle with the driver to agree upon the fare. This can be fun, but it is a good idea to find out in advance, from your tour leader or the hotel receptionist, approximately how much the fare should be. It will also help if you can speak a few words of Spanish. You will almost certainly have to accept that you will pay more than the Colombians do.

Local buses are interesting and usually very crowded. The new TransMilenio buses that ply back and forth on dedicated lanes from south to north are good and regular, like an outdoor metro system using buses.

One of the most fun ways to explore Colombia's cities is by "Chiva" bus, which is a truck chassis with brightly coloured wooden open-sided body with bench seating (these are the old typical type buses which are still used in many places in the countryside today for the locals – chicken buses, as we call them). Most cities have these tours, mostly in the evening where they will have a band/group on board playing live music and take you to many of the night spots plus hand out drinks en-route, mostly "aguadiente" (firewater, a kind of ouzo which is quite delicious once you've had one or two).

Colombia - Food & Drink

Food

Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants. You will find a range of international and local cuisine to suit every budget. Excellent seafood is available along

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all coastal regions and chicken, pork and beef are available throughout.

In Colombia the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Some of the most popular and typical dishes are: “frijoles” (kidney beans in a delicious sauce with lumps of pork), “ajiaco” (lovely soup type dish with chicken breast, maize, potato and is served with avocado, rice), “bandeja paisa” (minced beef with beans, egg, fried plantain, chorizo sausage, rice, manioc, huge meal), tomasales (which is like a boiled corn dumpling filled with chicken and wrapped in banana leaf). These are just a few of the local favourites, there are many more.

Typical snacks are “empanadas” (little fried pasties usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and “patacones” (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Colombia’s food is not hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of “aji” (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to provide interesting vegetarian alternatives when arranging group meals in the campsite, but your patience and understanding is requested.

Drink

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times.

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to order juice “con leche” (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices in Colombia is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between

mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de arbol (tamirillo or 'tree tomato'), guanabana (a soursop, like acustard apple) and curuba (which has a great taste).

In Colombia some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, agudiente (a kind of ouzo) and you can get imported Chilean wine can sometimes be found quite cheaply at supermarkets. There are various brands of beers including Costeña, Aguila, Bavaria and Leona. Please don’t forget the coffee, some of the best in the world but pick a nice café style establishment with an espresso machine.

Colombia - National Holidays

- 1 January - New Year's Day
- 12 January - Epiphany
- 22 March - San José
- March/April (variable) - Samana Santa (Easter)
- 1 May - Labour Day (national holiday)
- 24 May - Ascension
- 14 June - Corpus Christi
- 21 June - Sacred Heart
- 5 July - St.Peter & St.Paul
- 20 July - Independence Day
- 7 August - Boyaca Battle
- 17 October - Columbus Day
- 1 November - All Saints Day
- 15 November - Cartagena's Independence
- 8 December - Immaculate Conception
- 25 December - Christmas Day

Please remember that on public holidays, banks, museums and shops will be closed and often public transport is less frequent than usual.

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