

Bogota to Tayrona

10 days | Bogota to Tayrona



From Bogota - Colombia's capital city, travel north to the spectacular beauty and white sand beaches of Tayrona National Park. Stop off en route at the unusual salt-hewn temple of Zipaquira and artisan town of Raquira, explore colonial Villa de Leyva, discover lush coffee plantations and stunning Cocora Valley, and wander around colourful Cartagena.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Tayrona National Park - Enjoy free time in one of Colombia's most stunning national parks with mangrove swamps, green forest, mountain peaks and a spectacular coastline
- 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 Bolivar. Also visit the Museo del Oro and Museo de Botero
- Zipaquira – 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 Illuminada 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

- 9 breakfasts and 3 lunches
- 9 nights STANDARD accommodation. Upgrading to SUPERIOR or DELUXE accommodation options are also available upon request. Accommodation rating – See Trip Notes for details
- Airport arrival and departure transfer on day 1 and day 10
- Services of local English-speaking specialist guides
- Entrance fees to all sites and activities as described in the itinerary
- All relevant transfers and transportation

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

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flights. Please ask a member of the team for more information.

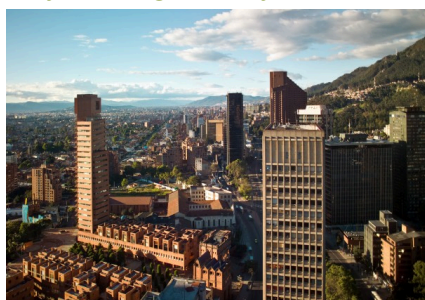
DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Bogota

Upon arrival in Colombia you will be met at El Dorado International Airport and transferred to your hotel. Spend the remainder of the day exploring Colombia's thriving capital city at your own pace. In the evening check out Bogota's many bars and restaurants.

Overnight - Bogota

Day 2 : Bogota City Tour



Today a guided sightseeing tour introduces you to some of the city's culture and history. Your first stop will be an early morning visit to the colourful Paloquemao Market, one of the largest and important in the country. Here you can witness the interactions between seller and buyer, as you browse the variety of fruit, vegetables, cheeses and medicinal herbs on offer. You'll also get to enjoy a sampling of exotic fruits and small snack.

Continuing on, your guided tour takes you to the famous and well-preserved historical colonial quarter of La Candelaria. If you fancy yourself a bit of whizz behind the lens, these picturesque streets make the perfect subject for stunning travel photos. As you stroll through the streets 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 remarkable historical buildings, including the Cathedral, Congress Palace, Independence House, Palace of Justice and City Hall.

Your next stop will be Monserrate Hill, referred to locally as the Cerro de Monserrate.

This forested mountain has a charming white catholic church sitting upon its summit, where on a clear day you can enjoy a stunning view over the city below. Continue on 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-renowned artists.

Overnight - Bogota (B, L)

Day 3 : Zipaquira & Raquira



Bogota – Villa de Leyva. Leaving Bogota behind your journey continues to the small town of Zipaquira, famed for its extraordinary salt-hewn Stations of the Cross. Crafted from the salt mine tunnels under the Halite Mountains, this impressive architectural feat boasts three naves, numerous sculptures and cavernous pools and is a popular local pilgrimage site. From here you'll travel to the small town of Satatausa where you'll explore its quaint colonial church, which displays a selection of 17th century paintings by anonymous artists.

A break for lunch will be followed by a visit to the artisan town of Raquira, renowned for its pottery and colourful architecture. Your first stop here will be to one of the many factories on the outskirts of town where members of the local community produce clay pots and decorations. Here you'll have the chance to observe the process of creating these handicrafts. Later you'll head into the town centre for some free time to wander around its quaint and colourful streets. 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. Get acquainted with Villa de Leyva today with a morning walking tour. Originally founded in 1572 Villa de Leyva is brimming with remnants from its colonial era, with its wooden balconies, decorative arches and 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 : Finlandia, Salento & the Cocora Valley



This morning embark on a full day guided excursion to some of Colombia's most charming villages and small towns, plus the truly spectacular Cocora Valley. Your first port of call will be the traditional village of Filandia, where you'll have the opportunity to explore the small town centre with its colourful Plaza de Bolivar, quaint colonial streets and typical fondas, or restaurant-bars, where you can sample the local liquor. Just outside of town is the Colina Iluminada viewpoint where you can enjoy views of Colombia's Coffee Triangle.

Departing Filandia, continue your journey to the majestic Cocora Valley home to the wax palm – the tallest variety of palm tree

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in the world and Colombia's national tree. Prepare to be amazed by the natural beauty and diversity of flora and fauna here before enjoying a warming local cocktail called canelazo, a popular tippie across most of South America. Later a guided tour will take you through the forest landscape to learn about the importance of conservation in the area. You can even do your part in protecting the environment by planting your very own wax palm with the Ritual de la Palma. Enjoy a traditional lunch of smoked trout before continuing to your next stop, Salento.

Dating back to 1842, Salento is one of the area's first settlements and is today home to centuries-old buildings housing restaurants, bars, handicraft shops and souvenir stores. There's free time to explore this charming town before journeying back to the Zona Cafetera and your hotel for the evening.

Overnight - Zona Cafetera (B, L)

Day 6 : Coffee tour & Butterfly Garden

Zona Cafetera – Cartagena. As you wake in the heart of Colombia's Zona Cafetera, what better way to spend the day than by learning about the country's production of this aromatic bean? Start the day with a visit to the Hacienda Combia coffee farm where you'll embark on a unique nine stop interactive tour that recreates the essential elements, environmental conditions and technical processes required to grow Colombia's high quality coffee.

After a break for lunch continue on to a Botanical and 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



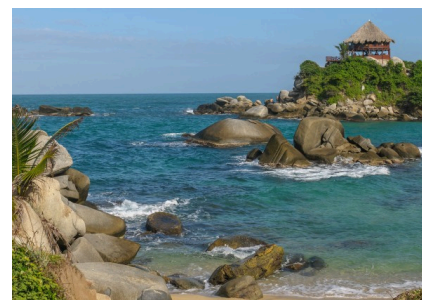
Spend today getting familiar with the colourful city of Cartagena, where the cobble-stone streets are lined with beautiful colonial architecture and artisans ply their trade to the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages. Begin today with a walking tour of the city starting with the Convento de la Popa, a 17th century convent nestled on a hilltop overlooking the city below, followed by a visit to the Castillo de San Felipe – a once-powerful fortress built in the 1600s under Spanish colonisation.

Your tour continues with a walk through La Bovedas, a series of vaults that were first built for military purposes in the 18th century and today house colourful craft market stalls. Your walking tour ends with a stroll through the cobbled streets of this charming city, so that you can admire its many colonial houses, flower-adorned balconies, pretty squares and bustling plazas.

This afternoon a different kind of tour awaits, one that is bound to get your taste buds tingling. Join a gastronomic walking tour of Cartagena led by a local guide, where you'll have the opportunity to get a real taste of Colombian cuisine as you make stops at seven authentic food vendors, each with a different delicious tasting.

Overnight - Cartagena (B)

Days 8-9 : Tayrona National Park



Cartagena – Tayrona National Park. On the morning of day 8 you'll be transferred to your next and final port of call – the impressive Tayrona National Park. With a spectacular coastline, beautiful beaches, mangrove swamps, green forest and verdant mountain peaks, it is no wonder why Tayrona is considered one of Colombia's most precious natural treasures. The variety of flora and fauna is extraordinary here, as is the presence of several indigenous communities. Spend the remainder of today and tomorrow enjoying the history, activities and nature this national park has to offer. **Overnight - Tayrona National Park (B:2)**

Day 10 : Tayrona National Park

Today your touring arrangements in Colombia come to an end. After breakfast and hotel check-out you will be transferred to Santa Marta airport for your onward travel. (B)

Tipping

Tipping is an essential part of the culture. For a job well done, we would suggest for your tour guide: USD\$5-6 per traveller, for each day of sightseeing.

For your driver and On The Go Representative we'd recommend USD\$2-3 per traveller for each day of service. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture and ultimately the amount is up to you.

Accommodation ratings

On our Private trips, you can often choose your style of accommodation. The price quoted on our website is reflective of the included accommodation, please see the "included" section on the first page of this

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document for details. Should you opt for an alternative hotel category, this will be confirmed in writing with the respective price on your invoice.

For further details about the indicative hotels, please see the "hotels" tab on our website. Here we rank hotel's in their respective country (REGIONAL CATEGORY) - but we also tell you how it ranks by Western standards (OUR CATEGORY).

STANDARD - Equates to a Western 3-star standard, always featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant.

SUPERIOR - Equates to a Western 4-star standard, featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant and often a swimming pool and/or a fitness centre.

DELUXE - Equates to a Western 5-star standard, usually featuring spacious, en-suite rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, excellent service and customer care.

LUXURY - Equates to a Western 5-star plus standard - the creme de la creme. Featuring spacious, en-suite rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, this accommodation is a cut above the rest. Sheer opulence!

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 (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.

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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 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

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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, aguadiente (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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