



## SOUTH STAR TOURS, Inc.

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# Colombia

## Introduction

This is Colombia: Vibrant cities with streaking metros and soaring skyscrapers. Elegant port towns cut by cobbled alleys and bougainvillea shrouded balconies. Spectacular national parks ranging from Garden-of-Eden-tropical to heavenly-high-alpine. Cruise boats, party buses, late night salsa dancing and shopping glory.

Enchanted, mysterious, and historical -- Colombia is the only country in South America with: both the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, golden beaches, Pre-Colombian artefacts, burial sites, and cities, eco-tourism, one of the top-10 diving spots of the world, the Amazon River, the most biodiversity in the world, not to mention the nicest people in the world as well! (In "happiness surveys," Colombia always comes in as the "happiest country in the world." Yet so few have visited this paradise?

Colombia's reputation is changing, and for the better. It's going through a cultural revolution and the world is finally looking to Colombia and appreciating it for the beautiful country it is. Colombia boasts some of the most successful and famous International artists and writers, musicians, actors, and TV shows (Nobel Prize winners, grammy winners, Oscar nominees, franchised soap operas .. the list goes on and on!).

Its doors are opening to a world of tourism. And what can the tourist expect? Where else in the world will you find yourself scuba diving hammerheads, dancing to the rhythms of the Caribbean, exploring pre-Columbian caves and burial grounds, hiking to the peak of a 5000 meter mountain, and relaxing in natural hot springs? Where else will you find a culture that celebrates its Indigenous roots while enjoying a cosmopolitan capital city that has the biggest International theater event in the world and more? Colombia's enchantments, opportunities, people, diversity are countless!

**Full country name:** Republic of Colombia

**Area:** 1,141,748 sq km ( 440,830 sq mi)

**Population:** 39,685,000

**Capital city:** Bogota

**Language:** Spanish, over 200 indigenous languages

**Religion:** Catholic (90%), with the remainder a mixture of traditional, Episcopal & Jewish faiths

**Government:** Democracy

**President:** Álvaro Uribe Vélez

**Major industries:**

**Major trading partners:** US, EU

Facts for the Traveler

**Visas:** Passport and Return ticket required

**Health risks:** Yellow Fever, Typhoid, Polio, Malaria, Cholera

**Time:** UTC -5

**Electricity:** Mostly 110 volts AC, 60Hz. American-style two-pin plugs

**Weights & measures:**



## When to Go

Tropical along coast and eastern plains; cooler in highlands; periodic droughts. Colombia is an equatorial country, so there are no seasons in the common sense of the word. The temperature is steady all year round, and what Colombians normally refer to as the winter is the rain season.

## Events

The Colombian calendar is awash with festivals, fairs and beauty pageants. Some of the biggest events include: Carnaval de Blancos y Negros ( Pasto, January), Semana Santa ( Holy Week, most prominent celebrations are in Popayan and Mompos, March or April), Feria de las Flores ( Medellin, August), and Reinado del Coco ( San Andres, November).

## Attractions

### Bogotá

The capital, founded in 1538, is the largest city and situated almost in the center of the country at an altitude of 2600m (8600ft). Bogotá reflects a blend of Colombian tradition and Spanish colonial influences. Many historical landmarks have been preserved, such as the Capitol Municipal Palace and the cathedral, the Capilla del Sangrario, on the main square, the Plaza Bolivar. Bogotá also contains the Gold Museum, with its unique collection of over 100,000 pre-Colombian artworks. Around 50km (32 miles) south of Bogotá lies Zipaquirá, an area well-known for its many salt mines, one of which contains the famous Salt Cathedral (capable of accommodating 8400 people). Guatavita, a two-hour bus drive from Bogotá, is best known for its Laguna de Guatavita, the ritual center and sacred lake of the Muisca Indians.



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### **Cordillera Medellín**

Colombia's second city is the capital of the state called Antioquia and has over 1.5 million inhabitants. The city lies 1300m (4264ft) above sea level in a narrow valley of the central mountain range. It is primarily industrial, and is the center of the coffee and textile trades. The region has acquired a reputation for violence owing to the war between the Government and the drug barons.

### **Cali**

It is said to be the world's capital of Salsa and is the center of the principal sugar-producing region of the country, where modern technology blends with colonial tradition. Deposits of coal and precious metals are found in this area.

### **Barranquilla**

A busy port and Colombia's fourth city, Barranquilla is located towards the mouth of the Magdalena River. It is the nation's main maritime port and is one of the country's primary commercial centers. There is a colorful market in a side channel of the Magdalena.

### **Caribbean Coast**

The main tourist resorts on Colombia's 1600km- (1000 mile-) long Caribbean coast lie near Santa Marta, one of the first major cities founded by the Spanish in South America. Its modern hotels, white beaches and proximity to fashionable beach resorts now make it a popular base for visitors wishing to explore the coast. The Tayrona National Park, some 35km (22 miles) south of Santa Marta, is one of the country's most popular parks. Its major attraction is its deep bays, shaded with coconut trees, beautiful beaches and several coral reefs. Cartagena, an ancient walled fortress city on the north coast, is also worth a visit, particularly for its fascinating Old Town. Tourist facilities have been considerably developed in recent years, particularly at El Laguita, an L-shaped peninsula, now packed with hotels and expensive restaurants. Some 35km (22 miles) west lie the Islas del Rosario, an archipelago of about 25 small coral islands now declared a national park. Cruises and tours are widely available and can be booked in Cartagena. Easily reached from Cartagena, by plane or boat, are the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, nearly 500km (300 miles) north of the Colombian coast. San Andrés was once the headquarters of the English pirate Captain Henry Morgan, the scourge of the Caribbean.

The islands are duty-free, and consequently often crowded, but there are still several less spoiled parts. Popular excursions include visits by boat to Johnny Cay and the Aquarium.

### **The Amazon Basin**

Almost one-third of Colombia's territory is covered by the Amazon Basin, an area of thick tropical forest in the southeast, with no roads and inhabited mostly by Indians.

The most popular base for tourists wishing to explore the area is Leticia, a small town with well-developed tourist facilities, located on the banks of the Amazon River and close to the border with Brazil and Peru.

Jungle trips, notably to the nearby Amacayu National Park, are widely available and often include visits to Indian tribes.

### **Elsewhere**

Colombia has much to offer those interested in archaeology. San Agustín Archaeological Park contains a great number of relics and massive stone statues. The traditional city of Popayan is the birthplace of many of Colombia's most illustrious statesmen. As well as containing many fine colonial houses and churches, it is also noted for its Holy Week procession. Tierradentro, in the southwest of the country, has beautiful manmade burial caves painted with pre-Colombian geometric patterns. In the same region, Silvia is a beautiful Indian town. The country also contains much unspoilt countryside; the Guajira Peninsula is home to more than 100,000 nomadic Indians.

### **Environment**

#### **Climate**

Colombia's proximity to the equator means its temperature varies little throughout the year. However, the temperature does change with altitude, which creates various climatic zones from hot lowlands to freezing Andean peaks, so you can experience completely different climates within just a couple of hours of travel. As a general rule, the temperature falls about 6°C with every 1000m increase in altitude. If the average temperature at sea level is 30°C, it will be around 24°C at 1000m, 18°C at 2000m and 12°C at 3000m. The altitude also affects the difference between daytime and night-time temperatures. The higher the altitude, the greater the difference. Consequently, in the highlands there can be warm days but freezing nights, while in the lowlands days and nights are almost equally hot. Colombia has two seasons: dry or verano (literally 'summer') and wet or invierno (winter). The pattern of seasons varies in different parts of the country, and has been greatly affected over recent years by El Niño and La Niña. As a rough guideline only, in the Andean region there are two dry and two rainy seasons per year. The main dry season falls between December and March, with a shorter and less dry period between July and August. This general pattern has wide variations throughout the Andean zone. The weather in Los Llanos has a more definite pattern: there is one dry season, between December and March, while the rest of the year is wet. The Amazon doesn't have a uniform climate but, in general, is quite wet year-round.

#### **Location**

Colombia is the only country in South America with coastlines on both the North Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Lying to the south of Panama, Colombia controls the land access between Central and South America. With Panama to the north, Colombia is surrounded by Venezuela to the east, Brazil to the southeast, Ecuador and Peru to the south west.



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