

SOUTH AMERICA · BEACHES · HIKING · CULTURE · NIGHTLIFE · WILDLIFE · MOUNTAINS



Colombia

Cartagena's walled old town glows at sunset, coffee farms in the Andes show you every step from bean to cup, and the Caribbean coast hides Tayrona's palm-backed coves and the jungle trek to the Lost City. Medellín's cable cars, Bogotá's Gold Museum and Cali's salsa clubs round out a country whose transformation has made it a favourite for longer stays.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Colombia.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 15 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Bogotá	 CURRENCY Colombian peso (COP) £1 ≈ COP 4,208	 LANGUAGE Spanish	 BEST TIME Dec–Mar, Jul–Aug
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h direct ~£600–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-5 standard time

Colombia is the only South American country with both Caribbean and Pacific coastlines, and the Andes split into three ranges here, so wildly different climates sit close together. A first trip of two to three weeks usually links four areas: Bogotá on its cool plateau at about 2,600 metres; Medellín and the Antioquia countryside; the Coffee Region around Salento, with its wax-palm valleys; and the Caribbean coast, from Cartagena to Santa Marta, Tayrona and the Lost City trek. Mountain roads are slow, so most people fly between regions rather than ride long buses.

Costs are low by European standards: a set lunch costs a few pounds, and domestic flights are cheap if booked early. Colombians are famously welcoming, but little English is spoken outside tourist areas, so some Spanish pays off. Domestic tourism peaks from mid-December to mid-January and at Easter, when coastal prices rise and buses fill. Visitors are often surprised by the chill in Bogotá, by the birdwatching, since Colombia records more bird species than any other country, and by how much of daily life runs on salsa, football and small cups of strong black tinto coffee.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

HISTORY
Cartagena's walled city
Spanish colonial ramparts enclose plazas, churches and bougainvillea-draped balconies. Walk the walls at sunset, explore the hilltop Castillo de San Felipe fortress, then eat and drink in Getsemaní, the liveliest barrio just outside the walls.
- 2

NATURE
Cocora Valley and Salento
Quindío wax palms, Colombia's national tree and among the tallest palms in the world, rise from cloud-forest pasture above the colourful town of Salento. Hike the valley loop, then tour a working coffee finca nearby.

3

BEACH

Tayrona National Park

Jungle trails lead from the park gates to palm-fringed coves at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, with hammocks for rent at Cabo San Juan. Many beaches have strong currents, so swim only where signs allow; the park closes for short periods each year.

4

ADVENTURE

Ciudad Perdida trek

A four- to six-day guided trek through the Sierra Nevada's jungle and river crossings to the Tayrona people's terraced city, built around AD 800 and rediscovered in the 1970s. A climb of some 1,200 stone steps makes for a dramatic arrival.

5

NATURE

Guatapé and El Peñol

El Peñol, a granite monolith some 200 metres tall, rises above a reservoir of wooded islands two hours east of Medellín. Climb its 700-odd steps for the view, then wander Guatapé, whose houses wear brightly painted zócalo friezes.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bogotá

≈ 10.7 million people

A high, cool capital with a colonial core in La Candelaria, the superb Gold Museum, the Botero collection and Monserrate's cable car; on Sundays the Ciclovía closes main roads to cars.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Medellín

≈ 4.1 million people

Once notorious, now known for metro-linked cable cars, a spring-like climate and Comuna 13's street-art escalators; base yourself in Laureles or El Poblado and day-trip to Guatapé.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Cali

≈ 2.9 million people

Colombia's salsa capital: learn the fast local style at a dance school by day and watch the experts in a salsoteca by night. Few formal sights, but the dancing makes the trip.

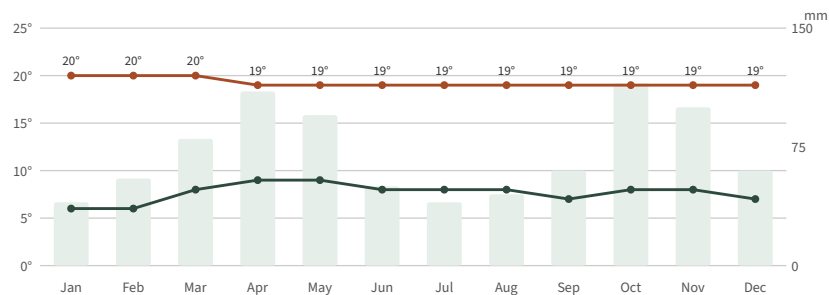
Figures are for metropolitan areas; Bogotá's district alone has around 7.9 million people. Barranquilla's metro area ranks fourth.

When to go to Colombia

Best time: **Dec–Mar, Jul–Aug.**

**Average climate in Bogotá**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Carnaval de Barranquilla Four days of parades, cumbia and elaborate costumes before Ash Wednesday, recognised by UNESCO; book Barranquilla rooms early or stay in Cartagena or Santa Marta and day-trip.
Aug	Feria de las Flores Medellín's early-August flower fair culminates in the Desfile de Silleteros, when farmers from Santa Elena parade huge flower arrangements carried on their backs.
Dec	Feria de Cali From 25 to 30 December Cali hosts salsa parades, concerts and dance contests, opening with the Salsódromo procession of the city's best dancers.

How much does Colombia cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ COP 147,267 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ COP 336,609 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ COP 715,295 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Bandeja paisa

Antioquia's heroic platter of red beans, rice, minced beef, chicharrón, chorizo, fried egg, ripe plantain, avocado and an arepa; a lunch, not a snack.

Ajiaco

Bogotá's chicken and three-potato soup, thickened as the potatoes break down and flavoured with the herb guascas, served with corn on the cob, capers, cream and avocado.

Arepas

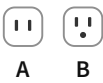
Griddled maize cakes eaten everywhere, from plain breakfast arepas with butter and cheese to the Caribbean coast's deep-fried arepa de huevo, with an egg sealed inside.

Getting around

Domestic flights on Avianca, LATAM and budget carriers such as JetSMART and Wingo save whole days, because mountain roads are slow: Bogotá to Medellín takes around nine hours by bus but under an hour by air. Long-distance buses are cheap and frequent. Medellín has the country's only metro, plus cable cars, while Bogotá relies on TransMilenio buses. Uber, DiDi, Cabify and InDrive work in the big cities.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **123**

Fire: **119**

Police: **123**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+57

TIME ZONE

UTC-5 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Restaurants usually add a 10% 'propina voluntaria' to the bill and should ask whether you want it included; you can decline. Taxi drivers do not expect tips.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'buenos días' before asking anything, use the formal 'usted' with strangers, and avoid joking about drugs or Pablo Escobar, a painful subject for many Colombians.

MAIN AIRPORTS

El Dorado International Airport (BOG), Bogotá; José María Córdova International Airport (MDE), Medellín; Rafael Núñez International Airport (CTG), Cartagena

Visas & entry for Colombia

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Colombia for up to 90 days without a visa for business or tourism, at the discretion of the Colombian immigration officer on arrival.

You must be able to show an onward or return ticket valid within the 90-day period.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in rural areas of Colombia below 1,600m: awareness or risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Colombia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 2 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day (observed)
Mon 16 Nov 2026	Independence of Cartagena (observed)
Tue 8 Dec 2026	Immaculate Conception
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 11 Jan 2027	Epiphany (observed)
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Saint Joseph's Day (observed)
Thu 25 Mar 2027	Maundy Thursday
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 10 May 2027	Ascension Day (observed)
Mon 31 May 2027	Corpus Christi (observed)
Mon 7 Jun 2027	Sacred Heart (observed)
Mon 5 Jul 2027	Saint Peter and Saint Paul's Day (observed)
Mon 12 Jul 2027	Day of Our Lady of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá (observed)
Tue 20 Jul 2027	Independence Day
Sat 7 Aug 2027	Battle of Boyacá
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Assumption Day (observed)
Mon 18 Oct 2027	Columbus Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	<i>OH-lah</i>
Thank you	Gracias	<i>GRAH-see-ahs</i>
Please	Por favor	<i>por fah-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Disculpe	<i>dees-KOOL-peh</i>
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	<i>KWAN-toh KWES-tah</i>

Know before you go

Order taxis through Uber, DiDi or Cabify, or ask your hotel to call one, rather than hailing cabs in the street, especially at night in Bogotá.

Pack layers: Bogotá sits at about 2,600 metres and is often cool and drizzly, while Cartagena and the Caribbean coast stay hot and humid all year.

Check the FCDO travel advice before planning overland routes or visiting remote areas, as its guidance differs from region to region.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.