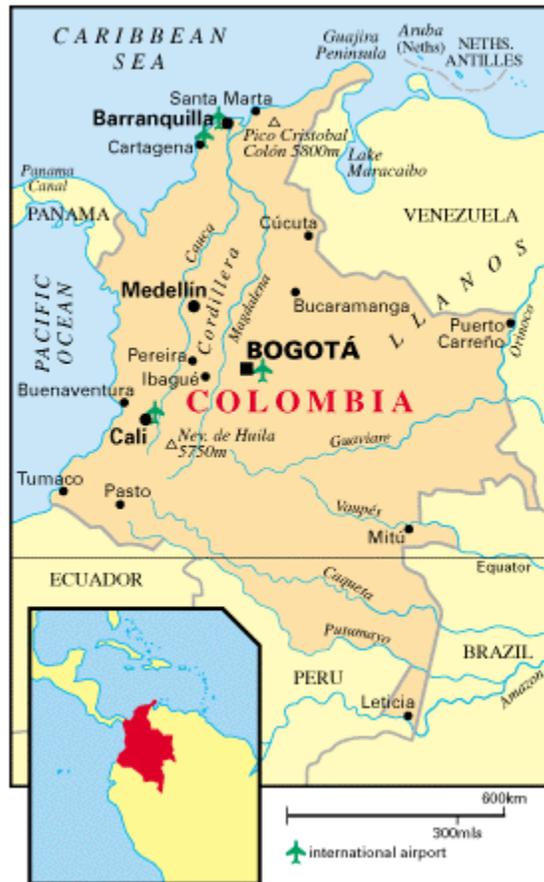




# COLOMBIA



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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Northwest South America.

Ministerio de Desarrollo Economico  
Carrera 13, No 28-01, Pisos 5-9, Santa Fe de Bogotá, DC, Colombia  
**Tel:** (1) 320 0077 or 287 4865. Fax: (1) 287 6025.

Embassy of the Republic of Colombia  
Flat 3A, 3 Hans Crescent, London SW1X 0LN  
**Tel:** (020) 7589 9177. Fax: (020) 7581 1829.  
**E-mail:** colombia@colombia.demon.co.uk

Colombian Consulate  
15-19 Great Titchfield Street, London W1P 7FB  
**Tel:** (020) 7637 9893 or (09001) 880 890 (recorded visa and tourism information; calls cost 60p per minute). Fax: (020) 7637 5604. Opening hours: 0930-1300 Monday to Friday.

British Embassy  
Carrera 9, No 76-49, Piso 9, Santa Fe de Bogotá, DC, Colombia  
**Tel:** (1) 317 6690. Fax: (1) 317 6265. E-mail: britain@cable.net.co  
**Honorary Consulates in:** Barranquilla, Cali and Medellín.

Embassy of the Republic of Colombia  
2118 Leroy Place, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
**Tel:** (202) 387 8338. Fax: (202) 232 8643.  
**E-mail:** enwas@colombiaemb.org  
**Web site:** <http://www.colombiaemb.org>  
**Consulate in:** New York (tel: (212) 949 9898 or 370 0004).

Embassy of the United States of America  
**Street address:** Calle 22D-bis, No 47-51, Santa Fe de Bogotá, DC, Colombia  
**Postal address:** Apdo Aéreo 3831, Carrera 45, No 22D-45, Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia  
**Tel:** (1) 315 0811 or 315 1566 (consular section). Fax: (1) 315 2197.  
**Web site:** <http://www.usia.gov/posts/bogota>  
**Consulate in:** Barranquilla.

Embassy of the Republic of Colombia  
Suite 1002, 360 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7  
**Tel:** (613) 230 3761. Fax: (613) 230 4416.  
**E-mail:** embcolot@travel-net.com  
**Web site:** <http://www.travel-net.com/~embcolot>

Canadian Embassy  
Carrera 7, No 115-33, Santa Fe de Bogotá, DC, Colombia  
**Tel:** (1) 657 9800. Fax: (1) 657 9914 or 657 9912.  
**Web site:** <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/bogota>

**Country dialling code:** 57.

## 2 GENERAL

**Area:** 1,141,748 sq km (440,831 sq miles).

**Population:** 40,214,723 (1997).

**Population Density:** 35.2 per sq km.

**Capital:** Santa Fe de Bogotá. Population: 6,004,782 (1997).

**Geography:** Colombia is situated in South America, bounded to the north by the Caribbean, to the northwest by Panama, to the west by the Pacific Ocean, to the southwest by Ecuador and Peru, to the northeast by Venezuela and to the southeast by Brazil. The Andes Mountains extend into the country in three ranges running south to north, dipping finally into the lowlands of the Caribbean coast. Along the southern part of the Pacific coast run wide, marshy lowlands rising to a relatively low but rugged mountain chain. East of this range, the southwestern coastal lowlands extend in a low trough running from the port of Buenaventura on the Pacific coast to the Caribbean. East of this, rise the slopes of the Western Cordillera which, with the Central Cordillera range, runs north to the Caribbean lowlands from Ecuador, separated by a valley, filled in the south by volcanic ash to a height of 2500m (8202ft). Further north lies the fertile Cauca Valley, which extends to Cartago where it becomes a deep gorge running between the Cordilleras to the Caribbean lowlands. The Eastern Cordillera, the longest range, rises north of the Ecuadorean border and runs north then northeast towards Venezuela. Flat grassy prairies in the east along with the jungles and towering rainforests of the Amazon make up over half the country's area. There are also two small islands, San Andrés and Providencia, located 700km (430 miles) north of the Colombian coast, that have belonged to Colombia since 1822.

**Government:** Republic. Gained independence from Spain in 1819. Head of State and Government: President Andrés Pastrana Arango.

**Language:** Spanish is the official language. Local Indian dialects and some English, French, German and Italian are also spoken.

**Religion:** 95% Roman Catholic; small Protestant and Jewish minorities.

**Time:** GMT - 5.

**Electricity:** Mostly 110/120 volts AC, 60Hz. American-style 2-pin plugs are common.

**Telephone:** IDD service to most areas; calls to smaller centres must be made through the international operator. Country code: 57. Outgoing international code: 90.

**Mobile telephone:** AMPS/TDMA networks exist. Operators include Celumovil (web site: <http://www.celumovil.com>).

**Fax:** Hotels have facilities.

**Internet/E-mail:** ISPs include Cablenet (web site: <http://www.cable.net.co>). Cybercafes exist in the main cities.

**Telegram:** Facilities are available through national ENDT telecommunications offices.

**Post:** Post offices are marked Correos. Opening hours are 0800-1200 Monday to Friday; 0800-1200 Saturday. There are two types of service: urban post (green letter boxes) and inter-urban and international (yellow boxes). Letters and packets sent by airmail normally take five to seven days to reach their destination.

**Press:** The Colombian Post is the only English newspaper. Spanish dailies include El Espacio, El Espectador, El Nuevo Siglo and El Tiempo.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**

MHz17.8415.229.9159.590

**Voice of America:**

MHz13.749.4556.1651.530

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	No	Yes

**PASSPORTS:** Passport valid for at least 6 months required by all.

**VISAS:** Not required by those travelling for touristic purposes for up to 90 days except nationals from countries listed below who do require a visa. A visitor's permit will be issued on arrival and a 15-day extension to this period may usually be granted. All visitors must provide proof on arrival of sufficient funds to cover their stay.

**Note:** Nationals of Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, China (PR), Comoros, Congo (Dem. Rep. of), Congo (Rep. of), Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Korea (DPR), Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestinian National Authority Region, Rwanda, São Tomé e Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovak Republic, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Vietnam, Taiwan (China), Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe do require visas, whatever the purpose of their visit.

**Types of visa and cost:** Tourist: £30 (depends of nationality). Business: £105. Temporary working: £140. Technical Assistant: £120. Journalist: £110. Religious: £110. Student: £30. Spouse of Colombian National: £110. Public performance: £120.

**Validity:** Depends on purpose of stay.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section.

**Application requirements:** (a) 3 recent passport-size photos. (b) Completed application form. (c) Onward or return tickets. (d) Valid passport. (e) Proof of sufficient funds. (f) Fee. (g) Proof of address. For visas other than tourist visas other documents are required. These will need to be translated into Spanish, and some of them will need to be legalised by the Consulate. There is a fee of £25 per document for this. Most applications will need to be supported by documents from the relevant organisations/the relevant ministry in Colombia and in the applicant's country of origin. Contact the nearest Colombian Consulate/Consular section at Embassy for further details.

**Working days required:** 2 for nationals resident in the UK who require a visa; in all other instances 10-15.

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Colombian Peso (peso) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of peso 20,000, 10,000, 5000 and 2000. Coins are in denominations of peso 1000, 500, 200, 100 and 50.

**Currency exchange:** The exchange rate tends to be lower on the Caribbean coast than in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. The US Dollar is the easiest currency to exchange at hotels, banks, shops and travel agencies; but all establishments charge an exchange fee.

**Credit cards:** All major cards are accepted, but check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Travellers cheques:** These are not always easy to change in the smaller towns, except at branches of the Banco de la República. A photocopied travellers cheque is not of course negotiable but the photocopy will help if they are lost or stolen. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Colombian Peso against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date Mar '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb

'01 £1.00=3103.78 3265.13 3093.63 3275.12 \$1.00=1962.80 2176.25 2137.00 2242.78

**Currency restrictions:** The import of local or foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration on arrival. The export of local currency is unlimited. The export of foreign currency is limited to US\$25,000.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be taken into Colombia without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes and 50 cigars and 500g of tobacco; 2 bottles of wine or spirits; a reasonable quantity of perfume.

**Prohibited items:** Vegetables, plants or plant material; meat and food products of animal origin.

**Note:** Emeralds and articles made of gold or platinum need a receipt from the place of purchase which must be presented to customs on departure.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Jan 6 Epiphany. Mar 19 St Joseph's Day. Apr 12 Maundy Thursday. Apr 13 Good Friday. May 1 Labour Day. May 24 Ascension Day. Jun 14 Corpus Christi. Jun 22 Sacred Heart. Jun 29 Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Jul 20 Independence Day. Aug 7 Battle of Boyacá. Aug 15 Assumption. Oct 15 Columbus Day. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Independence of Cartagena City. Dec 8 Immaculate Conception. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Jan 6 Epiphany. Mar 19 St Joseph's Day. Mar 28 Maundy Thursday. Mar 29 Good Friday. May 1 Labour Day. May 9 Ascension Day. May 30 Corpus Christi. Jun 7 Sacred Heart. Jun 29 Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Jul 20 Independence Day. Aug 7 Battle of Boyacá. Aug 15 Assumption. Oct 14 Columbus Day. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Independence of Cartagena City. Dec 8 Immaculate Conception. Dec 25 Christmas Day.

**Note:** Holidays which fall on a weekday are normally observed on the following Monday.

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	1	No
<b>Cholera</b>	2	-
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	Yes	-
<b>Malaria</b>	3	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	4	-

**1:** Vaccination is recommended for travellers who visit the following areas considered to be endemic for yellow fever: middle valley of the Magdalena River, eastern and western foothills of the Cordillera Oriental from the frontier with Ecuador to that with Venezuela, Urabá, the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, eastern plains (Orinoquia) and Amazonia.

**2:** Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is not a condition of entry to Colombia. However, there may be a risk of cholera in this country and precautions should be considered. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. See the Health appendix.

**3:** Malaria risk exists throughout the year in rural areas below 800m. There is high risk in the following regions: Urabá (Antioquia and Chocó Dep.), Bajo Cauca-Nechi (Córdoba and Antioquia Dep.), Magdalena Medio, Catatumbo (Norte de Santander Dep.), whole Pacific Coast area, eastern plains (Orinoquia) and Amazonia. The malignant falciparum form of the disease is reported to be highly resistant to chloroquine and resistant to sulfadoxine/pyrimethamine.

**4:** All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk is unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. Rabies is present. For those at risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. American trypanosomiasis (Chagas disease), as well as cutaneous and mucocutaneous leishmaniasis occur in Colombia. Hepatitis A and B occur. For further details see the Health appendix.

**Health care:** Health facilities in the main cities are good. In rural areas, services can be very limited. Travellers are strongly advised to take out full medical insurance. There are nine firms in Colombia offering prepaid medical care and medical insurance which may be purchased from travel agents, a list of which is available from the Embassy.

Travel - International

**AIR:** Colombia's national airline is Avianca (AV). British Airways and Avianca each operate two flights a week to Bogotá, via Caracas.

**Approximate flight times:** From London to Bogotá is 12 hours 50 minutes, from Los Angeles is 10 hours 30 minutes, from New York is 6 hours 30 minutes, and from Sydney is 29 hours.

**International airports:** Bogotá (El Dorado) (BOG) is situated 12km (7.5 miles) east of the city. Buses to the city depart every 20 minutes from 0600-2200 (travel time - 30 minutes). Taxis are also available. Airport facilities include bank (0700-2200), duty-free shop, bar, restaurant (0700-2200), tourist information and car hire (Avis, Hertz and Dollar). Barranquilla (Ernesto Cortissoz) (BAQ) is 10km (6 miles) from the city. Car rental is available. Cali (Palmaseca) (CLO) is 19km (10 miles) from the city. Cartagena (Crespo) (CTG) is 2km (1 mile) from the city.

**Departure tax:** US\$23; children under 5 years and passengers transiting within 24 hours are exempt. US\$19 is charged for all departing passengers whose stay exceeds two months.

**Note:** All air tickets purchased in Colombia for destinations outside the country are liable to a total tax of 15% on one-way tickets and 7.5% on return tickets.

**SEA:** Shipping companies serve Colombian ports with both passenger and combination passenger/freight vessels. The following ports and lines serve the major routes: US Gulf ports - Delta Line cruises; from Europe - French Line, Italian Line, Pacific Steam Navigation, Royal Netherlands SS Company and Linea 'C'. Cartagena is an important port of call for the following cruise lines: Sun Line, Princess Cruises, Delta, Norwegian American, Holland America, Westours and Costa.

**RAIL:** There are no international rail connections.

**ROAD:** The Pan-American Highway (Panamericana), when completed, should make it possible to drive into Colombia from Panama, which is currently separated from Colombia by the Darién Gap. Vehicles can also be freighted from Panama to one of Colombia's Caribbean or Pacific ports. There are also road links with Ecuador and Venezuela. Coach/bus: TEPSA buses connect with

Venezuela. Coaches are comfortable and services good. There are second-class buses from Maracaibo to Santa Marta and Cartagena, but this method of travelling can be uncomfortable.

Travel - Internal

**Note:** Visitors should take sensible precautions when travelling in Colombia, as violence and kidnapping occur.

**AIR:** There is an excellent internal air network connecting major cities, including those in the Caribbean coastal area. There are also local helicopter flights. There are flights between the mainland and the islands of San Andrés and Providencia operating from most major Colombian cities. Services are offered by Avianca and several smaller companies. San Andrés is a regular stop for Avianca, Lacsá and Sahsa airlines.

**Departure tax:** US\$4, usually included in the ticket price.

**SEA:** There is a ferry service between the mainland and the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, leaving from the Muelle de los Pegasos. The journey is long (72 hours), but cheap. Information about other sailings to San Andrés can be obtained from the Marítima San Andrés office.

**RIVER:** The Magdalena River is the main artery of Colombia. Some cargo boats take passengers, though this is a slow way to travel. It is possible to hire boats for particular trips. Paddle steamers no longer run services up and down the river and hiring can be expensive. From Leticia, on the Peruvian border, a number of operators run sightseeing tours and jungle expeditions up the Amazon. It is necessary to make enquiries in situ, and wise to shop around before booking on any one trip (see also Resorts & Excursions section).

**RAIL:** Although trains still carry freight, inter-city passenger services are virtually non-existent. Services have been frequently suspended during recent years owing to operators' financial difficulties. The main route is between Bogotá and Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, east of Barranquilla. Because of the distances, it is easier to take a plane if speed is important.

**ROAD:** A good highway links Santa Marta in the east with Cartagena, and passes Barranquilla en route. The Trans-Caribbean Highway has placed Barranquilla only five hours away from Venezuela. Northeast of Santa Marta, in the Guajira Peninsula, roads are usually passable except during rainy periods. There is highway transportation between the coastal cities and the capital and other cities of the interior, but much of the highway is rutted. Bus: The long distances make air travel advisable. However, the best bus lines are said to be the Flota Magdalena, Expreso Boliviano and, especially, the Expreso Palmita. About 42 companies with modern buses and minibuses provide transportation between coastal towns and cities. Car hire: Avis, Hertz, Budget and National have car rental offices, but driving in cities is not recommended. Traffic drives on the right. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is required.

**URBAN:** Bogotá has extensive trolleybus, bus and minibus services, and a funicular railway; flat fares are charged. There are also shared taxis (buseta) which are not expensive and stop on demand. Drivers are authorised to add a supplement for out-of-town trips and to airports. At hotels, the green and cream coloured taxis are available for tourists. They are more expensive than the others. Passengers should insist that meters are used. For those without a meter the fare should be agreed before starting a journey.

**JOURNEY TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate journey times from Bogotá (in hours and minutes) to other major towns/cities in Colombia.

Air  
Cartagena1.15  
Barranquilla1.15  
Medellín1.15  
Manizales1.00  
Cali1.00  
Bucaramanga0.45  
Cúcuta1.00  
Pereira1.00  
Leticia2.00

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

**HOTELS:** It is advisable to choose hotels recommended by the official Colombian hotel organisation, Cotelco, Calle 93B, No 12-28, Of. 302, Santa Fe de Bogotá (tel: (1) 621 6920; fax: (1) 621 7762). Two tariffs are levied: 'European tariff' from May to November, and 'American tariff' from December to April, which is much higher. It is advisable to make reservations well in advance. There are several hotels and residencias on the island of San Andrés, and one on Providencia. Prices rise on average 10% a year; visitors are advised to check current prices when making reservations. Grading: There is a star grading system similar to that operating in Europe.

**Note:** A 5% tax is added to all hotel bills throughout the country.

**CAMPING/CARAVANNING:** Camping is possible in Colombia, although there are very few official camping areas. Two of the better campsites in the country are Camping del Sol and Camping de Covenas.

## 9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

For the purpose of this guide, this section includes brief information on Colombia's major cities (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla), the Caribbean Coast and the Amazon Basin.

**BOGOTÁ:** BOGOTÁ: The capital and largest city, which is situated almost in the centre of the country at an altitude of 2600m (8600ft). The city 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 on the main square, the Plaza Bolívar. 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-hours bus drive from Bogotá, is best known for its Laguna de Guatavita, the ritual centre and sacred lake of the Muisca Indians.

**MEDELLÍN:** MEDLLÍN: Colombia's second city, with over 1.5 million inhabitants, lies 1300m (4264ft) above sea level in a narrow valley of the central mountain range. It is primarily industrial, and is the centre 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:** CALI: The centre 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:** BARRANQUILLA: A busy port and Colombia's fourth city, Barranquilla is located towards the mouth of the Magdalena River. It is one of the nation's main commercial centres. There is a colourful market in the so-called Zona Negra on a side channel of the Magdalena.

**CARIBBEAN COAST:** 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 are its deep bays, shaded with coconut trees, with 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 spoilt parts. Popular excursions include visits by boat to Johnny Cay and the Aquarium.

**THE AMAZON BASIN:** 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 in and often include visits to Indian tribes.

**OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST:** OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST: Colombia has much to offer those interested in archaeology. San Augustin 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 man-made burial caves painted with pre-Colombian geometric patterns. In the same region, Silva is a beautiful Indian town. The country also contains much unspoilt countryside; the Guajira Peninsula is home to over 100,000 nomadic Indians.

## 10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Football:** Football is Colombia's main sport, with major league games played throughout the year. Tennis is popular; most hotels have facilities. Mountain climbing begins 48km (30 miles) east of Santa Marta, with peaks of up to nearly 6000m (19,000ft). A major cycle race, the Tour of Colombia, takes place every March and April. Boxing and bullfighting (the latter at Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, Manizales and Cartagena) are popular sports. Golf clubs allow visitors to use their

facilities. Good skiing can be found on the slopes of Nevado del Ruiz (5400m/17,700ft), 48km (30 miles) from Manizales. Fishing is excellent all year round; a licence is required.

**Watersports:** Watersports: water-skiing, boating, sailing and skindiving can all be practised on the coast (check with authorities before diving, as sharks and barracudas have caused fatalities).

## 11 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** Restaurants offer international cuisine and table service is the norm. Local dishes are varied and tasty, with a touch of Spanish influence. Recommended dishes are ajiaco (chicken stew with potatoes, served with cream, corn on the cob and capers); arepas (corn pancakes made without salt, eaten in place of bread); bandeja paisa (meat dish accompanied by cassava, rice, fried plantain and red beans), served in the area of Medellín. Seafood, known as mariscos, is plentiful on the Caribbean coast. Lobsters in particular are renowned for their flavour. Drink: It is safest to drink bottled water. Colombians rarely drink alcohol with meals. Gaseosa is the name given to non-alcoholic, carbonated drinks. For a small black coffee, you should ask for a tinto, but this term is also used to describe red wine or vino tinto. Colombian wines are of poor quality. Chilean and Argentinian wines are available in restaurants at reasonable prices. Colombia produces many different types of rum (ron). Canelazo, a rum-based cocktail taken hot or cold, can be recommended. There are no licensing hours.

**Nightlife:** Bogotá's Colon Theatre presents ballet, opera, drama and music, with international and local groups. There are many nightclubs and discotheques in the major towns of Colombia.

**Shopping:** Special purchases include local handicrafts, cotton, wood and leather goods, woollen blankets, ruana, and travelling bags. Hotel shops carry excellent gold reproductions of ancient Colombian jewellery. Colombia produces first-grade stones, and the emeralds are among the most perfect in the world. Shopping hours: 0900-1200 and 1400-1830 Monday to Saturday.

**Special Events:** For a complete list, contact the Colombian Embassy. The following is a selection of the major festivals and other special events celebrated in Colombia in 2001: Jan 2001 Festival of Blacks and Whites, Pasto. Feb The Barranquilla Carnival. Mar The International Caribbean Music Festival, Cartagena; International Film Festival, Cartagena. Jun The Cumbia Festival, El Banco; The Porro Festival, San Pelayo. Aug Parade of the Flower Vendors, Medellín; The Sea Festival, Santa Marta; The Guabina and Tiple Festival, Veléz. Nov The National Folk and Tourist Festival, San Martin. Dec The Sugar-Cane Fair, Cali. In Bogotá, the open-air Media Torta presents music, plays and folk dances on Sunday afternoons and holidays. An amateur theatre group gives frequent performances in English.

**Social Conventions:** Normal courtesies should be observed. It is customary to offer guests black Colombian coffee, well sugared, called tinto. Spanish style and culture can still be seen in parts of the country, although in Bogotá, North American attitudes and clothes are becoming prevalent. Casual clothes can be worn in most places; formal attire will be necessary for exclusive dining rooms and social functions. Smoking is allowed except where indicated. The visitor is advised that many of the main cities in Colombia are notorious for street crime, particularly at night. Drug-related crimes are a serious problem throughout the country and the visitor should be wary of the unsolicited attention of strangers. Tipping: Taxi drivers do not expect tips. Porters at airports and hotels are usually given a few pesos per item. Many restaurants, bars and cafés add 10% service charge to bill or suggest a 10% tip. Maids and clerks in hotels are rarely tipped. Bogotá's shoeshine boys live on their tips and expect about 300-500 pesos.

## 12 BUSINESS PROFILE

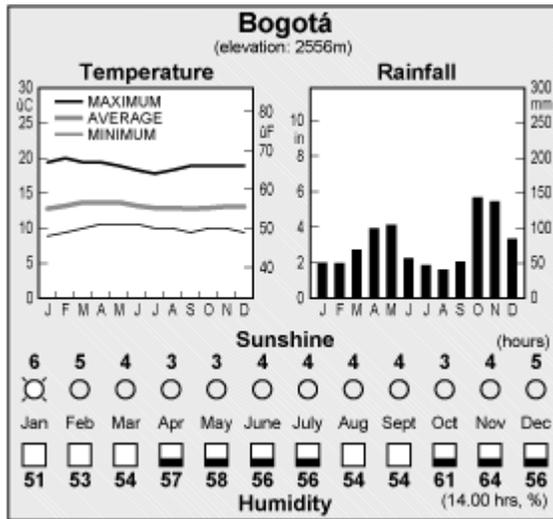
**Economy:** Agriculture is extensive and varied, and accounts for 75% of export earnings. Coffee has traditionally been the principal crop (Colombia is the world's second-largest producer), but as production has declined and the prices fallen, other products have partially replaced it, including sugar, bananas, cut flowers and cotton. Illegal farming of coca is also widespread in the more remote parts of the country. The country is self-sufficient in consumer goods and exports of manufactured goods - textiles, leather goods, metal products, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and cement - have been steadily increasing. Colombia has sizeable oil reserves which are now on stream. Coal deposits are the largest in Latin America although development of these has been slow. Colombia is a member of the Andean Pact and of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración (ALADI) which is seeking to regularise tariffs throughout South America. In addition, Colombia is establishing a three-country free trade zone with Venezuela and Mexico. The USA is Colombia's largest trading partner; Germany, Japan and Venezuela follow.

**Business:** Business people are expected to dress smartly. English is widely understood in many business circles; the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an official translation service, and there are a number of commercial interpreter services. A command of Spanish is always appreciated. Business visitors will sometimes be invited out to dinner, which may be preceded by a long cocktail party, with a meal starting around 2300. The best months for business visits are March to November. The business community generally takes holidays from September to February, the driest months. It is advisable to avoid Barranquilla in June and July. Office hours: 0800-1200 and 1400-1700 Monday to Friday.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisations can offer advice: Confederación Colombiana de Cámaras de Comercio (CONFECAMARAS) (National Chamber of Commerce), Apdo Aéreo 29750, Carrera 13, No 27-47, Of. 502, Santa Fe de Bogotá (tel: (1) 288 1200; fax: (1) 288 4228; e-mail: confecamaras@inter.net.com; web site: <http://www.confecamaras.org.co>); or Proexport Colombia, Ed. Centro de Comercio Internacional, Calle 28, No. 13A-15, Piso 37, Santa Fe de Bogotá (tel: (1) 341 2066. fax: (1) 283 5291; e-mail: [informacion@proexport.com.co](mailto:informacion@proexport.com.co); web site: <http://www.coltrade.org>) or Colombian Government Trade Bureau, Suite 560, 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington DC, 20006 (tel: (202) 887 9000).

**Conferences/Conventions:** For advice and assistance with conferences and conventions in Colombia, contact the CORFERIAS (National Centre of Trade Fairs), Carrera 40, #22C-67, Santa Fe de Bogotá (tel: (1) 337 7676; fax: (1) 337 7271; e-mail: [corferia@axesnet.com](mailto:corferia@axesnet.com); web site: <http://www.corferias.com>).

## 13 CLIMATE



The climate is very warm and tropical on the coast and in the north, with a rainy season from May to November. This varies according to altitude. It is cooler in the upland areas and cold in the mountains. Bogotá is always spring-like, with cool days and crisp nights.

**Required clothing:** Lightweight cottons and linens with waterproofing during rainy season in coastal and northern areas. Medium- to heavy-weights are needed in upland and mountainous areas.

## 14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** Prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, the territory was inhabited by the highly developed and sophisticated Chibcha Indians. Spanish occupation began in the 17th century and was consolidated during the early 18th in the viceroyalty of New Granada which covered the northern part of South America. Discontent among various parts of the population - indigenous inhabitants, lower-class Spanish immigrants and mixed-race Creoles - with the arbitrary nature of colonial rule eventually led to the 1819 rebellion under the legendary figure of Simon Bolivar. New Granada became Gran Colombia, divided into four provinces (roughly equivalent to the four present-day countries of Colombia, Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela). Colombia separated from the others soon after Bolivar's death in 1830. Political divisions focused on the extent of the future role of the Catholic Church: these differences were reflected politically in the formation of the Liberal and Conservative parties, and have played a major role in Colombian politics ever since. The Republic of Colombia was formally established in 1855, four years after the abolition of slavery. Over the next hundred years, Colombian politics were dominated by the Conservative-Liberal feud which often broke out into warfare. Periods of democratic government alternated with dictatorships. There were occasions, however, when the two parties were able to unite to see off a common threat. This occurred in 1970, when they joined forces to prevent a bid for power by the Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO), led by the former dictator, General Rojas. At a desperately close election in April 1970, which needed four recounts, Rojas was narrowly defeated by Dr Misael Pastrana Borrero, the candidate for the National Front alliance of Liberals and Conservatives. The 1970 election was a turning point in Colombia's recent history. Disaffected members of ANAPO formed a guerrilla movement known as Movimiento 19 de Abril

(M-19) which initiated a 15-year-long guerrilla campaign against the Government. They were soon joined in insurrection by two other left-wing groups, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) and the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army). While the three groups waged their campaigns with varying degrees of success, orthodox politics was taken over by the Conservative-Liberal duopoly. Meanwhile a third potent force emerged during the 1980s in the form of organised drug traffickers (known as cartels and identified generally by their cities of origin - hence 'Cali cartel', 'Medellin cartel'). Their control of large sums of money now began to be turned into political power and leading politicians increasingly became tainted by their connections with drug money. In September 1989, after almost a year of negotiations with the Government, M-19 formally gave up their armed struggle and committed themselves to constitutional politics. The 1990 presidential poll was won by the Liberal candidate, Cesar Gaviria, who succeeded his fellow Liberal Virgilio Barco Vargas; and the party hung on to the presidency in 1994 when Ernesto Samper won. The 1994 election was notable for the electoral baptism of ADM-19, the political party established by M-19; the party performed poorly, not least because their candidates were physically attacked, and many of them killed, by right-wing paramilitaries. By 1998, the electorate had had enough of the Liberals after twelve years and returned Andres Pastrana, a conservative and former mayor of Bogota (with a somewhat chequered record in office) standing under the banner of a Grand Alliance for Change. By now, the country was wholly dominated by a three-cornered struggle between the Government, traffickers and guerrillas. Under pressure from Washington, the Colombian security forces launched the 'war on drugs' towards the end of the decade. With extensive training equipment and finance - as well as constant political pressure - from the US, the campaign has produced mixed results. Although two of the largest drugs organisations, popularly known as the Medellin and Cali cartels, were dismantled, the flow of cocaine (and increasingly heroin) into the USA and elsewhere continues apace. Guerrilla strategy has concentrated on the creation of 'liberated areas' within which government forces are unable or unwilling to operate. The 15,000-strong FARC, the largest of the groups, has achieved notable successes in a large area south of Bogota. Negotiations between the government and the guerrillas led to a formal withdrawal by all government forces from this area at the end of 1998. The US administration was infuriated by the accommodation between the Colombian government and the guerrillas, who are now in effective control of one-third of the country. In 2000, the USA unveiled a massive military support programme, valued at \$1 billion, for the Colombian armed forces. Although portrayed as the latest phase of the 'war on drugs' - drugs play a central role in every part of the Colombian economy, - it is clear that the programme is essentially political and strategic: the objective is to destroy FARC and its allies once and for all.

**Government:** The President is head of state, elected by universal adult suffrage for a period of four years. The President appoints and is assisted by a Cabinet. The legislature is the bicameral Congress, consisting of a 102-member Senate and the 165-member House of Representatives. All members are elected by universal adult suffrage. The President and both houses of Congress serve 4-year terms.

## 15 OVERVIEW

**Country Overview:** Colombia is situated in South America, bounded by Panama, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, the Caribbean and Pacific oceans. The Andes Mountains extend into the country in three ranges running south to north. Flat grassy prairies in the east, along with the jungles and towering rainforests of the Amazon, make up over half the country's area.

Bogotá, the capital and largest city, is situated almost in the country's centre. The city blends Colombian tradition with Spanish colonial influences. Historical landmarks include the Capitol

Municipal Palace and the Plaza Bolivar cathedral. Santa Marta's modern hotels and white beaches are popular among tourists.

Local dishes are varied and tasty, with Spanish influences. Recommended dishes are ajiaco (chicken stew with potatoes) and arepas (corn pancakes made without salt, eaten in place of bread). Colombian wines are only of average quality but Chilean and Argentinian wines are available. Bogotá's Colon Theatre presents ballet, opera, drama and music productions with international and local groups.

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