



The Classic Colombia trip

TRIP LENGTH: 14 days
STARTS: Bogotá
ENDS: Cartagena

Colombia has so much to offer and this trip has it all - historic, vibrant cities that are gastronomic hotbeds; some of the world's loveliest valleys, lakes and beaches; modern art and folk architecture, all threaded through with gold and powered by coffee culture!

Day 1 Graffiti, ghosts and gunpowder

Your guide will meet you at your accommodation at 1pm and together you'll head out for an afternoon exploring *La Candelaria* - Bogotá's 16th century founding district, and now a renowned street art mecca. The mash-up of ghosts and graffiti, colonial castles and street art, is a pretty good metaphor for South America as a whole, and the perfect place to start our adventure together in Colombia.

We'll round out the afternoon and work up an appetite playing *tejo*, where we get to throw chunks of metal at packets of gunpowder. This much fun probably wouldn't be legal outside Colombia - but here it's the official national sport!

Accommodation: Four-star hotel in historic Bogotá

Meals: Lunch and dinner included

Day 2 Salt and gold

Two very different sights today, both of which have to be seen to be believed, and which will leave you in awe of Colombia's natural wealth.

This morning we'll visit the Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, Colombia's greatest man-made wonder. The carvings, the lighting, the sheer scale, all are indescribable. Catholic pilgrims flock here, and we'll see why today.

Back in Bogotá this afternoon we'll head to the *Museo de Oro* (Gold Museum). We don't tend to include museums in our trips, but Bogotá's Museo de Oro is not to be missed. Prepare to be overwhelmed again by a mining resource!

Accommodation: Four star hotel in historic Bogota

Meals: All meals included

Day 3 Colors and flavors of Colombia

If you were going to see just one market in Colombia, the mighty Mercado Paloquemao would have to be it. Beloved by the families of Bogota for 50 years, it's a sensory feast of fresh fruit, flowers and so much more. The way to anyone's heart is through their stomach, and here you'll get a feel for the fuel that makes Bogotá tick.

After sampling a few snacks we'll head to the airport for the short flight to Manizales, then to Hacienda Venecia, a functioning coffee farm and birdwatcher's paradise surrounded by gorgeous green hills in the heart of Colombia's *eje cafetero* (coffee zone).

We'll get straight into it with a coffee tour of the whole process, from the tree to your cup! And we'll spend the night at the hacienda, enjoying balmy breezes by the swimming pool.

Accommodation: Hacienda Venecia

Meals: All meals included

Day 4 Salento, Filandia and the Cocora Valley

Today we explore the most beautiful part of a very beautiful country.

Salento and Filandia are insanely charming little towns that time forgot. Here we'll wander through peaceful plazas shaded by Colombia's national emblem and the world's tallest palm tree, the *palma de cera*, and down quiet, colorful streets shaded by balconies overflowing with flowers.

Filandia is known for its amazing *mirador* (lookout) where we drink in soul-filling views of incredible mountains draped in infinite shades of green. We'll get in amongst those hills in the Cocora Valley National Reserve, where we have the option to hike for minutes or hours through a whole different, even greener world: the moss-draped, mist-damped cloud forest.

Accommodation: Four-star accommodation in the Coffee Zone

Meals: All meals included

Day 5 Santa Rosa de Cabal thermal springs

We'll spend today soaking up the serenity in the most beautiful hot springs imaginable, at Santa Rosa de Cabal.

Here, water that springs from the mountain at a scalding 158°F (70°C) drops 260 feet (80m) in a stunningly beautiful waterfall, and is collected in gorgeously landscaped pools for our enjoyment at 104°F (40°C).

We could easily spend all day here, or if we feel like being more active, we'll take a two-hour hike to where the water emerges from the mountain, observing birds, waterfalls, and stunning mountain scenery all the way.

Accommodation: Four-star accommodation in the Coffee Zone

Meals: All meals included

Day 6 One of the world's weirdest rocks

This morning we take a short flight to Medellín and drive (1.5 hours) to a different natural paradise, Guatapé - an incredibly cute little town, on an incredibly beautiful lake, with an incredibly strange feature called the Peñón - a weird, toothlike rock mountain that juts above the landscape like a lone tooth. We'll climb the staircase that's been somehow, ingeniously installed on its side, to enjoy breathtaking views of green hills, blue lake, and curly coves.

There's still time to take an optional scenic helicopter flight over the lake this afternoon, or you might prefer to just chill and enjoy the pool at our lakeside resort.

Accommodation: Hotel los Recuerdos, Guatapé

Meals: All meals included

Day 7 From gorgeous Guatapé to modern Medellín

This morning we'll explore Guatapé's curious, colorful, utterly Colombian streetscape. The jaunty, individualistic frescoes on each building have to be seen to be believed - there are surprises around every corner in Guatapé!

Then we'll take to the lake on a boat tour which gives us the chance to check out the hidden islands and inlets where drug barons and tech millionaires have their holiday homes, in between soaking in the incredible beauty of the lush green hills that surround us.

This afternoon we pack up our bags and pick up the pace as we head to Medellín, a fabulous city that has emerged from a bloody history of terrorism and drug cartels as a model of urban renewal and cultural innovation. All our guests love the vibe here, and it's Steve's favorite city in South America!

One of Medellín's attractions is its famous nightlife, and our accommodation in the Poblado entertainment district is close to the action, so a stroll through the balmy evening is in order - even if nights out aren't your thing, the people-watching on the pedestrian strip is incredible!

Accommodation: Four-star hotel in Medellín

Meals: All meals included

Day 8 Cable cars and Comuna 13

In 2008, Medellín was voted the world's most innovative city by the Urban Land Institute, and it's got even better since then! One of the biggest drivers of the city's amazing economic and cultural turnaround is its public transport network, and today we'll experience Medellín like the locals, riding the metro rail system that serves the middle of the city, and the cable cars connecting it to the poorer neighborhoods that climb the incredibly steep mountains around it.

The most famous of these is Comuna 13, arguably Colombia's most fascinating neighborhood, and definitely the world's poster child for urban regeneration. From a recent dark past of terrorism and drug cartels has emerged a vibrant artistic hotbed that's so steep we'll get around it on escalators!

Accommodation: Four-star hotel in the Poblado district

Meals: All meals included

Day 9 Morning in the mountains, sunset by the sea

This morning you have the choice of which aspect of Medellín you'd like to explore - culture, including the world-class modern art and fashion that defines Medellín today, or you might like to take the Pablo Escobar tour, and learn more about this Medellín native, the richest criminal in the history of the world, who turned Medellín into a warzone in the 1990s, and whose impact is still felt today. (Or if you'd like to go paragliding, we can arrange this as an extra.)

Then we'll take a short flight to Santa Marta, the oldest city in South America, where Gabriel Garcia Marquez was born, and where the liberator of South America, Simon Bolivar died. The colonial center is soaked in history, and the surrounding views, of the ocean on one side and the Sierra Nevada mountains on the other, are arresting... but most people come here for the beach! We'll round out the day dipping into colonial history, our hotel pool, the calm, warm water of the Caribbean - or all of the above!

Accommodation: Four-star resort in Santa Marta

Meals: All meals included

Day 10 Hike to the beaches of Parque Tayrona

45 minutes drive from Santa Marta is Parque Tayrona, Colombia's most famous natural reserve and home to indescribably beautiful forest and a significant archaeological site, as well as what we're here for today: a beautiful tropical forest walk to several of the world's best *playas* (beaches).

We spend the morning hiking through tropical forest through various micro-systems. As the day heats us, so do we, and just when we're perfectly hot and ready for a swim we arrive to world famous Cabo San Juan, Tayrona's most iconic beach and the perfect place to swim, rest, and take photos of a beach that seems too beautiful to be true.

We'll spend the rest of the afternoon hiking along the coast to a series of beaches, each less-visited than Cabo San Juan, and each more unbelievably photogenic than the last.

This is the quintessential day in the tropics, and by the end of it, you'll understand why Tayrona is South America's most popular national park.

Accommodation: Four-star resort in Santa Marta

Meals: All meals included

Day 11 Tayronaka - ancient rainforest mysticism

Tayronaka gives us a privileged glimpse at the long history, complex spirituality, and uniquely abundant environment that have formed the Kogui people, descendants of the Tayrona.

Two hours by vehicle, boat, and rainforest trail brings us to Tayronaka, a complex of gorgeous nature trails among the restored terraces, paths, and walls of an ancient city. 900 years ago, this was a city where Tayrona families farmed, fished, hunted, played, and conducted ceremonies for which they adorned themselves with flowers, feathers, seeds, crystals and gold abundantly supplied by the rainforest.

We'll walk Tayronaka's trails, gardens and plantations with an indigenous Kogui (descendants of the Tayrona) guide, and learn about the complex, highly respected religion of the Kogui, where the female is synonymous with the Earth, and male priests are trained from birth, spending their first nine years in a dark cave.

Accommodation: Four-star resort in Santa Marta

Meals: All meals included

Day 12 Captivating, colonial Cartagena

We've saved the best for last! This morning we drive (4 hours approx.) across the top of Colombia to the one and only Cartagena de Indias.

Hot and steamy, elegant and exuberant, historic Cartagena is the jewel of the Colombian Caribbean and this afternoon we'll see what all the fuss is about as we get to know the old walled city on foot.

We'll have dinner and enjoy the sea breezes at a rooftop restaurant - Lupe's favorite Caribbean experience!

Accommodation: Four-star hotel in Cartagena

Meals: All meals included

Day 13 Emeralds, chocolate, rum and more!

Today we'll take in all the best of Cartagena: spending the morning wandering through colorful, Bohemian Getsemani with its street performers and graffiti, and exploring the nearby 16th century fortress of San Felipe.

In the afternoon we'll visit an emerald processing factory and Katy's favorite museum in the world - home to the world's only air-conditioned emerald mine, and emeralds bigger than boulders!

We'll take in the view from Cerro de Popa, with its crazy views of the Miami-like resorts that have sprung up around the city's colonial architecture, before heading down to the waterfront to ease into our final dinner together in the spirit of indulgence, with a multi-course chocolate or rum tasting with a passionate local expert.

Accommodation: Four-star hotel in Cartagena

Meals: All meals included

Day 14 Goodbye Colombia!

You can book your flight home for any time today. Thank you for traveling with us - we hope you've enjoyed experiencing Colombia with us!

Meals: Breakfast included

What's included:

- All accommodation in double or twin room (*single room available on request*)
- All transportation, including airport transfers at start and end of trip
- All domestic flights (*Bogotá-Manizales, Pereira-Medellín, Medellín-Santa Marta*)
- All attractions and activities specified in itinerary
- Dedicated Aspiring Adventures guide
- All meals, as specified in the itinerary
- Clean, safe drinking water throughout the trip

What's not included:

- Scenic helicopter flight on Day 6 (*add \$85pp*)
- Paragliding on Day 9 (*add \$120pp*)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Laundry and room service
- Tips for guides and drivers