

EXPLORE!

Highlights of Colombia

9 days

Colombia - Trip code BCH



Highlights of Colombia

This once-notorious country now has a reputation for having some of the friendliest locals in South America, a status that is well-deserved. This trip gives first-time visitors a taste of Colombia's diversity, from the towering Andes to the warm seas of the Caribbean. Explore the country's indigenous history at the fascinating gold museum in Bogota; hike amid the beautiful wax palms of the Cocora Valley and eat a typical lunch in colourful Salento; discover Medellin's regeneration and relax on the lovely cobbled streets of colonial Cartagena.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Bogota** - Take a cable car trip up Monserrate and visit the magnificent Salt Cathedral at Zipaquirá
- ★ **Cartagena** - Wander around the cobbled streets of this picture-perfect colonial gem
- ★ **Coffee Region** - Walk in the wax palms of the Cocora Valley and visit a coffee plantation
- ★ **Medellin** - Discover innovative design and development in this diverse modern city

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:**Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:**10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Bogota

Bogota is set at an altitude of over 2,600m with the high ranges of the Cordillera Mountains lying to the east. The city's name comes from the Muisca indigenous people who inhabited the region before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1538, and the remnants of not only the Muisca empire but of Colombia's many other indigenous cultures can be found in the city's impressive Gold Museum. Bogota boasts grand colonial churches alongside futuristic architecture and a lively cultural scene. Arriving today we check-in to our hotel.



Accommodation: Hotel BH Bicentenario (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Take a cable car up Mount Monserrate; visit the Gold Museum

This morning we head out of Bogota and take the cable car up Mount Monserrate for magnificent views of the city. On our return we will spend time exploring the colourful colonial streets of La Candelaria and the city's lively central area. Walking under the balconied houses from where local residents often observe the comings and goings below, we'll cross the vast Plaza de Bolivar encountering some excellent examples of colonial architecture, such as the Catedral Primada de Colombia and San Bartolome College. The visit continues with the Museo Botero, a colonial house filled with works of art by the Colombian artist and sculptor Fernando Botero, famous for his abstract portrayal of people with large, exaggerated proportions. Finally, we will visit the Gold Museum, which is regarded as housing the finest collection of gold from Pre-Hispanic times.



Accommodation: Hotel BH Bicentenario (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Discover Zipaquira's cavernous Salt Cathedral; fly to the Coffee Country

We'll head north out of the city this morning towards the small town of Zipaquira, a town that may normally go unnoticed if not for its extraordinary Salt Cathedral. This immense structure, carved out of solid salt, can accommodate over 8000 people and was part of the salt mines - a house of worship created as an easy way for miners to practice their religion while not disrupting their work. Curving and twisting tunnels descend into the Roman Catholic Church, passing 14 small chapels representing the Stations of the Cross, illustrating the events of Jesus' last journey. The immense cross in the central nave, lit from head to toe, has to be seen to be believed. After our visit we'll go directly to the airport, where we catch our flight to Armenia, the capital of the Quindio department and an important coffee growing centre, where we will spend the next two nights.



Accommodation: Hacienda Combia (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Walk in the mountain landscape of the Cocora Valley

After breakfast, we spend time exploring the beautiful rainforest and creeks of the valley with the opportunity to see the multitudes of towering wax palms peppering the mountainsides. We will also visit the small and colourful town of Salento to see the very characteristic colonial architecture of this coffee growing region, enjoying a typical lunch in charming Salento. Smoked trout is particular to the area, usually served with plantain and rice, but you may also find yucca and arepas, a type of cornbread eaten by locals throughout the country.



Accommodation: Hacienda Combia (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 5 - Visit a coffee plantation; drive to Medellin

This is one of the most attractive parts of the country and today we will take a day out to a local coffee farm. During the visit you will learn about the whole process from the planting of the beans all the way through the picking and roasting process, finishing off with trying the fresh coffee. The coffee in this region tends to be planted in rows extending up the mountainside, and we will be amazed by the physical work undertaken by the pickers in hauling their loads along, sometimes even strapped or tied onto the steep mountainside. In the late afternoon we set off for our six hour drive to Medellin, stopping for dinner en route (not included).



Accommodation: Hotel Poblado Plaza (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Explore the giant Lake Guatape and colourful lakeside town

Today we drive out of the city to the picturesque lakeside town of Guatape, where the houses are painted in glorious pastel shades. The town is known as 'Pueblo de Zocalos' for the intricate paintings of animals, musical instruments, flowers and birds found on the lower half of almost every building in the centre. After discovering the cobblestoned streets and lakeside cafes, we visit the enormous rock of El Penol. This monolith is Guatape's most visited site, and the 650 step climb to the top is well worth it for the astounding views over the town, the lake and the mountains. After taking a breather on the top, we descend and return to Medellin, taking a stop at San Antonio de Pereira, a quiet town known for its confectionary and desserts. Although there is not much to see, the 'dulce' (sweet) shops and stands are well worth a visit to sample some of the local specialties, with flavours from orange and aguardiente to caramel and yucca.



Accommodation: Hotel Poblado Plaza (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Discover Medellin on foot and by cable car; fly to Cartagena

Medellin has had a colourful history, yet since the death of its most infamous resident, Pablo Escobar, in 1993, the city has gone through comprehensive urban and cultural development. It now has a reputation for innovation and creativity and is representative of the country's social transformation, with growing industry and projects of social integration. Part of this innovation lies in the building of a cable car system allowing the residents of the poorer neighbourhoods on the steep mountainsides surrounding Medellin to easily commute into the city to work and trade. There is art all over the city - murals providing a flash of colour high up on building walls, or the bronze statues on Botero Plaza, donated by the famous artist himself. Our stay in Medellin is an opportunity to learn more about Colombia's recent, and fascinating, history. In the afternoon we fly to Cartagena on the Caribbean Coast. Our hotel is in the heart of the old-town, surrounded by the city walls and the perfect spot from which to wander to one of the city's many fine restaurants and bars. Music and nightlife is at the heart of Cartagena, and our Explore Leader can point us towards one of the many popular salsa bars, where bands are often found playing their lively music to locals showing off their moves on the dancefloor.



Accommodation: Hotel Don Pedro de Heredia (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Walk in the walled colonial city; free afternoon

Cartagena was founded in 1533 by Spanish conquerors as a main port to transport people and their goods into South America, and export gold, silver and all sorts of plants, animals, minerals and handicrafts from all over the continent across the Caribbean and on to Europe. It was also a slave port, a business which necessitated the construction of defences and massive fortified walls around the old city, now designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today we will take a half day tour with our guide visiting, among other things, the San Felipe Fort, Convent de la Popa and the Convent de San Pedro Claver. There are plenty of things to do this afternoon, including a canoeing trip through in the mangroves to the fishermen's village La Boquilla, or a visit to the National Aviary where you can explore the different ecosystems of Colombia, and discover varied birdlife such as the harpy eagle, the Caribbean toucan, the pink flamingo and many other species. Alternatively, there are full day options (which would involve missing the walking tour), to enjoy the golden Caribbean sands at the beautiful Rosario Islands or to head to the fascinating African-influenced town of San Basilio de Palenques, home to descendants of communities of fugitive and escaped slaves from the colonial period of the 17th Century, and discover their rich culture. In the evening we can take a yachting trip to enjoy cocktails by sunset, a salsa class or a chocolate and rum tasting that will give you the chance to taste some of Colombia's finest produce.



Accommodation: Hotel Don Pedro de Heredia (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Trip ends in Cartagena

Our trip ends today in Cartagena. If your flight leaves in the evening, there will be a final opportunity to soak up the atmosphere in Cartagena's cobbled streets before departing. If anyone took a full day trip on the previous day, this is a good chance to explore the city. Alternatively, if you would like to extend your time in Colombia we also have an extension to Tayrona National Park, further along the Caribbean Coast, which is a park dense in green forest with excellent hiking trails as well as hidden beaches to explore.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Why book this trip

This trip is an excellent opportunity for someone who is short on time to visit five of Colombia's key highlights in just 9 days. Not just remaining in the cities, this holiday gets you off the main track into the countryside and to some of Colombia's hidden gems.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 8
Lunch: 1



Transport

Bus
Flight



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

8 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Colombia Trips

Climate

The dry season in Colombia roughly runs from December to March/April and also a slightly 'drier' period from July to September. These are among the best times to travel, although visits outside of these months are very manageable. The Caribbean coast is very hot and humid all year round (always around or above 30°C), although the offshore breeze between December and March makes this a more popular time to visit. Due to the high altitude locations of places like Bogota, Manizales and Armenia temperatures here can be quite cool during 'winter' months (Nov to Mar/Apr) and the nights are cool to cold at anytime of the year. The coffee harvest seasons are March to May and September to November; it is during these periods that it is possible to see the red coffee beans and watch the whole process of coffee production.

Time difference to GMT

-5

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Roman Catholic.

Language

Spanish.

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

All optional prices are based on 4 people. The price may vary if there are more or fewer people on the excursion. Cartagena: Full day boat trip to Rosario Island: US\$94; Half day trip to the National Aviary: US\$106 Horse drawn carriage with dinner: US\$108 Salsa classes: US\$42 Yachting trip for sunset and Cocktails: US\$88 San Basilio de Palenque: US\$88 Rum and chocolate tasting: US\$55 All tours include a local guide aside from the salsa class.

Clothing

For this trip you will need to pack for all weathers, as you travel through several different climatic zones. In the Andes (Bogota and Salento), warm clothing is useful, particularly in the evenings when the temperature can drop sharply at night. Lightweight clothing is necessary for the Caribbean coast with long sleeve shirts and trousers ideal to provide protection from the sun and insect bites. A waterproof is essential as it can rain at any time of year.

Footwear

Comfortable hiking boots/trekking shoes, shoes and/or sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

A torch, water bottle, good quality sunglasses, sun hat, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential. To climb El Penol you will also need some comfortable shoes - trainers are fine. Don't forget your swimming things and a small towel.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Local Crew: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow approx. US\$ 40 for gratuities for local staff. 10% is expected in restaurants.

International Departure Taxes

None for UK citizens, Canadian citizens have an entry tax of 68US\$.

Country Information

Colombia Trips

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£5

Dinner price

£10

Beer price

£1.6

Water price

£0.4

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Colombian Peso (COP).

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange.

Where To Exchange

Your tour leader can also advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

Credit Card Acceptance

Most major hotels, restaurants and stores accept credit cards.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Flight

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Columbia: Visas are not required for UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate. All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure. USA: (including those in transit) Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) - where you apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), which applies if you enter the country by sea or by air. This must be done on line - <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely to be refused boarding. You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover. If you have visited Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan since 2011 or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot travel with an ESTA and instead you will need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel. Please note for your ESTA application you will be required to supply Point of Contact information. Explore's USA contact information will be listed on your final documentation which you will receive approximately 3-4 weeks before departure. If you are leaving for the USA before this, please call the Explore team to get this information. (Not necessary if in transit) For further information please check out the US embassy website. Visa applications - <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/apply.html> Canada: An electronic travel authorisation (ETA) is required by British citizens transiting via Canada. For more information see the official Canadian government website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp> Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for

your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Colombia Trips

Vaccinations

We recommend protection against malaria, Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.
