

EXPLORE!



Highlights of Colombia

COLOMBIA - TRIP CODE BCH

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

This once-notorious country now has a reputation for having some of the friendliest locals in South America, a status that is well deserved. Our highlights trip gives first-time visitors a taste of Colombia's diversity, from the towering Andes to the warm seas of the Caribbean.

- **Bogota** - Take a cable car trip up Mount Monserrate and visit the magnificent Salt Cathedral at Zipaquirá
- **Salento** - Hike amid the beautiful wax palms of the Cocora Valley and try a typical lunch in colourful Salento town
- **Cartagena** - Wander around the cobbled streets of this picture-perfect colonial gem
- **2020 departures** - We are running an altered trip from 2020, please read on for the detailed itinerary
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INCLUDED MEALS
Breakfast: 8
Lunch: 1



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



TRANSPORT
Bus
Flight



ACCOMMODATION
2 nights standard
hacienda
6 nights standard
hotel



TRIP PACE:
Moderate



GROUP SIZE:
10 - 16

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 Augusta (or similar)



Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

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

This morning we 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 Augusta (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



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 Bosques Del Saman (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hacienda



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 Bosques Del Saman (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hacienda



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 trip out to a local coffee farm, located about 1.5 hours north-east of our hotel in the direction of Medellin. 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 afternoon we set off for our five hour drive to Medellin, stopping for dinner en route (not included).



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Poblado Plaza (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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

Today we drive out of the city to the picturesque lakeside town of Guatapé, 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 Guatapé'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 Medellín.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Poblado Plaza (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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

Medellín 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 Medellín 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 Medellín 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 Kartaxa (or similar)



Grade: Standard Hotel



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 Kartaxa (or similar)



Grade: Standard Hotel



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

Trip information

Country information

Colombia

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	Plugs	Religion	Language
-5	2 Pin Flat	Roman Catholic.	Spanish.

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

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\$96

Half day trip to the National Aviary: US\$90

Salsa classes: US\$37 (Plus cost of translator between group US\$50)

Half day canoe trip to fishing village La Boquilla: US\$70 (min 3 pers)

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.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. However, you might want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline

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, your leader may organise a group's tips kitty for included activities and meals and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 40, approx. 134'000 Pesos for group tipping

For all non-included services and meals on your trip please tip independently at your discretion. In restaurants and hotels a 'voluntary' 10% tax for service is included on bills. On top of this, it is common to leave no more than a further 5% for good service

International Departure Taxes

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

Colombia

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£5	£10	£1.6	£0.4

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Colombian Peso (COP).

Recommended Currency For Exchange

You can choose to either change your money in advance or on arrival at the airport. Here you will find both ATMs and Bureau de Change. The exchange rate with the COP is approximately COP 4'200 to the British Pound. We recommend you take some emergency cash in USD as the GBP exchange isn't very good. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they may not be accepted. Please check on line for up to date information

Where To Exchange

Your tour leader can also advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

ATMs can be found in the major towns and cities for cash withdrawals in COP. Always have some cash back up as they are not always reliable

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit card are widely accepted in many shops and restaurants but some may be subject to a service charge

Travellers Cheques

We do not recommend Travellers Cheques

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Flight

Accommodation notes

Bogota, Cartagena and Armenia are three diverse regions of the country, and we stay in perfectly located properties that allow us to make the most of our time here. In Bogota we're located near the La Candelaria area, near the Gold Museum and the other attractions of this district. In Cartagena we stay within the walled city, and in Armenia our hotel is located in the countryside, away from any towns or cities, to best appreciate the rolling landscape of the Andean foothills.

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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport 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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

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 complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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

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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.



**AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS**



**PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE**



**AIRPORT
TRANSFERS**