

# HIGHLIGHTS OF COLOMBIA



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## Itinerary Overview

Travel wide and journey deep into the heart of the Andes and on to the sunny shores of the Caribbean coast on this active nature and culture exploration of the best Colombia has to offer. Begin in Bogota with a cultural, artistic and gastronomic exploration of this vibrant city; then wend your way north into the perfectly preserved world of the ‘pueblos’. This area of Colombia combines hikes in highland cloud forests, along well-preserved royal roads, and deep into the Chicamocha Gorge, with easy cycling through the countryside and authentic, hands-on cultural experiences in quaint colonial villages, and lush shade-grown coffee zones. Turn your sights to the Caribbean and the wonders of the stunning Tayrona National Park, hailed as one of the wildest and most beautiful corners of South America, before marveling at the historic treasures of Cartagena and ending this adventure with a true Caribbean culinary excursion. This is an astonishing soft adventure with exceptional guides, beautiful boutique accommodations, and an authentic immersion into Colombian art, culture, and cuisine. Trip begins and ends on weekends to enjoy Bogota and Cartagena. Custom dates available on request.

DAY	DATE	LOCATION	OVERNIGHT	MEALS	HIGHLIGHTS
1	Fri	<b>BOGOTA</b>	Casa De La Opera		Arrival in Bogota. Transfer in
2	Sat	<b>VILLA DE LEVYA</b>	Casa Terra	<b>BLD</b>	Bogota markets, plazas, historic quarter, culinary tour and gold museum. Drive to Villa de Levya
3	Sun	<b>VILLA DE LEVYA</b>	Casa Terra	<b>BL</b>	Iguaque cloud forest hike, paleontology center
4	Mon	<b>BARICHARA</b>	La Nube	<b>BLD</b>	Transfer to Barichara, optional bike riding
5	Tue	<b>BARICHARA</b>	La Nube	<b>BLD</b>	Hiking Royal Road to Guane, cultural patrimony session
6	Wed	<b>SANTANDAR</b>	El Roble Coffee Hacienda	<b>BLD</b>	Chicamocha Canyon hike, El Roble coffee hacienda
7	Thu	<b>SANTA MARTA</b>	Barlovento	<b>BLD</b>	Coffee plantation walk and tasting, flight to Santa Marta, Tayrona National Park
8	Fri	<b>SANTA MARTA</b>	Barlovento	<b>BLD</b>	Hiking in Tayrona National Park
9	Sat	<b>CARTAGENA</b>	Hotel Bantu	<b>BLD</b>	Drive to Santa Marta old town and arrive Cartagena
10	Sun	<b>CARTAGENA</b>	Hotel Bantu	<b>BL</b>	Cartagena walking city and culinary tour
11	Mon	--	Departure	<b>B</b>	Transfer to airport

## Itinerary in Detail

### DAY 1: ARRIVAL IN BOGOTA

Welcome to Bogota, Colombia's capital city, where you are met and transferred to the lovely Casa del la Opera hotel located in the historic Candelaria district, an area with quaint cobbled streets and views of church spires and tiled roofs. Free afternoon to settle in and explore on your own.

Bogota is the modern heart of Colombia. In recent years, the city has seen a renaissance with innovative restaurants and a blossoming arts scene popping up to complement the beautifully preserved cobblestone streets, plazas, and colonial buildings. It's a city that delights connoisseurs of art, architecture, and ancient civilizations. In the evenings, local professionals and families mix with visitors from around the world transforming this neighborhood into one of the most animated parts of the city. Overnight at **Casa de la Opera**.

### DAY 2: BOGOTA CITY & CULINARY TOUR – VILLA DE LEYVA

*Driving time: 4 hours*

Walking through La Candelaria neighborhood, the heart of old, historic Bogota, you are surrounded by restored 300-year old homes, Spanish colonial buildings, and some of the most creative and colorful graffiti murals you'll ever see. Visit the busy Plaza Bolivar, San Francisco Church, the lively pedestrian street "Calle 11" full of artisan shops and cafes, the Santa Clara Convent with its golden interior walls, and stop at the traditional Paloquemao Market to taste local sweets.

An exploration of Bogota would not be complete without a visit to the Gold Museum. Behind its steel plated doors lie more than 33,000 incredible pieces of sculpted gold, emeralds, and other precious materials depicting the life and culture of pre-Hispanic societies. Learn about the metallurgical techniques; glean how gold played a part in cosmology and myth, and how it was used in political and social affairs. Lunch will be served at La Bruja, a local restaurant featuring the best Colombian soups of the Andes.



Depart Bogota for a four-hour drive to the charming 16<sup>th</sup> century town of Villa de Leyva, located high in the Andes. The road winds through intriguing pastoral scenes of lush, green valleys and cattle farms, before turning at Tunja into a drier landscape. Villa de Leyva is one of Colombia's top attractions. The whole town was declared a national monument in 1954 due to its perfectly preserved colonial architecture. Stroll down cobblestoned streets among white-washed houses with wooden shutters, red-tiled roofs, private courtyards and balconies festooned in geraniums and bougainvillea. Walking in any direction you stumble across churches, convents, and monasteries, many with exposed foundations embedded with ancient fossils.

Built in true Spanish tradition, open doors invite passersby into art galleries and workshops, so be sure to browse the local talent.

Your welcome dinner overlooks the immense Plaza Mayor in Villa de Leyva – among the largest in Latin America, the size of two football pitches – together with its beautifully lit cathedral. Overnight at **Casa Terra. [BLD]**



### **DAY 3: IGUAQUE CLOUD FOREST HIKE-- PALEONTOLOGY CENTER**

*Driving time: 30 minutes each way*

Leave the city for Iguaque National Park and a hike through the Andean cloud forest, a unique ecosystem and habitat for exotic bird species such as the toucan barbette, mountain tanagers, cinnamon catchers, and colorful hummingbirds. The lush forest abounds with giant tree ferns, large bromeliads, acacia flowers, various types of orchids, and endemic Andean bamboo.

Return to Villa de Leyva for lunch, before visiting the Ecce Homo Monastery, built by Dominican friars in 1620, followed by the Paleontology Center. The hills around Villa de Leyva are littered with fossils, remnants of an era when the Andes were submerged within an inland sea. The Fossil Museum houses a bus-sized, near-complete skeleton of a Kronosaurus, a Cretaceous-period relative of the crocodile. Discovered in 1977, it was left in situ. They literally built the museum around it! Glass cases abound with a sizeable collection of smaller marine fossils, including skeletons of dolphin-like ichthyosaurs, prehistoric tubeworms, and a whole load of ammonites, including some you can buy for yourself. Overnight at **Casa Terra. [BL]**

### **DAY 4: BARICHARA – OPTIONAL BIKING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

*Driving time: 4 hours, 15 minutes*

Journey further into the Andes among towering waterfalls cascading through lush cloud forests to the province of Santander, known as the adventure capital of Colombia. The UNESCO heritage town of Barichara is a National Monument dating back to the Spanish conquest and justifiably touted as “The Prettiest Town in Colombia.”

A great way to enter Barichara is on a bicycle, cycling down hill past the farms and outlying villages to witness daily life in the Colombian countryside. Unless you prefer to stay in the vehicle, you can mount your bike at Las Antenas Pass to descend the wide, dirt road into this delightful town, which is perched beside the canyon of the Suarez River with an awesome view of the region and a wonderfully peaceful bohemian atmosphere. Here, every adobe building, every terracotta roof tile, every stone street, and every window box has been lovingly restored and maintained. Visit a family-run paper factory and gain a fascinating insight into the four-month-long process of making artisanal paper from a natural fiber that grows in the leaves of the Andean figue plant. Enjoy the afternoon and evening strolling down the tranquil cobblestone streets among the 18<sup>th</sup> century whitewashed buildings and red-tiled roofs. Browse the artisan shops and galleries, and accept the invitations to step inside the workshops of the talented artists and craftsmen. For such a small town, Barichara has more than its share of stone churches; visit the main plaza with its elaborate Cathedral, fashioned in yellow rock from the Santander region. Overnight at **La Nube. [BLD]**

### **DAY 5: HIKE THE ROYAL ROAD– CULTURAL PATRIMONY WORKSHOP**

Your adventure begins as you walk from your hotel to the start of a hike on one of the vast networks of cobblestone roads, known as Caminos Reales. First used by pre-existing indigenous populations, European colonizers in Colombia built them in stone during the 18th and 19th centuries for efficient transport of coffee, textiles, tobacco, anise, quinine and cotton, to the strategic Caribbean coastal cities. The six-mile, three-hour hike downhill from the Barichara plateau descends about 1,000 feet through the Suarez Canyon, passing forests and farms and offering fabulous views down the length of the valley. Keep an eye out for colorful parakeets, tanagers, and mot mot, all of which are commonly spotted. The hike ends at the picture-perfect hamlet of Guane – a quintessential colonial village, where a traditional countryside lunch awaits at “Finka Color de Hormiga”, the old homestead of Misia Custodia. Here, the owner raises the regional Santander delicacy of “hormigas culonas” or fat-bottom ants. You can try local dishes with sauces made of this expensive delicacy (Atta species ants go for \$40 a pound), or try them whole and dried as a salty snack!

Return to Barichara in the afternoon where you have the privilege of meeting Santiago Rivero, a local civil engineer from San Gil whose work is to rescue, preserve, and promote traditional architectural techniques that are no longer practised or in danger of disappearing. Santiago and his team, at Terrarium Creative Organization, design ecologically efficient homes for the well-to-do, using local materials and techniques. He presents an immersive, ‘hands-on’ session showing you how to recreate the tapia pisada, bahareque, and mud adobe brick walls. Returning to Bari, you’re in for a very special dinner and Tiplistas live music performance at Hicasua. Overnight at **La Nube. [BLD]**



### **DAY 6: CHICAMOCHA CANYON HIKE– EL ROBLE COFFEE HACIENDA**

*Driving time: 3 ½ hours*

Drive 2.5 hours to Parque Nacional del Chicamocha and the vast Chicamocha Gorge, the Grand Canyon of South America, overlooking spectacular views of cliff walls and the Rio Chicamocha below. The hike begins at the small town of “15 Letras” where the trail ascends about 500 feet to the Umpala ridgeline at 2,900 feet with stunning views all around, before zigzagging down on a well-maintained paved segment of the Camino Real through the quaint town of Umpalá. The walk continues through a green river valley to the villages of Mensulí and Jordan, where it rejoins a Royal Road to the village of Los Santos.

It’s a one-hour drive from the trail’s end to the peaceful coffee hacienda of El Roble, arriving to enjoy a late afternoon coffee on the veranda with the charming Señora Miriam. She was born at the hacienda, has worked with the family for decades, and has many delightful stories to share about the place. Time permitting, ask about taking an

afternoon horse ride through the coffee plantation. Owned by three generations of the Acebedo family, this gorgeous old hacienda – now a boutique hotel – is one of Colombia’s most beautiful coffee farms – an exquisite, historic property with a family library, coffee exportation record sheets, books from the 1930s, framed family photos on the walls, and a lovely front porch on which you can sit back in a rocking chair and watch the blue-gray tanager birds feeding on bananas in the garden. The grounds are a captivating landscape of coffee plants, spacious lawns, flowering shrubs and trees creating a habitat for butterflies and an abundance of nectar-sucking and fruit-eating birds. Dinner is in the old family dining room. Overnight at **El Roble Coffee Hacienda. [BLD]**

## DAY 7: COFFEE TOUR AND TASTING – FLY TO SANTA MARTA

*Driving time: 1 hour, 30 minutes*

Arise early for some mesmerizing bird-watching and a sumptuous breakfast before a resident expert takes you on a two-hour walking tour of the hacienda, demonstrating all that goes into the cultivation of the organic shade-grown coffee. The plantation produces up to 72 varieties of the 320 types of coffee in the world, and here you learn about the roasting and preparation process of this precious beverage. The walk through the coffee plantation concludes in the supping room with barista Jose Antonio Martinez, a 30-year-veteran coffee-tasting expert who will teach you about coffee fragrances and tasting techniques to discern between sweet, salty, bitter, and smooth flavors.

Bid farewell to the hacienda and drive for an hour to Bucaramanga Airport to connect with your flight to Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast. Upon arrival, continue with a short drive to Tayrona where you can check in and relax at your hotel for the night, the Barlovento. This eco-tourism hotel is located on a rock between the mouth of the River Piedras and Los Naranjos Beach, offering breathtaking views only five minutes' drive from Tayrona National Park. Overnight **Hotel Barlovento. [BLD]**



## DAY 8: TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK - EL PUEBLITO HIKE

Tayrona National Park was established in 1964 to protect the vast biodiversity of endemic species found in this isolated range between the towering snow-capped Sierra Nevada Mountains into the rainforests and lowland rivers flowing to the paradisiacal palm-fringed, white-sand Caribbean beaches. Here, the indigenous Kogis reside in small communities among ancient archaeological sites hidden deep within the jungle and undiscovered during the Spanish conquest. Explore the park and encounter an astounding array of flora and fauna with over 300 species of birds, an abundance of marine creatures including sea turtles, crocodiles

and blowfish, and an incredible variety of flowers and orchids.

The first half of today's hike is a 3.5-to-4-hour-long excursion from Tayrona's main entrance to its famous and idyllic beaches. This undulating section along the shore is a natural blend of pristine blue water coves and cliffs lined with coconut palms and vivid green forest. You pass by the beaches of Canaveral, Piscinita, Arrecife, and La Piscina and finish the morning hike at Cabo San Juan Beach.

After a refreshing drink, you begin a steep, challenging uphill climb of 900 feet to an ancient stone-paved road through the beautiful rainforest. Keep your eyes peeled for parrots, toucans, hawks, howler monkeys, colorful lizards, and butterflies. After two hours of uphill trekking, you enter the extensive Tayrona ruins of "El Pueblito," with its vast system of stone terraces, aqueducts, and round platform foundations of former stone houses. This city was built in the 5th century and inhabited until the 16th century before being abandoned and engulfed by the jungle. Today you will likely encounter the Kogis, distinguished by their white woven clothing and caps. Please respect their privacy if they do not want to be photographed. After exploring these extensive ruins, continue up another 600 feet and then travel by car to your hotel. Overnight at the **Barlovento. [BLD]**



### **DAY 9: TAYRONA – CARTAGENA**

*Driving time: 4 hours*

Drive on one of Colombia’s main coastal roads for about four hours to the city of Cartagena de Indias, stopping on the way to see Santa Marta’s old city town. Break for lunch at La Cueva de Barranquilla, a hip place where the famous writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, spent much of his time while living here. Arrive in Cartagena in the afternoon with time to explore. Cartagena is a UNESCO city that charms all those who enter its maze of cobbled alleyways and vibrant streets. Founded as an important Spanish port in 1533, the Old Town remains largely intact behind high stone walls that preside over the Caribbean. A visit to this city

invites immersion in history, art, music, dance and theater; its heritage reflected by an ornate architecture of gaily painted homes with balconies draped in tropical flowers. Overnight at **Hotel Bantu** (or similar). **[BLD]**

### **DAY 10: CARTAGENA CITY & CULINARY TOUR**

A local specialist guide leads a walking tour inside the fortified walls where thousands of slaves landed from West Africa and migrants have been coming for centuries. Visit to the fortress of San Felipe, a masterpiece of protection against pirates and corsairs, and walk among the side-streets and plazas where Colombia’s colorful history and Caribbean culture comes alive through tales of the past. Soak up the sensual atmosphere in a world of magical realism; visit nine different local sites in the Old Town inspired by the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, eating different treats along the way as described by Marquez in his books, which he wrote with such authenticity that his legacy will last forever. Overnight at **Hotel Bantu**. **[BL]**

### **DAY 11: DEPARTURE**

Free time until your transfer to the airport for your international flight home. **[B]**

### **END OF SERVICES**

*Actual routes and activities may vary. Local trip coordinators reserve the right to change accommodations to similar quality alternatives.*

#### **INCLUDED SERVICES**

- All guided tours and excursions
- National Park entrance fees
- Local English-speaking naturalist guides for all included tours
- Airport-hotel transfers, land and sea transportation
- Hotel accommodation as indicated
- Meals as indicated [B-Breakfast, L-Lunch, D-Dinner]
- Airport departure taxes

#### **NOT INCLUDED SERVICES**

- International airfare
- Tips and gratuities
- Drinks, alcoholic beverages, and meals other than listed above
- Personal expenses for extra services, optional activities or changes in your itinerary for reasons beyond our control
- Travel insurance for trip cancellation, medical services, or evacuation
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Accommodations



### **CASA DE LA OPERA, BOGOTA**

Centrally located in Bogota's historic and active Candelaria district, each of De La Opera's 42 rooms are furnished with Italian made furniture, central heating, Wi-Fi, TV, minibar, and safety deposit box. Some rooms have balconies with views of the Candelaria neighborhood. There are two on-site restaurants: La Scala which serves Mediterranean cuisine and El Mirador offering pizzas, meats, and fish on the top floor overlooking colonial rooftops and cathedral domes. The spa features a sauna, hot tub, and Turkish steam bath.



### **CASA TERRA, VILLA DE LEYVA**

Located in one of the most beautiful towns in Colombia, this lovingly restored, 7-room, 16<sup>th</sup> C home is a mixture of natural, artisanal and modern influences built from quarried stone and wood according to the original architectural heritage of the region. Rooms are individually designed fusing rustic elements with contemporary furniture ensuring guests a quiet and comfortable stay. All rooms feature TV and wi-fi. Enjoy breakfast on the terrace under the sun, and dinners among an array of fine dining options just 3 blocks from the historical La Plaza Mayor colonial center of this beautiful UNESCO heritage city.



### **POSADA LA NUBE, BARICHARA**

Located in the Santander region of Barichara, Posada La Nube is your home in the Andes respecting the original spaces of the colonial times with 8 exclusive rooms surrounding the quarry stone patio of the cloister. Traditional minimalist rooms are small and cozy respecting quiet and privacy. White walls of tapia create a soft, clean interior leading out to a garden terrace and pool where meals are served among canaries and multicolored birds, local art on display, and views overlooking the red-tile roofs of this UNESCO heritage city. La Nube restaurant features fanciful tropical cocktails, a collection of Latin American

wines and rums, and a fusion of Mediterranean and Latin cuisine. is also an outdoor pool for swimming and relaxing in the sun.



### **EL ROBLE HACIENDA**

This traditional coffee hacienda, transformed into a delightful and charming boutique hotel, is surrounded by shade grown coffee plantations near the Chicamocha Canyon. The traditions of a family home are replete with living room and library built with wood beams, tile floors and a bountiful garden of tropical plants and flowers filling the interior courtyard. Six guest rooms are adorned with colorful, old-world colonial charm. Meals are hosted in the family dining room adorned with high ceilings and heritage paintings depicting earlier days. Delicious home-cooked meals, with fresh ingredients sourced from neighboring farms, are prepared by local women in the open kitchen on wood-

burning stoves. The shade forest, flowering coffee plants, and landscaped gardens attract flocks of colorful resident and migratory birds. The hacienda is a fully functioning coffee farm where guests are led on walks through the plantation, invited to see the process that goes into its harvesting and to experience cuppings of the 72 varieties of delicious fresh beans.



### **BARLOVENTO, SANTA MARTA**

Upon arrival, walk up a flight of stairs through the forest to enter Barlovento, perched on a clifftop location overlooking the Caribbean Sea. No matter what room or location on the property are captivating views of the sea and lush mountainside. The swimming pool, outdoor jacuzzi, and restaurant are connected by a large terrace and bar. The nine guestrooms are air conditioned with complimentary Wi-Fi throughout. Enjoy spectacular sunsets and watch fishermen casting nets on the beach early in the morning.



### **HOTEL BANTU, CARTAGENA**

The 5-star Hotel Bantu is located in the heart of Cartagena's historical old quarter just a 7-minute walk from the beach, is ideally situated right. This tailor made 28 room boutique hotel is designed with avant garde 18<sup>th</sup> C colonial architecture using exposed brick, bright colors, and authentic decor. Each room has complimentary Wi-Fi and TV. Enjoy the colonial courtyard, chill-out terrace, solarium area and swimming pool, spa, bar and Cabildo Restaurant serving Caribbean and Colombian cuisine using typical recipes to create creative dishes.