



Colombia

*This Colombia Country Guide is by no means the most thorough or all-encompassing travel guide. It's merely what The Lost Girl's Guide highly recommends to see and do when visiting the country from an adventure traveler's perspective. This is what I consider the best-of-the-best, what I would recommend, and my favorite things I experienced while in the country.

Colombia is a fantastic and vibrant country atop the South American continent. Known in the past for being a little dangerous, it has changed its beat in the last decade and now welcomes tourists with open arms. Locals hang out on their front porch with impressive speaker systems blasting out cheerful salsa, cumbia, and merengue. However, there still happens to be a few areas off the beaten path that might require some special planning and awareness of the local situation before you go. Overall, Colombia is jam-packed with pretty much everything and anything you could want to do and experience and is not a country to be missed.

Language

Spanish

Population

47 Million

Currency

Approximate market rate:
\$1 US is roughly 1800 COP

Visas

Always check before you enter the country, but Western Europe, the Americas, Japan, Australia and New Zealand don't need a visa. Otherwise the fee can range from US\$23 to US\$50.

Electricity

Two-pronged US style plugs that run 110V, 60Hz



Cities & Towns

Bogota

A fantastic city to start or end your trip in, Bogota delights on so many levels. Don't miss out on the gold museum, the viewpoint atop the mountain Cerro de Monserrate, and wandering through Plaza de Bolivar and the colonial quarter La Candelaria for cobbled streets, museums, theatres, and cafes.

Cartagena

A charming and beautiful city with one of the most spectacular "Old Town's" I've come across. If colonial architecture isn't for you, check out the Palace of the Inquisition, Felipe fortress, head to Playa Blanca beach, or experience some of the 27 small coral islands just outside the city in the Islas del Rosario.

Salento *personal pick*

One of my favourite towns in Colombia, Salento is the perfect place to relax and enjoy some Colombian coffee locally grown in Parque Nacional del Cafe, do some light hiking, and check out the incredibly beautiful Valle de Cocora.

San Gil (adventure capital)

If you're looking for adventure, San Gil is where you'll find it. Crush out some epic white water rafting on either the Rio Fonce or Rio Suarez, then spend your next day mountain biking through the stone streets of **Barichara** and into the beautiful valley. Over the next few days, try your hand at some really fun (and cold) adventure caving and finish it off with a hike to the waterfalls and parapenting over Chicamocha National Park.

Taganga/Santa Marta (beach paradise/city)

I used Santa Marta as my base camp to come back to after adventures all down the Caribbean coast and it was the perfect place to leave my bags, recharge, and buy groceries. Taganga is just a few kilometers down the road and is the perfect place to get some sun, sand, and scuba diving in.

Tayrona National Park (light trekking and camping)

The perfect place to spend either a day hiking, or a few nights relaxing, sleeping in tents or hammocks under the stars. With beautiful beaches and a very Caribbean feel, this is where both locals and tourists hang out to rest and have fun.



Ciudad Perdida (trekking)

The most famous hike in Colombia is to the Lost City. It's also the largest pre-Columbian town discovered in America. This trek is well worth the four, five, or six days you spend hiking up and down through lush tropical vegetation. Bring lots of mosquito spray and extra snacks.

Cabo de La Vela (off the beaten track & *personal pick*)

One of my [favorite experiences](#) in my six months in South America, I'd recommend this tiny town in La Guajira Peninsula to anyone going to Colombia, but warn them that the trip to get there isn't for the faint hearted. Changing transportation multiple times and then sitting in the back of a pickup truck in the dusty desert for several hours adds to the adventure of no running water and sleeping in hammocks once you get to the town. What the town lacks is more than made up for by the incredibly succulent lobster for only \$10US and the fantastic kitesurfing you can try your hand at. Also, take the time to check out the views around town before you make your way to the most Northern point in South America, **Punta Gallinas**.

Minca (relaxation)

A place for bird watching and sipping coffee, this town is the perfect spot for relaxation and enjoyment. I spent my days dipping my feet in a small pool and lying in my outdoor hammock/bed reading until the sun set over the mountains with a view of Santa Marta and the coast in the distance.

Other Locations to Check Out

I didn't get the opportunity to visit these locations, but that doesn't mean you should miss out on them too.

Medellin

An impressive city of 3 million that has a great night life.

El Cocuy National Park

Hit up some amazing trekking and experience the glaciers in this National Park.

San Augustin

Enjoy the countryside atop a horse while checking out ancient sites and relics.



Cali

The salsa capital of Colombia, don't miss out on the opportunity to learn and admire the impressive dance skills of the locals.

Amazon Basin

Go on an adventure of a lifetime in the Amazon, and hopefully with luck you'll get to see a pink, freshwater dolphin among other amazing animals.

Food

There's a pretty intensive list of amazing foods to sample and savor, so I've turned them into a separate post. Click to read up on all the tasty treats you need to try when in Colombia. <http://www.thelostgirlsguide.com/food-drink/colombian-cuisine>

Adventure Activities

Parapenting

- a must do in Chicamocha Canyon for spectacular views

Scuba Diving

- get your diving on in both Taganga or Cartagena, but be aware it can be fairly pricey

White Water Rafting

- on the Rio Fonce or Suaraz, just be aware things can get crazy

Caving

- just outside San Gil, hop on the local bus to get there

Mountain Biking

- another San Gil activity, through the quaint town of Barichara and into the valley

Trekking

- lots of trekking opportunities in all the national parks, highlight treks are to The Lost City and in the Cocora Valley

Kiteboarding

- try your hand at this challenging sport in Cabo de la Vela and Cartagena



Site Seeing Highlights

Las Lajas Cathedral *personal pick*

A cathedral set amongst the rolling hills of the southern Department of Nariño, Las Lajas Sanctuary looks like it's something straight out of a fairytale.

Bogota Graffiti

Wander the streets of Bogota and check out the impressive street art adorning buildings, walls, and overpasses.

Salt Cathedral

The salt cathedral located in Zipaquirá, just a few hours outside of Bogota, is actually a Catholic church that was built deep underground in an old salt mine. A bit touristy, but quite unique.

Valle de Cocora *personal pick*

An amazing view of the world's only 60m tall wax palm trees in the Cocora Valley, this short day hike is not to be missed.

Trek to the Lost City (Ciudad Perdida)

Originally found by treasure hunters in 1972, and now a four to six day hike into the Sierra Nevada for tourists, this trek takes you to some of the oldest ruins in South America.

Cabo de la Vela & Punta Gallinas *personal pick*

An adventurous journey leads you to the most Northern point in South America through desert shrub with wild donkeys and goats.

Costeño *personal pick*

A little-known beach paradise, Costeño is the perfect place for some secluded rest and relaxation along its miles and miles of unoccupied beach. It's also one of the only places you can surf in Colombia.



Favourite Hostels

There's a lot of authentic hammock sleeping if you're into that, but I highly recommend each of these places on this list. They're some of my favorite that I've stayed in on my travels.

Oscar's Place, Minca

This is one special place. Located just outside the tiny town of Minca (a bit of a walk if you have your bags, be warned) it has some of the most stunning views of the Sierra Nevada and Santa Marta in the distance. Oscar is an exemplary host with an amazing place known solely by word of mouth. Perfect location for sitting and reading a book, dipping your toes in the pool, and hanging out.

Casa de Felipe, Taganga

Set a little walk from the beachfront, this hostel is spacious, modern, and just plain lovely. With a kitchen for guests as well as a restaurant with fantastic food, you won't really need to leave. There's a rooftop patio with tables and hammocks as well as free WiFi, free computers, friendly reception, and cheap laundry service right next door. What more could you ask for?

Beach Hut Hammocks in Cabo de la Vela

This one's not for everyone, but how much more authentic could it get setting up an authentic chinchorro hammock for the night right on the beach in a tiny, open aired beach hut? Simplicity at its best.

Costeño Beach Surf Camp Ecolodge, Costeño

It's been a while since I've gasped in delight at an accommodation, but Costeño Ecolodge did just that. It's off the grid and you literally hop off the bus and walk down a gravel road for 20 minutes just to find it. There's no one and nothing else around but this amazing little lodge set right on the beach. Choose from hammocks (with mosquito nets), beach huts, or solar powered rooms depending on the level of comfort you're looking for.



Transportation

Buses

There are a whole host of different bus companies you can travel on to get around Colombia and the routes are well developed and extensive. You might spend 12-16 hours on one ride as the country is pretty massive, but it's worth it to enjoy the view of the countryside. If you're trying to maximize time, take a night bus to get from destination to destination. Prices are fairly cheap and seats are standard and it's not usually necessary to book in advance.

Colectivos

In certain places you'll hop on local transportation to get around in the form of 10-12 passenger vans. They're often quite cheap and packed full of locals. There's usually no room to store luggage so either you pay for an extra seat or somehow manage to stuff your bags under your feet. Also beware that they leave when full and not at a particular time so you may have to wait a while for them to fill.

Flying

Flights within Colombia aren't too expensive and cover most major cities. On budget airlines be aware that there may be additional charges not included in the quoted price. Listed are the most common passenger airlines.

LAN - Lineas Aereas Nacionales

Avianca/TACA -

COPA - Compania Panamena de Aviacion

Viva Colombia - cheapest to book through, but be aware if you're not a national, you can't book online and will have to go to an agent or their offices.