

Colombia Trip Report

By Linda and Chuck, s/v Jacaranda

July 12 - August 18, 2014

Overview -

Itinerary: Bogota, Villa de Leyva, Barichara, Santa Marta, Tayrona National Park (Los Naranjos), Valledupar (Pueblo Bello) , Cartagena (6 nights), Medellin (6 nights), Bogota, La Macarena (Caño Cristales), Bogota

Exchange Rate: \$1 dollar = 1.883 colombian pesos (COP) (<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>)

Resources/Extra Reading about Colombia

virtualtourist.com/travel/South_America/Colo...

<http://seecolombia.travel/blog/>

<http://seecolombia.travel/blog/2011/10/where-to-go-in-colombia-5-destinations-to-go-before-everyone-else/>

<http://www.tripping.com/blog/blog/2012/11/17/the-river-of-five-colors/>

<http://www.amusingplanet.com/2014/01/the-rock-of-guatape.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/travel/guides/central-and-south-america/colombia/cartagena/overview.html>

Getting There - We flew from Guayaquil, Ecuador to Bogota, Colombia. We took a 6 hour Reina del Camino bus from Bahia to Guayaquil for \$7. In Guayaquil we stayed at Hotel Livingston Inn (Av. Juan Tanga Marengo) - For \$40, it is conveniently located near the airport and within walking distance of the Mall del Sol with good food options. Airline was Avianca and the price was \$378/person one way. In retrospect we should have bought round trip tickets for less, even if we did not use the return portion.

BOGOTA

(elevation 8661 feet, population 8 million)

Hotel

Hotel Casa Deco (in La Candelaria) - www.hotelcasadeco.com

Calle 12C No. 2-36

(1) 2837262 / 283 7032

A junior suite was \$128/night with a delicious breakfast

Great staff - Lina, Ingrid, Felipe and Jaime the waiter

Guitarist and a fireplace at breakfast; nice roof terrace.

Free coffee, tea, and coca tea served all day long.

We had the hotel arrange an airport shuttle for 40,000 COP which was not really necessary.

Hotel de La Opera (in La Candelaria) - www.hotelopera.com.co

Calle 10 No. 5-72

La Candelaria's poshest hotel

Casa Platypus (in La Candelaria) - www.casaplatypus.com

Carrera 3 No. 12F-28

Newer "boutique" branch to the nearby Platypus hostel nearby. We stopped in this hostel to check it out although we didn't stay and liked it as a cheaper alternative. great location off of Av. Jimenez. \$69/private room with bath

Destino Nomada - near the Botero Museum

Calle 11 No. 01 - 38

Another hostel that is reportedly good although we have no first hand knowledge.

Restaurants

La Puerta Falsa - Calle 11 Carrera 6-7, No. 6-50

Classic snack shop serving great ajiaco soup, tamales, and chocolate completo since 1816

Sant Just

Calle 16 A # 2-73

Crepes&Waffles - a Colombian chain that is excellent - especially for getting some relief from heavy, starchy fried foods.

Bistronomy by Rausch (Usaquen)

Carrera 6 No 119-24

Bogota's Classic Cafes (Cultural Patrimony)

Cafe Pasaje (Avenida Jimenez)
Cafe Florida (Carrera 7 and Calle 21) - try the traditional chocolate completo (hot chocolate with bread and cheese)
Salon de Fontana
Saint Moritz (Calle 16 and Carrera 8)
Pandebono
Cafe Eldorado

Art Gallery

Art Gallery in Barrio La Macarena
NC- Arte, Calle 26, Carrera 5

Tours

Bogota Bike Tours - <http://www.bogotabiketours.com>
Carrera 3 #12-72
Run by Mike Caesar, an American ex-pat.
bogotabiketours@gmail.com

Bogota Street Art Tour - <http://bogotagraffiti.com>
Meet at Plaza de Periodistas in La Candelaria
A Must Do!! Amazing and eye opening!!
Led by Christian, an ex-pat Australian who is a street artist by the name of Crisp. An insider's view of the great graffiti/street art scene.
Free with a requested donation.

Colombia is known for its emeralds. You can even go on a tour of an emerald mine and for \$300 you can pick up all the loose stones you can find...so they say.
Tour of the Boyacá Chivor Mine. www.colombianemeraldtrips.com

Museums

Museo del Oro (Gold Museum) - www.banrepcultural.org
Carrera 6 No. 15-88, Parque Santander
The largest collection of Pre-Colombian gold artifacts in the world. Don't miss the Muisca Golden Raft and the Poporos - hand made with exquisite craftsmanship using the lost wax technique.

Museum Botero -
Fernando Botero is Colombia's national treasure and the most famous living South American artist. "Botero" means plump sculptures and paintings.

Getting There - Took a taxi from Casa Deco to the red terminal (1/2 hour and \$17,000 COP).

An 11:30 bus (Flota Valle de Tenza) took 4 hours and cost \$22,000 COP each.

VILLA de LEYVA

(elevation 8600 feet, population 12,000)

Hotel

Hotel Antonio Nariño - Carrera 9 #10-34

\$152,000/night but no breakfast - which was ok because we found the best French bakery 3 blocks away.

Marlen is the wonderful woman at the front desk, when it isn't being manned by kids.

Restaurants

Pasteleria Francesa

Calle 10, No. 6-05

Fabulous french bakery - the best almond croissants in the world!!

Barcelona Tapas

Getting There - Took a colectivo to Tunja; Tunja to Barichara - \$6,500 COP

BARICHARA

(elevation 8600 feet, population 8,000)

Hotel:

Posada Sueños de Antonio

Carrera 9 No. 4 - 25

Second floor balcony rooms (#5 or 6) with a view and an open air shower are a dream - pay the little extra for these rooms; the rooms on the lower levels are nice but nothing special. Breakfast was included and very good; staff was helpful. It's uphill from the main plaza but not too bad of a hike if you don't have luggage.

Restaurants - finding places to eat midweek in low season was a bit of a struggle

7 Tigres

Good pizza but terrible service

Igua Nauno

Cra 7 Calle 1

Pleniluni Cafe
Small and cute; decent food

Getting there - Bargain on the bus fares. Took an overnight bus from San Gil to Cienaga where we had to change buses to get into Santa Marta. From the Santa Marta bus station, the taxi was 6,000 to our hotel.

SANTA MARTA

(elevation of Santa Marta: 12 meters, population 500,000)

Hotel

Casa de Leda - <http://www.kalihotels.com/en/>
Calle 18 # 4-38
+57 5 4221302
Loved this boutique hotel!
Met Jacob, the owner who is from New Jersey!

Restaurants

Restaurante Black and White
Calle 20 # 3-39
Cute place with a nice ambiance. Service was very good. Food was just average.

Lulo
Cra 3 #16-34 Callejon del Correo
Great juices and light lunches

Getting There - The taxi from Santa Marta to Barlovento was \$80,000 (we should have only paid \$70,000 because he did not take us into the Park itself)

TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK (Playa Los Naranjos)

Hotel

[Barlovento - barloventotayrona.com](http://barloventotayrona.com)
Spectacular setting
Meals are included and they were very good
Booking this hotel was a real bitch because of confusion with an agent who also has rights to a similar domain name. DO NOT use barlovento.com

VALLEDUPAR

(elevation 165 meters, population 350,000)

Hotel

Provincia Hostel
Calle 16 A No. 5-25
580 0558

Getting there: From Valledupar, we took a 7 hour bus (Copetran) at 10:30 a.m. and bargained for a fare of \$31,000 each.

CARTAGENA (sea level)

(elevation 34 meters, population 900,000)

Hotel

Hotel Boutique Diego de Alcala Suites (Centro Historico)
Plaza Fernandez de Madrid Calle La Tablada No.7-26
Nice small hotel with excellent location. Nothing boutique about it however.
Double room overlooking the park with a little balcony - 208,000 or about USD\$115
We met the owner, Sonia who lives in NY and we had a nice chat.
But when we wrote an honest review giving her hotel an "average rating on Tripadvisor, she threatened us with a lawsuit (!!?)

Restaurants

Pizza en el Parque - Plaza Fernandez de Madrid
Pretty mediocre pizza - avoid it if you can

La Cevicheria
Calle Stuart 7
Great food! Join the crowds in the know about Anthony Bourdain's visit!

La Mulata
Calle Quero 9 58
Wonderful local eatery for a delicious and cheap lunch

Getting there: We flew from Cartagena to Medellin. The Medellin airport is 1 hour outside of the city (spectacular scenery on the way in). The taxi pick-up was \$60,000 but we took an airport shuttle instead and got off with a short walk to our hotel.

MEDELLIN

(elevation 1494 meters, population 2.44 million)

Hotel

61 Prado - www.61prado.com (Barrio Prado)

Calle 61 No. 50A-60

254-9743

75,000 for a double with a fan. Prices rose to 85,000 during the Feria de Los Flores. Good breakfast is included. Laundry service - check to make sure you get all your clothes back.

Nice guesthouse in the historic Prado neighborhood is within walking distance of the center and a few blocks from the Metro stop. However it not such a safe area and walking at night is not recommended (the Prado is ripe for restoration and subsequent gentrification one of these days). Atmospheric courtyard; you can order lunch and dinner too. There is a roof deck with a nice view.

Restaurants

Carmen (El Poblado) - www.carmenmedellin.com

Cra. 36 #10A-27

#1 on Tripadvisor and excellent and elegant (expensive)!

Restaurant In Situ - <http://www.botanicomedellin.org/servicios/alimentos-y-bebidas/restaurante-in-situ/>

Jardin Botanico near the Orquideorama | Street 73 # 51 d 14. Botanical Garden, Located in the Botanical Garden - lovely; the food was disappointing but good

Tours*****

Willi's Best Guide Medellin - Private Day Tours - <http://willisbestguidemedellin.com>

(573) 300 677 8058

willisbestsupport@gmail.com

The best way to see Medellin and the surrounding countryside from a bilingual native who knows the area. Willi is passionate, knowledgeable, and terrific!! You meet as strangers and part as friends.

Getting there: We flew on Avianca from Medellin back to Bogota. Fare was \$243,820 per person. We departed at 2:10 and arrived in Bogota at 3:20. We stayed at Hotel Casa Deco again for a few days while we arranged the trip with Aventure Colombia. We took a 3 hour private car to Villavicencio (the alternative was to take an early morning bus (4a.m) the same day or stay overnight in Villavicencio) . The travel agency didn't tell us about this in time to go a day early and we thought the 4 am bus (up at 2 am) would leave us too tired to go for the walk to the River that you do as soon as you get in to La Macarena. The plane from Villavicencio left at about 9:30 am and took about an hour to La Macarena. In La Macarena we were met at the plane by a representative who took us by jeep into the town and to a hotel we did not want to stay at. We insisted she take us to Punto Verde as Aventure Colombia had told us.

LA MACARENA

Aventure Colombia - Travel Agency that we booked the tour with in Bogota

Contact: Charlotte

Av. Jimenez No. 4-49

(57) 313 510 4856

www.aventurecolombia.com

info@aventurecolombia.com

We booked the tour for three days, 2 nights. - US\$645/person, (2,320,000 for two for everything)

The four day, 3 night trip - US\$730/person (2,627,000 for two for everything)

Except the bus to Villavicencio. We chose to go by private car - which was 720,000 (US \$340) roundtrip. Way too outrageously expensive and we wouldn't do it again. (see above)

Total cost for both of us: US\$1,630.00

Hotel

Punto Verde

Best hotel with cabin-like rooms in a garden setting and the only swimming pool in town. Good meals are served. Doña Mercedes is very warm and friendly. She loaned me a hat to wear for our hikes for the few days we were there since I had lost mine.

We used Aventura Colombia Travel Agency in Bogota to make all the arrangements. We would recommend them but know what you are getting. Ask them to tell you which hotel you will be in when you get to La Macarena. Luckily we did because the woman who met us at the La Macarena airport wanted to bring us to an inferior place and we insisted on going to Punto Verde, as we had been told by the Tour Agency.

