

# COLOMBIA



## REGIONAL INFORMATION



## General Info

*Colombia - living with a passion for life*

Colombia is a country on the move. With a vastly improved security situation, people are finally beginning to succumb to the charms of this wonderful country. From the warmth of its people to the beauty of its landscapes, from climbing active volcanoes to floating down the Amazon, from historic indigenous statues to colonial towns - Colombia has something for every taste.

## People



## Religion & Culture

*About 90% of Colombians are Roman Catholic*

While about 90% of Colombians are Roman Catholic, a religion brought over by the colonial power Spain, people's beliefs are often influenced by other cultures' beliefs - from African, indigenous and other regional spheres. Mormons, evangelicals and Protestants have been winning converts in recent times but still only represent a small minority.

## Population

*Colombia has the 3rd largest population in Latin America*

Colombia's population is roughly 45 million, giving it the third highest population in Latin America after Brazil and Mexico, and the second highest Spanish-speaking population in the world after Mexico. The capital city Bogota has around 8 million inhabitants. The three main origins of Colombian people are Spanish, African and various indigenous tribes.

## Language

*Spanish is the official language of Colombia*

Spanish is the official language of Colombia and apart from a small handful of indigenous tribes, all Colombians speak it. English is commonly spoken on the islands of San Andres and Providencia. 65 indigenous languages and over 300 dialects are also spoken within Colombia's borders.

## **Food**

*Creole cuisine and exotic fruit*

Colombian food is essentially Creole and is quite varied - ranging from guinea pig (a favourite in the Andes) to lobster (on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts). A typical lunch or dinner in Colombia consists of meat or chicken served alongside frijoles (kidney beans) or lentils, fried plantain, rice and a small salad. Coffee is tasty and ubiquitous. But the fruit of Colombia is the real surprise treat being both extremely varied and delicious.

## **Environment**



## **Geography**

*Roughly the size of France, Spain and Portugal combined*

Colombia covers over 1.1 m sq kms, making it roughly the size of France, Spain and Portugal combined. The Western region is dominated by mountains including 3 Andean chains and there are several peaks above 5000m. 49% of the country surface is forested and the Southeast of the country is dominated by the Amazon lowlands - thick rainforest where access is by river only. Tatacoa, a tiny desert between these two regions, also boasts its own unique eco-system.

## **Flora & Fauna**

*Colombia is home to 10% of the world's biodiversity*

Colombia claims to have more plant and animal species per square kilometre than any other country in the world. In fact only Brazil (7 times the size of Colombia) can boast more. Colombia hosts more than 350 mammals (including 15% of the world's primates), over 18% of the world's birdlife and a staggering 130,000 plants. From eagles to anacondas, piranhas to orchids, turtles to condors, Colombia is home to an incredible 10% of the world's biodiversity!

## **Climate**

*Daytime temperature averages around 30°C at sea level*

Being close to the equator, temperatures don't change much throughout the year. Altitude is a major determinant of temperature - with about 6°C decrease for every 1000m increase in altitude (though the difference is more at night). The average daytime temperature is around 30°C at sea level. Dry and rainy seasons vary from place to place.

## **History & Economy**



### **History**

*Colombia has known much strife*

Colombia's history is as colourful as it can be dramatic - from the ancient peoples of San Agustín, of whom we know very little other than their beautiful statues, through to Spanish conquest and colonisation. From the independence wars through post-independence violence, drug trafficking and civil war, Colombia has known much strife. The last few years have seen increasing stability, security and prosperity however, and most Colombians look forward to a brighter future.

### **Economy**

*The US is the biggest market for Colombian exports*

The Colombian economy has never suffered from the hyper-inflation or economic collapse that many of its neighbours have. In recent years GDP growth has regularly been above 5%, and unemployment has been below 15% for many years. The US is the biggest market for Colombian exports (both legal and illegal!) - followed by Venezuela - and its main exports are petroleum, coffee, coal, nickel, emeralds, clothing, bananas and cut flowers.