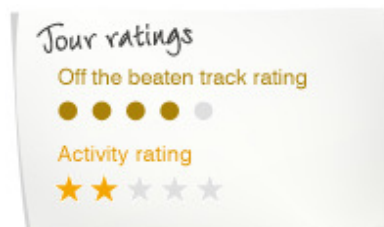




Southern Colombia Explorer - TRIP NOTES -

Southern Colombia Explorer (14 days)

**Bogota - Zipaquirá - Villa De Leyva
Manizales - Los Nevados de la
Ruiz park - Popayan - San Agustin
Tatacoa desert**



WELCOME

Thank you for booking your holiday with *Travel The Unknown*. We love travel and we are confident that you will go away with fantastic memories of our *Southern Colombia Explorer*.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bogota - walking tour of the Colombian capital.
- Zipaquirá – visit the stunning salt cathedral.
- Villa De Leyva Manizales - walking tour of this enchanting village.
- Los Nevados de la Ruiz Park - climb a volcano and discover the diverse beauty of the park.
- Popayan - admire the colonial architecture of the 'White City'.
- San Agustin - mysterious statues dating from the 1st Century.
- Tatacoa desert – wander through this bizarre landscape

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Airport pick-up & drop-off
- All internal flights
- Ground transport
- Accommodation
- Entrance fees to sites
- Breakfasts and an occasional lunch/dinner (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
- Drivers and guides
- Climate Care contribution

Itinerary

Please download the detailed itinerary for your tour from our website. We have made it simpler to navigate and there is now one-click access to each tour via the Trip Finder in the main menu, then click on the Itinerary tab to download your itinerary.

Itinerary Disclaimer

Itineraries are correct at the time of printing. Our itineraries are sometimes updated during the year to incorporate suggestions from past travellers and sometimes our own research too. Please ensure that you print and review a final copy of these **Trip Notes** and itinerary a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that may affect you.

Joining & Finishing Points

All travellers will be greeted at Bogota airport by a *Travel The Unknown* representative and will be escorted to their accommodation.

All customers will be escorted to the flight departing from Bogota airport. You can bolt on additional trips or services. Please contact us for more information.

Flights from London

We normally use the scheduled services of the airlines (depending on availability). As flight timings and schedules change regularly we recommend you to call one of our specialist sales staff or your agent to confirm up-to-date timings. Please note timings may change at a later date and cannot be confirmed until approximately two weeks before departure.

UK Regional Flights

Travel The Unknown is committed to making joining our trips as easy as possible, wherever you may live in the UK. The Flight Inclusive price is based on a London departure, but we are happy to tailor this to your local or regional airport.

Accommodation

Travel The Unknown will provide you with the best accommodation available, in keeping with the natural environments of our destinations. Please check your itinerary for the latest details on accommodation.

Usually we focus on small, family-run hotels and lodges. Here you will be personally catered to and your host will take care of your needs, as well as provide you with expert local advice and offer you their own insight on the local area. We've got to know many of the owners and families that run these places, and not only will you get a good night's sleep, but also bedtime stories that will stay with you forever.

All accommodation during the tour is provided as part of the package cost.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Accommodation</u>
Bogota	Hotel Abadia Colonial
Villa de Leyva	Hotel Plaza Mayor
Villa de Leyva	Hotel Bahia Olivia
Manizales	Hacienda Vanecia
Armenia	Galicia Finca
Popayan	Hotel de los Balcones
Popayan	Hotel MS La Herreria
San Agustin	Hacienda Anacaona
Neiva	Hotel Neiva Plaza

If any of our preferred first choice accommodation is not available, we will organise something of a similar standard.

Meals

All breakfasts are included in the tour price. We felt it is better to let you choose where to eat at other places as this gives you maximum flexibility and choice. Please refer to the itinerary for the meal plan.

You should budget about £15 (\$25) per day for additional meals.

Group Size

To minimise the footprint our tours leave - both on the environment and the local culture - we keep our group sizes limited to 12 people.

Tour Guides

We have gone to great length in trying to secure the best guides available. The group will be designated an escorting guide throughout the trek, and for the sightseeing aspects of the trip, we will sometimes use local guides.

Transport

Airport transfers by well maintained and comfortable cars, jeeps and mini-buses. All internal flights required are included in the cost of the package.

Style of Travel

Our trips combine culture, activity and relaxation. We try to give you the best of everything the region has to offer and you can opt in or out of any activities you please. These tours are for independent people and so we try to be flexible where we can, and give you time to explore on your own too.

Physical Demands

This is a relaxing tour if you want it to be. The level of activity you engage in is completely up to you. These islands are ideal for relaxation but the option of more strenuous activity is also available. See list of activities available above.

Accommodation is relatively basic but comfortable.

Activities

All of our activities are optional, but standard activities on our tours include:

- Gentle hiking
- Open-top buggy rides
- Optional horse-riding
- Optional rafting

A basic level of fitness and mobility is assumed of our clients. Please contact us if you are unsure of your suitability.

Optional Activities

From time to time other activities may be possible to arrange, e.g. rafting or horseriding in San Agustin, horse-riding in Valle de Cocora. Costs for such additional activities will not be covered in the standard tour package. Contact us in advance of your trip for more information.

Single Travellers

As experienced solo travellers, there were many times when we wanted to join tour groups, as it is a great way of meeting like-minded travellers, as well as getting to see some places that were otherwise not on our itineraries.

We try to keep our single supplements as low as possible. You will only have to pay a supplement if you want your own room. If you are open to sharing a room with another single same-sex traveller, then you pay no supplement.

Fellow Travellers

Travelling in a group is very rewarding and is a great way to meet new people. There may be large variations in age and nationality. This is most often a good thing, but can occasionally cause some teething problems, so we ask you to be patient with your fellow passengers and realise that everyone likes to travel a little differently. Please consider your fellow

passengers too, and try to respect meeting times, especially for game drives.

Group Leader

All Travel The Unknown group trips in Colombia are accompanied by one of our local Colombian group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Your leader will be knowledgeable about the places you are visiting, will be able to offer suggestions for things to do and see, and recommend great local eating venues, etc. Our group leaders are experienced, qualified guides and have a broad general knowledge of the areas visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. There may be a local guide to assist the group leader in certain places to ensure a consistent quality of local knowledge.

PRACTICALITIES

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. As a minimum we require that your insurance covers you for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We also strongly recommend you are covered for personal liability and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will be required to give details of your insurance prior to departure.

Please go to www.traveltheunknown.com/partners for links to excellent deals on travel insurance.

Visas

Visas are not required by the majority of travellers to Colombia. Please check the Colombian Embassy website for the latest conditions:

http://colombiaemb.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=607

Health

All *Travel The Unknown* travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our ground handler, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, *Travel The Unknown* reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. Please read the itinerary for this tour thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts or give us a call with any queries you may have.

An excellent resource for up-to-date travel medicine requirements is: www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk. We recommend that you also consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information before departure. You should also carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that in some remoter areas you could be some distance from medical facilities. For legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drugs including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

NOTE: Do not leave it to the last minute to see your doctor as you may have to get immunised or start taking tablets some time prior to departure. You should see your doctor or visit a travel clinic at least 45 days before your departure.

When organising your own meals, be selective where you eat. Choose places that seem quite clean and where many locals eat. A high turnover usually means food is not left lying around and has been made fresh. We recommend that you stick to drinking bottled water, even when brushing your teeth.

At the time of writing the following vaccinations were recommended for travel to Colombia but it is advisable to contact a doctor to get the latest available advice.

- Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid, Yellow Fever. In addition Hepatitis B and Rabies may be required. Yellow fever is necessary if you plan to visit any other countries in South America before or after your trip to Colombia and the certification may well be requested at border crossings. Malaria tablets are also strongly advisable. You will need to see a doctor to get a prescription.

Travellers should vigilantly protect themselves against mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved tops, long trousers and using a mosquito repellent with a high quantity of DEET. A mosquito net is also advisable for night time.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. For the UK, please visit: www.fco.gov.uk.

We strongly recommend that you use a neck wallet or money belt while travelling to ensure the safety of your documents and other valuables. It is not advisable to bring valuable jewellery when travelling. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities; however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. Any optional activities you undertake are not part of your *Travel The Unknown* itinerary, and *Travel The Unknown* makes no guarantees about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment. *Travel The Unknown* cannot be held responsible for any injuries or losses that may occur for any such optional activity. Please also note that *Travel The Unknown* retains the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

You may experience altitude sickness whilst staying in Bogota (at an altitude of 2640 metres). This is particularly apparent on arrival, so we have allowed time for acclimatisation. If you do not feel well please inform your group leader at the first available opportunity.

Dangers

Despite most people's perceptions Colombia is generally a very safe place to travel. However, you are still subject to the same problems that you find the world over – pickpockets can operate in busy places. Travelling with an experienced group leader will make your trip more protected from such external dangers but do not let your guard down completely. You are still responsible for your own belongings.

Colombia also suffers from various insurgencies. However, the security situation has improved dramatically in recent years and most parts of Colombia are free from this kind of worry. There is very rarely any trouble in the areas our tours cover. We closely monitor the safety situation on a continuous basis, using both government sources and our own network of contacts on the ground. Please check www.fco.gov.uk for the latest government advice on travel to the region. Please contact us at info@traveltheunknown.com if you have any further questions or concerns about safety issues.

In addition we recommended that you read the Health section for how to mitigate dangers to your health.

Electricity

Electricity in Colombia is 110 Volts, alternating at 60 cycles per second. If you travel to Colombia with a device that does not accept 110 Volts at 60 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter.

There are three main types of voltage converter. Resistor-network converters will usually be advertised as supporting something like 50-1600 Watts. They are light-weight and support high-wattage electrical appliances like hair dryers and irons. However, they can only be used for short periods of time and are not ideal for digital devices.

Transformers will have a much lower maximum Watt rating, usually 50 or 100. Transformers can often be used continuously and provide better electricity for low wattage appliances like battery chargers, radios, laptop computers, cameras, mp3 players and camcorders. However, they are heavy because they contain large iron rods and lots of copper wire.

Some companies sell combination converters that include both a resistor network and a transformer in the same package. This kind of converter will usually come with a switch that switches between the two modes. If you absolutely need both types of converter, when this is the type to buy.

Outlets in Colombia generally accept 1 type of plug (US-style):



Flat blade plug

If your appliances plug has a different shape, you may need a plug adapter. Check out www.traveltheunknown.com/estore for some adapters that will be suitable for Colombia.

Note there will not be any access to electrical sockets during the Lost City trek.

Communication

There are many internet cafes and call shops en route, however the service is sometimes slow outside main towns. International calls are reasonably simple. Most foreign mobile phones will work in most parts of Colombia.

Time

Colombia is GMT -5.

Laundry

Laundry facilities are offered by some of our hotels for a charge. In addition, laundry services can be found outside our hotel in all major cities and many smaller ones. However, we advise you not to leave laundry to the last minute as sometimes drying times may be required and laundry will not be available at all stops.

MONEY

Spending Money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some people spend a lot of money on drinks, whereas others may spend more on souvenir or present shopping. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, participating in optional activities and tipping.

Tipping

Tipping is totally voluntary and often not expected. It is however almost always appreciated. You should need no more than £30-40 (\$45-60) for tipping local staff in restaurants, hotels etc. It is also customary to tip guides and drivers if you have been happy with their services.

Departure Tax

Unless otherwise specified departure tax will be included in the cost of your package when you booked your international flight with *Travel The Unknown*. Where you are arranging your own international flights please check with your travel agent or airline.

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional £200 (\$350), to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or political strife) necessitate a change to our intended itinerary. This is not a common occurrence but it's better to be prepared.

Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: www.xe.com.

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Visa and Mastercard) throughout Colombia, though they are usually limited to towns. Although this is now a safe and convenient way to access money during your trip, we do recommend that you carry some money in the form of cash/travellers cheques for when these ATMs cannot be accessed. For travellers cheques, the easiest to change are Thomas Cook or American Express in USD currency. Cash should be in US dollars. Black markets no longer exist in Colombia. Major credit cards are accepted in the larger shops and restaurants but only in the bigger cities.

TIP 1: Slightly torn, faded or badly marked banknotes may be difficult to exchange. Coins are typically not exchangeable.

TIP 2: We recommend you take out the majority of the spending money you require when you arrive in Bogota and distribute it and keep it in secure places throughout the rest of the trip.

NOTE: Make sure you inform your bank of the exact dates that you are going to Colombia and that they ensure your card is not blocked when you are travelling.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Responsible Travel

As regular travellers, one thing that never ceases to amaze and inspire us while travelling is the kindness and generosity of people, who often have very little to their name. We firmly believe that the people who make these places special should also benefit from them. Therefore as first preference we use local guides and locally-owned lodges, shops and eateries. We do our best to ensure that the benefits of our tours reach as widely as possible into the communities where they operate and also invest a significant amount of our profits in development projects within those communities.

Environment

The biggest environmental impact of your holiday with *Travel The Unknown* is the CO₂ generated by your flights and land travel. As a responsible tour operator, we have included in our tour prices the costs of offsetting CO₂ emissions from all international and domestic flights as well as land travel forming part of the tour.

We have partnered with *Climate Care* for this purpose. If you are making independent flight arrangements, we urge you to take responsibility for your CO₂ emissions by offsetting through *Climate Care*, or another reputable offsetting scheme.

We also ask you to be vigilant about disposing of your waste. Dispose of all rubbish correctly and do not leave litter or cigarette butts in natural environments.

Our brochures and stationery are printed on FSC-accredited or recycled paper. To minimise waste, all of our brochures and trip notes are available for download online.

Visit www.traveltheunknown.com/responsible for further information.

LOCAL CULTURE - Dress

Colombian dress does not significantly differ from that in the West so culturally there are no real taboo issues. Bring light clothes for places that are hot. But also be properly prepared for the colder climates found at higher altitudes. Hiking boots, rainproofs and sandals as well as long sleeves and pants are advised for this trek. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us. Full contact details can be found on our website: www.traveltheunknown.com/contactus.

WHAT TO BRING

You will require clothing for both warm and cold weather as the tour moves through vastly different altitudes and terrains where weather conditions can vary hugely. Many of the items required are also available in our e-store:

www.traveltheunknown.com/estore.

- Any required medicines.
- Basic first aid kit, insect repellent and sunscreen (min. Factor 15), after sun and bite creams.
- Clothing for both hot and cold conditions. Practical clothing is strongly advised, especially long sleeved tops, long trousers and a sunhat.
- Binoculars, torch, sunglasses, small towel.
- Watch (strict time-keeping is required at times).
- Money for meals, souvenirs, contingencies.
- Water bottle or canteen.
- Good walking shoes (That will get wet) plus if sturdy sandals with straps and ankle protection. The sandals are good for river crossing if you want to keep your boots dry.
- Sun block and Mosquito repellent, and of course after sun and bite cream!
- Plasters (water proof are better)
- Spare camera batteries
- Water purification tablets if you want to be extra safe
- Malaria tablets

Electronic Items

- Digital camera – bring accessories: memory cards, battery, charger
- If film camera – bring film, lenses, batteries, etc.
- Mobile phone and charger
- Plug adaptors
- Music player (MP3, CD player, Ipad and relevant charger)
- Laptop and charger (useful if you want to keep a blog and upload photos)

Tour Photos

We prefer to use photos taken on our tours on our website so we actively encourage you to send us your photos. If you send us pictures we will also enter you in a draw to win some special prizes. Happy snapping!

Our Newsletter

If you would like to find out about new tours and all that is happening with *Travel The Unknown* then sign up to our newsletter on our website.

Recommended Reading

Here are some recommended books from or about Colombia:

- One Hundred Years of Solitude – Gabriela Garcia Marquez
- Love in the Time of Cholera – Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- Killing Pablo: The hunt for the richest, most powerful criminal in history – Mark Bowden
- Teach Yourself Spanish – Juan Kattan-Ibarra

These books and more can be found in our e-store, www.traveltheunknown.com/estore. You will also find a decent selection of guide books and other travel related goodies.

Spanish Cheat Sheet

Gracias	thank you
Hola	Hello
Es delicioso/a	it's very tasty
Azucar	Sugar
Carne	Meat
Que hora es?	what time is it
Si	Yes
No	No
quiero	I would like...
Quiero carne	I would like some meat
Me llamo (David)	My name is (David)
Soy estudiante	I am a student
Trabajo en un banco	I work in a bank

Feedback

We have spent much time and effort to make your trip a memorable experience for all the right reasons. However, we are constantly looking to improve our tours and any feedback you can give us or suggestions you may have would be very much appreciated.