

# SOUTHERN COLOMBIA EXPLORER

TOUR DETAILS		Duration
		14 days
<b>HIGHLIGHTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wandering cosmopolitan Bogota</li> <li>• The colossal Salt Cathedral</li> <li>• Rustic beauty of Villa de Leyva</li> <li>• Colonial villages in the Coffee Triangle</li> <li>• The “White City” of Popayan</li> <li>• The mysterious statues of historic San Agustín</li> <li>• The stunning Tatacoa desert</li> </ul>		
Off The Beaten Track Rating	● ● ● ●	Activity Rating ★ ★

## ITINERARY

**DAY 1** Arrive into Bogota airport where you will be met by a Travel The Unknown representative and driven to your hotel. Evening free to relax. Meal plan: N/A

**DAY 2** Half day tour of Bogota incl. Gold museum, historic Candelaria area and Monserrate. Afternoon free to explore/relax. Overnight in Bogota. Meal plan: B, L

*Nestled high in the Andes at 2620 m. (8646 ft), **Santafé de Bogotá**, to give it its full title, is a city of contrasts. It's a city of highrise buildings standing next to colonial churches, museums and artisan cafés. Its influences range from Spanish and English to the Indian. It is a city of wild traffic and calm oases reflecting a bygone era. **La Candelaria** is Bogota's old town, a historic neighbourhood in downtown Bogotá. The architecture of the old houses, churches and buildings has Spanish Colonial and Baroque styles and it houses several universities, libraries and museums. This vibrant district hosts the **Botero museum**, which showcases not only the works of Colombia's most famous painter but also paintings by Monet and Picasso from Botero's private collection, the largest and most impressive **Gold museum** in the world with an enormous assortment of pre-Hispanic gold work, the **church of Monserrate** with its stunning views over the city as well as many government buildings and an array of cafés and restaurants to suit every taste.*

**DAY 3** Drive to Zipaquirá, explore the stunning Salt Cathedral and visit the small museum. Lunch in Zipaquirá followed by a short wander through the historic centre. After lunch drive to heritage site of Villa De Leyva. Relax and overnight in Villa De Leyva. Meal plan: B, L

*The **Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá** is an underground Roman Catholic church built within the tunnels of a salt mine 200 meters underground in a Halite mountain. The name "Salt Cathedral" is mostly to attract tourists - while a functioning church that receives as many as 3,000 visitors on Sundays, it has no bishop and therefore no official status as a cathedral in Catholicism. The temple at the bottom has three sections, representing the birth, life, and death of Jesus. The icons, ornaments and architectural details are hand carved in the halite rock. Some marble sculptures are included. At the entrance of the church, there are 14 small chapels, representing the stations of the cross, which illustrate the events of Jesus' last journey. Each station has a cross and several kneeling platforms carved into the halite structure. The Salt Cathedral is considered **one of the most notable achievements of Colombian** architecture and has been denominated as a "Jewel of Modern Architecture". The cathedral represents for the Colombian people a valuable cultural, environmental and religious patrimony. The cathedral is part of a larger complex including "Parque de la Sal" (Salt Park), as well as a small museum of mining, mineralogy, geology and natural resources.*

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**DAY 4** Day around Villa De Leyva including half day walking tour of this beautiful village where time seems to have stood still. Afternoon free to go walking, horseriding or check out a 120m year old dinosaur fossil. Overnight in Villa De Leyva. Meal plan: B

*Declared a national monument in 1954, **Villa De Leyva** has been preserved in its entirety and virtually no modern architecture exists. The result is a colonial town par excellence - a place where the streets are still cobbled and the walls still whitewashed. Stroll through its unhurried streets where the locals will greet you with a welcoming smile. Swelled with visitors from Bogota on weekends, it is typically much quieter and more pleasant on weekdays.*

*Discovered in 1977 not far from Villa De Leyva, you can visit an **incredible fossil of a Kronosaurus**, the most complete Kronosaurus fossil in the world. The fossil of the **120m year old infant Kronosaurus** measures about 7m (without the tail) and this incredible creature with his tail would have measured about 12m in length despite not having reached its teenage years.*

**DAY 5** Breakfast, then drive to Bogota. Fly to Manizales at 13.50. Transfer to a traditional *finca* (farmhouse) with a couple of hours of daylight to enjoy the property and its beautiful surroundings. Overnight in the finca. Meal plan: B, D

**DAY 6** Jeep tour to Los Nevados National Park, a national park in the central Andes. Short climb of a volcano and discover the diverse beauty of the park. On the way back stop off to soak in the natural hot springs to revive yourself. Overnight in traditional farmhouse. Meal plan: B, L, D

***Los Nevados National Natural Park** is a national park located in the Cordillera Central of the Colombian Andes. The **5,300-meter high volcano Nevado del Ruiz**, the highest of eight volcanoes in the park, dominates its surroundings. Glacial activity has shaped the landscape 3,000 metres (9,800 ft) above mean sea level, leaving U-shaped valleys and moraines behind. Otún Lake, in an extinct volcano crater, and Green Lake are the main lakes in the area. **The park's hydrographic networks supply water to over 2,000,000 coffee-growers in the region**, and to most of the rice and cotton crops in the region. The area is home to 1250 species of vascular plants, 200 bryophytes, 300 lichens and 180 macroscopic fungi. On the lower slopes and in the valleys **Andean wax palms** are dominant. The upper Andean forest has trees reaching up to 30 metres (98 ft) in height. Noteworthy birds include the Blue-crowned Motmot, Yellow-eared Parrot, Fuertes's Parrot, Rufous-fronted Parakeet, Andean Condor, Brown-banded Antpitta and Ruddy Duck. The Bearded Helmetcrest hummingbird is endemic to the region. Noteworthy mammals include Mountain Tapir, Spectacled Bear, Northern Pudú, Oncilla and Cougar, White-eared Opossum.*

**DAY 7** Breakfast, then drive to the quaint village of Filandia. Short stop for coffee and a snack, a wander and a traditional craftshop visit. Get into Willys (jeeps) and drive to Cocora. Lunch in Bosques de Cocora restaurant (we recommend their famous trout). Two hours to wander or horseride through the wax palm landscape around Cocora. Drive to picturesque Salento village for a wander. Drive to a traditional coffee farmhouse, relax. Overnight in finca (farmhouse). Meal plan: B, L, D

***Filandia and Salento** are two small pretty colonial style villages set in stunning surroundings. Salento is the oldest village in the Quindio region with cobblestone streets and a wealth of restaurants, cafés and bars. Filandia is home to the beautiful María Inmaculada church and its streets are lined with colourful buildings with wooden balconies.*

*In a country full of beautiful landscapes, the **Valle de Cocora** still stands out. The valley stretches east of Salento into the lower reaches of Parque Nacional Natural Los Nevados, with a broad, green valley framed by sharp peaks. Everywhere you'll see **the famous wax palm, the largest palm in the world (up to 60 meters high)** and Colombia's national tree. Valle de Cocora is also home to a trout farm and the trout dishes are top quality. Local fauna includes mountain tapirs, spectacled bears, pumas, sloths, yellow-eared parrots, black-billed mountain-toucans, Andean condors and hummingbirds. It is a perfect area for hiking.*

**DAY 8** Half day to relax. Optional use of pool, chill by river, coffee tour by owner, Lunch at finca. Drive to Popayan. Evening to relax. Overnight in hotel in Popayan. Meal plan: B, L

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**DAY 9** Short tour of Popayan (2-3 hours). Rest of day free to soak up the atmosphere and explore the culinary delights of this colonial town. Overnight in hotel in Popayan. Meal plan: B

*Popayan was founded in the year 1537 by Sebastian de Belalcazar. Because of its beautiful white colonial houses, it is known as the "White City". Popayan has played a major role in Colombia's history dating back to the early days of the Spanish conquest and into the twentieth century. A number of Colombian presidents were born in Popayan including, most recently, Guillermo Leon Valencia from 1962 to 1966. In 2005, Popayan became the first city to be designated a **City of Gastronomy** as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities initiative. The typical dishes of the city are a legacy of Spanish and indigenous cultural interaction, integrating special components of the region with fruits brought from Spain.*

*Popayán is also widely known for the solemnity of **Easter processions** during which it commemorates the passion and death of Jesus Christ. **Since the sixteenth century processions have passed through Popayán's historical downtown.** During Easter week, Popayán is also home to the Festival de Música Religiosa (**Festival of Religious Music**), which began in the 1960s. Partially destroyed by an **earthquake in 1983**, Popayan's administration had the foresight to take their time with its reconstruction. Two decades later there is almost no evidence of the damage on the stunningly uniform white streets. **Rich with impressive churches and colonial architecture** it's easy to spend hours wandering around this quiet and relaxed town where every street leads to another just as beautiful.*

**DAY 10** Take the bumpy road to the World Heritage site of San Agustin, one of the gems of Southern Colombia. On arrival take some time to unwind and enjoy the unique atmosphere of San Agustin. Overnight in comfortable lodge. Meal plan: B

**DAY 11** Morning visit to the breath-taking Archaeological Park where you will discover stunning collection of statues dating from the 1st Century onwards. Very little is known about the mysterious culture that produced these statues - which has since vanished without trace. Afternoon free. There are options for hiking, rafting, horse-riding and hammock snoozing! Overnight in comfortable lodge. Meal plan: B

*Ten hours south of Bogota lies **the World Heritage site of San Agustin**, a small town of 18,000 people with breathtaking scenery, great music and home to a key archeological area in South America. **The pre-Incan civilization that lived here is shrouded in mystery**, even their actual name is still unknown.*

*The archaeological park sprawls over an area of 500 square kilometres and is considered **the largest of the pre-Columbian sites in South America**, and brings together cultural influences from peoples of the Andes, Amazonia and the Caribbean groups. Though not much is known of the cultures that created the statues, dolmens and carvings, these relics tell a tale of their own. The lush landscape serves as a foil for **statues representing mythical and real creatures**, perhaps gods and actual men, as well as the Goddess of Motherhood. There are **about 500 statues and tombs** are scattered in groups over an area on both sides of the Rio Magdalena Gorge, and there are most likely many more undiscovered to date. **Some speculate that huge Mayan-like pyramids and other structures remain buried** throughout the area. Other than the amazing statues, you can see burial chambers and ritual edifices in the Parque Arqueologico and huge petroglyphs spread throughout the valley. As far as culture and society is concerned, archaeologists have determined a few things: The San Agustin people treated women as equals and sometimes superiors (they had female leaders), they had a strong grasp of advanced mathematics, they attempted complex surgeries and **they were obsessed with the idea of life after death**. People were ritualistically sacrificed, burned alive and sometimes buried alive under the influence of hallucinogens.*

**DAY 12** Free day. Options are available to take a jeep tour, go hiking, horse-riding or rafting. Or simply relax. This is the place to do it. Overnight in comfortable lodge. Meal plan: B

**DAY 13** Early start - drive to Neiva. Lunch and drop bags. Drive to Villavieja. Pick up open-air buggy and driver for Tatacoa desert. Drive through this stunning semi-arid desert. Stop in pool for a while. Take a dusk walk around the lunar landscapes of El Cuzco. Drive back to Neiva. Overnight in Neiva. Meal plan: B

***The Tatacoa Desert**, the second largest arid zone in Colombia after the Guajira Peninsula, is one of the most attractive landscapes in Colombia. It occupies 330 square kilometres with two distinctive colours: ochre in the area of Cuzco and gray in the Los Hoyos area. The Tatacoa or **"the Valley of Sorrows"**, as it was called in 1538 the conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, due to traces of deterioration he noted in its soil. It is not actually a desert, but a tropical dry forest. The Tatacoa Desert was once a garden with thousands of flowers and trees which has gradually been drying out over millions of years.*



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*The plants in this area are adapted to climatic conditions through the development of horizontal roots up to 30 metres and vertical roots of 15 metres that facilitate access to water. Cactuses reaching between four and five meters high are common. Animals found in the Tatacoa Desert include **turtles, rodents, snakes, spiders, scorpions, eagles, alligators and wildcats**, many of whom hide throughout the day. Tatacoa is also an ideal spot for observing the skies and perfect for viewing the 88 recognised constellations and for viewing meteor showers.*

**DAY 14** Morning flight to Bogota. Drop bags at hotel. Rest of the day to relax, wander or go souvenir shopping. Transfer to airport and fly out of Bogota to UK or elsewhere. Meal plan: B

## PRICE INCLUDES

All internal flights

Airport pick-ups & drop-offs

Ground transport

Accommodation

Breakfasts and some meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)

Entrance fees to sites

Drivers and guides

Climate Care contribution

\* **NOTE:** Single supplement does not cover nights in the fincas (farms). Anyone paying a single supplement will be given single room priority subject to availability but a single room can NOT be guaranteed on these nights - refers to Days 5, 6 & 7

## ABOUT OUR TRIPS

In addition to our scheduled group departures, **private and tailor-made trips** can be arranged that include some or all of the places on this itinerary. Please contact us with your requirements (e: [info@traveltheunknown.com](mailto:info@traveltheunknown.com), t: 0845 053 0352) and we will happily put together an itinerary for you and your group. No trip is too long or too short.