



Trip Notes – Colombia: Southern Colombia Explorer

GETTING STARTED

Welcome

Congratulations on booking with *Travel The Unknown*! We love travel and we know that you do too, so we can't wait to show this truly remarkable tour.

Itinerary Disclaimer

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

www.traveltheunknown.com.

Itinerary

Please download the detailed itinerary for your tour from our site. 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. You will receive an email copy of the itinerary at least 2 weeks prior to the tour's commencement that will include details of all meeting points, flights, etc.



Joining Point

You will receive an email at least 2 weeks before your departure with details of the joining point. All travellers who booked flights with *Travel The Unknown* will be greeted at Bogota airport by a *Travel The Unknown* representative and will be escorted to their accommodation. Airport transfers can be arranged for other travellers upon request.

Finishing Point

All customers will be escorted to the flight departing from Bogota airport when flights have been booked with *Travel The Unknown*. Transfers to the airport can be arranged for all other travellers or you can come to the airport at the same time as the group that booked flights with *Travel The Unknown*.

TOUR DETAILS

Accommodation

Travel The Unknown will provide you with the best accommodation available, in keeping with the natural environments of our destinations. Traditional houses and farm stays are also arranged where appropriate. 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.



Meals

All breakfasts and some lunches/dinners 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.

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.

However, we found that many tour companies discriminate against solo travellers by whacking up the price unfairly, just for the privilege of having their own room. In reality, we know that the cost to the company is a lot less than this hefty premium. That is why at *Travel The Unknown*, we try to keep our solo 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.

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.



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. This will leave you with plenty of opportunity to meet and interact with locals as well as get to know your group better.

Transport

Travel between destinations is by well maintained and comfortable cars, jeeps and mini-buses. All internal flights required are included in the cost of the package.

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 horse-riding 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.



Fellow Travellers

While travelling in a group is very rewarding and is a great way to meet new people, the fact is that groups often contain quite a bit of variety within themselves. You may get large variations in age and nationality. This is most often a good thing and a way to learn about other parts of the world (and maybe even make some contacts there!) but these differences can also 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. Nobody likes to be kept waiting around. Remember, a little effort can go a long way.

Physical Demands

Please note that this is a reasonably demanding overland trip. The effects of altitude, the occasional long day travelling, bumpy roads and the possibility of sudden climate changes means that this is not a trip for the armchair traveller.

A basic level of fitness and decent health is assumed. Accommodation is comfortable however.

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.



Please check our website for our Responsible Travel philosophy and details of our projects.

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 for more details on our environmental policies.

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 & Permits

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 group leader, 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 your selected 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 and give us a call with any queries you may have.

We recommend that you 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 we are in remote areas and away from medical facilities for some time during this trip, and for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug 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 malaria 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 or sterilised 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 check out www.fco.gov.uk/. See *Dangers* section below.

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 your group leader has 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, then 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.

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.

EXPENSES

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.

Any tip that you wish to give your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated. See Tipping section below.



Departure Tax

Unless otherwise specified departure tax will be included in the cost of your package when booking 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 (\$300), to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (e.g. 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 for it.

Tipping

Tipping is totally voluntary and often not expected. It is however almost always appreciated. For the duration of your tour you should not need more than £30-40 (\$45-60) for tipping local staff in restaurants and hotels. It is also customary to tip guides and drivers if you have been happy with their services.

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.

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. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us. Full contact details can be found on our website:

www.traveltheunknown.com/contactus.

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 deliciosa	it's very tasty
Sucre	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

FINALLY

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. We will send you a detailed list of all the things you need to bring at the time of booking. 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).
- Clothing for both hot and cold conditions. Practical clothing is strongly advised, especially long sleeved tops, long trousers and a sunhat.
- Sandals and walking shoes.
- Binoculars, torch, sunglasses, small towel, and electricity adapter.
- Waterproof bag for documents and electronics.



- Watch (strict time-keeping is required at times).
- Money for meals, souvenirs, contingencies.

Most importantly, come with an open mind!

Checklist

A full checklist will be sent to you at the time of booking.

Tour Photos

We only 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! You can check out photos of our tours on our website at: www.traveltheunknown.com/gallery

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.

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. Please leave us some feedback by way of email (info@traveltheunknown.com) or through our website at: www.traveltheunknown.com/contact.