

FREE DESTINATION GUIDE

COLOMBIA

Colombia



Caribbean color in Cartagena, mountain cool in Medellin, capital culture in Bogota.

SAFETY: US State Dept: Level 3, plan with care

Travelling with ActorTonyB & Nala The Shih Tzu

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Top Sights

- **Cartagena Walled City.** Colonial streets, flower draped balconies, and plaza cafes inside 400 year old walls.
- **Getsemani, Cartagena.** The walled city's colorful neighbor: street art, local bars, and the liveliest plaza at night.
- **Castillo San Felipe de Barajas.** The great Spanish fortress above Cartagena; go at opening or sunset to beat the heat.
- **Rosario Islands Day Trip.** White sand and clear water an hour by boat from Cartagena; book a beach club day pass.
- **Comuna 13, Medellin.** Outdoor escalators, powerful street art, and a neighborhood story best heard from a local guide.
- **Metrocable and Parque Arvi, Medellin.** Ride the gondola over the valley to a mountain nature reserve; Medellin's transit is a sight itself.
- **Plaza Botero and Museum of Antioquia, Medellin.** Botero's joyful sculptures in the plaza, and his paintings inside the museum.
- **Bogota: Gold Museum and Monserrate.** The Museo del Oro holds the world's finest pre Hispanic gold, then ride the funicular up Monserrate for the city view.

Local Tips

- Locals say no dar papaya: do not give opportunity. Keep phones off the street, use them inside cafes, and skip flashy watches and jewelry.
- Use ride apps (DiDi, Cabify, inDrive) instead of hailing street taxis in all three cities.
- Bogota sits at 8,600 feet. Take day one slow, eat light, and save the Monserrate climb for day two.
- Fly between cities. Mountain roads are beautiful but slow; domestic flights are cheap and frequent.
- Take a guided tour in Comuna 13 and for Bogota's La Candelaria; local context turns sights into stories.
- Carry small peso bills; card machines and change can be scarce in smaller shops and markets.
- Beat the arrival gauntlet in Cartagena: vacation club pitches and unofficial taxi offers start early. Decline, keep walking, and use your prebooked ride or a ride app from the official pickup area.
- Book your airport pickup before you land and screenshot the details; a confirmed driver beats curbside bargaining in every currency.

Customs & Etiquette

Do

- Greet warmly with buenos dias and a handshake; Colombians are famously polite and it is returned.
- Use usted with elders and officials; it signals respect and smooths every interaction.
- Try a tinto, the small sweet black coffee sold everywhere, and say yes to fresh juice at lunch.
- Dress neatly in Bogota; the capital is more formal than the coast.

Please Don't

- Do not hail taxis off the street at night; apps and hotel called cars only.
- Do not display your phone walking or at outdoor tables; phone snatching is the top tourist crime.
- Do not joke about Colombia's past with strangers; locals are proud of how far the country has come.
- Do not accept drinks or invitations from overly friendly strangers in nightlife areas.

Things to Know Before You Go

Currency. Colombian peso (COP). The numbers look big, so use a converter app; cards are common in cities, cash rules in markets.

Language. Spanish. English appears in Cartagena's tourist zone and Medellin's El Poblado; elsewhere, basic Spanish carries the day.

Best time to visit. December to March and July to August are the drier windows. Cartagena is hot year round; Medellin earns its eternal spring nickname daily.

Getting around. Fly between the three cities. Inside them, ride apps plus Medellin's metro and metrocable cover everything you need.

Five phrases that open doors

Buenos días	Good morning
Muchas gracias	Thank you very much
Cuanto vale?	How much is it?
Donde queda...?	Where is ... located?
La cuenta, por favor	The check, please

What to Bring

- Layers for three climates in one trip: Cartagena heat, Medellin's spring, and Bogota's cold nights near 50 F.
- A secure crossbody or money belt and a phone you can keep out of sight on the street.
- Small peso bills; change for large notes is a daily struggle in small shops.
- Sunscreen and a hat for Cartagena and the Rosario Islands; the Caribbean sun at the equator is no joke.
- A light rain jacket for Bogota and Medellin afternoons in the wetter months.
- Copies of your passport: you will show the copy, not the original, for ID at most stops.

What to Expect

Weather: Bogota is cool and changeable, Medellin sits in the 70s F almost daily (the City of Eternal Spring), and Cartagena is hot and humid year round.

Pace: Bogota moves like a capital, Medellin is relaxed and modern, and Cartagena slows down at midday and comes alive after sunset.

Costs in practice: Colombia is excellent value. Nice dinners, ride apps, and boutique hotels cost a fraction of US prices, which is part of the draw.

How tourists are received: Colombians are exceptionally warm and proud to share their country's comeback story. Basic Spanish multiplies the welcome.

What NOT to Bring

- Flashy watches, chains, and the habit of using your phone on the street: no dar papaya, do not give opportunity, is the local rule for everyone.
- Street hailed taxi plans; use apps or hotel called cars instead, especially at night.
- Any illegal drugs, full stop; enforcement is strict and nightlife scams around substances are a known risk to tourists.
- An itinerary into Level 4 departments (Arauca, rural Cauca, Norte de Santander, near the Venezuela border) without expert guidance; those are off this guide's map by design.

Safety Rating

US State Dept advisory level: Level 3: Reconsider Travel (with Level 4 areas)

Colombia carries a Level 3 US State Department advisory (updated March 2026), citing crime, terrorism, civil unrest, and kidnapping. Read it precisely: the Do Not Travel (Level 4) zones are specific places, Arauca department, rural Cauca outside Popayan, Norte de Santander, and the area within 10 km of the Venezuela border, none of which are on this guide's itinerary. Bogota, Medellin, and Cartagena welcome millions of visitors a year, but they ask for big city discipline: app rides, low profile, and no street phone use. If your plans take you beyond the three cities, check the department level first.

Three practical safety moves

- Stay on the Bogota, Medellin, Cartagena circuit and well reviewed neighborhoods; research any side trip's department level.
- Use ride apps door to door at night, and keep phones pocketed on the street (no dar papaya).
- Enroll in the free STEP program at step.state.gov and buy travel insurance that covers Colombia.

Advisory levels change. Check the current rating for your destination at travel.state.gov before you book and again before you fly. Summary reflects the advisory in effect in October 2026.

Budget Snapshot

Rough per person daily ranges in US dollars, including lodging, food, local transport, and activities. Airfare not included. Treat these as planning estimates, not quotes.

Tier	Per day (USD)	What it looks like
Budget traveler	\$45 to \$70 per day	Hostels and family hotels, menu del dia lunches, metro and walking days.
Mid range	\$90 to \$140 per day	Boutique hotels, guided tours, nice dinners, domestic flights between cities.
Comfort	\$180 plus per day	Walled city boutique hotel, private guides, island club days, fine dining.

Ready to Go?

You have the sights, the tips, the customs, and the budget. Now put dates on it. Compare flights, stays, cars, and activities for Colombia in one place, with live prices and traveler reviews.

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