



CULTURES OF THE WORLD

Colombia





CULTURES OF THE WORLD

Colombia

 Cavendish
Square
New York

Published in 2023 by Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC
29 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010
Copyright © 2023 by Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC

Cultures of the World ® is a registered trademark of Times Publishing Limited.

Fourth Edition

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Request for permission should be addressed to Permissions, Cavendish Square Publishing, 29 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010. Tel (877) 980-4450; fax (877) 980-4454.

Website: cavendishsq.com

This publication represents the opinions and views of the author based on his or her personal experience, knowledge, and research. The information in this book serves as a general guide only. The author and publisher have used their best efforts in preparing this book and disclaim liability rising directly or indirectly from the use and application of this book.

All websites were available and accurate when this book was sent to press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: DuBois, Jill, 1952- author. | Jermyn, Leslie, author. | Yong, Jui Lin, author. | Horning, Nicole, author.
Title: Colombia / Jill DuBois, Leslie Jermyn, Yong Jui Lin, and Nicole Horning.
Description: Fourth edition. | New York : Cavendish Square Publishing, [2023] | Series: Cultures of the world | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022005427 | ISBN 9781502666345 (library binding) | ISBN 9781502666352 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Colombia—Juvenile literature.
Classification: LCC F2258 .D83 2023 | DDC 986.1--dc23/eng/20220211
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022005427>

Writers: Jill DuBois, Leslie Jermyn, Yong Jui Lin; and Nicole Horning, fourth edition
Editor, fourth edition: Nicole Horning
Designer, fourth edition: Jessica Nevins

PICTURE CREDITS

The photographs in this book are used with the permission of: Cover (top) R.M. Nunes/Shutterstock.com; Cover (bottom, left), pp. 17, 25, 88 Jess Kraft/Shutterstock.com; Cover (bottom, right) pipojackman/Shutterstock.com; p. 6 Gokhan Bozkaya/Shutterstock.com; p. 7 OSTILL is Franck Camhi/Shutterstock.com; p. 8 Inspired By Maps/Shutterstock.com; p. 10 Ekaterina McClaud/Shutterstock.com; p. 12 Ilyshev Dmitry/Shutterstock.com; pp. 13, 45 Guillermo Ossa/Shutterstock.com; p. 14 James Wagstaff/Shutterstock.com; p. 15 stefanophotographer/Shutterstock.com; p. 19 Margarita Shudro/Shutterstock.com; pp. 20, 26, 43 oscar garces/Shutterstock.com; pp. 21, 44 WILLIAM RG/Shutterstock.com; p. 22 sunsinger/Shutterstock.com; p. 27 Harold Escalona/Shutterstock.com; p. 29 stocklight/Shutterstock.com; p. 30 Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com; p. 31 Dan Baciul/Shutterstock.com; p. 32 Diego Grandi/Shutterstock.com; p. 34 Sebastian Delgado C/Shutterstock.com; pp. 36, 72 Roger.Rondon/Shutterstock.com; p. 37 Daniel Andres Garzon/Shutterstock.com; p. 38 Mikadun/Shutterstock.com; p. 41 Andres Navia Paz/Shutterstock.com; pp. 42, 120 Manolo Ramos/Shutterstock.com; p. 46 Javier Crespo/Shutterstock.com; p. 50 lu_sea/Shutterstock.com; p. 52 Sergio Formoso/Shutterstock.com; p. 53 (left) Atosan/Shutterstock.com; p. 53 (right) BearFotos/Shutterstock.com; p. 55 Alex Stemmers/Shutterstock.com; p. 56 Anrephoto/Shutterstock.com; p. 57 Alejandro Tejada/Shutterstock.com; p. 60 Danaan/Shutterstock.com; p. 62 javarman/Shutterstock.com; p. 64 Roberto Galan/Shutterstock.com; pp. 65, 101 Tinseltown/Shutterstock.com; p. 67 Mauricio Acosta Rojas/Shutterstock.com; p. 69 Anamaria Mejia/Shutterstock.com; p. 70 fernandoalonsostockfilms/Shutterstock.com; p. 74 Luz Zuluaga Photography/Shutterstock.com; p. 77 Simon Pittet/Shutterstock.com; p. 78 Featureflash Photo Agency/Shutterstock.com; p. 79 Leandro Reichert/Shutterstock.com; p. 81 Wirestock Creators/Shutterstock.com; p. 82 alvarobueno/Shutterstock.com; p. 84 Luis Echeverri Urrea/Shutterstock.com; p. 86 sduraku/Shutterstock.com; p. 87 Joerg Steber/Shutterstock.com; p. 90 Hernando Sorzano/Shutterstock.com; p. 92 Edaccor/Shutterstock.com; p. 94 RUBEN M RAMOS/Shutterstock.com; pp. 96, 111 posztos/Shutterstock.com; p. 99 Juan Camilo Jaramillo/Shutterstock.com; p. 102 Mark Pitt Images/Shutterstock.com; p. 103 vinjusoul/Shutterstock.com; p. 106 Dominici/Shutterstock.com; p. 108 oelerna/Shutterstock.com; p. 109 gary yim/Shutterstock.com; p. 110 Nowaczyk/Shutterstock.com; p. 112 Karloz Monsalve/Shutterstock.com; p. 114 Jesfotos/Shutterstock.com; p. 117 doleesi/Shutterstock.com; p. 122 HECTORHACHEGE/Shutterstock.com; p. 123 Fotos593/Shutterstock.com; p. 126 AS Food studio/Shutterstock.com; p. 127 Oleksii Mishchenko/Shutterstock.com; p. 130 zoryanchik/Shutterstock.com; p. 131 nehophoto/Shutterstock.com.

Some of the images in this book illustrate individuals who are models. The depictions do not imply actual situations or events.

CPSIA compliance information: Batch #CSCSQ23: For further information contact Cavendish Square Publishing LLC, New York, New York, at 1-877-980-4450.

Printed in the United States of America

Find us on  

Contents

WELCOME TO COLOMBIA

5

1. GEOGRAPHY

11

Mountain ranges • Average temperatures • Exotic animals • Plants • Minerals • Colombian cities • Colombia's capital • City of Eternal Spring • The growth of Cali • The picturesque town of Cartagena

2. HISTORY

23

Early settlements • Viceroyalty of New Granada • Colombian independence • Unstable political environment • Ongoing violence • COVID-19 pandemic

3. GOVERNMENT

33

The legislative branch • Judiciary branch • Voting process • Peace Colombia • Ingrid Betancourt

4. ECONOMY

39

Private enterprise • Resources • Fresh-cut flowers • Livestock • Fishing industry • Minerals • Oil and energy • Travel • Imports and exports • Illegal drug trade

5. ENVIRONMENT

51

Animal life • Endangered mammals • Colombia's national animal • The Colombian grebe and golden poison frog • *Cattleya trianae* • Air issues • Environmental protection • Wastewater treatment plan • Availability of essential services • Los Katíos National Park • National parks

6. COLOMBIANS

63

Indigenous groups • Ethnic groups • Fashion

7. LIFESTYLE

71

The importance of family • Godparents • Marriage • Roles in the family • Unlearning machismo • Work days • Meetings and social gatherings • Schools • Houses • Bogotá housing protests

8. RELIGION	85
Roman Catholic Church • Ongoing persecution of the Jews • Religious national holidays • Cathedrals and basilicas	
9. LANGUAGE	91
Body language • Verbal greetings • Addressing others • Freedom of the press	
10. ARTS	97
Artistic achievements • Authors and literature • Rayo Museum • Paintings • Stunning architecture • Performing arts • <i>Encanto</i>	
11. LEISURE	107
Fishing and swimming • Mountain climbing • Most popular sport in Colombia • Game hunting • Bullfighting • Gambling • Professional cycling	
12. FESTIVALS	115
Types of fiestas • Types of <i>ferias</i> • Barranquilla Carnival • Carnival of the Independence of Cartagena • Carnaval de Negros y Blancos	
13. FOOD	121
Kitchens • Shopping • Meals • Etiquette • Colombian foods • Regional favorites • Restaurants • Beverages	
MAP OF COLOMBIA	133
ABOUT THE ECONOMY	135
ABOUT THE CULTURE	137
TIMELINE	138
GLOSSARY	140
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY	142
INDEX	143

Welcome to COLOMBIA

Diverse landscapes; rich food; friendly, expressive people—these are things you'll find in the unique country of Colombia. With a population of more than 50 million people, Colombia has the 29th-largest population in the world, and about 85 different ethnic groups call Colombia home. Colombia is a country full of vivid contrasts. Breathtaking nature scenes full of vivid colors are contrasted with impoverished areas of cities. Snow-covered mountains are contrasted with jungles, and courtesy is contrasted with violence. While poverty and the violence that is connected to the drug cartels are often what comes to mind when people think of Colombia, this perception is starting to shift with the impact of films such as Disney's *Encanto*, which depicts Colombia and its people in a more positive light.

Colombia is the only country in South America with coastlines on both the Pacific Ocean and Atlantic Ocean. The climate is also diverse because it is largely dependent on the altitude of the region, which allows for fertile soils for plants, vegetables, and fruits. One of the most distinguishing features of Colombia is the Andes mountain chain, which is among the longest and highest mountain ranges in the world. In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains, there is even a lost city called Ciudad Perdida, which was occupied by indigenous groups in the 8th and 14th centuries and was only just rediscovered in the 1970s. The site is buried under plants and trees, but tourists can still hike to the area—if they're willing to make the four-day trek through sweltering heat, rainstorms, humidity, and insects.



Colombia has a diverse landscape with vivid colors.

Other large tourist sites include Bogotá, Barranquilla, Cali, and Cartagena. Bogotá is the third-highest capital city in elevation in the world at 8,612 feet (2,625 meters) above sea level and has an average temperature of 57.2 degrees Fahrenheit (14 degrees Celsius). Bogotá hosts various internationally acclaimed events and has a wide variety of restaurants that offer various casual foods, fast foods, healthy foods, and deep-fried foods. Bogotá also offers a wide variety of museums and

hosts the International Book Fair every year. The city is recognized throughout the world for its editorial industry, which makes the book fair an important event. Every year, the fair hosts a guest country and builds a theme based on the literature from the country, making it a popular event for tourists and publishers alike.

Barranquilla is famous for hosting a large multiday carnival each year that celebrates Colombian folklore and



Dancers perform in the 2017 Barranquilla Carnival.

heritage. It is one of the world's largest carnivals and is the biggest celebration of Colombian folklore in the country.

Cali is Colombia's third-largest city and has an important role in the sugar and coffee industries. The city also proclaims itself to be the salsa capital of Latin America.

Cartagena is an old walled city that is a popular destination for tourists. In fact, it is one of the most extensive tourist destinations in South America.

Even though the country has a diverse, beautiful landscape filled with popular tourist destinations, it is important to note that Colombia is a country of conflict. There are some areas where it is not safe to travel, especially by bus, and there have been a number of kidnappings in the country. Additionally, freedom of the press is still a difficult matter in the country, and journalists have faced threats. Due to this, Colombia ranks low on the list of countries offering press freedom.



Cartagena is an old city that is a popular destination for tourists.

Out of 180 countries, Colombia ranks at number 134. Colombia is also known for its drug trafficking and infamous cartels. Colombia is one of the world's top producers of the dangerous drug cocaine, and coca (the main ingredient in cocaine) is grown throughout the country. Cocaine production and exportation is fueled by large, powerful cartels such as the Clan del Golfo cartel and the former Medellín and Cali cartels.

At one point, the Medellín cartel was the largest drug cartel in the world and its head, Pablo Escobar, was one of the world's most powerful drug traffickers in the 1980s and 1990s. TV shows such as *Narcos* have been based around Escobar, resulting in many people associating Colombia with drug cartels and cocaine.

However, in 2021, an animated Disney movie called *Encanto* started a shift in the way people think about Colombia.

The movie, about a magical town and family, was widely praised for its casting of many actors with Colombian heritage who voiced and sang as the characters. Additionally, the movie portrayed a beautiful, positive side of Colombia that is not often shown in movies or TV shows.

Colombia is also working toward teaching young people the skills, values, and knowledge they need to engage with the world and take an active role in their community. This is a concept known as global citizenship. Global citizens work toward making the world a better place for others and make the world

more sustainable, peaceful, and fair. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) collaborated with the Colombian government to create Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which involves students in environmental, political, and social projects that address global issues.

Young people in Colombia have many famous Colombian celebrities to look up to as global citizen role models, including Shakira, Maluma, and Karol G, who all try to make Colombia and the rest of the world a better place with their charitable contributions.



Mountains of the Cordillera Central are shown here.

Geography

Colombia is about twice the size of France at 441,200 square miles (1,142,702 square kilometers). It is a country with strikingly diverse physical contrasts. Colombia's location near the equator means that it has diversity in its soils and crops as well as in climate and vegetation. The country consists of snow-tipped peaks that tower above warm forests and savannas, which are a combination of woodland and grassland ecosystems, as well as modern cities and rural landscapes where farmers grow coffee, corn, and other crops.

MOUNTAIN RANGES

The distinguishing geographical feature of Colombia is the Andes mountain chain in the central and western regions. The Andes are among the longest and highest mountain ranges in the world. Mountain ranges, called cordilleras, divide

the country down its length. Cordillera Oriental (Eastern Range) is the longest range, and Cordillera Central is the highest range. Cordillera Central consists of numerous volcanoes and makes up the backbone of the mountain range system in Colombia. The Cordillera Occidental (Western Range) is close to the border with Ecuador and is the least populated range in Colombia. The country is also divided by river systems. The river basins between the mountain ranges contain three of Colombia's most important rivers: the Atrato, Cauca, and Magdalena. The Magdalena is historically known as the lifeline of Colombia. The river rises

Point of Interest

Chocó Department is an area of Colombia that touches both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

DEFORESTATION OF THE MAGDALENA RIVER

The Magdalena River is one of the most important rivers in Colombia and is home to hundreds of fish as well as crocodiles, iguanas, turtles, manatees, and other wildlife that are still being discovered to this day. However, deforestation has removed some of the flooded forests surrounding the river, replacing them with pastures for livestock. Additionally, the river has gone dry at important points. Between 1980 and 2010, approximately 70 percent of the forest along the river banks was lost.

Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez traveled up and down the banks of the Magdalena River as a child; therefore, it was an important backdrop in his novels *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *The General and His Labyrinth*. In 1981, he wrote an article pleading for the rehabilitation of the river, which he did not get to see because he passed away in 2014. In 2017, a Colombian crowdfunding campaign hoped to connect with fans of Márquez's work in a project to plant trees and help save this important river.



The Magdalena River is one of the most important rivers in Colombia. However, deforestation has greatly affected the river, and it has gone dry in some parts.

in the Andes, flows northeast about 960 miles (1,538 km) between the central and eastern ranges, and empties into the Caribbean Sea. Although it is full of falls,

sandbars, eddies, and sunken rocks, it is channeled so that large vessels can travel as far as Honda on the northern Caribbean coastline. The Cauca is the

second most important river, with a valley that feeds most of the country.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

About half of Colombia's land surface is characterized by mountains, high plateaus, and cool valleys. Because the country is situated close to the equator, the climate of its various regions is determined mainly by altitude. The coastal and eastern plains, known as Los Llanos, are at low altitudes and enjoy a tropical climate. The northernmost area of the Andes experiences average annual temperatures of 64°F (18°C). This region is largely devoted to agriculture. Small coffee plantations lie on the craggy hillsides, and houses stand in the less tillable areas.

Regions situated between 6,000 and 9,000 feet (1,829 and 2,743 m) above sea level experience an average temperature of 53°F (11.7°C). Above 9,000 feet (2,743 m), temperatures fall below 50°F (10°C) and the land at this height is too cold for farming and can only be used for grazing. The snow line begins at about 15,000 feet (4,572 m).

The two coasts of Colombia vary greatly in the amount of rainfall each receives. La Guajira, at the northern

tip of the country, is the driest place in Colombia, with an average annual rainfall of 42.8 inches (10.87 centimeters). On the other hand, cities in Chocó receive an average annual rainfall of nearly 354 inches (899.1 cm).

EXOTIC ANIMALS

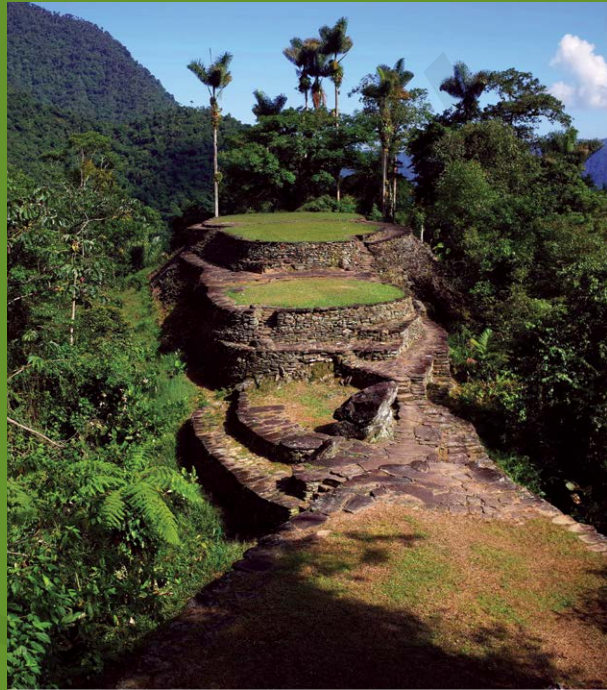
Tapirs, ocelots, armadillos, and many other exotic animals thrive in the tropical areas of Colombia. Several types of monkeys are also found in the rain forests. Some, however, such as the brown-headed spider monkey and Brumback's night monkey, are now critically endangered or threatened species.



Ocelots thrive in Colombia's tropical areas.

THE LOST CITY

The most popular hike in Colombia is to Ciudad Perdida, which is a lost city in the mountains known as the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It takes four days to hike the 27-mile (44 km) trail. Ciudad Perdida was occupied by Tayrona peoples in the 8th and 14th centuries and was only just rediscovered in the 1970s. The site is buried beneath thick jungle, and indigenous inhabitants have banned excavations of the area. However, the stone terraces and stairways are still in good shape. Tourists who want to visit the area are not allowed to go alone—they have to go with an approved tour operator that provides a tour guide and all meals. Brave tourists who decide to make the four-day trek battle extreme heat, rainstorms, stifling humidity, mud, and insects to catch glimpses of Colombia's famous lost city.



The lost city of Ciudad Perdida is largely buried under jungle.

Macaws, jacamars, cotingas, toucans, and many other birds with bright and colorful plumage make their nests in Colombia. The country has more than 1,900 species of birds. These range from the tiny hummingbird and the gorgeted puffleg (at only 3.5 inches [90 millimeters] long), to the large harpy eagle, which eats sloths, monkeys, opossums, and guinea pigs. The graceful Andean condor can also be seen

soaring over the mountains of Colombia.

The rivers and their tributaries contain fish and mammals, such as dolphins, that are usually found in the open sea. The freshwater fish vary greatly in size, from the tiny guppy and neon tetra to the arapaima, also known as pirarucu, the largest freshwater fish in the world. Colombia's waters are also home to large schools of flesh-eating piranhas.

PLANTS

So much variety in climate enables diverse flora to flourish in Colombia. More than 22,000 species of flowering plants have been found within Colombian territory. This includes around 4,000 types of orchids that are grown in the country. Cacti grow in the northern deserts, some reaching 60 feet (18 m) in height. In the central plains are vast woodlands. On the Caribbean coast are mangroves and coconut palms.

Orchids with large, vividly colored

flowers form a lush undergrowth in the dense Amazonian forest. This tropical region yields ipecac, quinine, and castor beans, used for medicinal purposes, and fruit such as papaya, mango, melon, pineapple, passion fruit, and banana. Rubber, chicle, vanilla, ginger, and sarsaparilla also come from this region. Other kinds of plants, virtually unknown in the United States, such as curuba, chirimoya, guanabana, zapote, and granadilla, are also cultivated in Colombia.



Orchids grow in the dense Amazonian forest in Colombia.

VOLCANOES IN COLOMBIA

Being a part of the Ring of Fire, a region of the world subject to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, Colombia must deal with natural disasters. Many natural hazards result from Colombia's position along the Pacific Ring of Fire and the consequent geologic instability. Colombia has 15 major active volcanoes, whose eruptions have on occasion resulted in substantial loss of life, such as at Armero in 1985, when more than 20,000 people died and the nearby towns were covered in lava, ice, and mud. Geological faults have also caused numerous devastating earthquakes, such as the 1999 Armenia earthquake.

The country's temperate regions produce flowers such as roses, chrysanthemums, and hortensia, which bloom throughout the year. Coffee plantations are located on the mountain slopes, and various small trees are planted to shade the coffee bushes. Eucalyptus, originally imported from Australia, grows well in the temperate regions. The windy, cold, high plains are covered with low vegetation of vine shrubs, mosses, and resinous woody plants.

Learn the Language

Tierra fría means "cold land" and refers to the mountain locations with high elevations in Colombia.

MINERALS

Mineral deposits abound in Colombia. The country is the world's major source of emeralds. Other significant reserves include platinum, gold, petroleum, silver, copper, lead, iron, mercury, nickel, and uranium.

Colombia also benefits from one of its most undeveloped regions, the Guajira Peninsula, located on the northeastern corner of Colombia's Caribbean coast. Poor agricultural conditions have prevented the area from being cultivated, although an active salt mine has been there for years. However, geologists have discovered that the peninsula is actually rich in many mineral deposits. Unexploited stores of natural gas, coal, and limestone have turned a desert into an

economic oasis. The fields of the Guajira Peninsula are currently producing most of the natural gas used in the country's northern coastal region.

Blessed with mountains and rivers, Colombia has become one of the largest producers of hydroelectricity in Latin America. An ambitious program to develop hydropower is under way. However, supply has still fallen short of demand.

COLOMBIAN CITIES

Colombia's largest cities are Bogotá, with a population of 7.1 million; Medellín and Cali, with a population of 2.5 million and 2.2 million, respectively; and Barranquilla, with a population of 1.2 million. Other large cities include Cartagena, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, Manizales, Pereira, Santa Marta, and Ibagué. Many Colombian cities have grown rapidly in recent years.



Bogotá is a sprawling tourist destination with the unique feature of the Andes in the background.

Immigration from rural areas has raised the country's urban population to more than 80 percent of the total population. The number of large cities in Colombia is uncharacteristic of Latin America. In most Latin American countries, the capital and two or three other cities usually account for most of the urbanization.

COLOMBIA'S CAPITAL

The name Bogotá derives from the name Santa Fé de Bacatá—Santa Fé came from conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada's birthplace in Spain, and Bacatá was the original indigenous name that eventually became Bogotá. Today, Bogotá is a sprawling metropolis. It is situated in a high valley called the Sabana de Bogotá, at an altitude of more than 8,500 feet (2,591 m) above sea level.

Bogotá is the artistic, cultural, intellectual, and political center of Colombia. It is also becoming a major industrial center. As one of the oldest cities in the Western Hemisphere, Bogotá is the site of many stately colonial churches, homes, and universities. Middle- and upper-class inhabitants live in ultra-modern buildings in the northern part of the city, where embassies, large private residences, and exclusive boutiques are also located. The broad boulevards,

modern skyscrapers, and shopping centers create a stark contrast to the historical architecture in other parts of the city. Working-class neighborhoods are in the southern and western areas of the city, where industrial plants are also located.

Bogotá has many museums tracing various aspects of Colombian art and history. The Colonial Museum has paintings of the Spanish colonial period. Works done by the indigenous people of San Agustín are displayed at the National Museum. The Museo del Oro contains more than 55,000 gold objects, the world's largest collection of pre-Columbian goldsmiths' work.

As in other Colombian cities, streets in Bogotá run in straight lines and are called *calles* when running east to west and *carreras* when running north to south. The migration of people from the countryside has created *tugurios*, or slums. As in many other major cities, unemployment, poverty, and crime are common problems.

CITY OF ETERNAL SPRING

Colombia's second-largest city is Medellín, known for its textile industry. In recent years, it has become infamous for being home to one of the largest cocaine-selling



The second-largest city in Colombia is Medellín, which is shown here.

drug cartels.

Spaniards looking for opportunities to mine gold deposits began settling in this area in the late 1600s and founded Medellín in 1675. Many Colombians in Medellín today are descendants of these settlers. As the mines gave out, the early inhabitants quickly became proficient farmers. The region has become the leading coffee-growing area in the country.

Called the “City of Eternal Spring,” Medellín has an agreeable climate and a dramatic mountain vista. There is a feeling of growth and prosperity about the city,

which boasts many modern hotels, banks, offices, shops, and skyscrapers. Its flower-lined avenues are a pleasant surprise to visitors expecting to see the smokestacks of an industrial city. Medellín is home to many flower festivals and exhibitions, and bullfights are a favorite pastime. On weekends during bullfighting season, La Macarena, a 15,000-seat bullring, is the center of much enthusiasm.

THE GROWTH OF CALI

Founded in 1536, Cali is another of Colombia’s old cities and the third largest.

This city has undergone exceptional growth throughout the years, but many colonial buildings still stand. Cali is a manufacturing and distribution center that lies in the middle of Cauca, the country's vital agricultural valley. However, it was not until the 1950s that Cali started developing economically due to its landlocked position. In 1954, the Cauca Valley Corporation (CVC) helped with the economic development of the city by draining the upper Cauca River to generate electrical power and make the small amount of farmland more suitable

for large-scale cultivation. Since then, the city has been responsible for agricultural products such as sugar, coffee, soybeans, and cotton. Dairy, beef, and poultry farms have also become more important, as well as printing paper, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

At an altitude of 3,327 feet (1,014 m), Cali has a pleasant climate all year, with significant rainfall during its two rainy seasons. Flooding is a problem in lower sections of the city, and several earthquakes have hit Cali.



Cali is one of Colombia's oldest cities. It has grown a lot throughout the years, but still has colonial buildings.

THE PICTURESQUE TOWN OF CARTAGENA

One of the most picturesque towns in Colombia is Cartagena. The town is filled with 16th-century architecture and was the most important fortified city of the Spanish Empire. Much of the fortification remains in place today, as the town is surrounded by 16 miles (25.7 km) of protective walls. On one side of the town is the Caribbean Sea and on the other is the old section of the city. On the newer side of the town, the houses are often brightly colored with gardens, patios, and balconies. Within the old section of the town, old fortresses



Cartagena is an old walled city filled with vibrant buildings.

that protected the harbor and the town still remain.

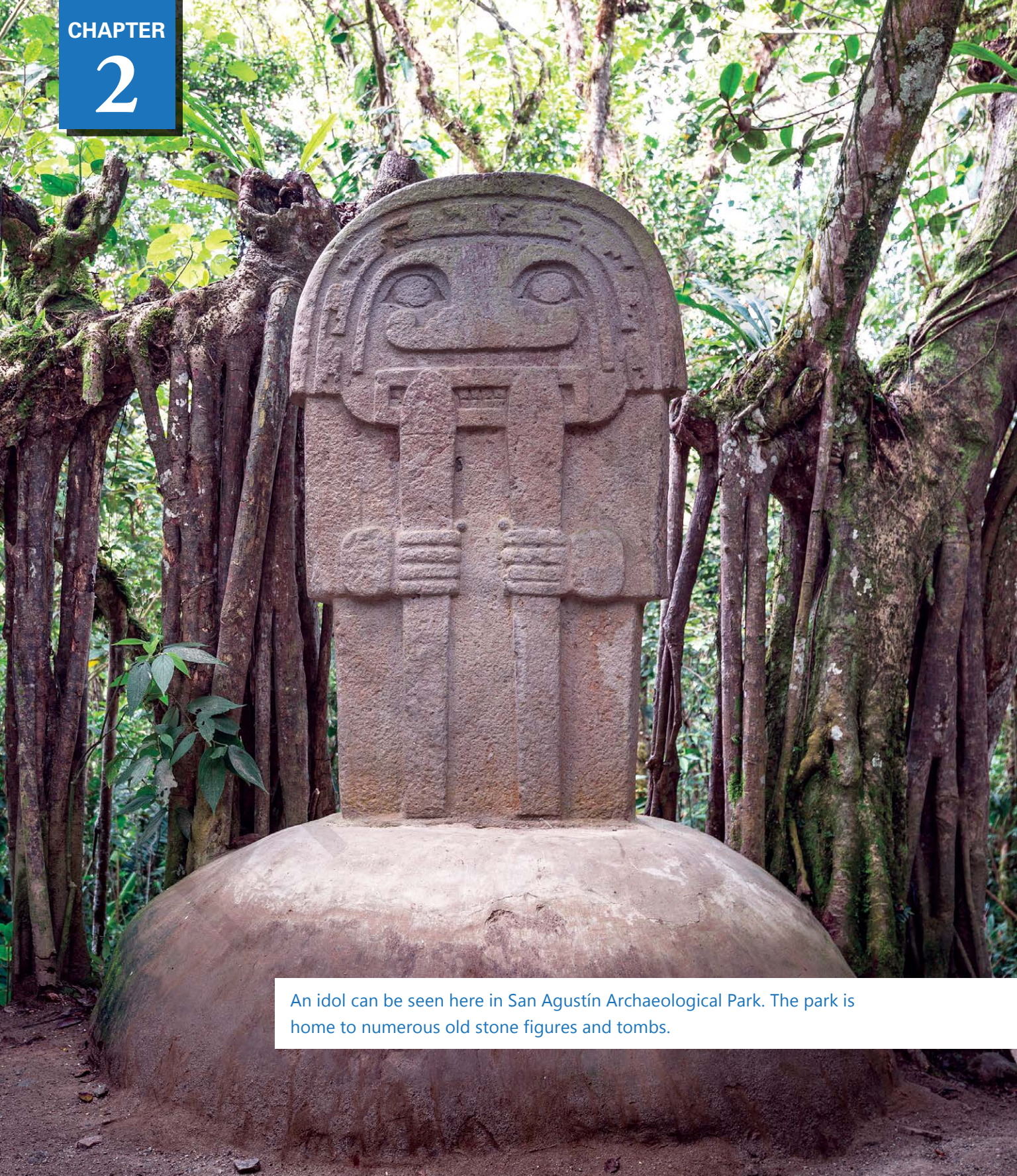
Links to Learn More

cnn.com/travel/article/lost-city-ciudad-perdida-colombia/index.html

Read a hiker's account of trekking to Ciudad Perdida.

nytimes.com/2020/04/15/travel/colombia-lost-city-ciudad-perdida.html

Read more about the lost city of Ciudad Perdida and look at stunning pictures of a trek through the area.



An idol can be seen here in San Agustín Archaeological Park. The park is home to numerous old stone figures and tombs.

History

The first European to reach Colombia was Alonso de Ojeda in 1500. At that time, Colombia was inhabited by a number of indigenous groups that all spoke different languages. From this point forward, Colombia went through a period of colonization, the most noteworthy being the Spanish conquest. This ultimately created the Viceroyalty of New Granada, consisting of present-day Colombia and Panama. Independence

from Spain was eventually won, but it brought about nearly constant political violence and unrest in the country that only started to decrease around 2005.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

The first permanent Spanish settlements were made at Santa Marta in 1525 and at Cartagena in 1533. However, the interior of the country was not seen by Europeans until 1536, when Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada traveled up the Magdalena River. He and his men defeated the Chibcha people they encountered in the various mountain valleys and founded the city of Bogotá in 1538.

At about the same time, an expedition from neighboring Ecuador, under the command of Sebastián de Benalcázar, had come up the Cauca Valley and founded Pasto, Popayán, and Cali.

Travel Tip

El Dorado has taken on the general meaning of a place where wealth can be easily and quickly gained. The legendary story of the city has been mentioned in literature such as Voltaire's *Candide*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and even an animated movie released in 2000.

EL DORADO

El Dorado originally was a legendary ruler near Bogotá. It was believed he would cover his body with gold dust during festivals and then jump into Lake Guatavita. People would then throw gold objects and jewels into the lake. Spanish conquerors heard of these stories in the early 1500s, with one saying that he visited the ruler. Starting in 1538, the Spanish went to the area in Bogotá to try to find the ruler. They did not find the ruler, but the area stayed under Spanish rule. Eventually, El Dorado the ruler turned into a legend of El Dorado the city, and it came to mean an entire city of gold. In 2021, archaeologists found eight ceramic jars full of emeralds and metallic figures at a temple tied to the legend of El Dorado. The figures consisted of snakes and other animals, as well as figurines of people with staffs and headdresses. The items are believed to have been related to ancestor worship.

Another expedition led by Nikolaus Federmann met up with Benalcázar's group as they both reached Bogotá. This initiated a period of conflict among the various conquering groups.

The three *conquistadores*, or conquerors, submitted their claims to the court of Spain. Federmann received nothing. Benalcázar was named governor of Popayán, and Jiménez de Quesada was given the military title of marshal and was allowed to remain on the land he had won for Spain. He named the newly conquered land Nueva Granada and named its capital Santa Fe de Bogotá.

VICEROYALTY OF NEW GRANADA

In 1550, a royal government was established for the administration of Nueva (New) Granada. In that same year, gold was discovered in Antioquia. As soon as gold shipments to Spain commenced, English and Dutch pirates began to attack Spanish ships and ports. However, the interior of the country was able to develop undisturbed.

Despite New Granada's great wealth, Spain was only mildly interested in this territory. For the first 200 years of Spanish rule, the land was governed by a president appointed by the viceroy

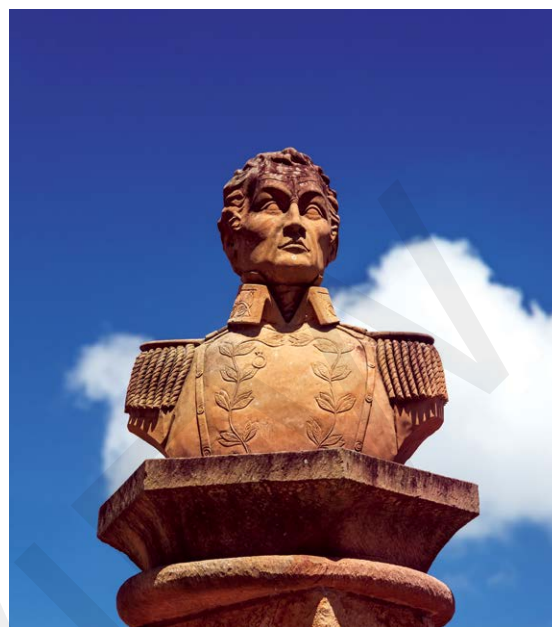
of Peru. During this time, however, Cartagena developed as the major port through which all trade with South America was supposed to travel. With the addition of the territory of present-day Ecuador and Venezuela, the viceroyalty was reestablished in 1739.

COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE

The movement for independence started in the 1790s, after the French Revolution. Venezuelans revolted in 1796 and 1806, but an attempt to set up an independent government in Bogotá failed.

In May 1810, Cartagena declared independence. Bogotá followed suit on July 20, and 6 years of independence ensued. At that time, Spain was involved in a war against France in Europe, but it regained the territory in 1816. Finally, Colombia got permanent independence in August 1819 from Spain, when Simón Bolívar and his generals defeated the Spaniards at the Battle of Boyacá.

Bolívar and his generals, however, could not agree on a new form of government. Bolívar preferred a strong central government, whereas José Antonio Páez and Francisco de Paula Santander pushed for a federation of sovereign states. In 1821,



Simón Bolívar assisted in Colombia's fight for independence from Spain in August 1819.

the Constitution of Cúcuta formally set up the federation called the Republic of Colombia, which also included Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Within the republic, present-day Colombia was still known as New Granada. It took the name of Colombia in 1863. Historians refer to the former federation as Gran Colombia to avoid confusion.

Travel Tip

July 20, 1810, is celebrated as Independence Day in Colombia.

Bolívar was the elected president of Gran Colombia, while continuing the fight for Ecuador's liberation and Peru's independence. In his absence, Santander, his vice president, governed the nation.

UNSTABLE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The federation was doomed from the beginning. In 1828, Bolívar established a dictatorship, but two years later, Santander became president and instituted a democratic state.

By 1849, two political parties were firmly established: the Conservatives, who were in favor of a strong central government and closely tied with the Catholic Church, and the Liberals, who favored a federation of states and separation of church and state. From 1840 to 1880, the two parties alternated in power, amid much civil strife. However, the economy and population prospered, and trade and communications gradually improved.

The poet Rafael Núñez was elected president in 1880. Although he was a declared Liberal, he held conservative views. Núñez ruled as a dictator until his death in 1894. He made Catholicism the state religion and restored a centralized government.



Francisco de Paula Santander, whose statue is shown here, governed Colombia in Bolívar's absence.

Meanwhile, the economy experienced little growth, and in 1899 the War of a Thousand Days broke out. Between 60,000 and 130,000 people were killed, and the country was brought to the brink of economic collapse. Shortly after the restoration of peace, Panama seceded with the help of the United States. This resulted in bitter Colombian–American relations that lasted for many years.

KIDNAPPINGS

In 2007, Colombia attracted a record number of foreign visitors. However, around this same time, thousands of Colombians were being kidnapped and held by leftist rebels. Approximately 3,000 Colombians were being held by kidnappers, and in July 2007, more than 1 million people participated in marches and demonstrations to protest the kidnappings. Some of the people who were kidnapped had been held for up to 10 years. In fall of 2007, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez acted as a mediator to reach deals with the rebels on releasing the hostages. It wasn't until the beginning of 2008 that some hostages started being released.



Hugo Chávez acted as a mediator to release hostages kidnapped by rebels.

The period between 1903 and 1930 was unusually stable. Colombia developed a vigorous foreign trade, initially by exporting coffee. Multinational corporations invested in banana and petroleum production. Colombia experienced boom years in the 1920s. Railroads and power plants were built, but the affluence led to over-expansion and inflation.

ONGOING VIOLENCE

In the 1930s, the worldwide economic

collapse of the Great Depression brought financial disaster to Colombia. In 1930, the government began economic and social reforms. In 1944, a new labor code provided for minimum wages, employee benefits, and trade unions.

After World War II (1939–1945), there were severe political crises, resulting in the assassination of popular leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. Thus began “La Violencia.” It was a period of civil conflict in the Colombian countryside

between supporters of the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party, a conflict that took place roughly from 1948 to 1958. It is estimated that between 1946 and 1964, around 200,000 people lost their lives. A military coup in 1953 toppled the right-wing government of Laureano Gómez and brought General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to power. Initially, Rojas enjoyed considerable popular support, due largely to his success in reducing La Violencia. However, when he did not restore democratic rule and engaged in open repression, he was overthrown by the military in 1957 with the backing of both political parties, and a provisional government was installed. An agreement called the National Front came into place. Under the accord, the Conservative and Liberal parties agreed to alternate the presidency for 16 years (four four-year presidential terms). Each four-year administration ruled over a coalition government. This sealed off political access to other smaller and more extreme parties, giving rise to the incessant guerrilla warfare of the past 50 years.

Left out of the National Front, smaller parties became disaffected and in the

1960s turned to guerrilla tactics against the state. In the 1970s as the National Front was ending, the ongoing conflict and social problems brought about a new problem in the country: drugs. In 1975, Colombia's role as a major supplier in the international drug market rapidly developed, and drugs such as marijuana and cocaine were being exported to countries such as the United States.

At the end of 1985, the Unión Patriótica was formed, which is now represented in the congress. The right-wing groups refused to accept these newly politicized guerrillas, and by the beginning of 1990, more than a thousand Unión Patriótica officials had been murdered. In June 1998, the Conservative opposition candidate, Andrés Pastrana Arango, son of former president Misael Pastrana Borrero, won the presidential vote in a runoff election. Pastrana Arango pledged to take a personal role in negotiations with rebel leaders, in an effort to end the civil conflict that raged for more than three decades and claimed at least 35,000 lives.

No single explanation fully addresses the deep roots of Colombia's present-day troubles, but some causes include limited government presence in large



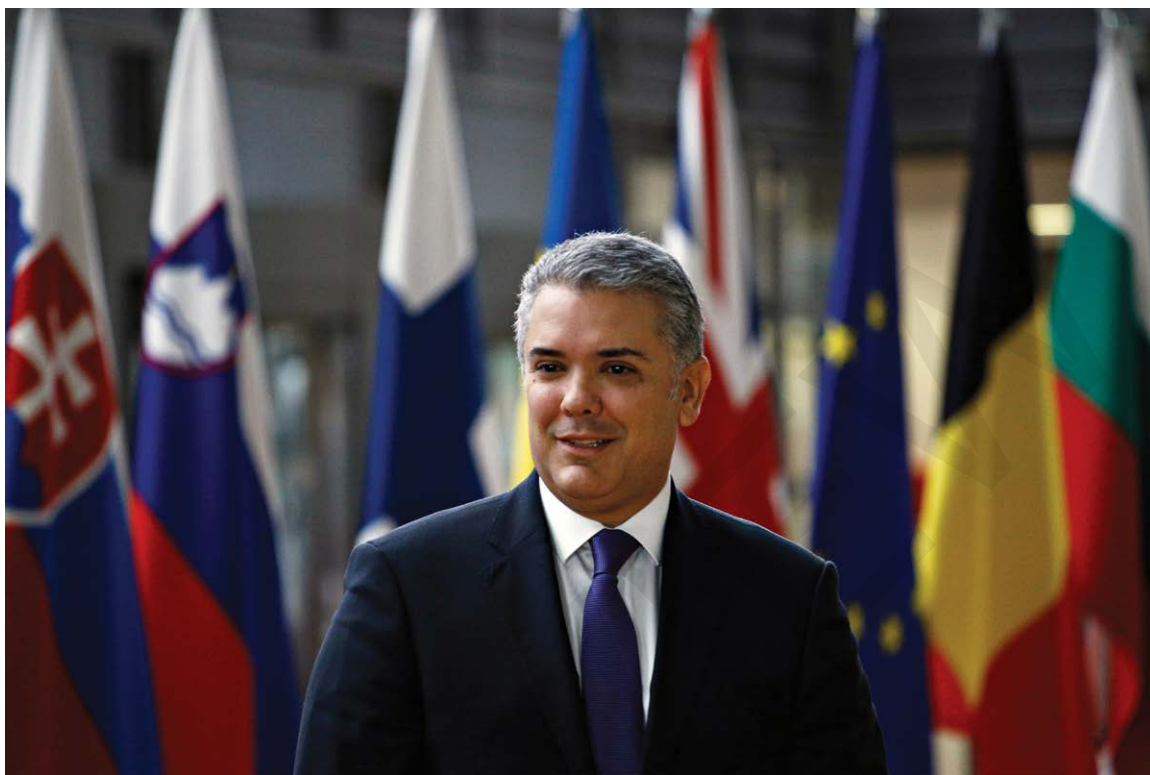
Álvaro Uribe was sworn in as Colombia's president in 2002. He would later have a hand in Iván Duque Márquez's presidency.

areas of the interior, the expansion of illicit drug cultivation, endemic violence, and social inequities. In May 2002, the former Liberal politician Álvaro Uribe, whose father had been killed by left-wing guerrillas, was sworn in as the Colombian president. He immediately began taking action to crush the militant groups, including the employment of citizen informants to help the police and armed

forces track down suspected members of these groups.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC) is the leading left-wing revolutionary guerrilla organization based in Colombia. Its members have fought the government and caused instability in Colombia for many years.

In the fall of 2002, the administration released the much-awaited Colombian national security strategy, entitled the Democratic Security and Defense Policy. In 2004, two years after its implementation began, the security situation in Colombia showed some measure of improvement, and the economy, although still fragile, also showed some positive signs according to observers. However, relatively little was accomplished in structurally solving most of the country's other grave problems. This is possibly in part due to legislative and political conflicts between the administration and the Colombian legislature (including conflicts over the controversial project to eventually re-elect Uribe), and a relative lack of freely allocated funds and credits. Uribe was re-elected in 2006 after a change in



Iván Duque Márquez became Colombia's president in 2018.

the constitution allowed re-election for presidents.

On May 30, 2010, the Colombian people voted for the former Minister of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos, to be the president. He became Colombia's president on August 7, 2010, on a platform of reconciliation with guerrilla groups, and was president until 2018. In 2018, Iván Duque Márquez took office as president. Márquez ran on a platform that included opposing the peace agreement with FARC.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The historic COVID-19 pandemic has strained this already strained country even more. Many groups lack access to clean water to wash their hands. Additionally, at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, many families were unable to make money due to staying at home to attempt to stop the spread of COVID-19. This resulted in families being unable to access food or diapers or pay rent because of the inability to work. However, with the development of the COVID-19 vaccines,

Colombia appeared on the Bloomberg COVID Resilience Ranking—a list updated every month of the countries that were most effectively managing the virus with the least economic and social upheaval. Colombia and Chile were the only two Latin American nations ranking in the top 20 in December 2021, with Colombia ranking at number 14.



The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected daily life around the world, including the use of face masks to stop the spread of the disease. Fruit vendors in Colombia are shown here during the pandemic.

Links to Learn More

livescience.com/ceramic-jars-emeralds-found-temple-el-dorado

This article provides more information on the metallic figurines and emeralds found in 2021 that were tied to the legend of El Dorado.

nationalgeographic.com/history/article/el-dorado

This page provides more information about the legend of El Dorado.



This is the seat of Colombia's National Congress in Bogotá.

Government

Colombia's government is similar to the government in the United States. Since 1991, it has been a republic with powers divided between executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Also similar to the United States, the president can serve up to two consecutive four-year terms. Members of the Senate and House of Representatives are elected to four-year terms, with House members being elected by districts that correspond to the departments and most of the Senate members being elected by the nationwide constituency. Two

Senate members are elected by the indigenous people.

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The legislative branch is known as the National Congress—a bicameral (two-house) congress composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Representatives and senators are elected to serve four-year terms. Each department, which is like a state, is represented by two senators-at-large and an additional senator for every 200,000 people. There are two representatives for each department plus an additional one for every 100,000 people. Currently, there are 102 senators and 161 representatives.

Point of Interest

Bogotá is considered the capital district of Colombia. This is similar to the way the District of Columbia (D.C.) is seen in the United States.

JUDICIARY BRANCH

Until 1991, the basic law of Colombia was the constitution of 1886. This

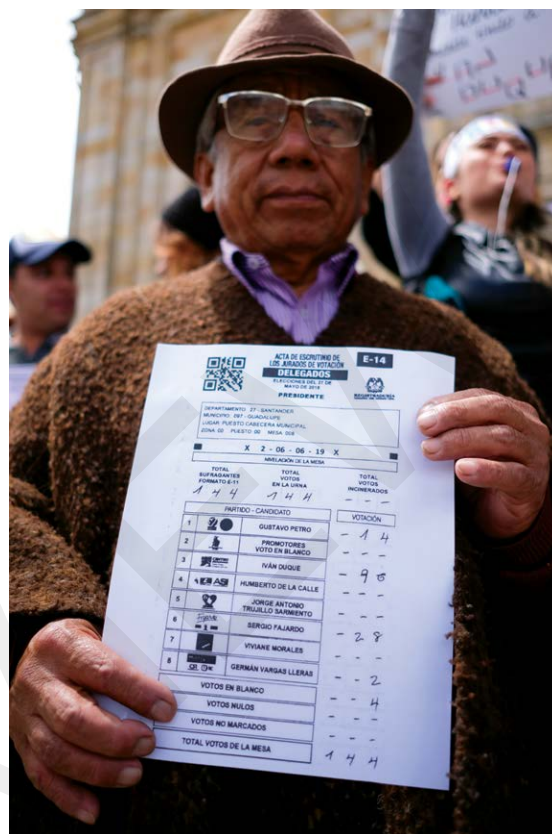
conservative document was supplanted by the more inclusive constitution of 1991. The system of courts includes a Supreme Court of Justice that tries cases involving interpretation of the constitution and impeachment. It also serves as the final court of appeal. Judges of this court are nominated by the president and approved by the congress. They are reappointed every five years.

VOTING PROCESS

Administratively, Colombia is divided into 33 units, which includes 32 departments and the capital district of Bogotá. Governors of each department are popularly elected and are included in the executive branch.

At the local level, mayors of cities are elected by popular voting. Deputies for assemblies of the various department and municipal councils are also chosen by direct voting.

Voting is open to all citizens above the age of 18. In August 1957, a special act was passed that allowed women to take



A 2018 voting ballot is shown here. All citizens 18 years of age and older can vote.

part in national elections. Colombians must register their vote and have a citizenship card. Voting is considered a legal right but not a duty, and there are no literacy or land ownership requirements. In past elections, participation has been as low as 30 percent. Members of the national police, active members of the armed forces, and a small number of people who have lost their political rights by law are not allowed to vote.

Travel Tip

All male citizens between 18 and 30 years of age may be called in to serve for the military.

IVÁN DUQUE MÁRQUEZ

Iván Duque Márquez was inaugurated in 2018 as the president of Colombia. He followed as president after Juan Manuel Santos, but he was an acquaintance of former president Álvaro Uribe, who picked Márquez as the presidential candidate of the political party that he had founded in 2014.

Márquez agreed with Uribe over condemning the peace agreement with the FARC, which was an agreement to end the longstanding war with the Colombian government. In 2017, a revised agreement was implemented, which required the FARC guerrillas to turn over their weapons to the United Nations. In August 2017, the Colombian government declared the ongoing conflict had ended. Márquez and Uribe were disappointed with the agreement, thinking that it had gone too easy on the guerrillas. Later, Márquez's administration was accused of not reintegrating the rebels into society well enough, along with allowing others to reach dangerous levels of power in areas after the departure of the FARC.

Voter registration takes place at the municipal level, which means that there are local offices to handle the process. Although the requirements for voting are not strict, registration is somewhat complicated, and re-registering after moving to another district is very tedious.

Polling places are supervised by a committee that consists of two members

from each political party. Committees report the results to the municipal registrar, and the results are forwarded to the national registrar.

PEACE COLOMBIA

Between 1998 and 1999, the Colombian president at the time, Andrés Pastrana Arango, thought of Plan Colombia. The plan involved the United States and refers to an aid initiative with the goals of ending Colombian armed conflict and an anti-cocaine strategy.

Throughout the years of the initiative, the Colombian government believed it was successful; however,

Travel Tip

All citizens in Colombia are guaranteed civil rights including the right to strike, to assemble, and to petition, and they also have the right to freedom of speech.

ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

In 2021, anti-government protests began in April and lasted for several weeks. These protests were the result of long-standing social and economic inequalities, which were made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The protests also highlighted additional areas of reform that were needed because they erupted into violence. From April to July, there were more than 60 allegations of deaths during the protests; 46 of these were verified.

There were more than 620 interviews with witnesses and victims, which included recorded phone footage of the protests and resulting violence. The United Nations believes police officers were responsible for 28 of these deaths and the National Police's Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) responsible for at least 10. The resulting report highlighted the importance of law enforcement officers following rules and also highlighted the importance of the state's responsibility in protecting human rights without discrimination. Protesters were often criminalized, and the media linked them to acts of terrorism and vandalism.



A 2021 tax reform protest is shown here.

more than 200,000 people died on top of additional unexpected consequences. Even though the plan was to create an anti-cocaine strategy, the amount of land cultivated with coca went from 118,610 acres (48,000 hectares) in 2013 to 170,502 acres (69,000 hectares) in 2014. In 2015, a record 277 tons (252 metric tons) of cocaine was seized, and it's become harder to fight drug trafficking.

Additionally, illegal mining increased and became a major source of income for illegal groups.

In 2016, U.S. president Barack Obama announced a plan to relaunch Plan Colombia as Peace Colombia, with a 40 percent boost in aid up to more than \$450 million. The Peace Colombia initiative focused on reintegrating the FARC into society while expanding

institutions that would strengthen the law in former conflict areas and provide essential services for conflict victims.

INGRID BETANCOURT

In January 2022, Ingrid Betancourt announced she was running for president of Colombia. This was not her first time running for president—in 2002, she ran for the presidency, but her campaign ended when she was kidnapped and held captive in the jungle for six years. She was attempting to travel through an area controlled by rebels when she was kidnapped by FARC. She stated that she campaigned against the corrupt system in 2002 and was campaigning in 2022 to finish what she started.



Ingrid Betancourt announced she was running for president in January 2022.

Links to Learn More

obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/04/fact-sheet-peace-colombia-new-era-partnership-between-united-states-and

Learn more about the Peace Colombia plan.

state.gov/countries-areas/colombia/

On the U.S. State Department's website, you can read about the Colombian government's relations with the United States.

usnews.com/news/best-countries/colombia

Learn more about Colombia's government.



Bananas are another significant crop that Colombia produces. Colombians are shown here after harvesting bananas.

Economy

The early economy of Colombia largely consisted of gold mining. Today, the economy has become more broad and includes agriculture, the manufacture of goods for home as well as export, and the collection of metals and hydrocarbon fuels. Generally, the economy is dominated by private groups. The government does not directly participate with the exception of telecommunications, railways, and petroleum. Rather, the government tries to encourage favorable systems of taxation and economic stability.

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

Private enterprise is stronger in Colombia than in most Latin American countries. In fact, one of the most dynamic capitalist projects in Latin America took place around Medellín at the beginning of the 20th century. There was a surge in the growth of industrial plants,

especially textile industries. The success of this venture convinced everyone that the government could not manage the economy alone and needed the aid of the private sector.

The government involves itself in the economy in unique ways. The Colombian economy is defined as a mixed economy. There are separate functions for the government, for private home-grown businesses, and for foreign multinational corporations. The government's role is considered essential to lead the nation to full development. The government owns transportation systems, roads, and telecommunications systems, and it

Travel Tip

The economy in the colonial period was partially based on robbing metal from the graves of indigenous persons.

produces and administers the country's electricity. As owner of the subsoil, the government is expected to develop energy resources. The government is also directly involved in the economy through its control of tariffs, taxation, and exchange rates.

An interesting aspect of the way the private sector operates in Colombia is that it does not invest in enterprises that are considered essential to national development. However, when these enterprises become profitable, the government sells them to private corporations.

RESOURCES

Colombia is primarily an agricultural nation, largely dependent on coffee. Approximately 40 years ago, about half of the population consisted of farmers. However, their terror of being killed or kidnapped by guerrillas, the army, paramilitary groups, or drug traffickers led to an emptying of the countryside and the shift from Colombia being a net exporter of produce to its being a net importer. As of 2020, 18 percent of the workforce is engaged in agriculture. Approximately 44 percent of the nation's land is used for agriculture. Colombia produces a wide range of crops, from

bananas, which need warm temperatures, to potatoes, which flourish in a cooler climate. However, many people have to farm on inclines that erode easily, and deforestation in the Andean region is intensifying the erosion problem. Many farms in the highlands are quite small, and the owners rely on simple farming methods. Their traditional ways limit them to subsistence farming, which means their work produces goods needed for the family, with no significant surplus for sale. As of 2020, agriculture accounted for 6.8 percent of Colombia's gross domestic product (GDP).

COFFEE Colombia is the world's third-largest producer of coffee. Colombian coffee is a protected designation of origin granted by the European Union (EU) that applies to the coffee produced in Colombia. Colombian coffee has been recognized worldwide as having high quality and a distinctive taste. The main importers of Colombian coffee are the United States, Germany, France, Japan, and Italy. Because coffee beans grow best at between 4,300 and 6,600 feet (1,311 and 2,012 m), the greatest concentration of coffee farms is near Medellín. Coffee is a labor-intensive crop, and coffee farms are typically small.



Colombia is one of the world's largest producers of coffee. A worker is shown here with coffee cherries during a harvest.

Colombia is the second-largest producer of Arabica coffee in the world, after Brazil. With climate change, coffee yields have plummeted as a result of rising temperatures and more intense and unpredictable rains. The average temperature in Colombia's coffee regions has risen nearly 1°F (0.55°C) in 30 years, and in some mountain areas, the temperature increase has doubled. At the new, higher temperature, the plants' buds abort or their fruit ripens too

quickly for optimum quality. There is also coffee rust, a fungus that could not survive the cool mountain weather previously. The Coffee Growers Federation has advised farmers to switch to a newer, hardier strain of Arabica.

BANANAS Bananas are another significant export. They are grown along Colombia's Caribbean coast. Among legal crops, this crop is believed to earn the farmer the best income return per

BANANA FUNGUS

In August 2019, Colombia declared a national state of emergency due to a banana fungus in the country's banana plantations. The fungus killed plants by disrupting their circulatory system and could exist in the soil for decades. Colombia is the fourth-largest exporter of bananas in Latin America, with only coffee and flowers being more valuable exports for the country. Therefore, the existence of this damaging fungus had the potential to be extremely harmful for the country's economy. In 2018, bananas alone earned Colombia \$866.2 million. However, the fungus did not affect the country as badly as it could have—in 2019, banana earnings were \$916.2 million and the goal for 2021 was \$1 billion.

acre. Foreign multinational corporations were initially involved with this crop, but private Colombian organizations have also entered the market.

SUGARCANE Sugarcane, much of which is made into unrefined brown



Sugarcane is often made into unrefined brown sugar called *panela*.

sugar, or *panela*, is planted throughout the warm areas of the nation, especially in the Cauca River valley and on the central Pacific coast.

In contrast to the well-defined growing season found in many other sugarcane regions in the world, Colombia's sugarcane harvest continues almost throughout the year. This is due to the constant hot and humid climate in the country's growing regions. Warm days and steady rainfall all year round provide permanent employment for Colombian cane cutters.

FRESH-CUT FLOWERS

Fresh-cut flowers are another important commodity. This commercial activity is concentrated in the *sabana*, or treeless plain, near Bogotá. It provides



Livestock, especially cattle, are raised throughout Colombia.

employment for about 100,000 people. Colombian flower producers supply carnations, orchids, and other popular flowers for the export market. Colombia is the second-largest exporter of fresh-cut flowers in the world, after the Netherlands.

LIVESTOCK

Livestock is mostly raised commercially in scattered areas throughout the country, although major concentrations are in the Sabana de Bogotá and the eastern plains.

There are numerous cow breeds that produce dairy, beef, or both. Beef is the major meat produced in the country. In the early 1980s, the cattle population was estimated to be more than 26 million, which means that there were almost as

Travel Tip

About 400,000 people in Colombia are involved in the potato industry, which includes potato harvesting and commercialization.

many cows as people. As of 2020, there are 28 million cattle distributed across more than 620,000 farms. Beef is the second most consumed animal protein in Colombia, with chicken being the first.

FISHING INDUSTRY

Colombian fishermen catch mainly tuna, shrimp, and many freshwater species. The nation's annual fish catch, most of which comes from coastal fishing, is not as substantial as that of some other Latin American countries, such as

Chile and Peru. Many observers believe that Colombia has much unrealized fishing potential. The country's fishing industry is active along the coasts and in the Magdalena River valley. Buenaventura and Tumaco are the main fishing ports.

MINERALS

Colombia is well endowed with minerals. The country possesses significant amounts of nickel, gold, silver, platinum, and emeralds.



Colombia's fishing industry is mostly active along the coasts and in the Magdalena River. Fishermen are shown here after a day of fishing near Cartagena.



Colombia produces significant amounts of gold. A gold mining operation in Colombia is shown here.

During the colonial period, Colombia was a major contributor of gold to the Spanish coffers. Today, Colombia accounts for about 70 to 90 percent of the world's emerald production.

Modern Colombia is also a major South American producer of gold and has the world's largest platinum reserves. In addition to those already mentioned, Colombia's wealth of minerals includes lead, mercury, manganese, coal, and salt.

The Guajira Peninsula has a valuable deposit of clean-burning coal. Because the

coal is near the surface, it is easily mined by open-pit or strip-mining techniques. The Colombian government and several industrial firms have spent millions to develop this coal mine, which may store as much as 60 percent of South America's coal reserves.

Point of Interest

Colombia is well known for emeralds, gold, purses, and shoes in the shopping centers.

OIL AND ENERGY

Oil wells in the Magdalena River valley have been supplying most of the nation's crude oil since the 1920s. Additional oil deposits have been discovered in numerous other areas, including the basin of the Catatumbo River, in the central Caribbean and Pacific areas, and in the eastern llanos.

These findings have led geologists to think that there may be more oil deposits in the Andean region. In the mid-



Much of Colombia's crude oil has come from oil wells such as the one shown here.

1970s, Colombia began importing oil to augment its production, but the nation has now regained its self-sufficiency and has even become a modest exporter of oil since 1986. The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on oil production, however. Investment in the oil sector fell by approximately 50 percent by 2020. By 2020, oil production was around 781,300 barrels a day, which was the lowest since 2019. In 2021, the country was averaging 733,561 barrels a day.

To keep up with its energy demands, Colombia makes use of its waterways. The abundance of rivers, coupled with abundant rainfall, has led experts to say that Colombia has some of the greatest hydroelectric potential in the world. Hydroelectric power facilities are located in the Bogotá-Cali-Medellín area, which is referred to as the “industrial triangle.”

As of 2004, Colombia had become a net energy exporter, exporting electricity to Ecuador and developing connections to Peru, Venezuela, and Panama as well.

The Cauca Valley Authority is headquartered in Cali. This corporation's focus is on flood control, improved farming techniques through irrigation, and the development of electrical power. This successful venture tripled Cali's electrical power in its first eight

years. Currently about 75 percent of existing Colombian power systems use hydroelectric power, and there is potential to increase this to 90 percent.

TRAVEL

Topography is a contributing factor to obstacles in transportation. The terrain of the Andes and landslides due to heavy rainfall in the heavily populated highlands make road and rail travel difficult and expensive to develop and maintain. In some areas, mules are sometimes the only means of transporting people and goods across the terrain. In more developed spots, aerial cable cars are the main option. There are some other alternatives, however.

RIVER Travel by river is very important. In fact, before the railroad from Bogotá to Santa Marta was built, the Magdalena River was the major travel route between the Caribbean coast and the interior. Not too long ago, almost 95 percent of all commercial inland water travel took place on the Magdalena. In times of drought, however, this mode of transportation became impossible.

ROAD Just over 50 percent of the roads in Colombia are paved. The

irregular terrain makes the construction of roads a very costly venture. Despite serious terrain obstacles, almost three-quarters of all cross-border dry cargo is now transported by road. There are three important road systems that run north to south between the mountain systems. In addition, the Simón Bolívar Highway, which is 2,300 miles (3,701 km) long, runs from Guayaquil in Ecuador, east through Colombia, to Caracas in Venezuela.

RAIL The National Railway System network, which is 2,363 miles (3,802 km) long, is almost completely owned by the government. Major extensions to the railway in the 1940s and 1950s finally connected the highlands with both coasts. The Atlantic railway was opened in 1961 and runs from Bogotá to Santa Marta. Buenaventura and Bogotá are connected by the Pacific railway. Freight and passenger railway traffic reached its height in the 1960s, when truck and airline services surpassed rail traffic in popularity. The national railroad system, once the country's main mode of transport for freight, has been neglected in favor of road development and now accounts for only about a quarter of freight transport.

AVIATION To surmount the difficulties of cross-country travel due to the complex mountain systems, Colombia turned to air travel and became a trailblazer in the field of domestic civil aviation. In 1919, Colombia founded its own airline, Avianca, which is now the nation's major international airline. This thriving service flies directly to numerous cities in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Colombia has well-developed air routes and an estimated 168 airports. As of 2019, Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport handles approximately 816,812 tons (741,000 metric tons) of cargo and 35 million passengers a year.

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Colombia's imports are mainly raw materials and intermediate goods. Its major exports, as mentioned earlier, are coffee, coal, and fuel oil.

The United States and Colombia have long been major trading partners. Prior to 1950, more than 70 percent of Colombia's exports went to the United States, and more than 60 percent of its import activities involved goods from the United States. Currently, Colombia is the 25th-largest goods trading partner with the United States, with goods

exported totaling more than \$14.7 billion and goods imported totaling more than \$14.2 billion.

New markets have opened in Europe, and Colombia has played a key role in the Andean Common Market. This group's major goal is to reduce the trade restrictions among its member nations. Evidence of its success can be seen in the significant trading relationships between Colombia and its neighbors. As part of its economic strategy to diversify its export markets, Colombia signed a free trade agreement with China in late 2011.

ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE

Colombia is one of the world's top producers of cocaine, with the cultivation of coca (the main ingredient in cocaine) being widespread in the country. Drug cartels, such as the Clan del Golfo cartel and the former Medellín and Cali cartels, have held large amounts of power in Colombia. At one point, the head of the Medellín cartel, Pablo Escobar, was one of the world's most infamous drug traffickers. Escobar was ruthless, often solving problems with *plato o plomo*, which meant "silver or lead" (bribes or bullets). His most notable victims were rival drug traffickers in the Cali cartel,

but his victims also included civilians, police, and government officials. In 1989, Escobar became the top target of the United States in the war on drugs, and there was a massive manhunt underway to find him. It wasn't until 1991 that he surrendered and was jailed. However, he escaped in July 1992 and was in hiding until December 1993, when Colombian forces found his hiding spot and he was fatally shot. After this, the Medellín cartel collapsed.

After the collapse of the Medellín cartel, the Cali cartel took a more prominent role in the cocaine market in Colombia. At the height of its power, it controlled approximately 90 percent of the cocaine market in the entire world and was bringing in between \$5 billion and \$7 billion annually. The cartel eventually

fell with the capture of Cali cartel leaders Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela. In 2006, they pled guilty to federal charges of conspiracy to import cocaine in the United States. However, when one cartel is removed, another steps in to replace it.

The Clan del Golfo cartel is currently Colombia's largest cartel, with a network that extends into 28 countries as of 2021. This cartel smuggles an unknowable amount of cocaine, illegally produced in the country, and smuggles weapons. In October 2021, the head of the cartel, Dairo Antonio Úsuga (also known as Otoniel) was captured. However, experts pointed out that nothing would change even though he was captured because when one leader or cartel is taken down, another simply takes its place.

Links to Learn More

[bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59026214](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59026214)

Learn more about the capture of Otoniel, the head of the Clan del Golfo cartel.

[science.org/content/article/colombia-confirms-dreaded-fungus-has-hit-its-banana-plantations](https://www.science.org/content/article/colombia-confirms-dreaded-fungus-has-hit-its-banana-plantations)

Learn more about the banana fungus and how Colombia was affected by it.



A caiman, which is a small reptile related to alligators, is shown here.

Environment

Colombia has diverse tropical, desert, and temperate climates, which means it is home to many different species of animal life. Additionally, its placement with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans makes it uniquely suited to be home to so many varieties of plants and animals. It is the second most biodiverse country in the world, with more than 56,343 total species of birds, amphibians, butterflies, and frogs—in fact, there are more of these species in Colombia than anywhere else in the world.

ANIMAL LIFE

Colombia's varied ecosystems support a wide range of different animal species. Deserts in the north; grasslands in the east; swamps and wetlands in the northwest; dozens of river habitats throughout the country; and forests ranging from

temperate to tropical, broad-leafed to coniferous, mountain to coastal, and mangroves to coconut palm groves—all form unique microenvironments, which host a diversity of plant and animal life, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth.

Colombia's animal life includes several species of monkeys, wild cats, reptiles (such as the Orinoco and American crocodile), bears, deer, tapirs, and armadillos. There are also hundreds of fresh- and saltwater fish, including the piranha and electric eel.

More than 1,900 species of birds have been recorded in Colombia—more than the total number of bird species found in the United States and Europe combined! Colombia's bird life ranges in size from the huge Andean condor that lives in the high mountains to tiny hummingbirds that inhabit the tropical forests.

180 MILLION TREES

In January 2020, the Colombian government announced an ambitious plan to plant 180 million trees throughout Colombia by 2022. This figure was based on the restoration of more than 741,316 acres (30,000 ha) of land. However, many questioned where the trees would come from and if there was even enough plant material to come up with all of the trees. There are between 2,600 and 3,000 species of trees in Colombia. However, there are only 15 to 20 native species of trees in commercial nurseries, which means that most of



Deforestation is a major problem in Colombia. There is a push for more trees to be planted to restore the forests in the country.

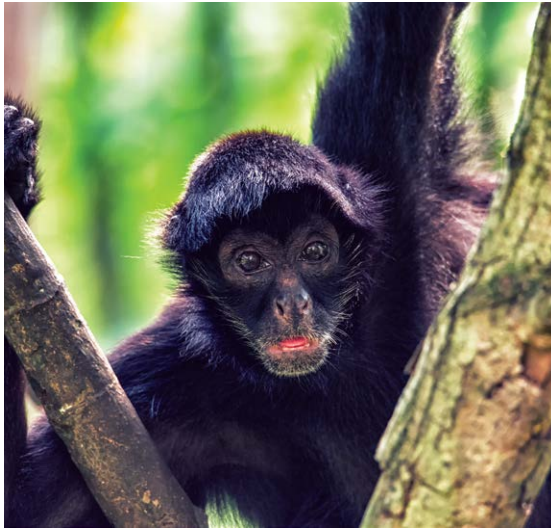
the trees planted would be exotic trees and would not contribute to the restoration and recovery of Colombia's unique ecosystem. Additionally, there were questions regarding if nurseries would have the 180 million tree seedlings needed and who would supervise the project, how many trees would be planted, and where, as well as monitoring the trees that died. However, shortly after this project was announced, it was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As of January 2022, this project is still on hold, with the goal of starting it again once the pandemic is under control.

ENDANGERED MAMMALS

Colombia has set aside approximately 14 percent of its territory for national parks, sanctuaries, and reserves. Examples are Los Flamencos, where pink flamingos stride in coastal lagoons, and Los

Estoraques, with its rock formations. However, much more needs to be done to protect indigenous flora and fauna.

Endangered species in Colombia include the black-headed spider monkey, brown spider monkey, Gorgas's rice rat, Handley's slender mouse opossum,



Black-headed spider monkeys are endangered in Colombia.

cotton-top tamarin, pacarana, Ecuadorian sac-winged bat, Colombian weasel, giant otter, Baird's tapir, mountain tapir, and Guajira mouse opossum. Few conservation measures have been established to save these mammals. Additionally, deforestation, hunting, and the clearing of land have not been regulated, resulting in the destruction of these mammals' habitats and the illegal hunting of some of them, such as the black-headed spider monkey, for meat.

COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL ANIMAL

The Andean condor is Colombia's national animal and the world's largest bird of prey; a fully grown adult weighs

up to 33 pounds (15 kg) and has a wingspan of about 4 feet (1.2 m). It can fly 100 miles (160 km) a day without flapping its wings once.

Andean indigenous cultures revered this magnificent bird; in some cultures, killing a condor was a mark of manhood. The condor's habitat once included all of the Andes and the western coastline of South America. Now, it is found only in parts of Peru, north and eastern Colombia, northern Venezuela, southern Patagonia (in the south of Colombia), Bolivia, and northern Ecuador. The bird has disappeared from much of its former



The Andean condor is Colombia's national animal.

AMPHIBIAN CONSERVATION

Colombia is one of the countries with the largest number of amphibians in the world (including frogs, toads, and salamanders). There are approximately 802 species of amphibians in Colombia, making it second to Brazil as the most diverse country for amphibians. However, amphibians are the zoological group with the highest rate of endangerment, and approximately 46 percent, or 368, of these amphibian species in Colombia are threatened with extinction. Some causes related to the decline of amphibians are habitat destruction, drought, pollution, and illegal trade. In 1998, the ProAves conservation foundation was founded to save a yellow-eared parrot from extinction. Since the founding, two amphibian reserves have been created in Colombia and two frog species have been saved.

range and is critically endangered where it is still found.

Andean condors are able to reproduce only when they reach 7 to 11 years of age. They then mate once every two to three years and build their nests at altitudes above 5,000 feet (16,000 m). In captivity, safe from human hunters, Andean condors can live as long as 70 years. They feed mainly on dead flesh, but sometimes they attack newborn animals and bird colonies as well. Because they have no voice box, condors cannot make normal bird calls, only wheezes and grunts.

Living in fragile high-altitude environments, the Andean condor leads a vulnerable existence. For the condor population to remain stable, each nesting

pair must live long enough for their own offspring to start nesting. This means a lifespan of 25 to 30 years, which is becoming increasingly difficult for the birds to achieve, as people encroach upon their hunting and foraging grounds.

THE COLOMBIAN GREBE AND GOLDEN POISON FROG

THE COLOMBIAN GREBE The Colombian grebe was an aquatic bird found in the Bogotá wetlands in the eastern Andes of Colombia. The species was still abundant on Lake Tota in 1945.

The decline of the Colombian grebe is attributed to wetland drainage, siltation, pesticide pollution, disruption by reed

harvesting, hunting, competition, and predation of chicks by rainbow trout. The primary reason was loss of habitat: Drainage of wetlands and siltation resulted in higher concentrations of pollutants in waterways that destroyed its food source.

By 1968, the species had declined to approximately 300 birds. Only two records of this bird were made in the 1970s; one was seen in 1972, and the last confirmed record was from 1977 when three birds were seen. Intensive studies in 1981 and 1982 failed to find the species, and it is now considered extinct.

THE GOLDEN POISON FROG

The golden poison frog or the golden dart frog is endemic to the Pacific coast of Colombia. In the wild, the frog is a social animal, living in groups of up to six individuals. Wild specimens of this frog are lethally toxic. This poison dart frog is confirmed to have killed humans

Travel Tip

The golden poison frog's poison is found in its skin, which makes it toxic to touch. The poison can kill a person in less than 10 minutes.



The golden poison frog is extremely toxic.

who touched the wild frog directly. Like most poison dart frogs, the golden poison frog uses poison only as a self-defense mechanism and not for killing prey.

The average dose of poison carried will vary between locations and the frogs' local diet, but the average wild golden poison frog is generally estimated to contain about 0.00003 ounce (1 milligram) of poison, enough to kill about 10,000 mice. This dose is enough to kill between 10 and 20 humans. This extraordinarily lethal poison is very rare.

The golden poison frog is a very important frog to the local indigenous cultures, such as the Choco Emberá people in Colombia's rain forest. The frog

is the main source of the poison in the darts used by these people to hunt for food. The Emberá people carefully expose the frog to the heat of a fire, and the frog exudes small amounts of poisonous fluid. The tips of arrows and darts are soaked in the fluid and keep their lethal effect for more than two years.

CATTLEYA TRIANAE

The national flower of Colombia is the orchid *Cattleya trianae*, which was named after the Colombian naturalist José Jerónimo Triana. The orchid was selected by the botanist Emilio Robledo, as a representative of the Colombian Academy of History, to determine the most representative flowering plant of Colombia. He described it as one of the most beautiful flowers in the world and selected *Cattleya trianae* as



The *Cattleya trianae* orchid is the national flower of Colombia.

a national symbol. The species grows at 4,921 to 6,562 feet (1,500 to 2,000 m) above sea level, in cloud forests. It is presently an endangered species due to habitat destruction.

AIR ISSUES

Colombia's climate varies from tropical to temperate, resulting in a diverse environmental system. However, out of Colombia's 50.8 million people, 81 percent live in the cities. This concentration of people in cities results in urban environmental problems, the most significant of which is air pollution.

In rural areas, coffee production, mining activities, and clearing of land for cattle grazing all contribute to deforestation and soil erosion. The exploitation of forests for timber, as well as the prevalence of cocaine trafficking, further intensifies these issues.

Bogotá has more than 7 million inhabitants and is the fourth-biggest city in South America. It has more than 1.5 million vehicles and a large number of small industries. As a result, Bogotá experiences air pollution problems. Ninety percent of the city's air pollution problems stem from automobiles. Traffic is so congested that it can take more than an hour to travel 5 miles (8 km).



Bogotá is the fourth-largest city in South America. Due to the number of cars in the city, it experiences air pollution problems.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Colombian government has initiated several programs to protect the environment. By 1959, the Amazon forests, the Andean area, and the Pacific coast were declared protected areas. In 1973, the government created the National Resources and Environment Code. The main environmental agency is the Institute for Development of Renewable Natural Resources and the Environment (INDERENA), established in 1968 and dissolved in 1993. Among other activities, it undertook extensive

projects in the training of personnel in conservation, fishing, and forestry. The Colombian Sanitary Code, in force since January 1982, establishes pollution control standards. In the 2020 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), conducted by Yale University, Colombia was ranked 50 among 180 countries in the world for environmental protection.

Point of Interest

The very first amphibian reserve in the world was the first reserve created in Colombia.

WASTE LANDSLIDES

In Bogotá, a staggering 6,393 tons (5,800 metric tons) of household waste is sent to the landfill site in the neighborhood of Doña Juana in the southeast of the city nearly every day. For 31 years, the dump has been the major site for the disposal of solid waste. In 2020, a large landslide of waste occurred in the dump, depositing 2,118,880 cubic feet (60,000 cubic m) of waste material. Waste landslides happen frequently in landfills because of unsafe disposal practices. There are multiple hazards to people in the area—first, debris flow may damage buildings and injure people. Additionally, the gases released from the landslide may be toxic to people.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLAN

In 2019, Aqualia led a consortium for the management of the El Salitre Wastewater Treatment Plant in Bogotá. The goal of this project is to improve the sanitation system of the city. After completion, it will serve 3 million people with an increased treatment capacity. In addition to increased treatment capacity, the project will add additional treatment measures and allow for the disinfection of treated water.

AVAILABILITY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

In 2022, Colombia was still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic along with the rest of the world. Colombia also

has unique circumstances added to its situation. More than 4 million people live in poverty, and more than 1.2 million people lack clean water. Additionally, more than 3.2 million people don't have a toilet, and 150 children under 5 years of age die each year from diarrhea. Indigenous populations in Colombia are especially vulnerable because they already face threats to their health and well-being because of climate change and frequent droughts. Organizations such as WaterAid are evaluating technologies and other approaches to teach local individuals to install windmills, as well as hand and solar-driven pumps. This organization is also setting up communities to keep the solutions working that they implement.

LOS KATÍOS NATIONAL PARK

Los Katíos National Park has been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO's goal is to encourage the preservation and protection of cultural and national heritage around the world that is determined to be of value to humanity. Los Katíos occupies 280 square miles (720 square km) of land in northwestern Colombia, in northern Chocó, and between the Atrato River and the border with Panama. The reserve contains several different ecosystems. Around 50 percent of Los Katíos consists of lowland swamp forests; tropical rain forest covers the other half of the park, ranging from lowlands to mountainous terrain. The area also includes the floodplain of the Atrato River and the foothills of the Darién Mountains in Panama. Los Katíos merges with the Darién National Park—2,305 square miles (5,970 sq km) of land in Panama—to form a massive trans-frontier protected zone.

Los Katíos was set aside by the government in 1973 and recognized as a World Heritage Site in 1994. A total

of 669 plant species have been found in the reserve, 20 to 25 percent of which are endemic. There are 450 species of birds, representing about 30 percent of all bird species in Colombia. There are also around 550 species of other animals in Los Katíos, including the manatee, American crocodile, bush dog, giant anteater, and Central American tapir. Because Los Katíos merges with the Darién National Park in Panama, it provides a gateway between Central and South America and a habitat for animals from both sides of the border.

Los Katíos also protects striking scenery, including the Tendal and Tilupo waterfalls, which measure 82 feet (25 m) and 328 feet (100 m) in height, respectively, and the Ciénagas de Tumaradó swamp, home to the manatee.

One of the problems with environmental conservation in this debt- and conflict-ridden country is that it often directly conflicts with the need to produce for the world market. Ecotourism is a major factor influencing conservation efforts. Some parks are almost completely undisturbed. Those near cities and along the coasts, however, receive many visitors and need greater care. The country also faces intense pressure from world



A waterfall in Santa Rosa de Cabal is shown here. Colombians have worked to protect areas of natural beauty in their country.

organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and powerful allies such as the United States to open its territory to a variety of industries. Most of these industries cause environmental degradation by polluting or destroying natural habitats.

In 2009, the park was listed as being in danger of removal from the World Heritage Site list because of receiving extensive damage from illegal activities. In 2015, after improved conservation

efforts, the park was removed from the list of sites in danger.

NATIONAL PARKS

Colombia's protected areas are grouped into the National System of Protected Areas. As of 2018, there were 59 natural national parks, which cover about 65,462 square miles (169,545 sq km).

The Chiribiquete National Natural Park is the largest national park in Colombia and occupies 10.6 million acres

(4.3 million ha) of the Amazon region of Colombia. The center of the protected area is the Chiribiquete Mountains, which form the western edge of the Guiana Shield. In July 2018, the park was expanded to include and protect a tropical rain forest. Around this same time, the park was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

La Serranía de las Minas, a mountainous region near the Puracé

National Park in the Department of Huila, is being proposed as a flora and fauna sanctuary. La Serranía de las Minas is located within the Cordillera Central mountain range of the Andes, within the municipalities of Saladoblanco, Oporapa, Tarqui, La Plata, El Pital, and La Argentina. It covers an area of approximately 247,105 acres (100,000 ha). The ecosystem extends from Saladoblanco toward the northeast, ending at the municipality of El Agrado.

Links to Learn More

amphibians.org/news/amphibian-conservation-in-colombia-by-proaves-before-and-after-peace/

Learn more about amphibian conservation in Colombia.

proaves.org/en/

Here you can find information about the ProAves Foundation and its amphibian reserves.

worldwildlife.org/magazine/issues/winter-2017/articles/a-look-at-the-natural-world-of-colombia

Explore this map to learn more about the plants and animals found in Colombia.



Colombia is home to a diverse population of people. Indigenous women are shown here in a Colombian village on market day.

Colombians

Colombia has a diverse population consisting of around 85 different ethnic groups. Most people in Colombia identify with indigenous, European, or mixed European and indigenous (mestizo) ancestry. As of 2022, the population is 50.88 million. Of this figure, approximately 53.5 percent are mestizo. The people who identify as this ethnic group are largely spread throughout the country and mostly speak Spanish. Approximately 10.5 percent of the population is of African descent. During the colonial era, the Spanish brought enslaved Africans to Colombia to work in the mines. There are a number of subgroups of this ethnic group, including the Palenquero, who are people of African ancestry and speak the Palenquero language, and the Afro-Colombian Raizal, who speak the

San-Andres-Providencia Creole language. These groups largely live in the coastal regions of Colombia.

Approximately 3.4 percent of Colombians identify as Native South Americans. There are approximately 102 of these indigenous groups in Colombia. Approximately 1.9 percent of Colombia's population consists of other ethnic groups, such as the Romani people and immigrants from Germany, Venezuela, Palestine, Syria, Spain, Uruguay, Lebanon, Japan, and Italy.

Point of Interest

More than one-third of Colombia's population live in six metropolitan areas, the largest of which is Bogotá.



Colombians perform traditional dances during a parade.

INDIGENOUS GROUPS

A variety of indigenous cultures flourished in Colombia before the 16th century and the arrival of the Europeans. The Quimbaya people inhabited the western slopes of the Cordillera Central. Skilled craftsmen of this group made elaborate necklaces, rings, breastplates, and nose ornaments. They made these items by pouring molten gold into wax molds. They got their inspiration from nature and shaped their gilded works of art in the form of eagles and owls. Quimbaya craftsmen also made many ornaments from clay.

The Chibchas made up almost one-third of the pre-Columbian population. They called themselves Muisca, but the Spaniards referred to them as Chibcha, which meant “people” in the Muisca language. They lived mainly in the Cundinamarca Basin, which is where Bogotá is today.

The Chibchas developed an advanced and complex civilization. They were deeply religious people who lived in villages and organized themselves along class lines. Rank and status were inherited through one’s mother. To show one’s position in society, both men and

GLOBAL CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT: KAROL G

Colombian singer Karol G (*right*) is known for her mix of pop music, reggaeton, and dance-oriented R&B; however, she is also known for her philanthropic efforts to make the world a better place. In 2018, she was honored at the 31st Annual Hispanic Heritage Awards with an Inspira Award for representing the voice of young Latinx individuals and the messages of empowerment and inclusiveness that are in her music. In 2019, a portion of the profits of sales of her album *Ocean* went toward cleaning the ocean because she believes it's everyone's job to make a difference as well as leave the world a better place. Around this same time, she created the video for her song "Pineapple," in which she featured people of all shapes and sizes in order to get the message out that everyone needs to respect themselves and one another. Following this, in April 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped 600 families in Colombia by paying their rent and donating food, diapers, and basic household necessities to these families who were not able to work because of the pandemic. Also in 2020, she partnered with the Latin GRAMMY in the Schools™ program, which donated musical instruments worth \$20,000 to a charter school in Miami, Florida.



women often painted their bodies with various designs.

The Chibchas had an efficient system of communal land laws. None of their land was privately owned, and they divided themselves into groups that occupied distinct provinces. Each

territory was ruled by a local chief, who reported to a more powerful *cacique*, or chieftain. Caciques then reported to one of the two supreme leaders.

The Chibchas were very skilled in farming, mining, and metal craft. They grew mainly corn, beans, and potatoes,

and mined salt, which they traded for other minerals. Although the Chibchas considered salt most valuable, they had an immense fortune in emeralds and gold. Many personal valuables were buried with the dead, but others have survived to the present and can be seen in Bogotá's Museo del Oro.

An indigenous group still found practicing a traditional lifestyle in Colombia is the Yagua of the Amazonian jungle. There are approximately 6,000 Yagua people making their living as hunters and fishermen. They live in huts on stilts that protect them from floods brought by torrential rains.

In groups such as the Chimilas and the Sanha of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain region, men and boys live in a temple, where they spin cotton and weave cloth, whereas women and girls live in houses with thatched roofs.

ETHNIC GROUPS

CAUCASIANS Because of the social ranking that was established during colonial times, fair skin became associated with being Spanish and, therefore, helped give those who had it high status.

Today, Caucasians continue to hold the highest positions in government and business in Colombian society. Having always been a minority in Colombia, Caucasians follow European lifestyles and behavior and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Their artificial sense of superiority influenced all of society.

Caucasian Colombians still emphasize the importance of intellectual pursuits, and they encourage creative activities and professions that are possible for a class that has the time and financial security to enjoy these pursuits.

Careers in business and industry are considered very acceptable for those who are not from the wealthiest and most prestigious families. However, the importance of ethnic purity varies from region to region and may not matter as much as an old and respected Spanish surname.

MESTIZOS Colombians often refer to themselves as a mestizo or mixed nation. Approximately 53 percent of the population is of mixed origin, and these people are found in all social classes, occupations, and regions. One of the most unifying factors within this group is the general stereotypical belief that the

status of mestizo is better than indigenous Colombian or Afro-Colombian. Another interesting sociological factor is that mestizos are said to identify most with the socially dominant Caucasian group.

AFRICAN COLOMBIANS The African Colombian population density reflects the distribution patterns of the colonial period. Most live in areas such as Choco, Magdalena, Bolivar, and Sucre. According to the United Nations, the income of African Colombians is 20 percent lower than the income of those who are not descended from Africans. Additionally, approximately 80 percent of the African Colombian population lives below the poverty line. The illiteracy rate for the non-African Colombian population is approximately 7 percent, while the illiteracy rate for the African Colombian population is 11 percent. The unemployment rate is about 5 percent higher than the non-African Colombian population as well.

Travel Tip

Colombia has the largest population in Spanish-speaking South America.

These figures point to ongoing social discrimination of those who are descended from Africans.

FASHION

Colombian city dwellers dress in the same style as people in the cities of the United States. Colombian youths are eager to follow fashion trends. They wear traditional clothing as frequently as they wear designer jeans and shirts. Climate also influences attire. In warm areas on



An example of a ruana is shown here.

STRATA SYSTEM

Colombia has a social stratification system that started in Bogotá and then spread to nearly every urban area in the country. Unique to Colombia, this strata system classifies neighborhoods with a number between one and six, with one being the poorest and six being the richest. The idea behind this system is that higher strata residents in levels five and six pay more for services such as garbage collection, telephone bills, and water, and help subsidize, or financially support, those in the lower levels of one, two, or three.

Those who live in the middle of the strata system are uniquely poised to notice the differences between those in lower and higher strata levels. They point out that others would not notice much of a difference between levels five and six, but between those in level one and level six, the vocabulary, dress, and culture are noticeably different.

While this system was meant to be progressive, it is actually fueling segregation and prejudice. People in stratum one or two struggle to find well-paying jobs, and when an individual has a job interview, they are always asked where they live because that would show which stratum the person is in.

In 2017, there was a new proposal that suggested replacing strata and using updated technology to assess individuals rather than properties, but as of 2022, the strata system has not changed.

the Pacific coast, men seldom wear coats.

Colombians in the countryside sew most of their own clothing. The basic rural garments include the poncho, ruana, and *bayetón*. Each of these garments is a kind of cloak with a hole in the center for the wearer's head to pass through. The garments hang from front to back, leaving the arms free. Bayetóns are nearly ankle length; ruanas, which are the most commonly

worn of the three cloaks, are shawls that hang to a little below the waist, and ponchos fall between the other two lengths.

Learn the Language

Sombrero vueltiao is a black and white brimmed hat made from dried cane leaves. In 2004, this hat was declared a cultural symbol of Colombia.

Among the poor, ruanas are also used as blankets. Woolen ruanas are remarkably waterproof because of the natural oils left in the material. The *pañolón* is a traditional women's garment that resembles the ruana. The pañolón shawl is customarily made from silk or cotton.

Footwear is an indicator of status. Typical shoes are fiber slippers and sandals. Many rural people prefer to work barefoot. In some groups, it is also regarded as ostentatious to wear shoes. However, with rapid urbanization, these customs are fast becoming extinct.



The *sombrero vueltiao* is a cultural symbol of Colombia.

Links to Learn More

colombia.co/en/colombia-culture/folklore/get-know-colombias-beautiful-varied-traditional-clothing/

At this webpage, you can read about the types of clothing worn in Colombia.

colombia.co/en/colombia-country/what-are-colombian-people-like/

Learn more about the Colombian people and what they are like.

theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/09/bogota-colombia-social-stratification-system

This article talks about the strata system in Colombia.

worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-colombia.html

You can find out more about the various ethnic groups in Colombia at this site.



Coffee plantations are the main source of income in some regions of the country. Workers pick coffee beans on plantations such as this one in Colombia.

Lifestyle

The lifestyle in Colombia varies greatly depending on the region. In some areas, inhabitants rely on fishing and trapping to make a living. In other areas, *vaqueros*, or cowboys, drive herds all day in the areas where much of the grain and meat in the country is produced. The lifestyle of a cowboy is especially tough because of the hard six-month winters and muggy summers.

In other areas, coffee plantations are the main source of income. Workers start early in the day picking coffee beans and are paid according to the amount of beans they pick. Generally, an experienced coffee picker handles about 110 pounds (50 kg) of beans each day.

In the cities, people generally work in service jobs. There are accountants, doctors, lawyers, office staff, janitors, and many other occupations, as in cities throughout the world.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

The family is an important social unit in Colombia. When Colombians refer to family, they mean a wide circle of kinship that consists of several generations—what a North American would probably think of as the extended family.

The function and structure of the family does vary, though, depending on regional and socioeconomic factors. Typically, children live with their family until they marry and often even afterward. Young adults from upper-middle-class and upper-class families often get their own apartments before marriage, but it

Travel Tip

Colombia sits at spot number three of happiest countries in the Happy Planet Index.



Family is extremely important in Colombia.

is still quite common for newly married couples to live with their large families until they have saved enough money to start their own home.

Family ties are somewhat weaker in urban centers than in rural areas, but households are generally large regardless of locality. Grandparents and other aging relatives are customarily part of the household, in addition to the core family unit of mother, father, and children. Cousins and their relatives can also join the family circle for extended periods

of time when necessary. The setup is generally flexible.

Sunday is a family day. Colombians are likely to visit their families on this day. It is the basis of much social and business interaction. On Sundays, families often have breakfast, lunch, and dinner together and also take the whole day to catch up with each other, watch a movie, go to a restaurant, or play games.

The family also plays a significant role in the Colombian business world. There are many family-run businesses in which

few, if any, positions of importance are given to outsiders. Employers feel safe in hiring family members, believing that the relatives' true strengths and weaknesses are well known among the family. In short, there are no surprises from a new employee. Furthermore, a sense of family loyalty motivates employees to keep their bosses' best interests at heart.

Among the lower socioeconomic groups, household membership and the structure of the family can be considerably different from those of middle- and upper-class families. The reason for this is that formal marriage may not be the foundation of the family relationship. Sometimes the father is not a permanent resident in the home, and the mother becomes the chief authority in the family. This trend is most prevalent in Chocó, where, in the 1960s, about one-third of households were headed by women.

Extended family ties are often weakened in the lower-class family by the ever-increasing need to migrate to urban centers to find employment. However, in keeping with Hispanic uniformity in family life, rural migrants will often move to areas where other relatives have previously relocated, and the pattern of extended-family living is resumed.

Family background and name are

most important to those who move up the social ladder. Colombia's most respected families are descended from 16th-century Spanish settlers.

The families with this distinction proudly display crests above the doors of their homes. A sense of pride is kept alive by a tradition of telling stories about the lives and deeds of their ancestors.

GODPARENTS

Kinship ties are stretched even further by baptismal godparenthood. In this relationship, social and emotional bonds are created when a godparent accepts some responsibility for a child's welfare, and in turn, earns great respect from the child. Furthermore, a spiritual bond is created between the child's parents and godparents.

Although children refer to their godfather and godmother as *padrino* and *madrina*, respectively, their parents generally address the godparents as *compadre* and *comadre*, signifying both friendship and companionship, and acknowledging the importance of the parent-godparent bond.

Colombians may have several sets of godparents, chosen at various important milestones in their lives. However, the baptismal godparents are by far the

Learn the Language

Compadrazgo is a spiritual bond linked to Catholic notions of baptismal godparenthood.

most important. They often supervise the religious education of the child, and it is not unusual for an orphaned child to be adopted by their baptismal godparents.

The godparent relationship is not limited to Colombians of Hispanic descent. Chibcha godparents are involved in rituals such as earlobe piercing, the

first clipping of fingernails, and the first cutting of hair. The godfathers who cut the child's hair are said to be the most honored.

MARRIAGE

Young people dating without chaperones has recently become more common in Colombia, especially among the educated families in the cities. Young Colombians develop exclusive relationships rather quickly.

Most Colombians go through formal marriage ceremonies. However, where indigenous and African



Most Colombians go through traditional wedding ceremonies, such as this one in Cartagena.

Colombian influence is strong, people generally practice trial marriage. Many communities openly acknowledge this as a legitimate pre-matrimonial stage. Civil marriage has been legal in Colombia since 1973. Before that, only Catholic marriages were valid. Nonetheless, many Colombians feel that there is less commitment to civil marriages and thus look down on them.

Religious marriage also connotes social status, and many Colombians see marriage as a path to social mobility. Parents are always hopeful that their young daughters will marry a man of great status and wealth. However, upper-class Colombians are reluctant to wed someone of a lower social status. Matchmaking is not uncommon among the aristocracy, with a second or third cousin often being the chosen match.

In 2016, Colombia became the fourth Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriages. The Constitutional Court of Colombia voted 6–3, stating that banning same-sex marriage was unconstitutional.

ROLES IN THE FAMILY

Many Colombians live with their children, parents, grandparents, and other relatives under one roof, and each

family member has a role to play in the extended household.

Traditionally, the father was considered the head of the family, and the mother had full responsibility for preparing meals, doing household chores, and taking care of the children. However, Colombian society is changing, and new family arrangements are arising. For example, more Colombian women—especially in the middle classes—are finding jobs outside the home and contributing to the family income, whereas Colombian men are learning to truly bond with their children.

Until recently, it was not acceptable for women of the upper class to work outside the home. The only acceptable activity was charitable volunteer work. Even social activities were limited to school and the home, and women were chaperoned at parties. Now, many upper-class women are well educated and enjoy careers in a variety of fields, including high political office. More legal rights have been granted to women, and their participation and involvement in public affairs, government, and higher education is increasing.

Limitations have always been greater for middle- and lower-class women. It has generally been an economic requirement for these wives to work out

in the fields alongside their husbands or to be employed outside the home and contribute their paychecks to the family budget. Unfortunately, wages remain low for these women.

UNLEARNING MACHISMO

The word “macho” is used a lot in the United States, but its meaning is rarely clear. Machismo, or being macho, is a Hispanic concept that for years has emphasized masculine attributes. It provided a guideline for men to follow and became ingrained into nearly every facet of Colombian society. A survey even found that 70 percent of Colombians identified themselves as being “moderately machista.” However, while the concept of machismo seemed harmless for years, starting in 2020, this concept started to be questioned.

An advocate for gender-based violence prevention in Colombia pointed out that machismo attitudes have consequences for women that can range from feeling pressured to laugh at a joke that is anti-woman to more extreme consequences such as physical violence and murder.

Men are expected to be tough, cold, and strong, so they don’t see that they

are actually being aggressive toward women. Additionally, some women may not realize the aggression at first and second-guess themselves, which can lead to poor mental health, work performance, and self-esteem.

Organizations in Latin America, therefore, are trying to help men “unlearn” machismo traits by re-educating them and helping them understand how their attitudes promote violence toward women as well as take responsibility for their actions.

WORK DAYS

There are 18 national holidays in Colombia each year, 12 of which are religious. The six secular public holidays are New Year’s Day (January 1), Labor Day (May 1), Independence Day (July 20), Battle of Boyacá Day (August 7), Columbus Day (October 12), and Independence of Cartagena Day (November 11). The only day of rest is Sunday. Most Colombians work a six-day week.

In the industrial centers, the workday begins between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. and ends between 6:30 and 7:00 p.m. On farms, laborers may start work at 6:00 or 7:00 a.m.

MARKET DAYS

Although rural life involves a lot of hard work, country dwellers do enjoy some recreation. They especially look forward to market days.

One day of the week is designated as market day in a village, and people from miles around come to visit and enjoy the festivities. All modes of transportation are employed, not only to bring produce, animals, and handicrafts to the market but also to transport visitors and customers.

Open-air buses packed with passengers are seen on the road next to burros (donkeys) and push carts.

The marketplace is generally located in the main square of the village. Goods and wares are spread out on wooden stands or stacked on the ground. Chickens strut past as people bargain with their friends and neighbors.

Market days are a great opportunity for people in the countryside to meet one another, catch up, and trade in a variety of goods.



The Santa Elena market supplies 80 percent of the agricultural products in Cali.

Government offices are open from 8:00 a.m. to noon and again from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. Most businesses operate from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Stores are generally open Monday through Saturday, from

9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and then from 2:00 to 7:00 p.m.. Banks are open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Friday. ATMs may be accessed at any time of the day.

GLOBAL CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT: SHAKIRA

Colombian singer Shakira started out her singing career when she was just 13, with her first album released in 1991. With her fifth album, *Laundry Service*, in 2001, she entered the English-language market and became one of the world's best-selling music artists. However, she is also dedicated to humanitarian and advocacy work to make the world a better place for others. Her work is focused on universal education as well as early childhood development for children who are not yet starting school. She has foundations dedicated to early childhood development around the world and specifically in Colombia. In 2011, Barack Obama, who was the U.S. president at the time, appointed her to the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, which was dedicated to advising the president on the educational success of Hispanic students. In the late 1990s, when Shakira was just 18 years old, she started the Pies Descalzos Foundation, which works to improve the health, nutrition, and education of children. The foundation consists of support programs for families to give children a better quality of life and protect their right to receive an education. Shakira is also a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, and in her position, she has advocated for establishing political initiatives that lower the number of children without access to education.



Shakira started the Pies Descalzos Foundation when she was just 18 years old.

MEETINGS AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS

In Colombia, business appointments are made at least a week in advance and are often reconfirmed beforehand, but

people may arrive 15 to 20 minutes late for a business meeting.

Colombia has a tradition of hospitality. People often invite friends to their homes. Relatives are the most frequent visitors in

Colombian homes. At social gatherings, the host family dresses formally and entertains the guests in the living room.

Supper at a party typically begins around 8:00 p.m., and drinks and snacks are served before a multicourse dinner begins.

SCHOOLS

Colombia spends very little of its national GDP on education. Nonetheless, free

education is available to all, and the adult literacy rate is about 95.6 percent.

There is still the perception among Colombians that private education is superior to public education. Wealthier Colombians prefer to send their children to private schools, and it is also common for middle-class children to attend private schools. Schools in Colombia are called either *escuelas* or *colegios*.



Free education is available to all students in Colombia, like at this school for indigenous students.

EDUCATION BY RADIO

In the 1950s, education in rural areas was difficult. There was a scarcity of teachers, and many students dropped out of school early, partly to work on their family farms. Colombia fought illiteracy during this time with education via radio, and the radio soon became a staple item in homes throughout the country.

In 2020, remote learning became a focus once again because of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which people were asked to stay in their homes to keep each other safe. Remote learning also helped students stay connected with one another, but many challenges remained because internet access was not reliable, and laptops, tablets, and smartphones were hard to find.

In one rural community in Colombia where connectivity was challenging, they went back to the early days of remote learning by teaching lessons via radio. Teachers would teach their lessons over radio broadcast to make sure that students didn't miss out on their lessons because of not being connected to the internet.

Despite an increase in government spending on education, some problems remain in the public education system. In the countryside, for example, there are sometimes not enough seats available in the schools.

School is compulsory for all Colombian children between the ages of 5 and 16 years. However, education is not always a priority among the poorest families. For them, the money that the children can earn from work is needed to support the household.

PRESCHOOL Most children over one year old are provided with daycare

and preschool. There are three levels of preschool. The first is for babies less than one year old, the second level is for children one to three or four years old, and the last level is for children four or five years old. The services provided for children in these groups are subsidized by the state, and children are taught basic communication skills and interaction. In the last year of preschool, children start to learn how to read and write and are expected to know how to read before starting elementary school.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION Free elementary education lasts five years. It



A teacher is shown here leading a classroom in Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

starts when children are five or six years old, and children are expected to not repeat any years of elementary education because this results in extra costs for the government.

HIGH SCHOOL High school programs take six years to complete and are split into two parts. The first four years are basic secondary school and last from ages 11 to 14. The second part is known as middle vocational and lasts from ages 15 to 17. During middle vocational,

students are encouraged to choose courses according to their skills or job preferences for the future. However, many schools do not provide a lot of options for students. Students from wealthier families are encouraged to attend institutes of higher education after high school.

HOUSES

Housing in Colombia is designed in different styles and is built from different materials, based on the climate in the location and the income level of the

occupant. Classic colonial mansions and modern ranch-style houses can be found in the cities and suburbs, whereas on the outskirts stand slums, where unemployment, poverty, and crime are rampant. In the rural areas, a large ranch of an upper-class family may be located near the small landholding of a subsistence farmer.

In remote areas, people often live in bamboo or thatched homes built on stilts that hold the structure about 6 feet (1.8 m) above the land or water. In swampy areas, the stilts keep the water

from getting into the house, and in dry regions, they protect the occupants from snakes, insects, and other dangerous wildlife. One of the stilts is notched to enable the occupants to climb up into the house.

Inadequate housing, overcrowding, and insufficient utilities such as water and sanitation are all contributors to the housing problem in Colombia. More than 3.8 million homes—nearly 30 percent of all homes—in Colombia do not satisfactorily meet the basic necessities of the families that live in them.



People in remote areas live in thatched or bamboo houses. A group of men are shown here repairing a roof after a storm.

BOGOTÁ HOUSING PROTESTS

As of January 2022, Colombia has nearly 5 million people who are displaced, which means they were forced to leave their homes. They were displaced because of fighting in their homelands, and they were forced out by armed groups. Between January and November 2021, more than 82,000 people were forcibly displaced, which was a 169 percent increase from 2020. Nearly 23 percent of the displaced people were indigenous, and more than 9,000 people were forced from Chocó, which was home to many people of the Emberá group. The Emberá indigenous group has not trusted the Colombian government in a long time due to the country's failure to follow through on its

promises to provide its communities with safe territories, health services, or food.

Families who are displaced have a right to restitution and reparations through a victims' law, which is supposed to provide support toward housing, health, education, employment, and more. However, the government has largely fallen short in supporting these families, and 8 out of 10 displaced households are living in poverty.

In September 2021, indigenous leaders tried to bring attention to their plight, and hundreds of families marched through Bogotá for 14 hours. After this march, they set up tarps throughout a national park. However, as late as January 2022, the government and indigenous leaders are still unable to reach an agreement.

Links to Learn More

colture.co/bogota/culture-bogota/lifestyle-customs-traditions/colombian-family/

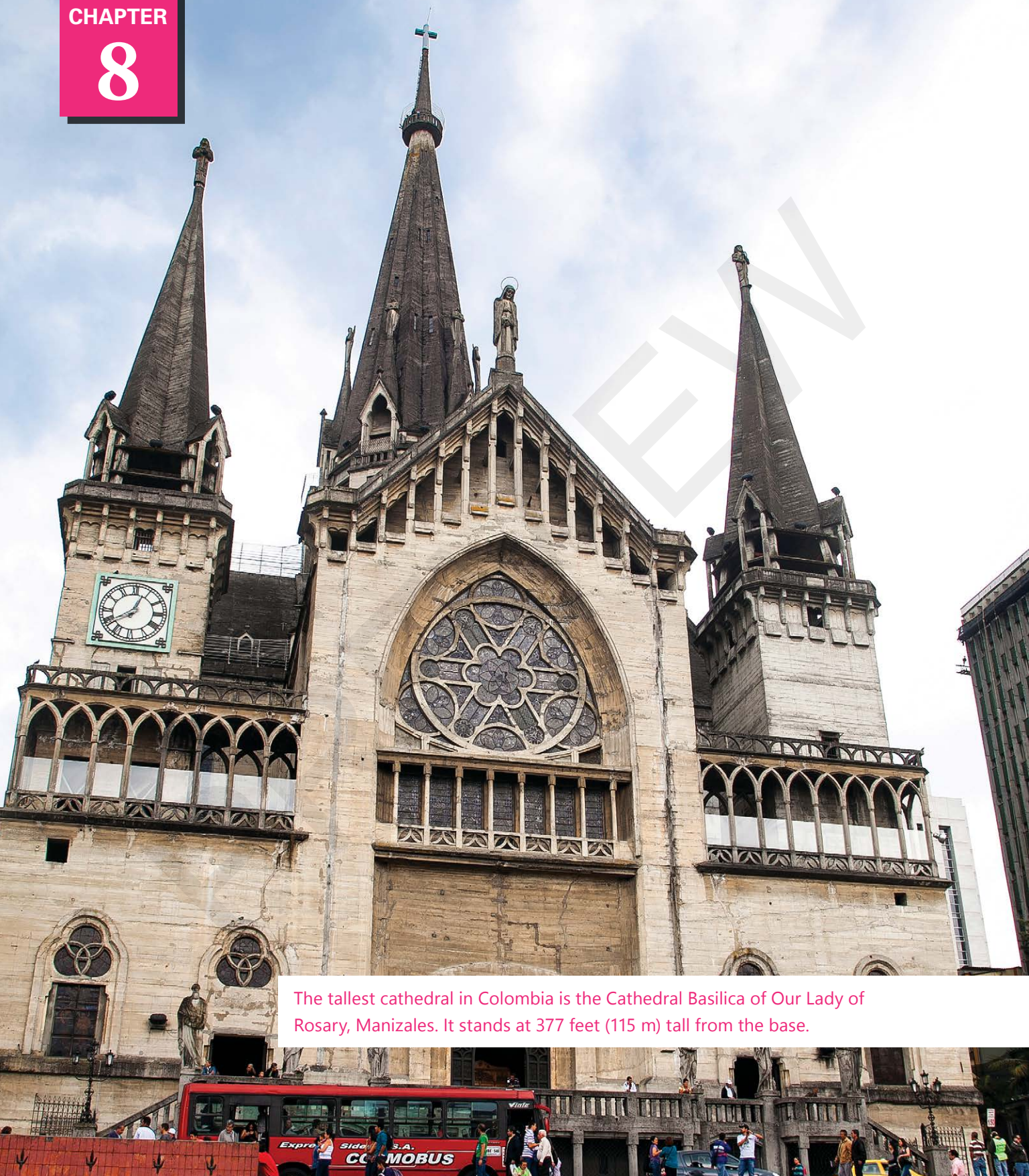
Read more about family values in Colombia.

time.com/colombian-cowboys/

This article talks about Colombian cowboys and includes pictures of a day's work.

washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/05/colombia-indigenous-displaced-protest/

Learn more about the housing protests in Bogotá.



The tallest cathedral in Colombia is the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Rosary, Manizales. It stands at 377 feet (115 m) tall from the base.

Religion

Colombia does not have an official religion; however, the population largely identifies as Christian. Approximately 90 percent of the population identifies as Christian, 5 percent identifies as atheists, and 5 percent practices other religious beliefs. Religion in the country is largely influenced by the cultural forces of Spanish colonization, indigenous peoples, and African Colombians.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The constitution of 1886 gave a special status to the Catholic Church, and the Concordat of 1887 between the pope and the Colombian government defined a special role for the Church in civil matters. However, in 1853, Colombia was the first Latin American country to pass a law separating church and state. The

concordat and constitution remained in effect until 1973, when a new concordat was issued. The Church lost its influence in education, in the territories occupied by indigenous people, and in marriage regulation. The Colombian constitution of 1991 abolished the previous condition of the Roman Catholic Church as the official church, and it included two articles providing for freedom of worship. However, the Church still has a profound political influence, and its close alliance with wealthy conservatives has sparked debate about its traditional role and majority appeal. Although

Point of Interest

The Las Lajas Sanctuary is a Gothic-style basilica built inside the canyon of the Guátara River. It took 33 years to build.



The Cathedral at Bolivar Square in Bogotá is shown here.

90 percent of the population is Christian, around 5 percent of the population consists of atheists, and another 5 percent consists of Muslims, followers of African animist faiths, followers of a blend of Catholicism and animism, a Taoist commune, and Jews.

Travel Tip

There are 10 synagogues in Colombia, four of which are in Bogotá.

ONGOING PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS

Between 4,500 and 5,500 Jewish people live in Colombia. Jewish people have been in Colombia since the time of Spanish colonization, but it wasn't until the end of the 18th century that Jews were able to practice their religion openly (even though it was still illegal—Judaism was not legal in Colombia until 1810). During the 1990s, there were between 6,000 and 6,500 Jews in Colombia.

THE KOGI PEOPLE

The Kogi are indigenous Colombians who live on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (*right*). This group of 20,000 treasures its ancestral lore about the laws of nature and the governance of the universe. The Kogi leaders, or Mâma, contemplate the skies because true knowledge for the Kogi is knowledge of the laws of Mother Nature. For them, living in harmony with these laws is the key to the preservation of the universe.



The leaders are responsible for watching over the universe, as well as watching over the spiritual and social order of the group. They know the Kogi belief system of the nine-stage creation of the universe. This knowledge, combined with the laws of nature, means the Kogi believe that they alone hold the secret of what causes the sun to rise each morning and what determines the way things are born and mature, multiply, and die.

The Kogi people want to show the damages that mining, logging, and the building of power stations and roads cause to the environment and that these things could lead to ecological disaster unless humans change their ways of living. For example, mountain peaks that were once white are now brown, and the trees and vegetation in the area are withering away.

However, between 1990 and 2000, this number greatly decreased as Jews moved to areas such as Miami, Florida; Costa Rica; and Israel. During these years, the economy in Colombia deteriorated, there were numerous kidnappings across the country, and Jewish people feared for their safety, resulting in a mass number of people moving to other countries.

In 2012, a large number of people who were initially raised as Christians discovered they had Jewish ancestry and converted to Judaism. Their ancestors were Jews who were forced out of Spain more than 500 years ago because the Spanish were systematically persecuting the Jews. Thus, their ancestors fled to Colombia for their safety.

In 2015, Jews were again starting to leave Colombia, once again fearing for their personal safety. This time, they left due to increased violence against their businesses caused by economic hardships created by a recession (a period of economic decline) as well as increased anti-Semitism directed toward them on social media. In this same year, there were six religion-based killings in Colombia, and the FARC was also killing and threatening members of religious groups.

RELIGIOUS NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

Of Colombia's 18 national holidays, 12 are religious, specifically Catholic. Easter and Christmas are the most important. The remaining 10 are Epiphany (January 6), Saint Joseph's Day (March 19), Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Ascensión, Corpus Christi (June), Saints Peter and Paul Day (June 29), Assumption Day (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), and Immaculate Conception Day (December 8).



The Zipaquirá Salt Cathedral was built in the tunnels of a salt mine. Figures in the tunnel, such as this one, are all carved from salt.

CATHEDRALS AND BASILICAS

There are more than 70 cathedrals and 40 basilicas in Colombia. A basilica is a church that's been designated by the pope because it carries special historical, spiritual, or architectural significance. It is the highest permanent category of a church building, and once a church is named a basilica, it cannot lose the basilica status. There are two types of basilicas—major and minor. As of January 2022, there are only four major basilicas and the rest of the basilicas in the world are minor. Cathedrals are religious and administrative headquarters in a certain geographic area.

Each cathedral and basilica in Colombia not only has impressive architecture, but each building also has its

own unique story, such as those of Las Lajas and the Zipaquirá Salt Cathedral.

Las Lajas church in Pasto is often voted one of the most beautiful churches in the world. It is built into a canyon and rises 328 feet (100 m) from the bottom of the canyon with a bridge connecting it to the other side. It was built on the spot where a woman saw an image of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, on a stone in 1754. This stone is still visible today.

The Zipaquirá Salt Cathedral in Cundinamarca is built in the tunnels of a salt mine 656 feet (200 m) underground. It was built in 1995 on the site of an older church. The tunnel leading to the church features figures such as the Archangel Gabriel carved out of salt.

Links to Learn More

[npr.org/2019/04/20/714609074/colombias-salt-cathedral-is-a-marvel-of-architecture-and-a-popular-house-of-worship](https://www.npr.org/2019/04/20/714609074/colombias-salt-cathedral-is-a-marvel-of-architecture-and-a-popular-house-of-worship)

You can read about the Zipaquirá Salt Cathedral and how it was made in this article.

[theguardian.com/sustainable-business/colombia-kogi-environment-destruction](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/colombia-kogi-environment-destruction)

Read about the Kogi people and their beliefs.

worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/CO

Learn more about the history of the Jewish people in Colombia.



Es la
hora
del café!



Body language is an important part of culture. For example, Colombians think it is rude to point with the index finger, such as in the photo shown here.

Language

Spanish is the official language of Colombia, and it is spoken by more than 99 percent of Colombians. It varies from traditional Spanish spoken in Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries, however. The Spanish language spoken in Colombia is known as Colombian Spanish, and there are various regional Spanish dialects spoken in different areas of the country. Additionally, there are some regions that have an official language other than Spanish.

There are also several other languages spoken in Colombia. Around 65 of these are Amerindian. There are two Creole languages—Palenquero and Vlach Romani—spoken in Colombia. Palenquero is a Spanish-based language, while Vlach Romani is spoken by the Romani people. Other minority languages include English, sign language, and other Romani languages.

BODY LANGUAGE

Colombians gesture for people to come to them as though waving toward themselves using the entire hand because it is considered aggressive and rude to gesture or point with the index finger. They indicate height in two ways—either by holding their hand up with the palm facing down, or by holding the hand on its side so the top of the thumb indicates the height.

Etiquette is important. Body language taboos include entertaining a visitor barefoot, putting one's feet up on a desk or chair, slouching in a chair, yawning in public, and eating on the street.

Generally, Colombians are expressive and open about their emotions. The loudest, most energetic individuals can often dominate conversations. However, Colombians are also attentive to the person they are having a conversation

Travel Tip

Bilingual education is mandatory in regions that have a different official language.

with and allow them to speak fully without interrupting.

VERBAL GREETINGS

Greetings are an important part of Colombian etiquette. A verbal greeting is almost always accompanied by at least a

handshake. Men shake hands with both women and men. Women sometimes shake hands with other women, frequently while grasping each other's right forearm. Close female friends often kiss one another on the cheek. Relatives or close male friends may hug.

Once first contact is accomplished, the greeting ritual continues with polite questioning about the well-being of each other's family members. Only then, after some small talk, is it appropriate to discuss business.



Colombians believe in being attentive to the people they're having a conversation with, including children.

ALPHABET

The Spanish alphabet looks similar to the English alphabet, but it consists of 27 letters:

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, ñ, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z

The letters *k* and *w* are generally found only in foreign words that have become part of the Spanish vocabulary. The *k* sound is represented in Spanish by *c* before *a*, *o*, and *u* and by *qu* before *e* and *i*.

Spanish vowels often have accents, but these accented vowels are not considered separate letters, unlike in some other languages. Also, unlike English, each Spanish vowel has one fundamental sound:

a as in *mama*

e as in *check*

i as in *police*

o as in *or*

u as in *rude*

Many of the consonants have the same approximate sound as in English, though a linguist would consider the differences significant. Very noticeable distinctions are as follows:

b and *v* are pronounced identically, as a *b*

d, when it is within a word, is pronounced like the English *th* in *then*

s is pronounced like the *s* in the English word *son*

ll, which represents one sound, is a blend of *l* and *y*, as in *call you*, or is often simply pronounced like *y*, as in *yore*

h is not pronounced in Spanish

j has no exact English equivalent; a throaty *h* sound is the closest English comparison; this would also be the sound for *g* before *e* and *i*

r, within a word, is a flapped sound like the *tt* in *kitty*

rr within a word is similar to the *r* sound described above; however, it is trilled.

(Note that *rr* is not officially a letter of the alphabet.)

There are also procedures to follow when entering a group. Everyone must be greeted, at the very least with eye and verbal contact, and preferably with a handshake. It is also essential to say good-bye to everyone when leaving the group.

ADDRESSING OTHERS

When addressing someone, Colombians can use the familiar *tú* or the formal *usted*, both meaning “you.” In certain regions, Colombians also use alternative forms, such as the antiquated *su merced* in Boyacá and the very intimate *vos* in the Valle del Cauca. There are no exact guidelines. Among social equals, *usted* is used, but it changes to *tú* as the people get

to know one another better. Persons of higher social status or those who are older may ask others to address them using *tú*, but Colombians may feel uncomfortable using the intimate form of address with persons of higher status. Use of first names is equated with using *tú*—that is, with intimacy. Before acquaintances have reached a certain familiarity, they address one another as *Señor* and *Señora*.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Freedom of the press in Colombia has been problematic. While security forces overall have not threatened journalists or subjected them to violence, there are



A street vendor sells newspapers in Colombia.

some officials who are exceptions to this. Due to this, journalists generally self-censor to avoid threats or punishment. Online campaigns to harass and intimidate journalists are frequent and are orchestrated by well-known figures or others behind the scenes. Due to this, Colombia ranks at number 134 on the Reporters Without Borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index.

In 2021, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and IFEX-ALC (an organization that includes 24 member organizations throughout Latin America) sent a letter to Colombian

Learn the Language

Colombians often add *-ito* or *-ita* to the end of a word to make it softer or more affectionate. For example, they may say *abuelito* instead of *abuelo* (grandfather).

president Iván Duque Márquez urging investigations into freedom of the press violations and to guarantee Colombians' right to free expression and access to information. The letter expressed concern about police officers' use of force against journalists covering protests in April 2021.

Links to Learn More

culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/colombian-culture/colombian-culture-communication

Learn more about the communication styles in Colombia.

rsf.org/en/rsf-2021-index-nearly-all-indicators-flashing-red-latin-america

Review the 2021 World Press Freedom Index information for Latin America.

worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-colombia.html

Read about the types of languages spoken in Colombia.



The Botero Museum in Bogotá is shown here.

Arts

Colombia has a rich history of art, and Colombians take great pride in their artistic and cultural achievements. There are a growing number of concert halls and galleries, and numerous bookstores, rather than coffeeshops or restaurants, line the streets of Bogotá. Colombians take pride in the fact that more poets than soldiers have become president. Additionally, the diverse makeup of Colombia has had an impact on the arts and culture of the country, resulting in extremely diverse music that has been influenced by Spanish, indigenous, and African cultures.

Travel Tip

Bogotá has numerous art galleries clustered together throughout the city.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Colombia's artistic and literary achievements fall into three periods: pre-Hispanic, colonial (when Colombia was a Spanish colony), and republican (after independence from Spain). Although there was an obvious and marked transition from the first to the second era, the change from the colonial period to the republican period was much more gradual.

When the conquistadors arrived in Colombia, they destroyed any traditional arts they encountered and insisted that all Colombian artistic expression be similar to styles and genres that were then popular in Spain. Their dislike for indigenous art was evident in paintings and religious sculpture of the colonial period, although some churches built during that time

housed indigenous carvings. Most artistic works of the period were reminiscent of the Spanish style.

As the desire for independence grew, the colonists rejected everything that connected them with Spain, including artistic motifs. However, much of their inspiration was based on the contemporary artistic modes of other European countries, especially France.

It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that Colombians truly began to appreciate their indigenous artistic heritage, and what had been their mere acknowledgment of indigenous monuments and art grew into a great source of pride in their heritage and a basis for the creation of modern Colombian art forms.

AUTHORS AND LITERATURE

The most valuable Spanish contribution to the Colombian arts scene was in language and literature, dating back to Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, a lawyer, scholar, and explorer. Colombia's first pieces of national literature came from the historical and descriptive writings of this conquistador.

Other leaders, such as Simón Bolívar,

Antonio Nariño, and Francisco de Paula Santander, were gifted writers and students of philosophy and European and American history.

The 17th century was considered the Baroque period in Latin American literature. The writing was exaggerated, flowery, and not particularly notable. The following century did not produce celebrated works either, which was perhaps a reflection of the decline of Spanish literature generally.

The 19th century, however, marked the beginning of significant Colombian literary output. *Tertulias* began to appear, where patriots discussed forbidden books that were smuggled into the colony. This was the Romantic period in Colombian and world literature, and poetry was the major literary form. The works dealt with love, patriotism, nature, and religion. A leading Colombian religious poet of this time was José Eusebio Caro. A variety of metrical forms marked his works. So much creative energy went into poetry in the 19th century that few outstanding novels emerged.

In 1867, Jorge Isaacs wrote *Maria*, the most widely admired Latin American Romantic novel of the 19th century. At the end of the 19th century, Colombian

INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

The Bogotá International Book Fair was created in 1988 and is one of the most important events in Colombia. The book fair happens over two weeks in the first half of the year in Corferias, which is a convention center in Bogotá. During this two-week fair, there are about 1,200 cultural activities to participate in, including music and dance shows. There are also about 1,000 publishing companies that are present for the fair, the purpose of which is to promote books and reading.

The fair brings together all people that are involved in the creation of a book: authors, editors, translators, proofreaders, distributors, booksellers, agents, and fans. Each year, there is a guest country or countries of honor and a theme. The theme for 2022 was culture for a sustainable future, and the guest countries were Nordic: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland.



The Bogotá International Book Fair occurs over a period of two weeks and celebrates books and reading.

poets and authors took part in a new literary movement called *modernismo*, Latin America's first original contribution to world literature. Famous literary figures from the modernismo movement included José Asunción Silva and Guillermo Valencia.

Twentieth-century literature focused on realistic social commentary in the form of regional novels. Tomás Carrasquilla wrote a novel about the mountain people of Antioquia, *The Marchioness of Yolombó* (*La Marquesa de Yolombó*); José Eustasio Rivera dealt with Amazonian life in *La Vorágine* (*The Vortex*).

The 1960s brought a new literary age led by Gabriel García Márquez. His 1967 novel, *Cien Años de Soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), is one of the most widely read novels in the Spanish language since *Don Quixote*. Many novelists have imitated his style, employing magical realism, which is a Latin American style of narrative that includes fantasy or mythical elements in realistic fiction. In

1982, Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his novels and short stories.

RAYO MUSEUM

Roldanillo, a rural town of 27,626 inhabitants in the Cauca River Valley, is more than 400 years old. Throughout its history, most of its inhabitants have lived by farming and cattle raising—except Omar Rayo, an artist of world renown and the force behind Roldanillo's imaginative Rayo Museum.

Nearly hidden in the center of the peaceful and traditional town, the museum is a strikingly beautiful collection of eight one-room spaces that are naturally lit by glass-domed ceilings. The museum is devoted to works on paper and is the only one of its kind in Latin America. The museum is not, however, merely an exhibition of his works. It is a workshop-museum where lithography, photography, and photoengraving are also taught. Other artists exhibit at the Rayo Museum as well as teach and create new pieces.

PAINTINGS

Colombian visual art borrowed Spanish techniques and themes and received little

Point of Interest

The Luis Ángel Arango Library is one of the most visited libraries in the world and takes up two city blocks.

GLOBAL CITIZEN SPOTLIGHT: MALUMA

Maluma is a Latin music singer who focuses on helping others and giving back to his community. In 2016, he created the foundation El Arte de los Sueños (meaning The Art of Dreams). This Colombia-based foundation focuses specifically on motivating at-risk youth through art programs including free music, dance, and art classes, percussion programs, and workshops to help empower young people. Participants have said the program is not only about singing and dancing, but also about learning discipline, perseverance, and persistence. Additionally, it makes at-risk youth feel welcome and surrounded by people who care about them and their dreams.



Maluma has become a popular musician who uses his fame to try to help others.

attention until the 19th century, when the *costumbrista* movement began. This genre was concerned with the portrayal of customs, manners, and lifestyles.

The best-known artist of the costumbrista era was Ramon Torres Méndez, whose series of paintings entitled *Cuadros de Costumbres* (*Pictures of Customs*) was a visual guide to life at the end of the 19th century.

The costumbrista period was followed by one of great interest in realism

and Impressionism, inspired by the French Impressionist movement.

Artists in the 20th century introduced progressive works following international trends. Alejandro Obregón was considered by some critics to be the greatest Colombian artist. Fernando Botero is another world-renowned Colombian artist.

Other distinguished artists in Colombia include Judith Márquez Montoya, who has gained recognition

with her many series of canvases on similar themes, and Ana Mercedes Hoyos, who experimented with a “pop” style, with surrealism, and with exacting treatments of everyday objects.

STUNNING ARCHITECTURE

Colombia’s colonial architecture was consistent with Spanish styles and varied according to the climate in which it was being developed and the province from which the colonists originated. Fine colonial architecture can be seen in Santa

Marta, Cartagena, Bogotá, Tunja, and Popayán.

Ultramodern buildings are being constructed in the cities. In Bogotá, wide boulevards with tall glass skyscrapers create a magnificent contrast to the impressive colonial quarter. Many modern Colombian architects have studied with leading architects in Europe and the United States, and architecture has become a very prestigious field. Works of particular merit include the Bank of Bogotá, Cartagena’s baseball stadium, and the Luis Ángel Arango Library.



The Luis Ángel Arango Library is the largest library in Colombia and one of the busiest libraries in the world.

PERFORMING ARTS

African Colombians and indigenous Colombians have had a strong influence on music in the coastal regions. Rhythms such as *fandangos*, *porros*, and *maples* have also gained attention outside of the country.

DANCE Folk dance ranges from the Caribbean coast's exciting rhythmic steps to the *bambuco*, which resembles a waltz at a slightly quicker tempo. The bambuco is the national dance and is performed by couples. The salsa is a lively dance in which everyone whirls to trumpets

and maracas. The *cumbia* is an African-Colombian rhythm that has its listeners tapping their feet.

MUSIC Instruments typically used in Colombian music are the *flauta*, which is an indigenous flute; the *tiple*, which is a many-stringed guitar-like instrument; and the *raspa*, which is made from a gourd and played like a washboard.

In the Popayán region, two types of traditional music prevail: the *murga* and the *chirimía*. The murga is performed by wandering bands of musicians playing tipples, *bandolas*, guitars, mandolins,



The music in Colombia greatly reflects the diversity of its people. Here, a group of musicians performs at a carnival.

and accordions. Chirimía music is characteristic of the music of the indigenous people of the lower Andes. Although folk music is the dominant type of music, Colombians do also enjoy classical music. Bogotá is home to the National Symphony Orchestra and the National Conservatory, founded in 1882. Concerts and operas are held in Bogotá's Colón Theater.

FILM AND DRAMA Colombia has a longstanding dramatic tradition. The country's first theater was established in the late 1700s. José Fernández Madrid was considered the founder of the national theater because he was the first Colombian dramatist to write about the New World. Enrique Buenaventura is a world-renowned Colombian playwright. He is the author of *A la derecha de Dios Padre* (*To the Right of God, the Father*), among others. He is also the founder of the Teatro Experimental de Cali (TEC).

Today, Colombian drama is thriving, not only in the numerous theaters around the country but also on the big screen. *Rodrigo D: No Future*, directed by Victor Gaviria in a quasi-documentary style, was the first Colombian film to be showcased in the Cannes Film Festival.

In 2003, the Colombian government passed the Law of Cinema, which assisted local film production. Numerous films were sponsored by the government through taxes collected from distributors, exhibitors, and film producers. The local cinema industry started to get more vibrant with films such as *Soñar no Cuesta Nada* (*A Ton of Luck*) by Rodrigo Triana. It reached 1.2 million cinemagoers in Colombia alone, which was unprecedented.

ENCANTO

In 2021, Disney released the animated movie *Encanto*, which is about a magical family living in a magical town in the mountains of Colombia. The movie was widely praised for its portrayal of Colombia and Colombians because the country and its people are rarely portrayed on screen, and when they are, it's not often in a positive light. Rather, movies and TV shows usually focus on the drug cartels. In addition to this, real Colombians and people of Colombian descent actually speak and sing in Spanish and English in the movie—this is rare because people from different countries often portray people from Colombia. For example, the TV show *Narcos*, which was

about Colombian drug cartel head Pablo Escobar, had a Brazilian actor portraying the Colombian cartel head, and he had the wrong accent.

The positive exposure and success of *Encanto* was unprecedented. For example, in a report from the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative that studied movies between the years 2007 and 2019, out of 1,300 popular movies, only 5 percent

of speaking roles went to Latino and Hispanic characters.

The movie has also been praised for its attention to detail—the accents of the characters, the outfits, the architecture, the embroidered dresses, and even the animals and hand-painted tableware have all been praised for their authenticity, making many Colombian children and adults feel seen.

Links to Learn More

[billboard.com/music/latin/encanto-colombia-positive-image-1235017931/](https://www.billboard.com/music/latin/encanto-colombia-positive-image-1235017931/)

Read about *Encanto* and how it authentically portrays Colombian culture.

[britannica.com/place/Colombia/The-arts](https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia/The-arts)

Learn more about the various arts in Colombia.



There are many recreational activities available in Colombia, including paragliding. A paraglider is shown here with the Andes in the background.

Leisure

Colombia's diverse landscape allows for a variety of outdoor activities. Organized sports have become more popular with Colombians, with the most widely played sport being soccer (called football, or *fútbol*, in Colombia). However, baseball and basketball are drawing increasingly larger numbers of fans, while skiing, tennis, and golf are enjoyed by smaller numbers of people who can afford to participate in the activities.

Other recreational activities that Colombians participate in include car racing and bicycle racing. Colombians also enjoy gambling, and like in many other Latin American countries, bullfighting is also popular.

FISHING AND SWIMMING

Water sports are quite popular among Colombians. They enjoy fishing for marlin, tarpon, dolphin, tuna, and

sailfish any time of the year, and international fishing competitions are held in Barranquilla in the months of May and November.

The coast offers great opportunities for surfers. Swimming, water skiing, scuba-diving, and snorkeling are exciting diversions in the inlets and bays of the Pacific. The Rosario Islands off Cartagena are a favorite place for diving, but only for the very daring—sharks and barracuda frequent these tempting, clear waters.

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

Scaling Colombia's mountains is a popular pastime, as are cycling and hiking. The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta provide one of the most exciting mountain-climbing experiences to be had anywhere in the world. The peaks are nearly 19,000 feet (5,791 m) high.



Shown here are soccer fans on their way into a stadium.

MOST POPULAR SPORT IN COLOMBIA

Soccer is the most popular sport in Colombia. Although it is not one of the leading soccer-playing nations in South America, Colombia has nonetheless produced some outstanding teams at both the club and international levels, as well as some talented individual players. The Colombian national soccer team participated in a FIFA World Cup tournament in 1962, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2014, and 2018. Despite going into the quarterfinals of the Copa America

2011, the Colombian soccer team's best achievement to date was winning the Copa America 2001, which the country also hosted.

GAME HUNTING

Game hunting has long been a favorite sport among the wealthy. With tapirs, deer, and boar roaming the wilderness and organized safaris in the llanos of the Amazon basin, game hunters are never bored. Serious dove hunters have been visiting the Cauca Valley near Cali since 1975.

BULLFIGHTING

Bullfights are so popular that there are two bullfighters' unions, and most cities have *plazas de toros*, or bullfighting rings. There are bullfights all year round, but the most exciting ones are the international festivals in February and December, when visiting *toreros*, or bullfighters, arrive. Although bullfighting is a dangerous profession, it is a matter of grace, courage, and skill for the torero. The bulls are bred specifically for

Learn the Language

Bullfighters in Colombia wear *trajes de luces*, meaning "suits of lights."

fighting. They are aggressive, obstinate, and extremely strong.

Bullfights take place on Thursday and Sunday afternoons. In a typical program, three toreros fight two bulls each. Before the contest, they parade around the



There are bullfights all year round in Colombia.

TRADITIONAL COLOMBIAN GAME

Tejo is a traditional game derived from the Chibcha people that is similar to horseshoes. Nearly every Colombian town has a tejo court. Two mounds of dirt are built around pipes that are set about 40 feet (12 m) apart. The tops of the pipes are leveled with the tops of the mounds of dirt and are loaded with small amounts of gunpowder, called *mecha*. The tejo, a smooth, round piece of metal or stone, is thrown at the top of the mound, and the object of the game is to explode the mecha.



There are tejo experts throughout the countryside, and on Sundays after church or in the afternoons on market days, the sound of exploding mechas provides much excitement and commotion. Men playing tejo are shown above.

arena in their beautifully hand-tailored suits. The toreros are armed with swords and followed by six-man teams, called *cuadrillas*, with *picadores* to assist them. The crowds are screaming by the time the parade is over, and then the bullfight begins. A trumpet sounds, the bullpen opens, and the bull charges out into the ring.

The picadores begin to taunt the bull so that the torero can observe its movements. He performs a few moves with his cape, called passes, without moving his feet. Then, the picadores harass the bull by prodding its shoulders with lances, weakening its neck muscles. The banderilleros (assistants) insert darts into the bull's upper back. Attached to

the darts are ribbons, which are included for color.

GAMBLING

An activity that is very popular among both the rich and the poor is gambling on games of chance. Estimates indicate that Colombians spend as much as 25 percent of their regular income on gambling, regardless of how small or large that income is.

Lotteries are prevalent throughout the country. They are thought to serve

Travel Tip

As of February 2022, Colombia has won 5 Olympic gold medals, 13 silver medals, and 16 bronze medals.

an important social function because the country's welfare program and hospitals receive a generous portion of the profits.

In addition to this government-sponsored activity, there are numerous gambling casinos and horseracing tracks, and there is always considerable wagering



Gambling and the lottery are popular in Colombia. Here, a woman in Cartagena sells lottery tickets.

on other sporting events, such as soccer and bullfights. In 2021, gambling skyrocketed, with more than \$5 billion being spent on gambling by Colombians. In 2020, this figure was just over \$2.5 billion.

PROFESSIONAL CYCLING

Professional cycling in Colombia became popular after Martín Emilio “Cochise” Rodríguez competed in European cycling

competitions. In 1951, the Vuelta de Colombia, a local cycling competition, was held for the first time. The competition features approximately 15 stages and averages more than 766 miles (1,233 km) in length.

The Vuelta de Colombia is regarded as one of the toughest races in cycling. The mountain passes that the riders race through are hundreds of feet higher than those in the Tour de France—the most famous race in the world. Throughout



Cycling competitions, such as the Tour Colombia, are popular in Colombia.

FIRST COLOMBIAN NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION PLAYER

In December 2021, Jaime Echenique made history as the National Basketball Association's (NBA) first Colombian player. Echenique is from Barranquilla, Colombia, and was formerly on Wichita State University's basketball team. He signed a 10-day contract with the Washington Wizards of the NBA, thus becoming the first Colombian player in the NBA's 75-year history. Shortly after being signed, he scored 17 points in a game against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

the years, there have been several serious career-ending accidents and even some deaths during the race.

In 2018, another cycling race, called Tour Colombia, was started.

The competition is held annually; however, in 2021 and 2022, the competition was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Links to Learn More

[britannica.com/place/Colombia/Sports-and-recreation](https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia/Sports-and-recreation)

This page from *Encyclopedia Britannica* talks about sports and leisure activities in Colombia.

[washingtonpost.com/sports/2021/12/31/jaime-echenique-colombia-first-nba-player/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2021/12/31/jaime-echenique-colombia-first-nba-player/)

Read about Jaime Echenique's historic debut with the NBA.



Festivals are popular in Colombia. There are numerous festivals held throughout the year.

Festivals

Colombia has up to 18 long weekends each year due to its national holiday schedule. This schedule allows visitors and residents the opportunity to celebrate the holiday over a span of multiple days. Numerous festivals are held every month throughout the year. There are festivals that celebrate the arts, music, and culture, and even folk festivals. Because of the diversity in each region, there are even festivals that celebrate coffee or flowers in addition to heritage and music.

TYPES OF FIESTAS

Fiestas, or festivals, in Colombia are held to commemorate milestones in the life of the nation or of members of its communities. Fiestas of indigenous groups may mark the harvest, a child's first haircut, or seasonal changes, such as the beginning of the rainy season. Civic

festivities often include speeches, parades, and athletic competitions.

Religious fiestas are generally the most numerous and most colorful. Although there is a serious and solemn background to each feast day, the purpose behind the celebrations is both religious and entertaining. Generally, a rural fiesta will more strongly emphasize the worship aspect. Special Masses mark the day as well as a procession that features a holy image and great ceremony. Often, a market day will be coordinated with the activities, so vendors can display their wares for a large crowd.

TYPES OF FERIAS

Fiestas that are associated with a religious pilgrimage and that last a week or more are called *ferias*. Dancing is generally part of the religious ferias. Two kinds of dance

SAN ISIDRO FESTIVAL

April marks the end of the dry season in Colombia. On April 4, the image of San Isidro (Saint Isadore the Farmer), who is responsible for bringing the rains, is carried through the town of Río Frío. All the townspeople follow his image and chant his praises.

In their chanting, the local farmers explain the need for rain, and optimally, San Isidro will cooperate by bringing the first shower before the celebration is completed. So as not to demand too much of the saint, the parade is slow and drawn out. For every two steps the participants take, they take one step back!

If San Isidro has not cooperated after several processions through the town, the tone of the chanting changes from praise to scolding. As the hours pass, the yelling becomes progressively more belligerent until the townspeople can be heard screaming. Should there be no change in the skies, San Isidro is put away until the next April, when the worshipers will hope for better results.

are often performed at ferias: ritual and folk dances.

Ritual dances take place in the courtyard or main grounds of the church. Women generally do not take part in them. A ritual dance is considered a serious matter and usually includes a dramatization and dialogue for a specific purpose, such as honoring a saint. Alternatively, a folk dance is a social matter. Its main purpose is to entertain, and it can be performed by men and women of all ages.

Some of the most colorful festivals are those of the indigenous groups and African Colombians. Among the Andean groups, as a result of missionary efforts,

there has been a blending of Christian saints and pagan gods. For example, many indigenous people do not see much difference between the Mama (Mother Nature) and Mary. Coastal African Colombians have also combined their traditional rituals and beliefs with those of Christianity.

Regardless of whether the celebration is strictly Christian, an indigenous ritual, or a mix of African, Christian, and indigenous ceremonies, a festival or feria is an opportunity to bring zest and color into lives that are often a simple and trying struggle. The festival is a wonderful contrast to the everyday routine of labor and poverty. Because it

occurs yearly, it is a magical time for all to anticipate. It becomes a project for all in the community to plan and revel in when spirited times begin.

BARRANQUILLA CARNIVAL

The word “carnival” comes from the Latin phrase *carne vale* (“farewell to flesh”), which aptly describes the fasting of Lent in the days leading up to Easter. The philosophy behind the carousing of Carnival is that indulgence in one’s desires before the fast will make it easier to realize the oncoming religious experience. The whole country participates in the festivities



Festivals in Colombia are colorful, joyful occasions. Dancers in the Barranquilla Carnival are shown here.

Travel Tip

It is recommended that visitors invest in a Carnival outfit that is a colorful mix of flowers, feathers, and sequins to attend the Carnival of Barranquilla.

of Carnival. However, the celebration in Barranquilla is most elaborate. The city begins preparing for Carnival just after Christmas, and the two months preceding Lent are filled with masquerades and dancing in the public square.

The Barranquilla Carnival is the largest celebration of folklore in Colombia. In 2003, UNESCO placed it on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. During the four days of the celebration, the streets are filled with music, dancing, and parades.

CARNIVAL OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF CARTAGENA

This annual carnival takes place on November 11, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Cartagena. The old walled city holds a celebration featuring thousands of costumed people dancing in the streets to the sound of maracas and drums. There

FESTIVAL CALENDAR

January 1.	New Year's Day
January 6	Epiphany Day (Three Kings Day)
February 2.	Candlemas
March 19.	Saint Joseph's Day
March/April	Maundy Thursday
.	Good Friday
.	Holy Saturday
.	Easter Sunday
May 1.	Labor Day
April/May/June . .	Ascension Day
June	Corpus Christi
June 29	Saints Peter and Paul Day
July 20	Independence Day
August 7	Battle of Boyacá Day
August 15	Feast of the Assumption
October 12.	Columbus Day
November 1	All Saints' Day
November 11. . . .	Independence of Cartagena
December 8	Feast of the Immaculate Conception
December 25	Christmas

are parades, floral displays, and frenzied excitement caused by fireworks called *buscapiés*, or feet searchers, that send crowds reeling as the firecrackers bounce along the streets.

People dance throughout the night to the music of guitars, maracas, and drums. The festivities culminate with the National Beauty Contest's selection of the

woman who will represent Colombia in international beauty contests.

Point of Interest

The Carnival of Barranquilla is the second-largest Carnival celebration in the world.

CARNAVAL DE NEGROS Y BLANCOS

In Pasto during the end of December and the first week of January, there is a Mardi Gras atmosphere to celebrate the end of the Christmas season. The Carnaval de Negros y Blancos occurs from December 28 through January 5 and is the largest such celebration in Colombia. Many people think that the color references are to the biblical Three Wise Men, who reached their destination on the sixth day of the month of January according to Christian tradition. However, the name actually derives from the activities that take place on those days.

The festival begins with the Carnival of Water. During this event, water is thrown in the homes and on the streets to mark the beginning of the celebration. On New Year's Eve, a parade takes place with marchers dressed as celebrities. The last two days of the carnival are the main days in which people smear black paint on themselves the first day and white paint on themselves the second day. This is done to show equality and integration of all citizens through the celebration of ethnic differences. In 2009, the celebration was placed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

Links to Learn More

theguardian.com/world/gallery/2018/jan/04/colombia-colourful-black-and-white-carnival-in-pictures

View pictures of Colombia's famous Carnaval de Negros y Blancos.

uncovercolombia.com/blog/famous-festivals-in-colombia/

Learn about the famous festivals that are held in Colombia.



Changua is a popular milk and egg soup that is eaten for breakfast.

Food

Colombia's food is as diverse as its landscape. The diverse cultures in the country have contributed to the unique food culture that features African, Latin, and Spanish influences. The climate and varying altitudes of the country's landscape have contributed to the fertile lands, which are ideal for fresh fruits and vegetables.

KITCHENS

The Colombian kitchen is simply the room in which meals are prepared. The family generally does not eat in the kitchen; they eat in the dining room instead. Colombian homes do not have dine-in kitchens or breakfast nooks like those that are common in the United States. Nearly all rural homes in Colombia now have electrical power and a running water supply. However, rural kitchens

may not be equipped with the electrical appliances used in urban homes, such as microwave ovens.

Colombians have a strong cultural bias against standing water. As a result, they prefer not to leave dirty plates to soak in the sink. Instead, they wash their dishes immediately under running water. The drain in the sink is rarely closed, and water is not collected in a dishpan to clean up after a meal. Rather, the water is kept running, everything is scraped off the dish, and then it is washed with a soapy sponge before rinsing it under the running faucet. As a result, dishes are washed in cold water. It is customary to leave the water running for long periods of time.

Hot water heaters are also not common in Colombia. In rural areas, water for cooking, bathing, and washing

clothes is boiled in a large pot over the fire or gas stove. City dwellers have water heaters that must be lit. Because gas is expensive, some families light the water heater each morning so that there is sufficient water for the family to shower, and it is routinely turned off after breakfast.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Colombia's major cities is very similar to shopping in the United

Travel Tip

Coffee and hot chocolate are often served with a piece of cheese in the Andean regions.

States. Colombia has one of the most modern supermarket sectors in Latin America. The large supermarket chains are Cafam, Carulla, Fortuna, Ley, and Olímpica. Almost any item can be found in the cities, but many foods are imported



A wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and flowers are available at markets, such as this one in Cali, year round.

COFFEE

Coffee is the national drink, found in almost every Colombian household. Nearly 80 percent of all households in Colombia serve coffee at least once a day.

There are four types of Colombian coffee: *caturra*, *maragogipe*, *pajarito*, and *borbón*. Coffee plants are grown under banana trees, which shade them from direct sunlight. Because only the ripest beans can be harvested, they must be hand-picked and dried on racks for several days.

Supremo is the highest grade of beans; *extra* is a lower grade. *Excelso* is a blend of the high- and lower-grade beans. This blend of coffee is exported to the United States in larger quantities than any other coffee.

In Colombia, meals are often served with coffee. A small cup of black coffee is called a *tinto*, and it often contains a lot of sugar. Coffee with milk is known as *café perico*; *café con leche* is warm milk with coffee.

There are no coffee breaks in Colombian offices because people drink coffee around the clock. In fact, a person may travel from desk to desk and dispense tintos.



Coffee is consumed throughout the day in Colombia.

and are only available in delicatessens and specialty stores.

A wide variety of fruit and vegetables are available throughout the year. They are generally moderately priced, but fruits

imported from the United States, such as pears, apples, and plums, can be costly. Meats are a bit less expensive than they are in the United States. However, they are often leaner—because the animals are

grass-fed—and they taste somewhat different because they are fresh. In small towns or in the neighborhood meat market, there may be no refrigeration. When pork or beef arrives from the slaughterhouse, a red flag is hung out so that customers know the meat has arrived. They buy up the meat quickly and take it home to prepare the next meal.

Rural villages generally have a small store, or *tienda*, where people buy food and other items. The tienda is also a social center, where villagers come to visit and share gossip. A tienda may be no more than a room, perhaps attached to the owner's house, with a counter where employees gather merchandise for customers.

Most Colombian towns and villages have more than one tienda, and these tiendas are open every day of the week. The tienda competes with the modern convenience store and the large supermarket by offering its wide

middle- and lower-income consumer base advantages such as proximity and credit.

MEALS

Breakfast is not a family meal, and everyone eats according to the needs of their personal schedule. The father, who may have to leave for work as early as 7:00 a.m., will often eat breakfast earliest. The children's breakfast time depends on whether they have to go to school and what time the school bus picks them up. Breakfast is often the smallest meal of the day. The foods eaten at breakfast vary between regions, but may include tamales, hot chocolate with cheese and bread, a milk and egg soup, rice and beans, smashed green bananas with cheese, and a cup of coffee.

Lunch, on the other hand, is the most important meal for the family. Lunch is eaten around 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. and may last until 2:30 p.m. This meal is often the largest of the day and is a three-course meal. The first course is soup followed by a main dish of meat, rice, and a vegetable for the second course, and ending with a small dessert.

The evening meal is eaten at around 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. This is viewed as the

Point of Interest

Bogotá offers a wide range of Colombian foods, from high-end to casual and healthy to deep fried.

COOKING AT HIGH ALTITUDES

In Medellín, Bogotá, and other regions above 5,000 feet (1,524 m), people practice high-altitude cooking. Because air has less pressure at higher altitudes, recipes must be modified to preserve the quality of the food being cooked.

Foods that suffer most from changes in altitude are those that require baking or boiling and those that contain a lot of sugar. Water boils at a higher temperature at higher altitudes, so it takes a longer time to prepare boiled foods. Pressure cookers are quite helpful in such cases.

Because most breads and cakes depend on yeast or baking powder for their shape and consistency, the decreased pressure makes it necessary to reduce the leavening agents so cakes and breads do not collapse. For baking in the highlands, the rule of thumb is to reduce baking powder, shortening, and sugar slightly and increase eggs and liquid slightly.

least important meal of the day and is not often eaten with the family. This meal often consists of a snack to hold someone over until breakfast the next day. The meal may include bread and cheese with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate. However, American customs are creeping into Colombian life, and some Colombians have started eating a larger dinner, especially if going out to eat at night with friends and family.

ETIQUETTE

Table manners in the Colombian home are similar to those in homes in the United States. One practice that is different, however, is that Colombians feel that the

left hand should be kept visible above the table. The elbows should not rest on the table either.

Colombians are quite formal at mealtimes. Wearing pajamas or a bathrobe and slippers to breakfast is not acceptable. At lunch and dinner, everyone in the family is expected to dress as though they were ready to dine out. Pleasant conversation is always welcome during meals, and it is considered impolite to eat too much or to take food without first offering it to others. If the host offers more refreshments, the guest politely declines. When a person has finished eating, they place the silverware horizontally across the plate.

COLOMBIAN FOODS

Colombian foods are rich and heavily seasoned, but not necessarily spicy. Starches, including potatoes, rice, and a root called yucca, are a large part of the Colombian diet. Generally, the Colombian menu is a mixture of indigenous and Spanish traditions. What individuals select from a menu reflects economic status and regional tastes.

A dish that is popular throughout the country is *ajiaco*, a highly seasoned soup of potatoes, chicken, capers, corn, and

slices of avocado. Soup is served much more often and in many more varieties in Colombia than in the United States. It is even occasionally served as breakfast or as a main course. *Changua*, a milk and egg soup, is a favorite breakfast.

Sopa de pan is a main course soup that uses bread, eggs, and cheese. It is quite filling and full of nutrients. Other popular soups are made with vegetables, plantains (a fruit similar to the banana), rice, and potatoes.

Some very tasty breads are served in



Ajiaco is a popular, hearty soup made of potatoes, chicken, and corn.

PAPAS CHORREADAS

2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon coriander
4 scallions
pinch of dried oregano
½ cup finely chopped onions
pinch of cumin
5 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded,
and chopped
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
½ cup heavy cream
8 large potatoes, peeled and boiled



Heat butter over moderate heat in a 10-inch (25.4 cm) skillet. Add scallions and onions, and stir frequently for 5 minutes or until the onions are soft and transparent. Add tomatoes, and cook, stirring for 5 minutes. Add cream, coriander, oregano, cumin, and salt, stirring constantly. Continue stirring, and add cheese. Stir until cheese melts. Serve over sliced boiled potatoes.

Colombia. *Arepa* is a simple cornroll of indigenous origin. It is made of ground corn mixed with a little salt and enough water to make a stiff dough, which is then toasted on a greased griddle. Arepa is eaten by rich and poor alike. *Roscones* are buns filled with guava jelly and sprinkled with sugar.

Because cattle are pasture fed, Colombian beef is somewhat tougher than beef from the United States, but

Colombian cooks have found some ways to tenderize and prepare it. Rather than grinding the beef into hamburger meat, they slice it into tiny cubes. The meat is sautéed, broiled, or added to soups. The small size of the cubes prevents the meat from becoming too tough. Another zesty Colombian tenderizing method is to simmer a chunk of meat for several hours and then baste and roast it for several more hours.

REGIONAL FAVORITES

Regional favorites have much to do with the types of vegetables and fruit that grow in the area. For example, the high, cool mountain valleys near Bogotá produce white potatoes in abundance, and the recipes of that region make good use of this vegetable. *Papas chorreadas* are boiled potatoes covered with a flavorful sauce of coriander, cream, tomatoes, cheese, and scallions.

Although the region around Bogotá is cool, the warm zones are quite close by, and the cooks of the capital city have an abundance of tropical fruit available to them. Bananas and avocados are favorite ingredients. There are perhaps a dozen ways that the people of Bogotá prepare green bananas. Avocados are added to all types of salads and soups.

People of indigenous and African descent who inhabit the jungles grow yucca, corn, beans, and plantains, and they catch local wildlife for meat. They eat monkeys, tapirs, and any kind of bird, except parrot, whose flesh is too tough. Ants are a delicacy among Colombian villagers and jungle dwellers. The insects are caught in large quantities during mating season and are fried in oil or fat.

In the western part of the country,

particularly the Cauca Valley, there is a distinctive local cuisine that makes wonderful use of the yucca and plantain that thrive in the warm climate. The leathery leaves of the plantain are used to wrap various mixtures of corn and other ingredients for steaming and boiling. One such treat is *hallaca*, which is similar to the tamales of Mexico.

RESTAURANTS

There is an exciting variety of international restaurants in larger cities, especially in Bogotá, where there are restaurants that serve Swiss, Middle Eastern, and other cuisines.

Many Colombian restaurants take pride in serving dishes typical of their region. At finer restaurants, waiters are particularly polite and provide excellent service. There may be as many as three to four waiters per table to meet the diners' every need.

Fast-food lovers can find some of their favorites in Bogotá. Burger King outlets dot the city streets, although the food there can be expensive. There are also local hamburger shops in all the major cities, and cantinas sell snacks, tropical fruit juices, and coffee. Bogotá also has many cafés for after-dinner entertainment.

BEVERAGES

Generally, Colombians do not drink much at meals. Coffee, however, is an exception and is often consumed throughout the day with meals. Children often drink milk with their meals, and fruit juices are generally provided during lunches. Hot chocolate is also a popular drink during breakfasts and dinners.

Aguardiente is a licorice-flavored alcohol and is the national alcoholic beverage of Colombia. It is made from sugarcane, and every region produces its

own brand of the alcohol, which brings a lot of pride to the residents. Colombians may have beer between meals, and in some areas, it is had with meals. Wine is often served at dinner when there are guests, but not during family meals because Colombia imports very little wine and wine can be expensive.

A traditional indigenous alcoholic beverage is a potent corn liquor called *chicha*. Although the government outlawed chicha in 1948, the drink's popularity has not suffered, and it is often openly advertised and sold.

Links to Learn More

backroads.com/pro-tips/travel-guides/food-and-drink/food-in-colombia

Learn about the types of foods in Colombia and typical Colombian dishes.

uncovercolombia.com/blog/colombian-culture-meals/

Read about the differences between meals in the United States and Colombia.

ARROZ CON POLLO

This recipe makes four to six servings.

Chicken

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 ½–3 pounds chicken, cut into serving pieces
½ cup flour
kosher salt
freshly ground black pepper
paprika

Rice

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (can use up to ¼ cup), if needed
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
2 cups medium or long-grain white rice
3 cups chicken stock
1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste or 1 cup diced fresh or cooked tomatoes, strained
pinch of oregano
1 teaspoon kosher salt

Heat 3 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet on medium-high heat.

Mix the flour, salt, pepper, and paprika in a bowl. Cover the chicken pieces lightly in the flour mixture, and put them in the skillet to brown.

Cook a few minutes on each side, until the chicken has browned. Remove from the skillet, and set aside.

Add the uncooked rice to the skillet. Stir to coat the rice with the oil in the pan, adding more if needed.

Add the onion and garlic to the pan, and cook, stirring frequently, until the onions have softened.

Place the chicken pieces on top of the rice.

In a separate bowl, mix the stock, tomato, salt, and oregano. Pour the mixture over the rice and chicken.

Bring the mixture to a simmer, reduce heat to low, and cover.

Let cook for 20–25 minutes, depending on the type of rice and the instructions on the rice package, until the rice and chicken are done.

Fluff the rice with a fork, and serve.



AREPAS

This recipe makes eight servings.

2 ½ cups lukewarm water

1 teaspoon salt

2 cups pre-cooked white cornmeal

¼ cup vegetable oil

Stir water and salt together in a bowl. Gradually stir cornmeal into water with your fingers until mixture forms a soft, moist dough.

Divide dough into eight balls and flatten each one to about 3/8-inch (0.95 cm) thick.

Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat until simmering. Cook dough in oil until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain until cool enough to handle.



MAP OF COLOMBIA

Amazonas, B4–B5,
C4–C5, D4–D5

Amazon River, C5,
D5

Antioquia, A2,
B2–B3

Arauca, C2, D2

Atlántico, B1

Atrato River, A2,
B2–B3

Barranquilla, B1

Bogotá, B3

Bolívar, B1–B2

Boyacá, B2–B3,
C2–C3

Brazil, C4–C5,
D4–D5

Bucaramanga, C2

Buenos Aires, B4

Caldas, B3

Cali, B3

Caquetá, B3–B4, C4

Caquetá River, B4,
C4–C5, D5

Caribbean Sea, A1–
A2, B1–B2

Cartagena, B1

Casanare, C2–C3

Cauca, A3–A4,
B3–B4

Cauca River, B2–B3

César, B1–B2, C1–C2

César River, B1–B2

Chocó, A2–A3,
B2–B3

Cordillera

Central, B2–B3

Cordillera Occidental,
A3–A4, B2–B3

Cordillera

Oriental, B3–B4,
C2–C3

Córdoba, B1–B2

Cúcuta, C2

Cundinamarca, B3

Ecuador,

A4–A5, B4–B5

Equator, A4, B4, C4,
D4

Guainía C3–C4,
D3–D4

Guajira Peninsula, C1

Guaviare, B4, C3–C4

Guaviare River, B4,
C3, D3

Huila, B3–B4

Ibagué, B3

Isla Fuerte, B1

Islas del Rosario, B1

La Guajira, C1

Llanos, C2–C3

Magdalena

River, B1–B2

Magdalena, B1–B2

Manizales, B3

Medellín, B2

Meta River, C2

Meta, B3–B4, C3

Montería, B2

Nariño, A3–A4

Norte de

Santander, B2, C2

Orinoco River,
D2–D3

Pacific Ocean,
A2–A4

Panama, A1–A2

Pereira, B3

Peru, A5, B4–B5, C5

Popayán, B3

Putumayo River, C5,
D5

Putumayo, A4, B4

Quindío, B3

Risaralda, B2–B3

San Andrés y

Providencia, A1

Santa Marta, B1

Santander, B2–B3,
C2–C3

Sinú River, B1–B2

Sucre, B1–B2

Tomlia, B3

Tumaco, A4

Tunja, B3

Valle del Cauca, A3,
B3

Vaupés, C4

Vaupés River, C4

Venezuela, C1–C2,
D1–D2

Vichada, C3, D2–D3

Villavicencio, B3



ECONOMIC COLOMBIA

Natural Resources



Coal



Fishing



Gems



Gold



Hydroelectricity



Salt

Agriculture



Cattle



Coffee



Orchids



Sugarcane

Manufacturing

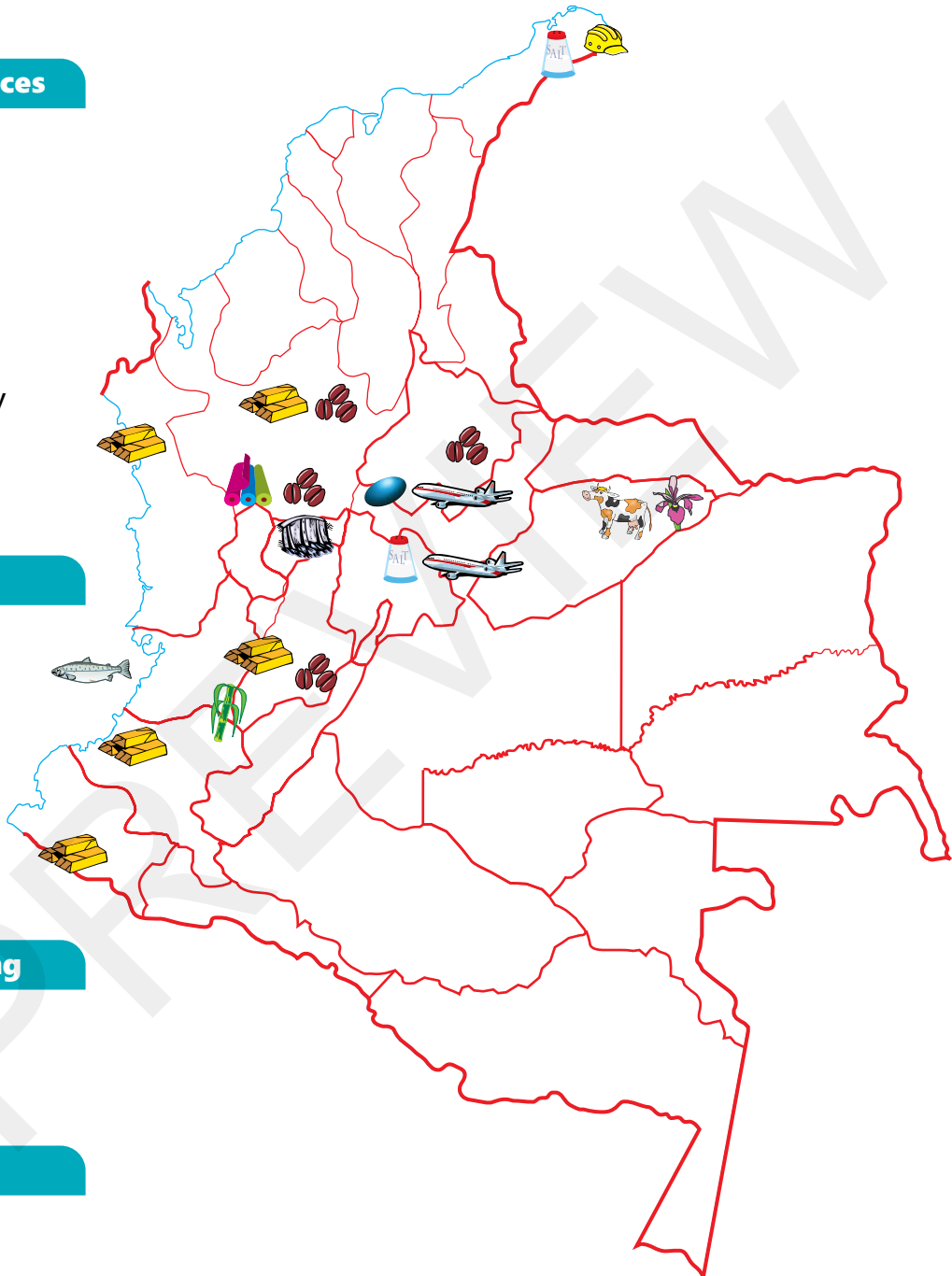


Textiles

Services



Airport



ABOUT THE ECONOMY

Statistics are from 2022 unless otherwise noted.

OVERVIEW

Private companies dominate Colombia's economy. Direct government participation is limited to certain industries—mainly, telecommunications, railways, and petroleum. The government has tried to maintain economic stability and encourage private companies through favorable systems of taxation and providing credit to new industries. However, inequality, unemployment, and drug trafficking are still significant challenges, and many lack access to clean water or housing.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)

\$683.94 billion (2020 estimate)

GDP COMPOSITION

agriculture 7.2 percent, industry 30.8 percent, services 62.1 percent (2017 estimates)

TERRITORY

land: 401,044 square miles (1,038,700 sq km)

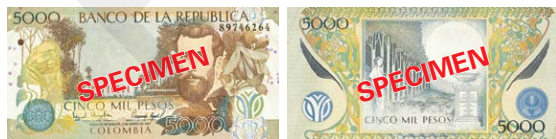
water: 38,691 square miles (100,210 sq km)

total: 439,735 square miles (1,138,910 sq km)

CURRENCY

Peso (1 peso = 100 centavos)

\$1 = 3,882 pesos (March 2022)



NATURAL RESOURCES

petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, emeralds, hydropower

LABOR FORCE

19.309 million (2020 estimate)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

10.5 percent (2019 estimate)

INFLATION RATE

3.5 percent (2019 estimate)

MAIN EXPORTS

petroleum, coffee, coal, gold

MAIN IMPORTS

petroleum, cars, broadcasting equipment, corn, packaged machines

MAJOR TRADING PARTNERS

United States, China, Panama, Ecuador

PORTS AND HARBORS

Atlantic Ocean (Caribbean): Cartagena, Santa Marta, Turbo

Pacific Ocean: Buenaventura

TELECOMMUNICATIONS USERS

land lines: 7.2 million (2020 estimate)

mobile cellular: 67.6 million (2020 estimate)

internet: 34.7 million (2021 estimate)

MOTOR VEHICLES

196.6 per 1,000 inhabitants

CULTURAL COLOMBIA



El Laguito and Bocagrande

Cartagena's main tourist centers boast beaches lined with large hotels, restaurants, cafés, and fruit and ice-cream stalls. There are opportunities for all kinds of water sports. Underwater reserves near Cartagena make this an ideal place for diving.



Santa Marta

White sandy beaches and a calm sea make the area around Santa Marta a good place for water sports. Taganga, a nearby fishing village, offers snorkeling and diving opportunities.



Barranquilla Carnival

Hundreds of dancers and musicians dressed in elaborate costumes lead the crowds in feverish dancing and parades celebrating Colombian folklore.



Zipaquirá Salt Cathedral

This unique cathedral was carved by miners inside a huge salt mine in Zipaquirá, two hours north of Bogotá. The ceiling rises 75 feet (23 m) high over the altar, a block of salt weighing 19 tons (18 metric tons).



seafood paradise

Numerous restaurants on the coast offer fresh seafood prepared in a variety of ways. Diners can feast on local seafood delicacies in the historical ambience of rebuilt ships and forts.



La Macarena Bullring

The bullfighting season is between January and February. The most important bullfights take place in February and December, when top matadors from Colombia and other countries meet for the international festival.



La Érnita

Cali's landmark, built in 1678 and renovated in 1930 after an earthquake, was inspired by Gothic architectural styles and has altars built by an Italian sculptor.



Carnaval de Negros y Blancos

From December 28 through January 6, Colombians take part in celebrations of ethnic and cultural differences by participating in festivals in which participants paint themselves in black paint one day and white paint the next day.



San Agustín

Stone carvings and figures left by ancient communities have made this village one of the most important archaeological sites in Colombia. The main collection of statues is in the archaeological park, almost 2 miles (3.2 km) from the village.



Museo del Oro

About 30,000 pieces of pre-Columbian art provide glimpses of ancient Indian spirituality. Flasks called *poporo*, for example, held the lime that tribal priests used to extract cocaine from the leaves they chewed to communicate with the spirits.



music and theater

Bogotá is the home of the National Symphony Orchestra of Colombia and also big theater groups such as the Teatro Popular de Bogotá and Teatro Nacional.

ABOUT THE CULTURE



Statistics are from 2022 unless otherwise noted.

OFFICIAL NAME

República de Colombia (Republic of Colombia)

CAPITAL

Bogotá

DEPARTMENTS (STATES)

Amazonas, Antioquia, Arauca, Atlántico, Bolívar, Boyacá, Caldas, Caquetá, Casanare, Cauca, César, Chocó, Córdoba, Cundinamarca, Guainía, Guaviare, Huila, La Guajira, Magdalena, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Quindío, Risaralda, San Andrés y Providencia, Santander, Sucre, Tolima, Valle del Cauca, Vaupés, Vichada, Bogotá Capital District

DESCRIPTION OF FLAG

three horizontal stripes: yellow stands for Colombia, blue for the ocean separating Colombia from Spain, and red for the blood shed for freedom from Spain

POPULATION

50,355,650 (2021 estimate)

LIFE EXPECTANCY

male: 73.77 years

female: 80.23 years (2011 estimate)

ETHNIC GROUPS

mestizo and white 87.6 percent, Afro-Colombian 6.8 percent, Amerindian 4.3 percent, unspecified 1.4 percent

MAJOR LANGUAGES

Spanish is the official language. Some indigenous groups speak their own languages. The San Andrés y Providencia islanders speak English.

MAJOR RELIGIONS

Christian 92.3 percent (predominantly Roman Catholic), other 1 percent, unspecified 6.7 percent

GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

constitutional republic with bicameral Congress and separation of powers among the executive, judicial, and legislative branches

LEADERS IN POLITICS

Simón Bolívar (1763–1830), liberator of the Spanish colonies and first president of Gran Colombia; Francisco de Paula Santander (1792–1840), Bolívar's right-hand man during the struggle for independence and first elected president of Colombia; Álvaro Uribe Vélez, president from August 7, 2002, to August 7, 2010; Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, president from August 7, 2010 to 2018; Iván Duque Márquez, president from August 7, 2018

TIMELINE

In Colombia

In the World

200s CE

The Chibchas farm, mine salt and emeralds, and trade with other peoples in the central Andes. They craft pottery, gold works, and cotton fabrics.

400s

The Taironas build great stone cities in the Caribbean coastal region.

1499

Alonso de Ojeda meets indigenous peoples with gold ornaments.

1533

Pedro de Heredia founds Cartagena. The town becomes Colombia's main trading center and port.

1536

Bogotá and Cali are founded by Europeans.

1717

The Spanish create the Viceroyalty of New Granada to administer Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

1781

A tax rebellion becomes the first Colombian revolt against Spanish power. Napoleon Bonaparte takes over the Spanish Crown and gives it to his brother Joseph. Many Spanish colonies refuse to recognize Joseph as their ruler. Wars of independence end.

1819

Simón Bolívar ousts the Spanish and establishes the republic of Gran Colombia.

1830

Bolívar dies. Ecuador and Venezuela gain independence. Colombia becomes the Republic of New Granada.

1948

La Violencia (The Violence) erupts.

1957

Women win the right to vote. The Liberal and Conservative Parties form the National Front and alternate presidency for the next 16 years. The exclusion of other parties leads to outbreak of several guerrilla movements.

1974

The National Front agreement is extended for another 17 years.

1980s

Rise of the narcotraficantes, or druglords, begins.

1985

Guerrilla group M-19 occupies the Palace of Justice. Their battle with the military kills more than 100 people. Nevado del Ruiz volcano erupts.

600 CE

The height of Maya civilization is reached.

1530

The beginning of transatlantic slave trade is organized by the Portuguese in Africa.

1558–1603

The reign of Elizabeth I of England occurs.

1620

Pilgrims sail the *Mayflower* to America.

1776

U.S. Declaration of Independence is written.

1789–1799

The French Revolution occurs.

1914

World War I begins.

1939

World War II begins.

1957

The Russians launch Sputnik.

1966–1969

The Chinese Cultural Revolution occurs.

In Colombia

- 1993**
The most famous druglord, Pablo Escobar, is killed.
- 1999**
An earthquake in Armenia, western Colombia, kills at least 1,185 people, injures more than 4,750, and leaves about 250,000 homeless. Plan Colombia is enforced in hopes of ending the Colombian armed conflict.
- 2000**
Plan Colombia wins \$1.3 billion, mainly in military aid from the United States to fight drug trafficking and rebels who profit from and protect the drug trade.
- 2002**
Independent candidate Álvaro Uribe wins presidential election.
- 2005**
Exploratory peace talks with the second biggest left-wing rebel group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), begin in Cuba.
- 2006**
Colombia and the United States agree on a free trade deal. By amending the constitution, President Uribe wins a second term in office.
- 2010**
Venezuela cuts diplomatic ties with Colombia. Juan Manuel Santos takes over as president, having won easy victory in runoff election in June.
- 2011**
FARC releases several hostages, described as a unilateral "gesture of peace" to government.
- 2016**
U.S. president Barack Obama announces Peace Colombia initiative.
- 2018**
Iván Duque Márquez takes office as president.
- 2020**
The COVID-19 pandemic strikes Colombia.
- 2022**
Ingrid Betancourt announces she's running for president.

In the World

- 1986**
Nuclear power disaster occurs at Chernobyl in Ukraine.
- 1991**
The breakup of the Soviet Union occurs.
- 1997**
Hong Kong is returned to China.
- 2001**
World population surpasses 6 billion. Terrorists crash planes in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.
- 2004**
Eleven Asian countries are hit by a giant tsunami, killing at least 225,000 people.
- 2008**
Earthquake in Sichuan, China, kills 87,000 people.
- 2009**
Outbreak of H1N1 flu virus spreads around the world.
- 2011**
Twin earthquake and tsunami disasters strike northeast Japan, leaving more than 20,000 dead and thousands more missing.
- 2015**
The Paris Climate Agreement is signed.
- 2019**
COVID-19 outbreak begins in Wuhan Province, China.
- 2021**
Kamala Harris becomes the first female, African American, and Indian American vice president of the United States.

GLOSSARY

anti-Semitism Hostility toward and prejudice against Jews.

capitalism A political and economic system in which a country's industry and trade are controlled by private companies for profit, rather than by the state.

deforestation The clearing of forested land to make space for agriculture.

ecotourism Tourism featuring exotic, often threatened, natural environments. The purpose of these trips is to observe wildlife and support conservation efforts.

Happy Planet Index A scale that measures the well-being of people in the nations of the world while taking into account their environmental impact.

landlocked Completely surrounded by land with no coastlines or seaports.

persecution The cruel, hostile mistreatment of people, often due to their religious beliefs.

picturesque Visually attractive; vivid.

pre-Columbian Relating to the era that incorporates all periods in Colombia's history before the appearance of significant European influences.

reparations The making of amends for the wrongs that someone has done, often by paying money to those who have been wronged.

restitution The restoration of something lost or stolen to its owner.

topography How the physical features of an area are arranged.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

BOOKS

Baker, Christopher. *National Geographic Traveler: Colombia*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2017.

Betancourt, Ingrid. *Even Silence Has an End: My Six Years of Captivity in the Colombian Jungle*. New York, NY: Penguin Press HC, 2010.

Cathey, Kate. *Colombia—Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture*. Great Britain: Kuperard, 2019.

Davis, Wade. *Magdalena: River of Dreams: A Story of Colombia*. New York, NY: Vintage, 2021.

WEBSITES

Britannica: Colombia

[britannica.com/place/Colombia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia)

The Colombia page of *Britannica* has in-depth information on all parts of Colombia and Colombian culture.

CIA World Factbook: Colombia

[cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/colombia/](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/colombia/)

This page from the CIA includes an overview of Colombia's economy, geography, and more.

Colombia

colombia.co/en/

This official website of Colombia has information about the country and up-to-date articles about festivals, food, music, and more.

MUSIC

Laundry Service (Shakira)

This album was Shakira's breakthrough English-language album that catapulted her to fame.

Magia (Maluma)

Listen to Maluma's successful debut album.

Ocean (Karol G)

This album recognized inclusivity of all body shapes and sizes, for which Karol G was praised.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acosta, Luis Jaime. "Colombia's Clan del Golfo Gang Network Extends to 28 Countries—Police." Reuters, November 3, 2021. [reuters.com/world/colombias-clan-del-golfo-gang-network-extends-28-countries-police-2021-11-03/](https://www.reuters.com/world/colombias-clan-del-golfo-gang-network-extends-28-countries-police-2021-11-03/).

Ayala, Nicolas. "Encanto's Real Life Influences: How Accurate Is Its Colombian Story?" Screen Rant, November 26, 2021. screenrant.com/encanto-movie-real-life-influences-colombia-explained/.

"Carnival of Barranquilla." United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. ich.unesco.org/en/RL/carnival-of-barranquilla-00051.

Cosoy, Natalio. "Has Plan Colombia Really Worked?" BBC News, February 4, 2016. [bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35491504](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35491504).

"CPJ, Partners Call on Colombian Authorities to Address Press Freedom Violations in Protest Response," CPJ, May 6, 2021. [cpj.org/2021/05/cpj-partners-call-on-colombian-authorities-to-address-press-freedom-violations-in-protest-response/](https://www.cpj.org/2021/05/cpj-partners-call-on-colombian-authorities-to-address-press-freedom-violations-in-protest-response/).

Farnsworth-Alvear, Ann. *The Colombia Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. London, UK: Duke University Press, 2017.

"Los Katíos National Park." United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. whc.unesco.org/en/list/711/.

"Lost Jews of Colombia Say They've Found Their Roots." NPR, December 20, 2012. [npr.org/2012/12/20/167714541/lost-jews-of-colombia-say-theyve-found-their-roots](https://www.npr.org/2012/12/20/167714541/lost-jews-of-colombia-say-theyve-found-their-roots).

"Top 10 Colombian Ferias y Fiestas You Should Not Miss." Impulse Travel, December 24, 2018. impulsetravel.co/en/blog/45/top-10-colombian-ferias-y-fientas-you-shouldn-t-miss.

Velásquez, Mariana. *Colombiana: A Rediscovery of Recipes and Rituals From the Soul of Colombia*. New York, NY: Harper Wave, 2021.

INDEX

- agriculture, 13, 39–40
- amphibians, 51, 54
- Andean condor, 14, 51, 53–54
- Andes Mountains, 5, 11–13, 16, 47, 53–54, 61, 104
- architecture, 18, 21, 89, 102, 105
- army, 40
- baptism, 73–74
- baseball, 103, 107
- basilicas, 84, 89
- basketball, 107, 113
- beliefs, 85, 116
- Betancourt, Ingrid, 37
- beverages, 129
- biodiversity, 51
- birds, 14, 51, 54–55, 59
- Bogotá International Book Fair, 6, 99
- Bolívar, Simón, 67
- Brazil, 41, 54, 105
- buildings, 18, 20, 58, 89, 102
- bullfighting, 20, 107, 109–110, 112
- business, 39, 66, 72–73, 77–79, 88, 92
- cathedrals, 89
- cattle, 43, 56, 100, 127
- Cauca Valley Corporation (CVC), 20
- Christianity, 85–87, 116
- Ciudad Perdida, 5, 14
- climate, 5, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 40–42, 51, 56, 59, 67, 81, 102, 121, 128
- coastline, 5, 12, 51, 53
- cocaine, 8, 19, 28, 35–36, 48–49, 56
- Colombian grebe, 54
- Congress, 28–29, 33–34
- conservation, 53, 56–57
- construction, 47
- cooking, 121, 125
- COVID-19, 30–31, 36, 46, 52, 58, 65, 80, 83, 113
- crime, 18, 82
- crops
 - banana, 15, 27, 40–42, 123–124, 126, 128
 - coffee, 7, 11, 13, 16, 19–20, 27, 40–42, 48, 56, 71, 115, 123–125, 129
 - sugarcane, 42, 129
- cuisine, 128
- customs, 69, 107, 125
- dance, 65, 99, 101, 103, 115–116, 118
- death, 26, 36, 113
- deforestation, 12, 40, 53, 56
- deserts, 15, 17, 51
- drama, 104
- earthquakes, 16, 21
- Echenique, Jaime, 113
- ecosystems, 11, 51–52, 59, 61
- Ecuador, 11, 23, 25–26, 46–47, 53
- education
 - schools, 24, 65, 78–81
 - universities, 18
- El Dorado, 24
- elections, 28, 34
- employment, 29, 42, 73, 83
- Encanto*, 5, 8, 104–105
- energy
 - electricity, 40, 46
 - hydroelectricity, 17
 - natural gas, 17
- entertainment, 129
- Escobar, Pablo, 8, 48–49, 105
- etiquette, 91–92, 125
- events, 6, 99, 112
- exchange rates, 40
- exports, 27–28, 39, 41–43, 46, 48, 123
- family, 8, 40, 71–73, 75–76, 79–80, 82, 92, 104, 121–122, 124–125, 129
- farming, 13, 40, 46, 65, 100
- fauna, 52
- festivals
 - All Saints' Day, 88, 118
 - Carnaval de Negros y Blancos, 119
 - Christmas, 88, 117–119
 - Corpus Christi, 88, 118
 - Easter, 88, 117–118
 - ferias, 115–116
 - fiestas, 115–116
 - Good Friday, 18, 118
- fishing, 44, 57, 71, 107
- floods, 12, 21, 46, 66
- flora, 15, 52
- flowers, 15–16, 42–43, 56, 115
- forests, 11–13, 15, 51, 55–57, 59
- freedom of the press, 7, 94–95
- friendship, 73
- fruits, 5, 15, 41, 121, 123, 126, 128–129
- Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), 29–30, 35–37, 88
- gambling, 107, 111–112
- gestures, 91
- golden poison frog, 54–55
- Great Depression, 27
- greetings, 92
- gross domestic product (GDP), 40, 79
- growth, 19–20, 26, 39
- Guajira Peninsula, 16–17, 45
- guerrillas, 28–30, 35, 40
- habitat, 51, 53–54, 56, 59–60
- handicrafts, 77
- health, 59, 76, 78, 83
- heritage, 6, 59–61, 65, 85, 98, 115
- holidays, 76, 88, 115
- hospitals, 111
- hunting, 53–54, 56, 108
- imports, 8, 16, 40, 46, 48–49, 122–123, 129
- independence, 23, 25–26, 76, 97–98, 117–118
- inflation, 27
- investments, 46
- irrigation, 46
- islands, 107
- Judaism, 86–87
- judiciary, 33
- Karol G, 9, 65
- kidnappings, 7, 27, 87
- La Violencia, 28
- laws, 64
- literacy, 34, 67, 79–80
- literature, 6, 98, 100
- livestock, 12, 43
- Los Katíos National Park, 59

INDEX

- machismo, 76
Magdalena River, 12, 23, 44, 46–47
Maluma, 9, 101
mangroves, 15, 51
manners, 101, 125
manufacturing, 20
markets, 48, 77, 110, 115, 122, 124
Márquez, Gabriel Garcia, 12, 100
marriage, 71, 73–75, 85
meals, 75, 121, 123–125, 129,
meat, 43, 53, 71, 123–124, 127–128
Mexico, 128
migration, 18
military, 24, 28
minerals, 16, 44–45, 65
mining, 36, 39, 45, 56, 65, 87
Museo del Oro, 18, 66
museums, 6, 18, 100
musical instruments, 65, 103

national parks, 52, 59–61, 83
natural resources
 coal, 17, 45, 48
 copper, 16
 emeralds, 16, 24, 44–45, 65
 gold, 16, 18–19, 24, 39, 44–45, 65
 oil, 46, 48, 128
 petroleum, 16, 27, 39
 platinum, 16, 44–45
 salt, 16, 45, 65, 89, 127
 silver, 16, 44, 48
nature, 5, 63, 87, 98

Pacific Ocean, 5, 51
paintings, 18, 97–98, 101
Panama, 23, 25–26, 46, 59
Peru, 24, 26, 44, 46, 53
Plan Colombia, 35–36
plants, 5, 15–16, 41–42, 51, 123
poetry, 98
police, 29, 34, 36, 49, 95
political parties, 26, 28, 35
pollution, 54, 56–58
poverty, 5, 18, 21, 58, 67, 82–83, 116
presidents
 Arango, Andrés
 Pastrana, 28, 35, 103
 Márquez, Iván
 Duque, 29–30, 35, 95
 Uribe, Álvaro, 29–30, 35
protests, 27, 36, 83, 95

radio, 80
rainfall, 13, 21, 42, 46–47
rain forests, 13, 55, 59
restaurants, 6, 73, 97, 128
rituals, 74, 116
ruana, 67–68

Shakira, 9, 78
soccer, 107–108, 112
stratum, 68
swamps, 51, 59–60, 82

tejo, 110
temperatures, 6, 13, 40–41, 125
theaters, 104
trading, 48
traffic, 47
transportation, 39, 47, 77

unemployment, 18, 67, 82,
United Nations
 Educational, Scientific, and
 Cultural Organization
 (UNESCO), 9, 59, 61, 117, 119
Úsuga, Dairo Antonio (Otoniel), 49

vegetables, 5, 121, 123, 124, 126, 128
Venezuela, 25, 27, 46–47, 53, 63
villages, 64, 124
violence, 5, 23, 27, 29, 36, 76, 88, 95
volcanoes, 11, 16
voting, 34–35

wages, 27, 76
water, 30, 46–47, 55, 58–60, 68, 82, 107, 119, 121–122, 125, 127
welfare, 73, 111
wildlife, 12, 82, 128
workforce, 40
writing, 98

CULTURES OF THE WORLD®

Fourth Edition

Titles in This Series

Argentina

Japan

Brazil

Malaysia

Chile

Mexico

Colombia

Myanmar

India

Singapore

Indonesia

Venezuela

ISBN: 9781502666345



9 781502 666345