

*BIG FIVE*<sup>®</sup>  
TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

*Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys*

# Destination Information Guide

# Colombia



*The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.*

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## Welcome to the World of Big Five!

*Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.*



### Bogota, Colombia

Elevation: 8357 feet    Latitude: 04 42N    Longitude: 074 08W



#### Average Temperature

Years on Record: 21

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	56	55	56	57	57	57	56	55	55	56	56	56	55

#### Average High Temperature

Years on Record: 21

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	65	66	66	67	66	65	64	64	64	65	65	65	66

#### Average Low Temperature

Years on Record: 21

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	46	43	45	47	48	48	48	47	46	46	47	47	45

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## WEATHER

The climate is very warm and tropical on the coast and in the north, with a rainy season from May to November. This varies according to altitude. It is cooler in the upland areas and cold in the mountains. Bogotá is always spring-like, with cool days and crisp nights.

## TIME ZONES

GMT – 5 hours.

## PASSPORTS / VISAS

**Passports:** For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

**Visas:** Not required by U.S and Canadian nationals referred to in the chart above for stays of up to 180 days except the following: Many countries require that travelers obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Zierer Visa Service (ZVS) to process required visas for our passengers. The Visa Application Kit is included with your pre-trip confirmation packet. You can also download the necessary forms from the website: [www.zvs.com](http://www.zvs.com). Click on the “**members**” section to log in. For user name, enter *bigfive*, and the password is *55509*. You will enter the visa section for Big Five Tours & Expeditions. Here you will find a list of country-specific forms. You will also discover useful hints such as how to obtain a passport, adding passport pages, and other tips.

**Important:** Please check your passport before you submit it for your visa to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

**Please note:** Pages reserved for amendments & endorsements cannot be used for visas.

## AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Bogotá’s El Dorado International Airport is eight miles east of the city, and travel time is about 30 minutes. Facilities: Bank, ATMs, duty-free shop,

bars, restaurants, tourist information, pharmacist, and Internet access. Airport

**Departure Tax:** Transit passengers are exempt. US\$19, usually included in the ticket price.

## COLOMBIA CUSTOMS

**Duty Free:** The following goods may be taken into Colombia by people 18 years of age and older without incurring customs duty:

- 200 cigarettes and 50 cigars and up to 500g of tobacco.
- Two bottles of alcoholic beverage.
- A reasonable quantity of perfume.

## Prohibited Imports

Ammunition and firearms, unless prior authorisation has been obtained, and item(s) are declared on arrival. Vegetables, plants or plant material; meat and food products of animal origin.

Regulations may change without notice. For more information, you can check the Customs & Border Protection homepage at [www.customs.gov](http://www.customs.gov), or contact the Brazilian Embassy at 3009 Whitehaven St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20008; telephone (202) 238-2700.

## U.S. CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. For more information you can write U.S. Customs Service at Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, or check the Customs and Border Protection homepage at [www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml](http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml).

## HEALTH

International travelers should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Be prepared to take precautions against sunburn with sunscreen and lip balm. At the time of this writing, no inoculations are required for entry into Argentina

## From the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

CDC yellow fever vaccination recommendation for travelers to Colombia: For all travelers older than nine months of age. Travelers whose itinerary is

limited to the cities of Bogotá, Cali, or Medellín are at lower risk and may consider foregoing vaccination. Vaccination should be given 10 days before travel and at 10 year intervals if there is on-going risk.

**Yellow Fever:** Yellow fever inoculation is required if one of the following applies:

- If you are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.
- If you are traveling between countries, and one of those countries have areas where Yellow Fever can be found.

Before visiting Colombia, you may need to get the following vaccinations and medications for vaccine-preventable diseases and other diseases you might be at risk for at your destination: (Note: Your doctor or health-care provider will determine what you will need, depending on factors such as your health and immunization history, areas of the country you will be visiting, and planned activities.) To have the most benefit, see a health-care provider at least 4–6 weeks before your trip to allow time for your vaccines to take effect and to start taking medicine to prevent malaria, if you need it.

Even if you have less than 4 weeks before you leave, you should still see a health-care provider for needed vaccines, anti-malaria drugs and other medications and information about how to protect yourself from illness and injury while traveling.

CDC recommends that you see a health-care provider who specializes in Travel Medicine. Find a travel medicine clinic near you. If you have a medical condition, you should also share your travel plans with any doctors you are currently seeing for other medical reasons.

Be sure your routine vaccinations are up-to-date. Check the links below to see which vaccinations adults and children should get.

Routine vaccines for influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), polio, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), and diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) are given at all stages of life. Routine vaccines are recommended even if you do not travel. Although childhood diseases, such as measles, rarely occur in the United States, they are still common in many parts of the world. A traveler who is not vaccinated would be at

risk for infection.

**Other Risks:** Vaccinations against tuberculosis and hepatitis B are sometimes recommended. Hepatitis C occurs. Outbreaks of dengue fever sometimes occur.

Health facilities in the main cities are good. In rural areas, services can be very limited. Visitors travelling to jungle areas are advised to carry first aid kits. Travelers are strongly advised to take out full medical insurance.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE IS ESSENTIAL FOR ANY FOREIGN TRAVEL.**

*Check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. To receive these documents, call 404-332-4565 and follow the prompts. You can also get information on the CDC's website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).*

## **CLOTHING**

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

### **Required Clothing**

Lightweight clothes with waterproofs during the rainy season in coastal and northern areas. Medium-to heavyweights are needed in upland and mountainous areas.

## **LUGGAGE**

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions may apply for charter

flights. This will vary according to destination. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

## MONEY

Currency: Colombian Peso (COP; symbol Col\$) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of Col\$50,000, 20,000, 10,000, 5,000, 2,000 and 1,000. Coins are in denominations of Col\$1,000, 500, 200, 100, 50 and 20.

Currency Exchange: Currency should be exchanged at hotels, banks and bureau de change only, though most places charge commission. Travelers are advised against changing money on the street. The US Dollar is the easiest currency to exchange.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs: Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted, American Express and Diners Club less so. There are ATMs throughout the main cities; some will allow cash withdrawals using Visa, MasterCard or Cirrus.

Traveler's Checks: The most commonly accepted are those issued by American Express and Citicorp, and can be exchanged at banks, hotels or bureau de change. They are generally not accepted as a form of payment, other than at major hotels.

Currency Restrictions: Restrictions may apply.

## COMMUNICATION

**Language:** Spanish is the official language. Local dialects and some English, French, German and Italian are also spoken.

## ELECTRICITY

Electricity varies. Mostly 110 volts AC, 60Hz. American-style two-pin plugs.

## FOOD & DRINK

**Do not drink tap water.** All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated outside major cities. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth, cleaning contacts or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Milk may be unpasteurized in places and should be boiled. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably freshly prepared and served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Restaurants offer local and international cuisine. Local dishes are varied and tasty, with a touch of Spanish influence. Colombian wines are generally of poor quality. Chilean and Argentinean wines are available in restaurants at reasonable prices.

Table service is the norm. Colombians rarely drink alcohol (except lager) with meals. Gaseosa is the name given to non-alcoholic, carbonated drinks. There are no licensing hours.

National specialities:

- Ajiaco (chicken stew with herbs, different potato varieties, cream, corn and capers).
- Arepas (hard corn pancakes, eaten with savory toppings).
- Bandeja paisa (meat with avocado, rice, fried plantain and red beans), typical to Medellín.
- Mariscos (seafood) is a specialty on the Caribbean coast - lobsters in particular.

National drinks:

- Tinto (small black coffee) - but this term is also used to describe red wine or vino tinto.
- Aguila beer.
- Aguardiente (a fiery aniseed-flavored spirit). Canelazo (rum-based cocktail taken hot or cold).

Legal drinking age: 18.

**Note:** If you have food allergies or are on a special/restricted diet, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have any mobility restrictions, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability.

## TIPPING

Tipping: A 10% tip is usual in restaurants.

## SHOPPING

Goods to look out for include gold jewellery, art, antiques and leather products. Colombia produces first-grade **precious stones**, and the emeralds are among the most perfect in the world. Bogotá has numerous large shopping **malls** as well as several distinct shopping districts.

## **SOCIAL CUSTOMS IN COLOMBIA**

Normal courtesies should be observed. It is customary to offer guests black Colombian coffee, well sugared, called *tinto*. Spanish-style and culture can still be seen in parts of the country, although in Bogotá, North American attitudes and clothes are becoming prevalent. Casual clothes can be worn in most places; formal attire will be necessary for exclusive dining rooms and social functions. Smoking is allowed except where indicated.

## **SUGGESTED READING LIST**

Many comprehensive and readily available guides produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc., many books relating this destination. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Longitude Books at <http://www.longitudebooks.com> has an extensive collection of books, searchable by country. Below are some titles available from Barnes & Noble: [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com).

### **MAKING OF MODERN COLOMBIA: A NATION IN SPITE OF ITSELF**

by Georg Wilhelm Hegel, David Bushnell

Colombia's status as the fourth largest nation in Latin America and third most populous--as well as its largest exporter of such disparate commodities as emeralds, books, processed cocaine, and cut flowers--makes this, the first history of Colombia written in English, a much-needed book. It tells the remarkable story of a country that has consistently defied modern Latin American stereotypes--a country where military dictators are virtually unknown, where the political left is congenitally weak, and where urbanization and industrialization have spawned no lasting populist movement.

There is more to Colombia than the drug trafficking and violence that have recently gripped the world's attention. In the face of both cocaine wars and guerrilla conflict, the country has maintained steady economic growth as well as a relatively open and democratic government based on a two-party system. It has also produced an impressive body of art and literature. David Bushnell traces the process of state-building in Colombia from the struggle for independence, territorial consolidation, and reform in the nineteenth century to economic development and social and political democratization in the twentieth. He also sheds light on the modern history of Latin America as a whole.

The Colombian people are known for their vibrant nightlife, with busy restaurants, numerous parties and nightclubs filled with dancers twisting hips to the beats of salsa, cumbia and merengue. The busiest nights are Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Bogotá in particular offers ballet, opera, drama and music, as well as casinos.

### **MY COLOMBIAN WAR: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE COUNTRY I LEFT BEHIND**

by Silvana Paternostro

Growing up in the coastal city of Barranquilla, Colombia, Silvana Paternostro enjoyed a privileged childhood, a comfortable existence marred only briefly by fleeting encounters with the social inequalities and burgeoning drug trade that threatened the country's security. Soon, however, these shadowy threats intensified, boiling over into the most violent, most protracted, and most misunderstood civil war of our time.

In *My Colombian War*, Paternostro, now an acclaimed reporter, journeys back to the place where her family and closest friends still live, weaving authentic experience into a history of this ongoing conflict. Drawing on interviews with family members, rebel and paramilitary leaders, and a singular young American marine named Charlie, Paternostro portrays all sides of the conflict. Blending superb reportage with poignant personal stories, she offers a stunning, comprehensive narrative of Colombia's complicated past and present.

### **ALTA COLOMBIA: THE SPLENDOR OF THE MOUNTAINS**

by Cristobal Von Rothkirch, Juan Pablo Ruiz, Cristobal Von Rothkirch

Ever since they were formed in remote geological eras, emerging from the depths under the earth's

crust, the mountain ranges of our planet have appeared to dominate the world. Magical in their silence and seemingly indestructible, mountains have been viewed by people living near them as sacred places-dwellings of gods and birthplaces of forces that rule human destinies-and colossal manifestations of elemental power.

Ascending to the summits of the Andes, Cristobal von Rotkirch begins his photographic essay, *Alta Colombia*, on their slopes, in the world of the highlanders, portraying settlements and farm land, and revealing a way of life intimately linked with the mountains that remain always in view.

Leaving behind the world of mankind, the photographer captures the serene beauty and vitality of the Andean forests, transparent waters, vast open spaces, and endless skies. He guides the reader through the high moorlands, with their ecosystem so critical to the conservation of the water resources of the nation. There, millions of frailejones and other species of exotic plants stand, like taciturn armies, catching the mist and regulating the balance irrigation of the basins that originate there.

On the upper high moorlands, plant life disappears, giving way to ancient glacial beds and moraine and ultimately to perpetual snow. Viewing the photographs taken of these icy peaks in the clear mountain air the reader is forced to reflect on man's smallness, and to stand still, in awe of the severe beauty of land this landscape.

## **DRUG LORDS: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CALI CARTEL**

**by Ron Chepesiuk**

For 20 years, the Cali drug cartel, a vast criminal conspiracy, pumped thousands of tons of cocaine into the United States, laundered billions of dollars

in profits and was responsible for endemic political corruption and an untold number of murders and assassinations. It ultimately controlled 70 percent of the world's cocaine market, flooding towns and cities with the addictive white powder dubbed the "champagne of drugs."

Through organized violence, terrorist strategies, intimidation and bribery, the cartel became a major threat to Colombia's fragile stability. It also brought an unprecedented degree of strategy and planning to the drugs trade. It would take more than two decades and a global effort to bring it down.

In this first-ever account of the cartel's rise and fall, author Ron Chepesiuk provides a compelling insight into the history of international drug trafficking, organized crime and US drug policy. He draws vivid pictures of the gang's founders-Jose "the Chess Player" Londono and brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela-and reveals how they built their empire, carving up the massive US market with their rival Medellin Cartel: New York going to Cali, Miami to Medellin.

Unlike Medellin, headed by the vicious Pablo Escobar, the men from Cali kept their complex operation in the shadows. It grew quickly and came to operate like a multinational corporation. In time, they became too big to share their spoils and fought an indescribably bloody war with the Medellin mob, a war they ultimately won.

Written with the pace and vividness of a thriller, *Drug Lords* also illustrates the similarities between global traffickers and international terrorists and compares the current war on terror with the war on drugs.