TOUR CODE

CM2

ADVENTURESABROAD

COLOMBIA

with the Ecuadorian Amazon

18 days

Updated 05/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Cartagena*

Welcome to Cartagena, Colombia.

Founded in 1533 by Spaniard Don Pedro de Heredia, and named after the port of Cartagena in Spain's Murcia region, Cartagena de Indias was a major center of early Spanish settlement in the Americas, which had impressive development in the 18th century as the de facto capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. Today Cartagena beautifully preserves its colonial character with the assistance of UNESCO as a listed World Heritage Site.

Overnight in Cartagena. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Cartagena: City Tour*

Cartagena is undoubtedly one of Latin America's most beautiful cities, lost somewhere in time between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the Caribbean sea as a sparkling backdrop. Sir Francis Drake laid siege to the city but the fortress walls and cannons remain, making the area within the old walled city a living museum.

We start our tour at the Fortress of San Felipe de Barajas. The fort, which is on the way to the Old City, is the largest and strongest fortification the Spanish ever built in the colonies. From the fort, we head to the Old City, which is nearly encircled by walls that stand 4 m (12 ft) tall and are as thick as 18 m (60 ft) in some places. Their strength has preserved some fascinating colonial structures, many of which are situated around Plaza de Bolivar, a lovely, leafy plaza that contains an impressive statue of the liberator himself on horseback.

We stroll through the narrow shaded streets of the old walled city, where flowers cascade from overhanging wooden balconies. You'll find a photo opportunity at every corner. Peek into doorways to see the cool tiled patios hidden from other passersby. We also explore Plaza de Bolivar as well as Plaza de San Diego and Plaza de Santo Domingo.

Overnight in Cartagena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Cartagena: Gold Museum & Leisure Time*

This morning we visit the Gold Museum, an amazing and priceless national collection with interesting rooms that recreate the region's Amerindian ethnic groups. The "Strong Room" contains lovely gold jewelry, crafted in fine and exquisite detail, as well as other interesting pre-Colombian artifacts. Information is available in English providing explanations and visuals of the many fine displays found in this two story museum.

The balance of the day is free to enjoy and explore Cartagena. Later this afternoon, colonial carriages will pick us up at the hotel and take us for a very pleasant ride around the city. Our carriages will drop us at a very good restaurant for our evening meal.

Overnight in Cartagena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Cartagena - Bogota*

Today we fly to Bogota and transfer to our hotel.

Also known as Santa Fe de Bogota, or the 'Athens of the Americas' (owing to Bogotanos' reputation for politeness and civility), Bogota is set at an altitude of over 2600m (>8,000 feet) with high ranges of the Cordillera to the east. Downtown Bogota is filled with shops, business offices, cafes, and the banking district -- an interesting area to stroll around.

Overnight in Bogota. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Bogota: City Tour*

Bogota's name comes from the Chibcha word 'Bacata.' Bacata was the territory of the zipa (overlord) of the Chibcha or Muisca Indian tribes that inhabited the region before the arrival of the Spaniards. Gonzalo Jimenez of Quesada was the first European to set foot in the lands of the Chibchas nation in 1538.

Most of the sights of the city are in the historic central neighborhood of La Candelaria. Bogota is shaking off its unjust reputation as mad, bad and dangerous, and La Candelaria is the very heartbeat of this cultural and touristic renaissance. Our tour will take us around myriad streets in La Candelaria and into the vast Plaza de Bolivar. We will encounter some excellent examples of colonial architecture, such as the Catedral Primada de Colombia and San Bartolome College. We visit the Gold Museum, regarded as the finest collection of gold from pre-Hispanic times. It has some excellent, well laid out exhibitions and some explanations in English. On to the Botero Museum, home to some of Fernando Botero's finest pieces. Fernando Botero is the most widely recognized Colombian painter and sculptor.

In Candelaria there are many 'chocolaterias', where you can sample the famous Bogotano hot chocolate. Walking around La Candelaria streets, you will witness most traditions typical of 'old Bogota'.

Overnight in Bogota. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Bogota - Salento*

This morning we fly to Armenia and continue by road to our hotel near the town of Salento, located in the Cafetera, a charming region of rolling hillside carpeted with coffee bushes and plantations. The Cafetera is widely considered the heart and soul of Colombia -- its cultural epicentre. With every turn, spectacular panoramas emerge, from the rolling hillsides of fertile coffee plantations to plunging valleys and bold elevations. Campesino, or rural, life continues as it has done for centuries, with the cultivation and harvest of coffee, plantains (a type of banana) and many other fruits and vegetables.

Later we visit one of the small villages in the area, as well as the Butterfly House (mariposario), home to some one thousand five hundred butterflies from thirty different species. Walking around the six hundred species of plants and trees you will understand the diverse and rich ecology of Colombia.

Overnight near Salento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Salento: Valle de Cocora*

Today we visit Valle de Cocora to see the Palma de Cera growing on the green hillsides. The Palma de Cera (wax palm), grows abundantly along the hillsides, towering high and making for the rather strange but beautiful scenery. The Valle de Cocora belongs to Colombia's coffee region, a tourist destination of increasing popularity for its historical and ecological richness. Having shed years of isolation imposed by surrounding civil war and the central Andean range that marks its eastern limit, coffee country has become the heart of Colombia's nascent "rural tourism" industry that fuses history, ecology and know-your-roots national pride. We also visit a hacienda with an excellent array of Heliconia specimens.

We also visit the town of Salento, one of the oldest towns in the department of Quindio, and probably the smallest. In the colonial era, the main route from Popayan to Bogota travelled over the Quindio Pass, going through the current-day site of Salento. In 1830, Simon Bolivar travelled the route and, for its poor condition and strategic importance, ordered that it be upgraded. However, work did not start until 1842 after the Guerra de los Supremos. Political prisoners from that war were sent from Panama, Antioquia and Cauca to upgrade and maintain the road. After completing their sentences they were given a block of land in the region.

Overnight near Salento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Eje Cafetera*

Today we learn, step-by-step, everything about the coffee producing process, from cultivation to harvesting to cup. You can directly participate in the process; collecting the ripe beans from the trees, placing them in the sun to dry on bamboo stretchers, take part in the manual roasting process, grinding and final proper preparation.

The balance of the day is yours to enjoy at leisure. Also on the grounds of our hotel is The Canopy, a 2-kilometre track with seven stations, between which you to glide across the coffee plantations, bamboo stands and heliconias, at speeds of up to 80 km per hour! The Canopy is the highest and longest in Colombia (Optional activity, approximately $17, third-party general insurance included).

Overnight near Salento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Salento - Villa de Leyva*

Today we fly to Bogota and drive to Villa de Leyva, one of Colombia's colonial treasures and a popular place for those with enough wealth to buy a traditional house in the country. Villa de Leyva was declared a national monument in 1954. The cobbled streets and whitewashed buildings, with their wood framed windows and balconies often straining under the weight of flower pots and plants, make for some excellent photographic opportunities.

We have a tour of the town and some of the main historical venues, including the Iglesia Parroquial, facing onto the plaza major. This plaza is reputed to be the largest town square in Colombia. There will always be time to meander the streets and find out for yourself what draws so many people to this little town.

Overnight in Villa de Leyva. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Villa de Leyva: El Fossil & Muisca Observatory*

Today we have a trip El Fossil and then onto the Muisca Observatory, both of which are located only a few kilometers from the town itself. Although now located in the Andes chain, Villa de Leyva was once deep below the ocean. When the Andean range rose it brought with it an abundance of fossils, including the 170 million year old Kronosauras, otherwise known as El Fossil. Also on display are a number of other fossils found around a very small area of Boyaca.

From the El Fossil Museum we make our way to Muisca Observatory, El Infierno, an astronomical observatory for the Muiscans and a place of worship. The observatory is home to thirty cylindrical stone monoliths. Muisca refers to a nation of the Chibchan Culture that formed the Muisca Confederation encountered by the Spanish at the time of the conquest of what is now part of central Colombia in 1537. The Muiscas used the observatory to plan planting seasons and harvests.

Overnight in Villa de Leyva. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Villa de Leyva: Raquira & Monasteria de la Candelaria*

From Villa de Leyva, our half-day trip to Raquira is the perfect opportunity to buy artisan goods and maybe learn how to make clay pots for which Raquira is so famous. Raquira is another pretty little town with colourful houses and an abundance of pottery, hammocks and sweet dulces. We will watch a short demonstration and have the opportunity to try your hand at making some pottery yourself.

We also visit the even smaller town of La Candelaria and its monastery, the Monasteria de la Candelaria, founded in 1660. We can take a tour with the monks.

In the afternoon we have time to relax in the main square, watch the world go by over a Colombian coffee. This evening we hope to have a traditional BBQ dinner and music.

Overnight in Villa de Leyva. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Villa de Leyva - Catedral de Sal - Bogota*

Today we drive back to Bogota via Zipaquira and the Catedral de Sal. This cathedral is an engineering feat under the earth's surface, part of the salt mines that date back from the Muisca period. It has been thoughtfully lit and enchanting music is piped through its internal spaces. Curving and twisting tunnels descend into the Roman Catholic church, passing 14 small chapels representing the stations of the cross, illustrating the events of Jesus' last journey. Each station has a cross and several kneeling platforms carved into the salt structure.

Back in Bogota we take the cable car to Cerro Monserrate. Some amazing views can be had from this great vantage point. Monserrate is crowned with its easily recognizable church and is a place of pilgrimage due to its statue of Senor Caido, the fallen Christ.

Overnight in Bogota. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Bogota, Colombia - Quito, Ecuador*

Today we fly from Bogota to Quito and transfer to our hotel. Quito (2788m / 9,200 feet) is Ecuador's lovely capital city, nestled against Pichincha Volcano high in the Andes.

Overnight in Quito. Reina Isabel Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Quito - Amazon*

Today we fly to the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Cuyabeno Lodge, our preferred accommodation.

Our 30-minute flight takes us from Quito to Lago Agrio where we will meet our naturalist guide and continue by bus to the Cuyabeno Reserve bridge where we will continue our trip by boat for an other hour and a half. From the boat we will have the chance to see some of the wildlife of the reserve, like monkeys and many bird species such as the colourful macaw

Cuyabeno National Park is the largest protected area of Ecuador, covering about 603,380 hectares of mostly pristine jungle. The lakes and narrow rivers are the secret of wildlife visibility of Cuyabeno. Throughout the Amazon region, most national parks lack narrow rivers and can only be seen from very wide branches of the Amazon river and from trails through the jungle. In Cuyabeno, on the other hand, the shores are so close on both sides that you feel that you are part of the jungle. The Cuyabeno Amazon Rainforest Lodge is one of the longest established jungle lodges within the Amazon region and is operated by international conservationists who helped create and protect the park.

Seven detached cabins made of wood with thatched roofs scattered throughout the grounds, each sleeping two people in double or twin beds. All rooms have a balcony or terrace and private bathrooms with hot water showers.

Upon arrival we'll have some welcome drinks and, after a little break, go for the first jungle walk on the Chorongo Trail where we can learn more about the local flora and fauna. After dinner an optional night walk.

Please note that groups of fewer than 8 participants will not be accompanied by an Adventures Abroad Tour Leader for this Amazon portion (you will be very capably looked after by lodge staff & guides).

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 15 *Amazon*

You will experience a pristine rainforest gallery that is home to 1,500 species of trees, hundreds of climbing vines, and exotic flowers, as well as 550 species of tropical birds, 13 species of monkeys and 1,000 beautiful butterflies. Guides with extensive knowledge of the Amazon wildlife and biodiversity can give guests the true experience of the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle. All of our jungle adventures will be guided by a naturalist guide.

This morning we'll visit the canopy tower where we will have the chance to spot more bird and mammal species. This afternoon we can enjoy an easy canoe ride and perhaps fish some piranhas! After dinner, an optional canoe trip to see some caimans.

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 16 *Amazon*

Today we visit a local Siona community, an integral part of any complete tour of the Cuyabeno Reserve. This ethnic group lives along the Cuyabeno River in a community named Puerto Bolivar.

You will be able to experience native culture as it has existed unchanged for millennia. The local Shaman will instruct you in some of their religious practices and explain their medicinal knowledge, passed down from ancestors whose

intimate relationship and deep understanding of the natural resources and rhythms of the jungle are the basis for many of our modern pharmaceuticals.

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 17 *Amazon - Quito: City Tour*

Today we catch the morning flight back to Quito.

On arrival in Quito we will embark on a walking tour of old Spanish Colonial Quito, preserved by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. As we enter the streets of Old Quito we step into the past, surrounded by centuries-old architecture. We will see Quito's most beautiful religious buildings, including the cathedral, the Independence Plaza, San Francisco Church, and visit one of Quito's most impressive religious buildings, La Compania Church, whose ornate facade and solid gold altars make it one of the most famous of South American churches.

Overnight in Quito. Reina Isabel Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Departure*

Departure from Quito.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.