Tour Code
CM1

ADVENTURESABROAD

COLOMBIAN HEARTLANDS

Medellin, Cartagena & the Cafetera

12 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Bogota

Today we arrive in Bogota, Colombia 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 (8,600 feet) with high ranges of the Cordillera to the east. This captivating urban center has a rich cultural life and beautiful architecture. Like any self-respecting capital city, Bogotá is the country's capital of art, academia, history, culture and government. This is Colombia's beating heart.

Overnight in Bogota.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Bogota: Paloquemao Market, Cerro Monserrate & Gold Museum

This morning we will visit the Plaza de Mercado de Paloquemao, the most famous flower and food market in Bogota. This is the focal point where the produce of the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, the fertile Andes and the tropical jungle meld together. The market is divided into sections: flowers; fruit, vegetables and aromatic herbs; and meat and fish. A visit here will engage all of your senses, and provides us with a great insight into Colombian customs and local living in Bogota.

Next we take a cable car to Cerro Monserrate. Some amazing views can be had from this great vantage point (weather dependant). Monserrate is crowned with its easily recognizable church and is a place of pilgrimage due to its statue of Senor Caido, the fallen Christ. Cerro de Monserrate is sometimes called the 'mountain-guardian' of Bogota, and has been a place of religious pilgrimage since colonial times.

Afterward we discover the best spots of street art in Bogota, where the most famous artist of the graffiti around the world have come to out their ideas in the walls of the city. Continue to the old quarter of La Candelaria and walk through the Plaza de Bolivar, stop at the well-known 200-year-old restaurant, La Puerta Falsa, to try the local typical sweets and desserts. We also visit the Botero Museum, home to some of Fernando Botero's finest pieces. Fernando Botero is the most widely recognized Colombian painter and sculptor. Today the museum houses one of Latin America's most important international art collections. The museum consists of over 100 works of Fernando Botero, and some of the other highlights include works by Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, and Henri Matisse.

We finish our day at the world-famous Gold Museum, regarded as the finest collection of gold from pre-Hispanic times. This museum has some excellent, well laid out exhibitions with explanations in English.

Overnight in Bogota.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Bogota: Catedral de Sal & Paso Fino Horse Ranch

This morning we travel north to Zipaquira where we visit the Catedral de Sal. The Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá (Catedral de Sal de Zipaquirá) is an underground Roman Catholic Church built within the tunnels of a salt mine 200 meters underneath a mountain. This is not only a popular destination with travellers, but also an important place of pilgrimage in the country.

This cathedral is an engineering feat under the earth's surface, part of the salt mines that date back from the Muisca period. 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.

Upon leaving Zipaquirá, we'll visit a traditional hacienda, one of the most traditional estates on the outskirts of Bogotá. Here you will enjoy the best of the local gastronomy by trying the typical ajiaco (chicken and potato soup) for lunch, and afterwards attend to private and exclusive exhibition of the famous Colombian creole "paso fino" horses.

We return to our hotel (due to our early departure tomorrow and included lunch today, dinner is on your own this evening).

Overnight in Bogotá.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Bogota - Fly to Cafetera Region & Coffee Experience

Early this morning we transfer to Bogota's airport for our 30-minute flight to Pereira, one of the cities located near the Colombian Coffee Triangle, a UNESCO listed area known for its breathtaking deep green landscapes and the unique culture and traditions of the region. 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.

Once landed, we'll have a hands-on coffee experience covering the cultivation, harvesting, roasting, and tasting processes of coffee production, from the seed to the roasted bean. The rich volcanic soil together with the climate and the topography make this region ideal for the cultivation of quality coffee.

Our overnight point is Salento, situated in the heart of the coffee region. This is one of the oldest towns in the department of Quindio and probably the smallest. Startlingly well- preserved, Salento offers us an opportunity to enjoy a traditional coffee settlement. Set amid gorgeous green mountains, this small town survives on coffee production, trout farming and, increasingly, tourists, who are drawn by its quaint streets, typical paisa architecture, and its proximity to the spectacular Valle de Cocora.

PLEASE NOTE that hotels in the area are relatively small and simpler with respect to the amenities on offer. Our preferred choice is clean and comfortable and quite charming, but please do not expect a lot of "frills" or assistance with your luggage. We may also need to walk a short distance (15-20 minutes) to the restaurant where we will have our evening meals; we suggest bringing a small flashlight and, as always, sturdy walking shoes with well-treaded soles.

Overnight near Salento.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Salento: Barbas Bremen Nature Reserve

We begin our day by visiting the reserve of Barbas Bremen, an easily-accessible nature reserve filled with hundreds of wild species, such as the howler monkey, butterflies, and myriad birds. Along our +/- 2 km leisurely walk, we'll explore the surrounding river, and forest ecosystems (your Tour Leader will provide more details on the nature of our excursion the night before).

Overnight near Salento.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Salento - Cocora Valley - Fly to Medellin

This morning we visit Valle de Cocora located to the east of Salento. Here we will enjoy a walk in the valley and see the famous Palma de Cera (wax palm) growing abundantly along the hillsides.* Towering high, this palm makes for the rather strange but beautiful scenery. Back in the 80s, this place was declared a sanctuary for the protection of Colombia's national tree, also home of the endemic yellow-eared parrot.

We then return to our hotel, check out, and catch our flight to Medellin, transferring to our hotel located in the modern neighborhood of El Poblado.

This is Colombia's 'second city' and the capital of 'Paisa' culture. Medellín is a forward-thinking city, which has reinvented itself since the dark days of the drug cartels. With Colombia's most extensive integrated public transport system, this city is a 'pioneer' in terms of social reform and offers a slick uptown district with an international feel.

Overnight in Medellin.

* Please note that viewing the trees involves the need to walk on hilly terrain some distance away from where our transport is parked. The surface is "natural" (ie not paved) and can be slippery if it has rained. By this point your Tour Leader will be familiar with your abilities and, if you have concerns about your suitability, please consult with them prior to the excursion.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Medellin: City & Area Touring

Today we will enjoy a guided tour through Medellin, the "City of Eternal Spring". We walk through the historical and cultural centers where we learn about Colombia's controversial yet fascinating history.

Having gone through several periods of significant transformation, the Medellin of today is an inclusive city, where every inhabitant has the space to express themselves and participate in social change. Much of this is due to the efforts made to improve the quality of life of Medellin's inhabitants following the difficult decades of the 80s and 90s. On our visit, you'll have the chance to learn more about this city and the art, music, and food culture that has developed during its gradual transformation.

We enjoy the urban street art in the comunas of San Javier, the typical and avant-garde street food on the boulevard of Parque del Rio, and the massive sculptures by Fernando Botero in the heart of Medellin's city center. We continue to the Medellin Memorial Center, a blast from the past, displaying the dramatic history of cartels and gangs that struggled for control of the city.

After a break for lunch we head to Parque Arvi, a large natural reserve located above the city that has several paths that weave their way through magical forests and amazing landscapes of the Andes Central Mountain Range. After arriving by cable car from Medellín, we visit the village of Santa Elena, best known for its large, ornate flower arrangements displayed annually at Medellin's Flower Festival.

The people of Santa Elena have learned how to create colourful shapes, figures and even faces out of flowers – a tradition that has been handed down to them over many years. On this visit, you'll even get a chance to chat with a flower farmer, or silletero, and stroll through a flower producing farm, taking in all the lovely fragrances.

Overnight in Medellin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Medellin & Guatape

Today we get away from the hustle and bustle of Medellin with an excursion to the nearby (2- hour drive, each way) village of Guatape.

Guatape was relocated to its present spot after the construction of the Guatape hydroelectric dam. Since its foundation, all the inhabitants of the town began the tradition of decorating their houses with the unique stories of their families, their livelihoods, and the events that have marked their lives. As we explore the streets of Guatape, you'll be impressed with the amazing, colourful walls and original art. You'll also have the chance to visit the big rock of El Peñol, a huge monolith that faces a picturesque lake, the perfect postcard shot of the day.

We return to Medellin.

Overnght in Medellin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Medellin - Fly to Cartagena: Old Town Walking Tour

This morning we fly to Cartagena.

Located on Colombia's northern coast and facing the Caribbean Sea, Cartagena de Indias is the undisputed queen of the Caribbean coast. 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. Today Cartagena beautifully preserves its colonial character with the assistance of UNESCO as a listed World Heritage Site.

This afternoon we'll discover Cartagena's rich history and beautiful colonial architecture. You will learn about the culture of Cartagena and its interesting architecture, and visit such beautiful sites as Plaza de Bolívar, the Cathedral of Cartagena, San Pedro Claver Square, and San Pedro Church. We will stroll through the narrow shaded streets of the old walled city, where flowers cascade from overhanging wooden balconies. The Old City is nearly encircled by walls that stand 4m (12ft) tall and are as thick as 18m (60ft) in some places. Their strength has preserved some fascinating colonial structures.

Cartagena's historic center is flat and relatively small, making it the perfect city for walking. You'll find a photo opportunity at every corner. Peek into doorways to see the cool tiled patios hidden from other passersby.

Overnight in Cartagena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Cartagena: San Fernando Fortress & La Popa Monastery

Cartagena is built on several islands located at the end of a bay; the marshes that originally surrounded these islands were filled in order to link the land to the coast. Several bridges provide access to and from the island, and one of these leads directly to the old city. A number of lagoons separate the suburban areas from the old city, whose centre is surrounded by magnificent ramparts.

Today we visit San Fernando Fortress, located on Cartagena's island of Tierra Bomba at a strategic location for Spaniards to defend the city from corsairs. The most representative sight here is the Fortress of San Rafael, a well-preserved gem that endured many battles in its time.

We'll also visit the fortress of San Felipe, a masterpiece of military strategy, before heading up to la Popa Monastery, located on the highest spot of Cartagena, where we can have a 360° view of both modern and historic Cartagena.

Overnight in Cartagena (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Cartagena: Palenque & Leisure Time

This morning we travel two hours to San Basilio de Palenque, a centuries old village and the first place registered as a free town for the slaves in all of the Americas, over 100 years before slavery was abolished. With the insight of a local guide, we are able to enter rustic homes, try local foods and drinks, hear traditional music, learn about a UNESCO recognized language and culture, and rub shoulders with some of the friendliest people in the country.
After about a 90-minute visit, we return to Cartagena by way of Bocagrande and Manga.

You are then free to find lunch and enjoy an afternoon of exploration before we meet later this afternoon, when colonial carriages will take us for a ride around the city before our final dinner.

This afternoon may want to visit the local Gold Museum with its amazing and priceless national collections, and interesting rooms that recreate the region's Amerindian ethnic groups. Though small, this museum offers a fascinating collection from the Zenu (also known as Sinu) people, who inhabited the region of the present-day departments of Bolívar, Córdoba, Sucre and northern Antioquia before the Spanish Conquest.

Overnight in Cartagena.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

Departure from Cartagena.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast