



COLOMBIA
COUNTRY GUIDE

elevate destinations

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PURPOSE OF THE COUNTRY GUIDE

In this document you will find a plethora of information that will be useful during your journey to Colombia. The information listed in this guide includes cultural guidelines, communication tips and tricks, health and safety recommendations, and so much more! Please note that all information specific to your trip, such as inclusions and exclusions, staff contact numbers, flight recommendations, etc. is listed in your Online Trip Portal. For any questions unanswered by either the country guide or the online portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to an Elevate staff member. We hope that this document proves to be helpful and that you are getting excited for your journey to Colombia!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Passport

Travelers to Colombia should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least 6 months beyond the end of their intended stay, and should have at least 2 blank (unstamped) visa pages in their passport to enter the country. The last 2 amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps. If you are out of Visa pages, you will need to renew your passport, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible.

We recommend travelers scan a copy of your passport and email it to yourself. This way you always have a copy if something happens to it while traveling.

Visa

Citizens from the United States can obtain a tourist visa upon arrival. It is valid for 90 days from the date of entry and is free.

Medical & Travel Insurance

Elevate Destinations requires that travelers purchase medical insurance that will cover costs of any health care while in Colombia and Covid-related medical expenses and costs associated with quarantine. Proof of your medical insurance is required to participate in this program.

We highly recommend travelers purchase Travel Insurance with "cancel for any reason" (CFAR) coverage which provides more robust coverage for cancellation. To be eligible for CFAR coverage, travelers must purchase it within 1 to 21 days of their first trip payment. Every policy has different requirements for this so please verify with a specific provider.

Below are two insurance brokers that Elevate Destinations recommends:

- [Yonder Travel Insurance](#)
Email: hello@insureyonder.com
Phone Number: 855-358-6433 (M-F 8:30-5:00 CT)

- Travel Insurance Center (Dan Drennan)
Email: dan@travelinsurancecenter.com
Phone Number: 1-866-979-6753 (extension 3621)

Guests may acquire travel insurance through or any other travel insurance company of their choosing. Elevate Destinations recommends that travelers evaluate the insurance options available for their needs, and inquire with providers about insurance that will cover them for all Covid-related expenses including quarantine costs while abroad.

Covid Protocols

Covid Vaccination: Elevate Destinations requires that all travelers are fully vaccinated and up to date on any doses of the the Covid-19 vaccine they are eligible for. This means many travelers will need a booster.

Covid Protocols: As Covid is continually evolving, please check your Online Trip Portal for the most up to date information regarding entry requirements and Covid protocols for your specific trip.

Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in Colombia. Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit [the CDC Website for Colombia](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region, and other tips for staying healthy and safe.

Other Health Considerations

If you take any prescription medication or vitamins regularly, we recommend bringing enough to last you the entire trip plus a few extra days, just in case. Be sure to pack any prescription medicine in their original bottle with the actual prescription label that lists the drug name clearly and keep it in your carry-on luggage.

Communications

Wifi: In most places you will visit in Colombia, wifi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Oftentimes, connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in individual rooms. In remote places or if you are doing a trek or hike, you will likely not have access to phone service or wifi.

International Calls: If you are in Colombia and trying to reach a number *outside* of the country, dial the country code + [telephone number]. To call numbers in Colombia *from* the U.S. dial +57 + [telephone number].

Staying connected: Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smart Phone apps:** Apps such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Viber (when Wifi is available).
2. **Getting an international calling package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges.
3. **Use a local phone/ SIM card:** Best for making calls within Colombia as international calls can get expensive. Local SIM cards are inexpensive, can be found at a variety of stores, and often have pay-as-you-go plans where you can “top up” your credit for use in the country. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards.

Safety Recommendations

Your guide will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- Keep all valuables in the hotel safe.
- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all time. Keep bags in front of you in crowds, and on your lap when at restaurants.
- Pay attention: avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand.
- Be vigilant when crossing roads - Pedestrians do not have the right of way.
- Stick with the group.
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements.
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings.
- Do not wear expensive or sentimentally valuable jewelry while traveling.
- We encourage you to register with STEP (see below).

Smart Traveler Tip!

We recommend that all travelers from the USA sign-up for the [State Department’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)! This is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in case of an emergency. Enrolling in this program has enormous benefits in case of an emergency while abroad:

- You will receive information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination
- Enrolling lets the U.S. Embassy in that country know that you are there and helps them contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family-related.

Essential & Emergency Documents

In case of emergency, it is advisable to have copies of your important documents with you and leave with a loved one at home. We also recommend taking a photo of your important documents to have on your phone. Also email a scanned copy to yourself to have available online anywhere. Here are the essential documents:

- Passport
- Medical & travel insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number
- Covid Vaccine Card
- Details of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency
- Elevate Destinations' Emergency Contact list - this will be provided closer to your trip
- Bank and credit card details (including phone numbers)

Money

The local currency in Colombia is the Colombian Peso (COP). When in Colombia, you may be able to use a credit or debit card in some places, though many small shops or places in remote settings you will only be able to use cash.

For your extra personal costs and shopping, bringing USD \$20 - \$40 per day is a good rule of thumb.

Inform your guide if you need to go to an ATM to withdraw cash in the local currency or exchange money. We suggest that you limit the amount of money you convert into local currencies and exchange only what you think you will spend before leaving any foreign country. If you are exchanging money, please be aware that only paper currency will be accepted for exchange, and bills must be crisp, clean, and new.

Cash: Colombia is primarily a cash economy, so we recommend bringing the funds you will need for personal spending in cash or withdrawing cash out of ATMs in country.

It is recommended to travel with \$100 - \$300 USD in case ATM machines are not working (see note below). If you bring USD, your bills should be:

- **New** (printed in the last 5 years)
- **In pristine condition** (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)
- **Larger denominations** (the \$50 and \$100 bills attract the best exchange rate).

Forex bureaus, banks, and ATMs are available in most major cities, and your guide can help with currency exchange throughout your trip.

Change: Ask for smaller bills when you change money, or use your large bills at large shops to receive more change. In many cases, people (local vendors especially) don't have change.

Credit Cards: Credit cards (Visa preferred) are acceptable in larger establishments, while cash is more appropriate everywhere else. Most merchants will charge an additional 3-5% of the bill for a credit card transaction.

ATM/Debit Cards: You can use your debit card to withdraw money from ATMs.

Note: ATMs can be finicky, and may not work on a given hour or day. We recommend traveling with 1-3 crisp \$100 bills to be exchanged in the case that ATMs are not working.

IN-COUNTRY INFO

Time

Colombia is in the Colombia Time Zone (COT // GMT - 5) and does not observe daylight-savings. From November through March, Colombia is on the same time zone as Eastern Standard Time (EST - New York). From March to November, Colombia is one hour behind Eastern Standard Time.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Consider downloading a conversion app for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling. Here are some that we like: Units - Free Unit Converter, Convert Units for Free, Converter+, GlobeConvert

Electricity

Colombia uses 110 volt electricity with 2-pronged outlets, the same as the United States. The plugs do not always have the same three prongs, so bring an adapter if your chargers are three-pronged.

Water

There are some places in Colombia where it is safe to drink tap water and other places where it is not safe. In large cities like Bogota or Medellin it is safe to drink tap water. It is not safe to drink tap water anywhere on the coast.

Elevate Destinations encourages travelers to pack a reusable water bottle to fill up with clean drinking water. These are large water canteens that you can fill your water bottles from. When in areas where it is unsafe to drink tap water, some people also choose to brush their teeth with clean drinking water but this is up to personal preference based on how hardy you feel your stomach is. In these areas, not use ice, unless you know it was made from clean drinking water. Bottled water and soft drinks will be supplied at all meals.

Similarly, we recommend that travelers eat foods that have been cooked well. Fresh vegetables and fruits bear the risk of having been washing in contaminated water. Fruits you can peel are usually safe (i.e. bananas and papaya).

Toilet Paper

We recommend carrying toilet paper or tissues with you as some bathrooms, especially in more remote areas or restaurants, may not have any. Please also remember that in Colombia you are required to throw the toilet paper into the bin provided and **not into the toilet** itself, as this can cause problems with the delicate sewage system.

Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that much of the developing world waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often unavailable. To minimize your impact on the country you are visiting, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no Trace — everything that you bring with you should go home with you.
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room!)
- Avoid packing with plastic baggies and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill
- Remove packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go

Local Cuisine & Drink

Colombia is diverse in its landscapes, music, climate and of course its food! With lush forests and fertile lands, it is an ideal place to grow fresh fruits and vegetables all year round. The food culture in Colombia is influenced by the country's indigenous communities, Latin and Spanish cuisines and African flavors.

- **Bandeja Paisa:** Colombia's unofficial national dish, though most popular in the Antioquia region (Medellin, Santa Fe, Jardin). This meat-heavy, mega-calorie meal was originally devised to provide farmers with enough energy to keep working throughout the day. A bandeja paisa typically comes with rice, plantain, arepa, avocado, minced meat, chorizo, black sausage, fried pork rind and a fried egg.
- **Arepas:** Another staple in Colombia! Thick and flat corn cakes made with either yellow or white flour. Often eaten at breakfast with eggs and hogao (sautéed tomato, onions and garlic). There are many different types of arepas - arepas con queso (arepas with cheese) - arepas de huevo (arepas with egg) - arepas de chocolate.
- **Empanadas:** Deep fried stuffed pastries with meat, chicken or cheese .
- **Sancocho:** A traditional stew / soup made with chicken, pork or beef and yuca, corn, potatoes and plantains. You can often find people cooking sancocho out on the streets to enjoy with their families on the weekend.
- **Chicharron:** Fried pork belly, a hearty dish covered in onions, bay leaves and seasoning.

- **Bunelos:** A popular street food and absolute staple - a bundle is a fried dough ball that is sweet and savory.
- **Pan de Bono:** A small, round bread-like bite made with yuca flour and sweet cheese.
- **Coconut Rice:** Mainly prepared on the coast, rice with fresh coconut and coconut milk is served with a traditional coast meal of fish, plantains and salad.
- **Peascado Frito:** Most common on the coast, the whole fish is fried and served with its skin and head intact. In Colombia, the fish is usually mojarra or red snapper.
- **Cazuela de Mariscos:** Another seafood dish most common in the coastal regions.
- **Fresh Fruit:** The fruits found in Colombia are some of the best in the world! To name a few - maracuya (passion fruit), lulo (sour, “little orange” often found in cocktails and fresh juices), and of course delicious tropical fruits - papaya, mango, pineapple.
- **Chocolate con queso:** Hot chocolate, with good quality cacao in Colombia is another must-try! In many of the quaint towns, you may find it is served with cheese to melt inside.
- **Coffee** - There’s nothing like a good cup of Colombian coffee!

Weather Conditions

The climate in Colombia is as diverse as the country’s landscape and wildlife, and depends on the city or region you are visiting and on the time of year. Because of its close proximity to the equator, many parts of Colombia experience tropical weather patterns. Cities or regions at a higher elevation, such as Bogota and the mountain towns outside of Medellin can be quite cool and rainy.

- **Caribbean Coast:** The temperatures range from 73°F to 90°F on the Caribbean Coast all year round. There are three main seasons in the Caribbean Coast
 - Dry Season: December - April
 - Mid-Rain Season: May - August
 - Rainy Season: October & November
- **Andean Region (Medellin & Bogota):** The temperature is stable in this region throughout the year, though it can vary depending on the altitude. Most months are also the same, in terms of rain, though April, May, October and November tend to experience the most rain.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of traveling. Please take note of the information below to better understand and respect these cultural differences in Colombia.

- **Greetings:** Simply saying “hola” is considered too casual. Other greetings to use instead include “buenos días” (good morning), “buenas tardes” (good afternoon), and “buenas noches” (good evening).
- **Music:** A very important part of Colombian culture, there are more than 1,000 music rhythms grouped in 158 genres in Colombia! Click [here](#) for 8 different Spotify playlists to start to get a feel for the sounds of Colombia before your trip.

- **Pace of life:** The pace of Colombian life is slower and more relaxed than most travelers are accustomed to. Punctuality is not strict. This requires some getting used to, and a willingness to adapt to a different lifestyle. Travel with an open-mind and flexibility, and expect that things may start late.
- **Slamming Doors:** Avoid slamming car doors or doors to someone’s house unless it will not shut without force. Slamming doors is considered to be very rude in Colombia.
- **Noise:** Colombia can be a country full of noise - the streets, especially in cities, are often filled with music and people. It is a country full of celebrations and social gatherings!
- **Gender Considerations:** Colombian culture is still rather “macho”, and women are often treated differently than men. Cat calls are common towards women and it is advised that one should not engage and continue moving. Women should not walk alone at night or visit bars/clubs without a companion.
- **Street Vendors:** There will be street vendors everywhere you go in Colombia, selling anything and everything! Even if you do not want to purchase anything, it is polite to greet them by saying “hola” or tell them “mañana” (tomorrow). It is very rude in Colombia to ignore people.
- **Begging:** As in many developing countries, begging is common in Colombia. See our Responsible Travel Tips section below for more information.

Language

The official language of Colombia is Spanish. Try brushing up on these useful terms and phrases before your trip!

English Phrase	Spanish
Hello	Hola, buenos dias
How are you?	¿Como estas?
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You're welcome	De nada
Yes	Si
No	No
Excuse me (I'm sorry)	Lo siento
What is your name?	¿Como se llama?
My name is ____.	Me llamo _____.

English Phrase	Spanish
Nice to meet you.	Mucho gusto.
Where is the Toilet?	¿Dónde está el baño?
Goodbye	Adios
Is this water pure?	¿Es potable el agua? Or ¿Se puede tomar el agua?
Enjoy (used before eating)	Buen provecho
Tomorrow	Mañana

Photography

Colombia is a beautiful country, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first - this is a sign of respect. You can do this with gestures or ask your guide to translate. The only exception to this is when you are photographing a public scene with a lot of people in it, aiming at no one in particular. Because so many local people are asked for permission to be photographed, many will expect a tip or an outright fee for this. Always be considerate of anyone's desire not to be photographed. There are some places where photography is prohibited, and these areas are usually marked. If you are uncertain about whether or not photography is permitted, your guide will be there to advise you.

For more ethical photography tips, read Elevate Destinations' blog piece [here](#).

Human Trafficking in Travel

Elevate Destinations has signed *the Code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism* and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A "child" is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using this form](#); alternatively, you can email protect@ecpat.net to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate's values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back, and more on our website at www.elevatedestinations.com. Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes

ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback, and encouragement!

Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [Native Energy Carbon Calculator](#), and we encourage you to offset your international flights as well.

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Try to observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and “thank you” in the local language.
- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants, and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs.
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!
- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails, and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.
- **Use alternatives to single-use plastics:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible – check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts, and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more, rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.

Smart Traveler Tip!

In travel, especially in the developing world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible, and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.