

COLOMBIA AT A GLANCE

POPULATION: Est. 47,698,524

LANGUAGES: Spanish

PREDOMINANT RELIGIONS: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant) and indigenous beliefs

TIME ZONE: One hour behind Eastern Daylight Time (New York City)

TELEPHONE CODES: 57, country code; 1, Bogotá city code; 2, Cali city code; 4, Medellín city code; 5, Cartagena and Barranquilla city code; 6, Pereira/Armenia/Manizales city code

Colombia could be South America's best-kept secret, if it weren't for a lingering history of drug trafficking and kidnappings. But it remains a volatile and dangerous country, trapped in a cycle of violence. There's been no final act in the bloody drama being played out by drug lords, terrorists, guerrillas, vigilantes and corrupt politicians. Ordinary citizens — and on rare occasions, travelers — continue to be caught in the crossfire, despite ongoing negotiations between the country's president and its guerrilla and right-wing paramilitary groups. Yet travelers return from Colombia raving about the beauty and the hospitable, friendly people.

COMPASSION IN COLOMBIA

Compassion's ministry in Colombia began in 1974. Today, more than 62,200 children are served by more than 235 Compassion-assisted child development centers throughout the country. Compassion's church-based child development centers are places of hope for impoverished children in Colombia. Under the guidance of caring Christian adults, children's pressing needs for nutrition and medical attention are met. Children



also receive tutoring to help with their academics. Health and hygiene lessons teach them to care for their own physical well-being, and positive social skills are modeled and encouraged.

WEATHER

Colombia has an equatorial climate. As a whole, the country enjoys its best weather December through March, when it rains the least. During the periods of May through July, and October through December, heavy rains can fall (though these are usually followed by bright sunshine). The elevation ranges from sea level to 10,000 feet/3,050 meters, so temperatures can vary greatly. Coastal cities have day temperatures in the 70s-80s F / 23-32 C, with nights in the 60s-70s F / 17-27 C year-round. A sweater or light jacket is needed along the coast at night and a jacket is needed in the mountains.

CURRENCY

Colombia uses the Colombian *peso* (COP). Dollars are readily exchanged at most banks and *casas de cambio* but are almost never accepted as direct payment. Too many “drug dollars” and counterfeit dollar bills have flooded the country. It's best to take credit cards.

FOOD

Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables before eating, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the water is unsafe (stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks).

SHOPPING

Shop for soapstone carvings, straw items, hats (the famous *vueltiao sombrero* is made in Tuchin, Cordoba), handicrafts, *mochilas* (a type of backpack woven by the Kogi and Arhuaco people), *ruanas* (a combination poncho and cape made in Boyaca and Cundinamarca), gold, silver, leather and emeralds.

Colombian hammocks are colorful and usually a good buy. Choose between the lighter *chinchorros* made in the Llanos and Amazonas regions (many are machine-made) and the heavier, colorful *hamacas*, for which the Wayus of the Guajira peninsula are famous. Quality reproductions of pre-Colombian pottery are available.

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

Voltage used in Colombia is primarily 110V/120V with 150V in some regions. Most outlets in Colombia accept plug types A or B. (For up-to-date plug and outlet information, check whatplug.info and click on your destination country.) You



may also wish to take a universal plug adaptor, available in the luggage/travel sections of most big-box stores.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do** keep your bargaining for handicrafts to a minimum — if you persist too long, you just come off as being stingy. (In fact, fewer and fewer businesses allow bargaining.)
- **Don't** change money on the street. The counterfeiting of all currencies and traveler's checks is a serious problem in Colombia.
- **Don't** dress too noticeably or carry a camera or cellphone, especially in Bogotá. While traveling by car in cities, keep your windows closed. Never allow a motorcycle or motor scooter to ride alongside you.
- **Do** not show undue attention to an unknown child on the street or in rural villages, no matter how adorable he or she is. Although the sentiment is more pronounced in Central America, in parts of Colombia foreigners who attempt to ingratiate themselves with children are suspected as kidnappers.
- **Do** talk about the good things Colombia has to offer: the gold museum in Bogotá, coffee, literature, music, food and soccer. Do not criticize bullfighting; it's very popular. Politics, guerrillas and drugs are topics best avoided.

DRESS

Women should cover their shoulders when entering a church. Men generally should avoid shorts. In Bogotá and inland, wear darker clothes. Nights can be cool, and even cold inland. It may rain, so bring a jacket or a sweater. Many smaller hotels have no heating. On the coast, wear light cotton clothes and a hat. With the exception of the beach, footwear must be worn at all times and at all venues.

Women: Modest, loose-fitting tops (nothing form-fitting) are recommended; sleeveless tops are acceptable, but please cover

your shoulders in places of worship; pants, capris, longer skirts and loose-fitting, casual dresses are recommended for women.

Men: Button shirts and polo shirts are recommended. T-shirts are allowed in casual settings. Long, non-denim pants are recommended for center visits and church services.

Both: Shorts are highly discouraged outside of beachside locations. A light jacket is recommended for cool evenings or rainy days.

Shoes: Closed-toe shoes are recommended during the day due to potential unsanitary or uneven terrain.

GENERAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, Social Security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; make visible only the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car or any other location. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don't take safety and security for granted.

U.S. EMBASSY INFORMATION

Website: co.usembassy.gov

Phone: (+57) (1) 275-2000

Address: Carrera 45, No. 24B-27, Bogotá, D.C. Colombia

Email: ACSBogota@state.gov

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC (www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.

*All information taken from the World Factbook and
Compassion International.*

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The official language of Colombia is Spanish. The country's secondary language is English. Some common Colombian greetings include:

Hello	¡Hola!
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
Pleased to meet you	Mucho gusto
Very well, thank you	Muy bien, gracias
Goodbye	Adiós (or chou in Bolivia)
What is your name?	¿Cómo te llamas?
My name is ...	Me llamo (name)
How old are you?	¿Cuántos años tienes?
Yes	Sí
No	No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You're welcome	De nada
I do not speak Spanish	No hablo español
Do you speak English?	¿Usted habla inglés?
I don't understand	No entiendo
You can do it!	¡Sí, se puede!
I love you	Te amo or te quiero
I am praying for you	Estoy orando por ti

Jesus loves you

You are precious to God

God bless you

I believe in you

Tell me about your family

Good/OK

I need

How much?

Too expensive

Cheaper

Where is the bathroom?

Where is the church?

Where is the bank?

Where is the hotel?

Jesús te ama

Eres precioso(a) para Dios

¡Qué Dios te bendiga!

Creo en ti

Cuénteme de tu familia

Bueno

Necesito

¿Cuánto?

Demasiado caro

Más barato

¿Dónde está el baño?

¿Dónde está la iglesia?

¿Dónde está el banco?

¿Dónde está el hotel?

SPANISH TIPS

The h is silent in Spanish; therefore, *hola* is pronounced “ola.” The ñ is pronounced ny; therefore, *pequeño* is pronounced “pe-kenyo.”