


Currency	Colombian Peso	Can be obtained before arrival
Time	GMT -5	i.e. When its 12 noon in London its 07:00 in Colombia
Language	Spanish	English is understood relatively widely in tourist areas
Electricity	110V	110 Volts 60HZ. Plugs are of the two-pin type. 

PASSPORT & VISA

A valid ten-year passport is essential; it should be valid for at least six months after arrival in the country – check the FCO's advice on entry requirements for Colombia to be sure: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. Remember to check any regulations for countries you may transit during your flight. Currently British nationals can enter Colombia for up to 90 days as a visitor without a visa, but please check [current requirements on our website](#) in good time.

MONEY

Colombian Pesos (COP, Col\$) = 100 centavos, can be ordered in advance in the UK. Notes are available in either Col\$100,000 50,000, 20,000, 10,000, 5,000 and 2,000. Be aware of counterfeit notes – check texture and watermarks if you are worried. Traveller's cheques are not well known in Colombia. Damaged or torn notes (local and foreign currency) are very hard to get rid of so try to avoid accepting them. It is much easier to change US\$ in-country, but avoid bringing US\$100 notes as they are regarded with great suspicion and usually refused due to widespread forgeries. Major credit cards are accepted in larger hotels, restaurants and some shops. Most sizeable towns have at least one bank with an ATM (cash machine) where cash can be withdrawn (mainly Visa).

HEALTH

Vaccinations

We recommend you ensure your routine UK schedule of vaccinations is up-to-date (especially Tetanus) and check the Fit for Travel (<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>) website for further details. You should always check with your GP/travel clinic for the latest health advice, as they are made immediately aware of any updates in World Health Travel requirements.

Malaria & Insect Bites

The areas we visit in Colombia are low risk for contracting Malaria, but they are present in other areas of Colombia and situations do change, so always check. Seek advice if you are planning to travel independently after the trip. There are still insects that bite, so cover up at dawn and dusk in loose-fitting clothing, use a good insect repellent and avoid wearing strongly perfumed toiletries. Dengue fever is not uncommon in Colombia, and is spread by daytime mosquitoes that are more common in urban areas, so try to avoid being bitten. Daytime mosquitoes spread Yellow Fever, which is a threat in Colombia.

General

On the trip itself, food is cooked and prepared to very high standards and you can eat with confidence – though adopt good hand-washing procedures to prevent bugs being passed around the group. Elsewhere, be aware of general precautions: Do not drink tap water – or clean your teeth in it – and avoid ice cubes in drinks unless you are sure they are made with bottled water. For the same reason avoid salads, raw vegetables and fruit that you cannot peel yourself, as well as unpasteurised dairy products and ice cream. Do not eat a meal if you think it has not been freshly cooked. Sunstroke, dehydration and diarrhoea are the ailments you are most likely to suffer from in Colombia if you do not take precautions. With the country being so close to the equator, the blazing hot sun is directly overhead. You should use a high sun factor cream or sun block, wear a hat and sunglasses and ensure that you drink plenty of water or energy drinks to replenish your fluid levels. Some people are more prone to diarrhoea just by the intake of different mineral in food and drink and being in a different climate, but take all possible precautions.

WEATHER

Colombia is generally hot and humid, with fairly frequent showers. Rain rarely lasts for very long though some showers can be very hard – true equatorial weather! Temperatures show little variation throughout the year, although the rainy season runs from May to November. It is generally humid at lower elevations and cooler at higher elevations; there may also be a cool breeze off the coast. Average min/max temperatures and rainfall for Santa Marta:

March: 25 – 35°C; 23.7mm

November: 25 - 32°C; 122.4mm

SAFETY & SECURITY

Unfortunately theft from careless tourists is relatively common in Colombia, mainly in the big cities, and you should be vigilant with your belongings. It helps to wear a concealed money belt with your money and cards inside. Keep a few notes in your pocket while sight-seeing, so you don't have to display your wallet when you just want to buy something small,

especially on buses or in tourist areas. Use your common sense and don't draw attention to yourself by flashing anything valuable-looking. Leave valuables behind; you don't need your best jewellery and gadgets on this trip. It's safer to use ATM machines inside buildings. Be careful at night and avoid walking or getting into taxis alone. Busy touristy areas attract pick-pockets and bag-slashers, so be vigilant for both yourself and your companions. This might all sound a bit intimidating, but it's no different to most other major cities in the world, and it's very rare for a problem to occur on one of our trips.

FOOD AND DRINK

Colombian food is varied with a strong Spanish influence. There's a wide range of regional cuisine, but the basics are found everywhere. The common dishes are usually made up of a selection of rice, beans, meat or seafood. If you don't want soup with your lunch or dinner, order it 'seco' (dry). Vegetarians are well catered for as many of these dishes can be served without meat. Arepas (corn pancakes) are eaten at every meal with savoury toppings. A traditional dish is the Bandeja Paisa (the 'Paisa Platter'), which is a hearty mix of white rice, red beans, shredded meat, chicharrón (pork rind), chorizo, morcilla (black pudding), fried egg, avocado, arepa and plantain. There's an abundance of fruit in Colombia, which is served everywhere, along with a great variety of fruit juices. Make the most of this fresh and affordable produce and remember to wait for a customary top-up (a ñapa) when you buy a juice in the street. With the perfect climate for growing beans, Colombia is famous for its coffee production. With a well-balanced, mild flavour, it is considered by many to be the best coffee in the world!

LANGUAGE

The language spoken in Colombia is Spanish. In the major cities many people will speak English, but Spanish is quite easy to pick up and having a few basic phrases up your sleeve will go a long way in forming good relationships with the people you meet and having some fun interaction!

Hello/Goodbye	- Hola/Adios	Yes/No	- Si/No	
Please/Thank you	- Por favor/Gracias	How much?	- Cuanto (pronounce 'cu' as 'qu')	
I don't understand	- No entiendo	Sorry	- Lo siento	
1 - un/uno/una	4 - cuatro	7 - siete	10 - diez	50 - cincuenta
2 - dos	5 - cinco	8 - ocho	20 - veinte	100 - cien
3 - tres	6 - seis	9 - nueve	21 - veintiuno	1000 - mil

CULTURE & PEOPLE

Religion

79% of the Colombian population are Roman Catholic and 14% are Protestant. Every small village has its own church and Saint's Day celebrations.

Dress

On the whole you can dress as normal in Colombia without fear of causing offence - though women, particularly if fair, may experience unwelcome attention from men and dressing modestly may help to minimise this. By dressing thoughtfully you not only avoid the risk of causing offence, but experience minimum hassle. Latin American 'machismo' is very evident and men can be fairly persistent. Women travellers in particular should be modest in dress - avoid tight or 'strappy' tops in favour of regular T-shirts. Shorts should not be too short and men should wear a top at all times. Those extending their stay, especially women, should dress in order to draw as little attention to themselves as possible.

Haggling

Bargaining is expected in markets and at street stalls but not in standard shops which generally have fixed prices. Keep a sense of humour but don't be embarrassed to haggle for prices. As a general rule of thumb, start by offering around a half to two thirds of the first asking price, and meet in between.

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory. In fact, many Colombians only tip a little or not at all. A standard amount is either 1000 or 2000 pesos (\$0.50 or \$1.00). In finer restaurants and bars, a 10% service charge is included at the end of the bill. This fee is not compulsory, even though it may seem so, but most people pay it unless there's a good reason not to. Taxi fares are normally rounded up, to avoid giving small change. Generally tipping is only given elsewhere for very good service.

RECOMMENDED READING

Travel Guides (especially useful if extending your stay)

Colombia - Lonely Planet Guide
Rough Guide to Colombia
Latin American Spanish Phrasebook & Dictionary - Lonely Planet
Colombia - Insight Guides

Fiction / Autobiography

Moon Colombia - Andrew Dier
Short Walks from Bogota: Journeys in the New Colombia - Tom Feiling
One Hundred Years of Solitude - Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Colombia: a Comedy of Errors - Victoria Kellaway