

Colombia

Colombia is located in the northwest corner of South America, and borders Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama. It is the continent's fourth largest country and has a coastline of more than 3,200 kilometers (2,000 miles) on both the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean.

Its area of 440,831 square miles (1,141,748 square km)--more than twice the size of France--includes the San Andrés y Providencia archipelago, located off the Nicaraguan coast in the Caribbean.

The only American nation that is named after Christopher Columbus, the "discoverer" of the New World, Colombia presents a remarkable study in contrasts. The lofty snow-tipped peaks of the country's interior cordilleras tower high above equatorial forests and savannas where surviving Indian groups still follow the life ways and traditions of their ancestors. In the cooler mountains, at intermediate elevations, modern cities are juxtaposed with traditional rural landscapes.

Few countries boast such striking physical variety, as does Colombia. Its broken, rugged topography, together with its location near the Equator, creates an extraordinary diversity of climates, vegetation, soils, and crops. The Andean Cordillera, one of the world's great mountain ranges, dominates the landscape of the western part of the country, where most of the people live



Colombia Remarkable contrasts



Population

More than 39 million

Population: Colombia is the fourth most populous nation in Latin America after Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, having more than 39 million people

It is a country of many cities: its capital, Bogotá, has 5.8 million inhabitants. Ten other cities have populations of more than one million, and another ten have at least 500,000 inhabitants.

Approximately four-fifths of the population is mestizo or white; people of African ancestry account for nearly one-fifth. Indian peoples constitute only 1 percent of the population, a much lower share than in other Andean countries.

Colombia is a country full of young people who take an active role in all aspects of social, cultural, political and economical life.

Religion: Roman Catholicism is the state religion and about 90% of the people belong to this church. Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution, but the role of Protestant communities is small. Religion occupies a very important place in the social life of Colombians. A few Indian groups in remote areas still follow their traditional religions.

Government: The 1886 constitution has been amended several times since it became the first democracy in Latin America, where the most recent major revisions were approved in July 1991. Freedom of religion, speech, and assembly, among other basic rights, is guaranteed by the constitution.

The national government has separate executive, legislature and judicial branches. Elected for four years by all Colombians over 18, the president may not serve consecutive terms. There is a Vice-president from the president's party to become acting president in the event of the president's ill health, death or resignation.

History: Ruled by Spain for 300 years, Colombia won its freedom in the revolt of the Spanish American colonies, which took place from 1810 to 1824.

The liberator, Simon Bolivar, established the Republic of Gran Colombia in 1819, which included the lands now known as Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador. These last two withdrew from the union in 1830, leaving the "Republic of New Granada." New Granada became Colombia in 1886. In 1903, Panama declared itself an independent state after Colombia refused to ratify the leasing of territory to the United States for what became the Panama Canal.

Nature: Colombia has the highest number of species of plants and animals per unit area of any country in the world. Its animals include jaguars, ocelots, peccaries, tapirs, deer, armadillo, numerous species of monkey and the rare spectacled bear. There are more than 1550 recorded species of birds (more than in the whole of Europe and North America combined), ranging from the huge Andean condor to the tiny hummingbird.

Equally abundant marine life includes the predacious piranha and the electric eel. Colombia's herbariums have classified over 130,000 plants, including Victoria Amazonica, which is similar to a water lily and has leaves large and strong enough to support a child.



Indians

One percent



3,200 Km
Coastline

Economy: Variations in climate give Colombia a diversified agricultural economy. Colombia is the second largest coffee producer in the world, and is also the world's largest producer of cocoa, the second supplier of the world's emeralds and the largest source of petroleum in South America, after Venezuela. The raising of livestock also plays an important role in Colombia's economy.

Even though 75% of its people live in urban areas, agricultural production represents about 65% of the country's exports. The monetary unit is peso. American Dollars, GB Pounds, and Yens are easily exchangeable currencies.

Education: Although there are 32 different states within the country, the educational system of Colombia is highly centralised under the direction of a national Ministry of Education. The school system includes kindergarten, five years of elementary school, and six years of high school. Students usually begin high school at the age of eleven. Colombian high schools are either academic or technical in their focus. High School students may take up to 12 different subjects a week (some of them vocational) including Chemistry, Physics, Calculus, and Philosophy by the time they graduate. Private schools play an important role in the overall educational system in Colombia.

Most schools are academic and theoretical and do not try to train students for a job. Therefore, technical training institutes are becoming more and more important, producing graduates for middle management positions in business, industry and the banking system.

Family Life: Colombians still have a very traditional way of life. The family, in the majority of cases, is structured and patriarchal. Social class differences are very clear-cut. In some cities in Colombia, one can observe social class-consciousness due to ancestry, which comes with the tradition of surnames from the Spanish Colonial period. However, this practice is not maintained among the younger generation or among foreigners.

Each region of the country has its own handicrafts or folk art, made by the more modest social classes. Many beautiful crafts can be found in the market.. This traditional art has important cultural value for each region. There is no "typical" Colombian cuisine, but though each area has its own ways of preparing food, "sancocho" (a type of stew), "tamales" and "pepitoria" (eastern Colombia rice) are some of the most popular dishes in the country.



Chiva

Cultural Icon

Recreation: Colombia's most popular sports are football (soccer), car racing, basketball, skating and bicycle racing. On Sundays and holidays, the major avenues in some cities are closed to traffic so people can walk, ride bicycles, skate and jog safely. Young people in Colombia enjoy going to discotheques and meeting at different places where they can talk, eat and listen to music.

Spanish

Buenos dias.....	Good Day
Buenas noches.....	Good evening
Como esta Usted?.....	How are you?
Me llamo.....	My name is
Como se llama?.....	What is your name?
Por favor.....	Please
Gracias.....	Thank you
Perdoneme.....	Excuse me
Adios.....	Goodbye
Si / No.....	Si / No

YFU-Colombia was founded in 1970. The National Office is located in Bogotá and has representatives in over 15 cities. Each city has a group of volunteers who are responsible for recruitment of Colombian students going abroad, as well as the selection of host families and contact with schools for incoming students. They also co-ordinate promotional activities in their area as well as deliver orientations along with returnees.

YFU Host Families: Host families are selected by YFU volunteers in different cities from among those who have sent their own children abroad through YFU. Students are placed in all small cities where there are YFU representatives.



YFU Colombia

since 1970

