



South & Central American Travel Association

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Promoting the wonders of Latin America and the experts who take you there

Colombia es Pasión! (Colombia Is Passion!)

By Andrea Rossow, Alluring Americas

As the crowning country of South America, Colombia is today, described as a country with “a fusion of colorful towns, Caribbean and Pacific coasts, Andean valleys, Amazonian jungle, and wide plains.” Our group of tour operators traversed the cities of Bogotá (the capital) and Cartagena on a fam trip hosted Avianca Airlines and Proexport (Colombian Tourist Board).

Upon arrival at Miami International Airport, our group met each other one by one as many of us had not traveled together in the past. We were all greeted by the smiling faces of Flavia and Yahaira from our sponsoring airline, Avianca. Flavia was sure to remind us that we would be encountering many smiling faces and happy people during our trip as Colombia is known for its abundant generosity.

From Miami, our flight departed on time en route to El Dorado International Airport, Bogotá. Avianca’s on board service and efficiency certainly exceeds expectations.

Upon arrival, we were met by another Avianca representative who assisted in baggage claim and customs. Our Proexport representative, Paola, was elated to see us as we were just as excited to be in Colombia. So nice to walk outside to the cooler air, ready to take in the sights and sounds of the city.

Onto Zona Rosita to check in to the Boheme Royal Hotel for two nights in Bogotá, a businessman’s city we’re told. At seven million inhabitants, Bogotá is located near the geographic center of Colombia and stands as the most populous city in the country. A light dinner for most of us at the hotel, as we were treated well on our 3 ½ hour flight from Miami.

The next morning, we find ourselves in the conference room at the Boheme for breakfast and a presentation by Proexport on the growth of Colombia and the tourism sector. Onto a whirlwind of hotel inspections mid-morning and then stopping for lunch at Darpapaya, a restaurant that mixes the gastronomies of Asia and Latin America. The restaurant got its name from the commonality between the two cuisines...fruit. A wonderful stop for lunch as one is able to sit and socialize while listening to the hustle and bustle of the passersby. There are many restaurants in Zona G along with a mixture of highrises, converted convents and colonial buildings.

Our next inspection took us to Usaquén, a barrio that was once its own city but has become part of Bogotá due to expansion. A handicraft market, storytelling and much more fill the plaza on Sunday afternoons. Usaquén is best described as a delightful, quaint neighborhood with shopping and many cafés nearby.



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This afternoon, we are taken on a city tour of La Candelaria or “old city” which boasts universities, museums and wonderful Spanish Colonial and Baroque architecture. The main plaza of Bogotá is located in this barrio and is surrounded by a colonial cathedral and government buildings while filled with families, couples, groups of friends, vendors, and many pigeons. While in La Candelaria we had a few moments to breeze through the Fernando Botero museum and another museum that housed an astounding gold, emerald and amethyst work of art.

Back to our hotel to freshen up and onto Urbano Restaurant in Bogotá, where the tables, chairs and even the menu are made from recycled parts and pieces. Having our own private room, it was great to converse about our day, practice a little Spanish and reflect on Colombia.

Day Three and we’re off to more hotel inspections before an early afternoon flight to Cartagena, a city that many in our group were excited to see. Abrazos to Paola (Proexport) and Rosita (Panamericana de Viajes) as we parted ways at the airport. Upon arrival in Cartagena, we were met by another Proexport representative, Edwin, and one of the many Panamericana representatives that we would meet in Cartagena. As we boarded our bus and headed for our hotel, we were all in awe of the exuberant colors and wonderful architecture. Entering the walled city was such an indescribable feeling, as if we were going back in time. Little did we know that the “boys” would be staying at the Hotel Bóvedas de Santa Clara while we “girls” had the opportunity to experience the Sofitel Santa Clara. The Bóvedas has an agreement with Sofitel in that their guests have access to the areas and services available down the street at Sofitel. Both hotels are converted convents whose charm and warmth allow for its guests to feel very welcome.

This evening we are taken to the yacht club for dinner. We arrive around 8pm and are told that dinner is made to order. From king prawn to lobster to beef, we are all overstuffed and overjoyed with the live music, atmosphere and scenery provided by this lovely place set on the water.

On our last full day in Cartagena, we find ourselves being the typical tourist as we arrive at El Castillo de San Felipe and are bombarded by the street vendors. Some of the lucky ones in our group scored a lovely sombrero. And it was much needed as it was a hot, hot, hot day with extra dose of humidity. A climb to the top with our guide, Nidia, we were also able to go inside the fort, which could be described as very claustrophobic to some. Amazing views of the city from this point, yet more amazing views were yet to come as we journeyed onto la Popa, a 400-year-old monastery built on the foundations of a razed Indian temple. The monastery which sits on a 500-ft/150-m hill contains a statue of the Virgin of Candelaria who is credited with delivering the city from the ravages of disease and pirates. Here at the highest point in Cartagena, many city sights could be seen such as the bull fighting arena, a busy market, the walled city and the Caribbean. Astounding!



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A quick afternoon colonial city tour was to follow which included San Pedro Claver Cathedral and Plaza. While inside the cathedral we were able to witness decorators as they garnished the aisles with roses for an evening wedding. The Museum of Modern Art is located within the plaza and one is greeted by the several metal sculptures all throughout. Onto a market full of sweets, fully stocked with different arequipe candies!

Back to the Santa Clara hotels to freshen up and get ready for our last night in Colombia. We would be taken to the Decameron Hotel first for an inspection before heading to dinner. At Decameron we were greeted by dancers performing a unique routine, along with a welcome drink. For a moment we took a step back in time as we were picked up by a horse and carriage and taken back to San Pedro Plaza for dinner. Seated outside, watching the passersby and finally the wedding party, we were able to take in the warm atmosphere of Cartagena's colonial city. A superb dinner topped off with our last round of limonadacoco (official drink of Cartagena) could not have ended any better! Just before our departure, the first drops of rain began to fall. Not a drop before this as we considered ourselves very lucky to have stayed dry this whole time. Back to the hotel for our early morning departure back to Miami.

As a country in the midst of reviving its tourism sector, one can see that there is a lot to offer in this country at the crown of South America. There are several other areas one will want to explore (e.g. the coffee region, the adventure region of Santa Marta, the tropical beaches and divers paradise region of San Andres).

Thank you to Flavia and Yahaira at Avianca as well as Paola and Edwin at Proexport, all of our guides from Panamericana de Viajes and the gracious staff and management at Boheme Royal Hotel, Sofitel Santa Clara and Bovedas Santa Clara.

Qué Maravilla!



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