

Returning to Colombia

Country Profile

Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America and one of the continent's most populated nations with 45,509,584 people.

It is ethnically diverse, reflecting the indigenous Indian, Spanish and African origin of its people.



It has experienced decade-long violent conflicts involving outlawed armed groups, drug cartels and gross violations of human rights, although since 2002, the country has made some progress towards improving security.

The geography of Colombia is characterised by its six main natural regions that present their own unique characteristics, from the Andes mountain range region shared with Ecuador and Venezuela; the Pacific coastal region shared with Panama and Ecuador; the Caribbean coastal region shared with Venezuela and Panama; the Llanos (plains) shared with Venezuela; to the Amazon Rainforest region shared with Venezuela, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador

Capital: Bogota

Main language is Spanish

Main religion is Christianity: Catholic Dial code +57

The President is Juan Manuel Santos

Recent History

During the presidency of Álvaro Uribe, the government applied more military pressure on the FARC and other outlawed groups. After the offensive, many security indicators improved.

Since 2002 the violence decreased significantly, with some paramilitary groups demobilizing as part of a controversial peace process and the guerrillas losing control of much of the territory they once dominated. Colombia achieved a great decrease in cocaine production, leading White House drug czar R. Gil Kerlikowske to announce that Colombia is no longer the world's biggest producer of cocaine.

In February 2008, millions of Colombians demonstrated against the FARC. The FARC's commander in chief Alfonso Cano was killed by security forces of Colombia in November 2011. He was replaced by Timoleón Jiménez, who assumed the duty of first commander just days after Cano's death.

The Peace process in Colombia, 2012 refers to the dialogue between the Colombian government and guerrilla of FARC-EP with the aim to find a political solution to the armed conflict.

The Colombian government and rebel groups meet in Cuba. Talks have been positive and represent breakthroughs that comprise end the conflict.

Colombia shows modest progress in the struggle to defend human rights, as expressed by HRW. In terms of international relations, Colombia has moved from a period of tense animosity with Venezuela, towards a prosperous outlook to further enhance integration. Colombia has also won a seat on the Security Council of the UN.

Today Colombia is the third largest oil producer in South America and it is estimated that by 2012, Colombia will be producing a million barrels a day. In 2011, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) reported that 34% of Colombians were living below the poverty line, of which 10.6% in "extreme poverty". 1.2 million Colombians have been lifted out of poverty while 674,000 ceased to be indigent.

In 2012, the Colombian Government launched a policy to deliver 100,000 houses for poor people, a subsidy for to reduce the digital divide and the restitution of land for local farmers displaced by the violence.

Recent economic growth has led to a considerable increase of millionaires: 1.8 million adult Colombians are now newly rich. The number of Colombian entrepreneurs on the list of the richest people on the planet with net worth exceeding US\$ 1 billion also increased.

National Documentation

Colombian national ID card

Colombian law requires that all Colombian nationals identify themselves as such by presenting a Colombian national ID card and a Colombian passport when entering the country. Colombian Consulate prepare an emergency travel document for nationals who are going to be deported and their ID documents; passports and Colombian ID have expired.

To apply for the Colombian ID original birth certificate and document showing blood type are required. Application is in person and temporary ID is provided in one day. The actual ID will be issue in one year.

Military card

Military service is mandatory in Colombia and the Law 48 of 1993 (Ley 48 de 1993) states that all Colombian males have to define their military status once they reach their adulthood at 18 year old.

- Birth certificate
- Photocopy of the Colombian ID
- Tax certificate
- Two photographs
- Medical examination

The military card is required to get contracts with any public entity, to assume a role position, to get into the administrative career and to obtain a professional degree from higher education educational centre.

Travelling to Colombia

Upon Arrival

Many returning to Colombia have highlighted the importance of family and friends in providing support with the transition, including providing accommodation and assistance in settling in. Therefore it is recommended that before your return, you make contact with any relatives or friends that may be able to assist you.

If you arrive in Colombia without a place to stay, the following places may be able to offer you short-term accommodation, either free of charge or for a small fee. If they are unable to provide accommodation directly, they may also be able to offer support in finding alternative accommodation.

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER	SERVICES
Choices (Assisted Voluntary return Ser- vice)	Victoria Char- ity Centre 11 Belgrave Road, Victoria London SW1V 1RB	02079521510 080 8800 0007 choices@refuge-ac- tion.org.uk Website: www.choices- avr.org.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to plan the return • Help at the airport in Colombia • Request travel docu- ments and pay for flight ticket • In some cases offer financial support once the person has returned • Offer information about available support in Colombia; employment, training, entrepreneur- ship and business op- portunities.
Fundacion Caminos de Liber- tad Pastoral Peniten- ciaria Catolica	Carrera 6 No 6A -93 Bogota Colombia	0057 12803391 / 0057 12803422Email: libertad3@ etb.net. co www.pastoralpenit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help at the airport in Colombia • Provide emergency ac- commodation • Contact family in Co- lombia • Help to get ID docu- ments • Help with transport to city of origin

Housing and accommodation

Overview

There is no provision of housing benefits in Colombia. However there is a small provision of housing for displaced people or victims of violence and the Local Authorities have a duty to provide temporary accommodation for people who have been displaced from the countryside to the cities. In addition to this provision, there are NGOs, churches and charities providing temporary accommodation to disadvantaged people.

The Colombian government is implementing a programme to provide free housing for the displaced and the poor but the number of properties is very small in relation to the people in need. There are other programmes like the ABC that provides affordable housing for savers and for people on minimum wages. The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs and the Red Cross are developing a programme to provide temporary accommodation to deportees. (Please see Return Plan for more information).

Most accommodation is private accommodation. There are estate agencies that help people to find accommodation. Tenancy agreements are usually from six months to one year. Documents required from estate agencies to sign a tenancy agreement are:

- Application form
- Colombian ID
- Letter from employer and payment slips
- Deposit
- 2 Guarantors, one must own a property

Accommodation could also be found through private landlords. They do not require all that is required by the estate agencies and the accommodation could be as good as the offered by the estate agencies. However the accommodation could be in bad condition and the landlord could not be subject to any regulation.

Landlords advertise their properties on newspapers, magazines, notice boards and local shops.

Transport

Bus

Travelling by bus is the most popular way to get around Colombia and there are many companies to handle the demand. The buses are clean and efficient and by far the best way to travel between relatively short urban distances. Despite the cheap and comfortable nature of travelling by bus in Colombia, it is still not recommended. Flying is by far the safest way to travel between cities.

Car

The country's highways and roads are generally in a bad state, which makes the driving hard and during the rainy seasons many of the smaller roads turn to mud or wash away completely.

Taxis

Taxis are one of the safer transportation options in Colombia and should be used whenever possible. They are excellent value and can even be hired for long distance drives between cities or to outlying attractions. Taxis are required by law to have a meter, but they don't always turn them on. Always make your driver start the meter when you take off, otherwise negotiate the fare. After dark, fares increase by about one-third.

Hailing a taxi on the street is possible, but not always a safe bet. It's always safer to call for your taxi, especially in the northern parts of Bogota, where much of the taxi crime seems to take place. The taxi company will inform you of the number of your taxi and when you are picked up the driver will ask you for the last two digits of the phone number you called from. It is vital to use licensed taxis to prevent becoming a victim, so keep a couple of taxi company phone numbers with you at all times and use them.

Health Care

Overview

Colombia is yet to provide fair and efficient welfare support across the country but they do have a sustainable system that will not break the bank. Much of what the health services provide now are based on the infamous Ley 100, which was passed in 1993 as a top- up law to the 1991 Constitution. The first thing to know about healthcare in Colombia is that it is plagued with the most confusing set of acronyms which are widely used by the media and politicians (beware of the EPS, IPS, ARL and POS).

What is different about healthcare provision in Colombia is that is intimately linked to employment law and conditions. Healthcare in Colombia works through an insurance system that is provided both by private and public companies in order to avoid one

sector gaining the monopoly over it, and this in turn has ensured competition and a high standard of service.

The Entidades Promotoras de Salud (Health Promoting Entities) 'EPS' are the insurers, who supply services when they are needed through Instituciones Prestadoras de Salud 'IPS' (Health Providers). The EPS contribution, or insurance, is part of any employee's salary and an employer has to affiliate its employees to an EPS by law. This is not only effective as a means of covering a large proportion of the population, but furthermore it also benefits the government since most of the funding for this comes from employers, not from the treasury.

However there are many problems with the system. The close relation between the healthcare system and employment law has both positive and negative effects. Big labour groups in Colombia have gained access to healthcare as their work is standardised, forcing employers to make their work legal and official while the flip side of this principle is the growth of the informal labour sector. And as with many aspects of life in Colombia, there is a sharp difference between the healthcare provision between rural and urban areas; for example, insufficient roads makes access to hospitals and doctors tricky for the more rural populations.

Education for Children

School system overview

Primary and Secondary Education is compulsory in Colombia by law.

Primary basic education (Educación básica primaria) which goes from first to fifth grade – children from six to ten years old

Secondary basic education (Educación básica secundaria), which goes from sixth to ninth grade.

Basic education is followed by Middle vocational education (Educación media vocacional) that comprises the tenth and eleventh grades.

Students in their final year of middle education take the ICFES test (now renamed Saber 11) in order to gain access to higher education (Educación superior). This higher education includes undergraduate professional studies, technical, technological and intermediate professional education, and post-graduate studies.

There are two ways to enrol a child in a primary school or secondary school. Parents could apply directly at the school or they could approach the Local Education Authorities where they will inform where there are places available in the local region. The enrolment is a straight forward process subject to space availability. The following documents are required to enrol a child in a school:

- Child's Birth Certificate
- Parents' Colombian ID
- Proof of address
- Letter from previous school or studies certificates

Driving in Colombia

To obtain a driving license in Colombia there are a number of requirements;

- To be a resident of Colombia
- To meet the minimum age requirement (16 years old)
- To have paid insurance (16 years old only)
- To meet the minimum eyesight requirement
- To pass the driving theory test
- To present a certificate of proficiency in driving awarded by a driving school approved by the Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Transport.
- A certificate of physical and mental fitness to drive issued by a medical practitioner registered with the Ministry of Health. A valid Colombia ID or Colombian passport
- Blood test or a document showing blood type

The driving licence is processed by the Driving School. They provide the driving lessons and collect the all the required documents submitting them to the Ministry of Transport. The new driving licence is then sent to the Driving School who handed it to the new qualify driver.

Banking and Finance

To open a bank account in Colombia, you will need a number of important documents:

- A passport, OR
- Cédula de Ciudadanía (Colombian adults' I.D.), Tarjeta de Identidad (Colombian minors' I.D.), Cédula de Extranjería (I.D. card issued by Colombian authorities to resident aliens).
- Letter from the employer

For legal persons (i.e. corporations):

- Original certificate of existence and legal representation, issued no more than three months back by the Chamber of Commerce or other competent authority,
- The company's Tax Identification Card (NIT), issued by the National Customs and Tax Authority (DIAN), or

- For a foreign corporation, a certificate of incorporation, or equivalent document, certified by a proper authority.(must have an apostle)

The above are the legal minimum requirements to open a bank account. Rules and requirements can differ from bank to bank.

Employment & Training Opportunities

Guidance for job placement

For the employment relationship of returnees is available first on the support of the National Service of Learning through the Public Employment Service (PES). It also has partnerships with public and private organisations that offer vacancies that fit the profiles of returnees. Upon referral of beneficiaries verified working conditions in each of local allies.

Entrepreneurship and Business development guidance

For those who wish to develop productive projects in partnership with the National Apprenticeship Service are given through Entrepreneurship Units, and entrepreneurship guidance on access to funding sources according to existing institutional capacity. Moreover, it promotes bonding of the entities that can provide opportunities to develop and / or strengthen productive projects and micro entrepreneurs to return migrants

Law, Customs and Celebrations

Festivals

20th July: Independence Day 7th August: Boyaca Battle

Charities and Support Services in Colombia

Directory of Services

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	CONTACT	DESCRIPTION
Alcaldia de Pereira Secretaria de Desarrollo Social Subprograma de Migrante (Mayor of Pereira) Social Development Office Migrant programme	Carrera 7 No18-55 Pereira, Risaralda	0057 63208090 contactenos@pereira.gov.co	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and guidance about job opportunities. • Link the returnee with SENA (National Service of Learning) for training, qualifications and entrepreneurship • Help with GP registration.
Choices (Assisted Voluntary return Service)	Victoria Charity Centre 11 Belgrave Road, Victoria London SW1V 1RB	02079521510 080 8800 0007 choices@refuge-action.org.uk Website: www.choices-avr.org.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to plan the return • Help at the airport in Colombia • Request travel documents and pay for flight ticket • In some cases offer financial support once the person has returned • Offer information about available support in Colombia; employment, training, entrepreneurship and business opportunities.

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	CONTACT	DESCRIPTION
Juliana Montenegro Social Assistant Co- lombian Consulate in London	3rd Floor, Westcott House 35 Portland Place London W1B 1AE	02079277127 asistentesocial@ consuladocolombia. net	Provide general in- formation and help to connect with other organisations
ESAP Escuela Superior de Adminstracion Publica / School of Public Administra- tion	Calle 44 No 53-57	0057 12202790 departamento. capacitacion@esap. edu.co	Offer free training for people interest- ed in public admin- stration
Fundacion Caminos de Libertad Pastoral Peniten- ciaria Catolica	Carrera 6 No 6A -93 Bogota Colombia	0057 12803391 / 0057 12803422 Email: libertad3@ etb.net.co Website: www.pastoralpeni- tenciaria.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help at the air- port in Colombia -Provide emer- gency accom- modation • Contact family in Colombia • Help to get ID documents • Help with trans- port to city of origin
The Facilitated Return Scheme -UK Boarder Agency - Home Office	Home Office 14th Floor Apollo House, 36 Welles- ley Road, Croydon, CR9 3RR	02087608513 Yasmeen.Amman- toola@UKBA.gsi. gov.uk Website: www.gov. uk/home- office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide flight ticket • Financial Sup- port
Minsiterio de Rela- cionies Exteriores de Colombia (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	Palacio San Carlos Calle 10 No 5-51 Bogota Colombia	0057 13814000 Ex- tension 1381 contactenos@ cancilleria.gov.co Website: http:// www.cancilleria.gov. co/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan Retorno (Return Plan) • The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the return plan as ex- plained before. • Please contact the Colombian Consulate for more informa- tion.

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	CONTACT	DESCRIPTION
Ministerio de Trabajo (Ministry of Work)	Carrera 7 No 32-63 Primer piso Bogota Ciolombia	005714893900 Opcion 2 http:// www.mintrabajo.gov.co	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works in partnerships with SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) National Service for Training to support the returnees in employment preparation and job vacancies
Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA) National Service for Training	Calle 57 No 8-69 Bogota	0057 15925555 servicioalciudadano@sena.edu.co Website: www.sena.edu.co	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide qualification, training and skills as preparation to employment Works in partnerships with public and private organizations that offer vacancies that fit the profiles of returnees Support one entrepreneurship and how to start a business

Sources:

<http://www.registraduria.gov.co/-Tarjeta-de-Identidad-.html>

<http://www.ejercito.mil.co/?idcategoria=345484>

<http://www.cancilleria.gov.co/>

<http://www.consuladocolombia.net/> <http://www.mintrabajo.gov.co/>