



Colombia Country Information



General facts about the country

Colombia is an upper middle-income country with a population of around 49 million inhabitants. It is South America's oldest democracy and third-largest economy. Its economy is heavily dependent on the export of petroleum, coffee, and cut flowers. Colombia is a founding member of the Pacific Alliance and has free-trade agreements with many countries/regions, including the European Union. However, the country's income inequality is amongst the worst in the world, with more than a third of the population living below the poverty line.

Colombia is the second most biodiverse country in the world and one of 17 "megadiverse" countries. It is the only country in South America that has coastlines on both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

In 2016, the Government of Colombia signed a peace agreement with the country's largest guerrilla group, the FARC. However, several other armed groups remain active across the country, and civilians continue to suffer the humanitarian consequences of the ongoing violence. Colombia also hosts more than 1.6 million Venezuelans who have left their country.

Colombia is a heavily urban-populated country. 81,4% of the population lives in urban areas, Bogotá -its capital- counts for more than 10 million inhabitants, followed by Medellín (4 million), Cali (2,7 million) and Barranquilla (2.2 million).

Colombia and the Netherlands

We are neighboring countries through the proximity of the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a partner of Colombia in the peace process, contributing to stability and development. We have worked together for decades in cooperation, rural development and water projects. As the first destination of Colombian exports to the European Union, the fourth largest European exporter to Colombia and the fifth biggest investor, the Netherlands is an important partner in sustainable trade and investment for Colombia.

Staying and traveling

There are no visas (tourist or business) required to enter Colombia for a stay of less than 90 days with only a valid passport being required. Colombia's currency is the Colombian Peso (1 EUR = 4.121 Colombian pesos as per July 2020). The exchange of foreign currency should only be made in hotels, banks and bureaux de change, never on the street, since that can be dangerous. Major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard) are widely accepted.

Colombia is an equatorial country, and her climatic variations are determined by trade winds, humidity, and most of all, altitude. There are two main seasons year round: two rainy periods (April to June, then August to November) and two dry periods (July and December to March). Bogotá's temperature is usually between 14-18 degrees with cool days and colder nights. When the sun is shining, it can be quite hot during the day (up to 24 degrees).

Hotels in Colombia vary widely in size and quality, from 'hospedajes' and hostels to 5-star hotels. Apps such as Travel Advisor, Booking and Airbnb work well in the country.

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Public transport and Taxis

Traffic is very hectic in Colombia's main cities. Public transport varies from city to city. In Bogotá, there is the SITP transport system, which consists of blue, green and red buses (Transmilenio). In order to access the transport system, it is necessary to purchase a transport card, Tu Llave (which costs approximately 1 EUR). The app TransMiApp is useful to plan the journey beforehand.

It is advisable however for visitors to travel as much as possible by taxi; it is cheaper than other cities worldwide. It is not recommended however to take it directly on the street, it is better to use apps such as Cabify and Taxis Libres (for yellow, public taxis) or Uber (for private cars).

Higher education in Colombia

Colombia's expenditure on education is 4.5% of GDP (2017); 95.1% of people aged 15 and over can read and write. According to the OECD, "over the past two decades the Colombian education system has undergone a fundamental transformation." Quality of education however varies between public and private institutions at all level (primary, secondary and higher) as well as urban and rural areas.

Colombia has a unitary higher education system, with no clear distinction between academic and higher professional education. Some programs contain elements of both higher professional education and university education. Education is compulsory for children aged between 6-14. Unlike the Netherlands, Colombia does not have a binary system of higher education. Institutions come in four different types: universidades (universities), instituciones universitarias or escuelas tecnológicas (university institutes or technological institutes), instituciones tecnológicas (technological institutions) and instituciones técnicas profesionales (technical training institutes). For more information, visit NUFFIC, Education System Colombia www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/education-and-diplomas-colombia/.

Two Colombian universities are part of the Shanghai Ranking 2019: National University (801-900) and Andes University (901-1000). In the QS Latin America University Rankings 2018, 53 universities in Colombia are ranked within the region's top 400; the highest entry is the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, ranked joint 254th in the world. Both universities are

considered to be in the top 15 in Latin America. Other well-known universities in the country are: Rosario University, Javeriana University, Externado University, and Sabana University (private universities); Universidad de Antioquia and Universidad del Valle (public universities).

Outbound student flows from Colombia have been growing consistently. According to UNESCO, from 2007 to 2017 the total number of Colombian students enrolled in academic degree programs in other countries has doubled, going from 21,808 to 44,423. Preferred destinations are other Latin American countries (Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile), the United States, the United Kingdom, EU countries (Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands). Interestingly, the figures of Colombians developing higher education programs in Australia have increased in the past few years. Most of the students look for a scholarship/loan to develop their studies abroad.

Doing business in Colombia

Colombians are generally very happy, outgoing people, who enjoy social interaction. In meetings, expect lots of small talk initially about your experience and what you think of the country.

It is courteous to shake hands both upon meeting and departing. Colombian use of names is not generally overly formal, and first names can usually be used without giving offence. However, a lot of importance can be attached to titles, such as Dr. (even if the person does not hold a title on Medicine or a PhD).

Lateness in Colombia is commonplace, do not take offence if people arrive late to your meeting. For interviewing candidates, it is advisable to inform them beforehand that they are expected to arrive on time.

Colombians are termed as 'indirect communicators'; there is more information in body language and context rather than the words. Some people could be offended by straightforwardness.

> More information

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