

A Coffee Triangle Tour in Colombia

November 20th, 2009

While on my Spirit Air flight back from Armenia, Colombia the other day I put together a photo tour of the Coffee Triangle tour—with a bit of video. A few sites, a few hotels, ziplining through a coffee plantation, and more. Here's a quick flavor of the region. A feature story will follow next month.



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Latin American Spirits – Tequila Corralejo

November 19th, 2009



If you've ever spent much time browsing the tequila shelves in Mexico, you've no doubt run across the striking slender bottles of **Tequila Corralejo**. I say "ever" because this was probably the first tequila brand to really differentiate itself with unusual packaging, long before the premium tequila boom hit the U.S. and companies started putting \$30 tequila in showy bottles so they could charge \$200 instead.

Corralejo hasn't gone that route though. In fact if you're buying a bottle while on vacation in Mexico or from the duty-free shop, this brand is often the best value on the shelf. In this photo here that I shot in Playa del Carmen, a bottle of Corralejo is only 50 cents more than crappy Jose Cuervo Gold. The former is 100% agave, the latter is part agave, part whatever kind of sugar could be bought on the cheap. (The other great bargain in that photo is **Milagro**, which I've reviewed on here before.) Unfortunately, you'll pay three times that amount pictured if you buy it in the U.S., but that's on par with its peers.

This is a fairly complex reposada tequila, especially considering the price, with a mixture of citrus flavors, pepper, oak, and honey. It gets four months in three kinds of oak barrels—enough to smooth things out and add balance, but not as front-and-center as with añejo versions. In some shops you'll also find a blanco and añejo in bottles with different colors, but those are less popular.

Besides the distinctive bottle, this tequila has another attribute setting it apart: it's not made in Jalisco. That's a rarity since nearly all the quality tequila comes from that one state. Instead this is made in the state of Guanajuato, in the town of Pénjamo. It comes with a heavy dose of history: this tequila was distilled in a hacienda that was the birthplace of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla—the priest who sparked the Mexican fight for independence. You can't get more authentically Mexican than that. Fire up the mariachi band and pour some tequila!

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Touring Coffee Country in Colombia

November 16th, 2009



On Friday I flew as a guest on [Spirit Airlines'](#) first flight to the Coffee Triangle area of Colombia, to the town of Armenia and have been touring around the region. It turns out this was the first international flight to this airport of any kind, so it was a big deal. The mayor was there, the governor, local TV crews, a brass band, kids singing the national anthems (theirs and ours), and local beauty pageant winners. I can't say I've ever gotten a welcome quite like that before when stepping off an airplane.

This is a beautiful area, with lots of mountains and rolling hills, and the climate is quite pleasant at this altitude of 1,200 to 2,500 meters above sea level. And of course the coffee has been heavenly. No "gas station Colombian" here.



Most of the tourism in this area has been domestic, so I've only visited one hotel that meets the standards of Luxury Latin America. It's a beauty though: [Sazagua](#), pictured here. The other problem is that English proficiency is pretty rare, so it would make sense to hire a guide or set up some kind of organized tour to get the most of your visit unless you speak Spanish. (Our group of writers and Spirit Air people has been using [Citurc](#).)

Snag our RSS stream or [subscribe to our newsletter](#) to see when we post the full tour story and hotel review for this region of Colombia.