



Colombia's geographical terrain is full of surprises

Location

Situated in the northwest corner of South America, Colombia is the only country in the region with coasts on both the Caribbean and Pacific Ocean, with a continental area of 1.141.748 km² (440 829 square miles) and 928.660 km² (358 555 square miles) of maritime dominions.

It shares borders with Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador, and maritime limits with Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Jamaica, Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Located between latitudes 4° south and 12° north, and between 67° and 79° longitude west, Colombia is an equatorial country whose climate is determined by trade winds, humidity and altitude – the temperature drops as the altitude increases.

Colombia has coasts on the Atlantic and the Pacific.

In most of the country, there are two rainy seasons – from April to June and from August to November – and two dry seasons

The country enjoys constant luminosity throughout the year, with an equal duration of daylight and nighttime hours.

Natural regions: five universes



Santa Marta

The Caribbean

This region extends for 1.600 km (994 miles) along the Caribbean coast. It comprises desert on the peninsula of La Guajira; mountains covered by rainforest and perennial snow that form the [Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta](#), the highest coastal mountain in the world (5.770 meters above sea level); cienagas (swamps) and plains in the departments of Magdalena, Cesar and Sucre; bays with white sandy beaches such as the Gulf of Morrosquillo; jungles in the Gulf of Uraba, and a dazzling view of the Caribbean.

Near [Cartagena](#) lie the archipelagos of Rosario and San Bernardo, coral paradises with islets of mangrove. Some 700 km (435 miles) from the coast, the archipelago of [San Andres and Old Providence](#) forms an oasis of life amid the sea, with islands, keys and reefs spread over 500 km (311 miles).



Nevado del Tolima /Pic. [chilangoco](#)

The Andes

The longest mountain range in the world, the Andes enters Colombia in the Nudo de los Pastos in the south of the country, where it divides into two. In the Colombian Massif, the country's main hydrographic star, it separates into three mountain chains that cross Colombia from south to north and create a rugged terrain, with peaks higher than 5.300 meters above sea level, expansive highland plains, deep canyons and broad valleys.

These three mountain chains, crowned by perennial snow, boggy paramos, Andean rainforests, deserts and marshes, produce terrain that varies with altitude and whose fertile soils support an immense variety of crops. They are also where the majority of the country's population live.



Sunset on the Pacific /Pic. [ocastelblanco](#)
The Pacific Coast

Stretching for 1.300 km (808 miles), the Pacific coast is one of the wettest regions on Earth, with a rainfall of over 10.000 mm³ per year. The northern part, where the hills of Baudó sink into the ocean forming bays and sounds, is a jungle region of great biodiversity. The flatter south is bordered by cliffs and beaches lined with mangrove and crossed by wide rivers.

Located 56 km. from the coast, the islands of [Gorgona](#) and Gorgonilla — one of the country's national parks — are sanctuaries of flora and fauna. Their waters are visited by enormous humpbacked whales arriving from the South Pacific, while more than 300 km. from the coast, the island rock of [Malpelo](#) emerges from the depths of the ocean, surrounded by remarkable underwater life.



Victorias Regias, Amazonas

The Orinoquia

This vast region, which extends as far as the river Orinoco on the border with Venezuela, is a plain that spreads out eastwards, its savannas spotted with scrub and riverain forests. Crossed by broad rivers, the Orinoquia covers over 230.000 km² (2 475 699 square feet), representing 20% of the country. The Serrania de La Macarena rises in the southwest, a formation independent of the Andes and endowed with an immense biodiversity, in which natural elements of the Andes, the Amazon and the Orinoquia merge.

The Amazon

Of the 6.8 million km² (2 625 483 square miles) of jungle that make up the [Amazon](#) basin, 400.000 km² (154 440 square miles) belong to Colombia. This immense region, considered the lung of the Earth and one of the largest genetic banks of animal and vegetable species, is inhabited by numerous Indian communities who continue to preserve their ancestral way of life.

Natural Resources:Colombia, a generous land

Coffee, flowers and tropical fruits are some of the main products that Colombia exports.

The rugged terrain, cut by large rivers that flow into the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Amazon and the Orinoco, facilitates the construction of enormous reservoirs, which have steadily increased the country's generation of energy and supply of drinking water.

The broad range of topographical elevations has encouraged agricultural development, whose varied production of foodstuffs constitutes an important part of the economy. In 2003, the agricultural sector contributed 14% of GDP, excluding coffee, with a production worth almost US\$ 11 billion. In the hot lowlands of the Caribbean hinterland, the inter-montane valleys and the savannas of Orinoquia, there are immense plantations of bananas, sugar cane, rice, cotton, soybeans and sorghum, and large cattle farms that produce meat and dairy products.

Coffee, an important product of the economy, is grown on mountain slopes between 1.000 and 1.600 meters above sea level. Flowers, another export product, are grown on the highland plains, while potato, beans, grains and vegetables are grown between 2.000 and 3.300 meters. The production of tropical fruits, palm oil, timber, shrimp, palm hearts and asparagus is increasing rapidly, with significant export potential.



Colombia is the number-one coffee producing country in the world /Pic. 100porcientocafedecolombia

The subsoil is likewise a source of riches. An example of this is the world's largest open cast coalmine, located on the peninsula of La Guajira, which produces almost 50 million tons per year, making Colombia the world's fifth coal producer and the largest exporter of thermal coal. Considerable investments have recently been made to increase production capacity to 70 million tons by 2010.

Several sedimentary basins in the country contain large oil and gas deposits. Proven oil

reserves of 1.8 billion barrels have been found in the Magdalena River valley and in the foothills of the eastern cordillera, where some of the lightest crude in the world is exploited. Present production levels average 540.000 bpd, which provide a surplus for export in addition to supplying the country's needs. Natural gas reserves total 6.8 giga cubic feet, which provide the country with a source of low cost, clean energy for domestic and industrial use. In the search for alternative sources of energy, the country has begun to employ palm oil and sugar cane to produce fuel, and has developed infrastructure to produce solar and wind energy.

One of Colombia's great potentials is its immense biodiversity - the country ranks second after Brazil, with only a quarter of its territory - that in the future will lead to important developments in the fields of medicine and food production.

Population: Best of all our people

Colombia has the third largest population in South America - 60% Mestizo, 20% of European descent, 5% Afro-Colombian, 14% mixed African and Indian blood and 1% pure Indian. The diversity of races has produced not only cultural riches but also an intelligent, hard-working people, cheerful and hospitable, who enjoy one of the highest educational levels in South America and a literacy rate of over 92%.

The level of competent professionals is comparable to that of the developed countries. A study undertaken in 2003 by the United Nations ranks Colombia second among 30 countries with populations of over 20 million. The participation of women in professional fields is the highest in Latin America; by law, at least 30% of public-sector posts must be held by women.

Colombia has the third largest population in South America

Urban Development: Colombia, a country of cities

The economic activity of the zone of influence of each city is determined by the terrain and soils that surround it.

The economic activity in each city's area of influence is determined by topography and the soil of the surroundings

[Bogota](#) is on a highland plain of fertile soils dedicated to dairy farming and flowers for export, while [Medellin](#) is located in a valley surrounded by mountains, close to agricultural and mining regions of the Department of Antioquia. [Cali](#) is surrounded by the fertile Cauca River valley, which is covered by enormous sugar plantations, and [Barranquilla](#) is an important port on the Magdalena River.

Bogota, the capital and seat of government, is a modern and dynamic city that has a population of almost eight million. Medellín, in the west of the country, is the main producer of textiles and apparel, with two million, and Cali, in the southwest, is home to multinational companies supplying the Andean region. Other towns notable for their bustling activity are Barranquilla, Cartagena de Indias and Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast; Manizales, Pereira and Armenia in the coffee region; Bucaramanga and Cucuta in the northeast, and Neiva and Ibague in the Magdalena River valley.



Bogotá at night /Pic. [92014331@N00](#)

Infrastructure

Air Transport

Colombia boasts eight modern international airports that serve airlines from Latin America, North America and Europe. During 2003, nearly one and a half million passengers entered the country, and 450.000 tons of freight were handled. The rugged mountain terrain has encouraged the development of domestic air travel, with one of the densest route networks in Latin America, carrying 7.4 million passengers and 130.000 tons of freight per year, and with over 587 airports that connect remote regions with the rest of the country.

Sea transport

As part of the government's policy to open up the economy to international markets, the country's four main ports have been privatized and modernized: Buenaventura on the Pacific coast, and Barranquilla, Cartagena de Indias and Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, which permit an efficient movement of 70 million tons of freight per year. There are other ports specialized in the export of products such as coal, bananas and oil, and also a tourist quay for

cruise liners in Cartagena.

Road and rail transport

The country has a 145.000 km (90 099 miles) network of roads that connects the main cities with the sea ports, Venezuela and Ecuador, which are served by excellent bus and freight lines. A road has been planned to connect Colombia with Panama to complete the Pan-American Way, and the Marginal de la Selva, a road that will connect Colombia with Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru along the foothills of the Andes. 3.140 km (1 951 miles) of rail track is being rebuilt and two railroads transport coal to private ports that ship 27 million tons per year.

Telecommunications

Colombia has been modernizing its telecommunications. Today it possesses a modern digital telephone network, employing satellite and microwave links and two fiber optic trunk routes, covering the country with 8 million fixed lines, and served by 29 local and three long-distance operators. The country has five networks with 6 million mobile phones, which in 2003 grew by 35% in comparison with the previous year. By 2004, market penetration had equaled that of fixed lines. As a result of the need to liberalize communications and attract foreign investment, two of the five operators are multinational companies.

Power generation

Thanks to its immense water resources, almost 80% of the country's power generation is hydroelectric.

The use of a low-cost power source has been encouraged through the exploitation of the country's huge reserves of natural gas and the construction a network of gas pipelines that supplies 77% of potential residential demand. As a result, consumption has been growing at a rate of 10% per year.

In addition, negotiations are underway to export gas to Venezuela along a 205 km (155 miles) pipeline that will transport 150 million cubic feet per day. This project will open the way for a greater use of the infrastructure of transporting gas in the Andean region.

Water

The country provides excellent coverage of basic public services. Ninety percent of the population has access to drinking water and good-quality sanitation, a high percentage compared to other countries in Latin America.