Jean-Claude Bessudo /Picture: Hernan Díaz/

Interview to Jean Claude Bessudo, a Frenchman who wanted to be a math teacher and is today the president of Aviatur , the largest tourism organization in the country, present in 27 cities in Colombia and five abroad. Aviatur is made up of companies that carry out activities in the sectors of travel and tourism, foreign trade, marketing, insurance, medical assistance and services, technology and trading. Bessudo is a consummate traveler, in love with Mompox and Cayo Bolívar, who decided to come and stay in Colombia 48 years ago.

What is your nationality?

JCB: French and Colombian.

How long ago did you decide to come to Colombia?

JCB: 48 years.

What was the reason for your trip?

JCB: When my father passed away in 1956, my Uncle Victor had been telling me every year that I had to come and get to know Colombia, and when I was twelve years old, I finally traveled to Bogotá.

Was that your first visit to Colombia?

JCB: I was here from 1960 to 1965 and studied at the French Lyceum. I then attended Universidad de los Andes for one semester. Then I went to Belgium to study for two years; I did not graduate and decided to come to Colombia to work. I wanted to be a math teacher and when I arrived, my uncle had just passed away. I was nineteen and his wife asked me whether I would like to work with her. That is how I began to work in Aviatur.

During the time you have been living in Colombia, what places have you visited? Which of these have you liked more? Why?

JCB: I know a great deal of the country, from Providencia, San Andrés, Chocó, La Guajira, the Amazon, the Pacific Coast, the Colombian Massif, Pitalito, Mompox, La Pedrera. I also know several national parks.

The loveliest inhabited place in the country is perhaps Mompox because time stopped in Mompox since the Magdalena River changes its course in the 19th century. As to an uninhabited place, to me a paradise, just before you reach San Andrés is a place called Cayo Bolívar. There are hardly any tourists.

Why do you think foreigners should visit Colombia?

JCB: Because it is a marvel of a country, because the people are nice, because it is a country with authenticity, a country that has absolutely everything.

Do you have any plans to return to your country?

JCB: I go two or three times a year, that is what happens when you have a travel agency, you can travel whenever you feel like it, there is no problem.

But what about returning to stay for good?

JCB: I am a retired fellow, my greatest yearning is to travel once in a while with only a one-way ticket, without a confirmed return reservation, and stay five days or one month if I want to, wherever, but I have not had this luxury since I was seventeen.

What do you think about living in Bogotá?

JCB: Bogotá is a city with the ideal climate for working, not too hot, not too cold. One manages to be efficient. A city with a lot of cultural life. Also, if you have friends, then you like any place in the world.

Do you think Colombia is a world-class tourist destination? Why?

JCB: Yes, absolutely, because it offers absolutely everything, but most of all because it has people who are obliging and like to serve others.

Do you know the “Colombia, the risk is wanting to stay” campaign?

JCB: Yes, I love it.

Do you agree with the slogan?

JCB: Yes, I love it.

Do you consider yourself a foreigner in love with Colombia? Why?

JCB: I am now part of the national motto, I do not consider myself a foreigner, I am now part of the furniture, of the old furniture.

/**By: Ana María Campo**/