



Laura Gil

Life in Colombia is exciting, provocative, one finds challenges.

After 15 years of having settled down in Colombia, Laura Gil, an expert in international relations and human rights, believes that settling here was her best decision. She assures that she owes everything to Colombia: her son, her husband, best friends, and an unsurpassable professional career that would have been difficult to achieve elsewhere.

I have a 5-year old son who feels proud of being Colombian.

Due to her occupation, as well as her father's, she has always worked for international organizations. She has traveled to many countries, but none had seduced her enough to stay for good and take root. She did so in Colombia, and she feels proud about it, especially knowing that her 5-year old son, who was born in Bogotá, is going to grow up in a place where family, friends, and traditions are endowed with a valuable, even sacred, meaning.

An uncle and her rioplatense accent are the only ties she maintains with Uruguay, the country of origin that she abandoned when she was very young. Because of her profession she wanted to travel the world without tying herself down to any particular nation. Yet when she got to know Colombia, she understood that this was the place for rewriting her life. She thinks, feels, and lives as a Colombian; she knows the country and its problems; and she also knows about its beauty, goodness, and the quality of the people who inhabit it.

I cried like a Magdalene from emotion the day I got my Colombian nationality.

Laura Gil loves Colombia so much that in spite of having two nationalities, she dislikes being

called a foreigner. Laura loves Colombia so much that in the course of this interview she was afraid of using twee words and not finding the appropriate ones to truly give their true dimensions to her feelings of gratitude for a country of which she has been a national for several years. Following are the responses of a person who feels deeply for Colombia and who would never run the risk of leaving.

What is your nationality?

LG: I am Uruguayan, and also a Colombian by nationalization.

How long ago did you decide to come to Colombia?

LG: Sixteen years ago, in 1993.

What was the reason for your trip?

LG: I wanted to visit the country where my husband was born; I had met him in Haiti while he was working for the UN. I was here for two weeks during the Christmas holidays.

Was it your first time in Colombia?

LG: Yes, the first time was precisely in 1993.

How long had you planned to stay in the country initially?

LG: Only a couple of weeks, for the holidays. At first I came to become acquainted with the country.

Why did you decide to extend your stay?

LG: In 1994, I decided to settle down here with my husband. By reason of my work in human rights, and as an outside international, I wanted to work from within. There were many things, my husband, my friends, the possibility of developing my professional life. I remember that during the first year, adaptation was not easy for the fear of not being able to pursue my international career, but during the second year, I told my husband: "Even if we separate, I will stay here in Colombia."

During the time you have lived here, what places have you visited and

which ones have you liked? Why?

LG: By reason of my work and family travels, I know almost half the country. I like San Andrés, Santa Marta, San Gil, and their surroundings, but the one I like the most is Cartagena, where I usually spend Christmas and where I always want to go back to. Every time I go to Cartagena, I discover something new, a street that I had never seen before...

To what did you devote your time before coming to Colombia? To what do you devote your time nowadays?

LG: I used to work for the UN and the OAS in international relations and visiting various parts of the world. I now work with a Canadian government program in peace missions for the UN, I am a consultant for a firm of United States investors, I write a column for El Tiempo newspaper, and I participate in the Caracol Radio's Hora 20 program. I try to be as independent as possible in order to devote time to my family, especially my son.

Why do you think foreigners should visit Colombia?

LG: For its cultural wealth, because it is a country of traditions, for its professional class – one of the most sophisticated in Latin America - for the warmth of its people, and for the value Colombians give to friendship.

Do you have plans any for returning to your country?

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LG: Providencia. This is a place I know through images, but I would like to go there, especially for its sea. I must also get to know Ciudad Perdida on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. I am waiting for my son to be a little older in order to take him. I also have two trips pending, to Mompojón and Popayán, to learn about the Holy Week celebrations.

What would you recommend a foreigner to visit during a first trip to Colombia?

LG: I have a guest room at home that is always being used by relatives or friends who come from abroad. Generally, I take them to places in Bogotá like the Bolívar Plaza, the Prime Cathedral, La Candelaria district, the Bank of Republic's art museum, and the Gold Museum.

Then I take them to the Salt Cathedral in Zipaquirá. I also recommend visiting destinations like Cartagena, Santa Marta, and San Andrés.

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

LG: Yes, it's a world-class destination because it has everything. There are settings for those who want adventure; there are modern cities for those fond of city life; and there's a spectacular cultural offer; for example, the Ibero-American Theater Festival. Just to mention Bogotá, there is good theater, good films, and good concerts all the time.

Are you acquainted with the "Colombia, the risk is wanting to stay" campaign?

LG: Yes, I am. In fact, I show the promotional video clips during my classes in Canada and the people are pleasantly surprised by what they see.

Do you agree with the slogan?

LG: I think it's a fabulous campaign that is well-liked abroad. The people who have had the experience of getting to know Colombia tell me: "It's true; when you go to the country, you don't want to come back." My parents, who live in the United States, come every year, but want to settle down here for good.

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

LG: I feel frankly committed to and in love with Colombia, but it's just that I don't feel I am a foreigner.