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Brian C. Andrews.

The love that Brian C. Andrews feels today for Colombia was born as an unexpected surprise that caught him and pushed him to stay in the country. A growing idea took shape in his head: Let the world know about the exotic, paradisiacal, modern, and kind side of this country that amazed him from the first moment he stepped on its soil. This is how a section of RCN Channel called News In English was created, to speak to other foreigners about Colombia's real face.

When he tells his story, his mind walks back each step he took; he recalls each one of his experiences and the people who, trip by trip, joined his 'buddy list'. This North American journalist, known in the United States as a Fox Channel 7 and CBS reporter, left Miami nine years ago to cover a story in Bogotá, returning to his country with innumerable anecdotes that transformed his perception about Colombia.

My job was in South Florida, but my life was here.

When he arrived to Bogotá, he decided to take a walk and check the surroundings. Little by little, he discovered a modern, New York-style city full of beautiful and smiling people. Three days later he was already delighted by the country and, once he got back home, the only words coming from his mouth were praises about this unknown and poorly explored country. Upon realizing that he had accumulated about 15 Colombian stamps in his passport within three years, he decided to leave his car, his apartment, and his job to move permanently.

Brian has given Colombian people his news and knowledge as a journalist, and has also shown every different aspect of the country always highlighting those charming and peculiar elements of our culture. At the same time, he enjoys Colombia's different landscapes, cities, aromas, and regions, where day after day, he finds something new to carry in his heart.

## **What is your nationality?**

BA: I'm from Miami.

### **How long ago did you decide to come to Colombia?**

BA: I traveled to Colombia for the first time in 2001 for work reasons. After walking around Bogotá I fell in love with it and, in the lapse of three years, I traveled constantly to learn about other cities, clear my mind, and get some rest from my job back in Miami. Finally, I decided to write news here on a permanent basis, and make of this place my home.

### **What was the reason for your trip?**

BA: Fox Channel 7 sent me to Bogotá to write a story about drugs. I recall getting on the plane with my cameraman and saying, "This is really dangerous". But then, I looked out the window and saw a shade of green I had never seen before. There was this plateau, and big puffy mountains, and I suddenly felt like in the middle of a fairy tale: It was Bogotá's Savannah.

### **Was it your first time in Colombia?**

BA: Yes. The only thing I knew about the country, I learned it from the information of other news media around the world.

### **How long did you plan to stay in the country initially?**

BA: Only three days, just enough to cover the story I had been assigned to do for the television show.

### **Why did you decide to extend your stay?**

BA: About six months after returning to Miami, I was burned out. I had been covering hurricanes and political corruption, and one day I said, "I wanna get on a plane, and I wanna go back to Colombia". Then, I recalled a girl from the Embassy who told me I should travel to Cartagena, and also said they had direct flights from Miami. So I did, and all of a sudden I was sitting in a Coffee Shop inside the Walled City, with a beautiful aria playing in the background, and the sky was like twenty different shades of purple and orange. I felt like I was in a movie. I thought: "How can you not fall in love with this place?"

Pretty soon, I had made of Colombia my form of escape, and each time I had some time off, I came down here. I started to be more adventurous and visited Medellín and other cities; I was

hooked. One day I said, to myself “I’m not happy. Where am I really happy? Where are my friends? Oh! They all live in Colombia, they are all Colombian. Where do I go when I’m not working in Miami? To Colombia!” Then, I realized my work was in South Florida, but my life was here.

**During the time you have lived here, what places have you visited and which have you liked the most? Why?**

BA: I know Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, Cali, Barranquilla, and other cities. If I had to choose, I would definitely say my favorite place is the Walled City in Cartagena, and also Monserrate in Bogotá, both places and their amazing sunsets.

**What was your occupation before coming to Colombia? What is your occupation today?**

BA: I was a reporter for Fox Channel 7 in Miami and I also worked for CBS, just before I decided to move to Colombia. Now, I direct RCN’s News In English and its website in that same language.

**Why do you think foreigners should visit Colombia?**

BA: Because it will surprise them. For example, Bogotá is a big metropolis like Boston or Sao Paulo. And, foremost, because of the love Colombians put in everything they do. For them, making a burger takes 20 minutes, but it is made with love. In the United States, you simply get your burger in 3 minutes, but that’s all.

**Do you have any plans to return to your country?**

BA: I had planned to stay here for two years, but I am already on my third visa extension. I plan to stay here my whole life.

**What Colombian city or destination that you still don’t know would you like to visit?**

BA: I would like to visit the Pacific Coast. I’ve never been there. I’ve heard it’s really beautiful, and there is great whale watching, and lots of nice people. I have only been to Cali and Tumaco briefly to cover a story; that was 8 years ago.

**What would you recommend a foreigner to visit during their first trip to**

## **Colombia?**

BA: One of the things I enjoyed doing before returning to Miami from Bogotá was going to Monserrate to watch the sunset.

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

BA: Yes. Nowadays there is a boom in the number of Americans who are coming here to retire and buy real state in Cartagena, just to give you an example. Every American that I have talked to, who is here, just loves it, and says, “Why would I want to go back?” For North Americans this is a land full of opportunities, and its inhabitants are embracing other cultures and languages. This is the hottest place in Latin America, and the secret is out!

### **Are you acquainted with the “Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay” campaign?**

BA: Sure! In know about it.

### **Do you agree with the slogan?**

BA: I think it’s brilliant, because it really captures the essence of what happens to 90% of the ‘gringos’ who come here. They are scared when they take the plane, and after they dance cumbia in Barranquilla, taste manjar blanco in Cali, and see the spectacular sunsets in the Colombian green mountains, they want to stay.

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

BA: Yes. When I traveled to Bogotá for the first time, and took that first walk through the city, I realized that it really is modern, people are beautiful, and everyone is a “fashionista”. I thought to myself, “This really is a very nice place”. During that time, the capital city was transforming with Transmilenio (mass transportation system), and turning the tie from violent to big city, in the world metropolis kind of place. At the end of the trip, I was already hooked.