

- **Place:** Neiva, Huila
- **Region:** Andes
- **Date:** June 13 - 17, every year

Since colonial times, the department of Huila has been celebrating the feasts of Saint John and Saint Peter. These festivities are not only a large cultural sample full of music, dances, and costumes street marches, but a remembrance of very old traditions of this Colombian region.

History of the Festival



Bambuco National Folk Festival and Beauty Pageant /Pic. [11559407@N08](#)

The National Bambuco Festival began as homage to Saint John the Baptist, a saint from the old Christian Europe whose devotion was brought to America by the Spanish colonists. The feasts were made official in the eighteenth century to acclaim *La Jura*, an oath of obedience and respect to the King of Spain. Back then, the celebrations lasted ten days, during which the people participated in several events; among them, bullfights.

At the time, Saint John's Day was a rural feast celebrated in the countryside by families who usually spent the day at the riverside, where a traditional *huilense* roast was prepared. On the contrary, Saint Peter's Day was an urban feast developed in the city with horseback rides, fireworks, *aguardiente* (sugar cane spirits), and lots of music.

Starting in 1960, the festivities have been strengthened with rich and varied cultural offerings. Since then, the Folk Festival, a cultural heritage of the nation, is one of the better-organized ones and is only attended by groups with a proven musical record.

Main Activities of the Festival

As no other city in the country, Neiva integrates a profound mosaic of the most authentic

Colombian traditions in dance and music, which become visible during the famous, colorful folk parades.

The water parade This is one of the showiest acts of the feasts of Saint John and Saint Peter and the only one in its kind in the entire country. It takes place in a beautiful setting on the banks of the Magdalena river. Hundreds of *huilenses* and national and international tourists gather to watch the pageant candidates parade in their bathing suits on rafts decorated for the occasion. The folk parade It takes place on the main streets of the city. The candidates to the National Bambuco Beauty Pageant parade on floats decorated with the most important and traditional symbols of their department, and are followed by bands, costumed troupes, and allegorical representations of their myths and legends.

The National Bambuco Festival was started in honor of San Juan Bautista, a saint from Old Europe who the Spaniards brought with them to the Americas.

Aside from the parades, one of the most important events is the bambuco encounter, where contestant couples exhibit their mastery of this traditional Andean dance through pure movements, and fleeting, delicate contact.

The bambuco is the typical rhythm and dance of the Colombian Andes and the loftiest expression of its folklore. In its beginnings, the bambuco was played with three typical instruments of the region: *the bandola*, *the tiple*, and the guitar. *The tiple* and *the bandola* are string instruments. The body of *the tiple* is similar to that of a guitar, but has twelve strings. *The bandola* is smaller and pear-shaped and may have between 12 to 18 strings. Over time, composers have been adding more complex orchestrations, to the point that at present all kinds of instruments and vocal groups are allowed to participate.

Men and women of all ages participate in the performance and prove their great musical talent. Men wear white pants, a colorfully embroidered shirt, a kerchief, a white *aguadero hat*, a *carriel*, a *mulera*, and a *machete*, while women wear an embroidered half-sleeve blouse, a skirt decorated with horizontal strips of colored fabric at the hem, and a small, decorated *aguadero hat*.

If you had fun at the Bambuco National Folk Festival in Neiva, you will certainly enjoy other folkloric festivals Colombia has to offer:

- [Wayúu Culture Festival](#) ,
- [The Mono Núñez Festival](#) ,
- [International Amazonian Folk Festival Pirarucú de Oro in Leticia](#) ,
- [Festival of the Vallenato Legend in Valledupar](#) ,
- [The Ibagué Folk Festival](#) ,
- Or maybe [San Agustín Archaeological Park](#) , near to Neiva.