{rokbox title=|Almost all Yubarta whales from this region are born in Colombian waters and are faithful to their birthplace|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Quehacer/informeespecial/1especialwhalebahia.jpg{/rokbox}

Almost all Yubarta whales from this region are born in Colombian waters and are faithful to their birthplace

It's eleven a.m. The sun shines over the swells of the Pacific, casting its golden light above a canopy of trees grasping to the edges of the cliffs that make up the coastline of the Uramba National Park in Bahía Málaga.

"Ahoy!" shouts someone. "Three o'clock," another. "Straight ahead," yells someone else. There is no problem with our watches. We, the passengers of Alexia III, use the boat as an imaginary sundial to guide our way through the sea in search of humpback or Yubarta whales.

After navigating a shallow known as "Negritos" and glancing at the fins of half a dozen whales, without warning, just 25 meters away, an 18-meter-long female, following after her calf for air, reaches up towards the sky. The spectacle ends in a big splash and a unanimous sigh of disbelief.

Almost all Yubarta whales from this region are born in Colombian waters and are faithful to their birthplace

The Colombian Pacific coast is the mating and birthing area for the humpback whale, which migrates from the southern waters of the Americas between June and October. Of the total Yubarta population (estimated around 12,000) between 800 and 1,200 reach the Colombian littoral.

"Almost all Yubarta whales from this region are born in Colombian waters and are faithful to their birthplace," explains Héctor Fabio García, a biologist turned eco-tour-operator and guide. Besides Bahía Málaga, whales can also be seen in Isla Gorgona, Tumaco and Nuquí.

Whale watching in Colombia is regulated by local and national government. Safety for spectators and whales is equally important. Boat captains who offer the service are required to have special training and permits. A one hour whale watching excursion costs approximately Col$ 50,000 per person.

Chirimías and Wounaan

Although whale watching is one of the magnificent highlights of a trip to the region, the coastline also offers splendid hiking trails, windswept beaches and pristine rainforest.

Enjoy the local seafood, coconut sweets, and the friendliness of the locals who are eager to share their heritage with you.

Expect pleasant accommodation and ocean views from your room at Reserva Aguamarina in Ladrilleros (www.reservaaguamarina.com), and the nearby community of Juanchaco, which also offers simple lodging and family cabins.

Enjoy the local seafood, coconut sweets, and the friendliness of the locals who are eager to share their heritage with you. Don’t miss out on an evening of traditional chants and the sound of the chirimías accompanied by the marimbas, recently added to list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by Unesco.

A 20 minute walk from Ladrilleros will take you to a Wounaan indigenous community. Known for their elaborate handicrafts, they keep the weaving tradition going, and open their huts to visitors who are interested in knowing about their culture.

Low tide walks

The ocean tides, which sweep in and retreat four times a day, determine almost every aspect of life in this lush habitat - including soccer games on the beach, scientific field studies and tourism.

{rokbox title=|A whale of a good time|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Quehacer/informeespecial/2especialwhalebahia.jpg{/rokbox}

A whale of a good time

The Bahia Málaga Uramba National Park was added last year to Colombia's National Park list as number 56. It is one of the richest in flora diversity per square hectare in the world and home to 360 species of birds and 148 varieties of fish.

The 47,600 hectares of tropical rainforest include empty beaches, sweet-water waterfalls and estuaries crowned by rocky islands, such as Isla Palma. This delicate ecosystem is also a reserve for tree sloths and the very endangered Icotea turtle. Kayaking and hiking tours in Isla Palma and other small islands and beaches along the Malaga Bay (such as Playa Dorada or Tasqueros) is possible, and many such as San Juan De Dios offer camping facilities.

Natural wells spur from the earth, making this region one of the richest fresh water enclaves in the world. With 225 days of rain every year accounting for 15 meters of water, don't mind the weather as it is part of the Pacific experience.

High tide swims

The Sierpes waterfalls are a must see when the tide is high as hot and cold currents converge in the bright mangrove, and you can swim between salt and freshwater pools. When the tide retreats, the beaches of the Pacifico are home to many crabs and mollusks, which survive on that delicate balance between an ecosystem and sustainable tourism.

Bahía Málaga is an off the beaten track paradise for the experienced traveler. Just two and half hours from Cali, the capital of Valle de Cauca, by bus and a 45 minute boat ride from Buenventura, this region offers a unique opportunity to experience nature from a close and intimate setting. The sparkling ocean and the magnificence of giant mammals at play is just one of the many reasons you'll fall in love with Colombia's Pacífico.

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