



{rokbox title=|La Tatacoa

Desert|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Quehacer/informeespecial/tatacoa4.jpg{/rokbox}

La Tatacoa Desert /Picture <http://www.flickr.com/photos/fabianrios/>

La Tatacoa Desert, the second largest dry area in Colombia after the desert of La Guajira, is one of Colombia's most attractive natural landscapes. It covers an area of 330 km² of gray and ochre soil interrupted by the green of the cactuses.

La Tatacoa Desert has two characteristic colors: ochre in the Cuzco zone and gray in Los Hoyos.

La Tatacoa, or "Valley of Sadnesses", as it was called in 1538 by Conquistador Jiménez de Quesada on account of the deterioration he observed, is not exactly a desert but rather a tropical dry forest. The name "Tatacoa", was also given to it by the Spaniards in reference to rattlesnakes, not to the inoffensive black snakes found there.

According to scientific discoveries, during the Tertiary Period, La Tatacoa was a garden with thousands of flowers and trees that gradually dried up until it became a desert.

La Tatacoa continues to be harbor life thanks to the April-May and October-November rainy seasons, which evoke its past of a green, leafy garden, full of flowers, and birds singing in the trees.

The desert landscape

Quite a lot of erosion has taken place in La Tatacoa and relatively little animal and vegetable life was able to adapt to the scant humidity and the high temperatures. We can find turtles, rodents, snakes, spiders, scorpions, eagles, lizards, and ocelots that share this land and hide among cactuses that may reach heights of four to five meters.

The plants in the area adapt to the climatic conditions by developing 30-meter long horizontal roots and 15-meter vertical roots that allow them access to water.

The area is very eroded and crossed by dry canyons that develop temporarily during the rainy seasons. These mysterious shapes are created over surfaces of clay and generate mazes of gullies that can reach depths of 20 meters.

Climate

The average temperature in La Tatacoa Desert is 28° C; yet on sunny days, it can go up to 40° C.

The astronomic place

La Tatacoa Desert enjoys a privileged geographic location at latitude 3°13' north and longitude 75°10' west, not far from the equatorial line.

From there, it is possible to:

- Observe 88 constellations,
- Tour various celestial objects,
- Admire phenomena such as meteor showers.

La Tatacoa skies are cloud-free most of the year.



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La Tatacoa Desert /Picture <http://www.flickr.com/photos/marialegria/>

Aside from having perfect geographic and atmospheric conditions for the observation of celestial bodies, La Tatacoa has no visual or auditory pollution. This attraction greatly captures the attention of tourists who stop over to enjoy the scenery and its peace and quiet.

Villavieja, Colombia's paleontological capital

Villavieja, known as "Colombia's paleontological capital", possesses fauna and flora deposits dating back millions of years. Fossils found by scientists of mollusks, rodents, armadillos, and giant sloths prove that La Tatacoa originally possessed an exuberant and diversified animal and plant life.

For these reasons, the desert receives a great many visits, especially from paleontologists and geologists for whom it is a research paradise.

Star Party at La Tatacoa Desert

Some people say that the temperature in La Tatacoa Desert is so high that it is possible to cook an egg buried in the sand.



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La Tatacoa Desert /Picture <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chilangoco/>

A good reason to remain in the department of Huila after the conclusion of the National Bambuco Pageant is the Tatacoa Star Party 2009, which will take place in the desert between June 17 and 20, 2009.

The event is geared to astronomers, scholars, scientists, and students, as well as to amateurs in astronomy and celestial bodies. "Star Party 2009 will be an excellent opportunity to discover the sky, observe the two celestial hemispheres, and watch the Scorpius, Sagittarius, Virgo, Centaurus, and Cygnus constellations, among other phenomena," points out Astronomer Javier Rua.



How to get to Villavieja and La Tatacoa Desert?

- By air: a 30-minute flight from Bogotá to Neiva.
- By land: a 5-hour trip from Bogotá to Neiva.
- The trip from Neiva to Villavieja takes about 45 minutes by land; from there to the desert, an additional 15 minutes.
- If you have no car, you may use the motorcycle taxi service from Villavieja to the desert.

If you like natural environments like La Tatacoa Desert, you may also want to visit:

- [The San Agustín Archaeological Park](#)
- or, perhaps, you may decide to enjoy [the Bambuco Festival in Neiva.](#)