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Sierra Nevada del Cocuy

Colombia is a striking mixture of colorful landscapes. This time, it is about the white peaks of the snowy mountain range of El Cocuy, some of which, aside from beautifying the scenery, are points of reference for the challenges of mountain climbers and tourists who wish to become acquainted icy places in Colombian geography.

Some peaks are inaccessible to man; for example, the [Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta](#) , on the Caribbean Coast. Others like [El Cocuy](#) , or Güicán, Snowy Mountain Range constitute a permanent goal for travelers and ecologists who spend most of their time on the heights, far from the din of the cities, and close to the silent landscapes, in a state of full tranquility.

The Sierra Nevada del Cocuy is located in eastern Colombia, in the departments of Boyacá, Casanare, and Arauca

The Sierra Nevada del Cocuy is a 306,000 km² protected area from which rise 23 snow peaks surrounded by waterfalls, lakes, páramo vegetation - frailejón (Espeletia) is a good example - and several species of fauna, among them, tapirs, spectacled bears, Andean condors, eagles, and páramo deer.

It is possible to walk to many of the splendid places that make up the Sierra, as long as the tour is done under the guidance of expert guides who provide their services through companies legally incorporated in Bogotá or the Boyacá towns of El Cocuy and Güicán. This way it is much easier to reach one of the most spectacular environments in Colombia, a place where the hope of delaying or avoiding the ravages of global warming is still cherished.



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It is necessary to devote at least a week to achieve the best possible experience of body and spirit. And, naturally, during the dry season. During the rainy season, access is impossible and visibility is extremely poor. Although here, as in other parts of the world, the climate has changed in recent years, two seasons have been identified as the best for conquering this landscape: from July to August and from December to February. In any case, during any vacation period it is possible to travel to the nearby municipalities of El Cocuy or Güicán to wait patiently for the right time to climb the mountain.

Interesting sites on the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy

Plaza and Grande de la Sierra Lakes, Púlpitos del Diablo Rock, and Pan de Azúcar Glacier are not to be missed

The list of sites is extensive and varies according to whether the mountain climber is seasoned or not. Must-see attractions are Plaza and Grande de la Sierra Lakes, the blanket of snow that covers Devil's Pulpits, Pan de Azúcar Glacier, the Toti, Cóncavo, and Portales snow peaks, and of course, the most imposing of El Cocuy summits: Ritacuba Blanco, at a challenging 5,330 meters above sea level.

Reaching the top of these mountains is best left to professional mountain climbers. However, approaching its slopes and becoming a part of the enormous panorama of Sierra del Cocuy Güicán is a dream within reach of any adventurer enchanted by nature. It is only a matter of obtaining the necessary information beforehand and following the recommendations given by the local guides and the offices of the Dirección de Parques Nacionales (Department of National Parks).

How to get to the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy Güicán

From [Bogotá](#), it is necessary to take the Autopista Norte (Northern Highway) to the town of Duitama, in the department of Boyacá (240 km). From there, the trip continues on the road that crosses the northeastern sector of the department and passes the towns of Santa Rosa de Viterbo, Cerinza, Belén, Susacón, and Soatá. The latter offers two options: The first leads to Capitanejo, in the department of [Santander](#). The second, which is more advisable due to better roads, crosses Soatá, Boavita, La Uvita, San Mateo, Guacamayas, Panqueba, El Cocuy, or Güicán.

El Cocuy and Güicán offer four routes that lead to different mountain sites on the majestic

Sierra Nevada. All of them include a ride on a 4-wheel drive vehicle over an unpaved road, horseback rides, and hiking for at least an hour before reaching the snow.



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Snow and spectacular landscapes on the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy

- **Route 1 (south)** Lagunillas – Púlpito del Diablo – Pan de Azúcar
- **Route 2 (center)** Laguna Grande de la Sierra – Los Cóncavos
- **Route 3 (north)** Güicán – Cabañas Kanwara – Ritacuba Blanco (highest peak on the Sierra and the Eastern Mountain Range)
- **Route 4 Tour of the Sierra.** Done in a south – north direction beginning in El Cocuy, or in the opposite direction beginning in
 - **Güicán.** Either journey lasts between five and six days, whereas Routes 1, 2, and 3 allow the possibility to return on the same day to the cabins in the Natural Park or to the nearby municipalities.

Recommendations

- The minimum altitude reached during any expedition to El Cocuy is 2,750 meters. Thus, previous acclimatization is a priority, especially for people who arrive from sea level and the hot country.
- Touring El Cocuy Güicán Mountain Range involves great physical effort. Thus it is essential to be in good health. It is not recommended for people with a cold or the flu or respiratory or cardiac conditions.
- Follow the instructions of the park rangers and guides.
- Take warm, water-proof clothing, shoes for walking on the snow and steep terrain, sun glasses with UV filter, sun block, containers for collecting natural water, and sturdy tents. Make sure to pack foods that provide energy and calories, such as chocolate bars, bocadillos (guava paste sweets), peanuts, and whole cereal cookies or crackers.

If you like snow, we invite you to read the following articles:

- [El Cocuy Natural Park: extreme adventure amid perpetual snow](#)
- [Mystery and Splendor at Los Nevados Natural Park](#)