{rokbox title=|Ecohabs, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/ecohabs-sierra1.jpg{/rokbox}

Ecohabs, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The Sierra Nevada de *Santa Marta* is a magical destination where the wisdom of nature and the indigenous people are joined. Every step taken into its depth is an encounter with truly unique beauty and exuberance. It is the tallest seaside elevation independent of the Andes mountain chain.

The *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* is the tallest seaside elevation independent of the Andes mountain chain.

It possesses all the thermal floors, from the hot and dry to the perpetual snows whose melt-water creeks feed lakes and rivers 3,000 meters above sea level. Countless birds and howling monkeys live along the Sierra's 29 main rivers.

On account of the network of ecosystems that are home to countless life forms and several indigenous communities, in 1979, Unesco declared the *Sierra* a Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. This imposing mountain range is located in northern Colombia and occupies parts of the departments of
Magdalena, La Guajira
, and
Cesar
.

Snow on the Caribbean Coast

{rokbox title=|Snow Peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/nevado-santa-marta.jpg{/rokbox}

Snow Peaks of the *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* / Photo by Flickr user jennimarcela .

Just 42 kilometers away from the warm beaches of the Colombian Caribbean, there is a marvelous, icy landscape for ascending to perpetual snow. The two highest peaks of the *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* are *Colón* and *Bolívar*, at 5,775 meters above sea level, although some say the former is one meter taller than the latter.

The adventure starts by car in the city of *Valledupar* and goes on to *San Sebastián*, an *Arhuaco* settlement. From there, a journey along paths and trails leads to lakes and glaciers located at 3,000 meters above sea level. When the mountain gets very steep, excellent mountain climbing equipment and experience are necessary for the ascent.

Ciudad Perdida – The Lost City

{rokbox title=|Ecohabs view from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta beaches.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/ecohabs-sierra2.jpg{/rokbox}

Ecohabs view from *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* beaches.

In the midst of the dense flora of the *Sierra* and its natural park, lies *Ciudad Perdida*, or *Teyuna* Archaeological Park, the birthplace of the Tayrona indigenous people, an advanced pre-Hispanic culture. A team of researchers discovered it in 1976, although a year before, a treasure hunter had found it. Its extension is roughly 13 hectares.

Ciudad Perdida – Lost City – amazes for the complexity of its architecture and canal system, and the terraces built for conserving soil fertility.

When the *Tayrona* indigenous people lived there, their settlements were connected by stone paths. They lived in window-less, thatched circular cabins erected on stone terraces.

What is surprising about *Ciudad Perdida* is the complexity of its architecture, which included a canal system to carry rain water to the villages and terraces and conserve the fertility of the soil. There are also rock paintings and petro-glyphs. The *Donama* rock stands out for the multiple interpretations given to its carvings.

The Indigenous people of the *Sierra*

The Sierra Nevada "is the umbilical cord that joins the origin and the present, the spiritual and the material, it is the union with the Mother".

The *Tayrona* culture inhabited the *Sierra Nevada* prior to the Spanish Conquest. Following the conquest, its population of around one million inhabitants began to decrease to the point that it almost disappeared. At present, four indigenous communities that preserve their ancient traditions amount to about 30,000 people. They are the *Kogis, Arhuacos, Wiwas*, and *Kankuamos*.

For the indigenous people, "*The Sierra Nevada is like a ceremonial house (…), it is the site where all the responsibility to the universe is concentrated, the place from which everything that is sacred and vital to the universe is watched over and guarded, it is the foundation and the union with the spiritual. "It is the umbilical cord that joins the origin and the present, the spiritual and the material, it is the union with the Mother.* " **Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona**.

The *Kogis*

{rokbox title=|Kogi children in their cabin.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/koguis.j

pg{/rokbox}

Kogi children in their cabin / Photo by Flickr user Sailing Nomad .

The *Kogi* community occupies the northern area of the *Sierra*, among the valleys of the *Don Diego, Palomino, San Miguel*
, and
Ancho
rivers. Its members live in circular dwellings called "
bohíos
" and are under the authority of the
Mamo
, an elder that embodies ancestral wisdom and is the bridge between the spiritual and the terrestrial.

The *Wiwas*

The meaning of "*Wiwa*" is "warm", possibly reflecting the fact that they inhabit a lower region of the *Sierra*, where temperatures are quite high. Other meanings of the name are "give origin", "propitiate", and "engender". And another way of calling them is by the name "*Sanjá*", which means "native" or "Indigenous". Their settlements are situated on the *Sierra*, in the department of
Cesar
, close to the border with the department of
La Guajira
.

The *Arhuacos*

{rokbox title=|Arhuaco family.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/arhuacos1.jpg{/rokbox}

Arhuaco family / Photo by Flickr user ca.millionaire .

Also known as "*Ika*" or "*Ijka*", they live in the upper valleys of the *Piedras, San Sebastián, Chichicua, Ariguaní,* and *Guatapurí*
rivers, south of the

Sierra Nevada
. The capital is
Nabusimake
and is located in the central area. They speak a language that belongs to the
Chibcha
family.

The *Kankuamos*

They are known as "*Kankuaka*", "*Kankui*", or "*Kankuané*". Their traditions, language, and culture are undergoing a process of recovery, since most of their ancient memory was lost. The live on the eastern side of the *Sierra Nevada* ,
in the department of
Cesar
.

Another *Sierra Nevada* community is the *Wayúu*, originnaly from *La Guajira* and smaller in size than the four groups that descend from the
Tayronas
.

Nature handicrafts for today

{rokbox title=|Kogi indigenous woman with artisan necklaces made from colored stones / Photo by Flickr user.|}images/stories/turistainternacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/kogui-collares1.jpg{/rokbox}

Kogi indigenous woman with artisan necklaces made from colored stones / Photo by Flickr user Sailing Nomad
.

The wealth of the *Sierra Nevada* provides Indigenous people and artisans with the materials necessary for creating objects of great beauty. The *tutus*, or *Ta yona*
shoulder bags, stand out. The indigenous women weave them using wool, sisal, and cotton. The bags symbolize the creation of life.

The wealth of the Sierra Nevada provides indigenous people and artisans with the materials necessary for creating objects of great beauty.

Materials such as shell, coconut , seeds, tree bark, *tagua* (the so-called “vegetable ivory”, bone, and snail shell are several of the materials used for making necklaces, earrings, rings, watches, and bracelets. Other easily obtainable handicrafts are the *sombrero vueltiao* , the typical hat of the Colombian Caribbean region), sandals, key chains, and belts.

Additionally, they make decorative accessories such as ceramic pots, vessels, and plates and spoons from stone (especially *piedra jabón*), *totumo* (a relatively large gourd-like fruit with a shell that becomes very hard when dry), and clay.

Before going to the *Sierra*…

- Yellow fever and tetanus vaccinations are necessary.
- A complete first aid kit, include anti-venom serum, and anti-diarrheal.
- The *Tayrona* Park authorities must be informed of all visit. It is necessary to hire a guide capable of supporting the ascent to the snow peaks, as well as to take complete mountaineering equipment.
- If spending the night in *Ciudad Perdida*, a sleeping bag or a hammock and blankets are also necessary.
- During some seasons, *Ciudad Perdida* is closed, so it is important to check with the *Instituto Colombiano de Antropología* and the *Ministerio del Medio Ambiente* Bogotá offices and request the licenses required for mountain climbing and visiting indigenous communities

- If a visit to an indigenous community is intended, it is indispensable to obtain their authorization and consent, even for taking photographs. Their preferences in this matter should be respected.
- At the time of paying the guide for his services, a per-person toll is charged to access to the area, for the purpose of trail maintenance.
- In Colombia, it is unlawful to dig and remove pieces of any historical or archaeological value.

Other sites worth knowing on the *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*

(http://www.turismointernacional/Adondeir/Destinosfindesemana/sierranevada/casca
Tayrona Park (Tayrona National Park)
Cabo de San Juan del Guía (a cape) *Tayrona* Park)

Did you like this article? You may be interested in reading about:

- Destination *Santa Marta*
- The *Tayrona* : a nature and adventure destination
- *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* Natural Park
- *Ciudad Perdida*
- *Santa Marta* video
- *Santa Marta* photo gallery
- *Tayrona* : foreigner's pictures