**Colombia Facts and Culture**

* [Food and Recipes:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipes.htm) If one is offered more food, it is polite to refuse if it may be considered overindulging. It is considered... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipes.htm)
* [Family:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/family.htm) Family unity and support is highly valued in Colombia. Family members share their good fortune with other members of the... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/family.htm)
* [Fashion:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/fashion.htm) Dress is both conservative and fashionable in Colombia. In larger cities, men wear suits and ties. Women wear... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/fashion.htm)
* [Visiting:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/visiting.htm) People often sit on their verandas, and chat with people that pass by. Friends and relatives visit without notice, especially... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/visiting.htm)

**Colombia Facts**

Colombia stats

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital  | Bogota  |
| Government Type  | republic; executive branch dominates government structure  |
| Population  | 45,745,783  |
| Total Area  | 439,733 Square Miles1,138,910 Square Kilometers  |
| Location  | Northern South America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Panama and Venezuela, and bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between Ecuador and Panama  |
| Language  | Spanish (official)  |

Map of Colombia



**Colombia Geography**

**Terrain and geography**

The Republic of Colombia (about 440,000 square miles), is in northwest South America. Its location on the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, proximity to the Panama Canal, and economic potential give it a position of international importance.

As well as its frontier with Panama on the northwest, Colombia shares borders with Ecuador and Peru on the south, with Brazil on the southeast, and with Venezuela on the northeast.

The Andes mountains dominate the western two-fifths of Colombia, giving it a very different character from the remaining eastern three-fifths. The Amazon Region of southeastern Colombia lies below the Equator.

Greater than 90% of the population are concentrated in the mountainous west and along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. The rest live in the Eastern Llanos, a large plains area, that constitutes 54% of the area.

Most live on plateaus and mountain slopes, where elevation reduces the equatorial heat and contributes to the people’s health and vigor. By concentrating people in isolated pockets at high elevations, the mountain ranges determine not only settlement patterns, but also lines of communication and travel, which parallel the ranges in a north-south direction. Movement from rural to urban areas has been heavy, and nearly three-quarters of the population are now urban.

**Geography - note**

only South American country with coastlines on both the North Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea

**Colombia Geography**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Location  | South America  |
| Total Area  | 439,733 Square Miles1,138,910 Square Kilometers  |
| Land Area  | 401,042 Square Miles1,038,700 Square Kilometers  |
| Water Area  | 38,691 Square Miles100,210 Square Kilometers  |
| Land Boundaries  | 3,920 Miles6,309 Kilometers  |
| Irrigated Land  | 4,197 Square Miles10,870 Square Kilometers  |
| Border Countries  | Brazil 1,644 km, Ecuador 590 km, Panama 225 km, Peru 1,800 km, Venezuela 2,050 km  |
| Coastline  | 1,993 Miles3,208 Kilometers  |
| Geographic Coordinates  | 4 00 N, 72 00 W  |
| Terrain  | flat coastal lowlands, central highlands, high Andes Mountains, eastern lowland plains  |
| Highest Point  | 5,775 Meters  |
| Highest Point Location  | Pico Cristobal Colon 5,775 m  |
| Lowest Point Location  | Pacific Ocean 0 m  |
| Natural Resources  | petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, emeralds, hydropower  |
| Time Zone  | UTC-5 (same time as Washington, DC during Standard Time)  |

**Colombia Weather and Climate**

**Climate and Weather**

Colombia's climate varies with its different altitudes. Its three climatic zones are called: "hot country," "temperate country," and "cold country." Columbia is tropical along the coast and eastern plains; cooler in the highlands.

**Colombia Environmental Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Climate  | Colombia's climate varies with its different altitudes. Its three climatic zones are called: "hot country," "temperate country," and "cold country." Columbia is tropical along the coast and eastern plains; cooler in the highlands.  |
| Terrain  | flat coastal lowlands, central highlands, high Andes Mountains, eastern lowland plains  |
| Natural Resources  | petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, emeralds, hydropower  |
| Natural Hazards  | highlands subject to volcanic eruptions; occasional earthquakes; periodic droughtsvolcanism: Galeras (elev. 4,276 m) is one of Colombia's most active volcanoes, having erupted in 2009 and 2010 causing major evacuations; it has been deemed a "Decade Volcano" by the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior, worthy of study due to its explosive history and close proximity to human populations; Nevado del Ruiz (elev. 5,321 m), 129 km (80 mi) west of Bogota, erupted in 1985 producing lahars that killed 23,000 people; the volcano last erupted in 1991; additionally, after 500 years of dormancy, Nevado del Huila reawakened in 2007 and has experienced frequent eruptions since then; other historically active volcanoes include Cumbal, Dona Juana, Nevado del Tolima, and Purace  |
| Irrigated Land  | 4,197 Square Miles10,870 Square Kilometers  |
| Environmental Issues  | deforestation; soil and water quality damage from overuse of pesticides; air pollution, especially in Bogota, from vehicle emissions  |
| Environment - International Agreements  | party to: Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands signed, but not ratified: Marine Life Conservation  |

**Colombia Population Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Population  | 45,745,783  |
| Population Growth Rate  | 1.1%  |
| Urban Population  | 75.3%  |
| Population in Major Urban Areas  | BOGOTA (capital) 8.743 million; Medellin 3.694 million; Cali 2.453 million; Barranquilla 1.9 million; Bucaramanga 1.12 million; Cartagena 988,000  |
| Nationality Noun  | Colombian(s)  |
| Nationality Adjective  | Colombian  |
| Ethnic Groups  | mestizo 58%, white 20%, mulatto 14%, black 4%, mixed black-Amerindian 3%, Amerindian 1%  |
| Languages  | Spanish (official)  |
| Rate of Urbanization- annual rate of change  | 1.65%  |

**Colombia Medical Information**

Medical care is adequate in major cities but varies greatly in quality and accessibility elsewhere. Emergency rooms in Colombia, even at top-quality facilities, are frequently overcrowded and ambulance service can be slow. Many private health care providers in Colombia require that patients pay for care before treatment, even in an emergency. Some providers in major cities may accept credit cards, but those that don’t may request advance payment in cash. Uninsured travelers without financial resources may be relegated to seeking treatment in public hospitals where the standard of care is below U.S. standards.

Elective Surgery: The Department of State regularly receives reports of U.S. citizens who have died or suffered complications from liposuction and other elective surgeries overseas. Before undergoing such a procedure in Colombia, consult with your personal physician, research the credentials of the provider in Colombia, and carefully consider your ability to access emergency medical care if complications arise. It is important to confirm that your medical insurance provides coverage in Colombia, including treatment of complications from elective procedures or medical evacuation if necessary. If you suffer complications as a result of medical malpractice, collecting damages from your surgeon may be difficult.

Unregulated Drugs: Colombia has seen a recent increase in the use of unregulated drugs that purport to enhance sexual performance. Some tourists have died after using these substances, which come in liquid, powder, or tablet form. You are urged to seek guidance from a physician before ingesting such substances in Colombia.

Altitude Sickness: Travelers to the capital city of Bogota may need time to adjust to the altitude of 8,600 feet, which can affect blood pressure, digestion, and energy level, and cause mild dyspnea with exercise, headaches, sleeplessness, and other discomfort. Drink plenty of fluids to maintain hydration, and avoid strenuous exercise until you have acclimated to the altitude. If you have circulatory or respiratory problems, consult a physician before traveling to Bogota or other high-altitude locations.

**Colombia Health Information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Health Expenditures (% of GDP)  | 6.1%  |
| Death Rate/1,000 population  | 5.33  |
| Obesity- adult prevalence rate  | 17.3%  |
| Hospital Bed Density/1,000 population  | 1.4  |
| Physicians Density/1,000 population  | 1.47  |
| Infant Mortality Rate/1,000 population  | 15.46  |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Female/1,000 population  | 11.96  |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Male/1,000 population  | 18.77  |
| Underweight - percent of children under five years  | 3.4%  |
| Total Fertility Rate  | 2.1  |
| Age of Mother's First Birth  | 21.4  |
| Contraceptive prevalance rate (female 15-49)  | 79.1%  |
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births  | 92  |
| HIV Adult Prevalence Rate  | 0.5%  |
| HIV Aids Deaths  | 6,500  |
| HIV Aids People Living With  | 160,000  |
| Drinking Water Source: unimproved  | 8.8%  |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of rural population improved  | 73.6%  |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of urban population improved  | 96.9%  |
| Sanitation Facility Access: unimproved  | 19.8%  |
| Sanitation Facility Access - percent of urban population improved  | 84.9%  |
| Sanitation Facitlity Access - percent of rural population improved  | 65.7%  |
| Major Infectious Diseases - degree of risk  | high  |
| Food or Waterborne Disease (s)  | bacterial diarrhea  |
| Vectorborne Disease (s)  | dengue fever, malaria, and yellow fever  |

**Colombia Crime**

**Crime Information**

Violent and petty crime remains a significant concern in Colombia. Robbery and other violent crimes, as well as scams against unsuspecting tourists, are common in urban areas. Generally speaking, if you are the victim of a robbery, you should not resist. Firearms are prevalent in Colombia and altercations can turn violent. Small towns and rural areas of Colombia can still be extremely dangerous due to the presence ofof illegal armed groups and narcotics trafficking gangs. Theft also remains a significant problem in many urban and rural areas. There has been an increase in petty crime, including a significant increase in pick pocketing of passports in the El Dorado Airport in Bogota, Colombia, and at luxury hotels, especially during Colombian holidays, Christmas, Easter Week, and summer holidays (July and August).

Some of the most common methods used by criminals in Colombia are noted below:

ATMs: People are sometimes robbed after using automatic teller machines (ATMs) on the street. In some cases, robbers use motorcycles to approach their victims and then flee the scene. For your safety, only use ATMs inside shopping malls or other protected locations. Driving to and from the location – rather than walking – provides added protection. When using an ATM, you should be on the lookout for anyone watching or following you and be extremely cautious about displaying cash.

Taxis: Robbery of taxi passengers is a serious problem in Bogota, as well as in Cali and Medellin. Typically, the driver – who may be one of the conspirators – will pick up the passenger and then stop to pick up one or more armed cohorts, who enter the cab, overpower the passenger, and take his/her belongings. If the passenger has an ATM card, the perpetrators may force the passenger to withdraw money from various ATM locations. Such ordeals can last for hours.

In most taxi-related crimes, the victims have been riding alone and have hailed taxis off the street. Rather than hailing a taxi, you should use the telephone dispatch service that most taxi companies offer. Many hotels, restaurants, and stores will call a taxi for you. When a taxi is dispatched by telephone, the dispatcher creates a record of the call and the responding taxi. The taxi company provides the caller with the license plate numbers and a security code to present to the taxi driver before departing.

When taking a taxi, note of the license plate, company and other ID for the car and driver. Also, the Colombian Tourist Police recommend checking to make sure that your taxi has inside handles and latches before committing to the ride.

Airports: U.S. citizens arriving at major Colombian airports have occasionally been victimized by armed robbers and rogue taxi drivers while en route from the airport to their hotel or home. There are taxi booths both in El Dorado (international) and Puente Aereo (domestic) airports. You may go to the booth, request a taxi, and provide the address of your destination. The person in the booth will give you a ticket indicating the amount of money you will pay for the service. Dispatchers are right outside the exit to organize the waiting line. Authorized taxis are located in the designated area, close to the booth. Give one part of your ticket to the driver and retain one for your records.

Criminals also sometimes identify potential victims at the airport and then follow their vehicles before robbing the occupants at a stoplight. Remain vigilant at airports and inform the local airport police if you suspect you may be under surveillance.

Hiking Trails: Several U.S. citizens have been robbed in recent years while hiking on nature trails in and around Bogota. Hike in groups for safety, especially in isolated areas.

Hostels: The Tourist Police in Bogota specifically caution about crimes in backpacker hostels in the Candelaria area of Bogota, noting many attacks in recent years, including a sexual assault of a U.S. citizen. Be careful when selecting a hostel- consider not just the price, but the general safety of the area.

Disabling Drugs: The Embassy continues to receive reports of criminals in Colombia using disabling drugs to temporarily incapacitate unsuspecting victims. Perpetrators may offer tainted drinks, cigarettes or gum at bars, restaurants, and other public areas, especially those that cater to sexual tourism. Typically, victims become disoriented or unconscious, and are thus vulnerable to robbery, sexual assault and other crimes. Avoid leaving food or drinks unattended at a bar or restaurant, and be suspicious if a stranger offers you something to eat or drink.

Counterfeit Money: U.S. citizens in Colombia routinely fall victim to a scam in which purported undercover police officers approach them on the street and request to examine their money, supposedly to determine if it is counterfeit. The “officers,” who are in fact criminals, then flee with the money. In a variation of this scam, the thieves may ask to see your jewelry. Legitimate Colombian police officers do not make such requests. Colombian police officers will always be in uniform. If someone claims to be working “undercover” (out of uniform), they are not legitimate since undercover police are not authorized to intercept tourists on the street.

Don’t buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, if you purchase them you may also be breaking local law.

**Colombia Penalties for Crime**

**Criminal Penalties**

While traveling in Colombia, all persons including U.S. citizens are subject to its laws and jurisdictions. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. In some places driving under the influence could land you immediately in jail. These criminal penalties will vary from country to country. There are also some things that might be legal in the country you visit, but still illegal in the United States. The purchase of pirated goods may lead to prosecution under U.S. law. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime prosecutable in the United States. If you break local laws in Colombia, your U.S. passport will not help you avoid arrest or prosecution. It’s very important to know what is legal and what is illegal in the countries you visit.

If you are arrested, the U.S. government cannot request your release. Colombia and the United States do not have a prisoner transfer agreement, and so any sentence for a crime committed in Colombia is ordinarily served in a Colombian prison.

Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking of illegal drugs in Colombia are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long prison sentences under harsh conditions, with significant expense and great hardship for themselves and their families. Colombian police make multiple arrests daily for drug trafficking at major airports, and have sophisticated means for detecting illegal drugs in baggage or on your person. Travelers are sometimes requested to undergo an X-ray to ensure that they are not smuggling narcotics within their bodies. There are currently more than 40 U.S. citizens incarcerated in Colombia for attempting to smuggle drugs out of the country.

The hardships resulting from imprisonment do not end even after release from prison: Colombian law requires that serious offenders remain in the country to serve a lengthy period of parole, during which the offender is given no housing and may lack permission to work. As a result, family members must often support the offender, sometimes for more than a year, until the parole period expires.

Arrest Notification: Based on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, bilateral agreements with certain countries, and customary international law, if you are arrested in Colombia, you have the option to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the U.S. Embassy in Bogota.

**Colombia Life Expectancy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life Expectancy At Birth  | 75 Years  |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Female  | 78 Years  |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Male  | 71 Years  |
| Median Age (female)  | 29 Years  |
| Median Age (male)  | 27 Years  |
| Median Age  | 28 Year |

**Colombia Language**

Most Colombians speak Spanish, which is the official language. Among eighty indigenous groups at least forty languages are spoken.

**Colombia Literacy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Predominant Language  | Spanish (official)  |
| Literacy Definition  | age 15 and over can read and write  |
| Literacy Female  | 90.7%  |
| Literacy Male  | 90.1%  |
| Literacy Total  | 90.4%  |

**Colombia Education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Education Expenditures - percent of GDP  | 4.4%  |
| Literacy - female  | 90.7%  |
| Literacy - male  | 90.1%  |
| Literacy - total population  | 90.4%  |
| Literacy Definition  | age 15 and over can read and write  |
| School Life Expectancy - female  | 14 Years  |
| School Life Expectancy - male  | 13 Years  |
| Total School Life Expectancy - (primary to tertiary)  | 13 Years  |

**Colombia Age of Population**

Age 0-14: 24.3 %Age 15-24: 17.1 %Age 25-54: 39.1 %Age 55-64: 10.6 %Over 64: 8.9 %Highcharts.com

**Classroom**

Primary schools are run by local governments, whereas secondary schools and universities are supported by the national government. By law, the Colombian government spends at least 10% of its budget on education. Colombia has one of the highest expenditure rates for education in Latin America.
Rural elementary schools tend to have one room and one teacher. Nearly 70% of those teachers had not received formal training to become teachers, and over half of them did not even register as teachers. In rural schools, the teachers tended to focus on practical subjects to teach the children how to succeed as much as possible within the realities of their lives.

Most schools have a simple uniform that children are to wear: dark skirts for the girls, and dark pants and light shirts for the boys.

**Education Culture**

Preschool is operated by private organizations and can start as early as four years old. Almost 92% are Catholic and are located in larger cities.
Elementary school is free to all students, and children are required to attend school for nine years (five in elementary school, ages 6-10, and four more in secondary school, ages 11-14). For many, as we will see, only the first five years is likely. Most of the schools are operated by the Roman Catholic church, so courses in that religion are required study in all public schools. Protestant churches also run a number of schools, especially in Bogota.

Elementary schools are maintained by local governments where possible. If there is not enough money locally to support the school, the national government will step in to provide needed financial support. The national government also supports secondary schools and universities. An increasing number of nonprofit and private organizations are working to improve education in Colombia as well.

Keeping children in school can be challenging. Experts disagree on exact figures, but all agree that recent improvements have been helpful in improving education. In 1999, one study reported that 5.1 million students attended elementary school (88% attendance), and 3.5 million attended secondary schools (54% of the possible total number of students). Almost all secondary schools are in the larger cities, leaving children in rural areas with little chance to attend school after the age of 12. Nearly 650,000 students attended universities. Illiteracy had fallen to 3%. Another study for the same year, however, reported that more than 3.5 million children did not attend school (no age range was given), and 8% of the population over the age of 15 could not read. In 2003, 93% of the adult population was considered literate in the cities, but only 67% in rural areas.

Furthermore, when children go to school, too many are undernourished and hungry, which makes learning very difficult. Schools that have been able to provide breakfast programs are seeing tremendous improvement in their students’ abilities. These breakfasts often provide up to 75% of the children’s daily nutrition and consist of foods like oatmeal, milk, fruit, eggs, and toast.

There are two basic school schedules available for schools to choose from: the first begins in February with a four-week vacation in June and July, and finishes in November; the second begins in September with a four-week vacation in December, and finishes in June. Both schedules have 198 days of classroom instruction.

The school day is usually six hours long, divided into two sessions. Each session has three 45-minute classes and a 45-minute break. Subjects include Spanish, arithmetic, social studies, aesthetic and manual training (such as art), natural science, physical education, and religious and moral training. The school system requires that children are to receive training in Roman Catholicism, and the remaining courses are not allowed to include teachings that contradict Roman Catholic principles.

**Learning**

The schools do not buy the textbooks for their students, rather, parents must buy them from local businesses after school teachers or administrators tell them what books will be used. When a school chooses a textbook, it will usually use that book in its classes for about three years.
Although secondary schools have traditionally offered mostly academic subjects, the Ministry of Education is trying to move more towards a practical or vocational approach. Very few students will graduate and then go on to university studies, instead joining the work force because they must help support their families. If the subjects studied in secondary schools are more focused on preparing students for jobs instead of academic studies, they seem to better help the students with the realities of their lives.

In general, classes in Colombia are taught in Spanish. In small villages or rural areas where another language is spoken more frequently, the law requires that the schools teach in both the local language and Spanish. The second-most frequently studied language is English. In general, only the wealthier private schools teach other languages such as French or German.

In rural areas, secondary schools are rare. To assist with that problem, the government offers educational radio and television broadcasts. Where secondary schools are available, the courses now include practical training and agricultural education so students are more prepared to get a good job upon completing high school.

**To School**

Kids will usually walk or ride a public bus to school, depending on the local circumstances. They will catch their bus between 6:00 and 6:30, and arrive at school around 7:00. The roads in Colombia are often windy and mountainous, even within the cities. At the end of the day, students return home the same way they came.
Schools will either provide one meal a day or a series of light snacks throughout the day. In either case, the food provides about one-third of the recommended daily nutrition, although for poorer families, this school-provided food may be their main source of nutrition each day.

**Colombia Government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital Name  | Bogota  |
| Country Name  | Colombia  |
| Local - Long  | Republica de Colombia  |
| Full Country Name  | Republic of Colombia  |
| Local - Short  | Colombia  |
| Government Type  | republic; executive branch dominates government structure  |
| Capital - geographic coordinate  | 4 36 N, 74 05 W  |
| Capital Time Difference  | UTC-5 (same time as Washington, DC during Standard Time)  |
| National Holiday  | Independence Day, 20 July (1810)  |
| Constitution  | 5 July 1991; amended many times  |
| Legal System  | civil law system influenced by the Spanish and French civil codes  |
| Suffrage  | 18 years of age; universal  |

**Colombia Government and Politics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Government Executive Branch  | chief of state: President Juan Manuel SANTOS Calderon (since 7 August 2010); Vice President Angelino GARZON (since 7 August 2010); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government head of government: President Juan Manuel SANTOS Calderon (since 7 August 2010); Vice President Angelino GARZON (since 7 August 2010) cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the president elections: president and vice president elected by popular vote for a four-year term (eligible for a second term); election last held on 30 May 2010 with a runoff election 20 June 2010 (next to be held on 25 May 2014) election results: Juan Manuel SANTOS Calderon elected president in runoff election; percent of vote - Juan Manuel SANTOS Calderon 69.06%, Antanas MOCKUS 27.52%  |
| Legislative Branch  | bicameral Congress or Congreso consists of the Senate or Senado (102 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms) and the Chamber of Representatives or Camara de Representantes (166 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)elections: Senate - last held on 14 March 2010 (next to be held in March 2014); Chamber of Representatives - last held on 14 March 2010 (next to be held in March 2014)election results: Senate - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - U Party 28, PC 22, PL 17, PIN 9, CR 8, PDA 8, Green Party 5, other parties 5; Chamber of Representatives - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - U Party 47, PC 38, PL 37, CR 15, PIN 12, PDA 4, Green Party 3, other parties 10; note - as of 1 January 2011, the Senate currently has 101 seats after one seat became vacant due to a PL senator losing his seat for illegal collusion with the FARC; the Chamber of Representatives also has one seat vacant after only 165 of the 166 candidates were credentialed  |
| Judicial Branch  | four roughly coequal, supreme judicial organs; Supreme Court of Justice or Corte Suprema de Justicia (highest court of criminal law; judges are selected by their peers from the nominees of the Superior Judicial Council for eight-year terms); Council of State (highest court of administrative law; judges are selected from the nominees of the Superior Judicial Council for eight-year terms); Constitutional Court (guards integrity and supremacy of the constitution; rules on constitutionality of laws, amendments to the constitution, and international treaties); Superior Judicial Council (administers and disciplines the civilian judiciary; resolves jurisdictional conflicts arising between other courts; members are elected by three sister courts and Congress for eight-year terms)  |
| Regions or States  | 32 departments (departamentos, singular - departamento) and 1 capital district\* (distrito capital); Amazonas, Antioquia, Arauca, Atlantico, Bogota\*, Bolivar, Boyaca, Caldas, Caqueta, Casanare, Cauca, Cesar, Choco, Cordoba, Cundinamarca, Guainia, Guaviare, Huila, La Guajira, Magdalena, Meta, Narino, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Quindio, Risaralda, Archipielago de San Andres, Providencia y Santa Catalina (colloquially San Andres y Providencia), Santander, Sucre, Tolima, Valle del Cauca, Vaupes, Vichada  |
| Political Parties and Leaders  | Alternative Democratic Pole or PDA [Clara LOPEZ]; Conservative Party or PC [Efrain CEPEDA Sarabia]; Green Party [Jorge LONDONO Ulloa; Enrique PENALOSA]; Liberal Party or PL [Simon GAVIRIA Munoz]; National Integration Party or PIN [Angel ALIRIO Moreno]; Radical Change or CR [Antonio GUERRA de la Espriella]; Social National Unity Party or U Party [Juan Francisco LOZANO Ramirez]note: Colombia has seven major political parties, and numerous smaller movements  |
| International Law Organization Participation  | has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; accepts ICCt jurisdiction  |
| International Organization Participation  | BCIE, BIS, CAN, Caricom (observer), CD, CDB, CELAC, FAO, G-3, G-24, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC (national committees), ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC (NGOs), LAES, LAIA, Mercosur (associate), MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, PCA, UN, UNASUR, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, Union Latina, UNSC (temporary), UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO  |
| Politicial Pressure Groups and Leaders  | Central Union of Workers or CUT; Colombian Confederation of Workers or CTC; General Confederation of Workers or CGT; National Liberation Army or ELN; Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARCnote: FARC and ELN are the two largest insurgent groups active in Colombia  |

**Colombia Economy Data**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GDP - Gross Domestic Product  | $526,500,000,000 (USD)  |
| GDP - official exchange rate  | $369,200,000,000 (USD)  |
| GDP - real growth rate  | 4.2%  |
| GDP Per Capita  | $11,100.00 (USD)  |
| GDP by Sector- agriculture  | 6.6%  |
| GDP by Sector- Industry  | 37.8%  |
| GDP by Sector- services  | 55.6%  |
| Population Below Poverty Line  | 34.1%  |
| Inflation Rate  | 3.2%  |
| Labor Force  | 23,080,000  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- agriculture  | 17%  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- industry  | 21%  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- services  | 62%  |
| Unemployment Rate  | 10.3%  |
| Fiscal Year  | calendar year  |
| Annual Budget  | $104,200,000,000 (USD)  |
| Budget Surplus or Deficit - percent of GDP  | 0.4%  |
| Public Debt (% of GDP)  | 40.2%  |
| Taxes and other revenues - percent of GDP  | 29.1%  |
| Major Industries  | textiles, food processing, oil, clothing and footwear, beverages, chemicals, cement; gold, coal, emeralds  |
| Agriculture Products  | coffee, cut flowers, bananas, rice, tobacco, corn, sugarcane, cocoa beans, oilseed, vegetables; shrimp; forest products  |
| Currency Code  | Colombian peso (COP)  |
| Child Labor - % of children ages 5-14  | 9%  |
| Child Labor - # of children ages 5-14  | 988,362  |
| Child Labor - note  | note: data represents children ages 5-17  |
| Commercial Bank Prime Lending Rate  | 11%  |

**Colombia Economy**

**Economic Overview**

Colombia's consistently sound economic policies and aggressive promotion of free trade agreements in recent years have bolstered its ability to face external shocks. Real GDP has grown more than 4% per year for the past three years, continuing almost a decade of strong economic performance. All three major ratings agencies have upgraded Colombia's government debt to investment grade. Nevertheless, Colombia depends heavily on oil exports, making it vulnerable to a drop in oil prices. Economic development is stymied by inadequate infrastructure, weakened further by recent flooding. Moreover, the unemployment rate of 10.3% in 2012 is still one of Latin America's highest. The SANTOS Administration's foreign policy has focused on bolstering Colombia's commercial ties and boosting investment at home. The US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was ratified by the US Congress in October 2011 and implemented in 2012. Colombia has signed or is negotiating FTAs with a number of other countries, including Canada, Chile, Mexico, Switzerland, the EU, Venezuela, South Korea, Turkey, Japan, China, Costa Rica, Panama, and Israel. Foreign direct investment - notably in the oil and gas sectors - reached a record $10 billion in 2008 but dropped to $7.2 billion in 2009, before beginning to recover in 2010, and reached a record high of nearly $16 billion in 2012. Colombia is the third largest Latin American exporter of oil to the United States, and the United States' largest source of imported coal. Inequality, underemployment, and narcotrafficking remain significant challenges, and Colombia's infrastructure requires major improvements to sustain economic expansion.

**Colombia Exports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exports  | $59,960,000,000 (USD)  |
| Major Exports  | petroleum, coal, emeralds, coffee, nickel, cut flowers, bananas, apparel  |
| Top Export Partners  | US 42%, Netherlands 4.7%, China 4.2%  |

**Colombia Imports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imports  | $55,490,000,000 (USD)  |
| Major Imports  | industrial equipment, transportation equipment, consumer goods, chemicals, paper products, fuels, electricity  |
| Top Import Partners  | US 29.2%, China 11.9%, Mexico 11.5%, Brazil 5.3%  |

**Colombia Flag**

Yellow symbolizes sovereignty and justice, blue for nobility, loyalty and vigilance, and red for valor, honor, generosity and victory acheived at the cost of bloodshed. According to another interpretation the yellow stands for universal liberty, the blue is for equality of all races and social classes before God and the law and red for fraternity.

**Colombia Flag Description**

three horizontal bands of yellow (top, double-width), blue, and red; similar to the flag of Ecuador, which is longer and bears the Ecuadorian coat of arms superimposed in the center

TRANSLATE



Colombia flag



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Anthem Lyrics English  | CHORUS:Oh unfading glory!Oh immortal joy!In burrows of painGood germinates nowGood germinates nowOh unfading glory!Oh immortal joy!In burrows of painGood germinates nowIThe horrible night has ended!the sublime libertypours the dawnsof its invincible light.The whole humanity,crying in its chain,understands the wordsof the One that died in the Cross.2."Independence" criesThe American world;In heroes' blood is bathingThe Land of Columbus.But this great principle:"The King is not sovereign",Resounds, and those who sufferPraise the passion in it.  |

**Colombia National Anthem**

Listen to Colombia national anthem

**Colombia National Anthem History**

The History of the Colombia National Anthem

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The words to Colombia's anthem were written by a four-time president of the nation. President Rafael Nú ñez and the music was composed by Oreste Sindici. The anthem was first performed on November 11 1887 and was officially adopted on July 4, 1946. On TV broadcasts and all events, the chorus, first verse and chorus once again are sung  |

**Colombia Interesting Facts**

* A true llanero (cowboy) is a legendary figure on the ranches of Colombia. A llanero may wear the traditional dress of poncho, straw hat, and cotizas or rope-soled sandals.
* All Colombian men over the age of eighteen must be available for military service.
* Bogotá has grown from a town of about 300,000 people to a huge city of about 6 million people in the last 50 years. This rapid growth has created problems, such as a shortage of good housing and an overburdened transportation system. Although central Bogota has modern skyscrapers and elegant mansions, the city is surrounded by shantytowns where poor people live in makeshift huts.
* Colombia has 27 national parks. They cover more than 4% of the land in Colombia. There is a national park in every region. The parks protect the habitats of many rare species of plants and animals.
* Colombia has changed its name several times. It has been called Virreynato de la Nueva Granada, Gran Colombia, Repú blica de Nueva Granada, Confederación Granadina, Estados Unidos de Nueva Granada and Estados Unidos de Colombia.
* Colombia is the only country in South America with a coast on both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The country has five main ports: Buenaventura and Tumaco on the Pacific and Cartagena, Barranquilla and Santa Marta on the Caribbean.
* Mosquitoes pose a threat to many Colombians in low-lying areas as they may transmit malaria. Colombian scientist Manual Elkin Patarroyo discovered the vaccine for malaria. He donated the rights for this vaccine to the United Nations World Health Organization
* Most early Colombian scholars were priests. One was José Celestino Mutis, who led the Royal Botanical Expedition and made the first comprehensive study of Colombian flora. His study took 40 years to complete and consists of almost 6,000 drawings and sketches.
* Museums in Bogotá include the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, the National Museum, and the Museo del Oro (Gold Museum). This museum was founded in 1939 and it contains over 25,000 gold objects. Many Colombians visit the Quita de Bolívar or Bolívar's country house. It was built in 1800 and it is now a museum.
* One of the most commonly used words in Colombia is Maï¿½ana (tomorrow). It is best understood as "in the indefinite future." This reflects many Colombians' relaxed sense of time and punctuality.
* Simón Bolívar, known as El Libertador (the Liberator), accomplished a military conquest of about 5 million square kilometers. He had no formal training in military strategy. Experts are still mystified by how he won some battles.
* The 1991 constitution marked an important religious change in Colombia's history. References such as the “ Sacred Heart of Jesus” were replaced by a universal “ God.” This changed Colombia from a purely Catholic nation to a more inclusive state.
* The Kogi consider the Sierra Nevada Mountains to be sacred because they believe they are the center of the universe.
* The marimba is a distinctive Colombian musical instrument like a form of xylophone with keys made of wood. Other Colombian musical instruments include the arba (harp), the guasá (a rattle containing seeds) and the twelve-string guitar known as a tiple.
* The wettest place on earth is Tutunendo, where an average of 463 inches of rain falls every year.
* When a child loses a tooth they put their tooth under their pillow and wait for a mouse called El Raton Miguelito to take the tooth and leave money in its place.
* Colombia is the only South American country with coastlines on both the North Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea.

**Colombia Lost Tooth Traditions**

When children lose their teeth we belive that a little mouse called Ratoncito Perez that means little perez mouse (perez as a last name), comes at night and takes the tooth out of the pillow...so you have to put it there the night before. He takes the tooth and puts some money or a present instead.

**History of Colombia**

*One of several hundred stone monuments located near San Agustín, Huila Department. The monuments are distinguished by their part-men, part-jaguar features.*

THE HISTORY OF COLOMBIA is characterized by the interaction of rival civilian elites. The political elite, which overlaps with social and economic elites, has shown a marked ability to retain the reins of power, effectively excluding other groups and social institutions, such as the masses and the military, from significant participation in or control over the political process. Members of the lower classes have found it difficult, although not impossible, to challenge or join the established elite in the political and economic spheres. Their subordination dates to the rigid colonial social hierarchy that placed the Spanish-born above the nativeborn . Elite control of the military is the result of the "civilian mystique" that developed along with Colombian independence. That mystique has successfully restricted the military to nonpolitical functions, with three exceptions--1830, 1854, and 1953. Thus Colombia has a history rare for Latin America in that the country has been dominated more by civilian than by military rule. Because military forces have been denied political power, the civilian elites have had only themselves, divided into rival groups, to contend with in the political arena.

Some analysts have divided the political elite along economic lines between the landed and the nonlanded. The agricultural export sector, the backbone of the Colombian economy, has supplied the two main economic groups that also have been the most powerful in the political sphere: the landed aristocracy, who are devoted to the large-scale production of agricultural crops, and the merchants, who are engaged in the trade of these export goods and imported consumer goods. Lesser economic groups, such as the emerging manufacturing sector, have allied themselves with one of the two dominant groups, most often the merchants. Differences within the allied groups on issues such as trade created factions within the alliances even before they officially became established political parties. In addition, the nation’s economic development opened up new economic opportunities, and new forces increasingly expressed their views through the political factions.

Elite members of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party alternately competed and cooperated with each other throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Often the nature of relations between the two parties depended on whether moderates or extremists dominated the ruling party. During the periods when moderate factions of both parties were in power, the parties were able to work together in coalitions; when extremist factions prevailed, however, conflict often resulted. During the competitive periods, one party usually sought to limit or eliminate the rival party’s participation in the political process, attempts that often resulted in political violence. The most notorious of these periods were the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902) and *la violencia* (1948-66). At the end of these civil wars, the elite inaugurated the cooperative governments of the Period of Reconciliation (1903- 30) and the National Front (1958-74), respectively, the former catalyzed by the Rafael Reyes presidency (1904-09) and the latter by the Gustavo Rojas Pinilla dictatorship (1953-57). The replacement of the discredited extremist factions by the more conciliatory moderate factions in each case made it possible for the two parties to share power and to achieve a consensus on what policies were appropriate for Colombian society at the time.

Although the elite dominated the masses, the different classes were bound to each other through personalistic patron-client relationships, especially in rural areas where peasants relied on the propertied upper class for access to the land they farmed. These patron-client relationships also tied the masses into the political system as the numerical votes or bodies mobilized and controlled by local political bosses. The affiliation adopted by the members of the lower classes was determined largely by the affiliation of their patrons and their families; these affiliations, as much for a party as against the opposing party, became what Robert H. Dix termed "inherited hatreds," elements of one’s identity handed down from generation to generation. The emotional bond to the party carried individual members not only to the polls but also into violent conflict with adherents of the opposing party during those times when political conflict could not be controlled. In this way, the peasants and urban masses were recruited by the party elite to participate in the civil wars that riddled the nation’s history.

Colombia’s economic life has been based consistently on exports of primary goods, especially coffee. In the sixteenth century, the conquistadors and early colonialists, who often exploited Indian and slave labor, mined precious metals and gems for export to Spain under a mercantile system that inhibited the development of domestic industries. Throughout the preindependence and postindependence periods, agriculture on large landholdings, known as *latifundios*, became the predominant mode of production for export crops such as sugar and tobacco. By the 1860s, coffee had emerged as the key export crop. At the turn of the century, tariffs on coffee exports were the main source of government revenues, and profits from the coffee trade were the major source of investment in the newly emerging industrial sector that was beginning to produce basic consumer goods. Although the industrial sector grew sufficiently to induce urbanization and economic modernization in the first half of the twentieth century, industrial exports remained relatively minor compared with coffee, which in the late 1980s still accounted for almost 60 percent of all export earnings.

Economic modernization, supported by the coffee industry, became significant at the turn of the century. Modernization brought social changes and growing demands that produced various challenges to the dominant position of the traditional elite: the populist movements of the 1940s and 1970s, the military dictatorship of the 1950s, the rise of guerrilla activity in the 1960s through the 1980s, and the emergence of drug traffickers as a major economic and social element in the 1970s and 1980s. The increase in industrialization and the migration of peasants to the cities accelerated the rate of urbanization and the formation of urban working and lower classes. The heightened need for infrastructure, both within a given city and among urban areas, spurred the growing involvement of the state in the economy, especially during the reformist period in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1980s, the state had become an important investor in and manager of strategic sectors of the economy, such as energy resources, transportation, and communications.

The emergence of the National Front marked a significant break in the traditional political and economic patterns in Colombian society. Interparty conflict receded and was replaced in the 1960s by leftist subversion, which continued through the 1980s. The illicit narcotics industry emerged in the 1970s as a dominant economic force, altering the structure of the national economy and disrupting existing social and political relations. The leadership in both parties proved unable to address inflation, unemployment, and a skewed distribution of income. The post-National Front Liberal tenure bequeathed a triple legacy to the incoming Conservative government in 1982: guerrilla activity, the corruptive drug trade, and an inequitable economy.

**Colombia History Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Colombia Year in History | Colombia Timeline |
| 1525  | **Spain begins conquest of Colombia.**  |
| 1550  | **African slaves are shipped to Colombia.**They work on Colombian plantations.  |
| 1564  | **A president is appointed to govern the Colombian colony.**  |
| 1700  | **Spanish colonies around Colombia are combined into one large colony.**The new colony is called the Viceroyalty of New Granada.  |
| 1718  | **Bogota becomes the capital of the Spanish vice-royalty of Nueva Granada.**Nueva Granada also rules Ecuador and Venezuela.  |
| 1810  | **The King of Spain is overthrown by Napoleon.**  |
| 1814  | **Spain sends troops to South America**To quell an uprising of colonists.  |
| 1819  | **Battle of Boyaca.**General Simon Bolivar defeats royalist forces. The Republic of Colombia (also known as Gran Colombia) is proclaimed, consisting of Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.  |
| 1819  | **Colombia gains its independence from Spain.**  |
| 1835  | **Slavery is abolished.**  |
| 1899  | **Thousand Days' War.**Around 120,000 people die in civil war between Liberals and Conservatives. Panama becomes an independent state.  |
| 1903  | **Panama seceded from Colombia**Panama seceded from Colombia with US backing and allows US control over the strip of land now known as the Panama Canal zone.  |
| 1922  | **The United States pay Colombia $25 million for the loss of Panama.**  |
| 1939  | **World War II.**Colombia helps the United States to keep the Panama Canal open.  |
| 1989  | **The United States aid Colombia against drug dealers.**They supply the Colombian government with military equipment and advisory.  |
| 2002  | **Alvaro Uribe Velez is elected president.**  |
| 2004  | **Ricardo Palmera captured**Farc's Ricardo Palmera, the most senior Colombian guerrilla ever captured, is jailed for 35 years.  |
| 2006  | **President Uribe re-elected**President Uribe wins a second term in office.  |
| 2008  | **Diplomatic crisis**A Colombian cross-border attack into Ecuador kills senior Farc rebel Raul Reyes and causes a diplomatic crisis with both Ecuador and Venezuela.  |
| 2010  | **Juan Manuel Santos**Juan Manuel Santos takes over as president, having won easy victory in run-off election in June.  |
| 2012  | **President Santos apologizes**President Santos apologizes to indigenous leaders in the Amazon region for the killing of 80,000 indigenous people in 1912-29 due to latex harvesting.  |
| 2013  | **Farc calls for peace**Farc negotiator Ivan Marquez says the armed conflict is nearing an end at the Cuba talks, and calls on left-wing parties and unions to join the peace effort.  |

**Colombia Holidays and Events**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Display Date | Title |
| July 20th  | **Independence Day**  |
| December 25th  | **Christmas**On Christmas eve  a costume ball is held in many cities where people dress up in elaborate disguises and flock to the streets in the evening and try to recognize their friends.  Upon recognizing a friend they are entitled to claim an *Aguinaldos* (gift) from the one recognized.The Christmas dinner may include *lechona* (stuffed pork), fowls, salads, vegetables, tamales, *ajiaco* (soup with potatoes), *natilla* (corn based dessert), *buñuelos* (deep-fried pastries served with powdered sugar, cinnamon, and honey).In additional to attending Mass families exchange gifts and shoot fireworks at midnight. Those in the north may place gifts under the children’s bed early on Christmas morning.From December 26 until New Year’s Day, most villages host a Sugar Cane Festival, which sports a carnival atmosphere. |

**Colombia Meals and Food**

Recipes from Colombia

* [Aji (Colombian Sauce) - Side Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/aji-colombian-sauce.htm)
* [Antioquian Beans - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/antioquian-beans.htm)
* [Arequipe (Caramel Sauce) - Dessert](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/arequipe-caramel-sauce.htm)
* [Colombian Avocado Vichyssoise (Sopa De Aguacate Y Papas) - Soup](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/colombian-avocado-vichyssoise-sopa-de-aguacate-y-papas.htm)
* [Empanadas Paisas (Meat-Filled Turnovers) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/empanadas-paisas-meat-filled-turnovers.htm)
* [Sancocho de Gallina (Chicken and Vegetable Stew) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Colombia/recipe/sancocho-de-gallina-chicken-and-vegetable-stew.htm)

**Colombia Recipes and Diet**

Colombia food and meal customs

**Diet**

Breakfast foods vary from region to region. They include juice, coffee, hot chocolate, fruit eggs, bread or changua (potato and egg soup). A mid-morning snack, merienda, may include empanadas concarne (meat turnovers) or bread and a drink. Lunch is the main meal for the day. Many businesses close so the family may gather for lunch. Supper is usually not till 7 or 8 PM. Staple foods include soup, rice, meat, potatoes, salad and beans. Favorite national dishes include arroz con pollo, (chicken with rice), frijoles con chicharron (pork and beans). A cornmeal pancake is called Arepa.

**Meals**

If one is offered more food, it is polite to refuse if it may be considered overindulging. It is considered polite to keep hands above the table. One should offer food to others before taking it for ones self.

Lunch is the main meal for the day. Many businesses close so the family may gather for lunch. Dinner is usually not served until 7 PM or 8 PM. Typical foods include rice, soup, meat , salad, potatoes and beans. Favorite national dishes include arroz con pollo, (chicken with rice), frijoles con chicharron (pork and beans). A cornmeal pancake is called Arepa.

Food in Colombia



**Colombia Languages**

**Languages**

Spanish (official)

Most Colombians speak Spanish, which is the official language. Among eighty indigenous groups at least forty languages are spoken.

**Language Translations:**

**Greetings in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Do you speak English? | Habla usted ingles? |
| Do you speak Spanish? | Habla usted espanol? |
| Excuse me | Dispenseme |
| Fine / Good | Bien |
| Good afternoon | Buenas tardes |
| Good evening | Buenas tardes |
| Good morning | Buenos diás |
| Good night | Buenas noches |
| Goodbye | Adios |
| Happy New Year! | ¡Felíz año nuevo! |
| Hello | ¡Hóla! |
| How are you? | Como esta usted? |
| I'm pleased to meet you | Encantado de conocerle |
| Merry Christmas | Feliz Navidad |
| Please | Por favor |
| See you later | Hasta luego |
| Thank you | Gracias |
| Welcome | Bienvenido |
| What is your name? | Como se llama? / Deme su nombre |
| Yes / No | Si / No |

**Days in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sunday | Domingo |
| Monday | Lunes |
| Tuesday | Martes |
| Wednesday | Miercoles |
| Thursday | Jueves |
| Friday | Viernes |
| Saturday | Sabado |

**Months in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| January | Enero |
| February | Febrero |
| March | marzo |
| April | Abril |
| May | Mayo |
| June | Junio |
| July | Julio |
| August | Agosto |
| September | Septiembre |
| October | Octubre |
| November | Noviembre |
| December | Diciembre |

**Colors in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Black | Negro |
| Blue | Azul |
| Green | Verde |
| Orange | Anaranjado |
| Pink | Rosado |
| Red | Rojo |
| White | Blanco |
| Yellow | Amarillo |

**Numbers in Spanish**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One | Uno |
| Two | Dos |
| Three | Tres |
| Four | Cuatro |
| Five | Cinco |
| Six | Seis |
| Seven | Siete |
| Eight | Ocho |
| Nine | Nueve |
| Ten | Diez |
| Fifty | Cincuenta |
| one Hundred | Cien |
| One Thousand | mil |

**Colombia Clothing and Fashion**

Dress is both conservative and fashionable in Colombia. In larger cities, men wear suits and ties. Women wear comfortable dresses while youth in the cities dress casually.

**Dating, Family and Children Colombia**

**Dating and Marriage**

Dating begins around 14 or 15 years of age, depending on family custom and region. Going to movies, restaurants, and discos are popular activities. Sports and shopping at the mall are also attractive for youth. On the night before the wedding, the groom may hire a small band to serenade the bride. Marriage ceremonies generally follow the Catholic traditions, with mass included. The reception will always involve music and dancing.

**Family and Children**

Family unity and support is highly valued in Colombia. Family members share their good fortune with other members of the family. Divorce is relatively uncommon, largely due to the influence of the Catholic Church. The family unit usually consists of mother, father and two to four children. Children traditionally live with their parents till they marry. Families support each other through their life span. Urbanization is changing roles with the extended family. One third of the workforce is now female.

**Colombia Gestures and Greetings**

**Greetings**

When entering or leaving a meeting or a home , men shake hands. An "abrazo" is reserved for close friends or relatives. Women kiss each other on the cheek if friends or it not a verbal greeting or handshake is used. Kissing on the cheek is usual among young people. It is customary to use formal titles such as Senor or Senora.

**Gestures**

Colombians will use their hands expressively during conversation, especially if it becomes heated. It is considered rude to back away or interrupt during a discussion. Eye contact and standing close are important while conversing. People may beckon each other with the palm down, the waving of fingers or the entire hand. Smiling is important to indicate goodwill between parties. Colombian men open doors, and offer seats to women and older people.

**Visiting**

People often sit on their verandas, and chat with people that pass by. Friends and relatives visit without notice, especially in rural areas. However, one should make arrangements if they do not know who they are visiting. Colombian hosts are generous, usually offering refreshments such as coffee, fruit juice or a soft drink. Dinner guests usually arrive up to thirty minutes late. Alcoholic drinks such as rum or beer are offered before and after dinner. Etiquette is valued. Visitors wait until they are guided to a chair by the host.

**Cultural Attributes**

Colombia's various regions and climate add to its culture by influencing the food, music and dance. Colombians are also known for their "rumbero" spirit, which is the ability to work hard and play hard. Colombians are forward-looking and confident of the future.

**Colombia Church and Religion**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Government observes Epiphany, Saint Joseph Day, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, the Ascension, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart Day, Saints Peter and Paul Day, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas as national holidays.
The Constitution states that there is no official church or religion but adds that the State "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some interpret this to mean that the state unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Catholicism, which was the official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are unenforceable
because of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 constitutional court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.
The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: recognition as a legal entity personeria juridica) and special public recognition as a religious entity. Although the application process is often lengthy, the Ministry of Interior and Justice (MOIJ) readily grants the former recognition; the only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious group that wishes to establish a presence must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The MOIJ may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights. Accession to a 1997 public law agreement between the state and non-Catholic religious groups is required for such organizations to minister to their adherents in public institutions such as hospitals or prisons, provide chaplaincy services and religious instruction in public schools, and perform marriages recognized by the state. When deciding whether to grant accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government considers a religious group's total membership, its degree
of acceptance within society, and other relevant factors, such as the content of the organization's statutes and its required behavioral norms. The Ministry of Foreign Relations issues visas to foreign missionaries and administrators of religious groups that received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa, valid up to 2 years. Applicants must have a certificate from the MOIJ confirming that their religion is registered with the Ministry or a certificate issued by the Catholic archdiocese. Alternatively, they may produce a certificate issued by the religious organization confirming the applicant's membership and mission in the country, as well as a letter issued by a legal representative of the religious organization stating that the organization accepts full financial responsibility for the expenses of the applicant and his family, including return to their country of origin or last country of residence. In both cases, applicants must explain the purpose of the proposed sojourn and provide proof of economic means. The Government generally permits missionaries to proselytize among the indigenous population, provided that the indigenous group welcomes proselytization and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt
changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands. The Supreme Court stipulated that no group may force religious conversion on members of indigenous communities. The Constitution recognizes the right of parents to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious instruction. It also states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish their own schools, provided they comply with Ministry of Education requirements. For example, the Jewish
community operates its own schools. The Catholic Church has an agreement with the Government to provide education in rural areas that have no state-operated schools. These schools are tax-exempt. Leaders of non-Catholic religious groups claimed that local authorities in many municipalities did not grant their schools the same tax-exempt status
enjoyed by Catholic schools. These leaders also alleged that a decree by the Minister of Education to include education about religion in public schools was interpreted in many municipalities as a mandate to teach about Catholicism only, while offering no alternative instruction to students of other religious groups.

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**Students Life in Colombia**

**Mornings**

Children must leave early for school in Colombia, which means that getting ready in the morning is usually simple and fast. Breakfast may consist of fresh fruit or bread and a drink of fresh fruit juice. Unfortunately, because many Colombians, especially those in rural areas, are comparatively poor, many children arrive at school undernourished. As a result, more schools are offering breakfast programs for their students, especially those with a proven economic need.

**School**

Kids will usually walk or ride a public bus to school, depending on the local circumstances. They will catch their bus between 6:00 and 6:30, and arrive at school around 7:00. The roads in Colombia are often windy and mountainous, even within the cities. At the end of the day, students return home the same way they came.
Schools will either provide one meal a day or a series of light snacks throughout the day. In either case, the food provides about one-third of the recommended daily nutrition, although for poorer families, this school-provided food may be their main source of nutrition each day.

**Classroom**

Primary schools are run by local governments, whereas secondary schools and universities are supported by the national government. By law, the Colombian government spends at least 10% of its budget on education. Colombia has one of the highest expenditure rates for education in Latin America.
Rural elementary schools tend to have one room and one teacher. Nearly 70% of those teachers had not received formal training to become teachers, and over half of them did not even register as teachers. In rural schools, the teachers tended to focus on practical subjects to teach the children how to succeed as much as possible within the realities of their lives.

Most schools have a simple uniform that children are to wear: dark skirts for the girls, and dark pants and light shirts for the boys.

**Student Learning**

The schools do not buy the textbooks for their students, rather, parents must buy them from local businesses after school teachers or administrators tell them what books will be used. When a school chooses a textbook, it will usually use that book in its classes for about three years.
Although secondary schools have traditionally offered mostly academic subjects, the Ministry of Education is trying to move more towards a practical or vocational approach. Very few students will graduate and then go on to university studies, instead joining the work force because they must help support their families. If the subjects studied in secondary schools are more focused on preparing students for jobs instead of academic studies, they seem to better help the students with the realities of their lives.

In general, classes in Colombia are taught in Spanish. In small villages or rural areas where another language is spoken more frequently, the law requires that the schools teach in both the local language and Spanish. The second-most frequently studied language is English. In general, only the wealthier private schools teach other languages such as French or German.

In rural areas, secondary schools are rare. To assist with that problem, the government offers educational radio and television broadcasts. Where secondary schools are available, the courses now include practical training and agricultural education so students are more prepared to get a good job upon completing high school.

**After School Activities**

Extracurricular activities in Colombian schools depends largely on the amount of money the school has. Some high schools have marching bands, Boy Scout troops, intramural and extramural sports teams, and student-run radio broadcast facilities. However, many other schools are unable to offer such activities.

**Student Free Time**

 Colombians love *futebol* (soccer), which is easily their favorite sport. However, they are also fond of basketball, volleyball, golf, tennis, and swimming. Coastal or river areas enjoy boating and fishing. Those in cattle-ranching areas participate in rodeos. And because of Colombia’s mountainous roads, some of the best-trained cyclists come from this country.
Colombians are friendly and love to party. They mix play with their school and with their work. They are creative and social with one another. Unfortunately, so many families are poor that many children must work after school or drop out of school altogether in order to help support the family.

**Evenings**

Colombian family life is influenced by three major things: the Catholic religion, the geographic layout of the land, and the economy. All three of these influences help families stay close together, including extended families. Catholic rituals, such as marriages or other events, often bring family members from miles around to visit together. Because of the mountainous nature of Colombia, there are many small villages, which tend to keep families and friends close together rather than spread out in large cities. And the relatively poor economy of much of the country means that children must work with their families in order to help the family survive. All of these add up to close family relationships.
Thus, much of the time at home in the evening is spent with family, either working, celebrating, or just plain socializing. Sports and other social activities are frequent activities with friends, and folk art and dancing are important parts of the native culture for Colombian children and their families.

Evening meals are often traditional and are composed of great varieties of fruits and vegetables. The traditional, national stew can have as many as 20 types of vegetables in it. Along the coast, fish is a standard part of the diet, and can be fried, grilled, or placed in a soup. Rice and red beans are popular in some parts of the country, as can be beef in the ranching areas of the country. In fact, rice and some variety of potato are usually involved in nearly every meal. In short, much of the food is local, home grown, and prepared according to a variety of local Spanish, Amerindian, and African traditions.

**Education Culture**

Preschool is operated by private organizations and can start as early as four years old. Almost 92% are Catholic and are located in larger cities.
Elementary school is free to all students, and children are required to attend school for nine years (five in elementary school, ages 6-10, and four more in secondary school, ages 11-14). For many, as we will see, only the first five years is likely. Most of the schools are operated by the Roman Catholic church, so courses in that religion are required study in all public schools. Protestant churches also run a number of schools, especially in Bogota.

Elementary schools are maintained by local governments where possible. If there is not enough money locally to support the school, the national government will step in to provide needed financial support. The national government also supports secondary schools and universities. An increasing number of nonprofit and private organizations are working to improve education in Colombia as well.

Keeping children in school can be challenging. Experts disagree on exact figures, but all agree that recent improvements have been helpful in improving education. In 1999, one study reported that 5.1 million students attended elementary school (88% attendance), and 3.5 million attended secondary schools (54% of the possible total number of students). Almost all secondary schools are in the larger cities, leaving children in rural areas with little chance to attend school after the age of 12. Nearly 650,000 students attended universities. Illiteracy had fallen to 3%. Another study for the same year, however, reported that more than 3.5 million children did not attend school (no age range was given), and 8% of the population over the age of 15 could not read. In 2003, 93% of the adult population was considered literate in the cities, but only 67% in rural areas.

Furthermore, when children go to school, too many are undernourished and hungry, which makes learning very difficult. Schools that have been able to provide breakfast programs are seeing tremendous improvement in their students’ abilities. These breakfasts often provide up to 75% of the children’s daily nutrition and consist of foods like oatmeal, milk, fruit, eggs, and toast.

There are two basic school schedules available for schools to choose from: the first begins in February with a four-week vacation in June and July, and finishes in November; the second begins in September with a four-week vacation in December, and finishes in June. Both schedules have 198 days of classroom instruction.

The school day is usually six hours long, divided into two sessions. Each session has three 45-minute classes and a 45-minute break. Subjects include Spanish, arithmetic, social studies, aesthetic and manual training (such as art), natural science, physical education, and religious and moral training. The school system requires that children are to receive training in Roman Catholicism, and the remaining courses are not allowed to include teachings that contradict Roman Catholic principles.

**Colombia Sport and Recreation**

Soccer is the most popular sport in Colombia. Many Colombian children play the game. Watching professional soccer is also a national pastime. Colombians are very passionate about their national team.

Bullfighting is also popular throughout Colombia and most big cities have plaza de toros (bullrings). Horse racing, car racing and bicycle racing are other spectator sports that draw thousands of fans.

A traditional form of entertainment for Colombians is tejo. Tejo is a game that may have been played by the Chibchas in ancient times. The object is to throw a small metal disc at a gunpowder detonator lodged in a metal ring. Explosions and the number of discs that land within the ring determine the winners. A similar game is sapo, in which players must throw a small disc into a receptacle shaped like a metal frog.

Colombians love to dance. One of the most popular dances is called the bambuco. It has a complex series of steps with different names. Every year there is a festival of bambuco dancing in the city of Neiva. On the Caribbean coast, people dance the salsa and its variants, the cumbia and the vallenato. On the Pacific coast, energetic dances called the berejú and patacoré are popular, danced to music that includes strong drumbeats. In the region of Los Llanos, the favorite dance is called the joropo.