



Colombia

The Hidden Colombia Trek

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



DO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY...

ITINERARY

The Hidden Colombia Trek

12 DAYS • 11 NIGHTS

(trip to start on a Sat)

**Bogota – Salento – Cocora Valley Reserve – PNN Los Nevados –
Santa Marta – Tayrona – Santa Marta**

This trip can be tailored to your interests and requirements

HIGHLIGHTS

- Adventuring through Colombia's leading national park – Parque Nacional Natural Los Nevados
- Trekking over volcanoes and the Páramo of Colombia's Central Cordillera mountain range
- Visiting the UNESCO sites of The Colombian Coffee Region
- Experiencing Tayrona National Park's tropical jungle & relaxing on the stunning Caribbean coast

TOUR ESSENTIALS

Tour Style	Trekking/Adventure
Tour Start	Bogota
Tour End	Santa Marta
Accommodation	Hotels & Camping
Included Meals	11 Breakfasts, 11 Lunches & 11 Dinners
Difficulty Level	Moderate/Difficult



COLOMBIAN HIDDEN TREK

Our The Hidden Colombia Trek will allow you to experience and trek through the very best of Colombia's undiscovered departments and national parks. We'll also embrace much of Colombia's traditions and culture through exploring Colombia's traditional cities, towns and villages. This trip will allow you to trek the peaks of Parque Nacional Natural Los Nevados and experience many of Colombia's hidden highlights including adventuring to find the roof of Colombia, trekking through the outstanding Cocora Valley, conquering Colombia's stunning volcanic landscape and roaming the coast to experience a trek through tropical forest, beaches and ancient ruins at Tayrona National Park with an idyllic Caribbean twist; all with wildlife viewing opportunities along the way.

COLOMBIA, *an overview*

Colombia is in the midst of a new era in its history. It has one of the top regional economies and is one of the most politically stable countries in Latin America. The significant improvement in the country's safety has also positioned Colombia as a **top travel destination** that people from all around the globe are eager to discover. Colombia boasts the stunning **Andes mountain region** and the legendary **Amazonian rainforest**; the country is the second most **bio-diverse** country in the world. In terms of trekking in Colombia, there are an abundance of hidden spots to be discovered, where eager trekkers can roam Colombia's remarkable variety of landscapes. The **Andean Colombian wilderness** can offer **unique cloud forests, Mountain Rivers, valleys and canyons**. Colombia also features its **Coffee region** which is a never-ending green carpet of vegetation of which encircles the remarkable valleys and peaks. Furthermore, booming cosmopolitan cities like Bogotá and Cartagena can impress anyone with their magnificent views, innovative architecture, rich culture, exceptional restaurants, and enthralling ambience. Colombia has it all: **countless trekking opportunities**, city life, stunning coastlines, some of the world's most diverse landscape and wildlife.

WHY PIONEER EXPEDITIONS?

Pioneer Expeditions are one of the few specialists that really *do* off the beaten track and unique adventures. The team have a real passion for wildlife and adventure travel which we love to share with our clients. We delight in searching the world for new destinations, new experiences and creating the most incredible adventures.

We like to introduce our clients to unique, the different, and the incredible. Whether it is through wildlife tracking, sea kayaking, snorkelling, trekking, rafting, cycling or observing wildlife in its natural environment, we want to give you the real Pioneer experience.

From the moment you choose to travel with Pioneer Expeditions until you return back home, you are supported by our dedicated team. We listen to what you want and can create an itinerary around your specific needs, working with your budget and with a commitment to responsible travel.

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DAY 1: Arrive in BOGOTA

Welcome to Colombia! Upon arrival in Bogota, we will be met at the airport by our local guide and transferred to our hotel. Our Colombia trip commences with a tour; we will have a tour through Bogota's colonial neighborhood, La Candelaria, the capital's heart and soul. With its colorful houses, pretty balconies and village-y vibe, it's the city's cultural heart, too, with plenty of museums, the city's main library and a picturesque church on every second street corner. Home to artisans and musicians, it has plenty of bohemian cafes and restaurants, making it ideal for strolling and exploring its streets. Visit the capital's main square, the imposing Plaza Bolívar, with its magnificent Colonial and Republican style buildings, including the stately Palace of Justice, Colombia's Congress and Bogota's Primary cathedral. Enjoy the architectural mix of old adobe houses, churches, and buildings of the Spanish Colonial period, alongside Baroque and art deco styles. We will visit some of Bogota's most important museums such as Botero Museum and the Gold Museum.

Bogota - Founded in 1538 this cosmopolitan city of almost 8 million people, sits high up in the Andes Mountain Range – 8,660 feet (2,640 meters) above sea level. As the third highest capital city in South America. Before the Spanish arrival, various indigenous tribes inhabited Bogota and the region surrounding it. Remnants of these tribes can be seen in Bogota's spectacular gold museum and in the traditions of the small rural communities. Bogota has been the epicentre of Colombia's dramatic yet fascinating history, so visiting it is the best way to understand the country's tough past and recent revival.



Overnight – Casa Deco



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
D



Distance:
30min airport transfer



Activity:
Travel

DAY 2: BOGOTA LOCAL MARKTS and SALT CATHEDRAL

Today we will explore Paloquemao Markets. "Be part of the hustle and bustle of the capital's largest fresh produce market, 'Paloquemao'. Here you will learn about Colombia's rural or 'campesino' culture and enjoy the diversity and sheer abundance of produce grown in Colombia's varied climates. Open seven days a week, this market supplies the ingredients for the majority of the city's best restaurants. You'll have the chance to wander the heaving, colorful stalls, sample this country's vast number of exotic fruits (some of which are unique to Colombia and the Andes) and any other traditional local foods that take your fancy. Enjoy the dazzling display of exotic cut flowers too - one of Colombia's top exports on spectacular display in this sprawling market."



ZIPAQUIRÁ SALT CATHEDRAL

Zipaquirá Cathedral is a unique attraction in Colombia, steeped in history and atmosphere. Zipaquirá is famous for its underground cathedral, a Roman Catholic church carved from the cavernous spaces of a centuries-old but still active salt mine, just west of the town. You can explore the cathedral and learn how it was built - a feat considered one of the most impressive achievements of Colombian engineering and a 'Jewel of Modern Architecture'. The cathedral is testament to the dedication and skill of the salt miners and today it is a valuable cultural and religious heritage site. Visitors can explore the mining tunnels, the various chapels and imposing

main Basilica during an informative walking tour.

Overnight – Casa Deco



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
Varies



Activity:
City tour



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DAY 3: Transfer to Pereira, the COFFEE REGION! And explore the town of SALENTO



Our day will commence with a transfer to El Dorado airport (1hr) for a morning flight to Pereira, located within the Colombian coffee region ('The Coffee Triangle'). Upon arrival we will be transferred to Finca del Café in Santa Rosa de Cabal (40mins), for our morning coffee tour. Lunch will be provided at Finca del Café or in Santa Rosa, depending on your preference. A small tour of Santa Rosa de Cabal will also be included.

Following on, we will be travelling to the colonial/Andean town of Salento (1hr 30mins), before checking into our hotel. During the afternoon, we will be given a tour of Salento with its colourful buildings and craft shops, as well as an authentic

coffee region walk (5km approximately) to the village of Boquia, along the route of the original 'Camino Real' or 'Royal Pathway', offering us beautiful scenery. Our evening in Salento can be enjoyed at your leisure before dinner at a local restaurant, with a traditional Colombian game of Tejo to add an exciting twist to our evening. There will also be an insightful pre-trek preparation chat with our trek leader to ensure we are fully-educated for our upcoming trekking adventures.

The Coffee Triangle is not a city or a particular place. It is a beautiful blend of lush mountains, rich culture and incredibly kind people. The triangle consists of three states Pereira, Manizales and Armenia. This region sits high up on the western Andes mountain range, where the altitude, climatic conditions and fertile terrain enable the production of what many consider to be the best coffee in the world.



Overnight – Hostel Terasu



Overnight:
Guesthouse



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
Short flight
Approx. 2hrs drive



Activity:
Coffee tour

DAY 4: Welcome to COCORA VALLEY RESERVE

After a good night's sleep we'll be picked up by private Jeep (US army surplus vehicles that ended up being a match made in heaven for the Coffee Region.). These open-backed Jeeps are typical of the region, known for their unbeatable horsepower when conquering steep mountain roads when piled high with coffee and 'platano' or plantain. The drive will take us eastward along the river Quindio basin and into the beginnings of the Cocora Valley which makes up part of the buffer zone to Parque Nacional Natural Los Nevados. It is the sanctuary that protects a large remnant population of the national tree. Either side of the road you'll see lush green pastures dotted with cows, farmhouses and large boulders, all adding to the postcard quality landscape. Soon enough we'll arrive at the valley base. Green pastures and cloud forest cover the folds and mountains both of which are punctuated by the national tree – the Colombian Wax palm.

We'll keep our eyes peeled as the palm is a common nesting place of the famed Yellow-eared parrot. We will be following the River Cardenas/ Rio Quindio route. This route will ford the river before the trail begins to hug and climb the side of this quite beautiful valley. A steep set of switch-backs will break us in perfectly on the first day, levelling out a little after, punctuated by short, steep descents and ascents. The overall trek today lasts around 10km and will take around 5hrs. Eventually, we will reach Don Javier's farm, located at 3,476masl. The cloud forest of the Cocora Valley



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below is left behind as we ascend into a high-Andean forest surround, where the airs are much cooler, the vegetation becomes darker and the mountain tops begin to show themselves. Given its excellent level of conservation, high-Andean species such as Long-tailed Sylph, the local, rare (and tiny) Purple-backed Thornbill, Blue-winged Mountain Tanager, Grass-green Tanager, uncommon and beautiful Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan, noisy groups of endangered Golden-plumed Parakeet are all known to habit these valleys. If fortunate the immense Andean Condor can be seen soaring on a clear day.

Upon arriving at camp you'll have a late lunch with time to explore the surrounding folds and mountain streams. We will pay a visit to Don Javer's farmhouse and dinner will be at the camp just below the house. Jumpers and fleeces will be the order of the evening as it can get quite cold.

Overnight – Camping



Overnight:
Camping



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
Varies



Activity:
Trekking

DAY 5: Continue trekking in EL BOSQUE

Today's trek is arguably the most visually stunning. A steep climb through elfin forest or 'sub-paramo' will start the day as we make our way along what is now the Cardenas Canyon. Up ahead, on a clear day the Paramillo del Quindio volcano and crater can be seen with its yellow-ochre sands which hark back to an eruption some 5,000 years ago which created the Cocora Valley some 2,000 meters below. We'll enter the 'paramo' or high-Andean tundra of Colombia, an ecosystem recently classified as the fastest evolving on the planet. Extreme UV rays, wind, altitude and cold make everything up here very unique. Today's walk is around 14.5 km – it is a hard grade walk with steep switchbacks.



The climb continues to the 'High of Bitterness' which is today's high point of the trek, located at @ 4,172masl / 13,688ft. This mountain pass which separates the River Quindio and River Otun watershed and stands at the top of the stunning Berlin Valley, is bitter indeed. Watch out for flocks of Andean Siskin and screaming groups of one of the park's most famous residents - the endangered Rufous-fronted Parakeet which is endemic to this very small region of Colombia. Descending this paramo valley to Berlin farm, closed in by sharp peaks and rocks is a memorable experience. Small mountain streams and postcard pastures intertwined with ageless trees and cows all come together. A last ascent will take us to El Bosque caldera's look out point where a large basin surrounded by a sheer-rock horseshoe stands below. Among the pastures and trails lays our camp for the night, by El Bosque School, Risaralda department's only difficult access school which serves the local village. Donations are welcome and some gifts will be given as part of our passing through.

Overnight – Camping



Overnight:
Camping



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
N/A



Activity:
Trekking



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DAY 6: Discover LAKE OTUN



Today's medium level trek (7.5km) will start with a steep climb out of this extinct volcanic caldera. Once the initial climb is over you'll be back once again in páramo, surrounded by yellow-brown, stiff grasses, frailejones and flowers of various colours - from deep yellow to clear purple (Arnica flowers are used for medicine) to blood red. Given the lack of insects at such altitudes, it really is a battle between plants to see who's the brightest and most attractive - great for us visitors.

The páramo trails wind their way through ancient lava flows which make this landscape a collection of small hillocks, rocky outcrops, rises and dips,

before you emerge out to the once large body of water called 'Lake Mosquito'. This is now a dry lake bed, with grasses which have been taken over by cows. In the distance to the north, the first glimpses of the Nevado de Santa Isabel can be seen with its unique 3-domed structure and glaciated peak, its summit is forever shrouded in cloud.

Ahead a last climb will ensue before the serene Lake Otun emerges, measuring 2km by 1km this is one of Colombia's largest high-altitude lakes and by its shores our camp will be waiting for lunch. A chance will be had to say hello to the park rangers who have a cabin here and preparations will be made for an optional afternoon walk to the 'Azufrera' or sulphur mine which is located nearby, a surreal landscape which is always worth the walk. Dinner will be at camp.



Overnight – Camping



Overnight:
Camping



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
N/A



Activity:
Trekking

DAY 7: Continue trekking north to CAMPOALEGRE

After saying goodbye to the rangers at the cabin, we'll set out on a very steady climb via an old disused road that leads out and up by the side of the lake. Panoramic views will be offered of the lake and its volcanic backdrop, with the ochre sands of the Paramillo del Quindio in the distance and the Nevado de Santa Isabel looming ever closer. At the high point we'll look out for a family of the uncommon Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle - the páramo's largest raptor.

A deviation will be made from the road into the so-called 'Garden of Eden' (Jardín del Eden) where 4-meter high frailejones dominate, they help make this a beautiful walk. We'll be on the look out for puma and 'Tigrillo' (small ocelot-like cat) scat and deer may also appear. The páramo is the primary source of water for 70% of Colombians, acting like a giant sponge that gradually releases water during the dry seasons due to atmospheric pressure changes.

We'll descend from the high-point for around 7km, mostly downhill along the disused road, making our way around the side of a large, desolate valley before we see the welcoming site of Campoelgre farmhouse where you will be picked up by 4x4's to take you to Hacienda look out point. We will then say goodbye to our trek team before walking 30 minutes to our hotel, Hacienda Termales La Quinta. Spend the afternoon and evening relaxing in private hot springs and the main house. There is an optional walk to hot springs source (20mins) or horse ride around the hacienda, known for its award-winning mule breeding programme. Dinner and wine at the main house in the evening.

Overnight – Termales La Quinta



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
Varies



Activity:
Trekking



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DAY 8: Time to Relax! LEISURE DAY IN HACIENDA TERMALES LA QUINTA

Today you have a day of leisure to explore the Hacienda Termales La Quinta area. There are various optional walks and horse rides available for you; 'The Bromeliads' which is a 3 hour walk and a 'The Waterfalls' which is a 5 hour walk. Both of these are hard grade walks along horse trail. Additionally, if you didn't get a chance to walk to the hot spring emergence point, then this 20 minute walk is available today as well.

Packed lunches will be provided for those out on hikes and horse riding treks. In the evening you will visit the 'El Plan' farmhouse where good wines and billiards await. Dinner will be with the locals of La Quinta's Hacienda lands.

Overnight – Termales La Quinta



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
N/A



Activity:
**Options: Horse riding,
Trekking, Hot springs**

DAY 9: Transfer to SANTA MARTA

This morning we will be making the most of our day and leaving our hotel reasonably early at 5am. After a ½ walk to our car we will be transferred to Periera by car (approx. 3 hrs) to check in for our flight to Santa Marta. From here, we'll begin the next chapter in our journey, discovering the hidden beauty of the tropical Caribbean coast.

Once we arrive in Santa Marta we will be transferred to our beach hotel to check in and enjoy a late lunch. The afternoon will be reserved for us to relax and recuperate before continuing on with our trekking adventure tomorrow; the evening can be used entirely at your leisure.

Overnight – Playa Koralia



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
**Short flight
Approx. 5hr drive**



Activity:
Travel

DAY 10: Discover TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK



We will be leaving our hotel in Santa Marta at around 6am, for our 1hr transfer to Tayrona National Park El Calabazo sector to meet our guide. Our walk will begin at 8am and it will involve a hard-grade walk through tropical dry forest to the archaeological ruins of Pueblito Chairama. Once we've arrived at the ruins we'll get the chance to observe them, take in the scenery and enjoy our packed lunch.

Following on from lunch, we'll continue to follow the granite Tayrona pathway, along with some scrambling and beaches. This particular walk will be another hard grade walk due to the heat and the length of our walk of 16km with an approximate 580m ascent. Finally, we'll get to descend to the gorgeous Cabo de San Juan beach and spend some time there before returning along the main route back to the park entrance. After the



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success of our tropical-based trek, there will be a 1hr transfer back to our hotel and private beach, where we can enjoy being on the serene Caribbean coast for the evening.

Overnight – Playa Koralia



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
Approx. 2hr drive



Activity:
Trekking

DAY 11: Day of relaxation in SANTA MARTA

Today will be spent at our leisure. The hotel is a remote and secluded private beach hotel that lies one hour away from Santa Marta, it's located on a beautiful section of beach to the north of Santa Marta, surrounded by mountains and lush jungle, perfect for exploring which could be an possibility for today. In addition, there are a number of optional activities and expeditions that we can spend today experiencing including, mountain biking, local community visits, handicraft workshops with the local Kogi indigenous group, a foodie gastronomy tour of the Caribbean, River Don Diego tubing and wildlife watching ride as well as further trekking opportunities, amongst many others.

Overnight – Playa Koralia



Overnight:
Hotel



Meals:
B, L, D



Distance:
N/A



Activity:
Day at Leisure

DAY 12: Time to say GOODBYE to COLOMBIA as you are transferred back to Bogota Airport



Our final day on this Hidden Colombia Trek, you will have the morning at your leisure. Depending on the flight time transfer to Santa Marta airport for your flight to Bogota and your connection back to UK - You can discover more of the local sandy beaches along the stunning Caribbean shoreline or even indulge in a morning of relaxation before heading home.

You will then be transferred to the airport for your flight back home via Bogota.



Overnight:
N/A



Meals:
B, L



Distance:
N/A



Activity:
Travel



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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

INCLUDED

- All transfers and road transport
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees to all museums, parks and reserves
- Bilingual Trek Leader
- Local bilingual guides in major cities
- Bilingual accompaniment during airport transfers
- Tours as included in this itinerary
- All meals as noted in itinerary
- All snacks and water on day tours

NOT INCLUDED

- Any internal flights
- Any international flights
- Laundry
- Personal expenses
- Tips
- Visa
- Items of a personal nature
- Drinks or beverages
- Meals not specified in the meal plan as detailed in the itinerary

WHEN TO GO

- Due to Colombia being on the equator, temperatures are fairly stable at 24°C throughout the year, getting cooler if you move higher inland.
- Colombia wet seasons vary depending on where you are in the country. In the North, there are 2 rainy seasons, between April and June, and between September and November. However in the South the rain is more constant but the showers never last that long.
- As for when to avoid the tourists! The busy tourism season tends to be between December to February and Easter Week (the week before Easter weekend).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITY DURATION	5 – 7 hours per day.
SEASON	These parts of Colombia are best explored from December to March or June to September.
BEST TIME TO GO	December - March & June - September.
GROUP SIZE	Tailor-made
RESPONSIBILITY	As part of our commitment to responsible travel, we propose activities that are respectful of the environment and communities working at the same time exclusively with local partners.
DIFFICULTY LEVEL	Our grades have been designated based on our perception of the degree of physical activity you are likely to require to enjoy the adventure. These are only



a guideline. This itinerary has a 'moderate-difficult level' (5 – 7 hours of activities per day. This means you will need a good level of fitness and some specific training may be required.



THE PIONEER BOOKING PROCESS

Where do you go from here? Well, you can feel free to email us at info@pioneerexpeditions.com if you're interested in this trip, or any of our other expeditions from around the world. Visit our website www.pioneerexpeditions.com to unearth all of our other equally amazing trips and destinations.

1. Contact us -

We will be happy to answer any questions or enquiries you may have. From here we will begin to plan and put together your dream adventure holiday! Alternatively, on our website you will find our booking and enquiry forms; once filled in, we will be notified of your enquiry and will get back to you ASAP.

2. Leave everything to us -

Everything will be arranged and booked by us, but we will make sure to keep you updated every step of the way. In addition, we can arrange your international flights if needed, as we have access to competitive airfares. We can also arrange any additional tours or additional night's accommodation.

3. Wait for your adventure to begin -

Sit back and count down the days until your trip of a lifetime with Pioneer Expeditions. We'll handle all of the last minute preparations and provide you with everything you need. All practical information will be sent out to you, prior to your trip.

If you feel like altering this itinerary to suit your personal preferences, we can arrange all of that and more – just get in contact with us and let us know your requirements and wishes. From here, we can simply tailor-make your dream holiday.

