



## SANTA MARTA

Santa Marta's grace as a colonial city has faded under newer concrete buildings, but its proximity to the sea still makes it an attractive destination. For Colombians, this is one of the most popular tourist towns in the country, offering liberal amounts of sun, rum and long stretches of sandy beachfront property.



Among the city's attractions are an aquarium and the grand hacienda where Simón Bolívar died. But most travelers simply use Santa Marta as a jumping-off point for nearby attractions. El Rodadero, just to the south, is a fashionable beach resort. North of Santa Marta is the attractive fishing village of Taganga and, further northeast, the beautiful Parque Nacional Tayrona. Santa Marta is also the place to organize a trip to Ciudad Perdida, Tayrona's great pre-Hispanic city.

The climate is hot, but the sea breeze, especially in the evening, cools the city and makes it pleasant to wander about, or to sit over a beer or juice in any of the numerous open-air waterfront cafés.

## CARTAGENA

A fairy-tale city of romance, legends and sheer beauty, Cartagena de Indias is an addictive place that can be hard to escape. This is the place to drop all sightseeing routines. Instead, just stroll through Cartagena's maze of cobbled alleys, where enormous balconies are shrouded in bougainvillea and massive churches cast their shadows across leafy plazas. Take time out to relax at one of Cartagena's many open-air cafés, prime viewing spots to watch the parade of horse-drawn carriages, fashionable locals and mystified tourists. When the bustling city gets too much, you can always escape to the nearby Islas de Rosario.



Cartagena offers a variety of restaurants and accommodations to suit all tastes and budgets. If you've got pesos burning a hole in your pocket, this is the city to splurge on a pricey historic hotel or flashy restaurant.

## SAN ANDRES

Covered in coconut palms and cut by sharp ravines that turn into rivers after rain, the seahorse-shaped San Andrés is the largest island in the archipelago, covering 27 sq km. It's the main commercial and administrative center of the archipelago. As the only transport hub to the mainland, it's the first and last place you are likely to see.

San Andrés Town is packed with hotels, restaurants and shops; it has more than two-thirds of the island's population. There are two other small towns: La Loma in the central hilly region and San Luis on the eastern coast, both far less tourist-oriented than San Andrés Town. Both have fine English-Caribbean wooden architecture.



San Andrés offers excellent scuba diving opportunities all around the island, but sunbathers should note that beaches are limited to the eastern coast. There's a pleasant beach at the northern end of the island, in San Andrés Town, but it can be crowded in the tourist season. Possibly the best beach is on the islet of Johnny Cay, just opposite San Andrés Town, though it gets very crowded in the high season.

## THE AMAZON REGION

Deep down south we find the Colombian Amazon region. This enormous area offers stunning flora and fauna, rivers, streams, natives and dense rainforest occupying a vast area of the territory ending in the most southern part of the country at the Amazon River, bordering with Peru and Brazil.

It is here, in the "Tres Fronteras" (three frontiers) area, where we find the city of Leticia, gateway to the Amazon. Most visitors to this portion of the Amazon will arrive at the airport of Leticia after a 1 hour 40 minute flight from the capital Bogota. Other flights arrive from Iquitos (Peru) and Manaus (Brazil). The city has a good infrastructure of hotels providing you with comfortable accommodations before and after Jungle expeditions and tours. A variety of programs and Amazon river cruises are available from here.



The Colombia Amazon is part of the vast Amazon basin which is shared by Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. One of the best known areas of the Colombian Amazon is Amacayacu National park. The park is one of the best reserves in Colombia, and is a must for anyone wishing to visit this portion of South America. The park is situated on the banks of the Amazon, at the mouth of the river Matamata, and encompasses swamp, *Varzea*



and *terra Firme* forest. It is worth spending at least a few days here, making the most of the excursions offered. As in most areas of the Amazon, it is not recommended to explore the jungle alone, and the park is no exception. The park has strict guidelines and state that all visitors must be accompanied by a guide. Guided tours take travelers to the heart of the jungle, to the magnificent lakes in the Yahuarcacas region and the Tarapoto, as well as those found nearby in Brazil and Peru. Many indigenous communities inhabit the area, and are proud to share their culture and heritage with their guests. The sounds and sights are unique, creating a magical experience. Tours are flexible and can last from hours to days.