



Cartagena

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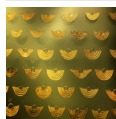
Cartagena is the undisputed queen of Colombia's Caribbean coast and easily the most attractive city in the region — this given its apparent shortage of attractions in the classical sense of the word. Instead, what draws travellers in is the city itself: a microcosm of the Caribbean, walled in by defensive ramparts built to ward off unwelcome visitors, the likes of Sir Francis Drake, who held Cartagena de Indias captive for months during his 16th-century raids on the Spanish New World.

Featured



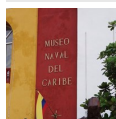
Sunset Cruise

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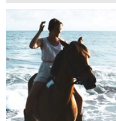
Museo del Oro Zenú

Museo del Oro Zenú is Cartagena's response to the famous gold museum in Bogo...



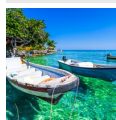
Museo Naval del Caribe

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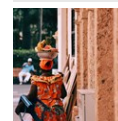
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Getsemani Neighbourhood

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Palace of Inquisition

This beautiful example of Spanish colonial architecture contains a small mus...

THE CITY



Inspired By Maps/Shutterstock.com

Cartagena's beginnings as a major hub of slave trade in the Americas has had a long-lasting impact on the city's social make-up. Over time it has created a tantalising mix of cultural influences that are manifested in its cuisine and music. Time runs slow on Cartagena's inviting squares, where locals play dominoes while tourists hunt for the perfect shot of the incredibly photogenic 'planenqueras' in the background.

Most tours of the city start with an exploration of Cartagena's incredibly attractive Old Town, soon followed by a dive into Getsemani, the best of city neighbourhoods to watch local life unfold, both before and after dark. San Diego is another area of the city favoured by visitors, in part due to its high number of solid and affordable accommodation options, while the aforementioned Getsemani remains a top nightlife pick for many, given its abundance of bars and dance clubs that offer a great taste of Cartagena's take on pura vida.

Cartagena is heralded as the most attractive urban destination of the Caribbean, and having walked its beautifully preserved colonial streets, there remains little doubt as to why.

Cumbia music fills the air in Cartagena's

absurdly beautiful Old Town, while locals enjoy leisurely chats in inviting town squares, street vendors peddle their wares (look out for the incredibly photogenic palenqueras!), and vacationers explore streets lined with well-preserved colonial buildings, their balconies deluged with striking fuchsia-coloured veranera. The first free town in the Americas founded by slave trade escapees — San Basilio de Palenque — is just an hour's drive from here.

DO & SEE



Jorge Gardner/Unsplash.com

There is a great deal of things to do in Cartagena, even if simply taking a stroll through the city's beautifully preserved Old Town with a distinct colonial flare. Some of the highlights include an obligatory visit to the imposing Castillo San Felipe de Barajas, a walk along Cartagena's defensive ramparts, a trip to the chilling Inquisition Palace (which still contains the original torture devices used to extract "confessions"), and a deep dive into the incredibly hip neighbourhood of Getsemani, teeming with eateries and bars where locals mix and mingle with guests from far and wide.

Cartagena Walled City



Enclosed within a protective wall reaching up to 20 m in width, the Ciudad Amurallada (or "Walled City") is Cartagena's old beating heart. Packed with well-preserved colonial buildings, it's a pleasure to stroll through; its streets of colourful low-rise merchant homes marked by iconic balconies are now mostly walked by either tourists or students who attend classes at the University of Cartagena during the day and linger for meals and nightlife after school is out.

Cafes in Plaza Aduana and Plaza Santo Domingo teem with patrons, forging an incredibly jovial atmosphere; the districts of San Diego and El Centro are two not to be missed. There is plenty of food and shopping to be had, with a mixed bag of world-class restaurants and street food hawkers and the incredibly photogenic palenqueras — women dressed in vibrantly coloured clothing selling fruit in the streets — images of whom have become emblematic of Colombia as a travel destination.

Photo: Luis Vidal/Unspalsh.com

Castillo San Felipe de Barajas



A feat of Spanish colonial military architecture, the Castillo San Felipe de Barajas is one of Cartagena's most prized attractions. The fortress, whose construction finished in the late 18th century, was never seized – and not for a lack of attempted forays. Part of its sophisticated system of underground tunnels is open to the public; a

guided tour (audio guides available) is highly recommended.

Photo: Andrei Medvedev/Shutterstock.com

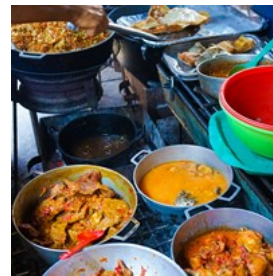
Address: Av Arévalo, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 8am–6pm

Phone: +57 5 6421293

Internet: fortificacionescartagena.com.co/en

Bazurto Market



While seasoned travellers may venture into Cartagena's gritty Bazurto Market on their own, those not yet toughened by locals-only

markets of the region may prefer to explore as part of a guided tour. This sprawling market, where trade starts before the crack of dawn, features incredibly fresh produce and seafood from Cartagena and beyond; much of it makes its way to the tables of local fine dining establishments within the space of the same day. There is plenty to look at and taste, including local street food and multiple succulent varieties of tropical fruit you're unlikely to have encountered before.

Photo: Inspired By Maps/Shutterstock.com

Address: Avenida Pedro De Heredia, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 4am–9pm

Getsemani Neighbourhood



The buzzing Bairro Getsemani is, perhaps, Cartagena's most attractive neighbourhood, for both its well-preserved colonial

architecture and vivid street life. Known as the nightlife hot spot of Cartagena, Getsemani stays up until late at night, with locals and visitors mingling in and around Plaza de la Trinidad over

drinks and street food.

Photo: Jorge Gardner/unsplash.com

Address: 174, Esquina con Calle 29, Cartagena

Palace of Inquisition



This beautiful example of Spanish colonial architecture contains a small museum dedicated to the Spanish Inquisition's brutal

persecution of heretics once carried out in these very chambers. Visitors can still see some of the torture devices used to extract confessions of heresy and witchcraft, along with some of the questions used in "witch" interrogations, which are still displayed on the museum wall. Needless to say, no prisoner could hope to be acquitted of their purported crimes against the Catholic Church, and most met their tragic end at the very guillotine still on display in the courtyard.

Photo: Eliel Fotografia/Shutterstock.com

Address: 46, Plaza de Bolivar, Cartagena

Opening hours: Mon-Sat 9am-6pm, Sun 10am-4pm

Phone: +57 605 6644570

Tickets: \$22,000

Internet: www.muhca.gov.co

Convent of Santa Cruz de la Popa



Visible from almost everywhere in Cartagena, the Convent of Santa Cruz de la Popa all the way up the a 150-meter hill known as Mt. Popa.

The hill got its name for resembling a poop deck of a ship. After four centuries of varied history, the convent itself is now open as a religious museum. From the top Mt. Popa you'll get the best panoramic views of Cartagena and its beaches.

The fastest and least stressful way up the hill is with a taxi (be sure to haggle on the price). An important tip : if you take a taxi or a car service to this location, pay them a few pesos to wait for you to drive you back. The taxis on top are all already "reserved" and Uber drivers are not eager to drive all the way to the top to pick you up.

Photo: Zezar02/Wikimedia Commons(image cropped)

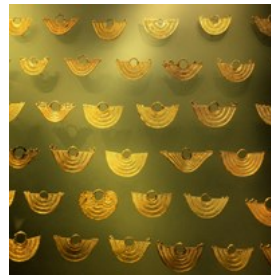
Address: Convento de Santa Cruz de la Popa, Calle 37, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 8:30am-5:30pm

Phone: +57 5 664 37 00

Internet: www.cartagenainfo.com/lapopa/index.html#_=_

Museo del Oro Zenú



Museo del Oro Zenú is Cartagena's response to the famous gold museum in Bogotá. Here you'll learn about the culture of the Zenú people through the artefacts of their tribe: over 600 gold, silver and ceramic pieces are on display. Other highlights include displays on body painting and textiles, and an exhibit focusing on the engineering prowess of the Zenú — learn how they built a vast network of canals over 2,500 years ago.

Photo: Edgar Jiménez/Flickr(image cropped)

Address: Carrera 4 #33-60, Calle del Landrinal, building of Banco de la República, Cartagena

Phone: +57 605 660 08 08

Internet:

www.banrepultural.org/cartagena/museo-del-oro-zenu

Rosario Islands



Just an hour's boat trip away from Cartagena lie the magnificent Rosario Islands, which belong to Colombia's only underwater natural park

(the Rosario and San Bernardo Corals National Natural Park). Abundant marine wildlife (including over 50 species of corals) and some of Colombia's best beaches draw in many in search of relaxation and active pursuits such as snorkelling and diving. Isla Grande is best for kayaking through unique mangrove forests and seeing the phosphorescent plankton light up the waters of a brackish lake at night, while Playa Blanca is Cartagena's most spectacular white-sand beach (also reachable by land).

It should be said that the company you choose to tour with has the potential to make or break the experience. Low cost tours can mean multiple intermediate stops en route to your destination, as well as unpleasant surprises such as no transfer back to your hotel. Try and choose a trusted company with consistently good reviews, or opt for a private tour. Mind that seas may be rough at certain times of the year, particularly in December and January, when tours on smaller boats may even become dangerous.

Photo: Venturelli Luca/Shutterstock.com

Museo Naval del Caribe



Housed in a beautifully restored Jesuit school building from 1612, the Museo Naval del Caribe covers in some detail the 500 years of Cartagena's maritime history. You'll find sunken ships,

cannons, ship's bells, muskets, and other treasures here. The descriptions are in Spanish, so it's a good idea to get a guided tour.

Photo: Kamilokardona/Wikimedia Commons(image cropped)

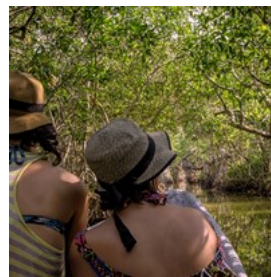
Address: Calle 31 (de San Juan de Dios) #3-26, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 10am-6pm

Phone: +57 5 664 24 40

More Info: Located along the ancient city walls next to Plaza De Santa Teresa

La Boquilla and the Mangroves



The mangrove tunnels of nearby La Boquilla are an easy day trip from Cartagena. Guided tours will often combine a visit to the beach (one of the

Playas De La Boquilla) with a boat or canoe tour of the mangroves, passing through Ciénaga de Juan Polo and the Ciénaga de la Virgen lagoons. Some tours will also include a closer encounter with local fishermen and offer insight into their craft.

La Boquilla is an area of contrasts: the district of upscale hotels — Morros — borders on humble neighbourhoods populated by workers. When sitting down to tuck into no-frills seafood dishes served up by local eateries, make sure you're clear about the price of each item ordered from the get-go, as there have been reports of "surprise" bills amounting to several hundred US dollars.

Photo: Danita Delmont/Unsplash.com

Scuba Diving & Snorkelling



If snorkelling and/or scuba diving sounds like your idea of fun, Cartagena is the place to indulge. Waters of the Caribbean washing over this part of the coast hold abundant marine life, including multiple varieties of tropical fish and corals, and the several underwater shipwreck sites make for exciting diving.

The archipelagos of Rosario and San Bernardo are both excellent for either.

Diving Planet Cartagena:

Photo: Stas Moroz/Shutterstock.com

Address: Plaza Fernández de Madrid No. 36-149, third floor, Office 303, Cartagena de Indias

Phone: +57 302 2922526

Internet: www.divingplanet.org/en

San Basilio de Palenque



Once the first free settlement in the Americas founded by those who escaped slavery during the colonial period, the town of San Basilio de Palenque still stands today, and with it the unique culture of its inhabitants. A portion of the population still speaks palenquero, a creole tongue that emerged from a mix of several European and African languages, now used almost exclusively in San Basilio de Palenque.

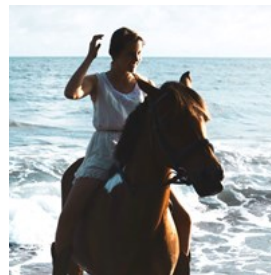
Music and dance occupy a place of paramount importance in residents' lives, with the Drums and Cultural Expressions Festival held annually in October. The palenque cuisine deserves a

separate mention — a culinary tradition upheld by inhabitants of a small Colombian village has garnered international acclaim, with a cookbook written in the town receiving the highest prize at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in 2014. If your schedule happens to be too tight for a dedicated day trip (which earns our highest recommendation), try some of the tropical fruit sold by palenqueras in downtown Cartagena.

The village was named Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005.

Photo: ReservoirHill/Wikimedia Commons(image cropped)

Horseback Riding on the Beach



There is more than one way of exploring the beach: if you have had enough of sun tanning and frolicking in the surf, join a tour that puts you

on a back of a horse. The ultimate romantic experience of riding along the sandy shore is available to riders of all levels. Feel like a character from a bodice ripper and get some spectacular photos for your Tinder profile while you're at it.

Photo: Millicent Leandra/unsplash.com

Sunset Cruise



It would be a shame to be on the Caribbean coast and not take a boat ride out to sea. One of the best ways to enjoy a bit of naval activity and get

ready for a fun night ahead is to take a romantic boat trip at sunset. The trips usually depart around 4:30 pm and give you a couple of hours

under the sails. Enjoy magnificent views of the city skyline, with plenty of time to take photos in the golden hour, enjoy the snacks and drinks on offer, or just sit back and watch the sun dive into the Caribbean waters.

Photo: Nicole Chen/unsplash.com

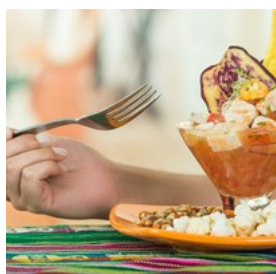
RESTAURANTS



Anamaria Mejia/Shutterstock.com

From crispy deep-fried arepas to elaborate seafood dishes featuring fresh catch of the day (ceviche is the dish, perhaps, most sought-after), there is no shortage of scrumptious foods to try in Cartagena, Colombia. The classic is a fried fish platter, featuring a whole tilapia with a side of coconut rice and fried plantain — you'll be hard-pressed to find a local restaurant that doesn't list it on its menu.

La Cevichería



Made famous by the late Anthony Bourdain paying a visit as part of the incredibly successful "No Reservations" series, La Cevichería did right by its new-found fame and maintained the high standards of its cuisine, remaining among the best places in town for seafood lovers. The menu isn't limited to ceviche alone. Prepare for a wait during dinner hours and opt for the indoor

seating to avoid being distracted by street vendors.

Photo: Fotos593/Shutterstock.com

Address: Next to hotel Santa Clara, Calle 39 #7 14, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 1pm-10:30pm

Phone: +57 5 6798743

Internet: lacevicheriacartagena.com

Caffé Lunático



This Getsemani hideout serves excellent tapas — to be paired with no less attractive drinks, both alcoholic and not. Lunático also offers entertaining cooking classes.

Photo: Besjunior/Shutterstock.com

Address: Calle Espíritu Santo #29-184, Cartagena

Phone: +57 312 334 54 15

Internet: lunaticoexperience.com

Espiritu Santo



With a location smack in the heart of Cartagena, Espiritu Santo (Holy Spirit) could easily be a tourist trap but is far from it. The place is incredibly popular with locals, found here in large numbers during lunch hour. Espiritu Santo's vibe is very casual, even canteen-like, with very decent, hearty food. A standard order includes your pick of protein (fish comes recommended) with three sides, of which there are many to choose from.

Photo: Bibarama/Shutterstock.com

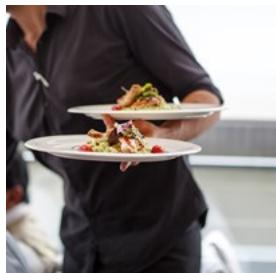
Address: Calle 35 #6-69, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 11:30am-3:30pm

Phone: +57 660 69 48

Internet: www.instagram.com/espíritusanto.cartagena

Alma



Elevated Colombian cuisine is served at this highly regarded restaurant that lays claim to "capturing the essence of colonial Cartagena"

through its cooking. Highlighting local ingredients such as coconut milk and seafood, Alma puts a delectable twist on familiar flavours and invites patrons to a memorable dining experience to the sounds of live music (Wed-Sun).

Photo: Romrodphoto/Shutterstock.com

Address: Calle #36, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily noon-11pm

Phone: +57 5 681 00 50

Internet: www.almacolombia.com

La Mulata



La Mulata is a cute little bar and restaurant a bit off the beaten path in the walled city in Cartagena. Good selection of cocktails, appetisers

(including some melt-in-your-mouth ceviche) and entrees. From time to time you'll catch live music here. Spend your evening sipping their signature mango margarita.

Photo: Yasmine Duchesne/unsplash.com

Address: Calle del Quero #9-58, Cartagena

Phone: +57 301 493 38 71

Cuzco Cocina Peruana



The Peruvian restaurant Cuzco boasts delicious food (Peruvian food is often considered the best in the region), great service and live music.

Their ceviche is predictably outstanding, and the tenderness of their octopus dishes is legendary. Generous portions and fair prices for the level of quality.

Photo: Stefan Schaubeger/unsplash.com

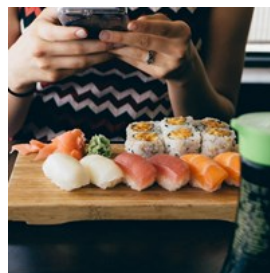
Address: Calle Santo Domingo #33-48, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 12:30pm-3:30pm / 7pm-11pm

Phone: +57 5 660 67 64

Internet: cartagena.restaurantecuzco.com

Pezetarian



Pezetarian is a modern casual dining restaurant that is all about healthy and fresh food heavily based on seafood as the source of protein. You'll

find plenty of healthy options on their menu: sushi, salads and soups, wok and breakfast dishes. Vegan, gluten and lactose free, and even low sodium orders are accommodated.

Photo: j/unsplash.com

Address: Carrera 7 ##36-19, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 11am-10pm

Phone: +57 302 383 83 76

Internet: www.gela.co/pezetarian/menu/en/index.html

CAFES



Benedict Kraus/Shutterstock.com

Although Colombia exports some of the world's finest coffee beans, it is only as of recently that these have become increasingly available to country natives, rather than shipped off to be sold abroad. Beans that don't reach export quality continue to get brewed as the ubiquitous 'tinto' (which translates to "ink water"): a popular brew that's sold at every cafe and street corner, and often needs plenty of sugar to camouflage the bitterness.

Colombia's budding coffee culture, spearheaded by young entrepreneurs, aims to introduce Colombians to unique flavour profiles originating in their own lands. Colombian beans are famously on the acidic side, with pronounced citrus notes (although coffee that comes from Colombia's north is known to be relatively less acidic, with more body). In Cartagena, one of the best places for an in-depth acquaintance with modern Colombian coffee culture is Café San Alberto, which offers a number of thematic workshops and courses (including tours of the plantation in Quindio, where all of their beans come from); for something quick and easy there are also multiple outlets of Juan Valdez Cafe (dubbed "the Colombian Starbucks").

Café San Alberto



San Alberto serves brews made from beans with the highest number of awards in the country, which come from a plantation in Buenavista, Quindío.

Their coffee is brewed using a variety of fascinating methods, from classic to highly modern, such as molecular cupping.

The Cartagena location of San Alberto (all branches are ceremoniously referred to as "coffee temples") offers "Coffee Baptism" programs that last a couple of hours and take attendees on a journey of coffee exploration. Other tours offered vary in focus, the one focusing on high-tech brewing methods being, perhaps, the most intriguing.

Photo: Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock.com

Address: Calle de los Santos de Piedra #3- 86, Cartagena

Phone: +57 318 796 44 57

Internet: www.cafesanalberto.com

Epoca Espresso Bar



Epoca Espresso Bar makes outstanding artisanal coffee from beans roasted in-house. Apart from the standard espresso based drinks

you ought to try one of their coffee cocktails. Epoca is great for breakfast and brunch, just make sure to come early — eggs Benedict in the mornings are a crowd favourite.

Check out the second floor seating, where they have cute little balconies.

Photo: Nathan Dumlao/unsplash.com

Address: Calle de Arzopispado, Carrera 5 #34-52, Centro Historico, Cartagena

Opening hours: Mon-Sat 8am-8pm, Sun 8am-6pm
Phone: +57 315 800 80 72
Internet: tienda.epocacafe.com/pages/arzobispado

La Bottega de Fitz & Co. — Literary Cafe



La Bottega de Fitz & Co is an excellent little with two air conditioned floors, great coffee and pastries, cold cocktails and warm atmosphere.

Probably the best place in Cartagena to relax with a book or read a newspaper.

Photo: Rizky Subagja/unsplash.com
Address: Calle 38 #8-55, local 3, Cartagena
Opening hours: Mon-Thu 10am-9pm, Fri & Sat 10am-10pm, Sun closed
Phone: +57 311 686 80 35
Internet: labottedefitz.co
Email: bottegadefitz@gmail.com

Cafe del Mural



Cafe del Mural excels at serving some of Cartagena's best brews, and this given tough competition in a country hailed for its beans. Stop

by for a solid espresso or try one of their more extravagant takes on coffee-based beverages; for those willing to dive deeper, attending a coffee appreciation class held regularly by the owner will be a worthwhile experience.

Photo: puthithons/Shutterstock.com
Address: Carretera 9a (Calle de San Juan) ## 25-60, Cartagena
Opening hours: Mon-Sat 3pm-8pm
Phone: +57 321 288 93 23

La Paletteria



The quaint ice cream shop in Cartagena's historic centre is a feast for the eyes: its colourful popsicle display will have anyone spoilt for choice,

left to take their (impossible) pick from an abundance of original flavours ranging from Caribbean fruit such as soursop (guanábana) to western-style Oreo cheesecake.

Photo: outtosea/Shutterstock.com
Address: Calle 35 #03-86, Cartagena
Phone: +57 5 666 15 79
Internet: www.lapaletteria.co/en

Ábaco Books and Coffee



One doesn't need to be a bookworm to appreciate this quaint locale's attractive concept, although being one would certainly add purpose to

the visit. A cross-breed between book shop and cafe, Ábaco allows patrons to combine the joy of reading with that of savoring a great cup of joe, with the option of freely browsing through endless titles along ceiling-high bookshelves. There's a catch: most books are in Spanish, with only a limited selection in English.

Photo: Wutthichai Phosri/Shutterstock.com
Address: Ábaco Libros y Café, Calle 36 #3-86, Cartagena
Opening hours: Mon-Sat 8am-8pm, Sun 1pm-7pm
Phone: +57 5 678 61 43
Internet: www.abacolibros.com

Juan Valdez Café



The country's most recognised brand of coffee has multiple outlets throughout Cartagena, which is part of the reason it's been dubbed 'the Colombia's Starbucks'. Each coffee shop is a casual affair with a comprehensive coffee menu; bagged beans and various merchandise can also be purchased straight at the shops.

Photo: Aleksandrs Muiznieks/Shutterstock.com

Address: Corner of Calle 36 & Calle de la Universidad, Cartagena

Phone: +57 5 665 11 56

Internet: www.juanvaldezcafe.com

BARS & NIGHTLIFE



Maksym Fesenko/Shutterstock.com

Cartagena is a blast to explore after dark: rhythms that were made for dancing sound from nearly every open door in Getsemani, setting the mood for a party that lasts into the early hours. If dancing is your thing, there is no shortage of salsa bars to explore (some even offer salsa dancing courses to those who are serious enough about the art), as well as places where champeta is the dance of choice (Bazurto Social Club is the place to be for the latter). For a low-key evening, kick back and enjoy a drink or two in an outdoor terrace of one of Cartagena's

many inviting plazas.

Café del Mar



Café del Mar's open-air terrace, set right on top of the city's old ramparts, is one of Cartagena's prime locations for evening drinks.

Unobstructed views of the water make for an excellent spectacle of nature at sundown, when the sun slowly disappears into the horizon to the sounds of live music. The cafe serves a wide variety of drinks (including cocktails), and a great selection of Colombian specialities with an emphasis on seafood.

Photo: Dpongvit/Shutterstock.com

Address: Baluarte de Santo Domingo, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 4:30pm-2am

Phone: +57 5 664 29 45

Internet: www.cafedelmarcartagena.com.co

Salsa Dancing



Although salsa isn't nearly as much part of the everyday in Cartagena as it is in, say, Cali, there are still a few great spots to head to if

mastering the iconic Latin American dance is in your plans. Apart from Cafe Havana mentioned in this guide, Donde Fidel and Quiebra Canto are two spots that come recommended. Our top pick for newbies is Crazy Salsa: this bar not only knows how to throw a great party complete with live music, but also offers a range of salsa classes that can be attended, covering levels from beginner to advanced.

Photo: Frank Romero/Unsplash.com

Address: Avenida Carlos Escallón (Calle 35) #8-85, building of Banco Santander, Office 301, Cartagena

Phone: +57 300 561 94 28

Internet: crazysalsa.net/crazysalsa

Alquímico



Alquímico is a hip bar with a rooftop terrace. Since the bar has been featured on the list of 100 best cocktails in the world, its popularity has skyrocketed. There is a line out the door beginning around 9 pm on any night of the week, so get there early if you want a smooth entry.

Guests are invited to explore all three floors of the venue. Each level has its own menu of inventive cocktails, sandwiches, seafood and meat plates. It is basically bar hopping without ever stepping outside!

Photo: Laure Noverraz/unsplash.com

Address: Calle del Colegio #34-24, Cartagena

Phone: +57 318 845 04 33

Internet: <https://alquimico.com/>

Chiva Party Buses



Although this won't exactly be everyone's idea of a good time, younger and solo travellers looking to explore local nightlife and make new acquaintances while in Cartagena might enjoy an organised tour on board a vibrantly coloured Chiva Party Bus. While specifics will vary by tour operator, most include an open bar, a selection of Colombian snacks (typically arepas, bunuelos, and empanadas), as well as live music and dance shows directly on board. Buses may stop at local attractions en route to the final drop-off point, which is commonly a popular nightclub where the party

continues.

Photo: Charl Folscher/Unsplash.com

Internet: www.juanballena.com/collections/things-to-do-in-cartagena/products/chiva-party-bus

El Barón



El Barón offers plenty of outdoor seating, but you'll be drawn inside the bar — the decor is too nice to want to stay outdoors. This craft cocktail bar has many options, try the mezcal-based cocktail. Try a Puro — rum cocktail with caramelised onion and tobacco leaf. For something fresh, order a gin basil smash.

Photo: M.S. Meeuwesen/unsplash.com

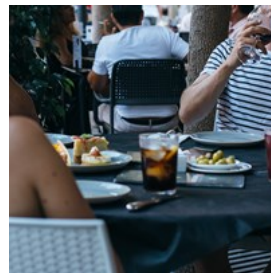
Address: Plaza San Pedro Claver, Carrera 4 #31-7, Cartagena

Opening hours: Tue noon-1am, Wed-Fri noon-2am, Sat 10am-2am, Sun 10am-1am, Mon closed

Phone: +57 315 646 30 18

Internet: www.elbaron.co

Demente



A buzzing Getsemani nightlife hotspot, Demente continues to be ever-popular with both locals and visitors. With a convivial outdoor terrace in a busy little town square and scrumptious tapas-style dishes, Demente is an easy pick for a night out in Cartagena.

Photo: Click and Photo/Shutterstock.com

Address: Carrera 10 #29-29, Cartagena

Phone: +57 5 660 42 26

Cafe Havana



"World famous Cafe Havana" — reads the signboard, a message recycled all throughout the establishment. Even the coasters sport it.

What brought such publicity to an originally one-of-many Cartagena bars is a memorable visit from none other than Hilary Clinton, the then-U.S. Secretary of State, who can be seen hitting the dance floor with a bottle of Aguila in photographs still plastered all over the web; all this while attending a political summit in Cartagena where US' isolationist policy towards Cuba was one of the primary talking points.

The bar is worth a stop up regardless of the celebrity patron: it's a jovial affair with mojitos, live music, and dancing (if you can squeeze yourself onto the dance floor, that is).

Abiertos de miércoles a domingos de 8:30 pm a 4:00 am (Domingos a las 7:00 pm) situados en Cartagena, Getsemani en la calle de la media luna.

Te esperamos!

Photo: Nadezda Murmakova/Shutterstock.com

Address: Getsemani, Calle de la media luna, Cartagena

Opening hours: Wed-Sat 8:30pm-4am, Sun 7pm-4am

Phone: +57 312 408 28 96

SHOPPING



MARTINVASQUEZPHOTOGRAPHY/Shutterstock.com

Must-buys range from food stuffs to hand-crafted accessories and interior decor items. Coffee tops the list of the former, given that Colombian beans are among the world's most revered. Beans from all corners of the country may be purchased in Cartagena, but if you're looking for as local as it gets, look for beans from the Quindio region (Café San Alberto is the primary distributor). Other edibles (and drinkables) include Colombian chocolate, made with regionally harvested cocoa beans, and drinks like Aguardient, the Colombian national drink with a potent tone of anis, and rum. Fruit will likely prove difficult to transport, but it's definitely worth purchasing and sampling some of the local favourites like mango, soursop and granadilla.

Hammocks, mochila bags and leather goods are some of the other best things to buy in Cartagena (and Colombia in general), and if you're looking for that extra something special, emeralds may be a great item to purchase — Colombia is the world's largest producer, and great deals are to be had.

Portal de los Dulces



Portal de los Dulces is, indeed, something of a portal to the world of Colombian sweets. Vendors here specialise in and peddle all manner

of dessert, with table displays set up all along this particular stretch of arcade in Plaza de Los Coches.

Many of the wares feature coconut in some form ('cocada', available in multiple flavours, and the colourful 'cubanito' rolls are among the most popular). If in doubt, try one of the pre-assembled "tasting sets".

Photo: Streetflash/Shutterstock.com

Address: Plaza de Los Coches, Ciudad Amurallada, Cartagena

St. Dom



St. Dom is an exquisite boutique that takes pride in showcasing the work of young and emerging designers from Colombia and greater Latin

America. The assortment of pieces receives regular additions of clothing, accessories, jewellery, and decor pieces. Prices are on the higher end.

Photo: Jason Briscoe/Unsplash.com

Address: Carrera 3 #3370, Cartagena

Phone: +57 317 432 34 85

Internet: www.stdom.co

Casa Chiqui



The brainchild of one well-traveled Colombian socialite, Casa Chiqui is an experience as much as it is a store. The indoor space and plant-deluged

courtyard pack a punch with an extensive collection of items handpicked by the owner on her many travels; wares range from Moroccan tajines to oriental rugs and pillow cases, all in impeccable taste.

Photo: Floral Deco/Shutterstock.com

Address: Carrera 6 #36-127, Cartagena

Phone: +57 5 668 54 29

Internet: casachiqui.com

La Serrezuela



La Serrezuela inside the Walled City is a lovingly restored bullfighting ring that now functions as a shopping mall. Stores and cafes are arranged along

the five storey wooden ring. The top floor hosts an upscale food court with fantastic views of Cartagena.

Photo: Priscilla Du Preez/unsplash.com

Address: Carrera 11 ##39-21, Cartagena

Phone: +57 5 642 17 95

Internet: www.plazalaserrezuela.com

Plaza de Las Bóvedas



Las Bóvedas (The Vaults) are a structure in the Old City of Cartagena in Colombia, attached to the walls. The Caribbean Sea is visible from the top of

the structure. They were built as dungeons. They are located between the forts of Santa Clara and

Santa Catalina.

Structure

The cells in the dungeon now house shops, boutiques and other businesses along the stout walls protecting the old city of Cartagena, Colombia.[1]

The arcades deep in the walls were designed as storage vaults but were used as prison cells during the civil wars in the 19th century; at high tide, the unfortunate internees were up to their knees in seawater.

The 23 bombproof vaults were built between 1789 and 1795, based on Antonio de Areballo's design. The 47 porticos were completed in 1798. The vaults were used by the Spanish Crown as a garrison, the same purpose used by patriot and republican forces.[2]

Today, Las Bóvedas is a popular tourist attraction because of its traditional Colombian merchandise and vast array of souvenirs.

Stock up on T-shirts, hats and shoulder bags at this series of small shops located on the eastern side of the Old City. Built as storage vaults in the 18th century, these dungeon-like spaces were also used to house prisoners during several different battles in that era. Sitting under the shade of an ancient portico, it's an iconic place to do some shopping. Most of the 23 different shops sell the same Cartagena-oriented souvenirs, but about halfway down the line, you will find Tienda Escuelas Taller, where handmade artisan items including wall hangings and sculptures from local artists are on display.

Photo: Joe Ross/Wikimedia Commons(image cropped)

Centenario Park



The Centenario Park is not only a lush urban park that is home to countless rescue animals — monkeys, iguanas and even sloths! On the eastern side you'll find a row of stalls selling souvenirs, books, crafts and practical items like Panama hats and sunglasses.

Photo: Ricardo Gomez Angel/unsplash.com

Address: Parque Centenario, Media, Cartagena

Bazarro Market



While seasoned travellers may venture into Cartagena's gritty Bazarro Market on their own, those not yet toughened by locals-only markets of the region may prefer to explore as part of a guided tour. This sprawling market, where trade starts before the crack of dawn, features incredibly fresh produce and seafood from Cartagena and beyond; much of it makes its way to the tables of local fine dining establishments within the space of the same day. There is plenty to look at and taste, including local street food and multiple succulent varieties of tropical fruit you're unlikely to have encountered before.

Photo: Inspired By Maps/Shutterstock.com

Address: Avenida Pedro De Heredia, Cartagena

Opening hours: Daily 4am-9pm

TOURIST INFORMATION



Ricardo Gomez Angel/Unspalsh.com

Passport / Visa



Citizens of the European Union, most countries in the Americas, Australia & Oceania, as well as several Asian countries such as South Korea and

Japan do not require a visa for stays of up to 90 days. In cases when an entry visa is required, the application can often be done online.

Nationals of Cuba and those holding passports issued by Palestine will need to apply for a visa, even if they will be entering Colombia for transit purposes only.

Photo: TukTuk Design/Shutterstock.com

Internet: www.cancilleria.gov.co/en/procedures_services/visa/requirements

Best Time to Visit Cartagena



The best time to visit Cartagena is early in the year, between January and March. This period is characterised by favourable weather and

doesn't get too humid, which is perfect for both

city exploration and nearby island-hopping. Streets begin to feel emptier as vacationer waves of December and early January subside, giving way to more manageable prices and attractions that are no longer swarmed with visitors. Another bonus of traveling during this period is the possibility to hit several important festivals: Storyland (dedicated to electronic music) and Hay Festival (revolving around all things cultural exchange) both take place in January, while Festival del Dulce — a celebration of sweets from all across the Caribbean — is a glorious Easter tradition worth making time for.

Photo: VectorA/Shutterstock.com

Rafael Núñez Airport (CTG)



The largest air hub on Colombia's Caribbean coast serves multiple destinations within the country, as well as several major

international ones such as New York, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Panama City.

The trip to central Cartagena usually takes no longer than 20 minutes. Taxis are always available; these operate on fixed fares rather than meters — get a voucher from the official taxi stand at the airport with an exact price quote to your destination to avoid being overcharged.

Public transport is available as well: one option would be catching a colectivo off the side of the road by the airport, another — taking a Metrocar shuttle (these run at 10-minute intervals and stop at the La India Catalina monument, just outside the old town).

Photo: Juan Garces

Internet: aeropuertocartagena.com.co

More Info: www.metrocarsa.com/rutas.html

Public Transport



Private buses circulate around Cartagena, each one's main stops indicated in the front window. Fares are very inexpensive, and the

buses can be flagged down off the side of the road.

Inside the old town, most locations are easy to reach on foot.

Photo: Pierre-Luc Auclair

Taxi



Taxis are relatively inexpensive, but make sure to be clear on the exact fare prior to boarding, as local taxis do not use meters. When

getting a cab, opt for calling an operator and ordering one rather than just getting into one in the street, as this puts you at a higher risk of being overcharged.

Ridesharing apps such as Uber are also in use and may even be the preferred option for travelling locally, as fares will be determined automatically prior to boarding and charged directly to your credit card.

Photo: ArrivalGuides

Medical Care



Medical care is generally of very high quality in Colombia, making medical tourism from nearby countries increasingly popular. If

you happen to require medical attention while in Cartagena, refer to one of the city's private hospitals: Hospital Naval is one of the most reputable.

Pharmacies/drug stores are readily available throughout Cartagena, including ones that operate 24/7. In some cases, medication that requires a prescription to be purchased in countries like the USA is sold over the counter at significantly lower prices, leading travellers to stock up on their supplies prior to returning home.

Photo: Gemma Garner

Address: Avenida San Martin, Cartagena

Phone: +57 5 677 80 21

Is Cartagena Safe?



Cartagena, Colombia is generally a very safe place to visit, with most trips being completely trouble-free. It may be a good idea, however, to

take certain safety precautions, such as keeping an eye on your belongings at all times, as petty theft and pick-pocketing do occur in touristy areas.

There are certain neighbourhoods outside the city centre that are best avoided if you're travelling alone or aren't accompanied by a local guide. As a general rule, neighbourhoods removed furthest from the historic centre will be

the ones posing most risk. While the Old Town, Getsemani, San Diego and Bocagrande are very safe, areas like Centro and La Popa are best reserved for daytime trips only, and neighbourhoods further afield, such as La Magdalena, La Maria, El Paraiso, Rafel Nuñez, and Piedro de Bolivar are better off avoided entirely. Mind that even the safest areas may pose a certain threat after sundown.

Photo: Alexander Lysenko/Shutterstock.com

Cash or Card?



While establishments across Cartagena do increasingly accept credit and debit cards for payment, many still either only do so nominally or

operate on cash alone. Cash will definitely be needed for smaller purchases, especially from street vendors.

A relatively high service fee may be charged at some restaurants for card payments, so it's generally a good idea to check with the staff whether this is the case to avoid unpleasant surprises.

ATMs are widely available; withdrawal fees will likely depend on your bank and the bank that operates the ATM. When choosing an ATM, go for ones that aren't in isolated locations, and make all your withdrawals during daylight hours.

Photo: upoo23/Shutterstock.com

Common Scams and Annoyances



Although Cartagena is generally safe to visit, there are a few things to watch out for during your stay. People posing as police officers and asking

to inspect your documents and money, supposedly to ensure their authenticity, are one common way of catching unsuspecting tourists off guard. If this happens to you, demand to be taken to the nearest police station, at which point the scammers will likely be spooked off.

Street salespeople will often approach cafe and restaurant customers, both at outdoor terraces and even in indoor seating areas. The best course of action would be to thank them and carry on with your meal.

When getting a cab, call an official company and order a taxi that'll arrive and pick you up, rather than just getting into the nearest one.

Alternatively, use ride sharing apps like Uber that pre-calculate the total cost of the ride in advance. That way, you'll avoid being overcharged.

Do not leave your drinks unattended and don't accept drinks or cigarettes from strangers.

When ordering drinks, chose ones with no ice in them, or request to leave the ice out.

Carry a photocopy of your passport, along with the page containing your entry stamp, along with you at all times.

Never leave the hotel carrying all your money and valuables — have most of it stowed away in a secure location while you're out exploring.

Photo: Gunay Abdullayeva/Shutterstock.com

Drugs in Cartagena



It's possible that you'll be approached by people selling drugs in the street, at bars or nightclubs — be sure to politely refuse all such

offers, and never consume or carry drugs on your person, as this is both illegal and can be a set up for yet another elaborate scam. The "dealers" may even be acting in cahoots with the police, who are known to have been waiting to apprehend and search tourists immediately after the "transaction" takes place. In other cases, the "police" may even simply turn out to be the dealer's accomplices in disguise.

Apart from marijuana and cocaine, another drug that's gained notoriety in recent years is 'ayahuasca'. Traditionally used by indigenous peoples of the Amazon as part of rituals, it is a potent hallucinogen whose consumption side effects may, in some cases, lead to a lethal outcome. There have also been reports of those attempting to cross borders carrying the drug being apprehended and given hefty prison sentences.

Photo: Martial Red/Shutterstock.com

Postal Services



The main public post carrier in Colombia is the "4-72"; the office closest to you may be located on their website. It is important to note,

however, that 4-72 is notoriously unreliable, and anything more valuable than a simple postcard is

best sent via a private carrier, such as DHL. 4-72 has a reported success rate of somewhere between 70 and 50 percent, meaning that up to half of all mail sent through them is gone without a trace and never arrives at the intended addressee.

It is also quite pricey to send mail abroad, especially if you choose to go for the "correo certificado" options, which allows one to track each mailing's location. To send with "certificado", you'll need to arrive at a physical office in person and present your official ID/passport number.

In Cartagena, the easiest solution for sending minor mail abroad may be via a tourist shop, some of which may sell stamps and even have an on-site mail box; post boxes in the street are hard to come by.

Photo: Andy Fuchs

Internet: www.4-72.com.co

More Info: Some shops working with DHL will have 50% off days. Looks around before you commit

Cartagena de Indias Cruise Port



Cartagena is a common day-stop for cruises whose routes lie through the Caribbean. The cruise port of Cartagena, Colombia, is located

roughly 4km from the Old Town, where the majority of Cartagena's attractions lie.

To reach the city center, one will either need to take a short walk from the pier to the Cruise Ship Terminal, or take a free shuttle bus. From the terminal building, the options are to either join a shore excursion or arrange your own transfer. Taxi drivers will be waiting at the port

and outside the port exit; those who choose to walk a little further can expect to pay two times less than those who choose to get a cab directly from the port (which will still likely be twice as expensive as getting a cab back from the Old Town to the port). It may be worth checking whether any cars are available via apps such as Uber.

The Cartagena de Indias Cruise Port is pleasant enough, and has been named best in the Caribbean on several occasions. The port is equipped with souvenir stores for last-minute shopping and a Juan Valdez Cafe outlet. It is best, however, to make any purchases elsewhere, as things at the port tend to be overpriced.

Although Colombia's official currency is the peso, US dollars are widely accepted throughout Cartagena. It is advisable to have some cash on hand for smaller purchases; there is a functioning ATM at the port.

The cruise port's absolute highlight is a miniature outdoor zoo, which contains a selection of animals ranging from macaw to flamingos.

Photo: icon Stocker/Shutterstock.com

Internet: www.puertocartagena.com/en/cruise-ship-terminal

Phone Calls



+57 is Colombia's country code, 5 is the area code for Cartagena. +57 5 will then normally be followed by a 7-digit local phone number

Photo: Jardson Almeida

Power Plugs, Sockets and Voltage in Cartagena, Colombia



Power plug types A and B are used in Colombia (these are plugs with two parallel flat pins, common throughout North America). Voltage 110 V;

frequency is 60 Hz. If the standard voltage in your country is between 110 and 127 V, you will NOT require a voltage converter.

Photo: Stirling Tschan

Population

914,552 (2020)

Currency

Colombian peso, COP or COL\$

Banknotes go from 2,000 to 50,000 so get used to a lot of zeroes.

Internet

www.cartagenedeindias.travel

Newspapers

El Universal — www.eluniversal.com.co

El Espectador — www.elespectador.com

Emergency numbers

National Emergency Number: 123

Tourist Police: (1) 3374413

Information: 113

Tourist information

Centro de Informacion Turistica

Plaza de la aduana 14.5, 32 #30, Cartagena

+57 5 6601583

Daily 9am–6pm

catagenedeindia.travel

Information is subject to change. Please contact your Lifestyle Consultant for the most up-to-date recommendations.