christopher p. baker
Lowell Thomas Award 2008 ‘Travel Journalist of the Year’

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AUTHOR / PHOTOGRAPHER / RESIDENT EXPERT
CONTENTS

TRAVELING WITH EYES OPEN 6

CHARTING YOUR TRIP 8

History & Culture 12
Colombia Today 14  Colombian History 24  Feature: Food & Drink 34
Land & Landscape 36  Flora & Fauna 40  Culture & Arts 48

Bogotá 56
Historic Bogotá 60  A Walk Through La Candelaria 66  Beyond the Historic Core 74  Around Bogotá 80  Feature: Pre-Columbian Gold 82

Eastern Highlands 88
Boyacá 92  Feature: Emeralds 94  Walk: Cocuy Circuit Trek 108  Santander 110  Norte de Santander 118

Caribbean Lowlands 122
Cartagena 126  Beyond Cartagena’s Centro Historico 131  Walk: In the Footsteps of Gabriel García Márquez 132  Feature: Pirates 138  South & West of Cartagena 140  North Central 144  La Guajira 156

Western Highlands 162
Medellín 166  Antioquia 174  A Drive into Coffee Country 178  Zona Cafetera 180  Feature: Parrots & Macaws 182

Southern Highlands 192
Cal & Around 196  Cauca & Nariño 202  Volcanoes 210  Huila 212  Drive: Neiva to San Andrés de Pisimba 216

Pacific & San Andrés 220
Choco & Nariño 224  Feature: Whales Ahoy! 232  San Andrés & Providencia 234  A Drive Around San Andrés 236

Los Llanos & Amazon Basin 242
Meta 246  Amazonas 251  Poison Dart Frogs 254

Travelwise 260
Hotels & Restaurants 270  Shopping 304  Entertainment 308  Outdoor Activities 310

INDEX 312  CREDITS 318

Pages 2–3: Dummy caption for this image
Opposite: Another dummy caption for the image on this side of the page
A vibrant capital teeming with sizzling nightlife, world-class hotels and restaurants—enveloped in a gorgeous natural setting

Bogotá

Introduction & Map  58–59
Historic Bogota  60–73
Experience: Dance Until Dawn  62
A Walk Through La Candelaria  66–67
Beyond the Historic Core  74–79
Experience: Ciclorutas  75
Experience: Dining Like a Local  79
Feature: Pre-Columbian Gold  82–83
Around Bogota  80–87

Dummy caption
A region marked by soaring peaks and fertile valleys in which the traditional lifestyle of Colombia thrives and adventurers find thrills.

Eastern Highlands

Introduction & Map 90–91
Boyacá 92–107
Feature: Emeralds 94–95
Experience: Visiting the Emerald mines 95
Experience: Hike to El Púlpito del Diablo 107
The Cocuy Circuit Trek 108-109
Santander 110–117
Experience: Down the Rapids 111
Experience: Fun for the Family 113
Experience: Playing Tejo 117
Norte de Santander 118–121
Hotels & Restaurants TK

Dummy caption
A Palenquera sells fruit at the market.
From stylish, cosmopolitan Medellín to majestic mountain peaks and fertile valleys studded with coffee plantations

Western Highlands

Introduction & Map 164–165
Medellín 166–173
Experience: Using the Metro de Medellín 167
Experience: Pico y Placa 171
Antioquia 174–177
A Drive Into Coffee Country 178–179
Zona Cafetera 180–191
Experience: Bullfighting 181
Feature: Parrots & Macaws—182
Experience: Wildlife Venues Not to Miss 183
Experience: Learn About Coffee & Coffee Culture 186
Experience: Learn Spanish in Colombia 190
Hotels & Restaurants  TK

“Hombre a Caballo” a bronze by Fernando Botero, one of 23 in Medellín’s Plaza Botero
The irrepressible rhythmic pulse of Cali set amid a dizzying array of topography—from mountains to páramo to desert.

Southern Highlands

Introduction & Map 194–195
Cali & Around 196–201
Experience: Dance Salsa Like a Native 198
Cauca & Nariño 202–209
Experience: Hiking in Colombia 207
Experience: Make it a Moto 208
Feature: Volcanoes 210–211
Huila 212–219
Experience: Hot to Make Bandeja Paisa 214
Neiva to San Andrés de Pisimbála
Drive 217–217
Hotels & Restaurants TK

A Guambiano man rests on a hillside near his home in Silvia.
Pacific & San Andrés

- Introduction & Map
- Dummy Section
- Dummy Section
- Dummy Section
- Dummy Experience
- Dummy Section
- Dummy Section
From vast grasslands and cowboy country to the untamed and wild rain forest of the Amazon Basin

Los Llanos & Amazon Basin

Introduction & Map 244–245
Meta 246–250
Experience: Choosing a Guide 248
Amazonas 251–259
Feature: Poison Dart Frogs 254–255
Experience: Slow Boat to Brazil 255
Appreciating the Indigenous Way of Life 257
Hotels & Restaurants TK

TKTKTK
Cocuy Circuit Trek

Parque Nacional Natural El Cocuy lures intrepid hikers seeking the satisfaction of trekking amid some of South America’s most stunning peaks. Day hikes are possible, but the week-long circuit demands stamina, determination, good hiking shoes, rain-resistant clothing, and a warm sleeping bag to guard against the cold nights spent at the snow-clad heights.

NOT TO BE MISSED:

Laguna de la Plaza • Paso El Castillo • Púlpito del Diablo

A hiker looks up at the distant Púlpito del Diablo, covered in snow.

The trek, or circuit, covers 5,742 feet (1,750 m) in elevation range and can be started from either of the mountain villages of El Cocuy or Guicán. Most trekkers choose a clockwise route from Guicán.

Before setting off, call in at park headquarters (tel 57-7/880-0089) in El Cocuy or Guicán to pay your entrance fee (US$5). Afterward, mail purchase a copy of the 1:200,000 trail map at one of the mountain tourism stores in the area. Also inquire about hiring a guide or porter (US$5) in any of the towns. The trail is well marked, but a guide is highly recommended. Pack high-mountain camping gear (including tent, stove, and compass), sufficient food, and proper clothing to face the weather. Don’t forget sunscreen and sunglasses for icy and snow.

The Trek

Begin your six-day loop trek at Guicán (9,678 feet/2,950 m). From here, hike six hours uphill to Ceballos Kaukara (tel 57-7/231-2800). 

Cocuy is renowned for its glacial peaks, but until recently, the pass near El Castillo posed no technical challenge. Take time to savour the sensational vistas before descending the rock-strewn trail to camp at Laguna del Perú (14,722 feet/4,450 m).

After a chilly night, start at dawn to ascend Paso Estaciones (14,600 feet/4,400 m). The pass requires care for its snow-covered northern slopes. Glaciers drop to a cliff. You’re now in the remotest part of the park. The relatively unmarked path (watch for cairns) follows the west side of a glacial vee squeezed between two peaks glowing with snow of jagged glaciers. Magnificent views open up to the east as you approach camp at Laguna de la Plaza (14,433 feet/4,399 m), the first mountain pass.

The next day, ascend Alto de los Frayles (13,634 feet/4,107 m) and turn south, beyond which the spectacular scenery opens. After a steep descent, snow-covered sentinels guide you through the valley of the Río Frayles. Pass the lake, to your west, the Paso de la Sierra (15,381 feet/4,648 m). It’s often snow-covered, but the track is well marked by cairns. The trail then descends to the marshy Valle de los Cognos, log-hewn with mossy plants—an emerald green counterpoint to the vertical scar of glacier-tipped Pico Ritas Urra Blanca (17,467 feet/5,310 m), the tallest summit in PNN El Cocuy. Follow the track as it descends downhill, east to the Cascada del Río Ratoncito, tumbling to the plains of Arauca. Returning to the valley, cross the creek and continue south, along the western side of the valley. Pass the east side of Lago del Rincón, it’s an hour-long climber to Paso El
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

COLOMBIA

Off-the-Beaten-Path Excursions
Insider Tips • Not-to-Be-Missed Lists • Authentic Experiences

christopher p. baker
www.christopherbaker.com