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SPECIAL PUBLICATION



# Welcome to Colombia!

As we celebrate our  
212 years of independence

# Message from the Ambassador H.E. Claudia Turbay Quintero

I have had the privilege of representing Colombia in Ghana since 2013 with the clear objective of generating ties that allow us to continue in an endless relationship of friendship, cooperation, and working for our people, our countries and for the global objectives which distinguish us in the international community to always leave a positive presence.

Today, July 20, 2022, we are celebrating the 212th anniversary of our independence which we would like to share with our friends in Ghana and West Africa, and especially in the countries where I have presented Letters of Credence on behalf of my country: namely Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and

Principe, Sierra Leone, Togo, Mali and ECOWAS.

The opportunity to serve for the integration of Colombia in Africa and to be able to learn, understand and recognize our cultures, similarities, differences and common challenges, for me, is without a doubt one of the greatest privileges I have had in my life.

Sharing together time and life experiences, we can testify that we have much more in common than we ourselves have suspected even by the knowledge of our readings; but what I want to refer to is that there is a personal experience and capacity to recognise each other and confirm Latin America and Africa, Colombia and Ghana are sister continents and sister countries.

In this supplement that we publish today and which we are sending online to all our friends, we are sharing with you a variety of information highlighting the Colombian reality; and importance of our nation permanently, progressively responding to the commitment, solidarity and common human challenges of our countries.

We are highlighting the importance of the Afro-descendant population that we have in Colombia and how it connects us with Africa. We are talking about our culture, our government; things that make us vibrate together, our economies, our tourism, our government and our history. In short, our identity.



## Colombia – Ghana Relationship

### Why Ghana?

First of all, I wish to commence by expressing our gratitude to the friendly Government of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo for hosting Colombia. I would like to mention something of the utmost importance, and that is addressing the question, 'Why is our Embassy for West Africa, Cameroun, and Equatorial Guinea located in Ghana?'

I have a clear and certain answer. Ghana and Colombia share the

commitment to the rule of law and the link with International Organizations, with their legal frameworks, both countries ensure the protection of human rights of citizens, institutional legal frameworks, which confirm and strengthen the bases of state decisions.

Our presence as a resident embassy since 2013, we have it at the bilateral level, Colombia-Ghana, but we also have it within the agreement of the pacific alliance being accompanied by our partners Chile, Mexico, and Peru.

### Good news for our friends and partners in West Africa and Africa as a whole.

On June 9, in Paris, the Deputy

Minister for Multilateral Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, led a delegation of Colombia to give a presentation at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on, "Africa, a future together", within the framework of the Ministerial Meeting of the OECD Council.

During the session, the Vice Minister highlighted the common challenges and cooperation initiatives of Colombia with the African continent. This is taking into consideration the role of Colombia as the next Co-Chairman of the Regional Program for Latin America and

the Caribbean (LACRP) of the OECD, from where it can contribute to facilitating a regional dialogue with Africa and promoting sustainable development that address global challenges such as climate change and digitization.

Given the forecast of urban growth in Africa, Colombia expressed its desire to share its BiodiverCities initiative with the African Union. Through this initiative, biodiversity and its benefits are prioritized towards sustainable urban development, allowing natural wealth to be connected with urban planning. The BiodiverCities focus on lines of work such as: circular economy, air quality, sustainable mobility and infrastructure, and environmental education.

## Our President

In this vein, I do not want to continue without giving a high recognition to the President of Colombia, H.E. Iván Duque Márquez, who during his term of office, from 2018 to 2022, has stood out for the multiple successful actions which have advanced and given leadership to Colombia in multiple issues in the international field, and in the National Objectives, dealing with the well-being of our population, solidifying the construction of peace, supporting youth in the different requirements for their growth and development, and the issues of infrastructure, economy, energy, health, childhood, gender, and especially in the defense of environmental sustainability promoting productivity, agriculture and industry, while taking into account the protection of the planet.

### Some achievements of importance of President Iván Duque

#### Education

His government has invested the most resources in education leaving Colombia with free tuition for public

university for people who fall under the first three socioeconomic strata.

The education sector has been a priority and fundamental tool in closing the social gap and reducing inequity, which has been one of the fundamental objectives of his government.

In his government, the largest budget allocation in history has been given to the requirements of early childhood, educational infrastructure, school feeding, educational quality, access, and permanence at all levels of the educational system, free higher education, welfare, and compliance with agreements with institutions, students, and teachers.

#### Environment

Colombia, thanks to the leadership of President Duque, has become a world leader in environmental protection and sustainable development.

Colombia went from 12 million hectares of marine protected areas to 30 million hectares, after 3 years of work, before the year 2030, the date by which the international community has proposed to have 30% of the area of marine protected. Colombia as promised has 62.1 million hectares of maritime and territorial areas.

Colombia is the first country in the western hemisphere to decree 30% of its marine protected areas, and for this, President Iván Duque Márquez has received international recognition.



#### Infrastructure

Once again, the Government of President Duque has been seen in recent times, during the last periods, as the government that has invested more resources in infrastructure.

He is the President who has done the most infrastructure works benefiting ports and public roads by rehabilitating and building highways, bridges, and mega works by joining mountain ranges to connect Departments.

He has advanced in the structure of telecommunications, internet, cellular connectivity, among others. His government has also given the most rural land titles to the peasants.

In communication, more than 70% of Colombia has been left with high-speed mobile and home internet coverage.

For the first time, 2 million underprivileged people in Colombia successfully have access to drinking water thanks to President Duque.

This is the government that has made the greatest investment in the sports sector of Colombia through its Ministry of Sports by obtaining visible results in the history of Colombian sports with the largest number of Olympic and Paralympic medals



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'Este día es un triunfo de la democracia, de la participación ciudadana y de la movilización pacífica liderada por las ideas y las propuestas', dijo el Presidente Duque al instalar el primer Consejo Nacional de Juventud en Colombia

The President of Colombia defended the process of implementing peace, within the framework of legality and this is how he has implemented processes of reincorporation and reintegration, with 12,823 and 4,327 people respectively, who at the time belonged to the armed groups and now show their mutual commitment to achieving a peaceful country.

This work has been done hand in hand with the national government, its ministries, different entities, and international cooperation, and most important, has been the commitment of the ex-combatants, both men and women, who are evidence of this great achievement.

The Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) has been on behalf of the national government in all the territories of Colombia where anyone in the process of reintegration can develop their life project within the framework of legality and precisely with this Agency, alliances have been made with partners of international friends, offering cooperation, and making known the Colombian model of reintegration.

Precisely in this month of July, Colombia together with Ghana, as Co-Chair, will be hosting different countries for the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, in Colombia, with Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre as the entity to represent Ghana.

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host the Junior Pan American Games.

obtained in Tokyo and several international competitions.

Thanks to President Duque, it was achieved that the Colombian city of Barranquilla in 2027 will serve and

Peace with  
Legality

## Our President

# Economic reactivation

### ◆ Through Tourism

The program 'pueblos que enamoran', translated as 'Cities to fall in love with' is a tourism promotion initiative which corresponds to the national campaign #YoVoy, (I go) and which aims to make visible, destinations which until the launch of this campaign, have not been promoted in the national agenda of Colombia.

The selected destinations have unique and special characteristics in areas such as architecture, history, culture, natural wealth, and gastronomy. That is, economic reactivation is stimulated through single tourism. In total there are 25 municipalities in 21 departments in Colombia under this campaign. Thus, Colombia continues to make progress.

### ◆ Visible positive results

The Colombian productive sector has demonstrated its resilience through the country's external sales, which showed an increase of 82% compared to the same period of the previous year. Exports, manufacturing, and agricultural sector have contributed to the

reactivation, with the extractive and fuel industries contributing 60%.

The Embassies of Colombia also contributed through the CO-nectados strategy and economic diplomacy, making important sales that have reached Italy, Germany, Spain, and France, through the export of products from the agricultural sector, such as the Tahiti lemon which represents the third most exported fruit from Colombia to the world after banana and Hass avocado (bought by the US, Germany, Netherlands, Guadeloupe, and Canada).

The growth of the Colombian economy is becoming recognized by all economic indicators, thus recording the effort of the Colombian government. For example, in May 2022, Colombia was notably among the fastest growing countries in the OECD.

### COVID-19

Colombia was recognized internationally for its good management of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the government has successfully vaccinated 71.1% of the national population. Now there has been a review to produce vaccines in Colombia, in which Colombia together with Serum Institute, Bharat Biotech and

Genova Biopharmaceuticals from India, to develop an alliance to produce vaccines not only for Colombia, but for the entire region, which will allow to achieve independence in the production of COVID vaccines.

### Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants

Colombia proved to be a fraternal, human country in the face of a migrant phenomenon such as the one that occurred in Venezuela where almost 1.8 million Venezuelans are currently protected by the decision of President Iván Duque to create the program Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants.

This initiative of Colombia to provide support to the Venezuelan migration crisis is done within a process of legality that has welcomed

over 1.8 million migrants who have temporary protection status for a period of 10 years in Colombia.

This program serves as a model for the world. The entities that are supporting this initiative, among others are the United Nations, International Migration Organization, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United States of America, and the Vatican.

### Youth

The President who has generated the most tools and instruments of progress to generate opportunities for young Colombians has been President Iván Duque Márquez. His policy is found in the Colombia Pact with the Youth, which was sealed in 2021.

This Pact has become the roadmap that allows young people themselves to be guarantors of this policy which was created with a specific number of resources to be executed within the next 10 years and responds to the creation of programs that emerged from the dialogue tables at the regional level of Colombia in which more than 14,000 young people participated, regardless of their political affiliation. By strengthening their capacity to participate in the different areas that,

with education and housing, as well as the programs generated within this Pact, can generate mechanisms to defend their human rights, improve their sports, cultural, entrepreneurship capacity and participate in incentives for culture and the creative industries.

It should be noted that this area, of the creative industries and culture, have been especially strengthened by the government of President Duque, as well as the sustainability policy where thanks to his efforts, Colombia is a world reference in the protection of the environment and sustainable development.

With this open and clear support for youth, the government of Colombia has decided to promote and strengthen the human talent of young Colombians.

### Orange Economy

The Orange Economy, also known as the Creative Economy, has been championed, spearheaded, and implemented by the administration of H.E. Iván Duque Márquez.

Orange Economy is the bringing together of sectors of the economy "whose main purpose is the production or reproduction, promotion, dissemination and/or the marketing of goods, services and activities that have cultural, artistic or patrimonial content" according to UNESCO.

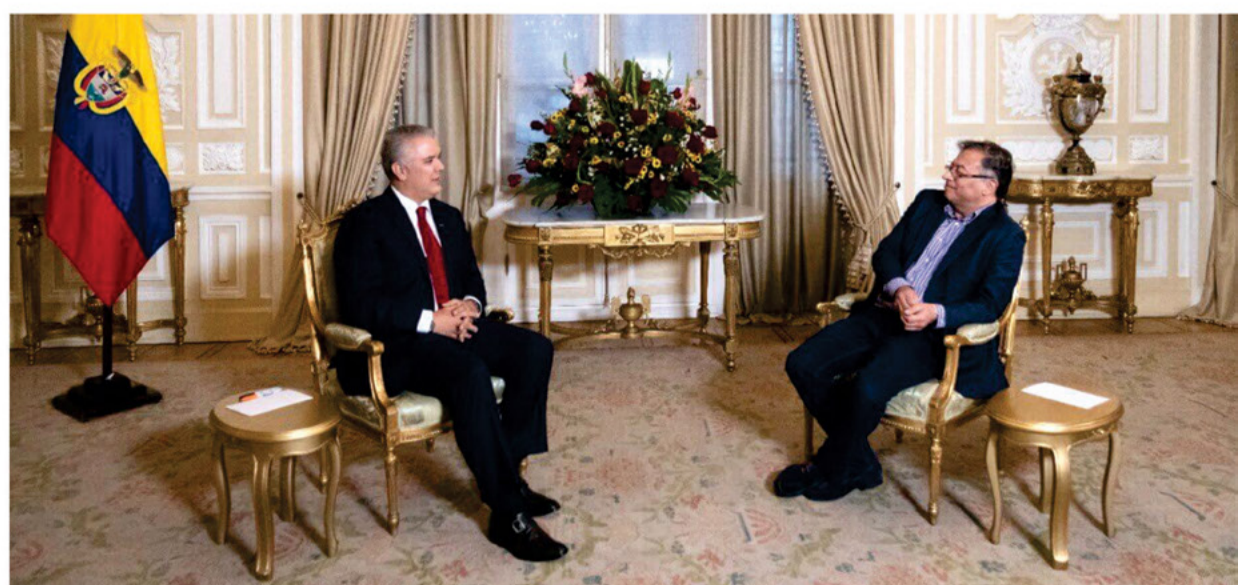
# Transition Government

When I made the decision to write this personal letter, I reconfirmed the Colombian political value that is based on democracy and its institutionality, and thanks to this, in an act, perhaps the most democratic of all, which is the voluntary expression of votes, Colombia went to the polls and on June 19, elected a clearly left-wing government for the first time in its history, in the person of Gustavo Petro as President and Francia Marquez, his Vice President, who is the

second female Vice President of Colombia and first Afro-descendant.

However, with a 3% difference in the results with his contender, the country accepted the victory in a gesture of pure democracy. In this vein, four days after the declaration of winners, the outgoing President of the Republic of Colombia, H.E. Iván Duque, in a harmonious, institutional, and transparent manner, in the Palacio de Nariño, the presidential

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President and President Elect



President and Vice President Elect



Vice Presidente and Vice President Elect

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palace of Colombia, met the President-elect, H.E. Gustavo Petro and his team to begin the handing over, ahead of August 7, when the official change of President is made.

On June 24, the process of handing over with the team appointed by the President of the Republic of Colombia began.

For her part, the first female Vice President and Foreign Minister of Colombia, H.E. Marta Lucia Ramirez, met with the Vice President-elect, H.E. Francia Marquez, initiating the handing over process. The fundamental themes were gender equity, transparency, economic reactivation, and productive inclusion of the informal population, among others.

A curious fact to observe is that in the second round of voting which led to the election of President Gustavo Petro, out of the total of 39,002,239 Colombian citizens authorized to vote, more than 20 million were women.

Now, Colombia will enter a process in which the good foundations of democracy and of economic, social, and political programs that can be matched, with the policy of the new government, can serve precisely as a basis in the construction of this new policy.

## Vice President And Minister for Foreign Affairs

The first female Vice President in the history of Colombia and the Minister for Foreign Minister, Marta Lucia Ramirez de

Rincón, who immediately assumed her role when appointed, and addressed the issue of gender, gender equality policies and the empowerment of women, also deserves recognition.

She herself is an example of the protagonist of Colombian women, being part of national and international decisions related to the state but fundamentally involved in the promotion of the opening of academic, labor, and economic opportunities that allow to promote the true capacities of women in Colombia, in Latin America and in general, in the world, resulting in women's economic, business, and

academic autonomy.

She has been a promoter of peasant women, defending their condition, women entrepreneurs, women aware of climate change, women scientists, but always including women, knowing that their presence generates change in the construction of our country and our society.

Another area promoted by the Vice President and Minister for Foreign Affairs with personal interest, has to do with economic issues, commercial exchange, and productivity of the different sectors of the economy of our country and its relationship with international partners.



H.E. Marta Lucia Ramirez and Vice President-elect H.E. Francia Marquez

Among her experiences, is having been Minister of External Trade and Minister of Defense of Colombia.

## Honorary Consul General of Colombia in Ghana

We have six Honorary Consuls of Colombia in West Africa, and the only Honorary Consul General of Colombia is

Mr. Thomas Svanikier.

Together with the rest of the team from the sub-regional area, the Honorary Consuls are our allies in supporting the cultural and business interests of our countries in the region and strengthening Colombia's presence in the region.

Let me conclude by wishing all Colombians a happy National Day, a day we naturally celebrate together with all our fellow Colombians residing in West Africa, Cameroun, and Equatorial Guinea, and closely with those who are in Ghana.

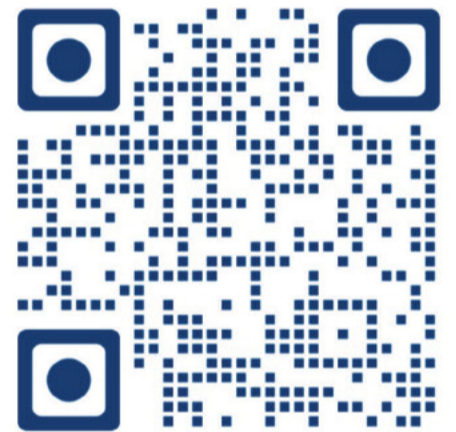
# Colombia Our Location and Geography

Colombia is one country that has been specially favoured in terms of geographical location. It is found in the South America yet stretches out daringly to kiss North America. It is the only country in South America with coastlines and islands along both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Colombia is the world's nineteenth megadiverse country: home to 70% of world biodiversity in only 10% of its territory, it has the second-highest level of biodiversity in the world. Its territory encompasses Amazon rainforest, highlands, grasslands and deserts.

It is a country in South America with an insular region in North America. It is bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the north, Venezuela to the east, Brazil to the southeast, Ecuador and Peru to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west and Panama to the northwest. It covers an area of 1,141,748 square kilometres (440,831 sq. mi) with a population of 50 million.

Colombia's cultural heritage



reflects influences by various Amerindian civilisations, European settlement, enslaved Africans, as well as immigration from Europe and the Middle East. Spanish is the nation's official language, besides which over 70 languages are spoken.

Colombia has been inhabited by various indigenous peoples since at least 12,000 BCE, including the Muisca, Quimbaya and Tairona. The Spanish landed first in La Guajira in 1499; and by the mid-16th century colonised parts of the region, establishing the New Kingdom of Granada with Santa Fé de Bogotá as its capital.

Independence from the Spanish Empire was achieved in 1819, with what is now Colombia emerging as the United Provinces of New Granada. The new nation experimented with federalism as the Granadine Confederation (1858) and then the United States of Colombia (1863), before the Republic of Colombia was finally declared in 1886. Panama seceded in 1903, leading to Colombia's present borders. Beginning in the 1960s, the country has suffered from an asymmetric low-intensity armed conflict and political violence, both of which escalated in the 1990s.

However, since 2005, there has been significant improvement in security, stability, and rule of law, as well as unprecedented economic growth and development.

Colombia is a member of major global and regional organisations including the UN, the WTO, the OECD, the OAS, the Pacific Alliance, and the Andean Community. It is also a NATO Global Partner. Its diversified economy is the third-largest in South America, with macroeconomic stability and favourable long-term growth prospects.

# Some Interesting Facts about Colombia

## Foods That Make You Go Hmmm

Before we journey into the yummy part and make your mouth water, let us begin with the staples: some of the most common ingredients that make up Colombian dishes are cereals such as rice and maize; tubers such as potato and cassava (yeah, you got that right); assorted legumes; meat, including beef, chicken, pork and goat; fish; and seafood. Sounds all familiar, right?

Colombian food culture is **rich and diverse**, as the different geographic and cultural regions of the country have strongly maintained their culinary

identity.

Many dishes in Colombia have Spanish influences, but they always reflect the people's great love for their land, its harvests and the waters which surround it.

The cultural traditions of the ethnic groups also impact the dishes.

## Examples of Colombian Cuisine

patacones (fried green plantains), sancocho de gallina (chicken soup with root vegetables) and ajiaco (potato and corn soup).

If you ever visit Colombia, never say no to bandeja paisa!

And coffee! Coffee in Colombia is a completely interesting story.



Patacones with Salsa



Bandeja-paisa



La aguapanela



Empanadas



Colombian-gluten-free-arepas-con-queso

# Africa in the Americas: An Amazing Diaspora Story

The history of this idyllic Palenque community highlights the connection between Colombia and Africa. If you arrive here for just a couple of hours, you cannot help but wonder if you are in Africa or not. Officially known as San Basilio de Palenque, it is a town in the foothills of the Montes de María - a small mountain range to the south of Cartagena. You will not ordinarily find it in major guidebooks, and few tourists take the time to visit. However, this settlement of some 4,000 people is one of the most important historical villages in the Americas and a UNESCO-declared Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Palenque was founded in the 16th century by Benkos Biohó, a former African king from either the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola. During the infamous slave trade, Biohó was sold into slavery but escaped from the slave port of Cartagena in 1599. He fled from his captors into the swamps to the south of Cartagena. There, he started a resistant movement - forming an army of people who had escaped slavery. Eventually, they conquered the area around the Montes de María and establishing their own enclave.

Of the many Palenque communities that existed in former times, only San Basilio has survived until the present day. It developed into a unique cultural space.

Here there are social, medical and religious practices as well as musical and oral traditions, many of which have African roots. The social organisation of the community is based on family networks and age groups called ma



kuagro. The kuagro membership comes with a set of rights and duties toward other group members and entails strong internal solidarity. Daily work and special events are jointly undertaken by all kuagro members.

Just as in Africa, in the Palenque community the complex funeral rituals and medical practices are evidence of the distinct spiritual and cultural systems framing life and death. Palenque's African-influenced funeral traditions, known as the lumbalú, have been maintained and studied extensively by historians and anthropologists.

Musical expressions such as the Buller's sentado, Son palenquero or Son de negro accompany collective celebrations such as baptisms, weddings, religious festivities as well as

leisure activities.

Though descended from formerly enslaved ancestors, the people have maintained many of their African oral and musical traditions - including the only Spanish-Bantú spoken on earth, known as Palenquero. It is also the only creole language in Latin America with a Spanish lexical basis and grammatical characteristics of Bantu languages.

It is influenced by the Kikongo language of Angola and Congo only spoken today by roughly half of the Palenque residents, and is recognized as the only Spanish-based Creole language that exists in the world. Palenquero constitutes a vital factor in reinforcing social cohesion among community members.

Just as there is a natural enclave of



great boxers at Bukom in Accra, Palenque is also the birthplace of some of the finest Colombian boxers, musicians and actors. The great Antonio 'Kid Pambelé' Cervantes - a two-time world junior welterweight champion - was born in San Basilio de Palenque. Another world-famous star is actor Evaristo Márquez,

who appeared alongside Marlon Brando in the movie *Burn!*

As you can imagine, the town has a great fiesta culture; indeed, music is in the air here. Palenque is known as the birthplace of Champeta music, which is now popular throughout Colombia and Latin America. Well-known exponents like Charles King, Louis Towers and Rafael Cassiani Cassiani were born in Palenque, as were the members of the popular Colombian rap group Kombilesa Mi.

Every year, the world-famous Festival de Tambores y Expresiones Culturales (Festival of Drums and Cultural Expression) is celebrated here. During the festival period, local and international musicians gather in the town to eat, drink and play live music in the main square. It is one of Colombia's most important cultural heritage festivals.

This festival is held in October and lasts for three days!

# Colourful Colombia

## An Amazing Tourism Scene

When it comes to tourism Colombia, seeing is believing. The country presents one of the most diverse and scenic destinations in South America. Offering everything from beaches to mountains to swamps surrounding the Amazon River, this country truly has it all. Visitors planning the perfect trip to Colombia will want to venture beyond the cities and check out national parks, historic attractions, and the vibrant culture the nation has to offer. The following guide presents an itinerary that showcases the top tourist attractions in Colombia.

### 10. Valle de Cocora

Cocora Valley in Colombia is famous for having the world's tallest palm trees. It's more commonly known in Spanish as "Valle Del Cocora". The wax palm trees in Cocora Valley grow up to 60 meters (200 feet).

There are multiple ways to see the Cocora Valley, which includes horseback riding, Jeep tours and a six-hour hiking loop.

### 9. Ciudad Perdida

Much of Colombia is still undeveloped jungle, and Ciudad Perdida is nestled right in the heart of that jungle. Also

known as the Lost City of Teyune, Ciudad Perdida is a pre-Columbian settlement that was constructed around the eighth century by the Tayrona Indians.

### 8. Caño Cristales

Visit Caño Cristales during the wet or dry seasons in Colombia, and you'd be forgiven for wondering what all the fuss is about. However, travel there from July to October, and you'll witness one of Mother Nature's crowning glories.

The 62.1-mile-long river is in Colombia's Serranía de la Macarena national park, in the province of Meta, and is known as the "River of Five

Colours."

This "liquid rainbow" - as it is also called - is one of the South American country's most spectacular natural wonders, thanks to its vivid colours.

The bed of the river sports bright red, yellow, green, blue, and black for the few months that conditions are right. Although the colours can be viewed from as early as mid-May and sometimes into December, they are brightest during June and November.

### 7. Los Nevados National Park

The Los Nevados National Park is perched at a high elevation and is centred around some of the country's most incredible volcanic peaks. The snow-covered Nevado del Ruiz and Nevado del Tolima, among others, serve as the park's main attraction.

Hiking is a popular pastime, and those with a streak of adventure can camp

in the park's backcountry. There is also the opportunity to spot the local wildlife, which includes spectacled bears, tiger cats, Andean condors, and pumas.

### 6. Carnaval de Barranquilla

While most people associate carnival with Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the Colombian city of Barranquilla is home to the world's second largest carnival. During Carnaval de Barranquilla, the city is overrun with festivals, live music and street parades.

The festivities kick off with La Batalla de Flores, or the Battle of the Flowers, where parade floats are decorated with flowers in magnificent and colourful designs. Attendees often wear bright colours or costumes that represent a figure or a fable in

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# Colourful Colombia

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Colombian heritage.

## 5. Santuario de Las Lajas

Just north of the border with Ecuador is the Santuario de Las Lajas, one of the most fascinating religious structures in Colombia.

The Gothic style cathedral was built in the early 20th century thanks to a financial donation from locals, and there is now a small museum located within the building. Getting to the Santuario de Las Lajas is easy from the nearby town of Ipiales, where travellers can join guided tours to the cathedral.

## 4. Monserrate

The Colombian city of Bogota is a unique capital because of its high elevation, something that becomes pronounced with a visit to Monserrate. At the top of the mountain of Monserrate, which overlooks the city, there is a 17th century church that serves as a mecca for religious pilgrims.

One of the best ways to experience Bogota is by riding either the funicular train or the aerial tramway to the top of Monserrate. From there, it is possible to view the sun setting over Downtown Bogota in a truly spectacular fashion.

## 3. Cartagena's Old Town

Arguably one of the most popular tourist attractions in Colombia, is the historic Old Town of Cartagena.

This city was the first of the Spanish settlements in Colombia, and the Old Town is bursting with historic colonial architecture. The walled Old Town, which is also known as the Ciudad Amurallada, contains several older neighborhoods and landmarks.

Of particular note is the Plaza Trinidad in the Getsemani neighborhood, which is the oldest part of the colonial city and a hub for local eateries. Take advantage of the coastal location and try fried fish with a side of arroz de coco, or coconut rice.

## 2. Tayrona National Park

In the northernmost part of Colombia is the Tayrona National Park, which borders the Caribbean Sea and offers remarkable beaches and scenery for visitors. One of the top spots in Tayrona National Park is the lagoon called La Piscina, where a natural reef turns the lagoon into a protected swimming area.

While snorkelling in La Piscina, it is possible to spot lobsters, fish and rays among the seagrass and in the reef. There are also plenty of sandy hiking trails leading to and from the coast, many of which provide spectacular views over the Caribbean.

## 1. Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá

Just an hour's drive north of Bogota is Zipaquirá, a city known as the salt mining capital of Colombia. As a result of salt mining, Zipaquirá has long had a concentration of extreme wealth.

One of the things that highlights this is the Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, which is a Catholic church constructed almost entirely of salt within a now defunct mine. Although this is a major tourism destination, the Salt Cathedral accommodates nearly 3,000 parishioners every Sunday and attending a church service can be an unforgettable experience.



Surrounding the cathedral is an area known as the Salt Park, where visitors can see other landmarks within the mines and learn more about the industry at the Brine Museum.

## Freedom of Belief and Religion

While Colombia remains a mostly Roman Catholic country by baptism numbers, the 1991 Colombian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and all religious faiths and churches are equally free before the law.

## Gabriel García Márquez: Author, Film-maker Nobel Laureate

There are luminaries that everybody must know. Gabriel García Márquez, the only Colombian to have won the Nobel Prize in literature, is one such personality. Writer, film-maker and journalist, he had a long, influential career gifting the world a large legacy. García Márquez's work in magical realism has influenced a number of authors, including Toni Morrison.

Some of his notable works are Leaf Storm, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, Love in the Time of Cholera, No one writes to the Colonel and Of Love and Other Demons.

## Contemporary Colombian Literature

Colombia is a leading light in Latin American literature, with a large number of Colombian writers producing world-renowned novels and award-winning novelists. Over the past few decades, the country has produced many award-winning authors, who have written on a variety of subjects and topics showcasing Colombia's present and its past, its problems and its history.

We present in random order, eight contemporary Colombian authors you must read and enjoy!

1. Melba Escobar: *House of beauty*
2. Jorge Franco: *Rosario Tijeras and El mundo de afuera*
3. Germán Espinosa: *La Tejedora de Coronas (The Weaver of Crowns)*

4. Juan Gabriel Vásquez: *The Sound of Things Falling*
5. Laura Restrepo: *Isle of Passion and Delirium*
6. Evelio Rosario: *Good Offices and The Armies*
7. Juan Gabriel: *The Informers and The Secret History of Costaguana*
8. Diana Ospina Pasajeros: *en tránsito and Guerra a voces.*

## Art is Colombia, Colombia is Art

Colombians believe the arts constitute a basic element of their national character. This is a country which boasts that more poets than soldiers have occupied the presidency. The arts in Colombia offer a very vibrant space. The different art forms are fostered and developed by conservatories and schools in several cities; either in connection with the universities or independently, and by the growing



number of concert halls and galleries.

The middle-class display considerable curiosity and the desire to be informed about contemporary artistic developments, and this same spirit is found among the artists themselves. The most outstanding Colombian artist is the painter and sculptor Fernando Botero, whose themes reach beyond regional tastes and temporal values to people worldwide. Numerous exhibitions in the 1990s exposed Botero's work to a broad international audience.

A product of the mixing of



indigenous, Spanish and African culture, music in Colombia is extremely diverse. Arguably, the country's most distinctive musical style is the dance-oriented cumbia. Its traditional form, porro, evolved when it migrated elsewhere in Latin America. Another distinctive Colombian musical form is vallenato, which is grounded in narrative songs and features the accordion or guitar along with the cato (a drum) and the guacharaca (a percussion instrument). The national instrument is the 12-stringed guitarlike tiple. Other popular musical styles include bambuco, pasillo, vals, champeta (a fusion of reggae, other Caribbean musical styles, and African and indigenous Colombian rhythms) and salsa. Colombia's best-known musical export is pop singer Shakira.

Handicrafts suffered a decline from the colonial period to the early years of the republic, but since the early 1930s interest in them has revived. Most notable are the growth in textile production and renewed activity in the manufacture of ceramics and pottery, chiefly in the municipalities of Ráquira, Espinal and Malambo. Basketweaving, harness-making and passementerie are also popular.

Popular traditions concerning manners and customs, music, legends and food preparation continue in somewhat attenuated form in their places of origin. Perhaps the most deeply-rooted folkloric form of expression is that of music. The tunes and melodies of the indigenous groups are sung only in limited geographic areas. The music of the mestizo can be divided into that of the

world's finest and largest collection of worked gold, the product of extraordinarily skilled craftsmen; whereas the Bogotá Museum of Colonial Art has a rich collection of criollo (Creole) religious sculpture and painting. The National Museum displays treasures and relics dating from prehistoric times to the present, and possesses various collections of Colombian painting and sculpture. The July 20 Museum contains documents from the period of independence.

No less important vehicles for the diffusion of culture are the National Library and Bank of the Republic Library, the latter containing a vast amount of reading material, exposition and music halls, and a concert theatre. Outside Bogotá there are other institutions of this kind, including the Zea Museum in Medellín and the House of Don Juan de Vargas in Tunja.

## Music Colombia, land of a thousand rhythms

Below is a list of some well-known Colombian artists

- ◆ Gaiteros de San Jacinto
- ◆ Carlos Vives
- ◆ Juanes
- ◆ Fonseca
- ◆ Andres Cepeda
- ◆ La 33
- ◆ Maluma

## Science and Innovation

The development of scientific research and innovative studies has helped shape the technological impact of Colombia. The government has introduced the Minciencias, which was formerly known as Colciencias, to serve as an entity that guides and coordinates the national policy in science, technology and innovation, as well as the National System of Science, Technology and Innovation by generating and integrating great in-depth knowledge into the economic cultural and social development of the country, with a critical focus on research, scientific culture innovation among others.

The Colciencias seeks to not only improve technological advancement of the land, but also boost its educational system and contribute immensely to social inclusion - facilitating the public approbation of knowledge, cultural diversity and skills development.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia also benefitted from the Ondas programme targeting more than 15,000,000 children and young people with a focus on 11 departments of the country. This new support established an alliance between the Organisation of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) and the government to promote scientific vocation at an early age.

## Cultural Institutions

The history and culture of Colombia's indigenous peoples are revealed in several museums of outstanding reputation. The Gold Museum in Bogotá possesses the

# Up close and personal with Ambassador Claudia Turbay Quintero

A career Diplomat with background in media and communication, Ambassador **Claudia TURBAY QUINTERO** is very well-loved in Ghana. But that is putting it one-sidedly. Her Excellency, in turn, loves Ghana with a passion.

Before her current station, she has served her country in places such as Switzerland, Uruguay, and the USA. In this conversation with award winning journalist Kofi Akpabli, Ambassador Claudia provides insight about her country and her love affair with Ghana.



**KA: Your Excellency, thank you for this opportunity. Can you share your first reactions when you learnt you were going to be posted to Ghana?**

**Amb. Claudia:** I can assure you that my first reaction was happiness! I really had always wished to be living in and serving in Africa. It is interesting to know that my dream was, as I understood it, to be an Ambassador of the United Nations in Africa. As life and God would have it, and as my family permitted, the Government of Colombia posted me to Ghana to serve as Ambassador of my country. This is an honour that I am happy about and will repeat 100 times over.

**KA: What will you say are the common things between Colombian society and Ghanaian society?**

**Amb. Claudia:** From my experience living here, I have had a unique opportunity to be close to Ghanaians, and I am able to recognize us (Colombians), in many aspects of the Ghanaian society and most especially in the family set up and organization of societal systems. Colombia, like many African countries, not only Ghana, gives high importance to the extended family. For us, the grandmother is an essential part of the family.

In both countries, what is happening gradually, is that the family is shrinking to the nuclear model, due to economic demands, location, etc., so much that in many cases, the extended family must be apart from the young family, thereby changing the family structure.

But overall, I can reiterate that the extended family is important in both societies although they operate differently.

Also, a characteristic that we Colombians have is that we are happy people. Other common things between Ghanaian and Colombian societies are the values that we cultivate and cherish, such as, joy, happiness, love for the motherland, and for the family. We are both expressive and creative.

We have other common values like, political values such as democracy and social values like inclusion and

respect for the other.

One of the great differences between the societies of our two countries is also the hierarchical socio-economic levels. In one sense, the Ghanaian society has a sort of royal structure, where according to the traditional family, the highest ranking is the King or paramount chief, the next level is the sub chiefs, then at the parallel level, the queen mothers.

But also at the same time, the different families have their head of family, thereby forming a sort of pyramid. Here, we can talk about power, territory, and money. So, the social scale exists and is expressed through this model.

What this brings in the end is that in both societies, we realize that there are constant demands for inclusion and opportunity.

Ghana and Colombia also have in common hardworking and cheerful societies. We also have an additional common circumstance. We both are tropical countries, have African populations (in the case of Colombia, Afro descent population).

**KA: Why is Colombia important to Africa?**

**Amb. Claudia:** Because Colombia can be a great partner for Africa and its different countries in many ways.

The first step of this partnership is the opportunity for integration and to bring us closer so that we can easily recognize our common ties and experiences. It is also important that we can identify our common challenges which are many, and from there, build up trust, alliances, businesses as well as cultural programs. We do have common political positions and it helps to work together on these common inclinations at the global level.

We have so much in common that when we get together, we can see how much we have been missing, and allow ourselves to create healthy, prosperous, and productive alliances for economic advancements.

I have something interesting to share with you, and it is that the newly elected Vice President of Colombia is a female and is Afro descendant. Her name is Francia Marquez. It may give Colombia opportunities to continue building and developing alliances between our two countries.

**KA: In your opinion, what is Colombia famous for around the world?**

**Amb. Claudia:** Well, it is not just my opinion, Colombia is well known for its leadership in environmental issues. Colombia is known as a country with a vocation for peace, with an integrationist agenda as a country in constant progress from the social, economic and productive points of view. I must add that Colombia is known for its biodiversity, friendly people, coffee, artistic and musical talents.

**KA: Which are some of the cultural values Colombians hold onto?**

**Amb. Claudia:** We believe in God. Much of the Colombian population is a believing population; Christian and Catholic mostly.

# The African and Afro-Descendant Diaspora

## Scenario of alliances and exchange

By Alfonso Cassiani HERRERA

**T**he diaspora is the meeting point at which we identify and locate the descendants of men and women who were uprooted from the West Coast of Africa, between the XVI and XIX centuries and taken as slaves.

The cultures - Ewe, Ibo, Xwala, Akan, Mandinga, Fanti, Bran, Zape, Ilof, among many others, native to the sixteen countries of the West African Coast - constitute the great root that fed with their experience, knowledge and practices of ethnic and cultural resistance which gave rise to the different strategies and made freedom possible in the Palenques and the abolition of slavery in the so-called New World.

The diaspora is that indelible and evident imprint that allows us to appreciate how information and knowledge of the formerly enslaved became an ancestral heritage, which today is revealed in each and every one of the manifestations and representations that make us feel proud to be of African descent.

Fried foods, rice dishes, encocados (boiled coconut milk), sweets, among many other delicacies,

account for those well-seasoned flavours which allow gastronomic encounters that being in any country of West Africa bring back memories, as much as it happens in any country of the Caribbean or in any Afro-descendant community in Latin America.

To the same extent, from Blues and Jazz through Son, Calypso, Reggae to Cumbia, Mapalé, Champeta in the case of Colombia, the music of Palos or Atabales and Gagá for the Dominican Republic, the Puerto Rican Bomba and the Candombe in the southern cone of South America to mention just a few, an account is given of the musicality and rhythmicity which is based on the percussion of African and Afro-descendant ancestry - one of the greatest cultural legacies from the Motherland.

In addition to the musical and rhythmic heritage, the ritual, spiritual and religious aspects were bequeathed: among them, Lumbalú, Chigualo, Chirimía in Colombia, Santería, Voodoo in the insular Caribbean, Candomblé in Brazil, to cite a few allow for a sufficient demonstration of how the African heritage permeated the everyday social life of Afro-descendant communities in the diaspora.

Gastronomy, musicality,

rhythmicity, rituality and religiosity are basic representations of an ancestral heritage full of manifestations established over the period of more than five centuries of history for each of the nations in Latin America which account for a wide multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity, thereby characterising the societies themselves and that need to be considered as part of the treasure of our societies.

It is essential to recognise that all citizens of the world have in their hands the power that allows us to be agents in the construction of inclusion, respect and positive assessment of difference.

Tourism: Encouraging tourism among our communities, and especially among researchers and young people, is the most effective strategy to generate exchanges and ethnic and cultural approaches that the diaspora requires so much.

Socially and environmentally responsible tourism capable of recognising and respecting difference, but above all of valuing it positively, is undoubtedly one of the greatest catalysts of ethnic, historical and cultural identity. It is precisely in this scenario that the African and Afro-descendant diaspora finds an

opportunity to consolidate itself as a social, cultural and economic alternative.

Currently afro-descendants in the Caribbean and Latin America have at our disposal the possibility of

strengthening the diaspora through consolidation of social, political, cultural and economic alliances with the communities of West Africa - it is time to act.

### Brief Bio of Author

*A Palenquero, a son of the Community of San Basilio de Palenque. Historically, the Palenquera community has constituted an academic, social and cultural interest. Its historical trajectory as a space/place and cradle of Cimarronism - which with the triumph of freedom and the first recognition by the Crown of a community of Cimarrones in 1714 - gave rise to one of the most significant collective achievements that would determine the importance of the Palenquera community.*

*It was precisely his interest in Palenque, in their history, in fighting racism, which led him to become a professional and study history as a strategy to confront the actions from those who attacked his community: whose phenotype was mistreated, their native language attacked, and their manifestations and ethno-cultural expressions ridiculed.*

*From a very young age, he was part of the cultural committee in the Nariño neighbourhood of Cartagena, contributing to the creation of a space for reflection to try and influence transformation of the conditions that promoted processes of not-losing the ethnic, historical and cultural identity of the Palenquera community.*

Up close and personal with

## Ambassador Claudia Turbay Quintero

Continued from previous page

We also have other expressions where people practice Islam and other faiths.

Our love for nature and our love for sports, for example, football, cycling, boxing, and so many other sports. We are friendly, we make friends easily. We like dance and music. We believe in the rule of law and inclusion.

**KA: What has Colombia got to offer in the tourism industry?**

**Amb. Claudia:** Colombia's touristic offer is exceptional, unique, and is full of different destinations, Colombia also

has experience in organizing national tourism making the Colombian love his country. Additionally, Colombia has several initiatives to promote tourism. There is a feature that I highly recommend and that is the Disney production called Encanto.

I also invite you to see Pueblos que enamoran. (trailer link) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaimKeDcudo> The last initiative I saw is commented on in my letter from this newspaper which is that of Pueblos que enamoran.

There is also gastronomy, Colombia offers unique destinations, experiences, and landscapes.

We have a saying that "when you visit Colombia, the only problem you may have, is not wanting to leave". And, we say that when you want snow, you go to place with snow, if you want the sea you go to certain places, if you

want adventure, gastronomy, and culture, you go to certain places, but when you go to Colombia, you experience everything. There are so many touristic treasures.

**KA: How should Ghanaians position themselves to trade with Colombia?**

**Amb. Claudia:** We have always believed that the best way to do business is to develop bonds of friendship between people of both nationalities.

To be precise, it is the way to open paths that allow us, through personal and face to face encounters such as tourism, and culture to build trust and do business together.

Let's attend trade fairs and learn more about our countries. Let's read and experience each other.

**KA: What is the Colombian Dream?**

**Amb. Claudia:** Colombia dreams of being a country capable of having all its population educated, with opportunities, with coverage of all social services, with equity, to build and develop the good conditions of our people; to always keep empowering a high level of performance and responding to every need of our society and our people. That's our dream.

Colombia dreams of being a perfect country. A perfect country in which there are no differences and

exclusions that are harmful.

**KA: What does Ghana mean to you?**

**Amb. Claudia:** A new home. Always!

**KA: What else do you want us to know about Colombia and the future?**

**Amb. Claudia:** In the first place, I would like to say that I believe that the future is built today, always in present time; the future is always challenging and daring. Secondly, I want you to know that Colombia is a fascinating, positive, and hospitable country!

**KA:** Thank you, Madam.

**Amb. Claudia:** Thanks to you, Kofi!

### Appreciation

*The Embassy of Colombia wishes to extend its gratitude and appreciation to the writers and contributors of this supplement in celebration of Colombia's National Day.*