

Colombia



Flag

Colombia (*kub LUHM bee uh*) is a country in northwestern South America. It is the fourth biggest country in South America, and only Brazil has more people. Colombia borders Panama in the northwest. This border is the place where North America is connected to South America. To the east of Panama, the coast of Colombia lies along the Caribbean Sea. To the west of Panama, the coast lies along the Pacific Ocean. Colombia also borders Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador.

Colombia lies on the equator—an imaginary line around Earth's middle, halfway between the North and South poles. In the east of the country, where it is hottest, there are grassy plains and tropical forests, and few people. Port cities such as Cartagena, large farms, and cattle ranches are found along the cooler and drier Caribbean Sea coast in the north. High in the mountains, it is cold. Most Colombians live in the west, around the valleys and rivers at the foot of the snow-topped Andes Mountains. The valleys have a mild climate and good soil for crops.

People. Most of Colombia's people have mixed European and *indigenous* (native) ancestry. Other groups include people with African ancestry and indigenous people. Most Colombians speak Spanish. A small percentage speak indigenous languages. Most Colombians are Roman Catholics.

Most well-to-do Colombians live in cities, where tall office and apartment buildings tower over old, Spanish-style houses with red tile roofs. Country people build houses from such local materials as bamboo, palm leaves, and mud bricks. Many country people have moved to cities to find a better life. Some of them live in slums on the edges of large cities.

Resources and products. Businesses that provide services make up the largest section of Colombia's economy. Colombia is

a leading producer of coffee and sugar cane. Other major crops include bananas, cassava, corn, cotton, palm oil, potatoes, and rice. Factories in Colombia make cement, chemicals, metal products, foods and beverages, and textiles and clothing. Important mined products include coal and oil. Colombia also produces high-quality emeralds and nickel, and other mined products.

History. Indigenous (native) people lived in what is now Colombia before Spaniards arrived in the 1500's. The Spaniards created a large colony called the Viceroyalty of New Granada. It included what are now Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. They forced the native people to work for them. They also brought in Africans to work as slaves. In the late 1700's, the colonists began a movement for greater self-government. In 1810, they set up several independent governments. In 1819, the Venezuelan general Simón Bolívar won an important victory against Spain. New Granada then became a republic called Gran Colombia. Venezuela and Ecuador became separate nations by 1830. Colombia lost Panama in 1903.

Colombia has had an elected government for most of its history. But there has often been violence among members of the major political parties. Violent conflicts also have occurred between the government and different rebel groups. In addition, the country has suffered from the production and smuggling of illegal drugs.

Other articles to read: **Andes Mountains; Bolívar, Simón**



Colombia and its neighbors

Facts in brief about Colombia

Capital: Bogotá.

Area: 439,737 mi² (1,138,914 km²). *Greatest distances*—northwest-southeast, 1,170 mi (1,883 km); northeast-southwest, 850 mi (1,368 km). *Coastline*—580 mi (933 km) along the Pacific Ocean; 710 mi (1,143 km) along the Caribbean Sea.

Population: *Current estimate*—43,127,000; density, 98 per mi² (38 per km²); distribution, 75 percent urban, 25 percent rural. *2005 census*—42,888,592.

Official language: Spanish.

Chief products: *Agriculture*—bananas, beef cattle, cassava, coffee, corn, cotton, milk, potatoes, rice, sugar cane. *Manufacturing*—cement, chemicals, metal products, processed foods and beverages, textiles and clothing. *Mining*—coal, emeralds, gold, iron ore, natural gas, petroleum, salt.

Money: *Basic unit*—Colombian peso.

Form of government: Republic.

Climate: Warm in the lowlands, cooler in the mountains, with two wet seasons and two dry seasons. Average temperature in Bogotá is about 57° F (14° C) winter and summer.



A Colombian village lies in the foothills of the Andes.