JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE COLOMBIA: EXPLORING THE COFFEE REGION AND BEYOND

12 days from **£2,700pp**

COLOMBIA / BOGOTA / COFFEE REGION (ZONA CAFETERA) / COLOMBIA'S HEARTLAND



WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

Take to the road in Colombia on this supported self-drive holiday, driving through the gorgeous landscapes of the coffee cultivation country.

DAY 1	**Arrive Bogotá airport. Transfer to hotel in the colonial centre.**
DAY 2	**Walking tour of the capital with the Gold Museum.**
DAY 3	**Fly to Pereira and pick up your car. Drive to Salento hotel.**
DAY 4	**Full day guided hike in the Cocora valley.**
DAY 5	**Drive to your hacienda close to Manizales.**
DAY 6	**Guided tour of the coffee production process.**
DAY 7	**Drive to your hotel in Salamina.**
DAY 8	**Guided visit to La Samaria wax palm forest.**
DAY 9	**Drive to your hotel in Honda on the Magdalena River.**
DAY 10	**Guided walking tour of Honda.**
DAY 11	**Drive to Bogotá airport, drop off car, transfer to hotel.**
DAY 12	**Transfer to airport for international flight.**

ITINERARY

A few years ago, you wouldn't have thought about driving your own car in Colombia, but now this politically stable and utterly enchanting country's roads welcome overseas drivers. This is the ideal way to explore Colombia on a flexible itinerary at your own pace. Drive through the sun-splashed, emerald hills of the peaceful coffee-growing region, where you'll stay in hospitable restored colonial coffee farms.

Flexibility is the keyword here. Driving in Colombia can be challenging: you need to be a confident driver, but we offer you plenty of information and support on the ground. How much you drive on your own and how much with an English-speaking driver to accompany you on excursions is mostly up to you; whether you take the main roads or intriguing little detours off the beaten track is your choice. However you do it, you'll have an exhilarating, adventurous and rewarding time, with glorious views throughout.

The coffee-producing area on the western slopes of the Cordillera Central has a pleasant, warm climate, and a hilly landscape of shiny coffee bushes interspersed with enormous bamboo jungles and banana plants.

DAY 1

Arrive Bogotá airport. Transfer to hotel in the colonial centre.

You'll be met at the airport and escorted to your hotel in the capital. Bogotá is a city of sparkling prosperity, oppressive poverty, and everything in between. Its centre is awash with splendid colonial churches, fascinating museums, futuristic architecture and lively universities. Its population is diverse and engaging and its cultural life vibrant and seductive.

DAY 2

Walking tour of the capital with the Gold Museum.

Today you'll have a guided exploration of the city with a walking tour of the historic core, the colonial Candelaria district.

Set off from the Plaza de Bolívar, where the Cathedral and Congress buildings are located, continue on foot through the steep colonial streets towards the Gold Museum for a visit to this extraordinary, well-displayed collection of pre-Columbian artefacts housing more than 34,000 gold pieces. It's arguably the most impressive museum of its kind in the world.

DAY 3

Fly to Pereira and pick up your car. Drive to Salento hotel.

Fly to Pereira in the heart of the coffee country. You'll be met by our local representative who will be on hand to help you as you pick up your car (a Renault Duster or similar). You'll be given a good briefing on driving in the area, shown how the GPS works, and provided with a Colombian mobile phone so you can stay in contact.

Pereira is a pleasant city in the shadow of the ice-mantled peaks of the Andean cordillera. It has some fine buildings, sculptures and a museum featuring gold and ceramics.

Set off on your drive to Salento: it's a good road, and introduces you to the rugged yet softly green mountains of the coffee region. Sunlit slopes are blanketed in coffee bushes, sprinkled with lofty palms and speckled with farms, or *fincas*, some dating back to colonial Spanish times.

The drive takes about an hour but, as with all the driving you do, this will depend on whether or not you take a detour, stop to look around a village or have a snack or drink. There's always something to see, if you are curious you'll have to be disciplined or you'll never arrive…

DAY 4

Full day guided hike in the Cocora valley.

Salento (1,985m) is a delightful little town of paint-box-bright colonial houses with wooden balconies overhanging narrow lanes. A popular weekend spot, it has a bunch of craft shops and restaurants for visitors. You can climb 250 steps lined by the Stations of the Cross for sweeping river valley views.

The Cocora valley is undeniably one of the most picturesque landscapes in a country endowed with so much beautiful countryside. You go 12km up a rough track from the centre of Salento.

If you wish to have a guided tour, an English-speaking guide will meet you at your hotel at a pre-arranged time and accompany you on the short drive. There is a range of hikes to choose from in the valley. Hike through mist-shrouded forest packed with hundreds of wax palms – the national tree of Colombia – whose spindly trunks tower as high as 60m. If you prefer, you can set off on your own without a guide, but he/she is on call.

DAY 5

Drive to your hacienda close to Manizales.

Once again, if you wish for a guide's experience and assistance, he/she will accompany you on the 90-minute drive to the Santuario de Fauna y Flora Otún Quimbaya, a compact reserve with bubbly rivers, waterfalls and cliffs groaning with tightly packed foliage.

There, you can hike along one (or more) of the three short trails in this protected forest and spot numerous species of orchids, birds, and maybe even monkeys.

There is a restaurant on site and you may decide to have lunch there before setting off (without a guide) driving to your next overnight stop, about 2 hours away if you drive direct.

DAY 6

Guided tour of the coffee production process.

This morning you may choose to stroll along any of the six marked paths in the large gardens or take in the sunshine around the outdoor pool. It's a great spot for bird watching, and there is a field guide at your disposal.

In the afternoon, there's a guided tour of the coffee production process. You'll learn about the intricacies of the coffee production process, including the picking, de-pulping, washing, drying and roasting of the beans.

Finish off, of course, by tasting some of the local brew.

DAY 7

Drive to your hotel in Salamina.

It's about a 3-hour drive to Salamina. Passing through Manizales the road begins to wind its way north, via the towns of Neira and Aranzazu, before reaching Salamina. This narrow road is full of twists and turns but it's a particularly scenic drive with dense foliage giving way to stunning vistas.

Clambering up a thickly wooded hill, Salamina is a dainty whitewashed village where Spanish-style one storey houses have uniform red-tiled roofs and flowery Juliet balconies. Wander the steep streets of the village independently or accompanied by your English-speaking guide to discover the lanes and hidden corners. Range after range of chunky mountains decorates the horizon.

DAY 8

Guided visit to La Samaria wax palm forest.

For this adventure it might be better to ride with your English-speaking guide in a four-wheel drive vehicle, as the road to San Felix is lumpy and bumpy. This little town with its rather grand baroque church sits at the foot of a range of steep hills, and it's a popular place for paragliding.

Have a look round the town and maybe stop for a coffee before driving on up to La Samaría Wax Palm Forest at the cool altitude of 3,000m. There you are presented with a surreal sight: hundreds of tall, skinny wax palm trees stand like pins in a cushion on the golden-green hillsides.

Once again there is a range of hikes to choose from, wending your way through the silent standing army of trees.

If you prefer a longer hike you can walk for around three hours from the hotel, without taking the jeep tour. Once again, the choice is yours.

Return to Salamina for lunch, or if you wish, you can arrange a picnic (with a view).

DAY 9

Drive to your hotel in Honda on the Magdalena River.

It's a long but beautiful drive from Salamina to Honda (5-6 hours), with a choice of two recommended routes, one of which involves negotiating an unpaved road where you'll be rewarded with stunning views.

Either way, you'll be on the road which leads to the Páramo de Letras, a mountain pass at 3,690m, with horizon-bending vistas. This altitude presents a very different landscape: the harsher conditions, exposure to the elements and rarified air means that the surrounding landscape is of rough, wind-strafed grasslands, not dissimilar to familiar moorland.

From there you descend to more tropical climes, passing through a couple of towns to Honda.

Nicknamed the 'City of Bridges' Honda, squatting sweltering on the banks of the Magdalena River, was formerly an important port on the trade route between the Caribbean coast and Bogotá. Honda is a hot and steamy place, surrounded by forest-stifled hills. Although parts of the town's outskirts are less than attractive, as you approach the historic core the prosperous past is reflected in the grandeur of the architecture, and in the colonial houses which line the cobbled streets.

DAY 10

Guided walking tour of Honda.

Today you have a guided walking tour of the town which visits the market, the impressive Navarro Bridge and the Museo del Rio, where you'll learn about the river's importance in forming the region's history and culture.

DAY 11

Drive to Bogotá airport, drop off car, transfer to hotel.

It will take about 4 hours to reach the Colombian capital Bogotá from Honda. Our local representative will liaise with you throughout the day and will be waiting for you at the car hire office at Bogota's El Dorado Airport to help you drop off your car.

Transfer to your hotel in the city.

DAY 12

Transfer to airport for international flight.

UK clients arrive home the following day.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office

Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides

All land and air transport within Latin America

Accommodation as specified

Meals as specified

Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Walking tour of colonial Bogota

Visit the Bogota Gold Museum

Full day guided hike in the Cocora valley

Guided tour of the coffee production process

La Samaria wax palm forest tour

Guided walking tour of Honda

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities

Meals other than specified

International flights to Latin America

Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket

Optional excursions

ESSENTIALS

TRANSPORT
1 domestic flight (1 hour) from Bogotá to Pereira; self-drive car hire – manual Renault Duster or similar.

ACCOMMODATION
In the coffee region you will be staying in small, independent mid-range hotels as well as a traditional coffee farm (finca). Your two hotels in Bogotá are bigger and more modern in style but are well located to explore La Candelaria, the colonial district, and La Zona Rosa, a neighbourhood with a vibrant dining and nightlife scene.

MEALS
Breakfast daily; lunch days 4,8.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS
12 days, 11 nights: Bogotá 2, Salento 2; coffee finca near Manizales 2; Salamina 2; Honda 2, Bogotá 1.

TRIP SUITABILITY
This is a self-drive holiday and will suit independent-minded clients seeking the freedom to explore on and off the beaten track parts of Colombia. You should be confident driving a manual 4WD on the right.

Main roads are generally in good condition but some rural roads can be unpaved and bumpy. A smattering of Spanish as well as some mechanical knowledge – the ability to change a tyre, for example – will be very useful. Your hire car will include a satellite navigation system in English, pre-loaded with all of your hotels and destinations, as well as petrol stations, and we will also send you our Rules of the Road document with helpful tips specific to driving in Colombia

CLIMATE
The dry season in Colombia is from December until March and then June to September. Temperatures during this period average around 30°C, although are reasonably consistent throughout the year. Bogotá, and towns in the coffee growing region, because of their altitude, have a spring-like climate and can be chilly at night. Honda, on the other hand, is hot and humid all year round with an average temperature of 33 °C.

ALTITUDE
Several days are spent at high altitude (over 2,500m). You may notice the effect of high altitude; symptoms vary: most common are mild headaches and breathlessness. If you drink plenty of water and allow your body to acclimatise (don't exert yourself or drink alcohol) in the first couple of days after arrival, you will minimise your chances of being adversely affected.

CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT
Bring plenty of light cotton clothing as well as some warm items and a good waterproof jacket. We suggest that you plan to 'layer' your clothing; it is easier and more efficient to put on a couple of light layers than one thick jumper. You may want to bring swimwear too.

Good, comfortable walking shoes are very important and you may wish to bring walking poles with you when hiking in the Cocora Valley and La Samaria Wax Palm Forest. Protection against the sun (sun cream and sun hat) and mosquito repellent are also essential.

If you plan to go to good restaurants or out on evening entertainment trips (most likely in Bogotá) you might bring something a bit smarter (although formal attire will not be required).

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts. Good equipment is very important and can be hard to come by in Latin America.

GUIDES
We carefully select our local partners, most of whom we have worked with for many years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their

return.

HOW TO TAKE IT

Cash machines are available in all major cities and towns, and so taking a debit or credit card with a PIN number is the most convenient way of withdrawing money while on your trip, and in most shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds. We recommend that additionally you take a reasonable quantity of US dollars cash (no more than is covered by your insurance), which you can exchange into local currency. Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused. You can take sterling, but the exchange rate is not always competitive or even available, restricting the number of places where you can change money. Never change money on the street.

CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Colombia is the Colombian peso.

DAILY SPEND

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US$45 per day should cover the cost of meals not included in the holiday itinerary, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants and you will pay considerably more.

TIPPING

Tips are welcomed and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. We recommend approximately $10 per person for a half day and $20 for a full day for guides and half that for drivers. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is essential.

Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

AIRPORT TAXES

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. You should consult your GP for specific requirements, including advice on yellow fever and malaria tablets.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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