

# Classic Colombia

16 days | Starts/Ends: Bogota



Take in the highlights of captivating Colombia, wander around colonial cities, uncover sun-kissed beaches nestled in the wildlife-rich Tayrona national park and discover the ancient stone monuments of San Agustin on this 16 day adventure.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

### Trip Highlights

- Bogota - take in the highlights of Colombia's capital city on a guided tour
- San Agustin - visit the UNESCO Listed San Agustin Archaeological Park with its fascinating statues
- Tayrona National Park – follow tropical trails through this dazzling national park, once home to the Tayrona Indians
- Cartagena - stroll around the beautiful Old Town and soak up the atmosphere of Colombia's most captivating coastal town
- The Coffee Triangle – learn about coffee farming at local ranch in Armenia
- Mompos - take a boat trip along the Magdalena River, spotting wildlife along the riverbanks
- Aracataca - learn about the famous Latin American writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez who was born in the town

- Cocora Valley – take a hike in the home of Colombia's national tree, the wax palm, the tallest variety of palm tree in the world
- Salento – stroll through this charming town with its preserved colonial bahareque architecture and streets lined with restaurants, bars and shops

### What's Included

- 15 breakfasts
- 15 nights 3 star hotels
- 3 domestic flights - Bogota - Neiva, San Agustin - Armenia, Cartagena - Bogota
- Arrival and departure transfers on days 1 and 16
- Guided tour of Bogota and Gold Museum, San Agustin Archaeological Park and Cartagena
- Excursion to coffee farm in Armenia, Tayrona National Park and Aracataca Marquez Museum
- Mompos boat trip
- Escorted by an experienced tour leader with the services of local guides
- All relevant transfers and transportation

### What's Not Included

- Items of a personal nature, additional meals and drinks
- International flights and visas
- Tipping – an entirely personal gesture

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### Day 1 : Bogota

Saturday. Hola Colombia! Upon arrival at Bogota airport you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Bogota 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.

This afternoon there is a guided tour of the city, including the fascinating colonial area of Candelaria with its fine historic buildings lining cobbled streets, including numerous churches and the presidential palace. We stop to look at the art and sculptures in the Botero museum and the tour culminates with a visit to the excellent Gold Museum, housing more than 34,000 gold pieces and arguably the most impressive museum of its kind in the world.

Please note: we recommend booking flights to arrive into Bogota before midday, in order to join the city tour which usually starts at approximately 2pm. Pre tour accommodation can be arranged upon request. **Overnight - Bogota**

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## Day 2 : Bogota



Today is free to spend at leisure or there are some optional excursions in and around Bogota. You have the option to head into the attractive La Sabana countryside, dotted with greenhouses that assist the region's lucrative cut-flower industry. Zipaquirá is home to a still functioning, centuries-old salt mine. Nearly 200m beneath the earth is an extraordinary, mysterious salt cathedral, its vast pillars and walls made from glistening salt. There are 14 stations of the cross sculpted by different Colombian artists.

The excursion continues across some beautiful countryside to the Guatavita Lagoon. There is a hike to the crater-lake's 3,100m rim, offering wonderful views. Legend has it that this was the site of legendary El Dorado. The ancient Chibcha king was thought to have been doused in sap and gold dust and pushed out onto the lake's calm waters in a ceremonial raft, from which he would submerge himself, rinsing off this valuable body paint. Other precious objects were believed to have been thrown into the lake as offerings, and a number have been recovered and are housed in the gold museum in Bogota. **Overnight - Bogota (B)**

## Day 3 : San Agustin

Bogota - San Agustin. Today we transfer to the airport for a flight to Neiva (1 hour), then there's a pleasant 4 hour drive past coffee plantations and undulating green hills to San Agustin. This pretty little town is our base for the next 3 nights and has a smattering of attractive colonial houses and churches, cobbled streets and shady plazas. **Overnight - San Agustin (B)**

## Day 4 : San Agustin archaeological park



Today there is an excursion to the archaeological park, about 3km from the town. Here more than 100 statues, some of which are thought to date back to 3,300BC, stand amid the forested countryside. Alongside them are circular burial houses, only about a third of which have been excavated, into which human sacrifices and offerings to the gods were made.

Little is known about the culture which produced these stone figures, but it is an impressive site in beautiful countryside and there are hiking opportunities into the surrounding area, including to the Fuente de Lavapatas, where stream water runs through channels carved into the stone. **Overnight - San Agustin (B)**

## Day 5 : Optional Magdalena Canyon

Today is free to spend at leisure or there is an optional Jeep tour of Magdalena Gorge. This optional day trip takes you by Jeep through sugar plantations and up and down steep gorges to the Magdalena Canyon. Here you can see huge figures carved into rocks midway up the canyon wall, with the river crashing below, and some free-standing stones sculpted into rudimentary animal shapes. **Overnight - San Agustin (B)**

## Day 6 : Popayan



San Agustín - Popayan. From San Agustín it's a beautiful and varied drive through rugged hills which first climbs and then descends through cattle pastures and crinkled bright green hills to the university town of Popayan (4-5hrs). Popayan is a stately colonial town which has maintained its character in spite of devastating earthquakes. For many years during the troubles the city was off limits; now it is safe but still relatively undiscovered by tourists, a pleasant change from many popular, equally exquisite Spanish cities in Latin America and a fantastic place to spend the night. **Overnight - Popayan (B)**

## Days 7-9 : The Coffee Region



Popayan - Armenia. We continue on by road (5hrs) to the heart of the country's coffee region. We spend three days in this beautiful, relaxing area, with walking trails, colourful flora and fauna and fresh coffee at your fingertips.

Time will be spent at a coffee ranch and there is a guided tour of a local farm, where we gain an insight into subsistence agriculture in the region. Learn about fruit production and tropical flower cultivation as well as the intricacies of the coffee production process, including the picking, de-pulping, washing, drying and roasting of the beans. There are opportunities to sample the final product.

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There is also the chance to drive out to traditional village Salento, its houses adorned with balconies bursting with flowers, and with wonderful views of the Cordillera Central emerging from behind elegant colonial buildings. Continue to Valle de la Cocora, a beautiful nature reserve which is home to the wax palm, Colombia's national tree and the only palm which grows above 3,000m. Follow a well-marked path up the valley and look out over the mountains' verdant foothills, and the cultivated patchwork of fields made up of a dozen shades of green.

On the last day in the region there is the opportunity to visit the Botanical Gardens at Calarca. A series of nature trails pass abundant tropical flowers and there is an excellent insect museum and enclosed butterfly garden. Alternatively, you may prefer to take a horse-riding excursion from a nearby farm to explore the surrounding countryside. **Overnight - Armenia (B:3)**

### Days 10-11 : Santa Marta & Tayrona NP



Armenia - Santa Marta. We travel back to Armenia before boarding a flight via Bogota to the Caribbean coast and the city of Santa Marta. Santa Marta is South America's oldest surviving colonial city and its spruced up town centre offers small scale historic charm as well as some great restaurants, bars and cafés. It is probably most famous for being where the great liberator Simon Bolivar was born.

From here it's a short journey to the incredible Parque Nacional Tayrona. There is a full day trip to this dazzling region of thick, humid jungle and exquisite unspoiled beaches fringed by coconut palms and peppered with vast, smooth boulders. It was once home to the indigenous Tayrona indians. Jungle paths follow

tree-covered trails surrounded by tropical dry forest, with monkeys swinging in the trees overhead and the atmosphere heavy with heat. There are a number of restaurants and bars in the park where you can stop for lunch in the shade and take in your exotic surroundings. Of course if you'd rather have the day to explore or relax in Santa Marta then this can easily be arranged locally. **Overnight - Santa Marta (B:2)**

### Days 12-13 : Mompos

Santa Marta - Mompos. On day 12 a private bus then takes us inland to the small provincial town of Aracataca (2 hours). The town is famous as the birth place of Gabriel García Márquez, and provides a good place to stop for lunch. Márquez is arguably Latin America's most famous writer and his works; (including 'One Hundred Years of Solitude') often feature in lists of the greatest novels ever written. He was born in Aracataca in 1927, and his birthplace features in some of his stories as the fictional town of Macondo. Today the family house he was raised in is a museum, and you will have time to visit the home of the Nobel Prize winning author.

A further 5 hour journey past banana and oil palm plantations leads to the small provincial town of Mompos. Situated on the eastern banks of the Magdalena River, this 16th-century town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one feels as if transported into a Gabriel García Marquez novel, wandering streets fronted by whitewashed colonial buildings and mansions which were once home to powerful Spanish merchants (for whom the town was an important stopping-off point on the trade route to Cartagena). Spend two days in these beautiful surroundings, relaxing in the shady plazas, lapping up the atmosphere, and enjoy the natural scenery on the river banks on an included boat trip. **Overnight - Mompos (B:2)**

### Day 14 : Cartagena



Mompos - Cartagena. Today day is spent travelling back by private vehicle to the Caribbean coast and the famous city of Cartagena.

**Overnight - Cartagena (B)**

### Day 15 : Cartagena



Caribbean's most exotic and romantic colonial city, Cartagena was founded in 1533, quickly blossoming to become the main Spanish port in the Caribbean, and a gateway to the north of the continent. Treasure plundered from native inhabitants was stored here until the galleons could ship it back to Spain, and it therefore became a tempting target for pirates. In order to protect their booty, the Spanish constructed an elaborate system of ramparts, which still encircle the town.

Today, while Cartagena has expanded dramatically, the walled centre has changed very little, allowing a glimpse of 16th and 17th-century Spanish architecture and town planning. Enjoy the shade provided by the buildings in these labyrinthine, cobbled streets, and explore the monasteries, palaces, churches, plazas and imposing mansions where the overhanging balconies are heavy with flowers.

**Overnight - Cartagena (B)**

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## Day 16 : Bogota

Sunday. Cartagena - Bogota. Transfer back to Cartagena airport for an included flight back to Bogota.

Please provide us with your international flight details and we will book the domestic flight at a suitable time for you. Arrangements end upon arrival at the Bogota airport or we can book post tour accommodation upon request.(B)

## Our Partners

This tour is operated in conjunction with our trusted partner and you will join travellers from different operators, not solely On The Go. The group size may vary in size from 4 - 20 persons.

## Tour Leader

On this tour, you'll be accompanied from start to finish by an experienced tour leader. From the moment you land in Latin America until the day the tour ends they will deal with all the practicalities, expertly adapting to the circumstances and individual needs of the group. Rather than different guides in different cities, your leader will get to know the group and keep you informed and entertained as you go.

## Transport

This tour includes 4 flights (longest 3.5 hours), 7 road journeys (longest 8 hours) and 1 boat journey (2 hours).

## Accommodation

On this tour the standard of accommodation varies. We utilise comfortable and attractive hotels/guesthouses but in remote locations where options are limited, accommodation is purely functional. All properties are well maintained and almost all will have a private bathroom. In Mompos, Tayrona and Cartagena there may well not be hot water. This is due to the local climate and the perceived needs for it and the fact that many properties/areas may not have the infrastructure.

We stay in farmhouse accommodation in the coffee country and cabins in Tayrona National Park (bathroom facilities may be shared between 1 or 2 cabins).

Examples of hotels used on this journey include:  
• Bogota: Casa Deco

- San Agustin: Hacienda Akawanka
- Coffee region: Finca La Cabana
- Santa Marta: Casa del Piano
- Mompos: Casa Amarilla
- Cartagena: Don Pedro de Heredia

On very rare occasions these hotels can change, however please speak to one of our consultants who can provide full details for each departure if you have any doubts.

## Optional Excursions

There are optional excursions available throughout this tour, which are booked locally through your tour leader once you are in Latin America. Not all excursions available will suit everybody, whilst others only operate within certain seasons, with minimum numbers or may not be included due to time constraints. A budget of around \$200 should cover participation in most of the following options, but prices can fluctuate depending on the size of the party and so cannot be provided accurately until travel commences.

- Bogota: visit the Mint which houses the Botero Museum
- Bogota: visit Zipaquira salt mine with a stop at the Guatavita Lagoon
- San Agustin: visit local fincas and waterfalls
- Coffee region: visit traditional Finlandia with its artisan shops and local markets
- Mompos: guided walking tour
- Cartagena: Rosario Islands day trip

## Travelling Alone

There is no extra cost for single travellers who are willing to share a room. You will be accommodated with a same-sex member of the group who is usually also travelling solo. For single travellers who wish to be sure of having their own room there are a limited number of single supplement places available, which carry a surcharge.

## Budget

A budget of around \$45USD per day should cover the cost of meals, drinks and the odd souvenir.

## Tipping

Tips are normally welcomed and expected. Local guides often rely on their tip as a

significant proportion of their income. We recommend approximately \$3 USD(or local equivalent) per person per day for each of guides and drivers, depending on the size of the group.

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. It is common to leave 10 - 12% in restaurants.

If you would like to show your appreciation to your tour leader, who you may feel has exceeded your expectations, a discretionary gratuity would be gratefully received. As a guideline we recommend an amount of between \$4 and \$6 USD per person, per day. You are obviously free to tip more or less as you see fit, depending on your perception of service quality.

## Insurance

Travel insurance is essential. For details of our recommended policy please contact our reservations team.

## Journey Grading

All walks on this tour are optional and you should discuss with your tour leader which are suitable for you. There are some long days spent travelling, in the heat, however many comfort stops are made to enjoy the scenery on route.

## 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 and good, comfortable walking shoes. Warm items and a good waterproof jacket are also necessary for all departures. 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

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jumper. Sandals are a good informal option for evenings.

Protection against the sun (sun block, sun hat) and mosquito repellent are essential and you should bring swimwear. A backpack or soft holdall is the most sensible and comfortable way to carry your belongings. Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts.

## Vaccinations

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. Yellow Fever vaccination may be required for your visit to the coastal region please consult a Health care professional for advice on this and malaria tablets.

Cases of Zika virus have been reported in parts of Latin America. If you're pregnant, or planning to be, you should follow the advice of the National Travel Health Network and Centre.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Colombia Country Guide

## Colombia - Fact File

Official Name: Republic of Colombia

Capital: Santa Fé de Bogotá

Population: 44.5 million

Total Area: 1.1 million square kilometres

Official Language: Spanish, Quechua and Aymara

Religions: Roman Catholic 95%

Voltage: 110 volts, double flat-pin plug (same as USA)

Dialling Code: +57

Time Difference: GMT/UTC -4. For other time differences please visit [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)

## Colombia - Visas

Please be advised that visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement is the responsibility of the traveller and not On The Go Tours, therefore it is essential that you check current visa requirements with the embassy before travel. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of departure from Colombia.

For stays of up to 90 days, USA, British, Irish, New Zealand, Australian and South African citizens do not require a tourist visa to visit Colombia. Canadian citizens have to pay a reciprocity fee to enter Colombia, which can be paid upon arrival into the country. The fee is approximately \$88 CAD (OR 160,000 Colombian pesos), and this can be paid by international credit card, debit card or cash. If made in cash, the payment must be in Colombian pesos. You will receive an immigration card, which you must retain and show when you leave the country.

## Colombia - Climate

Colombia has an equatorial climate and therefore does not have dramatic seasonal changes. The best time for the country as a whole is December-March as it rains the least then.

The rainy season is May-July and October-December, when heavy rains can fall (though they're usually followed by bright sunshine). The elevation in the country ranges from sea level to 3,050 metres, so temperatures can vary greatly. Coastal cities have day temperatures from 23-32°C, with nights at about 17-27°C year-round. The inland cities' year-round day temperatures are generally around 17-27°C (nights can get down to 5-16°C in the winter). A sweater is needed along the coast at night and a jacket in the mountains (this includes Bogota, which lies at 2,650 metres).

Visit [www.worldclimate.com](http://www.worldclimate.com) to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

## Colombia - Money

The official currency in Colombia is Colombia Peso.

For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com) or [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

### Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

US dollars (cash) are accepted for some purchases in Colombia (particularly when the dollar is strong) however, you will need pesos for most purchases. Even if you have the choice of paying for things in US dollars it will be in your favour to use the local currency.

US dollars and travellers cheques can be changed at casas de cambio (exchange bureau), banks and border crossings. Your tour leader will give you details of when and where best to change money. Casas de cambio are privately owned, usually have longer opening hours and attend to you faster than banks. The rate may be slightly lower but you must weigh this up against the convenience of not having to queue. In Colombia you get the best exchange rates in the cities of Bogotá and Cartagena where the casas de cambio offer about the same rate as the banks. Also, these places will quite often exchange other currencies and cheques. Hotels/restaurants will sometimes change US dollars, but at a much poorer rate.

Often the easiest way to obtain local currency is to use the ATMs ('cajeros automaticos') located in every city throughout the country. Visa, Plus, MasterCard and Cirrus/Maestro are accepted in most Colombian ATMs, as long as you have a four-digit pin number. Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

You should also be able to get a cash advance at the bank (usually only possible for Visa and sometimes Mastercard) although most banks will require a copy of your passport and quite often take your photo.

In Colombia they can be very particular about the condition of the US dollar bank notes. You will quite often NOT be able to use notes which are torn or marked even slightly. If your notes are at all damaged you may use them in Ecuador, but probably NOT in Colombia, so save them until then.

Remember that once you leave Colombia you will generally not be able to use or exchange pesos (so please change all left over pesos at the border).

## Colombia - Entrance Fees

Generally speaking most museums in Colombia cost between US\$2 and US\$5. There are many interesting museums to visit, but please bear in mind that many museums close on Mondays.

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The many beautiful churches and cathedrals of Colombia are always free to enter, but flash photography is strictly forbidden, and opening hours vary greatly. There are sometimes cultural events going on and galleries/exhibitions which are free to enter. Your tour leader will give you more details on these.

## Colombia - Shopping

Shop for hand-worked silver, emeralds, pottery, "chiva" pottery buses, leather, textiles, hammocks, wall hangings, gold, large mobiles (not the phone variety) and ponchos.

Each different region has its own regional handicrafts/ jewellery etc. so if you like something, buy it! You may never see it again (or if you do it will probably be more expensive). Bargaining is expected while shopping in the markets, but in shops it is usually considered rude to bargain. You may however ask for a 'discount' ("descuento" in Spanish).

Bear in mind that it can be very expensive and not always reliable to send packages home so try to buy only what you can carry home!

## Colombia - Tipping

A 10% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Colombia. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There should be no other charge on top of this. However, if IVA is said to be included on the menu then it should NOT be added onto the end of the bill. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50 cents. Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

## Colombia - Local Transport

Taxis are recommended for all journeys within cities. Most taxis have meters if not you may have to haggle with the driver to agree upon the fare. This can be fun, but it is a good idea to find out in advance, from your tour leader or the hotel receptionist, approximately how much the fare should be. It will also help if you can speak a few words of Spanish. You will almost certainly

have to accept that you will pay more than the Colombians do.

Local buses are interesting and usually very crowded. The new TransMilenio buses that ply back and forth on dedicated lanes from south to north are good and regular, like an outdoor metro system using buses.

One of the most fun ways to explore Colombia's cities is by "Chiva" bus, which is a truck chassis with brightly coloured wooden open-sided body with bench seating (these are the old typical type buses which are still used in many places in the countryside today for the locals – chicken buses, as we call them). Most cities have these tours, mostly in the evening where they will have a band/group on board playing live music and take you to many of the night spots plus hand out drinks en-route, mostly "aguadiente" (firewater, a kind of ouzo which is quite delicious once you've had one or two).

## Colombia - Food & Drink

### Food

Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants. You will find a range of international and local cuisine to suit every budget. Excellent seafood is available along all coastal regions and chicken, pork and beef are available throughout.

In Colombia the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Some of the most popular and typical dishes are: "frijoles" (kidney beans in a delicious sauce with lumps of pork), "ajiaco" (lovely soup type dish with chicken breast, maize, potato and is served with avocado, rice), "bandeja paisa" (minced beef with beans, egg, fried plantain, chorizo sausage, rice, manioc, huge meal), tomases (which is like a boiled corn dumpling filled with chicken and wrapped in banana leaf). These are just a few of the local favourites, there are many more.

Typical snacks are "empanadas" (little fried pasties usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and "patacones" (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Colombia's food is not hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of "aji" (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

### Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to provide interesting vegetarian alternatives when arranging group meals in the campsite, but your patience and understanding is requested.

### Drink

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times.

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to order juice "con leche" (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices in Colombia is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de arbol (tamirillo or 'tree tomato'), guanabana (a soursop, like acustard apple) and curuba (which has a great taste).

In Colombia some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, aguadiente (a kind of ouzo) and you can get imported Chilean wine can sometimes be found quite cheaply at supermarkets. There are various brands of beers including Costeña, Aguila, Bavaria and Leona. Please don't forget the coffee, some of the best in the world but pick a nice café style establishment with an espresso machine.

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## Colombia - National Holidays

- 1 January - New Year's Day
- 12 January - Epiphany
- 22 March - San José
- March/April (variable) - Samana Santa (Easter)
- 1 May - Labour Day (national holiday)
- 24 May - Ascension
- 14 June - Corpus Christi
- 21 June - Sacred Heart
- 5 July - St.Peter & St.Paul
- 20 July - Independence Day
- 7 August - Boyaca Battle
- 17 October - Columbus Day
- 1 November - All Saints Day
- 15 November - Cartagena's Independence
- 8 December - Immaculate Conception
- 25 December - Christmas Day

Please remember that on public holidays, banks, museums and shops will be closed and often public transport is less frequent than usual.

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