

COLOMBIA



INTRODUCTION

The cultural diversity of Colombia is most apparent and has several components in Colombia's history, its population and geography. Its Economy is marked by colonial heritage of agricultural und social exploitation. Though recently big efforts has been made to overcome social differences the country is still characterized by its rigid social hierarchy, growing cities, economically weak countryside, lack of handicraft tradition and industry. Despite all ethnic and social gaps a vivid national Colombian identity is what most Colombian are proud of.



City of Bogota

HISTORY

At the beginning of the 16th century the northern part of South America was densely populated by Native American Indian groups. Some of them were organized in highly specialized socio-political structures. Large urban systems based on stone terraces had been developed for more than 3,000 years. The Chibcha people in the northern part of the Andes had created a political system of "cacicazgos" (The Cacique) with a pyramidal structure of power. They would be the biggest political system of South America after the Incas. When first Spanish conquerors came to the Caribbean littoral and the north part of the Andes the oppressed the Chibcha people and founded new settlement on former Indian trading centres like Santa Fé de Bogotá and Tunja. The main people in the Colombian territory were hundreds of tribes of the Chibchan and

"Karib" or Caribbean peoples whom they assimilated or killed through warfare, disease, exploitation, or conquest. They soon established settlements that eventually grew into the provinces which were part of the Captaincy General of New Granada. As it became a Viceroyalty in 1717, some other provinces of north-western South America came under its jurisdiction. In the 16th century Europeans brought slaves from Africa.

Though there were independent movements of rebellion since the very beginning of the Conquest and Colony, the main one sprang up around 1810, led by Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander, that finally succeeded in 1819 when the territory of the Viceroyalty of New Granada became the Republic of Gran Colombia as a Confederation with Ecuador and Venezuela, Panama was a Colombian Department until 1903.



„Chiva“ the classical means of transportation

Internal political and territorial divisions led to the secession of Venezuela and Quito (today's Ecuador) in 1830. The so-called "Department of Cundinamarca" received then the name "Nueva Granada" until 1856 when it became the "Confederación Granadina" (Granadine Confederation). In 1863 the "United States of Colombia" was created, until 1886 when it finally became the Republic of Colombia. Internal divisions remained, occasionally igniting very bloody civil wars and contributing to the US-sponsored secession of Panama in 1903. The bloodiest of these wars occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s, known as La Violencia (the violence). It claimed the lives of at least 180,000 Colombians. Its cause was mainly tensions between partisan groups.

A new constitution was implemented in 1991 to replace the previous 1886 document, after being drafted by the Constituent Assembly of Colombia. The constitution included key provisions on political, human, ethnic and gender rights, which have been gradually put in practice, though surrounding controversies, uneven developments and setbacks have persisted.

FACTS

Surface:	1,141,748 m²
Capital:	Bogotá (6,8 million)
Form of government:	republic, executive branch dominates government structure
Inhabitants:	42.95 million (July 2005)
Population Density:	41/km²
Urbanization:	76.5 %
Population below Poverty line:	55% (2001)
Life Expectancy:	75.41 (W)/67.58 (M)
Language:	Spanish (official) native Indian Languages
Religion:	Roman Catholic 90%, other 10%

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In recent decades the country has been plagued by the effects of the influential drug trade and by guerrilla insurgents such as FARC and illegal counter-insurgency paramilitary groups such as AUC, which along with other minor factions have been engaged in a bloody internal conflict. The different irregular groups often resort to kidnapping and drug smuggling to fund their causes, tend to operate in large areas of the remote rural countryside and can sometimes disrupt communications and travel between different regions. Flying became most adequate not only for travelling but also for shipping cargo.

As a result of economic growth, and increased investment in national security, during Alvaro Uribe's government security indicators have improved substantially, with the latest security indicators showing a decrease in reported kidnappings (decreased from 3700 in the year 2000 to 1441 in 2004), and >48% in homicides (July 2002 to May 2005)

POLITICAL SITUATION

Colombia was one of the three countries that emerged from the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830 (the others are Ecuador and Venezuela). A 40-year insurgent campaign to overthrow the Colombian Government escalated during the 1990s, partly financed by funds from the drug trade. Although the violence is deadly and large swaths of the countryside are under guerrilla influence, the movement lacks the military strength or popular support necessary to overthrow the government. An anti-insurgent army of paramilitaries has grown to several thousand



City of bogota

strong in recent years, challenging the insurgents for control of territory and the drug trade, and also the government's ability to exert its dominion over rural areas. While Bogota steps up efforts to reassert government control throughout the country, neighbouring countries worry about the violence spilling over their borders.

ECONOMY - OVERVIEW

Colombia's economy has been on a recovery trend during the past two years despite a serious armed conflict. The economy continues to improve thanks to austere government budgets, focused efforts to reduce public debt levels, and an export-oriented growth focus. Ongoing economic problems facing President Uribe range from reforming the pension system to reducing high unemployment. New exploration is needed to offset declining oil production. On the positive side, several international financial institutions have praised the economic reforms introduced by Uribe, which include measures designed to reduce the public-sector deficit below 2.5% of GDP. The government's economic policy and democratic security strategy have engendered a growing sense of confidence in the economy, particularly within the business sector. Coffee prices have recovered from previous lows as the Colombian coffee industry pursues greater market shares in developed countries such as the United States.

GEOGRAPHY/CLIMATE/VEGETATION

The natural environment of Colombia has several important geographical components: As the only country of South America Colombia is with coast in both oceans (Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean). Close to coasts to mountain ranges rise up to over 5,000 m. The northern section of the Andes coming from the south opens into three branches of which one reaches the Caribbean coast of Venezuela. The second range is the Guiana Highlands, that emerge from the plains of the Orinoco river basin and divides it from the immense Amazon basin.

The geographical configuration provides several divers ecological environments of micro geographic complexity, reaching from the lower land of arid zones, plains and rain forests to the slopes and highlands of the mountain ranges.

The Colombian climate, though it is in the tropical area is affected by the Andes. It is tropical in its coastlands and lowlands and cool in the mountains.



Cartagena



Manizales

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Colombian Pacific plains are among the rainiest parts in the world, especially at the north (Chocó).

The five traditional natural regions are therefore: the Andean Region, the Caribbean Region, the Pacific Region, the Orinoquia Region and the Amazonian Region. Some people also include an Insular Region, separated from the coastal regions.

SOCIETY

As mentioned above Colombian society is characterized by its rigid social hierarchy. Ethnic origin and therefore skin colour is functioning as an indicator for social status. Colombia might be seen as a prototype society of South America where problems of first and third world meet in one place.



Images:

all photographs by Christina Jeménez Mattsson, September 2005

Maps and flag:

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bild:Colombia_flag_medium.png

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bild:Escudo_de_la_republica_de_colombia.jpg

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bild:Kolumbien_suedamerika.jpg

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/de/9/9a/Kolumbien_map.png

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