

COLOMBIA



Hope City Church Colombia Work Outreach
March-April 2025
Pre-Travel Orientation

Thank you for your interest in the beautiful country of Colombia, South America and what the Lord is doing there. In Colombia you will find several things quite familiar, but there are many more things that may seem quite strange to you, especially if you are not a “world traveler”.

The information in the following pages is intended to inform you of some of the things that you may need to know before you go. If you are excited about joining us, that is great! If you are afraid, put away your fears and trust the Lord that this is going to be the trip of a lifetime.



Introduction to Colombia

Colombia, a republic in northern South America, is named after Christopher Columbus and nicknamed the ‘Land of Flavor’ for its rich cultural heritage – including language, religion, art and delicious cuisine. Surrounded by the Andes mountains, Colombia has a landscape of snow-topped mountain peaks and broad, windswept plateaus, equatorial jungles and lowlying savannahs. To the north and west, the country is bordered by the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, with Panama splitting those two bodies of water. Venezuela and Brazil are the neighbors to the east, while Peru and Ecuador make up the southern border. It has an area of 440,831 sq mi (1,141,748 km²), which makes it about twice the size of the state of Texas. The official capital of Colombia, Bogota is also the largest city. At an altitude of about 8,660 ft (2,640 meters), Bogota is situated high in the Andes and has a population of roughly eleven million people. Skyscrapers, shopping malls, slums, traffic jams, pollution and beggars are all a part of the city.

Colombia is not considered the poorest country in South America, but over 40% of the population live below the poverty line. With a large population, Colombia has one official language (Spanish) and over 180 indigenous languages and dialects. Businessmen and professionals often speak some English. All students study English in school, but the standard is often very poor.



Colombia still strongly reflects its history as once being a colony of Spain and is the most populous nation of Spanish-speaking peoples in South America. The majority of the population is made up of mestizos (a mixture of European and indigenous descent) but a small Spanish elite has traditionally dominated the political and economic life of the country and held most of the wealth. The economy is largely based on agriculture with coffee and fruit being their main exports. Other imports are petroleum, coal briquettes and gold. However, industry and service jobs are gaining importance in today’s market. Coca leaves, the source of the drug cocaine, also became an illegal export and a problem especially in the late 20th century.

Strategically Impacting Communities

By partnering with a local church, we seek to open doors to the gospel that have been previously closed. Many doors that a Colombian cannot open, like schools, shopping centers and other venues, can be opened by a group of happy, excited North Americans.

When God speaks to us about working in a community, we try to take a long-term approach. Our global workers, Darren and Patty McCrea, have been working with 2 local churches in Chiquinquirá and have made a significant impact on that community. Our presence opens doors that the local church can later enter through follow up and the building of relationships. We come alongside these churches learning to work together in our outreaches. Some of the outreaches have been at the churches, a local government-run boys’ home and a nearby jail.

Chiquinquirá is a town in the Department of Boyacá. Population - 65,000. Located some 115 km north of Bogotá, Chiquinquirá is 2,556 m (8,386 ft) above sea level and has a yearly average temperature of 14°C (58°F).

Chiquinquirá is considered the religious capital of Colombia. It is home to the Basilica of Chiquinquirá, which houses the image of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá, the patron saint of Colombia. Chiquinquirá is a major point of religious pilgrimage. Despite the immense stronghold of religious idolatry in the town, the Evangelical church is making inroads into the community with several small to medium size congregations.



Cultural differences with foreigners will be more easily adjusted to **if the foreigner will accept and adapt to Colombia rather than expect Colombia to adapt to you.** Be prepared to eat food that is questionable to you and be flexible rather than set in your ways.

Schedules can and probably WILL change from hour to hour, and sometimes from minute to minute. You will have to learn to adjust and roll with it.

Team Focus



Our principal focus is continuing to work on Casa del Padre (Father's House) church/gymnasium and, possibly, to continue work on the Christ is King High School. Most of the work will be done using mortar, cement and bricks. While skilled workers are most welcome, you can learn to lay brick, tie rebar, or push a wheelbarrow. There are tasks for every skill level, age and gender. The team lead from another team we've joined calls it "slinging mud for Jesus").



We will also spend some time with the boys from 'The Refuge Boys' Home'. There may be some odd jobs that need doing there too but our main focus will be to spend time playing soccer, basketball, card games like spoons, building LEGO, crafts and more through Spanish and English. We can use your talents. The boys love it!

Church Ministry

Visiting and worshipping with local believers is the highlight of many short-term mission trips. We hope to have team members that will be able to interact with team leaders and local church members, sharing their testimonies and helping wherever we can.



What you have received from God, we wish to share with a community who does not have access to the same opportunities as you would find in metropolitan centers. Ideas for a ministry you might be interested in training others in, men's, women's, or children's ministries, couples' nights, leading a Bible study or doing daily devotions. Let us know!

Religion

Colombia is a very Catholic country, although the Catholic Church is little more than a religious social club. Evangelicals generally don't use religious symbols here (cross necklaces, for example) because they are strongly associated with the Catholic Church.

Ask almost anyone in Colombia and they will tell you that it is a "Christian" nation. The reality of the situation is that very few of these people have more than a traditional concept of what Christianity is. When the Spaniards first brought Catholicism to Colombia in the 1500's, they focused merely on the afterlife of the people. Whether they went to heaven or hell was merely a matter of "joining" the church. There was no heart change, and religion had absolutely no implications for daily life. A little bit of church tradition was added to the animism, superstition, and ancestor worship that was already in place, and today we have a textbook version of syncretism.

It is okay to share your faith with Colombians, but don't be aggressive or pushy. They are turned off by aggressive westerners and all you will accomplish is to convince them that they were right all along about those offensive Evangelicals. Be aware that Colombians often listen intently and agree with you just because they are polite!



On the other hand, discussion is often interesting and informative, and your witness of God's changing your life, healing you, or His faithfulness is often welcome. Listen more than you talk. If God is working in your conversation, they will often ask you the right questions. Just be aware that they probably are not perceiving the things you say in the same way you do. For example, God is not personal, but remote and far too great to approach. Heaven is something you earn by doing more good than bad. Sacrifice is another way of earning merit. Mary has just as important place in redemption as Jesus. The problem is that the foundation of truth in your Colombian friend is vastly different than it is in a typical westerner. He perceives things differently than you do.

Western methods are best left at home. **Come here to learn.** You will be surprised at how much opportunity you will have to build a bit of truth into someone's life. Just let God be God. Go slow and be sensitive to what your new friend is thinking and to what God is doing.

Attitude vs Altitude

1. Foreign tourists are not uncommon in Colombia, but they have the reputation of being loud and obnoxious, especially in large groups. This can be a turn-off to many locals, as North Americans are commonly viewed as pushy know-it-alls. We need to tailor our behavior to the mood of the location.
2. To call someone, it is impolite to crook your upturned index finger. It is appropriate to wave with your whole hand palm down or make a loud kissing sound to draw their attention. Yelling someone's name from a distance to get their attention is not polite.
3. In most areas, don't point with your finger. Point with your chin or lips.
4. Ask before you take a photo of that person. That person may get angry if they are not properly dressed for it. Get a telephoto if you just must have candid shots. Some Colombians think photo-ops mean \$\$\$ for them. Don't ever take a photo of a child unless you ask the parent first due to child trafficking fears. Watch out when you hand your camera to someone else. At best he may shoot up a few unnecessary shots of you and his friends, but at worst, you may discover just how fast that little guy with those short legs can run in the Andes Mountains.
5. Don't jump into conversations, Westerners are way too pushy. Sit down, steal a glance at a prospective interesting person now and then, and finally he or she will move over and try their English on you. Take your time and you will really enjoy these friendly people.
6. Men don't touch the women, and vice-versa.
7. In general, men minister to men, women minister to women. For pastors/ministers, it's not seen as a big deal, but if you feel a leading to do anything other than this, bring that to a Team Leader.

8. Remember always that you are a guest in this country, and you have no rights. If you have an accident, it is your fault, no matter what. If you make someone angry, it is your fault, no matter what. You will have to pay, and because you are rich, you will pay plenty.
9. When dealing with government officials or policemen, you absolutely must never show anger, impatience, or discourtesy. They may, but you may not, ever! It is not fair, that is just the way it is.
10. Time is not a finite construct in Colombia. It is a moving target. Expect most things to start later than advertised and expect to wait.
11. Most encounters are characterized by handshakes or kisses. Women greet men and women with a kiss on the cheek. It is important to greet and say goodbye to people.
12. Topics that are culturally taboo to discuss in most settings are things like politics, homosexuality, cocaine, slavery, etc. If you wonder whether a topic is ok, ask your host or leader.
13. If a national gives you a gift, it is tremendously rude to decline it. It is in your best interest to accept it graciously and if it is food, don't eat it unless told by our hosts.



Housing

The team will be staying in Bogotá in a combination of ministry housing (one of the houses the McCrea's rent for teams), bunk bed style for the first and last day of our outreach.

In Chiquinquirá, team members will be in host homes, (at least two people per home of the same sex or one married couple). If there are special circumstances, like families, we can put team members in a local hotel. However, we have found that the friendships created in host homes are priceless and the experience of better knowing the culture is impacting.



Toilets and Baths



In general, you won't find many surprises in the bathrooms of Colombia. You will likely notice that the cold-water taps are on the left and hot-water taps are on the right. Although both taps may only run cold water.

Under no circumstances should toilet paper be disposed of in the toilet. Their plumbing is not built to handle that. There will be a small trash can close by to accommodate you.

Climate

Colombia is situated on the equator. Therefore, we only have 2 seasons: rainy and dry. Due to the changes in world weather patterns, we cannot say with any consistency when the dry and rainy seasons start and finish. Traditionally, March to June and September through December are rainy seasons. The temperature depends on the altitude. In Chiquinquirá you can expect temperatures to be a high of 20°-22°C degrees and it can get down to 10°C at night.

Please keep in mind that you are at a high altitude and close to the equator. The sun is intense. **Sunscreen, at least SPF 50, is very necessary even on cloudy days.** Hats with neck protection and sunglasses are recommended.

Water

Do NOT drink water from the tap. Don't brush your teeth with it. The quickest way to spend your entire trip in a seated position with a roll in your hand is to forget this rule. You should even keep your mouth closed when showering. In other words, the water here is not safe to drink in its natural form.

Do drink lots of water! You must drink as much "bottled" water as you can stand. Make sure the bottle is sealed. Drinking water is the number weapon against altitude sickness and the headaches that go along with it. Water bottles are recommended. A bottle of water will be provided upon arrival. You may bring your own water bottle from home. Refill your bottle and refresh yourself often.

Clothing

Bring clothing that you can wear as layers. The weather can change quickly throughout the day. Be prepared to wear a sweatshirt/sweater and have a rain jacket or umbrella handy. It is acceptable for woman to wear slacks or jeans, but please DO NOT bring low cut shirts or use spandex or "Yoga" pants. For most daily activities loose-fitting jeans are more practical. Bring casual dress clothes for church. A MODEST swimsuit may be useful should we have some down time for swimming.

We discourage clothing or heavy make-up that draws inordinate attention to you. Please be discreet and modest at all times. As foreigners in Colombia (you are the newest flavour of Ice Cream in town), you will receive more attention from the opposite sex than normal. **So, please dress in a way that attracts attention to Jesus** and not your body.

Sometimes, Colombian and Christian culture will not easily accept men with long hair or men wearing industrial earrings or body studs. This varies from place to place and church to church.

Please bring gloves, safety glasses and any other protective gear that you think that you might need.

You, God, and the Internet

This is outreach and God has you right where HE wants you. He wants to move in you and through you. However, in our "constantly plugged in society," Smart phones and the Internet can get in the way. They can even cause problems for the team should someone post something that is misinterpreted by those back home.

As a ministry, we highly recommend an "internet fast" for outreach teams where team members are only allowed to connect once a week for an hour or two.

If you are interested in making calls while in Colombia, check your cell carrier to see what your options are. Otherwise, you may be paying a lot more than you want to. Internet in Colombia is sketchy. Whether we will have constant access to it is unknown so be prepared not to have it.

Being disconnected from the larger world (and its problems) allows team members to really connect to the people around them. It also allows God to work in and speak to each team member – something that can be easily missed if we do not allow the time for reflection.

Money

For the best exchange rates and ease of use, cash withdrawals from ATMs via credit or debit cards is recommended. **HOWEVER, BE SURE to call your bank or card provider** before leaving home and inform them that you will be in Colombia. Give them your arrival and departure dates. If bringing cash, US dollars are easily exchanged, and it is always good to have some US cash as a backup should your bank card not function.

Canadian dollars can be exchanged here, but only in major cities.

When travelling in groups it is good to pool all your cash together before arrival so that we can exchange all the team funds in one transaction upon arrival. This makes our exit from the airport easier and does not show so much flashing of money in front of potential thieves.

Food

The typical diet of a Colombian begins with a breakfast of coffee or hot chocolate with bread or an arepa (a thick corn pancake) and maybe fruit or yogurt. Lunch and dinner could consist of soup, rice, potatoes, pasta, fried plantain, empanadas, and beef, pork or chicken. Vegetables are usually diced and mixed in with rice or pasta. The food is generally not spicy. It is NOT similar to Mexican food.



Almost all types of food are available at a price. Local fruits are plentiful and relatively cheap; other fruits such as pears, apples and most grapes are imported and cost a bit more. Fresh bread and meat are easy to find. Staples are all available at western prices or slightly lower. Canned or frozen food is very expensive along with breakfast cereal.

It is best not to eat food cooked on the streets for health reasons. Stick to the restaurants suggested by our global workers – they will be safe. Packaged food (factory sealed) is almost always safe.

Healthcare



Colombia has good doctors and specialists. There are several modern hospitals in Bogotá and care is generally good. Costs are about 25%-50% lower than in the Western world. We will have complete travel medical insurance when we come to Colombia. Our ministry will not cover medical expenses.

Altitude and pollution can cause illness or can aggravate current illnesses, e.g., high blood pressure, heart conditions. If you have any history of these or other health problems, please remember to consult your doctor before coming.

Vaccinations - NO vaccinations are necessary although the Hepatitis A/B Vaccine can be taken as a precaution. In regard to Covid 19, the restrictions have been lifted in Colombia but check 48-72 hours prior to leaving to confirm what is needed.

Medications - Most medications can be purchased in Colombia; however, it is prudent to bring sufficient from home for any regular medical needs. Having a prescription from your doctor in case of medication loss is a good precaution.

Security

You will be orientated as to dos and don'ts, safety precautions, etc. when you arrive.

In general, the biggest concern is common crime. Moving as a group and listening to instructions by our staff will keep you safe. However, it is a good idea not to bring valuables with you that you are not willing to risk losing.

Electricity

Electricity is 110-120 volts, 60 cycles, standard **two prong** plugs. Adapters may be needed for three prong devices.

Teams often ask us what extras they can bring to bless the ministry:

Toys, especially things like Lego, Megablocks, Meccano or other good quality learning toys are great for the kids that we work with and many times can be donated from the overflow of North American kids. A box of Lego here costs twice what it does in North America, and in terms of the local economy, 10 times the amount!

Volleyballs, soccer balls, basketballs & frisbees are great.

Puzzles, art supplies – markers, dry erase markers – pencil crayons, pencils, glue sticks, scissors, pencil sharpeners, stickers, craft supplies, colored paper, balloons, duct tape, wooden clothes pins, etc – great for our kid's programs.

Clothes, shoes, new or used (in excellent condition) for children of all ages (ie adults) are a huge blessing. Sizes small to large are best as Colombians are not usually as big as some Canadians.

**With the influx of Venezuelan Refugees that Colombia is experiencing, underwear is a big need for both sexes. Women's bras (can be gently used) are also a big need.

Sheet sets for single or beds (new or used). These are donated to children's homes and other ministries. Double or queen sheet sets are also needed.

Used (or new!) **Digital Cameras, Laptops, Cell (Smart) Phones**, Memory Cards or USB drives that are less than four years old, but no longer needed, can be brought and allow us to equip Colombian missionaries with needed tools.

Things To Look Forward To

Open-air markets. They are everywhere; the big ones have everything. Bargaining, while a part of the culture in Colombia, doesn't always get you very far. Don't be surprised if you can't get them to lower the price of the item by more than a few pesos unless it is a more expensive item. Food prices are what they are - don't expect to barter in a restaurant.

Beggars. Being Canadian, you will be approached by beggars. We discourage giving money, because of the long-range problems it causes.

Sewers. You will find that the cities, in particular, are not very clean. Don't be surprised if there is a lot of air pollution, dirt and dust. Often there is trash all around. You will get used to it and be amazed that the people could be so healthy in such an environment.

Dangers. There are many for the soft, overprotected westerner. Open holes in the street and sidewalks are rarely marked; machinery is not built to protect the operator. Every step in this world must be taken carefully. There is no EPA or OSHA to protect you here and no liability laws to force anyone else to look out for you. There are more people and more pitfalls than you can imagine, yet almost everyone survives, because they use common sense. You will have to learn how to use yours! Even three-year-olds in Colombia know how.

Scenery. There is no end to it. It is truly spectacular in places. Bring the best camera you can, and stay as long as possible, as the variety is endless and it's a long way to go to miss it all. The mountains offer scenery and cultures as various as they are unique. The cities offer the usual fare of things to eat and things to buy. That's just the beginning! You will enjoy Colombia!

Last Words...

If you open your heart and mind to the possibility that "different" is not synonymous with "bad", you will enjoy Colombia very much. On the other hand, if you come demanding that people and things conform to your ideas of right and wrong and proper and polite, then you may not like it here as much. Come to learn... Colombia is a land of infinite variety. There is so much to discover and enjoy while you are here. A common mistake people make is to believe the generalizations. The only way to know what a place and a people are really like is to relax, lay down your prejudices, and get out of yourself and your ways for a while. Colombia is your opportunity to do that, at least for a short time...

We pray that this trip will provide you with a life-changing experience. Few people ever get to discover some of the wonderful differences that make this world so interesting. You will go home changed forever if you come expecting God to open your heart and eyes. And may He do just that!

Our Hosts and PAOC Global Workers, Darren & Patty McCrea (sons, James & Darien)



Iglesia Casa del Padre y Escuela Cristo es Rey – Hope City Church Project 2025