

# ATLANTA HOMES<sup>™</sup> & LIFESTYLE

*pride  
of place*

THE NEW  
ELEGANCE  
PRETTY,  
POWERFUL,  
GRAND &  
GORGEOUS

SEPTEMBER 2017  
ATLANTAHOMESMAG.COM

\$5.95US





CASA SAN AGUSTIN

# THE JEWEL OF COLOMBIA

*“A Tale of Two Cities” (or three or four) could have  
been written about Cartagena, Colombia*

WRITTEN BY *Gina Christman*



CASA SAN AGUSTIN

CARTEGENA DE INDIAS, COLOMBIA, MIGHT be one of the best-kept travel secrets of all time. No longer a no-go zone, Cartagena is gorgeously lush yet charming with a bohemian authenticity—and it’s one of friendliest places on the planet.

To fully appreciate Cartagena today is to understand the new, renewed spirit of its people. After many left in the early 2000s, discouraged by the economy and the violence, the migration back to Colombia of young entrepreneurs who assumed they’d have to make their fortunes elsewhere explains the country’s socio-economic coming of age.

As one of the oldest cities in the New World, Cartagena is astoundingly well-preserved. Known for its imposing wall built by the Spaniards, “El Centro” is a historical Old City center, where century-worn cobblestone streets beg to be wandered without hurry. In this walled city, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984, colonial treasures mix with modern storefronts, hip cafes, art galleries and bougainvillea-draped courtyards that offer a glimpse of a modern-but-laid-back Latino lifestyle.

Inside the walls, boutique hotels offer a personal and unique experience beyond anything that can be found in popular ‘luxury’ hotel chains. One such place, Casa San Agustín, is at the very top of the luxury heap.



As one of the Leading Hotels of the World, Casa San Agustin feels like home, perhaps because it once was—three historic houses, to be exact, that were elegantly joined and restored to create one jaw-droppingly beautiful hotel. Last year, the hotel won TripAdvisor’s Traveler’s Choice Award as the #1 Hotel in Colombia.

With 17th century Spanish colonial architecture as a canvas, South Carolina-based designer Kelley McRorie chose refined, bespoke furnishings and layered natural textures to adorn each of 20 guest rooms and ten suites, as well as the library and lounges. The result is tastefully chic. Details throughout the hotel evoke the rich history of the era, with (original) massive carved wooden beams defining the high ceilings, colorful, handmade tile and hand wrought-iron details in hallways and lounges.

Alma, the hotel’s restaurant (also designed by McRorie), is one the most celebrated restaurants in Cartagena and is perhaps the most beautiful—cozy and romantic, but stately. The food is a non-fussy style of Executive Chef Heberto Eljach’s take on Caribbean/Colombian cuisine with a few American touches thrown in, like delicious Ceviches and Tartares alongside Braised Oxtail with Lobster Risotto, or Aged Angus Beef® New York Strip with Blue Cheese Butter and Fried Swiss Chard. Alma’s lavish breakfast buffet, showing off a colorful array of local fruits, cheeses and pastries, accompanies made-to-order egg dishes and can be enjoyed in the restaurant, on the charming open-air patio, or by the pool.

The Casa San Agustin pool is a story in itself. Named World’s Coolest Plunge Pool by Travel+Leisure in 2015, it is breathtaking. It connects the three houses as it doglegs around an ancient aqueduct tucked into the hotel’s epicenter.



*top, left* The pool at Casa San Agustin is built around an ancient aqueduct at the center of the hotel. *below, left* The understated-but-elegant façade of the hotel. *above* The rooftop solarium, where guests can relax in the sun while trying out delicious cocktails from the rooftop bar. *below* Spacious Junior Suite with living area. All rooms and suites incorporate Spanish Colonial details that evoke the XVII century and feature sumptuous Frette linens, as well as exclusive Ortigia Italian amenities.



CASA SAN AGUSTIN

The adjacent pool bar is a convivial place to try a signature cocktail, complete with exotic fruits, herbs and spices, garnished with a spiraled cucumber or citrus peel. There is also a bar on the rooftop solarium—a private lounging area where the only sounds are chirping birds or an occasional splash in the pool below.

A recent renovation of the hotel spa, Aurum (Latin for gold), reveals the vision of Colombian architect Miguel Soto. The space is lavished with gold tiles and patterns that symbolize “radiance, health and new beginnings” bestowed to Earth by the Sun. Treatments feature local, natural ingredients such as Colombian coffee, tobacco, volcanic mud, sea fennel, sarsaparilla and sea salt. The spa’s oils and lotions are botanical and organic.

Cartegena is a wonderland—a city created for exploration. While in the Walled City, visit El Barón Cafe for an artisan cocktail or Cafe San Alberto to sip what is reputed to be the best coffee in Colombia. Venture out of the Walled City for a walk through the tunnels and to the top of Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas (in military use from 1536-1767), where the Spaniards sought to fend off the British. Panoramic views of the city are best seen from the top of the fort.

But perhaps the most authentic way to experience the local character of Cartegena is to visit the former working-class neighborhood of Getsemani. Candy-bright, noisy, festive and the “it” place for funky art, drinking dens, tapas bars and salsa dancing, Getsemani is a party all hours of the day and night. Take in the sights slowly, or risk being overwhelmed. It is impossible not to stop to study the hand-painted murals or to peek over the shoulder of residents playing board games on the sidewalk.

The welcoming and uber-friendly people of Cartegena will see to it that you have a pleasant time and will want to revisit soon. Bask in the joy, and don’t be surprised if you’re asked to join in a game of street checkers. [hotelcasasanagustin.com](http://hotelcasasanagustin.com)



CASA SAN AGUSTIN

*top* The luxurious lobby of Aurum Spa at Casa San Agustín. The Spa includes four treatment rooms, as well as a hammam, soaking tub, relaxation room, and a manicure and pedicure room. Traditional Colombian practices are customized to awaken guests’ inner spirit and energy. *below* A Premium Suite shows off a private patio with Jacuzzi and lovely view of the interior gardens.



CASA SAN AGUSTIN



EL BARÓN CAFE



*top* A magical sunset forms the backdrop for sipping a Gin Basil Smash on the seductive patio of El Barón Café in the Old City. *below, left* Step into the café outpost of the Hacienda San Alberto, the most prized coffee in Colombia, where you can become a specialist in coffee roasting and brewing methods. *below, right* As Cartagena's old Walled City fills up with emerald shops and chic boutiques, the once seedy neighborhood of Getsemaní has come into its own as a stage for street artists and performers. Here, whimsical art is everywhere, compelling visitors to stop, touch and enjoy.

