

What To Do and See in Cartagena, Colombia



DISPATCH by Ally Bether and Vanessa Granda

The 500-year-old walled city of Cartagena, Colombia, is chock full of history, but it also happens to have a burgeoning food scene, wild nightlife, great shops, and beautiful beaches nearby. In other words, it ticks a lot of destination boxes. And its size is perfect for both a long weekend (imagineable if you're visiting from the States), or a more relaxing weeklong trip. Here, what to eat, see, and do in this coastal city.

Eat

Restaurante Interno

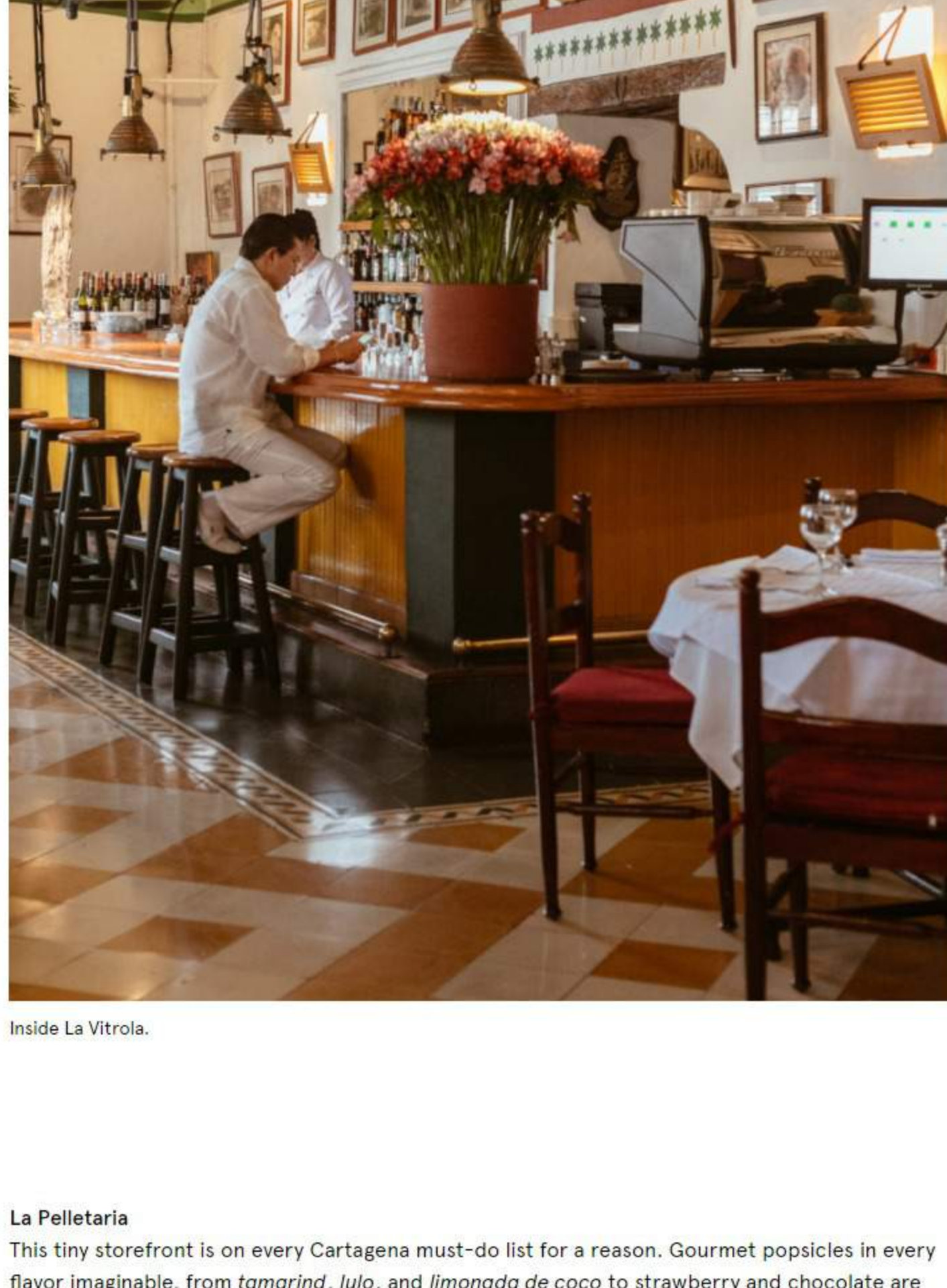
Don't be confused if you find yourself wandering around the San Diego Women's Prison looking for the entrance to this restaurant. It's actually inside the jail, and that means that the doorway—though pink and welcoming—is kept locked. Scrolled on the wall are the words "segunda oportunidades" which means "second chances," which is at the crux of Restaurante Interno's social impact agenda. As a "space of reconciliation between the prison population and the civilian population," the women work as cooks and servers, or on customer service, finance, and business development. For \$80,000 peso, a three course prix-fixe meal offers options such as fried yuca parcel stuffed with beef, sour cream, and mint salsa; prawns in coconut sauce; rice soup with seafood; grilled eggplants with pesto; and Koia ice cream.

La Vitrola

This restaurant is a staple for a reason—from the decor to the menu to the clientele, it's Colombian through and through. Palm fronds, wooden beams, and a tiled floor, all with rich yellow, red, and green accents provide the perfect backdrop for spiced fish, jerk chicken, and mojitos. Go at lunch to beat the crowds, and at dinner time for a six-piece band and dancing.

La Esquina Del Pan de Bono

The smell of baking bread permeates the streets of Cartagena, and you'd be wise to follow your nose. The line for pan de bono (Colombian cheese bread) at this shop starts as soon as it opens at 6 a.m. Go midday for less of a wait, and grab your breadiest to go as you wander the colorful streets.



Inside La Vitrola.

La Pelletaria

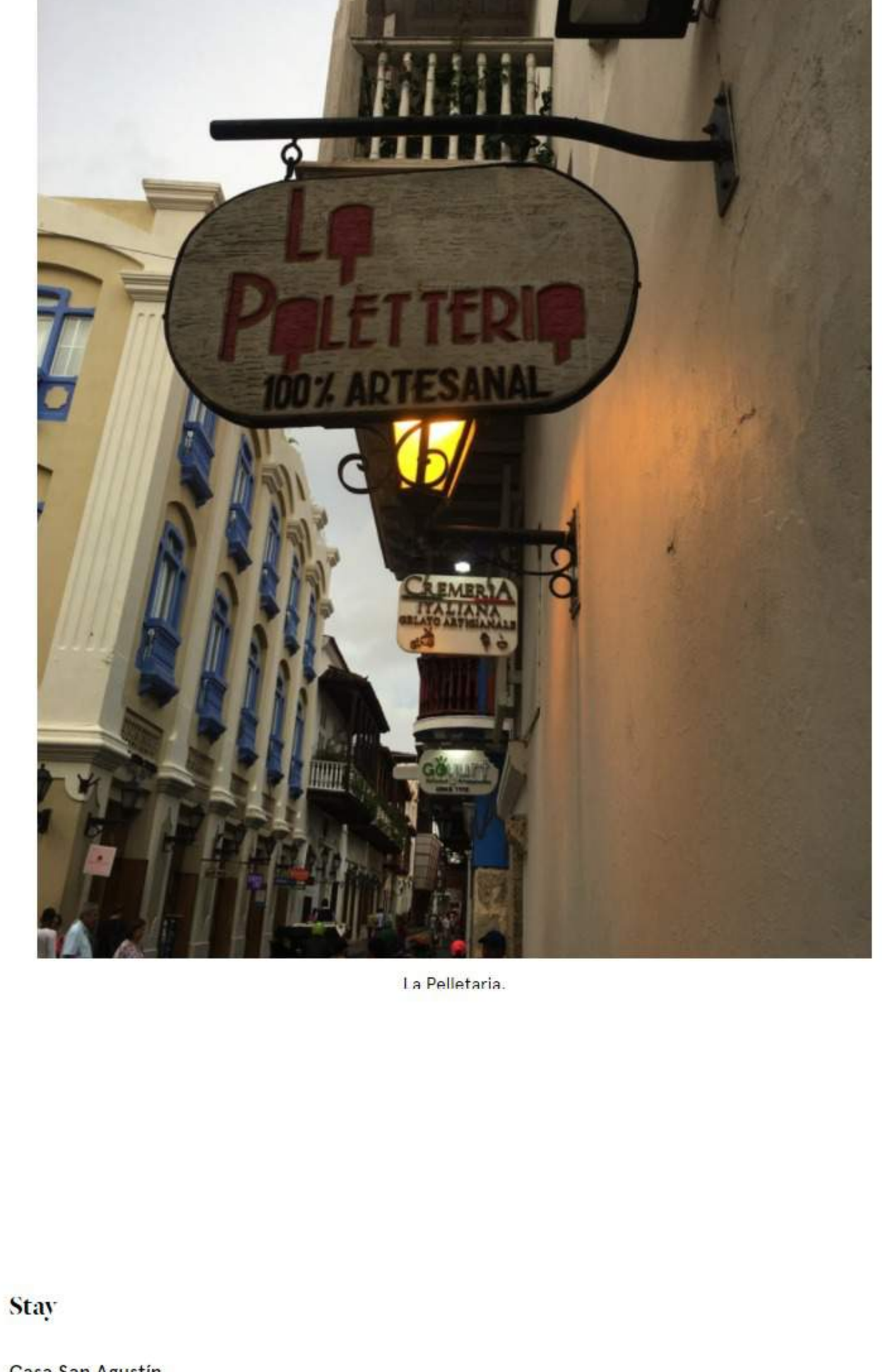
This tiny storefront is on every Cartagena must-do list for a reason. Gourmet popscies in every flavor imaginable, from *tomorind*, *lulo*, and *limonado* de coco to strawberry and chocolate are made with all-natural ingredients and are especially nice on humid days.

Cafe Mia

Colombia is the fourth largest coffee producer in the world, which means that it's not hard to find a good cup of joe. Skip Juan Valdez Cafe (the Colombian Starbucks) for this sit-down establishment. It's also a chain, but one with old school decor, a full menu of chocolate treats (the country is also a major cacao producer), and pretty pink to-go boxes.

Alquímico

This craft cocktail bar, meant to look like a chemist's lab, wouldn't be out of place in Brooklyn, New York. Servers wear lab coats, and ingredients line the floor-to-ceiling shelves along the wall. Fortunately, the drinks stand up to the theme: *La Amargura* is made with *lulo* and pineapple-infused rum, and the *Español* Coffee has mezcal, coffee and cacao-infused rum, and bitters. It's a good alternative for a night out that doesn't involve salsa dancing.



La Pelletaria.

Stay

Casa San Agustín

Walk through the wrought-iron gate and tiled lobby of Casa San Agustín, and you'll find yourself gazing at the remnants of a historic aqueduct, with a cutout for the swimming pool so that guests can backstroke right under it. The hotel is comprised of three 19th-century buildings that were combined into a family estate in the early 1900s, then converted into the hotel in 2012. So it makes sense that interior designer Kelley McRorie decorated the space to feel like a residence from a bygone era, complete with original frescoes in the library, wood-beamed ceilings, and colorful tile accents. There are only 20 rooms and 10 suites at Casa San Agustín, each with what could be the world's most comfortable beds.



Casa San Agustín.

Do

Isla Barú

This beachy island gets a bad rap for the crowds and the hawkers, but the white sand and crystal clear waters shouldn't be missed. Go on a weekday if you can, and even better if you arrive before noon. Take a boat far down the beach, post up at a restaurant with lounge chairs, and get ready to relax the day away.

Dance

Salsa dancing dominates the social scene in Cartagena. Start your night off at the eclectic Quiebra Canto, on the outskirts of the lively Getsemani neighborhood. From there, make your way to Bazarro Social Club, where live music is on consistent rotation. Cafe Havana is old school in the very best way, with a large, dark wooden bar, a Cuban band playing classics, new and experienced dancers pairing up, and a flower seller for those looking for more than a friendly salsa dance. The very bold should stop by Quiebra Canto again at the end of the night, when the dancing really gets going on the second floor.

Castillo San Felipe de Barajas

A castle on the Hill of San Lázaro, this fortress was built to protect Cartagena from attacks by land or sea. Construction began in 1536, and involved a complicated tunnel system—crucial for easy communication and evacuation (and one of the reasons why the fort was never taken by enemies). Today, some of the tunnels can be toured along with the rest of the impressive monument.



Isla Barú.

Shop

Casa Chiquil

Chiquil Echavarría opened Casa Chiquil in 2011 selling home goods and clothing she found on her travels. It quickly grew into a massive emporium of items she curates and produces herself. Her earrings—which range from orchids dipped in gold, to colorful woven hoops—in particular have caught on with the international fashion set.

Cano

The family who started this jewelry brand discovered pre-Columbian gold treasures near their home (that the gold collection in Bogotá belongs to them), and launched Cano to make reproductions of their jewelry. Every piece is inspired by Colombian tribes and the country's rich history.

Artesanías de Colombia

This government-owned operation supports artisans all over the country, and connects them with Colombian fashion designers via their *Moda Viva* program. Pick up traditional chamba pottery, mochilas, and Werregue baskets.

St. Dom

Cartagena's answer to Colette, St. Dom features high end Colombian designers with fashion-forward creations, from Palma Canaria slides to Piu pajamas, Johanna Ortiz clothing, and Paula Mendoza jewelry.



St. Dom.

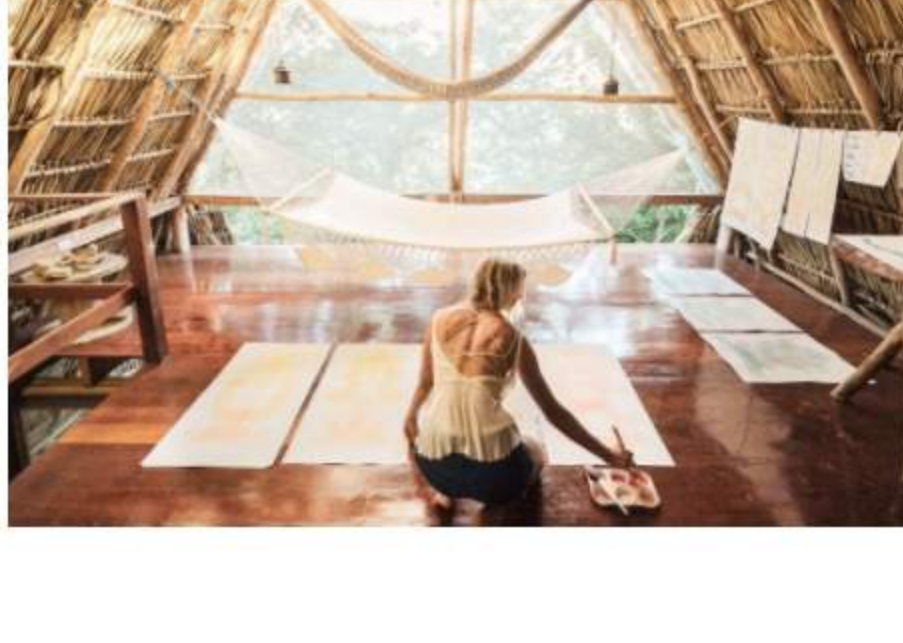
Shopping in Cartagena With Cloelo Echavarría



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