

Press Coverage 2020: Casa San Agustín

Date: 15 January 2020

Publication: Belfast Telegraph

Circulation: 35,931

PRV (\$): 2,395

Belfast Telegraph

Be seduced by all the delights of Cartagena

This colourful Colombian city has something for everyone. By **Laura Millar**

As befits the former home of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, between January 30 and February 2 literary heavyweights from Margaret Atwood to Nicole Krauss will assemble in this charming city for its 15th annual Hay Festival (hayfestival.com/cartagena).

But even if you're not coming for this, Cartagena, founded by the Spanish in 1533 and named after their port city, has plenty to attract the growing number of visitors to Colombia. With a clutch of award-winning restaurants, Instagrammable murals and buildings and compelling historical sites, its relentless energy won't fail to seduce.

Explore

El Centro is the main historical district, a mass of maze-like streets leading to secluded squares overshadowed by domed churches. All around is noise, scent and colour; food sellers peddle patacones (slices of fried plantain) or thick cornmeal arepas, while palenqueras – traditional Afro-Caribbean fruit sellers, in vivid, primary-coloured, frilled dresses – hustle for selfies with tourists and salsa music spills out of almost every bar and cafe.

Eat

If you want a flavour of Cartagena's food scene visit Bazarito market, 20 minutes' drive from the centre. Not for the faint-hearted but frequented by the city's best

chefs, it's where you'll find the freshest produce, from coconuts to sea bass and exotic fruit like the stewed-pear-like nispero and tart, tasty zapote.

Thanks to influences from Spain, Africa and the Middle East, the restaurant scene is just as varied. Ceviche is a star dish – fresh, diced fish or seafood flavoured with red onion, coriander and, often, coconut milk.

Stay

Centro has a growing number of boutique hotels. One of the most authentic is the colonial **Casa San Agustín** (hotelcasasanagustin.com), elegantly cobbled together from three 17th-century former merchants' townhouses, with an azure pool glittering below a 300-year-old aqueduct. The city's oldest luxury hotel is the Sofitel Legend Santa Clara, in a converted monastery (sofitel.accor.com).

© EVENING STANDARD



Scenic spot: the city of Cartagena