

# TRAVEL

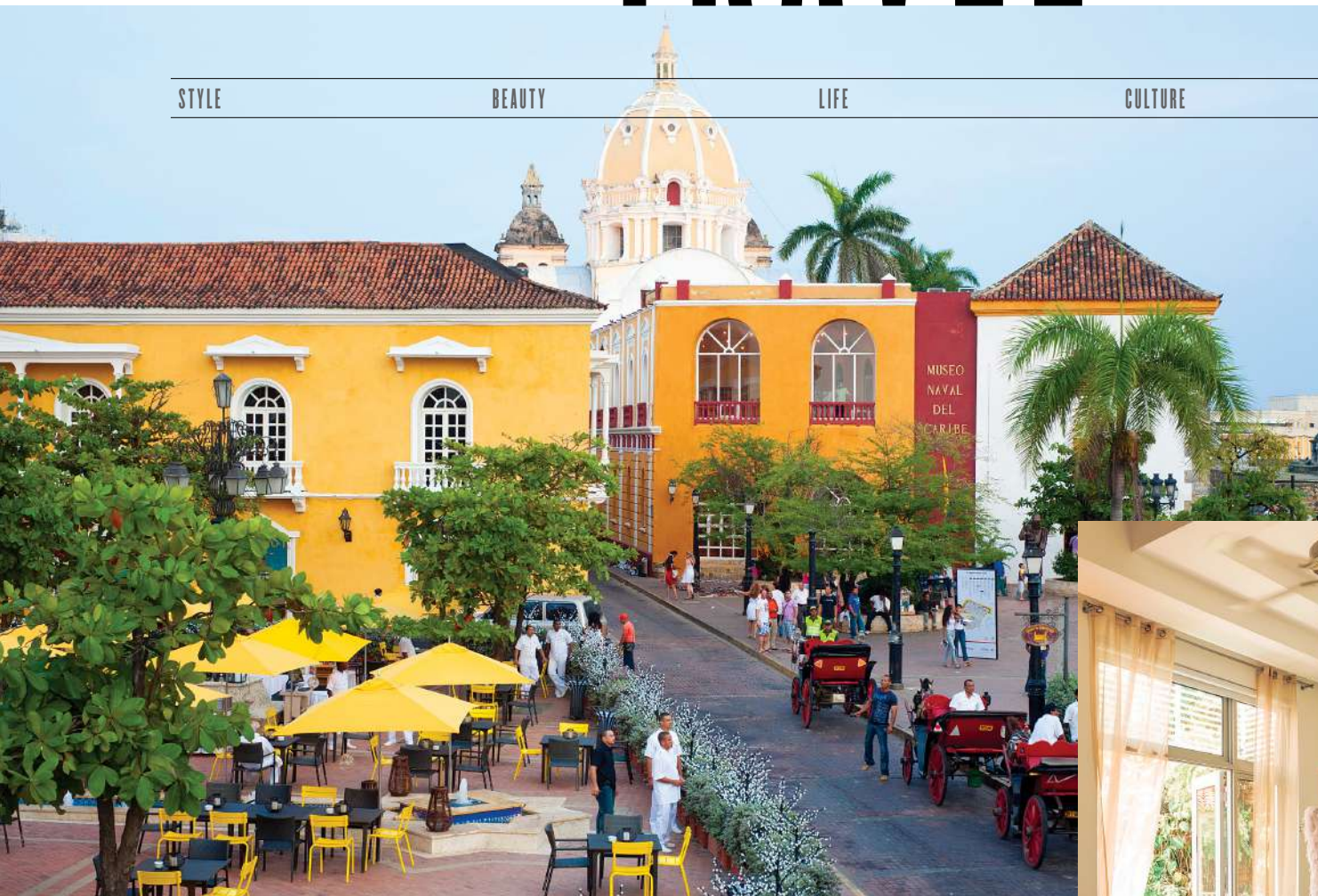
STYLE

BEAUTY

LIFE

CULTURE

TRAVEL



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Cartagena, Colombia; a guest room at Tcherassi Hotel and Spa; the hotel's rooftop pool.



## Cartagena Cool

This historic city is a perfect summer getaway, with its upscale hotels, chic shops, and luxe beach clubs.

BY JONATHAN SOROFF



In the past decade, Cartagena, Colombia, has emerged as a white-hot destination for one-percenters—an ancient and absurdly picturesque colonial city perched on the edge of the Caribbean, an easy five-hour flight from New York. Whether you're wandering the labyrinthine streets of the cotton candy-hued Centro Histórico, people-watching at a café in the vibrant hipster haven of Getsemani, or catching an eagle's-eye view from one of the magnificent high-rises that line the city's beachfront, there's a delicious Latin sizzle and a sense of magic captured so famously in the novels of native son Gabriel García Márquez. While the year-end holidays and New Year's are high season, the temperature varies little throughout the year, so July and August are an ideal time to visit, with little to no rain and somewhat reduced prices.

### WHERE TO STAY

#### The Movich Hotel Cartagena de Indias

A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, this blend of colonial architecture and boldly contemporary interiors perfectly captures the yin and yang of Cartagena. Ideally located inside the walled city, some of its rooms boast balconies with views of the ocean or the surrounding architectural treasures, but it's from the rooftop infinity pool that the view really wows, looking out over the Old City and toward the more modern neighborhoods of Bocagrande and El Laguito. *From \$309 per night; movichhotels.com*

#### Tcherassi Hotel and Spa

The brainchild of Colombian fashion designer Silvia Tcherassi, her namesake hotel offers only seven rooms, guaranteeing intimacy and recreating the ambience of staying in someone's superchic home. The courtyard pool is dominated by a vertical garden with more than 3,000 plants, and the Italian restaurant is one of the city's finest. *From \$324 per night; tcherassihotels.com*

#### Casa San Agustín

Housed within three conjoined 17th-century mansions, this stylish boutique hotel

has a swimming pool as its lobby's focal point and its own private beach on one of the nearby Rosario Islands (which can be booked for the day at an additional cost). The award-winning Restaurante Alma serves regional cuisine, and the location is convenient to sites like the Cartagena Cathedral, the Gold Museum, and the Palace of the Inquisition. *From \$412 per night; hotelcasananagustin.com*

### WHAT TO DO

As one of the oldest colonial cities in Latin America, Cartagena has no shortage of sights to see. The dominant feature of the Old City is the Castillo de Don Felipe de Barajas, whose fortifications are among the oldest in the Americas. The Palace of the Inquisition shines a delightfully macabre light on one of the darker chapters in Spanish colonial history, while the Gold Museum highlights the spectacular metalwork of the indigenous Zenú people. The newly chic neighborhood of Getsemani features endless boutiques and cafés, and an afternoon of shopping for local crafts at Las Bóvedas is a haggler's dream. But ultimately, the charm of Cartagena lies in simply walking the streets and happening upon a sculpture by Fernando Botero or an arresting piece of graffiti, turning a corner



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Shopping in Cartagena de Indias; Centro Histórico; the bar at the San Pedro Café/Mirador Restaurante.

and stumbling upon a riot of bougainvillea, or strolling along the bustling beachfront. An absolute must is a trip out to the Rosario Islands, which feature beach clubs where you can soak up the sun. Our favorite: The Blue Apple Beach Club, on Tierra Bomba, a 30-minute boat ride from the city. The beach is sublime, and the club's paella rivals any in Spain.

### WHERE TO SHOP

Colombians take their fashion seriously, and three standout retailers are Ketty Tinoco, which sells exquisite linen clothing; Silvia Tcherassi, one of Colombia's most revered designers; and Jon Sonen Privé, which carries fashion-forward men's attire. Of course, Colombia is famed for its emeralds, and there is no shortage of jewelers catering to foreign trade, but you may want to ask your concierge for a reference to a private dealer. (Bonus hint: The emeralds from the famed Muzo mines are said to be the finest in the world.)

### WHERE TO EAT

Leisurely lunches and dinners are Cartagena's stock-in-trade, and two of the biggest hot spots are La Vitrola and the San Pedro Café/Mirador Restaurante. Both attract an international clientele like New York fashion icon Lauren Santo Domingo, Mick Jagger, and Javier Bardem, but you can't go wrong with most of the smaller cafés lining the backstreets of Getsemani. ■

