

Press Coverage 2020: Casa San Agustín

Date: 11 January 2020

Publication: Standard.co.uk

Unique users: 26,340,000

PRV (\$): 20,645

URL: <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/travel/cartagena-colombia-travel-city-guide-a4331551.html>

Evening Standard.
WEBSITE OF THE YEAR

Lifestyle › Travel

What to see, eat and do in Cartagena, Colombia

It's hosting the Hay Festival, but not only book fans will love this colourful Colombian city, says Laura Millar

LAURA MILLAR | 2 days ago | 0 comments

📷 Cartagena, Colombia - in pictures



📷 12
show all

As befits the former home of Gabriel García Márquez, 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.



Bright outlook: a house in the picturesque old town, which is full of maze-like streets and secluded squares (Cartagena Tourism/Marina Maldonado)

Make for the yellow and white Torre del Reloj, or Clock Tower, once the main gateway to the walled city. Located between Plaza de Independencia and Plaza de los Coches, it's just a short walk to leafy Bolivar Park and the handsome Palace of Inquisition — today a museum but, between 1610 and 1821, the chilling site of brutal attempts to stamp out heresy (muhca.gov.co/muhca).

One of the imposing structures which helped earn Cartagena its Unesco status is the fortress of Castillo San Felipe de Barajas, which looms over the city on San Lázaro hill, just across the bridge from the lively, boho neighbourhood of Getsemani. Formerly run-down and edgy, Getsemani — whose rebellious inhabitants played a role in helping Cartagena become one of the first cities to declare independence from Spain in 1811 — has had a cultural renaissance over the past six years, helped by a street art initiative in 2013. The city's first International Festival of Urban Art left the narrow streets and crumbling walls covered in vivid, ever-changing, often-political works. The best examples are in Calle de la Sierpe, while smaller passageways are adorned with colourful, dangling open umbrellas. Hip hostels and cafes abound and this area, less polished and touristy than Centro, is popular. Head for buzzy Plaza de la Trinidad and watch kids playing football, elderly locals gossiping over beer and impromptu domino tournaments.

Eat

If you want a flavour of Cartagena's food scene visit Bazarro 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.



Vivid: Plaza del Reloj in Cartagena (Cartagena Tourism)

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. Find some of the best at Centro's La Cevichería (lacevicheriacartagena.com), one of the late Anthony Bourdain's favourite restaurants. Renowned local chef Juan Felipe Camacho helms Donjuán (donjuancartagena.com), a chic dining space dishing up pork belly spring rolls and lobster risotto. Elevating roast salmon and carpaccio of beef into art is Alma (almacolombia.com), while in Getsemani, at Doña Lola in the elegant townhouse interiors of Casa Lola hotel (casalola.com/en/dona-lola), you'll find excellent grilled octopus and shrimp tempura.

Drink

Rum is the local tippie. Try a tasting session run by experts from El Barón bar (elbaron.co/experiencias). Once you've fuelled up, head to one of the best places for live salsa, Café Havana, an old-school joint with wood-panelled walls, lazy ceiling fans and enthusiastic Cuban musicians. Don't miss sunset with a cocktail from the sixth-floor roof terrace of the Movich hotel (movichhotels.com) or head to the rooftop bar at Townhouse, which has its own hot tub (townhousecartagena.com).



A woman in a colourful dress on the streets of Cartagena (Cartagena Tourism/Marina Maldonado)

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), while smaller, marble-floored Bastión (bastionluxuryhotel.com) is moments from magnificent Santa Catalina de Alejandria Cathedral.

Details: Cartagena

Avianca flies to Cartagena from Heathrow via Bogota from £670, avianca.com ■