

General Considerations

We rank the country of Colombia, with some exceptions, as a **MEDIUM Risk** travel destination. The principal concerns for the travelers will be petty and opportunistic street crime. The group will benefit greatly from employing common sense security precautions. Such precautions include traveling together as a group and not individually, concealing valuables at all times and avoiding low-income districts where petty crime is more prevalent.

Generally speaking, the boundaries between upscale neighborhoods and more dangerous areas are much more fluid in Latin America and not quite as stark as they are in the United States or Canada for example. As such it is important to rely on trusted local contacts as much as possible for assistance in avoiding inadvertently entering a trouble spot.

The rural areas that the group will visit generally register lower crime rates than their urban counterparts. Regardless, the group should employ the same security precautions that they would in urban centers as no part of the country is entirely immune to petty crime.

A crime that all travelers to Colombia should be familiar with is known as express kidnapping. Express kidnapping (known locally as *paseo millonario*) is a short term abduction in which the victim is forced under threat of violence to make withdrawals from their bank account at ATMs. The victim is typically released unharmed after complying with the assailants demands. This crime is much less likely to affect your travelers in the rural districts they will visit, however they should be aware of it, particularly as their itinerary takes them to urban centers of Colombia such as Bucaramanga, Medellín and potentially Bogotá. As such, travelers should only withdraw money from ATMs in secure locations, such as a bank lobby, during daylight hours. ATMs that are accessible from the street should not be utilized. Criminals have also been known to utilize street taxis as a means to target an unsuspecting victim for an express kidnapping. For this reason, it is safest to arrange car travel through a local contact or hotel.

Transportation Considerations

We generally recommend that travelers limit their overland travel in Colombia. Road conditions vary greatly, particularly in the rural areas and driving customs are more erratic than in the US or Canada. When air travel is a viable alternative, such as 20 February's trip to Medellín, it is preferable to proceed by air. For other portions of the itinerary outlined in which air travel is not a viable option, a private bus is suitable as long the provider is reviewed to ensure they adequately maintain their vehicles and that the drivers are experienced in local conditions and customs. Overland travel should be undertaken during daylight hours only.

Regarding travel within each of the locations the group will visit, it is safest to arrange transportation through a trusted local source or reputable organization such as their hotel. Public transportation is not sufficiently secure for international travelers to Colombia and street taxis should be avoided due to risks of exposure to criminality. Tourist and downtown areas of Bucaramanga, Medellín and Bogotá are safe to traverse on foot during daylight hours, however they should be avoided after dark.

A Word on Accommodations

We typically recommend that travelers stay in internationally branded hotels. Such hotels tend to provide security features we find desirable such as 24 hour security personnel, access controlled entrance points and closed circuit surveillance. In the event that such options are not available, it is suitable to rely on trusted local contacts for assistance in arranging accommodations - this is particularly relevant for the mining and otherwise rural districts the group will visit.

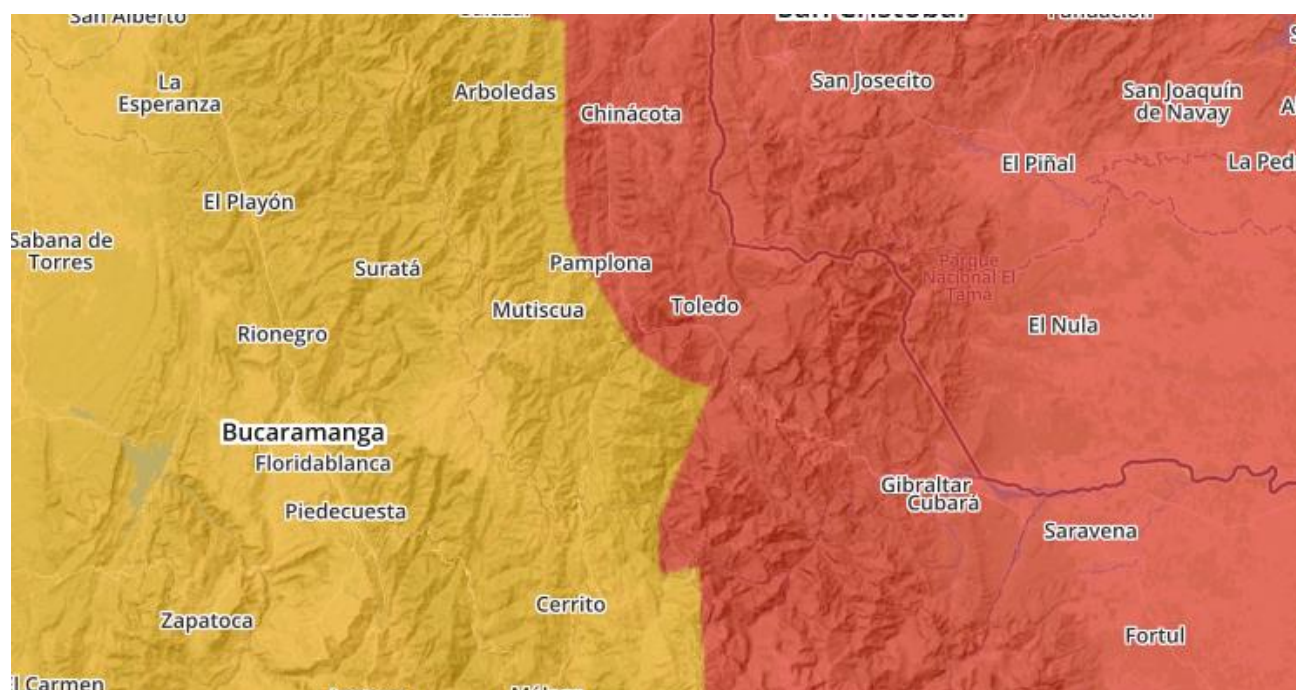
Bucaramanga | SANTANDER

Bucaramanga, located in north east Colombia is the capital of the Santander department. It is home to over 500,000 inhabitants and considered one of the economic hubs of the country. It lies roughly 400 kilometers northeast of the capital Bogotá and about 200 kilometers west of the Venezuelan border.

Like most of Colombia, Bucaramanga is considered a **MEDIUM Risk** travel destination. The group should focus on avoiding petty and opportunistic street crime by maintaining a low profile and avoiding any obvious displays of wealth.

We rank the areas along the border between Colombia and Venezuela as **HIGH Risk** travel destinations due to increased criminal activity, including violent crime. Pamplona (Norte de Santander) lies on the edge of this **HIGH Risk** area. As such, the group should ensure they take extra precautions when traveling in this area, relying heavily on trusted local contacts and remaining situationally aware at all times.

Please see the below Risk Map. The **yellow** area is considered **MEDIUM Risk** while the **red** is considered **HIGH Risk**.



Medellín | ANTIOQUIA

Medellín is Colombia's second largest city. It is the capital of the Antioquia department and home to nearly 2.5 million. Medellín is a popular destination for foreign travelers thanks to its many historical sites, public parks and nightlife.

Medellín is considered a **MEDIUM Risk** travel destination. The city does have a well-known history of organized crime, however this poses only an incidental risk to travelers. The criminal group *Los Urabeños* operates in Medellín, however they are unlikely to target foreigners for fear of drawing the unwanted attention of authorities. The travelers' primary concern should be avoiding petty and opportunistic crime by maintaining a low profile and minimizing exposure. The group must be sure to avoid the low income areas of the city known as *comunas* where levels of criminality are higher. Like the other cities referenced, tourist spots are safe to traverse during the day if the group remains situationally aware and conceal their valuables. There are many public transportation options in Medellín, but they are not

sufficiently secure for travelers. They should take extra care to avoid the *metrocables* that lead to the *comunas*.

Bogotá D.C.

Bogotá is the capital and largest city of Colombia. It is home to over 8 million inhabitants. It is situated in the center of the country and lies on the eastern range of the Andes Mountains. It has a bustling business district, a plethora of museums, cultural and historical sites and many tourist destinations.

Bogotá, like Medellín and Bucaramanga, is a **MEDIUM Risk** travel destination. The principal security concerns are the same - petty and opportunistic street crime. The group can have a safe stay in Bogotá if they limit their travel to upscale districts and keep in mind that the security environment changes substantially after dark. Public transportation and street taxis should be avoided. Instead, door-to-door transportation should be arranged through a hosting organization or through their hotel. Tourist sites are safe to travel to during daylight hours, but the group should be certain to conceal their valuables – especially in crowded public areas. If they are wearing a bag, for example, they may wish to wear it in front of them over their chest rather than over their back or to their side. These tourist zones however are not safe to traverse at night, especially on foot and *no area* of the city is entirely immune to crime.

Risk Mitigation | Advice

- Maintain a low profile at all times.
- Avoid appearing overly vulnerable, distracted or otherwise attractive to criminals.
- Smash-and-grab crimes are common in most urban areas of Colombia. While inside a car or taxi, keep all valuables concealed with the windows closed.
- Public transportation and street taxis should be avoided. Transportation should be arranged by trusted local contacts or through a reputable hotel. If neither is available, ride sharing apps like Uber are acceptable alternatives.
- Do not self-drive – road conditions and driving customs in Colombia vary greatly from those of the United States. Traffic laws can at times be confusing to foreigners.
- If accosted by criminals, comply with their demands to prevent the situation from escalating.
- Rely heavily on trusted local support to avoid inadvertent travel into unsafe areas.
- Only withdraw cash from a secure ATM during daylight hours within the bank to avoid the risk of being targeted for express kidnapping. Never assist anyone at an ATM who requests help – instead direct them to bank staff.