



COLOMBIA 

THE TOP CYCLING
DESTINATION

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Alto de Letras, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes

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Chapter 1



Why Colombia?

NICK PERKINS, A COLOMBIAPHILE ON CYCLING IN COLOMBIA

My name's Nick Perkins. I was born in South Africa, spent my teenage years in the UK, and have been living in Colombia for the last twenty years, working as an English teacher and translator. I've been cycling all my life. I paid my way through university as a cycle courier in London.

I'm lucky enough to have cycled in many different places around the world, and it's not just because I live here and adore this country, but I genuinely love cycling in Colombia more than anywhere else.

Colombia is geographically blessed with the Andes splitting into three spines at the southern border with Ecuador. This gives cyclists an incredible variety of terrain to explore where the temperature is a function of altitude, not season. It also explains why some of the world's top professional cyclists come from Colombia. I can cycle up to a glaciated snowline or down to the tropics, literally in one day. I've never been anywhere else in the world where I can do that. Where I live, in Bogotá, the country's capital, you can hop on your bike from the city center and within 15 minutes be on a world-class climb up to 3,000 meters.

Cycling in this country is also a fantastic way to meet people. As a foreigner, you stand out among the Colombians, and there's always a fellow cyclist who's curious about who you are, what you're doing here, and is happy to share tips on where to ride or their favorite bakery.

I'm constantly telling foreigners they should come here and ride. The people are fantastic, the climate's perfect, and it's safe. There's a lot of accessible cycling, undoubtedly, but I think it's a place to come and challenge yourself. If you're game, you will find some of the most iconic riding in the world and experience an incredible sense of cycling achievement.

[@someonecallednick](#)

How to Ride?

INDEPENDENT CYCLISTS

Grand Fondos / Events

Copa Mezuena

A family mountain biking event geared towards young riders between 3 and 18 years of age. It was founded in 2014, and in 2019 more than 1,200 riders of all ages participated across the two different races.

www.copamezuena.com

Giro de Rigo

Organized by Rigoberto Uran, one of Colombia's most beloved cyclists, the Giro de Rigo is an annual event that has taken place since 2018. Since its inception, the Giro has been held in the Eternal Spring Region and Coffee Country, with a future edition planned in the department of Santander. With a 60km and 115km race, there are routes for beginners and more competitive riders.

www.elgiroderigo.com

Gran Fondo Boyacá

This upstart Gran Fondo is a rewarding ride through the scenic landscapes and historical monuments of the Boyacá region in The Altiplano. The 140km extended route includes 2,000 meters of climbing, not an easy feat at high altitude.

www.gfboyacamundial.com

Gran Fondo Nairo Quintana

Organized by Colombian cycling legend Nairo Quintana, this Gran Fondo takes place in the altitudinous roads of Boyacá region (The Altiplano), where Quintana was born and came of age as a champion rider. Boyacá is the beating heart of Colombian cycling culture, and local people of all ages line the mountainous roads, cheering the riders on as they pass. There's no better Fondo to challenge yourself and experience firsthand the warmth and openness of the Colombian people at the same time.

www.granfondonairoquintana.com

La Leyenda del Dorado

Billed as South America's most prestigious mountain bike stage race, the Leyenda del Dorado is a formidable but breathtaking transect through the mountains of Colombia and an event where professionals and amateurs rub shoulders and ride together. The inscription includes professional rider support, hotel accommodation, seven stages. The organizers have recently branched out to create the La Leyenda Series, one-day MTB marathon events in different Colombian regions.

la-leyenda.com



Cómbita, Altiplano
Eastern Colombian Andes

La Ruta Colombia

With a proud history of 6 years, 12 races, and more than 30,000 participants, La Ruta Colombia bills itself as the country's first Gran Fondo. The event has taken place throughout Colombia, from the Medellín area to the Caribbean Coast, and upcoming editions will explore the 'Heritage Town' of Santa Fe de Antioquia in the Eternal Spring Region and tackle Alto de Letras. Route options include distances ranging from 50km to 180km.

larutacolombia.com

*Detailed information for the routes and climbs listed in the is guide can be found in the following websites and applications

Altimetria Colombia

altimetriascolombia.blogspot.com

Bikepacking

www.bikepacking.com

Komoot

www.komoot.com

Strava

www.strava.com

CICLOVIA

The people of Colombia love cycling, and there's no better expression of that passion than the weekly Sunday Ciclovía or 'cycleway.' Every Sunday and public holiday, between 7 am and 2 pm, thousands of kilometers of city streets are blocked off to cars in major cities like Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Manizales, allowing cyclists total freedom to explore their city on two wheels.

In Bogotá, 2 million people take part in Ciclovía every weekend. Bogotá was the pioneer of this now global initiative, with the first Ciclovía taking place in 1974. The Sunday Ciclovía is now a national institution, beloved by all Colombians.



Monquirá-Villa de Leyva, Altiplano
Western Colombian Andes

LOCAL CYCLING OPERATORS

Colombia Bike Tours

With an intimate knowledge of Colombia's thousands of miles of rideable roads and a passion for making your Colombia biking dreams come true, Colombia Bike Tours is an agency created by cyclists for cyclists. Their Bogotá to Boyacá Altiplano tour is a highlight for visiting cyclists looking to combine riding with travel. The route includes seven days of brisk rides along the Andean plateau with visits to stunning colonial villages. If you're looking for an independent adventure, they can also help create a customized Colombia cycling tour.

colombiabiketours.cc

Colombia Cycling

With years of experience in cycling and tourism, the founders of Colombia Cycling, Tomás and Marcela, certainly know what it takes to create a world-class cycling experience in Colombia. They offer a range of tours, from day-trips cycling around Medellín to two-week bike adventures across the country. They also run full training camps for cyclists looking to escape the northern winter and train in the beautiful climate of The Eternal Spring. These camps include all meals, sports massages, and tune-ups.

www.colombiacycling.com/en

Kumanday Adventures

Kumanday Adventures specializes in adventure travel experiences in Coffee Country. Their diverse portfolio of tours offers three different biking experiences covering various fitness levels and landscapes. Adrenaline junkies will enjoy their 'Nevados Descent' itinerary, while those in search of a more challenging physical experience might opt for one of their tours crossing the high-altitude mountains of Coffee Country.

kumanday.com

Neotropic Expeditions

Neotropic Expeditions has been providing unforgettable journeys through Colombia since 2013 and has extensive experience planning trips across the country. They pride themselves on ethical and sustainable tourism with an emphasis on family, local communities, and adventurous activities. Their trip portfolio includes a multisport adventure through the Andean and Caribbean regions and custom tours for cyclists looking to create an independent biking adventure in Colombia.

www.neotropicexpeditions.com/colombia

Peak DMC

Peak DMC builds innovative tours designed and delivered by experienced local guides and travel experts. So whether you want to spend time on a working coffee farm or take a bike tour through the winding roads of the Andes, Peak DMC can make it happen.

www.peakdmc.com/destinations/latin-america/south-america

Retro Ciclas

Arvey and Elizabeth are a Colombian couple with a passion for traveling who founded Retro Ciclas to share their love of adventure and cycling with international travelers in Colombia. Their tours mix everything from simple one and two-day Coffee Country biking experiences to more immersive multisport adventures, including biking, rafting, kayaking, canyoning, and hiking. Their trips place a strong emphasis on rural life, local experiences, and sustainable tourism.

www.retrociclastours.com

Senderos Colombia

Founded by two Bogotá natives who fell in love with the landscapes and culture of Coffee Country, Senderos Colombia offers cycling and trekking tours and a diverse portfolio of local experiences. Their popular Salento and Cocora Valley bike tour is a great way to enjoy the iconic landscapes of Coffee Country from the saddle.

senderoscolombia.com/en

The Cycling Company

A company specialized in amateur and competitive cycling services, including events, training camps, and corporate events.

thecyclingcompany.com

Trail Hunters

Trail Hunters offers a range of mountain biking tours, from beginner and intermediate level one-day adventures to advanced 10-day experiences. Their flagship 10-day trip, Arriero Trails, covers a series of incredible singletrack routes across Coffee Country. If you'd prefer something less intense, opt for their two-day Trochas y Café, which includes a day of mountain biking and coffee tasting.

trailhunters.co



Salento, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes

GIVE BACK

Esteban Chaves Foundation, FUN

Fun Chaves is a foundation created by Colombian professional cyclist Esteban Chaves to empower disadvantaged children and young people through the twin pillars of sport and medicine. Their goal is to nurture future top cyclists and support the development of well-rounded human beings. Young cyclists receive clothing, uniforms, training, race registration, transportation, lodging, and food through the FUN Chaves Development Cycling Team. The foundation also organizes an annual cycling race and a yearly crowd-funding campaign to pay the medical bills of young people with orthopedic challenges who don't have the resources for care.

funchaves.org/en

Fundación Gero

Founded in 2017 to honor a Bogotá cyclist who tragically lost his life on the popular Patios route, their goal is to educate drivers and cyclists on road safety, promote the responsible use of cycling as an environmentally friendly transport option, and support cycling schools. Fundación Gero also backs projects empowering female cyclists and disabled riders in Bogotá.

www.fundaciongero.org

KNOWLEDGE

Books

Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History
Book by German R. Mejia and Michael J. LaRosa

Colombia Es Pasion!: How Colombia's Young Racing Cyclists Came of Age
Book by Matt Rendell

Kings of the Mountains: How Colombia's Cycling Heroes Changed Their Nation's History
Book by Matt Rendell

Magdalena: River of Dreams: A Story of Colombia
Book by Wade Davis

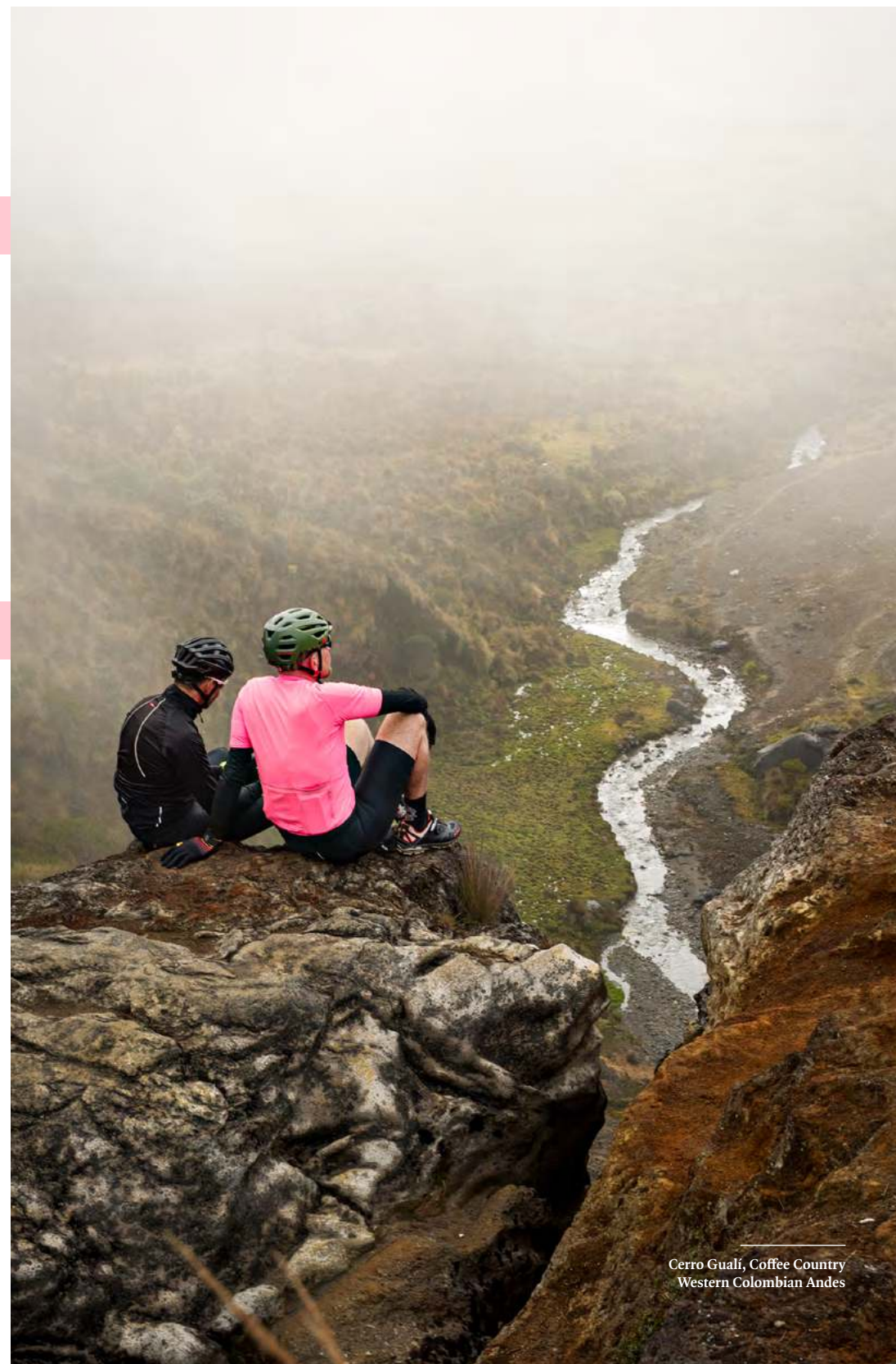
Short Walks from Bogotá: Journeys in the New Colombia
Book by Tom Feiling

The Robber of Memories: A River Journey Through Colombia
Book by Michael Jacobs

Video

Ruta Chingaza: Bikepacking for Conservation
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDq-m_Pi0VY

Thereabouts 3, Discovering Colombia
vimeo.com/ondemand/thereabouts3



Cerro Guali, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes

Chapter 2

Gear Essentials

BY NICK PERKINS

ROAD BIKE

I prefer a compact chainset on my roadie in Colombia, and I find a 50/34 works for me. You might even want to go to a 48/32 because the climbs often include steep ramps. As for the rear cassette, I recommend an 11-32.

I suggest a wide road tire for Colombia, a 28mm or even 32mm tire. The roads are good, but it's something about the tarmac; there's a lot of chatter as you're riding, so I find a slightly wider tire with a bit lower pressure is just more comfortable for long days in the saddle.

GRAVEL BIKE

If you're riding a 1x as I do, I would say go as wide as you possibly can with the cassette. I managed to squeeze a 10-48 on my setup and recommend, at a minimum, a 10-46.

I suggest a 45mm tire. I ride 650B wheels, and I've got a mountain bike tire on the back. If you're riding 700C, I think you need to consider a 42mm, 45mm, or wider tire, just to deal with the varied terrain that you'll be riding in Colombia.

MOUNTAIN BIKE

I'm pretty new to mountain biking, so I picked several people's brains on recommendations for a proper mountain bike setup for Colombia.

Go for wide tires, 2.2, 2.3, or above. While producing the Coffee Country videos for this guide, I rode a hard-tail and my riding companion, Cesar Grajales, was riding a full suspension setup. Cesar said an enduro style rig is perfect for the kind of riding we did in Coffee Country. My hardtail also felt great, especially on super steep climbs.

OTHER ESSENTIALS

Bring a variety of clothing. You might find yourself riding in tropical heat and then high-mountain chill from one day to the next, or even on the same day. Sunscreen: even though the high-mountain climate can be pretty fresh, the equatorial sun can quickly burn through a light jersey.

And any non-standard gear that you use, whether it's a bike component or part of your camping gear, bring spares if they're essential to your comfort or survival. Sometimes specialty parts can be challenging to find in Colombia, even in the major cities.



Chapter 3

Region, Western Colombian Andes:

Coffee Country

Hacienda Venecia, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes



MEET MY BACKYARD, CESAR GRAJALES

My name is Cesar Grajales, and I was born in Manizales, the capital of Colombia's Coffee Country. I think this is the best and maybe the most underrated place in the world to ride a bike. I'm a former professional cyclist and had the honor to race at both the mountain and road bike World Championships during my 14-year career. I'm proud to have been able to represent my country in both disciplines.

The Coffee Country region offers pretty much everything you could ever want on either a mountain, road, or gravel bike. On the road, if you want to ride in warm weather, just go down the Andes to the Cauca Valley and ride in a tropical climate on flat terrain. If you want to experience cooler weather, you can pedal right up to the snow line. It's the only place in Colombia where you can ride up to 4,000 meters on a paved road, and you can do that at any time of the year.

Mountain and gravel biking here is very organic. We don't have a lot of public land with designated trails like in the United States or Europe. So over the years, we've built relationships with private landowners, and our routes mostly go through coffee plantations, cattle farms, and private land. I think it's cool that all of these farmers and landowners are just totally friendly. They trust cyclists. They associate us with being good people.

Our culture loves and understands cyclists. We respect the activity and admire you for doing it. Drivers give you room when they pass. My dream is to see more foreigners coming to the Coffee Country region to ride their bikes. You're welcome any time of year. Just hop a flight and pack your road, mountain, or gravel bike. Or pack all three if you want; cycling doesn't get much better than this place.

[@cesargrajales06](#)



FIRST PERSON

Colombia used to be a country that conjured up images of narcos with guns, and even now, as a bicycle tour operator, I frequently get asked – Is it safe? But, the reality I discovered is that Colombia is teeming with smiling, happy people who love color, music, food, exercise, and most of all, having a good time. And it seems as if everyone wants to make sure that visitors to their country are also having a good time.

It has been a treat to explore different regions of Colombia, and although the landscapes, the birds, and the flowers differ, the people are always welcoming and ready to dance and laugh. Of course, we all know that the Colombian terrain is challenging on a bicycle. Still, it is more than uplifting to encounter music coming out of every brightly painted house you pass as you labor up yet another hill in the countryside. And to have people wave and shout encouragement to you gives you the energy to keep going when it seems as if a climb is never going to end. Colombians are thrilled that you are visiting their country, and they want you to feel welcome.

In our travels in the Coffee Region and Boyacá, we have encountered so many people who want to show you where they live, what they work at, and the things they make. We have had the opportunity to experience dance troupes from the local school, to tour fish farms and taste the product, to watch artisans create their crafts and food products, and of course, enjoy the coffee. Colombians do not dwell on their troubled past. Instead, they revel in their history and are proud of what their country has overcome.

All the enthusiasm that I have encountered in Colombia has given me vivid memories, friendships, and many reasons to want to return to this beautiful country as often as I can.

Danelle Laidlaw
Co-founder at TourAL & TourCO

CYCLING FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS

Casa du Vélo Cycling Hotel

This luxurious cycling hotel is located in the charming Coffee Country town of Filandia and offers a truly immersive cycling accommodation experience. With a fully equipped on-site bike workshop and store, healthy kitchen offering a selection of nurturing meals and snacks, and a relaxing spa with sports massages and a Turkish bath, Casa du Vélo is a cyclist's dream hotel. They also offer mountain bikes and e-bikes for rent so you can mix up your riding without having to lug an extra bike on tour, and their privileged position in the heart of Coffee Country gives you access to 42 variable and enjoyable cycling routes, right from the front door.

www.casaduvelo.com

Hacienda Venecia

This 100-year-old family-owned working coffee farm near Manizales is a delightful spot to spend a few nights in the heart of Coffee Country. Bike-friendly owner Juan Pablo Echeverri is a welcoming host and a fountain of local knowledge. The relaxed poolside area is the perfect spot to recover after a long day of riding. And if you're not the 'relaxing' type, the gravel roads surrounding the hotel are some of the most beloved climbs and descents for Manizales' cycling community. If you fancy a day out of the saddle, you can take a coffee or cacao tour, enjoy a rum tasting, or simply laze around in a hammock listening to the birdsong.

www.haciendavenecia.com

La Unión Coffee Farm

This rural hotel is located on a working coffee farm near the city of Pereira, and the founders are also the operators of RetroCiclas Tours, so they are well placed to offer advice and assistance to visiting riders. La Unión is a peaceful and comfortable place to spend a few relaxing days, waking up to the scent of freshly brewed coffee and birdsong in the center of Coffee Country.

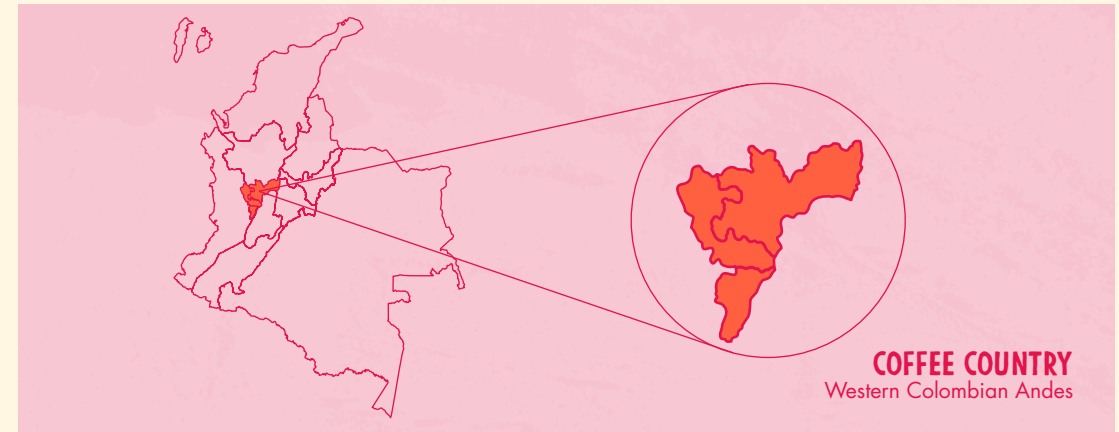
www.launioncoffeefarm.com

Termales El Otoño

Termales El Otoño is a beautiful hotel set on the fringes of Los Nevados National Park. It offers privileged access to cycling routes in the shadow of the snow-capped Andes, a thermal swimming pool, an ecological trail through the cloud forest, and a garden known throughout the country for its hummingbird feeders.

www.termaleselotono.com

Hacienda Venecia, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes



COFFEE COUNTRY
Western Colombian Andes

REGION OVERVIEW

Colombian Coffee Country is located in the heart of the central and western Andes and is famed worldwide for producing coffee that many consider to be the finest in the world. The flavor of its coffee is only surpassed by the beauty and diversity of its landscapes and small towns. From the colorful facades of tiny villages like Salento and Filandia to the giant wax palms of the Cocora Valley and snow-capped volcanoes of Los Nevados National Park, the Coffee Country is a living playground for adventurers and cyclists. In a single day, you can ride across windswept Andean moorlands with the sun glinting off distant snow peaks and descend to zip through sugarcane fields in the heat of the Cauca River valley. The region counts on excellent tourism infrastructure, with hundreds of comfortable rural hotels, roadside restaurants, and, of course, mouth-watering coffee shops. Additionally, Coffee Country is well prepared to welcome all different types of cyclists, with well-maintained and planned cycling routes and diverse levels of difficulty and types of terrain. A good example is the new and wholly signposted mountain biking route from Salento in the Quindío region to Caicedonia, which passes through spectacular landscapes and the delightful small towns of Calarcá, Córdoba, Buenavista, Pijao, Génova, and Sevilla.

HOT CHOCOLATE ON THE HIGH PASSES, CHILLED PANELA IN THE LOWLANDS

The roadside hydration options for riders in Coffee Country are as diverse as the landscapes, and there's something unique to enjoy no matter your choice of climate and altitude. On top of the chilly Alto de Letras Pass, warm yourself up from the inside out with a steaming mug of hot chocolate topped off with a hefty chunk of fresh cheese. In the tropical lowlands of the Cauca Valley, sip an ice-cold glass of fresh panela juice with a squeeze of lemon. Sugary, chilled, and refreshing, this Colombian cultural staple is the ultimate recovery drink.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS¹

Kumanday Adventures
<https://kumanday.com>

Retro Ciclas
www.retrociclastours.com

Senderos Colombia
senderoscolombia.com/en

The Cycling Company
thecyclingcompany.com

Trail Hunters
trailhunters.co

BIKE CENTRIC SHOPPING

Bike House

Bike House was founded in 1989 and has been recognized as one of the world's leading distributors of the Trek brand. They have locations throughout Colombia, and the Pereira branch is an excellent spot to pick up bike gear, accessories, and clothing to prepare for your cycling trip through Coffee Country. bikehouse.co

Eleven Pro Cycling Clothing

Eleven Pro is a clothing brand from Armenia with the goal to provide innovative cycling garments designed and manufactured with the latest high-quality materials. www.elevenpro.com.co

GoRigoGo

Famous for his eccentric style and strong race performances, Colombian Olympic medallist and Grand Tour cyclist Rigoberto Uran is one of the country's most beloved riders. In 2019, he fulfilled his dream of opening a national chain of cycling stores, GoRigoGo. Selling everything from branded apparel to Rigoberto Uran coffee, GoRigoGo is the place where local cyclists go to buy the most fashionable Colombian cycling swag. gorigogo.com

¹ For more info please refer to Chapter 1: General Overview, Section: Local Cycling Operators



Alto de Letras, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes



FIRST PERSON, LETRAS

Alto de Letras is argued to be the longest climb in the world if you include the final rise up to Cerro Gualí. It's just under 100km with a total elevation of about 4,866 meters. The climb starts a few hundred meters above sea level in Mariquita and tops out at just below 4,000 meters. You pedal up into what's known as Parque Los Nevados, the snow-capped Mountain Park, which is home to a number of Colombia's iconic peaks. I suggest acclimatizing for a few days in one of Colombia's higher cities like Bogotá, Medellín, or Manizales before you try climbing Letras.

The climb is challenging in a way that I think is relatively unique. It never gets particularly steep, and the last few kilometers have some of the biggest ramps of the entire climb. The average grade is just over 4 percent. It's not the steepness that gets you, it's the length and altitude. It's the relentless grind.

I recommend setting out before dawn and attempting to summit around lunchtime to avoid both the tropical heat in Mariquita and the inclement afternoon weather that's common at the top. It's well worth stopping on the way to refuel on Agua de Panela at a roadside restaurant. Panela is raw cane sugar that is then melted down into hot water with a bit of lemon. It's a delicious drink full of glucose, a natural energy booster.

The scenery is spectacular. The climb is often cloudy, and then with a few gusts of wind, massive landscapes appear out of the mist. Near the top, you've got glimpses of this vast, 5,000-meter mountain range around each corner.

The sense of accomplishment and rush of adrenaline as you realize you've reached the end of arguably the world's longest climb is a truly unique cycling experience. Come and do it.

Nick Perkins
Recreational Cyclist

Kafitt Pereira

Kafitt is a women-run and operated business offering 100% handmade cycling clothing. With stores and suppliers in most major Colombian cities, Kafitt began in Coffee Country and operates two flagship stores in Manizales and Pereira. Their designs are a colorful and fun reflection of Colombian cycling culture.

kafitt.com

Manzur Cycling Design

This company from the Coffee Country region of Quindío has been producing cycling gear for more than eight years. Their clothing prioritizes comfort and technical features, and their designs are simple, elegant.

www.manzurcyclingdesign.com

Zerie

Zerie has been specializing in cycling apparel since it opened its doors in 1991. They offer a range of lycra, shirts, jackets, and cycling accessories for both men and women and have stores in Pereira and Medellín.

www.zerie.com



Chapter 4

Region, Eastern Colombian Andes:

The Altiplano

Cómbita, Altiplano
Eastern Colombian Andes



MEET MY BACKYARD, ALEJANDRA CADENA

Hello, my name is Alejandra Cadena. I am a cyclist, and I was born in Bogotá. Bogotá is the capital of Colombia and The Altiplano. It's a huge city. In 2016, I started cycling, primarily as a means to get to work and back. Then I started exploring the routes around Bogotá with my friends on the weekend. I noticed that I was a strong climber and entered a few local races. In 2019, I was fortunate enough to win both the L'Étape Colombia and Rigoberto Urán's Gran Fondo, the Giro de Rigo.

To ride your bike in The Altiplano means that you will see the real Colombia. You will see the farmers in the fields of Boyacá pulling potatoes out of the ground. You will see thousands of recreational cyclists testing themselves on the climbs just a few kilometers outside Bogotá. You will understand how connected our culture is to cycling when random people on the roadside cheer you on. And,

of course, you will feel the Andes in your soul (and your legs); the awesomeness of this mountain range is something you will never forget.

Most people have heard of The Altiplano's champion male cyclists like Nairo Quintana, Egan Bernal, Esteban Chaves, and Miguel Ángel Lopez. However, I'd also like to mention how much women's cycling is growing here. I am so amazed to see how many young girls are starting to ride. My dream is to see this up-and-coming generation of powerful women cyclists get more public recognition as they take on the best in the world in the coming years.

I hope in the future, more people from other countries can come to The Altiplano to experience the magic of my backyard.

[@alecadena23](#)





FIRST PERSON, THE ALTIPLANO

There's no better way to immerse yourself in a new culture and landscape than by riding a bike. I've pedaled in Jordan, Turkey, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Iceland, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, Spain, and Switzerland. But for scenery, variety of terrain, and a bike-friendly culture, there is nothing like riding in Colombia. One of the most classic, not-to-be-missed cycling experiences in The Altiplano is Patios, a climb out of Bogotá that's become a national treasure.

To fully experience the climb, I recommend pedaling the 24km out and back route that begins in Bogotá, ascends to its summit at Patios, and ends in the mountain town of La Calera, not surprisingly the hometown of two-time Tour de France athlete, Israel Corredor. Strava rates Patios as a Cat 2 climb, short and steep. You start at about 2,600 meters and gain 400 meters in elevation over 6.8km to the peak. There are plenty of extensions you can add on for a longer route. I stopped at one of La Calera's outdoor restaurants for empanadas and fresh Guanabana juice and then downed a coffee to fuel the return ride back to Bogotá.

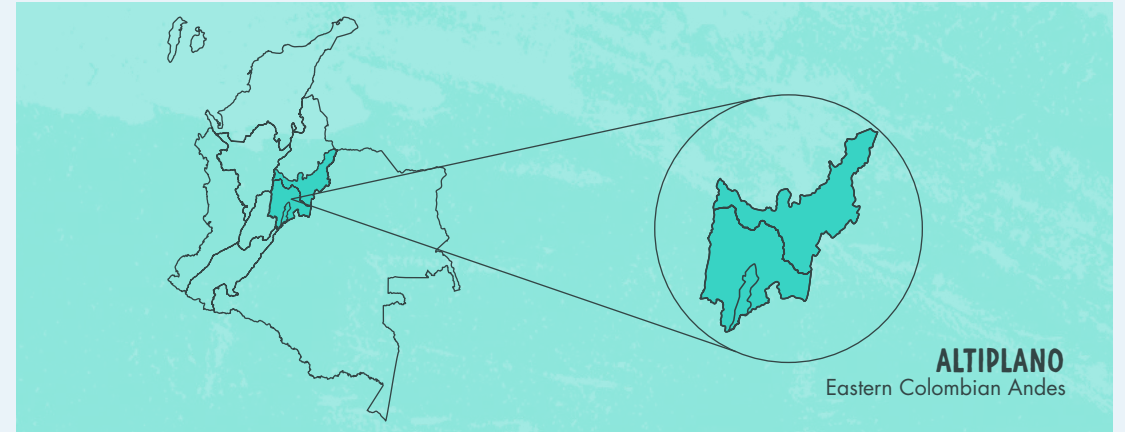
Don't be thwarted by the altitude, elevation gain, or 6 percent average grade. More than a million people have made the trek, many on hand-me-down bikes

during the carnival-like Ciclovía that happens in Bogotá every Sunday when the city closes down more than 120km of road for riders. You'll witness lots of speed enthusiasts (the current male record for the one-way ascent is just under 15 minutes), but there are plenty of folk just out for some exercise, incredible scenery, and fun with friends.

As you wind your way over the mountains, there are views so vast you'll want to pull over for a picture (or, in my case, a chance to catch my breath). On your way to the top, you'll see the sprawling city of Bogotá. The road then descends past green vegetation punctuated by splashes of vibrant color with some flowy downhills followed by smaller sweeping climbs. Finally, you'll pass by the San Rafael reservoir before rolling down into La Calera. There's a bus you can take back to town, but I'd recommend grabbing some refreshments and pedaling back to Bogotá on your own. That makes the post-ride stories and beer (we swung by the Bogotá Beer Company for a Roja) all the sweeter.

Nancy Prichard Bouchard
Cyclist, Media Specialist, and Writer

 @nancyprichardbouchard



REGION OVERVIEW

The Altiplano Cundiboyacense is a high plateau in the Colombian Eastern Andes, ranging from 2,500 meters to 4,000 meters above sea level. The plateau covers parts of Cundinamarca and Boyacá and contains the sprawling Colombian capital of Bogotá. Outside of this bustling metropolis, much of the land is taken up by rural agriculture, mainly potato and dairy farms. It's incredible how quickly you can cycle out of downtown Bogotá and find yourself alone in the Andean countryside. In the higher reaches of The Altiplano, the predominant ecosystem is the páramo, a high-altitude Andean moorland environment, home to Andean Condors and Spectacled Bears. With its rich Muisca Indigenous heritage, The Altiplano is also one of Colombia's most historically significant regions, and travelers can find ancient archaeological sites at every turn.

HIGHLIGHTS

Bogotá + Ciclovía

Colombia's capital city is a delightfully chaotic mixture of the old and the new, where cobbled 16th-century streets house chic cafes and art galleries, and life moves at its unique high-altitude-influenced rhythm. From the historical center of La Candelaria, where Bogotá was founded almost 500 years ago, to the hip artistic districts of Teusaquillo and Chapinero, this is one of the most discoverable cities in the Americas. So whether you're a foodie, music-lover, museum lover, or outdoor adventurer, you're bound to find something to captivate you in this vast metropolis.

The city is also a paradise for cyclists. The weekly Ciclovía sees over 120km of roads closed off for human-powered transportation every Sunday. Riding less than an hour in any direction will dish up a remarkable range of terrain and climate. Head east, and you'll be spiraling up steep Andean tracks above 3,000 meters, or take the road heading west, descend, and you'll soon find yourself in the rich heat of the Magdalena Valley.

CYCLING FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS

Casa Sumapaz

This pretty rural hotel to the southwest of Bogotá places a strong emphasis on sustainability, nature, and environmental consciousness. It's a great accommodation option for cyclists who want to experience authentic rural Colombia. The food is sourced from their gardens and freshly prepared by the local chef.

casasumapaz.com

Clarion Sabana Park

This modern hotel is located near the town of Cajicá on the main highway north of Bogotá, the perfect location for any cyclists looking to get out of the city and explore The Altiplano by bike. In addition to large, comfortable rooms, Clarion Sabana Park counts on a well-equipped gym and wellness spa, making it a top option for cyclists looking to squeeze in some extra training or relax after an Altiplano cycling adventure.

www.clarionsabanapark.com

Hotel Estelar Paipa

The lakeside spa town of Paipa is one of The Altiplano's most popular tourism destinations. It is a strategic stopover point for cyclists exploring the mountains and villages of the region. It enjoys a privileged lakeside location, contains a range of fitness and wellness facilities, including massage services, as well as thermal pools and jacuzzis.

<http://www.hotelesestelar.com>

Hotel Viraba

This newly opened hotel is aimed squarely at cyclists, with on-site bike rental services, a well-stocked cycling shop selling nutrition products, clothing, and bike accessories, and bike tours with 24/7 logistical support included. They also have a static bike setup available for guests to use, and the owners are helpful in offering tips on good routes to visiting riders.

www.instagram.com/hotel.viraba

Termales el Batán

This hotel in the center of The Altiplano places a particular emphasis on revitalizing wellness treatments and thermal baths, making it the perfect place to stay after a long cycling trip or in-between day adventures. Surrounded by nature, mountains, and natural thermal springs, it's a great spot to disconnect and recharge the batteries. The rooms are comfortable and straightforward, and the natural steam baths are a great way to wind down and relax after physical activity.

elbatan.travel

Villa de Leyva

Villa de Leyva's out-of-the-way location spared it the modern developments of many other rural colonial towns, and wandering its cobblestoned alleyways is like entering a portal back to the sixteenth century. The focal point is a giant central square which, at 14,000 square meters, is thought to be the largest entirely cobbled

square in South America. An ideal basecamp for exploring the gravel backroads of Boyacá, Villa de Leyva is blessed with a bustling restaurant scene and a range of excellent hotel options, from luxurious boutique hotels to simple rural guesthouses.



Villa de Leyva, Altiplano
Eastern Colombian Andes



Nairo's House

If you fancy paying tribute to a Colombian cycling legend while you're visiting The Altiplano, then consider making a pilgrimage to the iconic childhood home of the great Nairo Quintana, located on the expressway between the regional capital of Tunja and the village of Cómbita. A constant cacophony of truck drivers honking their appreciation as they pass provides an audio soundtrack to the huge, colorful murals of the region's favorite cycling hero. Expect to meet plenty of fellow riders stopping off to enjoy a tinto (black coffee) and chit-chat with Nairo's parents, who still live in the house and operate the cafe and gift shop.



Arepa at Alto de Arepas

This classic Bogotá cyclists' stop-off on the ride from the capital to the Andean moorland town of Guasca serves piping hot arepas by the truck-load to the hordes of hungry riders. These cheesy corn pancakes are a staple Andean snack and contain everything a cyclist needs in a roadside bite: a mix of protein, carbs, and fat, all wrapped up in a handy little package. If you haven't stopped off at Alto de Las Arepas for a carb-load, then you haven't truly biked The Altiplano.

Ajiaco at La Puerta Falsa

This Bogotá institution in the historical district of La Candelaria was founded in 1816 and holds the title of Bogotá's oldest working restaurant. It sits just half a block from the Plaza Bolívar central square and, although the cramped interior can make for a tight squeeze when it's busy, it serves the best Ajiaco in town. This famous local soup contains three varieties of potato, chicken, and a local herb called guasca. It's typically garnished with rice, avocado, cream, and capers and is an ideal dish to enjoy at Bogotá's chilly 2,600 meters of altitude.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS²

Colombia Bike Tours
colombiabiketours.cc

Neotropic Expeditions
www.neotropicexpeditions.com/colombia

Peak DMC
www.peakdmc.com/destinations

GEAR FIX

14 Ochomiles

14 Ochomiles is arguably Bogotá's leading cycling and outdoors store, with three locations dotted around the capital and an excellent range of cycling, climbing, hiking, and triathlon gear. If you're looking to stock up on clothing, accessories, or bike parts before or during a cycling trip in The Altiplano, then it's worth swinging by.
www.14ochomiles.com

BikeNers Colombia

BikeNers specializes in windbreakers, vests, and incredibly cool neck gaiters, stamped with colorful, graphic design-inspired images. You can find their products online or at their Bogotá store.
www.bikeners.com

Clinch Industria

With their contemporary designs and artistic, punk rock aesthetic, Clinch Industria produces a superb range of cycling caps, backpacks, and messenger bags for the rider who wants a quality product without sacrificing style. Their caps are a particular highlight of their varied inventory, with an exciting range of designs and color schemes inspired by Colombian landscapes, street art, and comic books.
www.instagram.com/clinchbike

Cuellos Stark

You might want a windbreaker and neck gaiter for a biking trip in Colombia, and this Bogotá-based company produces some of the best ultra-light, quick-drying products in the city. They come in various colors and designs, from garish jackets for those who want to stand out to more understated designs in khaki and camo print.
www.instagram.com/cuellosstark

El Gallo

This bike workshop and café is strategically placed on the highway heading north out of Bogotá and has become an important meeting place for Colombian cyclists, both amateur and professional, heading out of the capital in recent years. Whether it's a quick technical stop to patch up a flat tire or a social meet-up with biking buddies, El Gallo has you covered. Try their delicious yucca waffles with honey.
www.facebook.com/ElGalloc

HyF Sport

With their roots as a textile company founded in 1977, HyF Sport manufactures garments for a range of outdoor pursuits, but cycling is their speciality. Their products run the gamut of high-quality, performance-oriented clothing, from sleeves and socks to jerseys and caps.
hyfsport.com

² For more info please refer to Chapter 1: General Overview, Section: Local Cycling Operators



FIRST PERSON, THE ALTIPLANO

We began on the river-smoothed paving stones of Villa de Leyva, beneath a green mountain the shape of a ship, then climbed slowly, over four hours, spinning on crunchy gravel into the crisp, cold clouds above the childhood home of Colombian champion Nairo Quintana. A light rain fell, covering the farms and farmers in mist. A man in a wool poncho stood, watched, and waved us on toward a cafe with hot coffee, grown and ground right here.

If there was one ride that encapsulated riding in Colombia better than any other, this was it. Not Alto de Letras and Cerro Gualí, the world's longest climb, rising from the humid jungle up through the clouds into the very ceiling of the Andes. That ride is merely spectacular. Spectacular is everywhere in Colombia. Nor was it our cruise through the closed roads of Bogotá, available only to cyclists on a Ciclovía Sunday in a beautiful reversal of the usual urban norm.

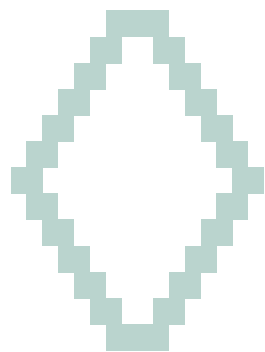
This ride, through the rugged mountains of Boyacá, was the most uniquely, utterly Colombian. It was the most dynamic, the best reflection of a place that hides its gems in plain sight, changing with every corner, with every meter of altitude. A country where you can ride from one season to another simply by gaining or losing altitude. Drop to spring, climb to fall, descend to hot summer. A country that never ceases to surprise, enchant, and challenge. Where the coffee is strong, and the climbs are hard. Pavement, gravel, singletrack; each kilometer offers up something new. This ride held it all.

We called the ride our Nairo Pilgrimage. At the farthest point from Villa de Leyva lay something of a shrine to Quintana, the Boyacan boy made good.

Two giant robotic Nairos sat astride 3-meter-tall bikes outside the building. T-shirts, mugs, and scarves with his face on them were inside. Colombians of all stripes stopped and took selfies. The love of cycling is palpable all across Colombia, and nowhere more so than near the home of one of its greatest heroes.

The Altiplano is the land of Egan Bernal and Quintana, of Lucho Herrera and Fabio Parra before them. The Escarabajos, they call them. Great cycling champions who entered the staid, traditional European professional cycling peloton and changed it forever. These riders were built in this region, made for and by them. Made to fly. They are products of this place, and even after a short time here, you feel like you are too. Riding in The Altiplano changes you. A little more daring, more eager to explore.

Caley Fretz
Cycling Journalist



 [caleyfretz](https://www.instagram.com/caleyfretz)



Kalunga

Kalunga set out to address the issue of safety for cyclists, with an emphasis on visibility. Their designs are focused on nighttime visibility for cyclists without sacrificing an ounce of aesthetics: think streetwear-style clothing with bright splashes of reflective color, making sure that you not only stand out in low-light but for your style as well.

kalunga.co

KOM Coffee Sopó

The pretty town of Sopó lies north of Bogotá and sits on the crossroads of many cycling routes in The Altiplano region. Here you can find KOM Coffee, a well-stocked bike store and coffee outlet with a friendly vibe, tasty cakes and pastries, and a regular clientele of Colombian cyclists. So if you fancy a quick caffeine boost and a break or need something more substantial after a long day's ride, KOM makes for an ideal pitstop.

www.instagram.com/kom_coffee_sopo

MOVA Cycling

Since their journey began in 2015, MOVA has grown into a cycling company that sells its products worldwide in over 60 countries. Their products are 100% designed and made in Colombia, focusing on urban cycling, allowing their clients to be visible and safe without ever losing their style.

www.movacycling.com

Saeta Sport

Saeta Sport has been recognized as one of Colombia's top sport clothing brands since they began life on two sewing machines back in 1982. All of their gear is excellent quality, highly breathable, and suitable for moisture control, a helpful trait when cycling through Colombia's various climate zones.

saetasport.com

Strongman

With two locations in northern and central Bogotá, Strongman sells everything from gravel and mountain bikes to dietary supplements and biking accessories, making it a perfect stop in the Colombian capital if you're looking to kit yourself out for a biking adventure or simply grab a few items that you've left at home.

bicicletasstrongman.co

Tour & Nativa

Tour & Nativa have two locations in central and north Bogotá that are well-stocked with a range of bike accessories. They carry quality brands like Scott and Profile Design.

tourynativabicycletas.com

Triathlon

Triathlon counts on an excellent online bike store and a physical location in downtown Bogotá in the trendy Chapinero district. They specialize in sports supplements, so if you're looking to stock up on energy powders and gels before a long bike adventure, then it's worth visiting them while you're in Bogotá.

triathlondeportes.com

MECHANICAL HELP

Your Personal Mechanic

Mario Lucas Cortes is a mobile bicycle mechanic who provides services in Bogotá's urban core.

WhatsApp +57 301 303 3555

Nissi Mechanic Center

www.instagram.com/nissi_mechanic_center



Chapter 5

Region, Western Colombian Andes:

The Eternal Spring

Guatapé & El Peñol, Eternal Spring
Western Colombian Andes



MEET MY BACKYARD, MAURICIO ORDÓNEZ

My name is Mauricio Ordóñez. I'm from Medellín, Antioquia, the capital city of what's called The Eternal Spring, because we have fantastic weather all year round. I'm an incredibly obsessed recreational cyclist. I'm also very active with the entrepreneurial and start-up cycling scene in Medellín.

Because of our privileged climate, I usually recommend to my friends who live abroad, especially those who live in the States and Europe, to come down here for winter training. In this region, we can do both high-altitude training and mid-altitude training at any time of the year. During a single ride, you could be around 3,000 meters of altitude and then come down to around half of that, 1,500 meters, without the need to change your clothing layers.

We also have really good road infrastructure and smooth tarmac. Our gravel routes are a bit more approachable than in other parts of the country. In recent years, loads of professional riders have started to come here to train. I think there's more professional talent per square kilometer in The Eternal Spring than anywhere on the planet. For example, it's not uncommon to run into Rigoberto Uran or Sebastián Molano or any number of world-class pros from other countries while you're out riding.

People from this region are called paisas. We are known for something called "paisa hospitality." We are friendly, very open to meeting new people and pride ourselves on making foreigners feel welcome, especially if you're a cyclist.

@cheset



REGION OVERVIEW

Antioquia department is a mountainous territory in the central Northwestern region of Colombia. The capital city of Medellín has undergone a startling transformation in recent years. It is now at the crest of a wave of urban innovation sweeping across the continent, with a modern transport network, cosmopolitan neighborhoods, and a growing gastronomic culture. The surrounding countryside of Antioquia doesn't disappoint either, with dense Andean cloud forest shrouding delightful mountain villages and humid Pacific jungles giving way to the dry forests of the Cauca River Valley.

As the largest Andean region of Colombia, Antioquia has a strong cultural identity – the people of this area are known as paisas and have a reputation as some of the friendliest people in all of Colombia (high praise indeed in a country famed for its welcoming locals). Paisas are intensely proud of their region, and justifiably so: Antioquia is one of Colombia's most naturally beautiful and historically important departments.



Santa Elena, Eternal Spring
Western Colombian Andes

CYCLING FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATIONS

Hotel Movich Las Lomas

Nestled in the mountains between Medellín and Rionegro (the location of Medellín's international airport), Hotel Movich Las Lomas is the ideal base for exploring the Land of Eternal Spring on two wheels. The hotel offers a bike rental service if you're keen on cycling but don't want to travel with your wheels. The on-site Kua Spa focuses on relaxing and revitalizing experiences themed around the four natural elements. www.movichhotels.com

LOCAL CONNECTIONS*

Colombia Cycling

www.colombiacycling.com/en

TorreAlta Cycling Pub

What could be better after a long day riding the roads and trails of The Eternal Spring region than a refreshing, locally brewed pint of craft beer? TorreAlta is a cycling-themed craft beer pub located in El Retiro, with a large beer garden, a range of delicious brews on tap, and merch that's sure to delight the beers-and-bikes crowd. It's a great spot to unwind after a long day of riding or to meet new friends while you're in Colombia. Their "Pedalista" Belgian Quadrupel is especially recommended but be warned, it packs quite a punch at 10% alcohol content, so don't plan on enjoying a few then riding home. www.instagram.com/torrealta_cerveceria

GEAR

Bioracer

This sporting brand specializes in clothing for cyclists, triathletes, and runners. Their clothing is comfortable and lightweight. They carry designs for a range of climates, which is vital for a cycling trip in Colombia. They are based in Belgium and have a store in Medellín. www.bioracer.com.co/

Code Sports

Code has been working with cyclists to design a range of high-performance, design-conscious clothing since they started in 2003. They are a custom outlet, meaning that they control every single step in production, from design right through to delivery. Their commitment to research and development has led to a reputation for innovation. www.codesports.com

3 For more info please refer to Chapter 1: General Overview, Section: Local Cycling Operators



Las Palmas, Eternal Spring
Western Colombian Andes

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

El Peñol

This 200-meter tall granite monolith juts out of the rolling hills of eastern Antioquia like a surreal natural landmark in the mountains. The rock towers over the blue-green waters of the surrounding Peñol-Guatapé hydroelectric dam and offers a jaw-dropping 360-degree panorama of the labyrinthine network of lakes and inlets. The nearby lakeside village of Guatapé is equally worth a visit, with its brightly painted houses, restaurants serving fresh trout, and boat tours on the lake. Cyclists can also enjoy the helter-skelter downhill ride to the tropical heat and waterfalls of nearby San Rafael.

Rionegro

This small historical city to the east of Medellín is located alongside the main regional airport and offers a laid-back place to spend a few nights if you don't fancy the frantic energy of the big city. Set on the lush alluvial plain of the Negro River, Rionegro has an average elevation of 2,150 meters, giving it a cooler climate than Medellín and a distinctly more mountainous feel to the landscapes and vegetation. The city's pretty historical center is worth a look, but it's Rionegro's proximity to excellent cycling roads that attract a global roster of professional cyclists to train in The Eternal Spring.

Las Palmas Climb

The Alto de Las Palmas climb is arguably Medellín's most popular climb, with hundreds of cyclists riding up and down every day. The route begins to the east of the city, adjacent to the tourist neighborhood of El Poblado, before climbing more than 1,000 meters over a distance of 15.6km. The climb ends with a delightful panorama over the city below, and a convenient roadside café where you can grab a snack and a coffee before zipping back down to Medellín. This climb is best enjoyed on a Sunday when there's less traffic to contend with.

Enjoy Activewear

With a store in Medellín and nationwide delivery, Enjoy Activewear is an excellent choice for high-quality performance clothing for various sports. Their designs are characterized by high-tech fabrics such as Swift-Dry, Pro-Sun, Pro-Repel, ColorTech, and AquaTech.

enjoyactivewear.com

Guairo Workshop

The founder of this excellent bike workshop in Medellín's popular Poblado neighborhood worked for years as a mechanic for the country's top cycling teams, including Postobón, Colpatria, and Café de Colombia, and decided to open his own workshop back in 2006. Their full-service shop offers complete bike assembly and general maintenance.

bicicletasguairo.com

GoRigoGo

As well as their Coffee Country store in Pereira, GoRigoGo has three different sales points in Medellín. The most popular is located in the neighborhood of El Poblado, which is also home to some of the city's best restaurants and hotels.

gorigogo.com

Hincapié Sportswear

The Hincapié brothers were keen cyclists growing up, but while George pursued cycling as a career, Rich headed to business school. They combined their skill sets in 2002 to create a sports brand that sells an excellent range of cycling, triathlon, and BMX clothing across Colombia and in their US store.

hincapie.com.co

Safetti

Safetti likes to think outside the box: their designs are cool and elegant, with understated minimalism that makes them stand out. So if you want to explore Colombia by bike and look sharp at the same time, then visit one of their Medellín stores to stock up on their range of apparel.

www.safetti.com

Sanremo Cycling

Sanremo Cycling prides itself on the comfort and quality of their clothing and accessories, and always strive to create items with a timeless quality; classic clothing that won't go out of style anytime soon.

www.sanremocycling.com

Suarez Clothing

Suarez Clothing is based in Medellín but offers free delivery around Colombia. They provide a range of products, from simple cycling jerseys to colorful Colombia flag designs. They can also fully personalize any of their products.

suarezclothing.com

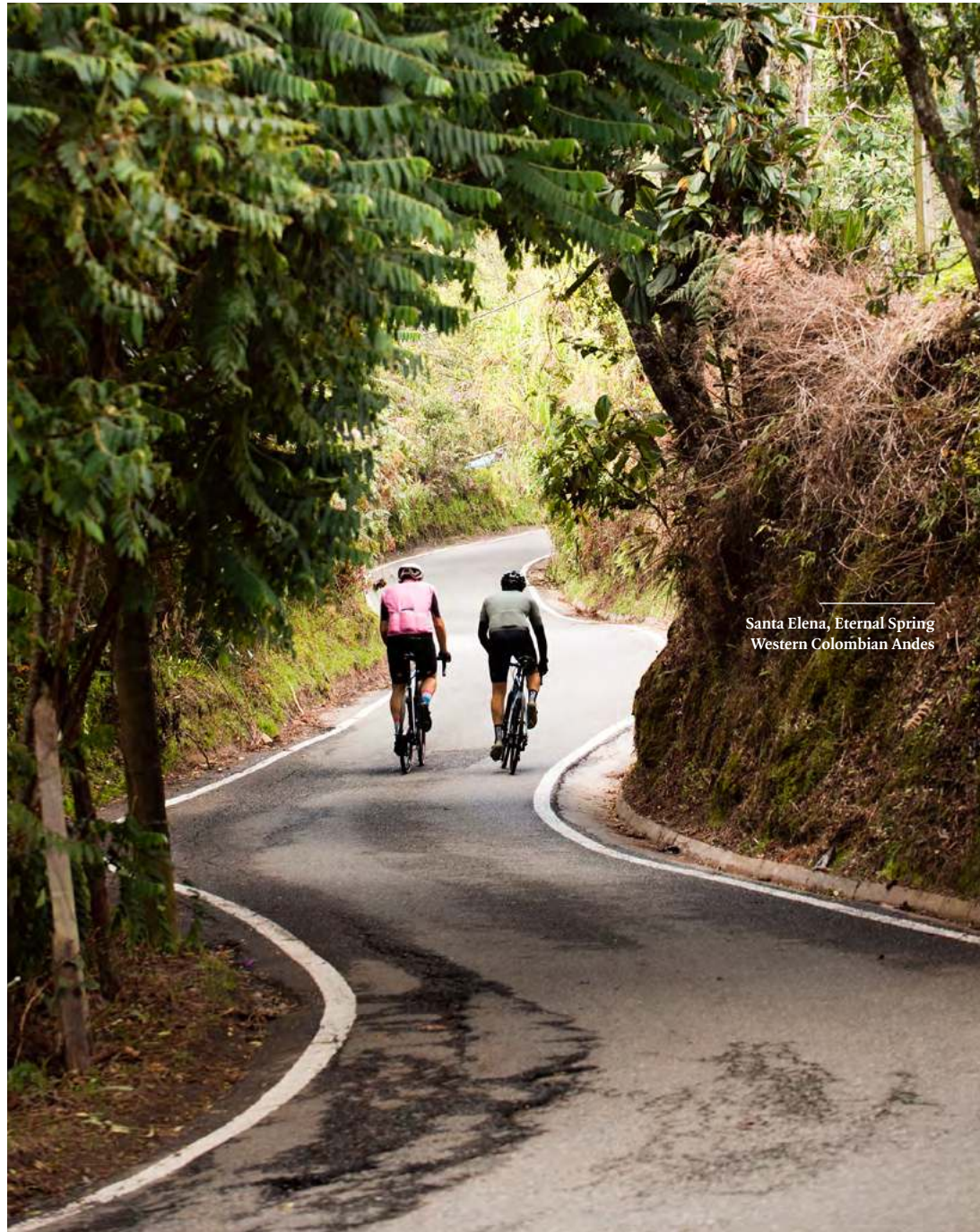
Zerie

Zerie's wide range of specialist cycling apparel can also be found in their Eternal Spring stores, one of which is located in the central neighborhood of Laureles and the second in the small southern city of Envigado. See the Coffee Country chapter for more Zerie's products.

www.zerie.com

Alto de Santa Elena

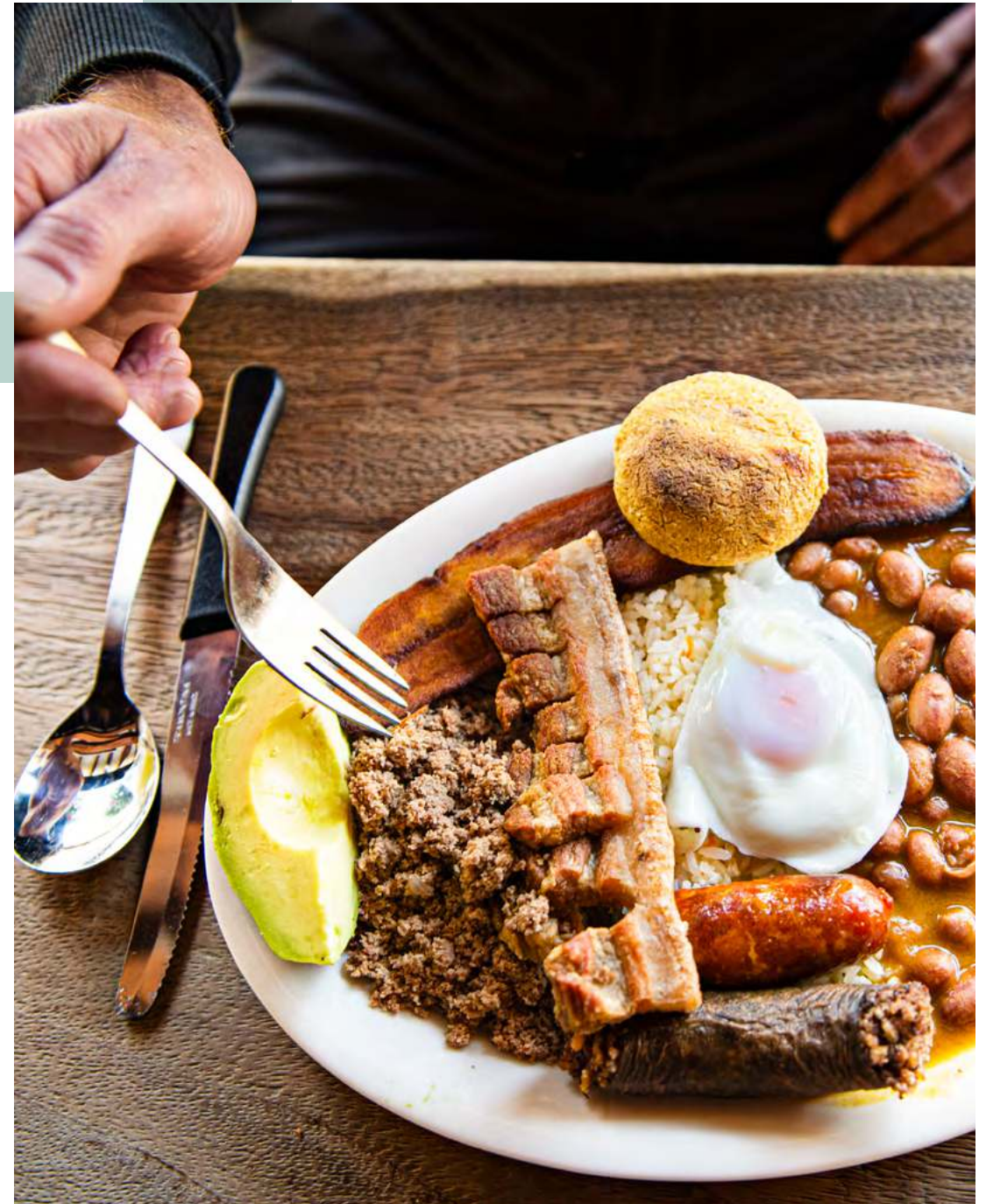
This 1,000 meter, 16km climb has often been used as a stage-finisher during Colombian cycling tours, and it's an ever-popular weekend route for Medellín's cyclists as well. Climbing out of Medellín up to the lovely weekend-getaway town of Santa Elena in the cooler climate of the adjacent Andes, Alto de Santa Elena is the perfect route to enjoy the scenic countryside of the Eternal Spring region.



Santa Elena, Eternal Spring
Western Colombian Andes

Bandeja Paisa

The iconic regional dish of Antioquia is this mountainous plate piled high with a calorific combination of beans, beef, chorizo, rice, plantain, pork rind, and avocado. A full Bandeja Paisa isn't for the faint of stomach and is definitely not to be ordered before a long ride, but as a culinary, cultural experience, this gastro-bomb is not to be missed.



Ready to explore the most welcoming place on Earth on two wheels?

Watch our Colombian cycling video series
and learn more at Colombia.Travel

COLOMBIA 



PROCOLOMBIA
EXPORTS TOURISM INVESTMENT COUNTRY BRAND

Cerro Guali, Coffee Country
Western Colombian Andes

