

Country Handbook: Colombia



Introduction



Travelling to see the work of Compassion and our local church partners firsthand is an unforgettable experience. On this trip, you'll see for yourself how children are known, loved and protected by their church communities and are being released from poverty in Jesus' name.

This Country Handbook is designed to start preparing you for your trip to Colombia. Please read it before you depart, and we'd also recommend that you keep it handy for easy reference.

We pray that God will bless your time in Colombia!

Country Information



Colombia was named after Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, and was colonised by Spain in the 16th century. It's a land of extremes; boasting everything from snow-capped volcanoes and tropical beaches to dense rainforests and sprawling savannas. Music, dance and soccer are all important parts of Colombian culture, and the national anthem is played across every radio station at 6am and 6pm every day.

Main languages:

Spanish

Climate:

Mostly tropical, but can get cooler in the highland areas

Main religions:

Roman Catholic (69%),
Evangelical (16.4%)

Currency:

Colombian Peso (COP\$)



Compassion in Colombia

Compassion has been working to release children from poverty in Jesus' name in Colombia since 1974. 39 per cent of people live below the poverty line.

Compassion's Child Sponsorship Program is tailored to be age-appropriate for each child.

Children **AGED 1 TO 3** receive home-based care.

Children **AGED 3 TO 11** attend their local Compassion centre each weekday outside of school hours.

Students **AGED 12 AND OLDER** attend the centre for six hours on Saturdays.



For more information on Colombia, scan the QR code or visit: compassion.com.au/where-we-work/colombia

Compassion assisted children in Colombia typically attend program activities at their local child development centres. Here is an example of what a typical program day looks like:

Devotional time - Children learn to pray.

Spiritual lessons - Children sing songs and learn Bible stories. Children usually receive their own Bible within a year of joining the Child Sponsorship Program.

Break and snack time - Children can play in a safe environment and develop friendships. They are often provided a snack of biscuits and juice.

Social-emotional lessons - Children learn conflict resolution skills and how to develop healthy self-esteem and a godly character. Children often come from challenging home environments and are taught social and personal skills.

Lunch and social time - Children generally receive a snack and lunch at the centre twice a week. Lunch usually consists of rice and beans. If the children do not receive food at school, the local church aims to provide lunch each day.

Health lessons - Children learn practical health and hygiene lessons.

Letter writing and career planning - Older children work with local staff to identify their strengths and interests and set goals for their future.

Children are also encouraged to join in activities such as sports, yearly camps, festivals and spiritual retreats. Students can elect vocational training skills, such as computer maintenance, beauty skills, tailoring, baking and shoe making. Parents and caregivers are invited to workshops on parenting skills.

Cultural Considerations



Body language

- Colombian males may show respect to women and the elderly by forfeiting seats, opening doors, and offering other assistance. Age is valued in Colombia and elderly people are deeply respected throughout the country.
- Refrain from using two fingers to indicate the length of something as this is considered a rude gesture. Rather, extend your right arm and use your left hand to mark distance.
- Avoid beckoning people with your index finger alone. Instead, wave towards yourself using your entire hand.
- Please avoid pointing with one finger, as this is considered rude and aggressive.

Greetings

- Colombians tend to take a long time in greetings, as they feel that doing so demonstrates respect for the other person.
- Titles are important when you start a conversation. You can use 'señor' or 'señora' followed by the first name of the person. 'Señorita' is used for unmarried girls.
- The standard greeting in Colombia is a handshake upon introduction and departure.
- Among close friends, women may kiss each other on one cheek and men may embrace and slap each other's backs.

Security

- Please ask permission before you photograph any local people. This can include photos taken from a moving vehicle, so be sure to check with your driver or Trips and Visits Specialist first.

Emergency contact information:

Local emergency number: 123

Compassion Colombia office: +57 14321792

Australian Embassy: +57 16577800

Clothing

- **Men:** The dress style in Colombia is similar to Australia, but men should avoid wearing shorts where possible. Shirts and t-shirts are acceptable.
- **Women:** Women should dress casually and modestly, avoiding shorts.
- It is best to wear closed-in shoes when visiting local church partners or children.

Language

- Useful Spanish phrases:

Hello: Hola

Goodbye: Adios

Good morning: Buenos dias

Good night: Buenas noches

Thank you: Muchas gracias

Please: Por favor

Excuse me: Perdon

How are you? Como estás?

I don't understand: No entiendo

I'm sorry: Lo lamento

Yes: Si

No: No

Eating and drinking

- Eating and drinking in Colombia is counted as much a social activity as a daily necessity. Lengthy meals (two hours or more for lunch) are common.
- Coffee is the national beverage of the country. Children start drinking coffee early in life, and adults drink coffee all day long.
- A standard diet typically consists of lots of carbs and starches, including potatoes, rice, poultry and vegetables.
- It is polite to try and taste every dish on offer.



Key Challenges and Prayer Points

More than five decades of conflict between the government and drug-trafficking militia has seen over five million people displaced by violence. This internal tension has exacerbated poverty by making it harder for vulnerable Colombian children and their families to access safe shelter, medical care and education. As a result, nearly 40 per cent of the population live in poverty. Please pray for an end to this violence and ask God to give our local church partners wisdom as they work to protect children affected by these issues. Pray also for wisdom and discernment for government officials as they work to protect and serve the Colombian people.

Colombia remains one of the world's top cocaine producers—and Australia is a significant export market. The poorest sections of society, including Colombia's indigenous people, continue to struggle as drug-related crime and kidnapping remain a common part of everyday life. Across the country, local churches continue to support and encourage children and their families, reaching out to those in need. Pray for our local Compassion staff members and churches workers as they work to release children from poverty amid challenging circumstances.



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