

Mission Trips to the Diocese of Colombia

The clergy and laity of the Episcopal Diocese in Colombia appreciate your interest and invite you to join us as, together, we respond to God's call to serve those in need. We welcome your participation and companionship as we offer and develop programs for food security, health, elder care, micro-finance, education, housing and advocacy.

Why Colombia? In many ways, Colombia is a well-developed country, with cosmopolitan cities, popular vacation spots, and a vibrant economy. It has, however, the highest rate of income inequality in Latin America, with 46% of the population living in poverty, and the second highest rate of displacement in the world, with 5.2 million people displaced from their land and homes. Bishop Francisco Duque leads a diverse and vibrant diocese and is the President of Province IX. In addition, the Episcopal Church in Colombia has



traditionally had a number of Diocesan companion relationships along with strong ties to many bishops in the U.S. The diocese is currently served by an ordained missionary from the U.S. who, before coming to Colombia, worked with his bishops for eight years in developing mission partnerships. This missionary is available to advise and assist you in planning your trip, and in developing a mission partnership with a church in Colombia.

What will we be doing? Take your pick! We have many outreach programs. We welcome medical teams to provide health screenings and basic medical care for the elderly and poor families and vaccination clinics for children. We have women's programs to assist single mothers and their children. We are developing and building after-school programs for youth, feeding programs for malnourished children, food banks to feed families, clothing distribution centers, daycare programs to enable working-poor parents to work, and the list goes on. We have mission churches in need of basic care such as cleaning, simple construction, and painting. Mostly, though, what you'll do is come be with us and experience the church in Colombia.

Where will we stay? That depends on where you'll be. In most cases, we'll make arrangements for you to stay in local, inexpensive hostels, hotels or retreat centers.

What will be the plan for local transportation? It will vary, but in most cases, your host will make arrangements for some form of local transportation, most likely a dedicated shuttle service.



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What would a typical itinerary look like? We highly recommend that you spend a minimum of ten days in Colombia for a short-term mission trip. This allows the group to acclimatize a bit to the culture, climate, and altitude, as well as have an opportunity to enjoy this beautiful region, friendly people, and vibrant culture. Our missionary will be happy to work with you to design a trip that meets your group's needs. A suggested itinerary might be:

Saturday	<i>Arrive, get settled, and meet with host</i>
Sunday	<i>Go to church (at host location or the Cathedral), meet with the Bishop, meet with host clergy to finalize the week's schedule, and learn a little about Colombian culture and history</i>
Mon-Thur	<i>Work on a project during day with evening group time for group worship and processing of the experience; break early Wed to meet with Diocesan leaders & learn about their churches, programs, etc.</i>
Friday	<i>Finish up work; break early to spend some time with the community (eg. a small party)</i>
Saturday	<i>Spend the day learning about the culture and history of Colombia: go to the Museo de Oro, visit historic sites (Montserrat, Central Plaza, etc.), visit historic churches (Iglesia San Francisco, Iglesia San Augustin, etc.), go to the Cathedral de Sal, etc.</i>
Sunday	<i>Attend church; exchange some form of recognition and appreciation for the visit from the community; go to a craft market; pack bags</i>
Monday	<i>Depart</i>

What will we eat? You can count on having arepas, a corn flour pastry typically filled with cheese. All kinds of arepas are eaten throughout the day, but they are most often found on the breakfast table, sometimes served with eggs, and always with coffee or chocolate. Colombians tend to eat larger noontime meals (soup, salad and main dishes), and smaller evening meals, in part, because they tend to eat somewhat later.



What about the water? Colombia prides itself on its water quality, especially in the cities. That said, in a city like Bogota, you will be drinking a great deal of fluids due to the high altitude. Although in the majority of locations you will not need to be overly concerned about water quality for drinking or in food preparation, you should still be mindful and plan to occasionally purchase bottled water as needed.

Do we need special immunizations? As always, you should consult a travel clinic or family physician a few months before departure, as

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well as the CDC (Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov) for recommendations. Immunization needs vary greatly in Colombia, because it is one of the most ecologically diverse countries in the world. Bogota, for example, is approximately 8,000 ft. above sea level, and typically, the only medication most people will need is Tylenol until they've acclimated to the altitude. In more tropical, lower-altitude regions, you are likely to need bug spray and anti-malarial prophylaxis; travelers to rural or tropical areas may require additional vaccinations.

Is it dangerous in Colombia? According to the US State Department, "Security in Colombia has improved significantly in recent years, including in tourist and business travel destinations such as Cartagena and Bogota..." While there are risks as in all travel, security concerns tend to center around the more remote areas and border towns. Currently, travel to Colombia incurs approximately the same risk level as travel to Mexico, India, Thailand or Russia, and lower risk than travel to a number of other destinations such as Honduras, Guatemala, Israel or Haiti.

What about cost? Your host will do his or her best to place you in the best-quality accommodations for the lowest price, to ensure that your stay is comfortable and safe while enabling you to maintain control over expenses. A good starting cost projection for a ten-day trip is \$1,650 per person, assuming approximately \$700 for airfare. Air travel can vary considerably with the airline, time of year, and group discounts (10+). We highly recommend using Wayland Travel (www.waylandtravel.com) in the US as a mission travel consultant. Ask for Michelle on the Mission Travel Desk.



We hope that you will consider a mission trip to partner with us as we reach out to the people of Colombia. Join with us as we answer God's call together.

For more information or to plan a mission trip to Colombia, please contact the Rev. Dr. Ted Gaiser, Missioner to Colombia, at ted.gaiser@bc.edu, or contact the Diocese directly at iec@iglesiaepiscopal.org.co.