

Medellin, CO

Colombia Survival Guide

Universidad EAFIT

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Preparation

1. Visa
 - a. Must travel to Colombian consulate to complete Visa process (I went to Chicago)
 - b. Be sure to make appointment beforehand
 - c. Be sure to have everything so you don't have to make the trip twice
2. Spanish
 - a. Practice a little maybe before you go
 - b. No matter how prepared you are, the language barrier will hit you like a storm upon arrival
3. Packing
 - a. DO NOT BRING ANY HEAVY, COLD WEATHER CLOTHING UNLESS YOU PLAN ON GOING SOMEWHERE THAT IS ACTUALLY COLD!!!!!!!!!! Cold weather clothes take up immense space and are never touched if you stay within Colombia (coming from someone who foolishly brought a jacket "just in case")
 - b. Shorts
 - i. Guys
 1. In Medellin, guys hardly ever wear shorts out and about (like literally never)
 2. Wearing shorts SCREAMS foreigner
 3. Shorts are, however, acceptable for exercise obviously
 - ii. Girls
 1. Girls almost never wear shorts either
 2. However, sometimes they are worn when girls go out, but not really.
 - c. Almost everybody wears just jeans or pants and a t-shirt/polo/button-down all the time.. so pack a lot of that stuff
 - d. Even if you don't like to or don't plan on working out a whole lot, bring athletic clothing just in case! Also handy for hikes/treks.
 - e. Solid backpack is necessary for school and for short trips
 - f. Bringing toiletries and such isn't really necessary, unless you have special prescription stuff or allergy related concerns. Most everything can be found in stores in Colombia for relatively the same price (sometimes cheaper) in many brands that you'd find in the US
 - g. At least one good rain jacket

Housing

SAFETY TIP!!! Do all of this searching and securing under the guidance of your buddy or someone else from the area to ensure safety and safe choices.

Before arriving, I booked 4 nights in a hostel from the day I arrived in Medellin. This gave me essentially 5 days to find an apartment to live in. I found an apartment in less than 2 days. The point is that it is very easy to find places to stay especially if you use your buddy and other buddies as a resource! They should know of some landlords looking for patrons and such. Also, you may ask the people that run the hostel if they have any recommendations.

1. Hostel
 - a. I stayed in Waypoint hostel which is super close to the school
 - i. This was decent, and decently priced
 - b. I wouldn't recommend picking a hostel outside of Poblado, the region in which the university lies.
 - c. That being said, there are tons of hostels in Poblado, especially many run by international folks
2. Apartment
 - a. I stayed throughout the semester in an apartment across the street from Clinica Las Vegas (super close to EAFIT). This was a decent place in a decent location.
 - b. For my time over the summer doing research at EAFIT, I lived in Cristo Rey, which is across the river from EAFIT (this will all make sense really soon)
 - c. I could recommend living in Poblado or Envigado or Laurels if you're looking for large and nice
 - d. If you're looking for something more "Colombian" or cheaper, try Cristo Rey or Guayabal
 - e. All of these places listed are relatively close to EAFIT (some closer than others)

Money

1. Cash
 - a. In Colombia, CASH IS KING!!!!!!!!!!
 - b. I would recommend you use cash for everything
 - c. This helps you better keep track of what you're spending and makes it easier to use no matter where you are or what you're buying
 - d. There are ATMs everywhere, make use of them!
 - e. I would exchange for maybe \$50 worth of Colombian peso before leaving the US and do the rest of your exchanging once you arrive
2. Card
 - a. Although you should pay in cash, you need some sort of account to hold your money
 - b. I did not get a bank account in Colombia, but I should have.
 - c. I simply used my Wells Fargo Visa card throughout my time for certain purchases and ATM withdrawals
 - d. However, I paid a 3% fee for every international purchase and paid ATM fees every time I withdrew. Also, my card did not work for Bancolombia ATMs (which was very sad as they're easily the most common
 - e. If you have a card that will be difficult to use abroad like mine, I advise you open a debit account with Bancolombia
 - f. I don't know much about how the actual process goes, but I knew many exchange students that did it
 - g. Bancolombia has ATMs in practically every part of every city in every corner of Colombia, making ATM withdrawals easy

Cell Phone

SAFETY TIP!!! Do this under the guidance of your buddy or someone else from the area to ensure safety and safe choices.

Bring your cellphone from the US for use in Colombia. You will simply remove the SIM card from your US provider (and keep it in a safe place) and replace it with your new one purchased in Colombia! There are many companies to choose from: Claro, Tigo, Movistar, etc. You will find that different people give different recommendations based their experiences. In my experience, Claro was like Verizon (disclaimer: I'm a Verizon customer as well): its more expensive than the others but the coverage/signal is by far the best in all parts of the country. That being said, I never had anything but Claro.... I can only speak from the allllllllll of the situations in which I had signal and others didn't....

Food

1. Household/Groceries
 - a. Grocery stores are very easy to come by
 - b. Grocery shopping is super straight forward as you would expect to find anywhere else
 - c. The main stores you'll find are: Carulla, Exito/Jumbo, and D1
 - i. **Carulla** is the most expensive of the three but has nice stuff and is usually found near large malls
 - ii. **Exito and Jumbo** are your middle ground, Walmart-esque stores that carry pretty much everything including solid food selections of a large variety for good prices.
 - iii. **D1** is the cheapest of them all, but as a result has a smaller selection. I would recommend going to a D1 first to see what you can find there. Especially in terms of things like cleaners (dish soap, hand soap), trash bags, bread, milk, etc.
2. Restaurants
 - a. You will likely find yourself eating out quite a bit, especially for lunch
 - b. Eating in restaurants and things of the sort is much much cheaper in Colombia than it is here, making it far more convenient than cooking much of the time
 - c. Recommendations
 - i. **La Strada** (strip mall) (Poblado)
 - ii. **Oviedo** (mall) (Poblado)
 - iii. **Santa Fe** (mall) (Poblado)
 - iv. **Parque Poblado/Lleras** (downtown poblado area)
 - v. **Contenedores** (strip mall) (Envigado)
 - vi. **El Tesoro** (mall)
 - vii. **Downtown Laureles**
3. Water (**IMPORTANT**)

In Medellin, the water is safe to drink from the tap! I drank it for 7 months without any issues! However, once you leave Medellin, take extreme caution with that. I wouldn't drink from the tap anywhere else out of uncertainty. Stick to bottled water once you leave Medellin as very very few cities in Colombia have clean drinking water from the tap.

Travel

1. Coast
 - a. Cartagena**
 - b. Santa Marta**
 - c. Parque Tayrona
 - d. Baranquilla**
 - e. San Andres**
2. Inland
 - a. Bogota
 - b. Cali
 - c. Eje Cafetero**
 - d. Jardin de Antioquia**
 - e. Guajira

** denotes places I personally visited and can therefore provide information and recommendations