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In Colombia, Did You Know ...?

- At a dinner party, dinner may not be served until 10 pm or midnight.
- When greeting someone, it is considered disrespectful if inquiries are not made about one's health, family, etc.
- Yawning in public is frowned upon.
- A Colombian will avoid opening a gift in front of guests, as it would make them look greedy.
- Most Colombians have two surnames, the first one from their father and second one from their mother. When a woman marries, she adds her new surname as an extension to the first two.

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"Being Colombian is an Act of Faith." *Jorge Luis Borges, writer.*

From a very early age, we are taught in school that Colombia occupies the premium corner of the South American continent: coasts in both oceans, a breathtaking piece of the Andes, magnificent extensions of rainforest, deserts, valleys....name any topographical miracle: we have it.

As with all self evident truths, we grow accustomed to the landscape and think nothing of getting in a car in the city of Cali on a boiling hot Sunday with 90°F weather, to drive 20 minutes up the Farallones mountains and enjoy a cool, foggy afternoon, drinking hot chocolate, eating arepas and wearing a sweater to defeat the icy 40°F temperatures. This is the closest we get to sudden weather changes. Being in the Torrid Zone, we have no seasons in my country, Colombia. Weather news is not a big business. You will never see live reports of a thunderstorm being tracked incessantly on four television channels. Either it rains or it stays dry and depending on the altitude, it is either hot or cold. Period. An occasional hailstorm will make the front page of newspapers if children are able to make a slim, 3-inch tall snowman.

However, the relationship we have with the landscape clearly determines the different types of Colombians you will encounter. And if you are a seasoned Spanish speaker, you will notice that with each comes a very distinct accent. For example, the "rolos" or "cachacos" live in and close to the capital city of Bogota, located in the high altitude mesa of the Cordillera Central (central mountain, we have 3). Known to be very reserved, they think of themselves as cultured and sophisticated. Very aware of fashion trends, bogotanos relish line-

age, family trees and heritage.

Paisas, on the other hand, born and raised on the strenuous slopes of the mountains of Antioquia, are the model for entrepreneurial spirit, much like the gold diggers who founded California. No enterprise is too risky or difficult for a paisa who, according to popular legend, is able to sell a hole in the ground.



Photo courtesy of Corporation Nacional de Turismo

"Vallunos", like myself, come from the valleys located between the mountains, usually close to river. Mother Nature has not been incredibly challenging to us. Crops and cattle multiply effortlessly, water is abundant and we enjoy relatively stable temperatures all year round. Easygoing, we are great hosts, expansive and lovers of simple pleasures.

The unchallenged national masters of fun are the "costenos" who live by the two sea-coasts. With a heavy accent, fond of loose, colorful clothing to fight warm temperatures, they carry the "burden" of being the country's party animals. Belly dancing and exotic, singer Shakira is a true representative of the costeno's tropical nature.

Llaneros inhabit Colombia's extensive plains. With a heart as big as the horizon, they are known for their uncanny ability

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COLOMBIA: Suggested Reading

The Magical Reality of “One Hundred Years of Solitude”.

“One Hundred Years of Solitude”, by Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, has been hailed by literary critics as one of the greatest of all Latin American novels. A novel of epic proportions, it tells the story of the life and death of a small town called Macondo, as well as that of its most prominent family, the Buendias. The chronicle of this family is a metaphor for the history of the continent in general, and of Colombia in particular, since it’s Independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century.

It was in this novel that “magic realism” was launched into the literary world. This term was coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe “a magic insight into reality”. No description could be more appropriate. The mingling of the real and fantastic along the novel manages to keep the reader on edge, unable

to anticipate what will come next. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* oscillates between scenes of great poetic wisdom like the trail of yellow butterflies, to comical ones about the characters whose farts were so strong they killed all the flowers in the house, not to mention the dramatic ants that carried human babies on their backs. In this world, the strange and exotic become comfortably familiar, and the whole concept of an objective reality is put in question..

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a wonderful introduction to the magic of the caribbean, the complexity of its characters, and the tragic irony underlying a remarkably energetic group of people. Gabriel García Márquez is a Colombian-born writer of amazing skill, thought by many to be one of the world's greatest living authors. He currently lives in Mexico City and is considered a pioneer of the Latin American literary “boom”.

- Pilar Angel



Photo courtesy of Corporation Nacional de Turismo

Being Colombian... (Continued from page 1)

with horses and classic outdoor lifestyle. Like Texans, they have created 1001 recipes to barbeque steaks, the most famous one being the “*ternera a la llanera*” (veal llanera style).

Just like Americans who try to explain their fondness for cultural diversity using the “melting pot” metaphor, Colombians are more than the sum of all these parts. We are also the sons and daughters of a very rich Indian tradition, as ancient and legendary as the Aztec and Maya cultures. We endured a very bloody Spanish Conquest and fought it rebelliously. Founded in 1810, one could say that Colombia is a very young country. Its diversity and heritage are still struggling to settle and take shape. Recent attempts to redefine our nation and agree on the civic, peaceful life we all want to live, have bonded our people more than ever. We recently elected a new President by the most overwhelming majority that the country can remember. We pride ourselves in having the oldest and most stable democracy on the continent.

Unable to define it by traditional standards, no wonder then that Borges appealed to faith, to define what makes such richness, exuberance and diversity so unlike any other.

- Pilar Angel



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