

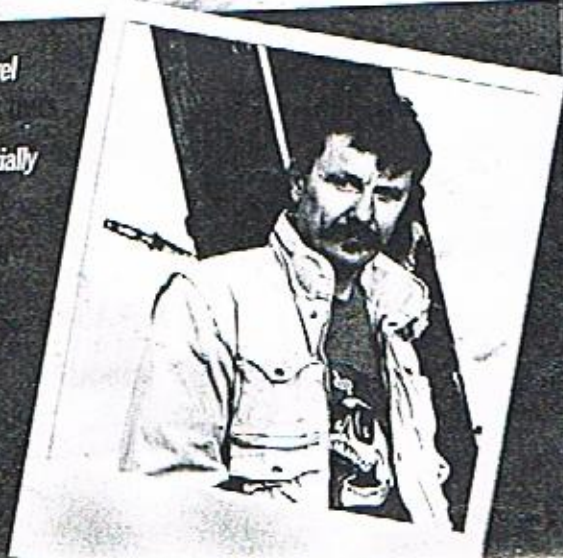
guide to danger and adventure!

WORLDWIDE

THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS PLACES™

ROBERT YOUNG PELTON
COSKUN ARAL & WINK DULLES

"One of the oddest and most fascinating travel books to appear in a long time"
"A primer on how to get in and out of potentially lethal places"
"Laced with biting humor"
"Wickedly funny"
"Absolutely fabulous!"
"A real lifesaver"
"Survival tips you just don't get anywhere else"



Fielding Worldwide, Inc.

How bad is it? Civilians and soldiers are stopped at roadblocks, dragged out of their cars and summarily executed in Antioquia department. Tourists are dragged in bars and discos, then robbed and murdered. Expats, missionaries and other foreigners are favorite targets of terrorist groups, who kidnap them for outrageous ransom amounts that climb into the millions of dollars.

Wealthy rightwingers employ about 100 or so paid killers to systematically murder left-wingers. Left-wingers attempt to kidnap every freckle-faced foreigner they can get their hands on. Drug dealers are knocking off police at the rate of about one a day. The survivors are those who stay away from office buildings, bus stops, police stations and travel agents displaying American Express logos on their windows. However, tourists and other travelers are way down on the list of people who have any protection in this cocaine-fueled free-for-all.

Should you be victimized or seek revenge due to a misfortune, expect little comfort or sympathy from the police, military, and judicial or diplomatic folks; they're busy covering their own asses from the threat of terrorism, drug cartels and crime lords. Only 12 percent of the crimes committed in Colombia ever reach the judicial system.

If you get into trouble and can't afford the ransom, hire a death squad. The price is lower.

With the breakup in May 1992 of peace negotiations with the Colombian government, the country's remaining insurgency groups have focused on taking their war to the cities, using urban terrorism. Both the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), united in the Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinator (CGSB), have made efforts to increase their presence and infrastructure in urban areas, particularly in and around Bogota. The capital and other major Colombian cities (including Barranquilla, site of the U.S. consulate) have been hit by sporadic terrorist attacks, the most common of which have been bombings of financial institutions at night, apparently intended to cause damage but no injuries. But 1996 has seen a nationwide series of guerrilla attacks currently taking place. The FARC and ELN are staging the attacks in hopes of influencing a change in Colombia's government. As of April, 20 people had been killed and there were over 30 guerrilla attacks against public transportation, police stations and gas/oil pipelines. Guerrilla forces are also running a series of ambushes against government police and military forces.

Any good news? Some. The death squads have forced many drug traffickers to move into neighboring Brazil for "health" reasons. But the bottom line here, as one journalist commented, is this: "As many drug-trafficking countries fret about becoming another Colombia, with narcotics-dominated politics, Colombians worry that their country will become another Somalia, run by warlords."

The Players

The Government

Liberal Ernesto Samper Pizano squeaked into power June 19, 1993 in a dead heat with Conservative Andres Pastrana Arango. Considering that only one of every three Colombians voted, it doesn't seem to make any difference who runs the country. Samper has been accused as being a stooge of the Cali drug cartel, despite his public calls for the extermination of Colombia's drug problem. A recent investigation into his alleged ties with druglords concluded that he was offered backing but didn't accept it.

The government is actively but unsuccessfully trying to negotiate peace with various rebel factions, but for now is trying to figure out how to find jobs for the 5200 ex-guerrillas left over from the EPL and the M-19 groups.

The Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinator (CGSB)

This is an unholy triumvirate of three terrorist groups: FARC, ELN, and the EPL/D. They claim about 8000 effective members among all three. The military has said that it managed to diminish that number in 1993 by killing 993 guerrillas and capturing another

1873. They also nabbed five tons of explosives and 1863 weapons in over 2000 armed engagements. Not as high a count as fowl during the duck hunting season in Minnesota, but not bad.

**Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, or
Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)**

FARC was founded in 1964 and is currently estimated to have between 12,000 and 17,000 combatants. Their stock in trade is kidnaping, extortion and protection of rural drug operations across Colombia. They have more of an entrepreneurial bent, considering they began as a Marxist, pro-Soviet revolutionary group. They are the largest and oldest of the three main rebel groups operating in Colombia.

The FARC rebels have decided to spruce up their image with a snappier name that will get them moved up in the Yellow Pages. They will now be known as the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia. Maybe Triple AAA Killing, Kidnaping and Narco Protection would get them more business.

The group specializes in armed attacks against Colombian targets, bombings of U.S. businesses, kidnappings of Colombians and foreigners for ransom, and assassinations. Their funding comes from extortion (ransom payments) and income from the trafficking of drugs (predominantly cocaine). FARC has well-documented ties to drug traffickers and Cuba. It is assumed that any drug transportation from Colombia to Cuba and beyond is controlled by FARC, and with the blessing of Fidel Castro. The dope bucks provide much needed hard currency for Cuba, whose economy has been in tatters since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Peace talks between the government of Colombia and FARC have proved unsuccessful.

There are an estimated 4500 to 5500 armed combatants and 10,000 supporters of FARC which likes to be cruel to be kind. They mainly target the wealthy, but off a couple of peasants once in awhile to keep them in line. The Patriotic Union (UP) is FARC's political arm, seeking change through old-fashioned rhetoric and arm twisting.

In a perfect world, FARC would overthrow established order in Colombia and replace it with a leftist and anti-American regime, in the process creating a broad antimonopoly, anti-imperialist front, while uniting left-wing parties and organizations into a single political movement.

On the scarier side, FARC is the largest, best-trained, best-equipped, and most effective insurgent organization in Colombia, and perhaps in all of South America—the one Western terrorist group voted “most likely to succeed” by U.S. intelligence services. Many consider FARC to be the “military” arm of the Communist Party of Colombia (PCC). The leadership of FARC is composed largely of disaffected middle- and upper-class intellectuals, although it recruits from the peasant population in an effort to maintain a popular base. FARC also draws support from traditional left-wingers, workers, students and radical priests. The popularity of FARC has been undermined by the questionable practice of kidnaping peasants and murdering them as “collaborators” and “traitors” if they're not cooperative.

FARC is the principal force behind National Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinator (SBGC), which includes all major Colombian insurgent groups. FARC was able to muster this coalition due to its closer ties with Colombian narcotics traffickers than the other insurgent groups. The relationship appears to be the strongest in those areas where coca cultivation and production and FARC operational strongholds overlap. In exchange for FARC protection of narcotics interests, the guerrillas have received money to purchase weapons and supplies.

pickpockets and opportunists. The richer, northern suburbs of Bogotá have experienced a rash of car bombings.

Colombia East of the Andes

This area can be hazardous to your health, with the exception of the city of Leticia in the Amazonas Department and adjacent tourist areas in Amazonas.

North Coast/Barranquilla/Isla San Andres

Cali is the home of two of the major drug cartels. Expect plenty of fighting between the two rival groups. The island of San Andres is a major drug shipment area. Cartagena is considered somewhat safe, due to the increased presence of police protecting the lucrative tourist trade. Expect tourist crime.

Barranquilla is the site of guerilla attacks on businesses and government centers. The bay port is a major center for drug traffickers. Guerrillas like to regularly attack the Navy base near the airport at night. Outside the city limits is the domain of bad people, particularly at night.

Rural Valle de Cauca Department

As well as most of the Cauca River Valley, including the cities of Cali and Buenaventura, and the road between Cali and Buenaventura.

The Northern Half of Choco Department

Particularly the Uraba region, except for the tourist area of Capurgana.

The Magdalena Medio Region

The Magdalena River Valley south to Tolima, including western Boyaca, eastern Caldas, and northwestern Cundinamarca.

Tolima Department South of Espinal

Especially if traveling after dark.

Road Travel in Huila and Cauca Departments

The cities of Neiva and Popayan are considered to be safe if reached by air.

Dangerous Things

U.S. Companies

Several terrorist or guerilla groups are active in Colombia; U.S. interests are among their targets. Kidnapping for ransom or political purposes, including U.S. citizens, is increasingly common in Colombia. In early 1994, bombs destroyed a Mormon temple in Medellin, damaged another in Bucaramanga, and damaged a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Bucaramanga. Additionally, two American missionaries were kidnapped for political reasons by guerrillas.

Kidnapping

Remember the last time you asked your boss how much you were really worth? Well, you may find out on your next trip to Colombia. In 1993 there were 121 kidnappings a month in Colombia, or about four a day. In 1994, there were 4000 for the year, or about 11 a day. Kidnapping has become a US\$350 million industry in Colombia. Over 70 foreigners have been abducted in the last four years, each for huge ransoms. A Briton was killed in August of '95, while an American was released after being held for 11 months. It seems his captors just gave up on ever getting the \$5 million they were asking for.

Fewer than one in 30 kidnapers are ever caught and sentenced. Although kidnappings in Colombia fell 23 percent between 1992 and 1993, in 1994 they shot up nearly 35 percent to 1378 abductions. Fewer than half the kidnappings that actually take place are ever reported. Luckily, Colombians make up the bulk of the victims. Most never report the abductions, fearing it would just advertise their culpability. There were believed to be 10 Americans being held captive in Colombia as of February 1995. A splinter group of the

Popular Liberation Army (EPL) took responsibility for the January 1995 abduction of Edward Gravowsky. Although the EPL was disbanded in March 1991, a group of about 150 diehards remains. Gravowski was the fourth foreigner kidnapped by Colombian guerrillas in a four-month period. In the past few years, only one in 10 of the reported victims has been rescued by security forces. Many others are murdered by the kidnapers, who often demand large ransoms and then return a corpse.

Murder

Think the U.S. is the murder capital of the world? Think again. Colombia has the highest murder rate in the world. For every 100,000 people, 77.5 are offed. That's more than eight times higher the rate in the U.S.

Oil Pipelines

Occidental Petroleum (Oxy) is the country's largest producer of oil. The Cano-Limon oil field (along the border of Venezuela and Colombia) yields Colombia's largest oil deposits. The 470-mile pipeline cost over a billion dollars and is the focal point for guerrilla activity. Nasty men have blown up the pipeline over 400 times since it came on line in 1985. In 1988 an Oxy engineer was kidnapped and sprung for an impressive US\$6 million dollars. To make things fair, the government of Colombia took responsibility for the repair of the pipeline every time the bad guys punched a hole in it. It takes about 36 hours to repair the bomb blasts. About 190,000 barrels of crude oil flow through the pipeline every day. The joke is that the rebels claim that the pipeline is robbing the Colombians of their natural resources. The real criminal seems to be the Colombian government, which skims 85 percent of every dollar generated by the oil. There is a \$1.20 a barrel "war tax" to help fight the guerrillas and a tax of 12 percent of all profits taken out of the country.

Scopolamine

Scopolamine (or Burundanga, as it is called locally) is a drug Colombian thugs use to incapacitate tourists in order to rob them. It's spiked into drinks in bars, and into cigarettes in taxis. The drug renders victims unconscious and causes serious medical problems. Colombian doctors report that hospitals receive an estimated 2000 Scopolamine victims every month in Bogota. One out of every three patients in the emergency room has been intoxicated with the drug. The druggings occur in all areas of the city throughout the day, but with more frequency at night. The most effective way to administer Scopolamine is in a liquid form, which can incapacitate the victim in two to three seconds. However, research has revealed that street tactics can involve the drug being utilized in a spray, dust or smoke form as well. Most drugging incidents take place in bars and discotheques. Some incidents occur when the server brings you a drink. On the way to the table, he/she will drug the drink or bottle. This usually occurs toward the end of the night, when most people are less observant. After being drugged, the server helps you to the door, where an accomplice is waiting. Another common tactic is through a casual conversation in a bar. During the course of the conversation or at a time when your drink is left unattended, the drug is administered. To defend against such tactics, avoid going to nightclubs alone. While inside such establishments, try to watch your drink being prepared and brought to the table. Do not leave your drink unattended. Street druggings are also common and may involve spray, dust or smoke. These scenarios typically involve being approached by a stranger on the street who initiates a conversation and then administers the drug. The best preventative measure is to try not to walk alone. Avoid stopping and talking to strangers or accepting anything to eat, drink or smoke from them. Druggings on public transportation are frequent, so buses should be avoided. Scopolamine symptoms include disorientation, incoherence, dilated pupils, mouth dryness, restlessness, fast heart rate, blurred vision and stupor. Victims of suspected Scopolamine drug-

Santa Marta

The north end of town and the Rodadero Beach areas are extremely dangerous. Do not travel alone into these areas. Daylight armed robberies of tourists are commonplace. Thieves will often relieve their victims of their clothes as well as all other valuables.

The Darien

Pressed against the Panama border, Uraba is the murder capital of Colombia. The country's richest banana growing region, it's also home to a myriad of drug runners, leftist guerrillas and paramilitary outfits. Uraba's annual murder rate of 254 per 100,000 people is the highest in Colombia. In 1995, 124 people—almost all peasants—were killed in 15 different massacres. A far greater number were gunned down singly or in pairs. On February 14, 1996, guerrillas massacred 10 banana farmers—and 10 more people were mowed down by AK-47 and R-15 gunfire in a billiards hall on April 4. How bad is Uraba? Local officials are pleading for U.N. intervention and for a peacekeeping force to be installed. The area around the Darien Peninsula is a major transit point for contraband goods and a center for drug processing. The FARC group provides protection for the drug labs.

Cartagena

Professional pickpockets abound, especially at the beaches. They especially like to strike in crowded areas. Cameras are a favorite trophy for thieves here. Scams in Cartagena are numerous. Other crooks pose as tour guides. Some of them can be rather touchy if you turn down their expensive excursion offers. If you're offered a job on a ship bound for the U.S. or other parts of South America, this is most assuredly a con.

Medellin

Despite being a major drug traffickers' center, the city is a remarkably friendly place. However, it's not the druglords you should be afraid of here. Rather, it's petty thieves and street thugs.

Valle Department

Everywhere off the main roads in Valle Department is extremely unsafe due to guerrilla activities. Beware particularly of Cauca Department E off the Pan-American Highway. Tourists should avoid this area entirely. Areas of Cra 6 are also extremely dangerous, including Parque Bolivar and the market. There has also been guerrilla activity in the Purace National Park area, particularly near the Popayan-La Plata Road. In Inza, women should not be on the streets unaccompanied.

Other Guerrilla Areas

The Departments of Boyaca, Norte de Santander, Casanare, Caqueta, Huila, Putumayo, Cesar, Guajira, Arauka, Meta, as well as the Turbo/Uraba region.

The Upper Magdalena

You'll constantly encounter ruffraff here, touting everything from drugs, gold and emeralds to pre-Columbian art. The items are always fake, except for the drugs.

Antioquia Department and Medellin

Medellin was the focus of much of the shoot-outs and wars between Escobar and PEPES. There are roadblocks throughout the countryside, and there have been executions of military, civilians and locals without provocation. This is a very nasty area, and the most dangerous place in Colombia.

Bogota

Narco-traffickers/guerrillas have threatened and carried out terrorist attacks against Colombian officials, foreign embassies, and other targets. Expect to travel in fear of violent crime, particularly in the south of Bogota. Tourist areas are infested with thieves,

have become favorite targets of disgruntled and jealous FARC fanatics, who moved into the areas the EPL abandoned. On January 23, 1994, FARC nasties ambushed an EPL fund-raiser, massacring 35 people.

Dignity for Colombia Movement (DCM)

This player on the scene seems to have a fairly simple agenda. Kill every member of the 165-member House of Representatives who votes to clear President Ernesto Samper of drug charges. A refreshingly direct change from our own political pressure groups.

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About 250 members who split from M-19 group when the M-19 turned into a political group. They are based outside of Bogota.

The U.S. Military

The U.S. government has unofficially declared war on the drug trade in Colombia and, therefore, FARC. Currently, there are nine U.S. advisors in Colombia training troops; 62 military technicians are installing radar bases; 32 members of a navy construction battalion in Meta province are building a military base on the Meta River, a heavily used artery for drug transport; 156 U.S. Army engineers northwest of Cali are building a school, clinic and road. Although covert U.S. involvement in Colombia is low-key presently, further disintegration of Colombia's infrastructure would undoubtedly lead to an increased presence.

Death Squads

More than a hundred groups of teams made up of five to 10 members each are paid by wealthy and influential Colombians to kill former and current left-wingers and communists on an ongoing basis, and to act as a more effective deterrent to kidnapping, murder and extortion threat than the police or military. The death squads are primarily active in Medellin and Bogota, and around the Antioquia Department. One of the principal players is the Macetos paramilitary group, which is centered in the San Martin municipality. This group has performed numerous massacres against leftist guerrilla groups and their sympathizers.

Drug Lords

Pablo Escobar is gone; however, cocaine is still the biggest covert industry in Colombia. Coca is grown in the country, processed in labs and then shipped or flown out to various ports and other sites in the Caribbean and Mexico. The headquarters for the drug trade is in Cali and Medellin. The drug folks are very tight with both left- and right-wing terrorist groups. So be nice when you talk to anybody about drugs.

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Getting In

A passport and a return/onward ticket are required for stays up to three months. Minors (under 18) traveling alone, with one parent, or with a third party must present written authorization from the absent parent(s) or legal guardian, specifically granting permission to travel alone, with one parent or with a third party. This authorization must be notarized, authenticated by a Colombian embassy or consulate, and translated into Spanish. For up-to-the-minute information regarding entry and customs requirements for Colombia, contact the nearest consulate in Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, New Orleans, New York, Houston or San Juan, or the

There is evidence that various FARC fronts have actually been involved in processing cocaine. Money from the narcotics trade has supplemented FARC revenues from kidnappings, extortion and robberies.

And on the military front, on April 16, 1996, FARC guerrillas killed 31 soldiers and wounded 18 others in a major ambush on an army patrol in the southwest province of Narino, highlighting a surge in rebel activity in 1996. The attack occurred at dawn in a remote area near Puerres, close to the Ecuadorian border. Troops were dispatched to the area, following a rebel sabotage of an oil pipeline that runs through the area. The patrol was attacked by 150 FARC rebels armed with automatic assault rifles and grenades. The attack was one of the worst to be suffered by the military this decade.

National Liberation Army (NLA), or Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)

A rural based, anti-U.S., Maoist-Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group formed in July 1964, the ELN raises funds by kidnapping foreign employees of large corporations and holding them for lofty ransom payments. The ELN conducts extortion and bombing operations against U.S. and other foreign businesses in Colombia, particularly the deep pocketed petroleum industry. The group has inflicted major damage on oil pipelines since 1986.

They boast up to 2000 members, many of whom have been trained and armed by Nicaragua and Cuba. The ELN seeks "...the conquest of power for the popular classes..." along with nationalizations, expropriations, and agrarian reform.

The ELN is a political-military organization that draws its support from among students, intellectuals, peasants and, surprisingly, the middle-class workers of Colombia. Operations include the kidnapping of wealthy ranchers and industrialists, assassinations of military officers, offing of labor leaders and peasants, multiple armed robberies, various bombings, raids on isolated villages, weapons grabs on police posts and army patrols, and occupations of radio stations and newspaper offices. The ELN is currently perfecting attacks on petroleum pipelines and facilities, seeking to damage Colombia's economic infrastructure and investment climate.

Dignity for Cuba (DFC)

A twenty-year-old terrorist group called Dignity for Cuba bit the bullet in 1996. The three dozen members were an extra-pissed-off splinter group from the National Liberation Army led by former Spanish priest Manuel Perez. The small group was composed of white collar workers who lived off the ransom money they made kidnapping politicians and wealthy Colombians. Their leader Hugo Toro, actually ran the group from his prison cell in La Picota prison where he was sentenced to 25 years for murder.

Their last hurrah was an attempt to force the Colombian congress to impeach President Samper for his association with drug cartels. To make their point more urgent they threatened not only to kill every person who didn't vote for impeachment but they kidnapped Juan Carlos Gaviria, the brother of the former president of Colombia, in April of '96.

Uncle Fidel interceded on behalf of the kidnap victim and even allowed the group to fly to Cuba where they will try to figure out what to do for a living.

Popular Liberation Army (EPL/D)

This dissident former affiliate of the Popular Liberation Army based primarily in Uraba can't seem to get ahead. The PLA signed a peace treaty several years ago with the government but these Maoist EPL/D sad sacks won't quit. The EPL/D leaders are followed and arrested on a regular basis (probably due to informants from the PLA). The 2800 armed troops demobilized in 1991 and the group changed its name to *Esperanza, Paz y Libertad* (Hope, Peace and Freedom), retaining the initials EPL. As the new group/party has had political success in the polls since making peace with the government, members

have become favorite targets of disgruntled and jealous FARC fanatics, who moved into the areas the EPL abandoned. On January 23, 1994, FARC nasties ambushed an EPL fund-raiser, massacring 35 people.

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gings should be taken immediately to a hospital. And if that's not serious enough, the "high" isn't even any good, and you feel like hell the next day.

Power Blackouts

When the lights go out, make sure you are nowhere to be found by street criminals. Common street crime increases exponentially during blackouts in major cities.

Phony Cops

A common scam is an approach to an obvious tourist by an alleged "policeman" who says that he is checking for counterfeit U.S. dollars and wants to "check" the foreigner's money. The person gives the criminal his/her money, receives a receipt, and the "policeman" disappears. Others request that the victim accompany him "downtown." You have just been kidnapped.

Strolling Through the Country

You may want to save the rain forests, but coca growers and processing labs would prefer that you stay at the beach. Two French tourists were snatched by FARC in the La Macarena nature preserve south of Bogota. The countryside is effectively controlled by rebel groups who view you as a source of income.

Bombs

Bombs don't drop from the sky here. They are usually car bombs. Bombing is a deliberate attempt to capture publicity and strike fear into the populace. The victims are incidental. Car bombs are deliberately detonated in crowded central locations. Buses are bombed, as well as oil pipelines, refineries, hotels and office buildings.

Driving

Colombia's roads are in poor condition. Many routes aren't marked. Avoid driving at night. Many vehicles have dim headlights, if any at all. Other drivers are reckless. Cattle are unwitting, as they pause to pee in the middle of the road at midnight.

Taxis

Women should never travel alone at night in taxis. Both sexes are subject to popular scams where the driver feigns a mechanical breakdown. The passenger is asked to get out of the car and help push the taxi to a "jump-start," which separates passengers from their luggage. The driver will then start the car and drive off.

Buses

Bus travel in the south of Colombia can be hazardous. Thieves haunt buses in this area waiting for passengers to fall asleep. Then, guess what they do. Buses between Bogota and Ipiales and between San Augustin and Popayan are frequented by scam artists/thieves who offer doped chewing gum, cigarettes, food and sweets before taking everything you've got.

Hotel Rooms

Hotel rooms of foreigners are not infrequently raided by the police looking for drugs. Having a witness around may prevent them from planting drugs in the room. But, then again, it may not.

Planes

In Colombia many radar and ground tracking stations are damaged by rebels and drug smugglers to protect illegal drug shipments. More than 1000 people have died in Colombian air accidents since 1986.

Rumors

A Spanish magazine, *Cambio 16*, published a report purporting to be from a DEA source, which claimed the U.S. government is attempting to bring about the resignation of President Ernesto Samper through attacks, blackmail and prison breakouts. The article cited the recent escape of Cali cartel leader Jose Santacruz Londono from prison as evi-

dence of this plot. Colombian army commander General Harold Bedoya stated to the Colombian press that he had no knowledge of this plot and could not vouch for the veracity of the article. The apparently fabricated article appears to have risen out of recent tensions between the U.S. and Colombian governments. Nonetheless, the report appears to be raising anti-American sentiment in Colombia.

Booze

Beware of drinks poured from brand-label liquor, such as Johnnie Walker scotch, with broken seals. In many instances, the labels are fake and the booze is a potentially lethal spirit. Drink only beer if you need to catch a buzz.

Drugs

Despite what we said about the few criminals that get to justice in Colombia, if you get arrested for any drug-related crime expect at least threats of lifelong incarceration and spending a few thousand bucks bribing your way out of jail. The government will do little to help. Any foreigner who wants to cut out the middlemen and go into competition with the Colombian drug dealers should watch the movie *Scarface* a few times. Strangely enough, every year some yahoo ends up in a Colombian jail for doing exactly that.

Hassles with Police

Many police officers and soldiers will shake you down for doing everything from taking pictures to walking on the beach at night. The best bluff is to demand to see their supervisor and walk quickly in the direction that takes you farthest away from them. If the police really do arrest you, get on the horn to the consulate ASAP. They can't do much if you really screwed up, but they're all you've got.

Getting Sick

Medical care is adequate in major cities, but varies in quality elsewhere. Health problems in Colombia include the presence of cholera, though cholera is found largely in areas outside the cities and usual tourist areas. Visitors who follow proper precautions regarding food and drink are not generally at risk. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services. U.S. medical insurance is not always valid outside the United States. In some cases, supplemental medical insurance with specific overseas coverage is considered useful. If you are the victim of a Scopolamine attack, remember to seek medical assistance immediately. Scopolamine is usually mixed with other narcotics and can cause brain damage.

Nuts and Bolts

Spanish is the official language. English is common in major cities and tourist centers. The Colombians like to party, so expect massive crowds and price hikes during local holidays. Electricity is 110V/60hz. Local time is the same as New York. The local currency is the peso, about 837 to the U.S. dollar at press time.

Temperatures are fairly high throughout the year. It gets cooler and wetter the higher you go. Seaside areas are muggy. Heavy rain falls between April and October.

Business hours are from 8 a.m.-noon and from 2-6 p.m., Monday-Friday. Bank hours in Bogota are from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday, and from 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on Fridays, except the last Friday of the month, when they close at noon. In other major cities, they're open from 8 a.m.-11:30 a.m. and from 2-6 p.m. Monday-Thursday. On Friday, they're open until 4:30 p.m., except the last Friday of the month, when they close at 11:30 a.m.

Embassy Location/Registration

Upon arrival, U.S. citizens are urged to obtain updated information on travel and security within Colombia and to register with the following:

Consular Section, U.S. Embassy

Calle 38 No. 8-61
Bogota
☎ [57] (1) 320 1300

U.S. Consulate

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Dangerous Days

Anniversaries are bad days for a stroll in the country or shopping downtown in Colombia. Rebel groups like to remind people by blowing things up.

- 10/08/1987** The Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (CNG) is an umbrella organization, under which the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and a dissident faction of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) coordinate political positions and organize joint terrorist operations. It was founded on this date.
- 08/28/1985** April 19 movement (M-19) originated; leader Ivan Marino Ospina was killed in a clash with government troops.
- 11/20/1983** Legalization of the M-19. The April 19 movement (M-19), a leftist terrorist organization, was legalized by an amnesty law after the group had made peace with the government. The M-19 is now a legitimate political party.
- 04/29/1967** Founding of the EPL (Popular Liberation Army).
- 08/15/1964** The National Liberation Army (ELN) began its armed struggle.
- 05/27/1964** When government troops attacked the "independent republic" that communist peasant groups had set up at Marquetalia, Caldas Department.
- 11/11/1957** The Popular Liberation Army (EPL), a leftist terrorist organization, has since made peace with the government and become a legitimate political party. However, a dissident faction continues the armed struggle against the government.
- 07/17/1930** Communist Party founded.
- 08/07/1819** Battle Of Boyacas.
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In a Dangerous Place

Colombia: Un Favorito, Por Favor

I had agreed to go out with the official's daughter. She was coming into San Andreas tomorrow from Cali for Holy Week. To decline the social request would not be a wise idea. I watched in amazement, as this distinguished gentleman was able to piss in the sink at the same time he was washing his hands. We were in his hotel suite, which served as his full-time home. He was a very high level government official on the island. Instead of wallpaper, he had cases of Mumm's stacked up from floor to ceiling, creating a pleasing but somewhat industrial pattern. His choice of music was limited to the one or two AM radio stations on the island—he used a state-of-the-art quadraphonic stereo system to blast out Julio Iglesias. Like most of his possessions, they were "gifts" or leftovers from customs inspections of travelers.

He explained how he makes his money. He has a group of three to five "beach boys" who sell coconut oil on the beach to tourists. Along with the golden fragrant oil in old beer bottles, they offer hash or marijuana to unsuspecting tourists. As the sun goes down, they turn in the money they've made and carefully point out each and every person who bought drugs that day. During the night, the doors of the surprised victims are crashed down and they're trotted off to jail at gunpoint. They then pay the judge, the lawyer, the DAS, the F2 and, of course, the Aduana dearly for their freedom. In fact, they even have to pay for meals while they are in jail. As he adjusted his evening clothes and carefully combed his hair, I thought he looked rather dashing for a thug.

—RYP

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