

REGIONAL NARRATIVES

OF TOURISM

Tatacoa Desert, THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.

HUILA

FROM THE GREEN HEART OF COLOMBIA
TO THE WORLD

COLOMBIA 

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**MINISTRY OF COMMERCE,
INDUSTRY AND TOURISM**

VICE MINISTRY OF TOURISM

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Monument to Cacica La Gaitana, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

WELCOME TO A NEW WAY OF NARRATING COLOMBIA

We are delighted to take this step forwards with you during this stage of promoting the tourism of our country and, first of all, we would like to thank you for being part of this strategy geared towards the growth and strengthening of the sector. It is people like you who make it possible for increasingly more Colombians and foreigners to explore Colombia.

The Government's goal was to find innovative content associated with cultural expressions and natural attractions in our country, to enable the stakeholders of the tourism sector to publicise destinations and experiences to promote Colombia in the best possible way.

Following in-depth research into our 32 departments plus Bogotá, needs and perspectives were identified with a

view to promoting the country.

This is what led to the creation of the regional narratives of tourism, which are a tool for anyone who wants to generate attractive content and benefit from this department-based research, which featured the participation of researchers, composers, writers, journalists, entrepreneurs, artisans, artists, cultural advisers, social leaders, singers, traditional cooks, indigenous communities, natural parks' representatives, tourists, chefs and other experts from all regions of the country.

So, together, we are going to take advantage of these opportunities for communication and we are going to show that Colombia is the most welcoming country in the world.

PROCOLOMBIA

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

As a result of a tourism promotion initiative, we have created the regional tourism narratives and their accompanying magazine—a tool to convey them to local tourism operators. Both the toolkit and this publication are designed to complement each other and offer an outstanding opportunity to attract tourism from all corners of the world.

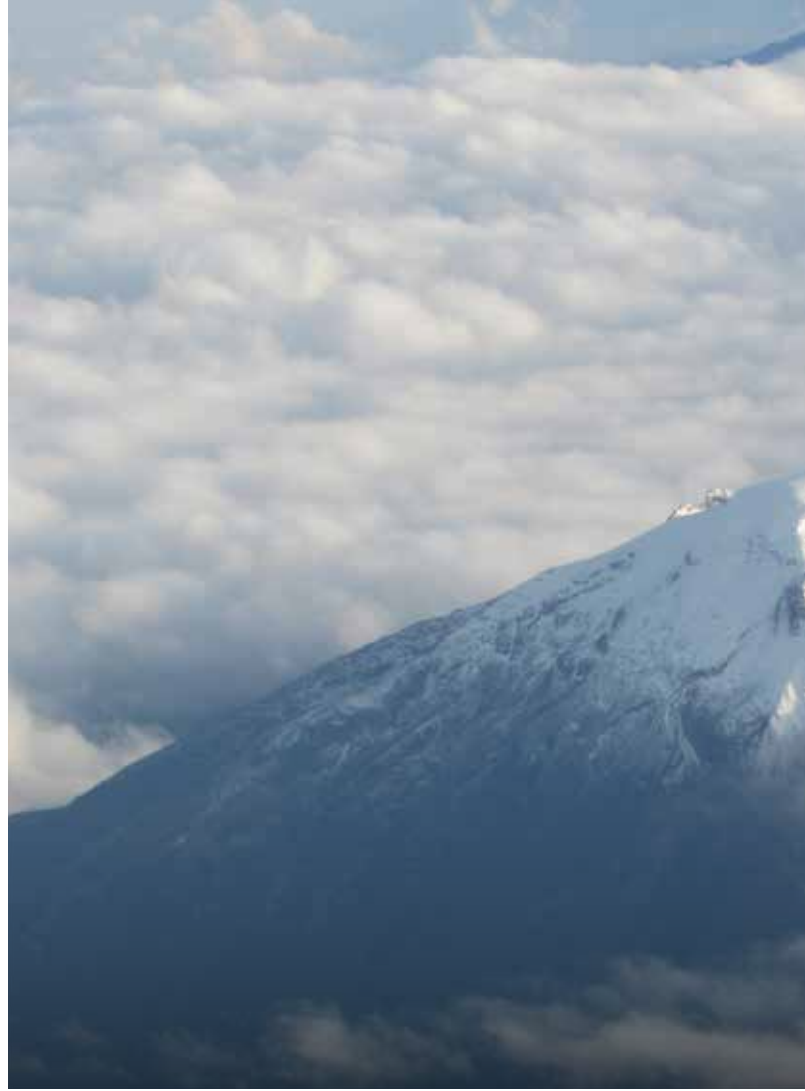
As a reader, you will have at your disposal **33 research modules**, broken down by region and department. Additionally, a content manual is available, a guide teaching you how to best wield this information and create content for different media that efficiently communicates destinations' offers and aligns itself with their needs. The initiative also includes the podcast series "**Sounds from the Heart of Colombia**", 33 stories that reconstruct environments, voices, songs of nature, and the cultural identities of each of our departments, as well as a series of photographs and illustrations of the main destinations.

The following pages contain articles showcasing the highlights of each department in keeping with the aforementioned narratives, as well as information providing a general summary of the research. If you were to require more in-depth information, we recommend reviewing the 33 modules comprising the regional tourism narratives.

PROCOLOMBIA

VALLEY, SNOW, SNOWY VALLEY

Among mountains, deserts, rivers, valleys, moorlands and snow-capped mountains, irrigated by the Magdalena River, we find the department of Huila, belonging to what is known as Tolima Grande.



The spectacularly diverse department of Huila —belonging to Tolima Grande— emerged from a colossally varied and vast landscape, it has one of the highest Andean peaks and is one of the departments that hosts the source of the Magdalena River. Its flag, blazoned with white and green, represents snow-capped mountains and biodiversity. The yellow symbolises the awakening of the ear of corn, the product of hard work and the perseverance of farmers.

“From the yellowish green of the desert to the intense green of the mountains, we boast nature for all tastes.”



Nevado del Huila volcano, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

Huila stretches across a vast landscape that includes mountains, one of Colombia's most important snow-capped volcanoes (Nevado del Huila) and the Magdalena River, which represents the region's hydrographic axis.

"We have everything ranging from landscapes, diverse natural environments and many stark contrasts. There are snow-capped mountains, deserts, major rivers, caves and natural parks that are very well known in the country and worldwide."

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And it is because of this vast and varied landscape that the department's geography is renowned and known as: "Green Heart, Shining Mountain", alluding to both its diversity and ecological importance. These monikers have been planted in the souls of the people of Huila, who still express them today and display them with pride, such as

Raúl, a young man who sees tourism as an opportunity to get ahead, and tells us:

"Huila is the green heart of Colombia. We are almost in the very centre of the country, between two mountain ranges and the Magdalena valley, both sides show us that: a green heart that reflects the department's richness. We try to conserve nature, the wealth of trees and plants."

Furthermore, thanks to the Magdalena River, the department is host to a variety of activities that have boosted its economy through the use and exploitation of its resources. Many benefits are attributed to the river (not only for the gain of the department, but also for the region and the country): the fertility of the land it flows through, livelihoods (thanks to fishing) and how we connect various regions of the country, which led to the growth of what were and still are the most important river ports in Colombia.

"The Magdalena River is a guiding theme because its source is found in our department and benefits the country. It has an abundance of fish, different species, and varied landscapes in its surroundings. We all benefit from it, we all need the river for one reason or another."

The Strait of Magdalena is located in Huila, and is noteworthy for being the place where the country's most representative river reaches a width of just 2.2 metres. Visiting this spot and observing its grandeur has become one of the most popular tourist activities. Here you can also practice extreme sports, which has turned this area into a regional benchmark for activities such as canoeing and rafting.

"Taking a stroll along the Magdalena River is a whole different experience from taking a stroll, for example, along the River Seine, because here you see turtles, you see nature. You can cherish birds of every possible colour and vegetation that you won't see anywhere else on the planet."



The Mohán, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

IMMORTAL CULTURE

The cultural manifestations of the breathtaking department of Huila are boundless. Traditions and stories resonate with mysticism, spirituality and connection with a priceless legacy.

The department abounds in legends and stories of guardians and beings that look over the diversity of its geography. It is a region that has untold cultural manifestations, customs and traditions that gather legends and myths around the department's geography and history. It boasts the presence of supernatural beings that protect nature, and of ghosts that reproach those who misbehave. All this is imbued, in one way or another, in the personality of the people of Huila.

There is also the figure of La Gaitana, a heroine who called upon the indigenous resistance to defend themselves against their oppressors and avenge the death of her son. The people of Huila identify with her story and highlight her defence of life and her bravery.

"She is a woman who is representative of Huila, the origin of the genes that we women possess to care for, protect and defend the community and the environment."

We also have the Mohán, an old shaman who hid from the conquistadors in the Magdalena River, from where he watches over his people. Then there is the Poirá, a mythological being who lives in the Magdalena River, guarding its waters and the treasures left by the natives. Similarly, the Madremonte lives in the forests, has long hair covering her face and has never been seen by any human being. She defends nature and chastens those who harm it. Many places are characterised by mystery and are home to ghosts and witches, who represent an enigma and are an attraction for visitors.

"The Magdalena River is host to a wealth of stories, and there are many who claim to have seen the Mohán and describe him exactly as he was. The Poirá is a mythological figure of the river that frightened fishermen, especially during Holy Week, when everyone was working."



It is a unique place that is host to many ethnic groups and communities that defended their territory and also has one of the continent's major archaeological sites, representing one of the biggest pre-Columbian civilisations and which is considered a treasure by its inhabitants: San Agustín.

"We have many indigenous people here and in some way we owe part of what we are to this heritage. In San Agustín we have this monumental architecture that was declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco and is a symbol of regional tourism and a place of reference for scholars and lovers of pre-Columbian cultures."

The department boasts gastronomy that incorporates elements of the richness of its geography of contrasts, its indigenous legacy and the region's own products, notably featuring the asado huilense (grilled meat dish), which represents the idiosyncrasy and is a staple in the festivities of San Pedro; the arepas orejeporro (corn patty), an necessary accompaniment to the asado; the achiras, a mixture made from the starch of a plant used by the pre-Hispanic peoples of Peru and Colombia; insulso, a preparation with a white corn, sugar and cinnamon base that accompanies various dishes; viudo de capaz, a fish dish typical of the inhabitants of the riverbanks and even the stuff of legend; and cholupa juice, one of the department's typical fruits, noteworthy for its sweet and sour taste similar to passion fruit.

"Huila's gastronomy is also highly varied, we have the famous fish viudo, the best achira in the country is produced here, and it even reaches many corners of the world."

THOSE DEEP ROOTS

The historic department of Huila has cultural activities and festivals that preserve and socialise Huila's culture and identity.



This narrative is currently reproduced through the conservation of its past, its legacy and its traditions with a view to preserve and strengthen its roots. The department of Huila is noteworthy nationwide for its music- and dance-based cultural activities and festivals where parades, concerts and varied rhythms preserve folklore and showcase the importance of Huila's culture and identity. Every year visitors are treated the joy of the music and the festivities in honour of San Pedro and San Juan. These are festivities of eminently Catholic origin that slowly grew to become a renowned cultural scene.

The department has given rise a major number of composers and musicians, who seek to preserve folklore through their art by singing and composing lyrics about the region's geography, river and indigenous legacy.

"We have amazing interpreters of traditional music who use their lyrics to revive the stories and the value of the department."

Thus, they use music to endeavour to preserve the past and its traditions, strengthening identity, roots and pride in traditions. Their music evokes the region's origins, indigenous dances, the movement of the river and its myths. It is home to noteworthy composers, along with those of Tolima, due to their work to preserve the region's musical legacy.

"We have amazing interpreters of traditional music who revive the stories and the value of the department. It is a festival with two sections: a religious part and a pagan part, so in these festivities we revive musical traditions and the folklore of Huila that represent us."

Their musical rhythms reflect the region's origins, evoking movements from indigenous dances, the waves of the river and mythology: sanjuanero, bambuco, rajaleña, rhythms that children learn from an early age and which represent culture and identity. Although the region shares its rhythms, dances and music with the neighbouring department of Tolima, Huila is noteworthy for being the cradle of performers who have been responsible for preserving the region's musical legacy and for being standard bearers of its traditions through their lyrics.

"One of Huila's strengths is dance. It has always been closely linked to our culture. The Bambuco Festival has gone international, carrying the message of joy and fun that is represented by dance."

Thus, part of the region's tourist offer relates to visits to places that evoke all that is sacred. This includes the likes of the Chingaza National Natural Park Tunos Natural Park, the Peñas Blancas reserve, the Encenillo biological reserve, the Bogotá wetlands, the Nemocón salt mine, the Zipaquirá salt mine, the Thomas van der Hammen forest reserve and the Sumapaz Natural Park, in outdoor spaces, full of air, for you to feel freedom and tranquillity. Other tourist attractions promote caring for water and the land, such as visits to farmers who grow crops chemical-free and who prepare typical foods using traditional methods. This entire tourism does exactly that: it upholds and showcases the legacy of water, the land and the indigenous heritage.

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"It is a festival with two sections: a religious part and a pagan part, so in these festivities we revive musical traditions and the folklore of Huila that represent us."



KEY WORDS
AND CONCEPTS

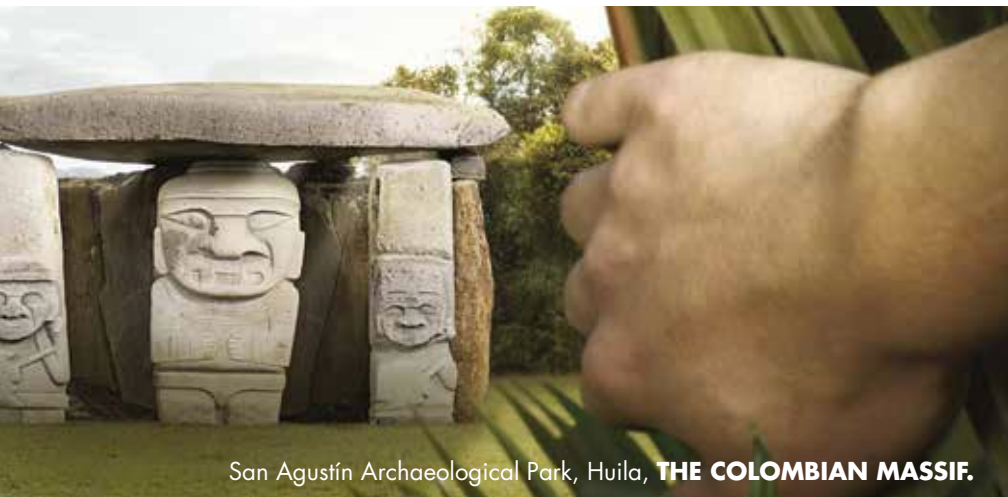




Magdalena River, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

REGION OF CONTRASTS

It is home to Nevado del Huila volcano, the Tatacoa Desert and the Magdalena River. Green heart and shining mountain are icons that represent the beauty and richness of the ecosystem.



San Agustín Archaeological Park, Huila, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

ANCESTRAL HERITAGE

Its indigenous legacy, archaeological remains, mythical guardians and custodians of resources and history are core pillars of what today is the identity of the department and its people.



Bambuco, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**

MUSICAL HERITAGE

Its festivals and cultural displays showcase bambuco, coplas, string music, traditional dress and other cultural legacies, thus preserving its unique intangible heritage.



Tatacoa Desert, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**



GEOGRAPHY

- Nevado del Huila National Natural Park
- Cueva de los Guácharos Natural Park
- Tatacoa Desert
- La Mano del Gigante vantage point
- Rivera thermal springs
- Betania reservoir
- El Químbo dam
- Bordonos Falls
- Mortiños Falls
- Strait of Magdalena
- Playa Juncal water park
- Las Ceibas River among others.



MUSIC

- Sanjuanero
- Bambuco
- Rajaleña among others.



FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

- Folklore Festival, National Pageant of Bambuco and International Folklore Show (Neiva)
- La Alegría y El Folclor Departmental and People's Festival and Pageant (Garzón Huila)
- Cocoa and Coffee Departmental Folklore Festival and Pageant (Gigante)
- Sanjuanero Huilense Children's Festival (Neiva)
- Jorge Villamil Cordobés National Composition Competition (Neiva) among others.

KEY CONCEPTS



GASTRONOMY

- Asado huilense (grilled meat dish)
- Arepas orejeperro (corn patty)
- Achiras (crackers)
- Insulso (corn baked in banana leaf)
- Viudo de capaz (fish stew)
- Cholupa juice among others.



LEGENDARY TOURS

- Charco del Boquerón and El Poira
- San Agustín Archaeological Park
- La Jagua among others.



COMPOSERS

- Jorge Villamil
- Carlos Enrique Cortés
- Carlos Álvarez Camacho
- José Ignacio Tovar
- Anselmo Durán
- Álvaro Córdoba Farfán among others.



Achira, **THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.**



SOME OF THE REGION'S EMBLEMATIC VILLAGES

- Neiva
- Aipe
- Algeciras
- Garzón
- Gigante
- Isnos
- Palestina
- Palermo
- Pitalito
- Rivera
- Altamira
- Fortalecillas
- Suaza
- Villavieja among others.

THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF

We sincerely hope that all these tools will serve as a point of departure to offer better services, optimise promotion and strengthen our tourism industry, which will be prepared for the golden future that awaits it.



Scan this code and view the 33 modules of the regional narratives of tourism.

Tatocod Desert, THE COLOMBIAN MASSIF.

REGIONAL NARRATIVES OF TOURISM

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