

# Cruise Tourism Reported 20% Increase

Colombia is a leading destination for both the boating industry and marine tourism. Its increase in popularity can be attributed to its strategic and superb location on the Caribbean and Pacific Ocean and its unique port cities. People visiting Colombia are given a rare opportunity to see the country's natural beauty, culture and rich history coupled by the welcoming ambiance and hospitality of the local people.

Colombian cruise tourism industry is undoubtedly one of the pillars of the country's economy. The cruise season that lasts from October to May each year, sees thousands of tourists visiting Colombia during this season.



## Recent Developments

The Colombian cruise tourism has experienced significant growth in the recent times. For example since the year 2006 the inbound arrivals have increased from 50,946 passengers to 414, 791 passengers. This means that the arrivals increased by eight times and from 43 calls to 210 calls. It is clear that the cruise tourism in Colombia has increased tremendously over the recent years.

Last year, the arrival of cruise passengers recorded an increase of 20.6% in comparison with 2012, totaling 306,694 travelers on 221 cruise ships.

Moreover, last autumn, the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) held its annual conference for the very first time in South America. This was a five day event that welcomed over 1,000 participants to one of the port cities of Colombia – Cartagena. This was a sign that without a doubt, Colombia is ready for takeoff as one of the best tourist destinations in the world.

The Cruise Market watch indicates that the cruise tourism industry is among the least vulnerable international market segments. This is because of the competitive prices, changes in technology as well as increased innovation of new world class ships, emergence and development of new ports of calls and short itineraries. By capitalizing on this trend, Colombia has experienced a significant growth in its cruise tourism industry for the last seven years. This has managed to put the country on the world map as a leading tourist destination and an ideal investment location for both the locals and foreign investors.

## Most Popular Ports

Colombia has a number of ports that get a lot of tourism during the cruise season. The following are some of the most popular ports in the country:



### Cartagena de Indias

This is the most popular tourist destination in Colombia. The attractions that this port has to offer include clean water and beaches, rich cultural heritage, and cobblestone streets. The Old Town is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During the 2012– 2013 cruise season, approximately 350, 000 passengers visited Cartagena and a larger number is expected this year.

### Santa Marta

This is the oldest city in Colombia. The port is characterized by beautiful beaches and the most amazing mountains of Sierra Nevada. The city is called the Park of the Newlyweds (Parque de Los Novios) because of its romantic scenes and atmosphere. It holds the most amazing architectural heritage that cannot be found anywhere in the world.

### San Andres

This is a tiny paradise located 700 km from the Colombian mainland. The island is characterized by perfect beaches, clean water ideal for water sports, ecotourism and diving activities. Home to the sea of the seven colors San Andres is famous for its coral and hued fish.

### St. Catalina and Providencia Island

The island of Providencia is a unique destination and among the best places to visit in Colombia. The island is known for its solitary beautiful beaches and peaceful atmosphere. The water here is clear and ideal for water sports and diving. St. Catalina is a small mountainous island that is connected to the Providencia Island. Together they form a romantic tourist destination for lovers and holiday makers.



## **Challenges of the Industry**

Although the cruise tourism in Colombia has significantly improved over the years, it is facing a number of challenges and problems.

**Travel warnings and advisory:** In the past Colombia was known for notorious gangs and drug trafficking. These activities tainted the image of the country and up to date, some countries still issue travel advisories and warning to their citizens who wish to visit this country.

**Lack of adequate accommodation:** Due to the increase in the number of tourists visiting Colombia in the recent times, accommodation is becoming one of the biggest challenges facing the tourism industry. However, the government has put in place strategies to help increase the amount of quality hotel rooms.

**Insecurity:** This is by far the biggest challenge faced by the local cruise tourism. Safety is a highly important issue for most travelers. However, the Colombian government has laid down policies and measures to fight the crime and improve the country's image.

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