

Title:

Deep Inside Colombia- Crossing The Andes with a Surfboard

Word Count:

1345

Summary:

This article is part one of a five part series about an adventurous experience the author had traveling all over Colombia, South America by way of taxis and busses with a surfboard in tow. It is a detailed description of what it is like to travel on a budget in a dangerous and mysterious country like Colombia.

Keywords:

Colombia, travel, travel articles, travel adventures, Colombia South America, travel stories, adventure travel, travel on a budget, great travel stories, adventure stories

Article Body:

PART 1.

I'll never forget the look on the face of that Colombian campesino man. My wife just explained to him in Spanish that what I am holding under my arm is indeed a surfboard, despite the fact that we were standing in a Colombian village that was located somewhere in the middle of the Andes Mountains, hundreds of miles away from any ocean. After hearing this news the man made a joke about us getting bad directions. He then flashed a smile that revealed a mouth full of rotten teeth. Soon after that he shook his head, tucked his hands into the front pockets of his hand-woven Inca style poncho, turned, and moved on down the only street in his town. When the man reached the center of town a gust of wind swept down the street and blew the black fedora hat off his head. As I was watching him chase after it through a cloud of dust, I thought to myself; "I gotta' get to the ocean."

I was beginning to feel like a fish out of water. Surfers cannot stay away from the ocean for too long, or they start to "dry out". As I was standing on that dirt street in that dusty little town, I realized that I had not seen the ocean in over a month. More importantly, I had not surfed in it. Halfway through a two month excursion across the country of Colombia, in South America, we were on our way to a small Caribbean beach resort on the northeastern edge of the country for a much needed break from the madness we had experienced so far on that trip. We had spent the holidays traveling from Bogotá to Medellín, and then back to

Bogotá again to meet and visit with various different members of my wife's family. There had been some mishaps along the way involving pick-pockets and miscreants. Up to that point it was not fun, and we will leave it at that.

Traveling on a tight budget in a foreign country is the best way to experience the true culture of that country, but it can be quite taxing on your soul. We could not afford plane tickets to fly all over the country, so we had to take busses and taxis instead. Some of those bus rides took over two days to reach our destination. We traveled through some of the most remote areas of Colombia, changing busses and hailing taxis the whole way. Along the way we saw some of the most beautiful scenery on earth, and experienced some very interesting, intense, and strange things. Black magic and evil curses are practiced in many areas of Colombia, and I cannot say any more on that subject, for fear that you would think of me as crazy. There are things that cannot be explained in this world, and a lot of them happen in Colombia.

There were other things that happened to us that were even more terrifying than black magic. Let's just say it's never a good thing to have your bus stopped in the middle of the night by rough looking men with machine guns on a winding, dark, mountainous road. That is whole other story for another time.

Back to our main story; we were about four hours North of Bucaramanga, and waiting to board yet another one of those colorful busses. All I could think about at that moment was surfing and relaxing at this place called Tayrona. I was told you can sit in your own thatched-hut "choza" and watch the waves from your front porch. For those who are not familiar with the sport of surfing, that sounds about as good as it gets for a surfer.

It had not been easy carrying that surfboard all over Colombia. We landed in Bogotá in the middle of the country a month before, and I had been schlepping it around with our other luggage from one bus or taxi to the other ever since. It was like I was living my own little version of the movie Fitzcaraldo, and my surfboard was the ship that was being carried for many miles across dry land. I was determined to make the effort pay off.

While we were waiting for our bus in that little mountain village we were inundated by the usual local people trying to sell us stuff. My wife, being a Colombian native did most of the talking for those negotiations. These little villages along the main roads of Colombia survive on money from people who are just passing through, or waiting for a bus. The local indigenous people sell everything from bags of purified water, to homemade "empanadas" (a meat and potato filled turnover made with corn-meal dough). My wife and I had been surviving on food and water provided by those people for most of our trip. Amazingly, neither of us had been sick yet. Albeit, most of this food had been

delicious, you have to wonder about the cooking and cleaning practices in a town that has no running water. Something tells me that if the cook had a choice between using their last bucket of water to wash their hands before cooking, or having water to drink the next day, they'd forego the cleanliness. I tried not to think about stuff like that on that trip. I only thought about how much flavor those homemade items had with their homegrown ingredients.

People sure know how to cook in Colombia. Wow! The food in that country just seemed to have a lot more flavor than the food I was used to in the United States. We really experienced the authentic food of Colombia; "buñuelos", "pandebonos", "arepas", you name it and we tried it along the way. We were on a budget, yet eating very good food. The people who made this food were as poor as one could be, but they could make food like no-one else on earth. The freshness, lack of pesticides, and the nutrient-rich soils also have a lot to do with why the food tastes so good.

After we ate our share of "empanadas" that we purchased from a little old village woman carrying a hand-woven basket, we were ready for a freshly blended fruit smoothie. There were always several of these little smoothie stands in every town that we stopped at along the way, and we always made sure that we sampled at least one. No matter how small of a stand, the vender always had electricity to run their blender, ice box, and boom-box. I immediately ordered a couple of "tomate de árbol" smoothies at a nearby stand, and then we sat down on an old wooden bench provided by the smoothie vendor.

We were told by the driver of the last bus that our next bus should be along in "no time at all". It had been my experience up to that point that this bus driver may, or may not be right. Sometimes the bus came right away and the transfer went smoothly. Other times we ended up waiting long periods of time between transfers. Those ones did not go so smoothly.

The mountain roads and leftist guerilla laden areas that these busses travel through can cause long delays, to say the least. Hanging out in that small town in the middle of nowhere in the foothills of the Andes Mountains waiting for a bus was quite nerve-racking. The local people of those types of towns were always very suspicious of anyone that stayed behind after a bus came through. Most people just passed right through. They were especially suspicious of a Gringo with a surfboard and a Colombian wife. There was a war going on in that country. Everywhere we went everyone wanted to know whose side we were on. As we were sitting in that dusty, one-horse town in a remote area of Colombia, I knew we were in for a long, harrowing wait.

