

COLOMBIA

The admiral could hardly believe his eyes. ..he gazed with awe at the rustic huts surrounded by gardens from which all possible colours and aromas emanated. ...no one spoke while the stately Admiral with clear eyes and restless heart knelt down among the blossoms, picked one, smelled it, and – as he would later tell the Queen herself – for a time felt that the entire world had disappeared and that the sailors and the ship and the waves crashing against the rocks had faded before the flower he had held for a few moments in his hands.

Christopher Columbus, gone before he realised that he had discovered a continent, was paying homage to the sensitivity of American natives, who for centuries past had centered their daily life around the care of variegated gardens.

..later when their fright at the Admiral's red beard and hair had subsided, the Indians approached him and favoured him with flowers. That simple act reaffirmed a deeply rooted custom of theirs: flowers, and the pursuit of a rustic but lovely pleasure in those gardens that Conquistadores would find wherever they went in the New World.

For it is no secret that the Indian inhabitants of ...Colombia, Peru and Mexico ...asserted their creativity in the decoration of their houses with blossoms³.

Colombia enjoys almost every ecosystem known to man and over 130,000 plant species have been described. No other country is so richly endowed for plant and bird species based on land area. It is a prodigious bounty!

Flower culture was fundamental to their lives – in their religion, festivals, art and lifestyle - their clothes and bodies were regularly adorned with flowers. This culture quickly found a responsive chord with the conquering Spaniards⁴.

But Colombia has so much else to boast of. It has well-educated and sophisticated people interested in the arts and education. It has a rich history and Cartagena is 'the most architecturally significant remnant of Spanish architecture on the continent.'

There is also *La Zona Cafetera* – heart of the coffee growing country – which is beautiful, fertile and undulating country with authentic *fincas* (coffee estancias) to stay and to enjoy the virtues of the magic bean. There are wonderful national



³ p15-16 from Colombia – land of Flowers, by Alberto Duque López [Villegas editores], publ 1990.

⁴ The native curuba (passion flower) and the passiflora of the Llanos Orientales, p62, *Colombia: land of Flowers*, by Alberto Duque López [Villegas editores], publ 1990. The original plates were first published in the The Royal Botanical Expedition of the Kingdom of New Granada.



A wonderfully conserved patio garden which forms part of an old estancia in Bogota – over 300 years old, to which we have special access.

parks, fabulous beaches and some great art. On the cool temperate plateau around Bogota, the soils and climate are excellent and the rainfall regular. They can grow most anything!

Given this background it is not surprising that Colombia has a proud network of national parks, of public parks, tree lined avenues and fine

private gardens – both city and country. The country estancias and *fincas* are rich with history, noble trees and cultural overlays.

A romantic garden at Pereira is described, *The immense trees of tropical temperate climates, ceibas, samanes, caracolies, shelter in their endless branches hanging gardens of hallucinating beauty. Bromeliads orchids, ferns are the customary inhabitants of these epiphytic gardens*⁵.

Established gardens are often well grounded in European traditions but in the country they are often blessed with tropical plantings. We find sculptures and ornaments are usually classical in style, with vistas, garden bedding and patio gardens with their Spanish influences.



Candelaria, Bogota



An imaginative restaurant in Bogota where the waiters (university students), are also actors and musicians, with bizarre costumes to entertain! And the food – is superb!

But there are also exciting new designers and landscapes and Diana Wiesner in Bogota is an outstanding example with her social conscience driving community projects and cutting-edge designs for public buildings - including two wonderful new library complexes.

⁵ Gardens of Colombia [Villegas editors].

Colombia Program

Our Colombia Tour Program will be provided to travellers in more detail but in brief:-

4-8 Sept – Bogota area – to include downtown walking tour of historic precinct including the fabulous Gold Museum (Museo del Oro), Fernando Botero Museum, Candelaria Artists Colony, various private properties and gardens, Bogota Botanic Gardens, at least one of Diana Wiesner's contemporary landscape projects in addition to the Casa Bolivar and the rehabilitation project at the Monserrate Mountain which dominates the capital.



A very special, rambling old estancia, with gardens that sweep down to a huge ornamental lake.



Butterfly enclosure, Quindio B.G.

8-9 Sep Pereira and Armenia *La Zona Cafetera* – two established estancias with gardens, the Quindio Botanic Gardens and a fascinating *finca* (coffee plantation).

10-12 Sept Cartagena We have three nights for enjoying the Old Town at Cartagena – a wonderful Spanish architectural legacy and a fascinating old port in which to relax.



Cartagena



Undulating rich soils in the *La Zona Cafetera*



Guillermo Londono, artist and special friend in Bogota

13 Sept Transfer to Lima, Peru.