



A JOURNEY TO
THE HEART OF
THE WORLD

GUIDE TO INDIGENOUS
TOURISM IN THE SIERRA
NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA

TORNUS
Agencia Creativa de Turismo



ALCALDÍA DE SANTA MARTA
Distrito Turístico, Cultural e Histórico



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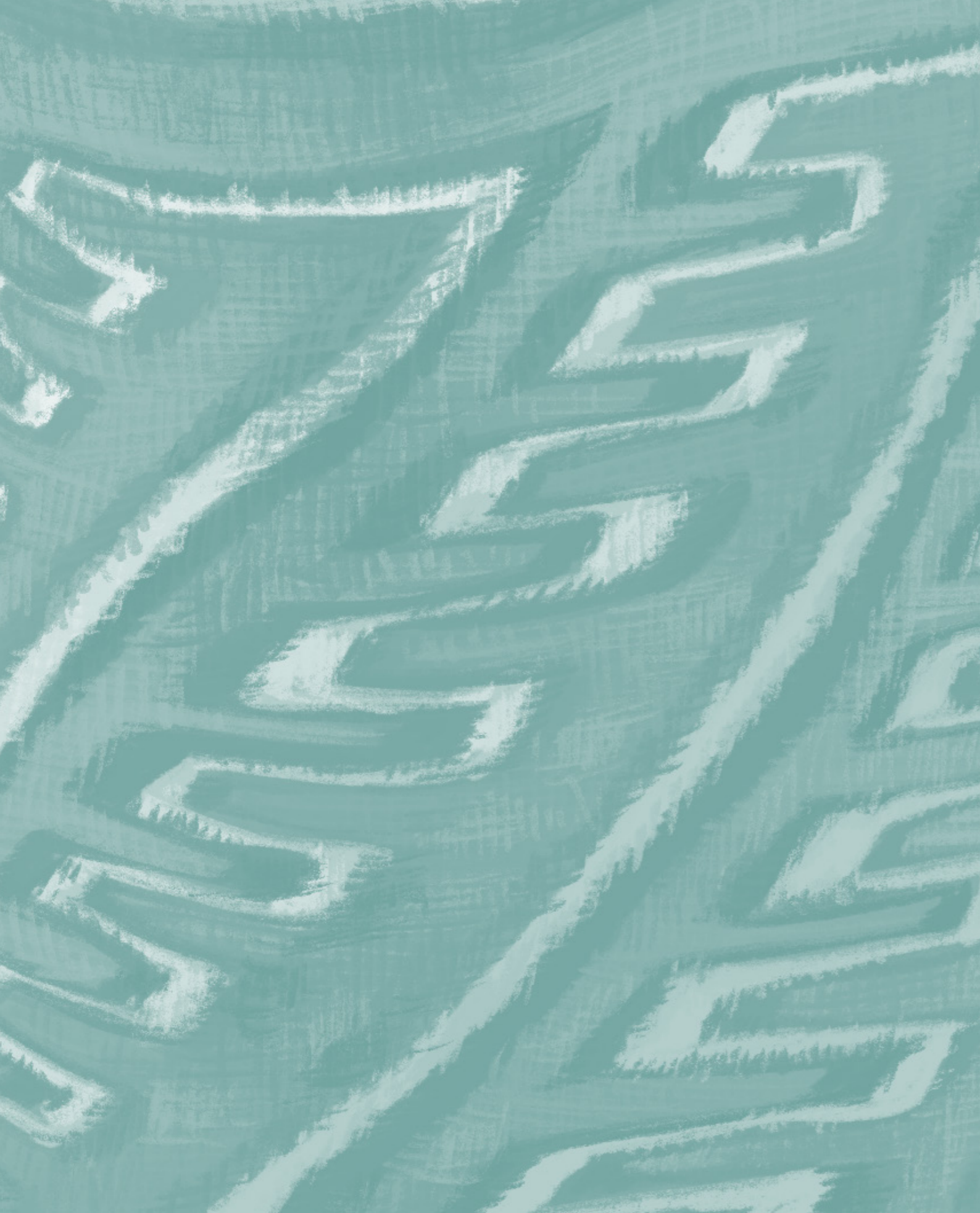
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Editorial

We believe in tourism as a powerful industry for promoting the development of local communities and bringing new opportunities to territories, based on the protection and promotion of their most valuable asset: their rich natural and cultural diversity.

The journey we undertake is not ordinary tourism, but a voyage towards deep understanding and mutual respect. In many places, tourism, although it brings development, often erodes cultural essence and disturbs the balance with the environment. This guide aims, beyond promoting a destination, to educate and enchant visitors, so they value the natural and cultural wealth of the Sierra Nevada and its four towns. Our elder brothers.

Therefore, entering the Sierra Nevada should be an act of reverence. It is asking for permission, keeping the heart and mind clean, and balancing our energies with that of the place. It means understanding that not all corners of the Sierra are open to everyone, and that some spaces have specific meanings and roles that must be honored. That we must have the authorization of the Mamos and authorities to enter their sacred territory and free ourselves from negative energies to avoid contaminating them.

Thus, we share the purpose of the Mayor's Office of Santa Marta, its Mayor Virna Johnson, and the Santa Marta Tourism Institute (Indetur), led by its Director, Marcelino K'david, in promoting authentic intercultural encounters, not based only on

economy, but on the respectful exchange of knowledge. In this process, we find valuable allies like Mamo Camilo, Nelsón, Lucelly, and Mamo Camilo from the Katanzama community, Agustín in Mulkwakungui, our friends from Poporo Tours and Baquianos, and other valuable members of the communities, agencies, and guilds, committed to responsible tourism.

It is our responsibility and desire, in presenting this guide, to strengthen and promote tourism that highlights the unparalleled beauty of our territories and celebrates the traditions and ways of life of the communities that inhabit them. We want every traveler, through this guide, to understand that the true value lies not in the simple visit, but in the deep and enriching connection established with these places and their people.

May this guide be a bridge of understanding, respect, and admiration towards the ancestral guardians of these lands.

As we traverse the paths of the Sierra Nevada, let us not only contemplate its natural beauty, but also listen to the stories and wisdom that have been passed down from generation to generation. And if anything remains, let it be a renewed love and commitment to the protection of nature. If that happens, we would be honoring the legacy of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

TORNUS
AGENCIA CREATIVA DE TURISMO



EMBARK ON "A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF THE WORLD" AND DISCOVER THE OTHER GUIDES THAT WILL TAKE YOU TO SAVOR THE GASTRONOMY OF "THE LAND OF FLAVOR", EXPLORE "SANTA MARTA NATURALMENTE MÁGICA" AND DELVE INTO THE FASCINATING WORLD OF "BIRDS OF THE SIERRA".



A complete experience that will connect you with the heart of the world!

› THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA IS KNOWN AS THE HEART OF THE WORLD BECAUSE, MILLENNIA AGO, IT WAS THE FIRST THING THAT WAS FORMED SPIRITUALLY AND ESSENTIALLY ON EARTH.

CHAPTER

I

WELCOME TO
THE HEART
of the WORLD

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

4 VILLAGES INDIGENOUS



5.775 METERS HIGH
PICOS BOLÍVAR AND COLÓN

IT REPRESENTS
MOTHER
NATURE

EVERYTHING IS INTEGRATED
AND INTERCONNECTED



IS THE HEART OF THE WORLD

ENERGY CENTER OF THE PLANET

KANKUAMO

WIWA

ARHUACO

KOGUI

MILLENNIAL MISSION

MAINTAIN
BALANCE AND
HARMONY OF
THIS SYSTEM

THE MOUNTAIN

FUNDAMENTAL IN THE CONCEPTION
OF TIME AND SPACE, TRADITIONS
AND CEREMONIES





WELCOME TO THE HEART *of the* WORLD

- › THE SNOW-CAPPED PEAKS REPRESENT THE HEAD; THE LAGOONS OF
- › THE HIGHLANDS THE HEART; THE RIVERS AND STREAMS THE VEINS; THE LAYERS OF EARTH THE MUSCLES; AND THE
- › GRASSLANDS THE HAIR. WITH THIS BASIS, THE ENTIRE GEOGRAPHY OF THE SIERRA IS A SACRED SPACE.

Rising from the shores of the Colombian Caribbean, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta reaches 5,775 meters in height at its Bolívar and Colón peaks. It is the world's highest coastal mountain range, where the wisdom of nature and indigenous knowledge converge

This corner of the planet features a mosaic of climates, landscapes, fauna, and flora, making it a lush natural paradise. The melting of its peaks forms sacred lagoons and rivers that flow down to the Caribbean Sea.

But beyond a geographic description, the Sierra is a spiritual refuge, filled with ancestral nuances. It was the planet's first breath, in times of ruins. The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is known as the heart of the world because, millennia ago, it was the first to form spiritually and physically on Earth.

For the Indigenous Peoples Wiwa, Arhuaco, Kankuamo, and Kogui, the Sierra Nevada is the heart of the world because it is the planet's energy center. Without its beats, it would not be possible to maintain and preserve the existence of all beings and elements. The Sierra Nevada represents Mother

Nature, and it is like a human body, in which each part (organ) has a function, and everything works interconnectedly and integrally. The snow-capped peaks represent the head; the lagoons of the highlands the heart; the rivers and streams the veins; the layers of earth the muscles; and the grasslands the hair. With this basis, the entire geography of the Sierra is a sacred space.

The heart pumps blood to all parts of the body to keep us alive. The sacred territory of the Sierra Nevada does the same. Every beat of Mother Earth keeps an entire planet alive.

The mountain is fundamental in the conception of time and space, and traditions and ceremonies are closely related to natural cycles and ecological balance. Thus, the millennial mission of the four peoples has been to maintain the balance and harmony of this complex system, caring for and ensuring the proper functioning of the sacred spaces that make it up.

A journey to the Sierra Nevada is more than visiting a destination, it's not a random trip. It is a spiritual encounter, a place to dream, learn, and value. An opportunity to connect with the elder brothers and their conception of harmony and natural happiness described from the state of the intangible world.

Therefore, when visitors travel to this area, it is essential that they do so with deep respect for the beliefs and traditions of the indigenous communities, as well as a commitment to the conservation of the region's nature and culture.

- › A TRIP TO THE SIERRA NEVADA IS MORE THAN VISITING A DESTINATION, IT IS NOT A RANDOM TRIP. IT IS A SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTER, A PLACE TO DREAM, LEARN AND VALUE.

FROM THE MAR CARIBE UNTIL THE PEAKS COLÓN AND BOLÍVAR

YOU WILL FIND EVERYTHING
FROM EXUBERANT TROPICAL
FORESTS TO FIELDS DOTTED
WITH FRAILEJONES AND
PAJONALES.

THE MOST IRREPLACEABLE
ECOSYSTEM ON THE
PLANET IN TERMS OF ITS
CONTRIBUTION TO THE
SURVIVAL OF THREATENED
SPECIES.

- INTERNATIONAL UNION OF
NATURE CONSERVATION
(2013)

42 km
LINEAR DISTANCE

WARM AREAS AND
PERPETUAL SNOW

21.158 km²
TOTAL AREA

11° NORTH
LATITUDE

73° 45'
EAST LENGTH

30 RIVERS

74° 20'
WEST LONGITUDE



GEOGRAPHY OF THE SIERRA NEVADA

› IN 1979, UNESCO CONSECRATED IT AS A BIOSPHERE RESERVE AND WORLD HERITAGE SITE. AND, AS IF THAT WEREN'T ENOUGH, IN 2013, THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE DECLARED IT THE MOST IRREPLACEABLE ECOSYSTEM ON THE PLANET IN TERMS OF ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SURVIVAL OF THREATENED SPECIES.

From the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean, the astonishing peaks of the Sierra Nevada touching the sky at almost 5,800 meters can be seen. The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is one of the highest coastal mountains on the planet, only surpassed by the Saint Elias Mountains in Canada.

From the Caribbean Sea to the Colón and Bolívar peaks, the highest points of the Sierra Nevada at almost 5,791 meters, there is a linear distance of 42 kilometers.

Although the world knows them by names like Simón Bolívar and Christopher Columbus, for the Arhuaco people, for example, this sanctuary is known as Chundua, which in their language means, the sky. The Sierra emerges between the delta of the Magdalena River and the Serranía de Perijá, guarded by the Banana Zone and the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta, while to the east, it is outlined by the valleys of the Cesar and Ranchería rivers.

And it is not only great in spirit but also in extension. It covers some 17,000 km², but if we consider its hydrographic slopes, boom! It expands to 21,158 km², almost the size of El Salvador (21,040 km²) and a little smaller than Switzerland (39,550 km²) or Costa Rica (51,000 km²).

But the Sierra is not just nature. From 200 A.D. to 1600 A.D., it was the home of the fascinating Tairona culture and its predecessors.

Now, it's hard to imagine a place with every possible climate, ranging from warm zones to perpetual snowy peaks, from which lagoons and rivers emerge. The Sierra has it all. And in its nearly 30 rivers, howler monkeys and multicolored birds calm the atmosphere with their songs. Depending on the altitude, you'll find everything from lush tropical forests to landscapes dotted with frailejones (a type of high-altitude plant) and grasslands. And, as if that weren't enough, above 4,500 meters, an outer layer of snow adorns the northernmost páramo (a type of high-altitude ecosystem) in South America.





CHAPTER

II

THE FOUR SIBLING

PEOPLES — *of the* SIERRA NEVADA

DE SANTA MARTA

› "...FOUR GUARDIAN SOULS,
THOSE OF THE INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA,
ARHUACO, KOGUI, WIWA
AND KANKUAMO, WEAVE A
PROTECTIVE MANTLE OVER
MOTHER EARTH."

ALTHOUGH THEIR

LANGUAGES DANCE

IN
DEEP
OF THEIR

SOULS,

EVERYONE REVERES THE
ESSENCE OF

IN DIFFERENT
RHYTHMS AND
THEIR CLOTHING
SHINE IN
DIFFERENT COLORS,

THE LAW OF



ORIGIN

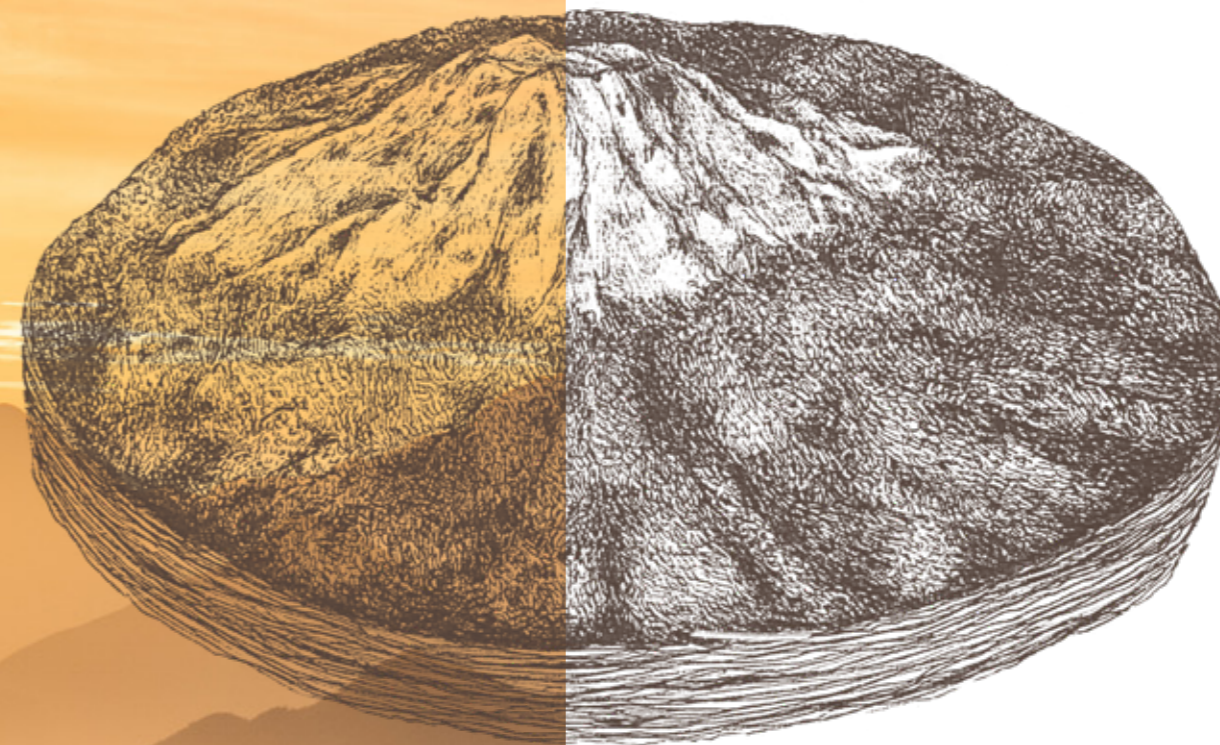
THE FOUR SIBLING PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA NEVADA *de* SANTA MARTA

In the mountainous embrace of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, four guardian souls, those of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra, Arhuaco, Kogui, Wiwa, and Kankuamo, weave a protective cloak over Mother Earth. United by an ancestral mandate, the peoples of the Sierra Nevada share common principles that seek the conservation of nature and the protection of their cultural heritage.

However, each shines with its own light, and their customs gleam, making a journey to each community a valuable and unique story.

These peoples, in their shared wisdom, venerate the Origin of Mother Earth, respect their sacred sites, and through the spiritual knowledge of the Mamos (traditional leaders), keep their traditions alive in special traditional houses (Nujué, Kunkurwa), the use of the coca leaf (hayú, Júa, hañu), the Poporo (Jo'buru, sugí Dumburru), and their relationship with mother nature.

In this land, they consider themselves as the elder siblings, the guardians of the Heart of the World, while "the younger siblings" are those foreign to this understanding, those who, blinded by desire and ambition, strip nature of its resources, accumulating more than necessary, without care for it and others. Therein also lies the origin of conflicts, which the indigenous peoples aim to avoid by living in peace among themselves and their environment.



These guardians cultivate the land, nourishing themselves from its fruits and respecting its limits.

The Mamos, spiritual leaders, guide these communities, supporting them as the wind supports the leaves of a tree.

Although their languages dance in different rhythms and their garments shine with different colors, deep in their souls, all revere the essence of the Law of Origin. No people is superior to another nor possesses more wisdom.

They are like the four fingers of a hand resting on the same palm, which represents the ancestral territory, or the four cardinal points that orient the cultural world with the universe. This vision reveals that, in essence, they are four historical and inseparable cultural realities.

The coexistence of these four peoples in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta illustrates the cultural diversity and richness of the region. This amalgam of cultures constitutes an invaluable heritage that deserves recognition and protection.

› **THE ARHUACO OR IKA LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN BY THE ARHUACOS. IT IS A COMPLEX LANGUAGE THAT REFLECTS THEIR DEEP SPIRITUALITY AND CONNECTION WITH NATURE.**

› **LOS KOGUI, ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY SPEAK A RELATED BUT DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE, KNOWN AS KÁGGABA. IT IS A VITAL TOOL TO CONVEY YOUR RESPECT TOWARDS "THE GREAT MOTHER", OR THE FORCE BEHIND NATURE.**

› **EL WIWA, ALSO KNOWN AS DAMANA, IT IS SPOKEN BY THE WIWA PEOPLE AND, LIKE THE LANGUAGES OF THE OTHER GROUPS, HAS ROOTS IN THE CHIBCHAN LANGUAGE FAMILY.**



KOGUI



HAT:
NAMANTO

ATTIRE:
TRADITIONAL
WHITE

POPORO:
SUGI

MOCHILA:
SUGAME
FIQUE -
COTTON

LOCATION

- › MAGDALENA
- › LA GUAJIRA
- › CESAR

INDIGENOUS

- › KOGUI-
MALAYO-
ARHUACO

COSMOVISION
LAW OF ORIGIN / SE

SACRED PLACE
EZUAMAS

COCA
JAÑIU

LANGUAGE
KAGGABA

ARHUACO

HAT:
TUTUZOMA

LOCATION

- › MAGDALENA
- › LA GUAJIRA
- › CESAR

INDIGENOUS

- › KOGUI-
MALAYO-
ARHUACO
- › ARHUACO

ATTIRE:
TRADITIONAL
WHITE

POPORO:
JO'BURU

MOCHILA:
TUTU WOOL -
FIQUE -
COTTON

COSMOVISION
LAW OF ORIGIN /
SEYN ZARE

SACRED PLACE
K'ADUKWU

COCA
AYU

LANGUAGE
IKU

WIIWAA

HAT:
MAMTU

POPORO:
DUNBURRU

MOCHILA:
SUSU LANA
FIQUE
ALGODÓN

LOCATION

- › MAGDALENA
- › LA GUAJIRA
- › CESAR

INDIGENOUS

- › KOGUI-
- MALAYO-
- ARHUACO

ATTIRE:
TRADICIONAL
BLANCO

COSMOVISION
LAW OF ORIGIN /
SHENBUTA

SACRED PLACE
MAMANUA

COCA
AIU

LANGUAGE
DANAMA

KANKUAMO

COSMOVISION
LAW OF ORIGIN

LANGUAGE
KANKUÍ

POPORO
POPORO

MOCHILA:
SUSUGAO LANA
FIQUE
ALGODÓN

LOCATION

- › CESAR

INDIGENOUS

- › KANKUAMO



KAGGABBA (KOGUI)

› ...OUR LAW OF ORIGIN STEMS FROM THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES THAT ORIGINATED MOTHER EARTH, SÉ NENULANG. SHE AND FATHER SEZHANKUA, IN THE TIME OF CREATION, LEFT US, THE FOUR PEOPLES -KÁGGABA, PEBU (ARHUACO), WIWA, AND KALKUAMA- A SET OF NORMS TO LIVE BY. THE PERFECT FULFILLMENT OF THESE NORMS IN THE TERRITORY IS WHAT ENSURES OUR CONTINUITY AS DISTINCT CULTURES AND THE STABILITY OF THE ENTIRE NATURAL SYSTEM

The Kaggabba people, also known as Kogui, live in deep harmony with nature, guided by their reverence for "Aluna" or "The Great Mother". This creative essence, which they see as the driving force behind all existence, teaches them that the Earth is a living being and that we are all its children. However, they warn that our actions, through plundering and devastating resources, are harming "The Great Mother", and such behavior could lead to our own demise.

"Kággabba" is the term they use to describe themselves, meaning "people" or more precisely, "the true people". This community is noted for its rich artistic and archaeological heritage. They live in bohíos, cozy circular constructions made of palm leaves where each family gathers, and their way of life revolves around subsistence farming.

For the Kogui, the Sierra Nevada is not just a home but a spiritual map marked by sacred sites, connected by what they call "the black line". In these special places, they perform ceremonies, consultations, and gather elements for rituals. This black line not only traces their spiritual understanding of the territory but also marks a boundary, separating them from the "younger siblings". It is their way of understanding and honoring the space they inhabit.





› **MULKUAKUNGUI**

TERRITORY -

Their home stretches across the northern Sierra Nevada, encompassing river basins of Tucurínca, Frío, Mendihuaca, Buritaca, Don Diego in Magdalena; Palomino, Santa Clara, Garavito, San Miguel, Jeréz, and Tapias in La Guajira; and the Guatapurí River in Cesar.

Their settlements vary in altitude from 150 meters above sea level to the páramo region. But their notion of ancestral territory transcends, reaching even beyond where the eye can see the sea.

WINTUKWA O IKU (ARHUACO)

The Arhuaco indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta revere the mountain as a living and powerful being, the dwelling of the spirits of their ancestors, and a site of divine connection and spiritual revitalization.

› THE ARHUACOS, KNOWN FOR THEIR DEEP SPIRITUALITY AND ANCESTRAL PHILOSOPHY, PROFESS A BELIEF IN A CREATOR AND GREAT FATHER, KAKÜ SERANKUA, SYMBOLIZED BY THE SUN. FROM HIM, ACCORDING TO THEIR WORLDVIEW, EMERGED THE FIRST GODS AND MATERIAL BEINGS, AS WELL AS SACRED ENTITIES LIKE THE SNOWCAPPED MOUNTAINS AND MATERNAL DEITIES LIKE THE EARTH AND THE MOON. THE SIERRA IS SEEN BY THEM AS THE HEART OF THE WORLD, THE ORIGIN OF ALL THINGS.

The Arhuaco life and cosmos revolve around the Kunsamü, a Sacred Law, eternal and unchangeable. This is not just a rule; it is the very essence of the origin of life. The universal Kunsamü Law is represented by a child, the Mamo Niankua. This Law of origin finds expression in the universe. There is then an association between Law and thought, which, in harmony with the environment, transforms into Natural Law. This Natural Law gives rise to the creation of matter and its evolution, balance, preservation, and harmony, which constitute the fundamental objectives and *raison d'être* of the Mamo.

Each Mamo or Mamü is chosen from different candidates aged eight to ten years old and receives an education that lasts at least 9 years, 15 years on average. They can extend their studies, specializing in certain knowledge. They are philosophers, priests, doctors, and individual and community advisors. Their influence is decisive in the life of each person and in society



LAND *where the* SUN *was* BORN

TERRITORY -

The Iku people mainly inhabit three collective territories or reserves in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: the KoguiMalayo-Arhuaco, between the municipalities of Santa Marta and Riohacha; the Arhuaco of the Sierra Nevada between Santa Marta, Valledupar, Fundación, and Aracataca; and the Businchama, located in Pueblo Bello, Cesar. Near the municipality of Pueblo Bello is Nabusímake, the spiritual capital of the Arhuaco people. In their language, Nabusímake means "*Land where the sun was born.*"

Unlike the Kogi, the Arhuaco people practice, as one of their main economic activities, family livestock farming. Their diet is complemented with agriculture, with coffee cultivation as their main product. In cold lands, they produce potatoes, arracacha, sweet potatoes, garlic, cabbage, and onions. In temperate areas, they grow beans, avocados, corn, squash, sugar cane, plantains, bananas, coca, tobacco, and yucca.

WIWA

"WIWA" COMBINES TWO ANCIENT WORDS: "WI", SYMBOLIZING EVERYTHING THAT DANCES IN NATURE AND VITAL FERVOR, AND "WA", REFLECTING WISDOM BOTH SPIRITUAL AND EARTHLY.

Before the dawn of the world we now know, in an era where everything was enveloped in deep aquatic darkness, the Wiwa already existed, communicating through words. In that vastness, the first thought, the core of existence, was born, and from it emerged the Wiwa spirit. This initial moment is called Gaira.

Ancient stories recount how the fathers Sealukukui and Seizhankua gave human form to the Wiwa. They took a thought, combined it with clay, and with heat, shaped it. At daybreak, men and women already populated the earth, endowed by Abu Yuimke with the ability to procreate and perpetuate their legacy.

Past chronicles passed from grandparents to grandchildren tell that they emerged from a sacred corner called Yuimke Atshintukwa in the Sierra Nevada.

For the Wiwa, the territory is much more than landscapes; it is a living entity, woven by memories and experiences. First, they conceptualize space through their ancestral symbolism. Then, the mamo, their spiritual guide, determines and structures these spaces based on visions. And finally, this space is enlivened with their daily activities and spiritual journeys.



The territory
is a living
ENTITY
woven by memories and
EXPERIENCES

TERRITORY -

Today, the Wiwa settle in regions of Cesar, La Guajira, and Magdalena. They are found in places like Dibulla, Riohacha, San Juan del Cesar, Valledupar, Becerril, and near Santa Marta. Proudly, they speak Damana, a linguistic treasure of the Chibcha family, preserving and sharing their legacy with future generations.



KANKUAMO

The Kankuamo people are settled on the southeastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada, encompassing municipalities in the Cesar department, such as Valledupar and Pueblo Bello, as well as Riohacha, Maicao, and San Juan del Cesar in La Guajira. It is important to note that there is no Kankuamo presence in the city of Santa Marta and its nearby areas.

ALTHOUGH THE KANKUAMOS HAVE THEIR OWN IDENTITY, THEY SHARE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS WITH OTHER PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA, SUCH AS THE KÁGGABBA, IKU, AND WIWA. WITHIN THEIR COSMOGONY, THEY VIEW EACH SETTLEMENT AS "A LEG OF THE TABLE" THAT IS THE SIERRA, ALL OF THEM BEING CUSTODIANS OF THE WORLD'S BALANCE.

Due to their strategic location at the foot of the Sierra, the Kankuamo people became a natural barrier against waves of migrations by Spaniards, Creoles, and other settlers. Intense, often unequal interactions with various institutions since the times of conquest have caused a gradual weakening of their traditions and customs.

Today, the traditional Kankuamo attire has disappeared, and their language is on the brink of extinction. However, in the process of reaffirming their identity, other peoples of the Sierra, especially the Kogui, have played a fundamental role, acting as guardians of the Kankuamo memories and traditions.

In reclaiming their culture, they have emphasized the importance of collectivism, their roots, their worldview, and their aspiration to be recognized as an autonomous and sovereign indigenous people. In this struggle, the reaffirmation of their ancestral territories has become not only a right but an essential necessity, as the land is the cornerstone of their identity, their way of life, and their essence.



› WHEN THE WORLD FINALLY TOOK
SHAPE, THE PRECEPTS OF THIS
CREATION, CONTAINED IN THE LAW
OF ORIGIN, WERE ESTABLISHED TO
BE FOLLOWED BY THE FOUR ORIGINAL
CHILDREN, THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA
MARTA, THUS SEEKING TO PERPETUATE
HARMONY AND AVOID CONFLICTS.

CHAPTER

III

COSMOVISION *AND*
TERRITORIAL
ORGANIZATION

THE LAW OF ORIGIN

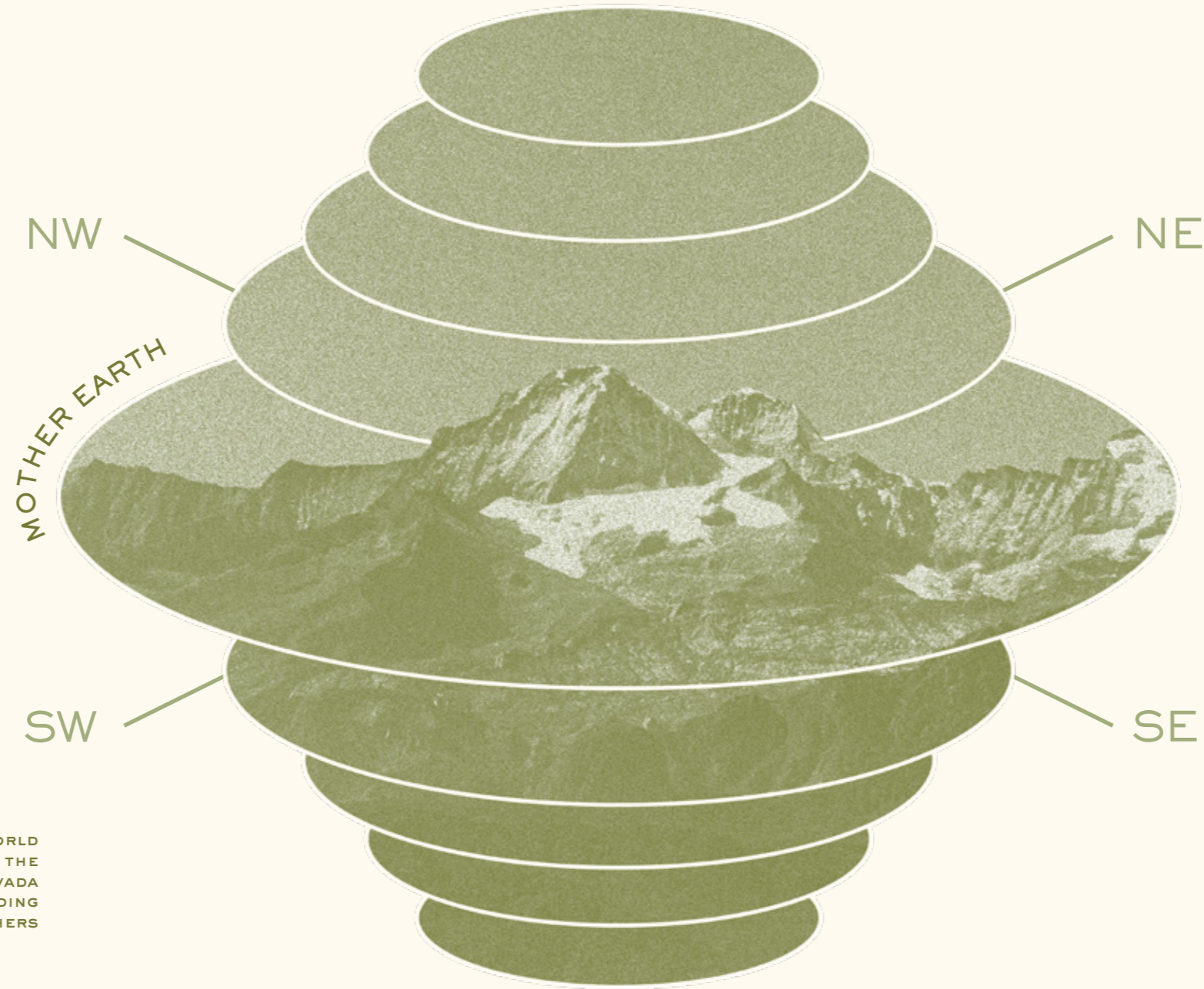
The Mamos narrate that, at the dawn of time, when everything was merely an idea and there was no distinction between day and night, before the first cell of the universe emerged, our human essence already existed in an intangible form, yet we were present, being just as we are now.

At that time, spiritual beings debated whether the world should materialize or not. However, this reality was not the only one, as different levels of thought and existence coexisted. The spiritual cosmos was structured into nine ascending and nine descending worlds, with the Mother Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the intermediate position.

On that intermediate level, two spiritual powers held a profound debate. One of them advocated the materialization of the world, thus allowing physical and spiritual evolution. On the other hand, the other power was firmly opposed to this idea. This disagreement required millennia of reflection and debate among the Fathers until a spiritual consensus was reached.

› WHEN THE WORLD FINALLY TOOK SHAPE, THE PRECEPTS OF THIS CREATION, CONTAINED IN THE LAW OF ORIGIN, WERE ESTABLISHED TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE FOUR ORIGINAL CHILDREN, THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA, THUS SEEKING TO PERPETUATE HARMONY AND AVOID CONFLICTS. FROM THAT MOMENT, THIS ACCUMULATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES HAS SUSTAINED THE COSMIC BALANCE, REVITALIZING AND HARMONIZING ENERGETICALLY BOTH THE UNIVERSE AND NATURE

T H E W O R L D *of the* H E A V E N S



THE PEAKS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA ARE OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN THEIR SPIRITUALITY; THEREFORE, THERE ARE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THEIR DAILY LIFE THAT REFER TO THESE:



THE REPRESENTATION OF THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE WORLDVIEW OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE SIERRA NEVADA CONSISTS OF A SPIRAL WITH LEVELS ASCENDING TO THE "WORLD OF THE HEAVENS" AND OTHERS DESCENDING TO THE "UNDERWORLD."

U N D E R W O R L D

The Ancestral Knowledge System of the Indigenous Peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta comprises a set of rules, guidelines, and care norms aimed at maintaining the integrity of the world, arising from the disagreement between the spiritual authorities

For the Arhuaco, Kankuamo, Kogui, and Wiwa peoples, the "Elder Brothers", the Law of Origin is the supreme mandate that contains the principles and foundations that support the existence and harmony of the universe to ensure peaceful coexistence and balance among the natural elements that constitute the body of Mother Earth.

In this intermediate plane, two spiritual authorities engaged in a profound debate. One of them advocated for the materialization of the world, allowing for physical and spiritual evolution. On the other hand, the other authority strongly opposed this idea. This disagreement required millennia of reflection and debate among the Fathers until a spiritual consensus was reached.

The Law of Origin varies among each indigenous community in the Sierra Nevada, although they share common elements, covering the following aspects:

› **CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE:** EXPLAINS HOW THE UNIVERSE ORIGINATED, INCLUDING THE FORMATION OF THE MATERIAL WORLD AND THE APPEARANCE OF SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE FORCES.

› **CREATION OF HUMAN BEINGS:** NARRATES HOW THE FIRST HUMAN BEINGS WERE CREATED AND HOW THEY ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM.

› **CREATION OF NATURE:** DESCRIBES HOW NATURAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS MOUNTAINS, RIVERS, ANIMALS, AND PLANTS EMERGED, AND HOW BALANCE WAS ESTABLISHED IN NATURE.

› **THE ROLE OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THE WORLD:** INDICATES THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF HUMAN BEINGS IN MAINTAINING BALANCE AND HARMONY WITH NATURE AND SPIRITUAL FORCES.

› **ORAL TRANSMISSION AND SPIRITUALITY:** THE LAW OF ORIGIN HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION THROUGH ORAL TRADITION. THESE NARRATIVES ARE CONSIDERED SACRED AND CONSTITUTE THE FOUNDATION OF THE SPIRITUALITY AND WORLDVIEW OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.



"EVERYTHING HAS ITS SPIRIT, INCLUDING PLANTS, STONES, ALL THIS FORMS A THOUGHT THAT GOES TO THE UNIVERSE, ALL UNITED LIKE A BREATH"

› - MAMO ZEUKUKUY

THE BLACK LINE

The Black Line is an imaginary boundary representing a system of interconnected terrestrial, marine, and aerial landmarks that are sacred to the four indigenous peoples.

Each sacred point has specific energetic functions, where the Mamos make offerings to preserve the balance of the universe and protect their ancestral territory.

› THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ISSUED DECREE 1500 OF 2018 RECOGNIZING 348 SACRED SITES

› THE SACRED SITES OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TOTAL AROUND 350 HECTARES, WITHIN AN AREA EXCEEDING 1.7 MILLION HECTARES.

The territory and sacred spaces are fundamental for the existence and perpetuation of the spiritual plane, as they allow the maintenance of oral tradition and its generational transmission. The physical conservation of these places and sacred objects ensures the preservation of intangible heritage, manifested in practices such as singing, weaving, traditional governance, and construction techniques.

The Sierra is seen as a sacred human body, where the masculine mountains represent life and the water sources, the blood that nourishes it. In this universe, spiritual beings, balanced between positive and negative, subsist thanks to "pagamentos" (offerings) made at sacred sites, under the guidance of the Mamo, intermediaries between the cosmic and the earthly.

For the Arhuacos, for example, forests are not just conglomerates of trees, but sacred vital spaces that provide sustenance and are treated with respect. Their circular dwellings reflect the symbiosis between humanity and nature.

Within the Law of Origin, sacred places possess established hierarchies, based on the importance and function of each space. The highest-ranking places are known as Ezuamas (in Kaggaba), K'adukwu (in Iku), and Mananua (in Damana). These are located in high mountain plains and river eadwaters, being sites where the wisdom of the Fathers and Mothers resides. Here, fundamental decisions for the communities are made, and they are under the protection of certain mamos and their families.

Besides the Ezuamas, K'adukwu, and Mananua, there are other relevant spaces such as the Nevados, residences of spirits and settings for rituals; water sources, connecting with mother earth; stones and monoliths with special meanings in rituals; ancestral paths used by generations; ancestral burial sites; and primary forests, seen as places of power and home to spirits.



TRADITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS *AND* sacred spaces

The settlements of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, known as Nikuma in the Damana language, are considered sacred spaces vital for community life. Within these settlements, there are different areas that fulfill specific and symbolic functions:

- › **UNGUMA:** THE HOUSE FOR MEN.
- › **USHUI:** CORRESPONDS TO THE HOUSE FOR WOMEN.
- › **GAGAKA:** MEANS "HILL". THIS IS A SACRED SPACE ACCESSIBLE TO BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, ACTING AS A PLACE OF CONSULTATION AND WISDOM. ON THE HILL, THERE ARE STONE CHAIRS, CALLED **ATIKJANA**, WHERE THE MAMOS SIT TO GIVE ADVICE AND CONNECT WITH THE FATHERS AND MOTHERS.

The first buildings constructed when establishing a new village are the ceremonial centers. These places have high ritual and educational importance:

- They serve as spaces for transmitting knowledge through oral tradition. In them, the Mamos and Sagas share visions, experiences, and wisdom with the community.
- These enclosures are not used as dwellings but exclusively for sacred ceremonies and offerings.

The ceremonial houses are buildings of special significance and cannot be constructed randomly or by just any individual:

- They represent places where dialogues and conferences are held between Mamos and traditional leaders, being the epicenter of the word, the spirit, and the physical and spiritual connection.
- The ceremonial house is always illuminated by four lit hearths, symbolizing the presence and validation of fire in the imparted dialogues.
- These houses have different names depending on the language and the people: Nujue and Juitema in Koggian, Kankurwa Cheyrwa and Kankurwa A'mía in Ikun, Unguma and Ushui in Dumunu, and Teruarikwa in Kankuamo. Each name encloses stories, codes, and teachings about the purpose and knowledge linked to that specific space.

› IN ESSENCE, ALTHOUGH AN INDIGENOUS HOUSE MAY APPEAR AS A SIMPLE STRUCTURE, IT IS ACTUALLY A SYMBOL OF PROFOUND SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL COMPLEXITY FOR THE COMMUNITIES OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA.

SOME SACRED SPACES

The growth of tourism in the Sierra Nevada poses a challenge between preserving sacred spaces and promoting local economic development. While tourism has economically benefited the region, it has also raised concerns about protecting the sacredness and privacy of these places.

One of the permanent threats to the Sierra Nevada is the destruction and impact on sacred paces, losing the ability to manifest their principles on a material level. The impacts are manifested in logging, land movement, grave robbing, and looting of tumas and clay pots, among others.

Many visitors, unaware of the rich cultural tapestry, are not conscious of when they are in the presence of a sacred site. Although certain sacred points coincide with areas of high tourist influx, this guide only highlights some, not with the purpose of revealing their location, but to foster awareness of the impact of our actions and encourage visitors to interact with the environment respectfully, honoring the culture and traditions of the peoples of the Sierra Nevada



J A B A M I T A N S A M A

Located on the outskirts of Palomino in the beaches. It is a space for performing spiritual works of mortuary, marriage, baptism, and for community work.

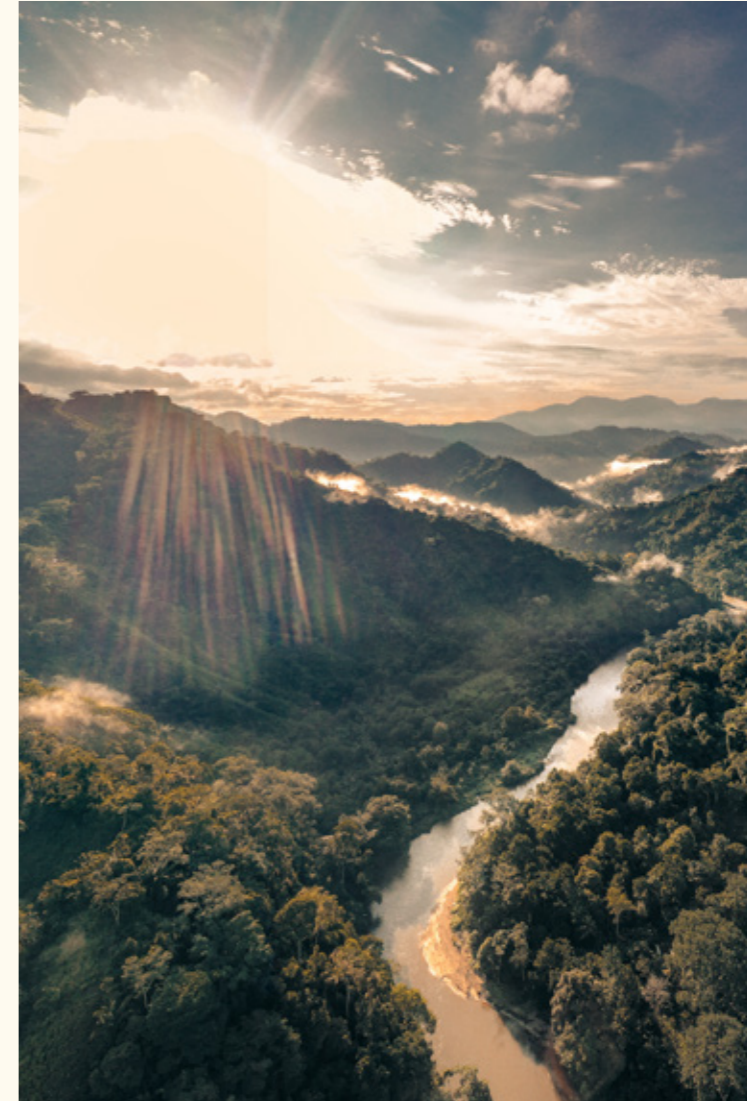


NIKUMA (PUEBLITO - TEYKU)

Tayrona Park. From the beginning, Father Tayrona had four children: This is the house of the four peoples Kogi, Arhuaco, Kankuamo, and Wiwa.

JABA ALUMAINZIASHKAKA

It is the main (western) mouth of the Don Diego River. Where the Don Diego River originates is called Jaba Lumanzhian, where the positive spirit resides, and Ulueskaka is for the negative spirit.



JABA KUBALA

Area of the mouth of the Río Piedras. Mother of the principle of accuracy for measuring and everything that involves manual work such as weaving, plowing the land, and cutting wood, among others

JABA SENANEISHI

Located in the sector of Cabo de San Juan in Tayrona Park.
A space where the artisan Mamas specialize in the making
of clay pots.

MUTUATEIZHAKA - TELUAMA

Located in the sector of Cabo de San Juan in Tayrona Park -
"Cerro Chúndua". From the beginning, Father Teyuna left a
cape in charge of watching that the sea and diseases did
not rise.



SHASHALDA GEKA

Located in the sector of Cabo de San Juan in Tayrona Park.
It is where the character Zongula, father of negative thunder,
lived. The Mama bring offerings to this site
to be able to control those thunders.

JIBAKSEISHI

Located in the sector of Cabo de San Juan in Tayrona Park,
Jaba Gikbaseishi is a meeting and consultation space for the
Mama to fix all kinds of problems.

MUNUÉ

Sector Taganga, where the father of the howler monkeys is located. The monkey ancestrally worked as a mamo. Today, when the Mama hear the monkeys sing, it is a sign of rain or the beginning of summer.

MULKWABAKE

Bahia Taganga. A space where the pure thought of the animals of this entire jurisdiction ends.

NUJUE CHI MULKUEKE

Bahia de Taganga. It is the njuué of Mulkueke, the main father and highest authority in the history of the peoples of the Sierra, who from this site enforces the Law of Origin in the material and spiritual world, as a space for governance of the ancestral territory.

MANAWI

Bahia de Taganga. It is a sacred space for Nikuma works. Manawi was the cape of Father Mulkueke who managed the knowledge of the Mama to ensure its compliance in the Law of Origin.

JABA SOMEIZHI

Playa Cinto in Tayrona Park. Jaba Someizhi is part of the mythic relationship history with two characters: Due Nugi and Jaba Soma.



JABE SÉ

Bahia Santa Marta. It is the mother of spiritual origin. Here everything related to the interpretation of zhátukwa (consulting the Law of Origin) and its payments was ordered.

SHIBALDIGEKA

El Morro in Bahia Santa Marta. It is the place of imprisonment and payment for those who commit offenses both in the spiritual and material world.

OFFERINGS OR "PAGAMENTOS"

› "PAGAMENTO" IS AN ANCESTRAL AND SACRED PRACTICE THAT REFLECTS THE DEEP CONNECTION AND RESPECT THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE WITH NATURE, AND THEIR ACTIVE ROLE IN MAINTAINING THE HARMONY AND BALANCE OF THE WORLD.



The Mamos, with their ability to communicate with spiritual forces and understand the needs of nature, carry out ceremonies in which offerings such as shells, stones, and coca are made at sacred sites.

Their purposes include gratitude to nature for its gifts, benefits received, such as rain, harvests, or good health, restoring balance, compensating for what is taken from nature, like when a tree is cut down or an animal is hunted, and requesting protection against adversities or illnesses, among others.

In the documentary "Palabras Mayores," made by Zhigoneshi in 2009, the main Mamos of each people Amado Villafaña (Arhuaco), Silvestre Gil (Kogui), Saúl Gil (Wiwa), and Roberto Mojica (Wiwa), address the younger brothers to share their traditions and express their concern for the care of the planet



"IF THE CULTURE OF PAYING THE DEBT TO NATURE ENDS, EVERYTHING WOULD END. PREVIOUSLY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PAID WITH GOLD AND QUARTZ, NOW THEY DO NOT DO IT BECAUSE SACRED SPACES HAVE BEEN PROFANED. SERUNKA CAN PUNISH, AND DESTRUCTIONS COULD COME. THE YOUNGER BROTHER MUST UNDERSTAND THAT HE MUST PAY THE DEBTS WITH NATURE"

- SILVESTRE GIL, MAMO KOGUI



When a baby is born, its placenta is planted in sacred spaces, establishing a spiritual bond with the territory. The parents perform this ritual as a way of thanking Mother Earth for the woman's fertility, strengthening the family's exchange with the immaterial world.

Certain rituals are linked to gender. For example, when a girl experiences her first menstruation and transitions from being a girl to a woman, she performs specific pagamentos. The community celebrates this moment, as it represents the potentiality of giving life.

On the other hand, when a man receives the poporo through a ceremony, it not only marks his transition to adulthood but also affirms his prominent position within the community. This ceremony symbolizes both his physical and spiritual maturity.

When an individual dies, the mortuary ceremony is performed. According to their tradition, death is perceived as a rebirth for the deceased. The community gathers and accompanies in mourning for nine days, a period in which pagamentos rituals are carried out. The individual's life trajectory is symbolically likened to the journey from the sea to the snow-capped peaks.



the ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

› INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

ANCESTRAL knowledge and wisdom are conceived in the territory, space, and time, making their conservation and maintenance possible through the native languages of each people. Ancestral knowledge (Shibulama (Koggian), Kunsamu (Ikun), Shembuta (Dumuna); Kankuamo does not have its own term) is the set of ideas, principles, and norms established from the Law of Origin that maintain the Ancestral Knowledge System

UNESCO has recognized the ancestral knowledge system of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



› OVER THE YEARS, BOTH MEN (MAMOS) AND WOMEN (SAGAS) DEVELOP SKILLS AND SENSITIVITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SNOW-CAPPED PEAKS, CONNECT WITH THE WISDOM OF THE RIVERS, AND UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGES OF NATURE.



› THE RECOGNITION OF THESE ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGES AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY SEEKS TO VALUE, RESPECT, AND PROTECT THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL WEALTH OF THESE COMMUNITIES, PROMOTE RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY, AND PRESERVE THE IDENTITY OF THE PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA.





AUTHORITIES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Principles of Origin guide the social organization of the indigenous peoples, founded on collectivity and led by authorities who comply with the Ancestral Law related to the territory. There are various authorities such as Father and Mother guardians, all with specific roles to maintain harmony

The mamos, essential authorities, represent wisdom and ancestral knowledge, acquired through profound training. They do not transmit learned knowledge, but direct from the Spiritual Fathers, giving them genuine authority. Supporting the Mamos, there are staff known as Commissioners or Minor Councils, in charge of maintaining order and supervising community tasks.

In Kogui culture, the "Mamos", whose name means sun, act as intermediaries between the spiritual and physical world, guiding the community based on ancestral precepts to take care of both nature and their people

Women play a crucial role, not only in the family sphere but also in social responsibility, supporting the decisions of the mamos and actively contributing in ceremonies and events. In addition, sagas, spiritually prepared women, possess ancestral knowledge and collaborate closely with the mamos, although they maintain their own rituals related to the feminine.

The cohesion and dynamism of this social organization lie in the joint work of all its members, each one with a role defined from childhood to old age. Complementary roles ensure the transmission and experience of ancestral knowledge, similar to how each tree contributes to the ecosystem of a forest on a mountain.

For the Wiwa, the "Mamo" is equivalent to the sun, grandfather, and counselor, while its counterpart, the "Saga", symbolizes the moon, grandmother, and counselor. Both have special training to understand divinity, nature, society, and people. They also have the gift of healing, interpreting dreams, and leading sacred ceremonies and rituals.



SYMBOLIC
VALUE
OF THE

L

COCA LEAF



All men and women of the Kogui carry traditional bags over their shoulders. Only women can weave these bags. Many of the items carried inside a bag are secret and known only to the owner. The bags carried by Mamas contain traditional sacred objects. When two Kogui men meet, they use the customary greeting, which is to exchange handfuls of coca.

In small cotton backpacks, the roasted coca leaves or hayo are stored. The larger backpacks with stepped geometric designs are used to store the Poporo and other personal objects.



THE POPORO

A SACRED OBJECT

AND ITS MEANING IN INDIGENOUS CULTURE

› IN THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA, THE RITUAL OF CHEWING THE COCA LEAF GOES HAND IN HAND WITH THE POPORO, A SACRED OBJECT THAT INDIGENOUS MEN CARRY AS AN EMBLEM OF THEIR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH.

The poporo symbolizes the worldview of the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada. Each component and action in its use combines functional and symbolic purposes, merging the spiritual and the earthly, and linking tradition with the day-to-day life of these peoples.

The ayu (coca leaf) is the plant of thought and the mother. It is shared as a reminder of mental and spiritual unity. The poporo is given as a means to guide a man's purpose in life. Although the poporo is carried by men, it represents a feminine energy, demonstrating the duality in the culture. Women, for their part, are responsible for collecting the ayu for the poporo.



In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the ritual of chewing the coca leaf goes hand in hand with the poporo, a sacred object that indigenous men carry as an emblem of their spiritual strength. When a young man reaches adolescence, he is presented with the poporo. The parents and the Mamo determine the appropriate age for this handover, usually between 15 and 18 years. This handover marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, the beginning of sexual life, and integration as an active member of the community.

The ceremony lasts four days and nights, celebrated in the male ceremonial house. During this time, the young man, along with the Mamo, remains awake, sitting on a traditional bench. He acquires fundamental skills for his adult life: chewing the coca leaf, weaving on the loom, and, in parallel, the Mamo imparts the second Sewa or knowledge, addressing traditions and guidelines for his future life, including commitments to the community and the environment.

ELEMENTS INVOLVED AND THEIR PROCESS OF USE

THE CONTAINER -

Generally made of calabash or gourds, it represents the feminine universe and fertility.

THE STICK -

Made of wood or bone, it symbolizes the masculine universe. It is used to grind coca leaves and mix them with lime.

COCA LEAF -

These leaves are chewed by the mamos and elders, providing mild stimulation and aiding in meditation and spiritual connection.

LIME -

Produced from crushed seashells or limestone, it is an alkaline substance that, when mixed with the coca leaf, allows its active principles to be released.



P

PREPARATION OF THE COCA LEAF

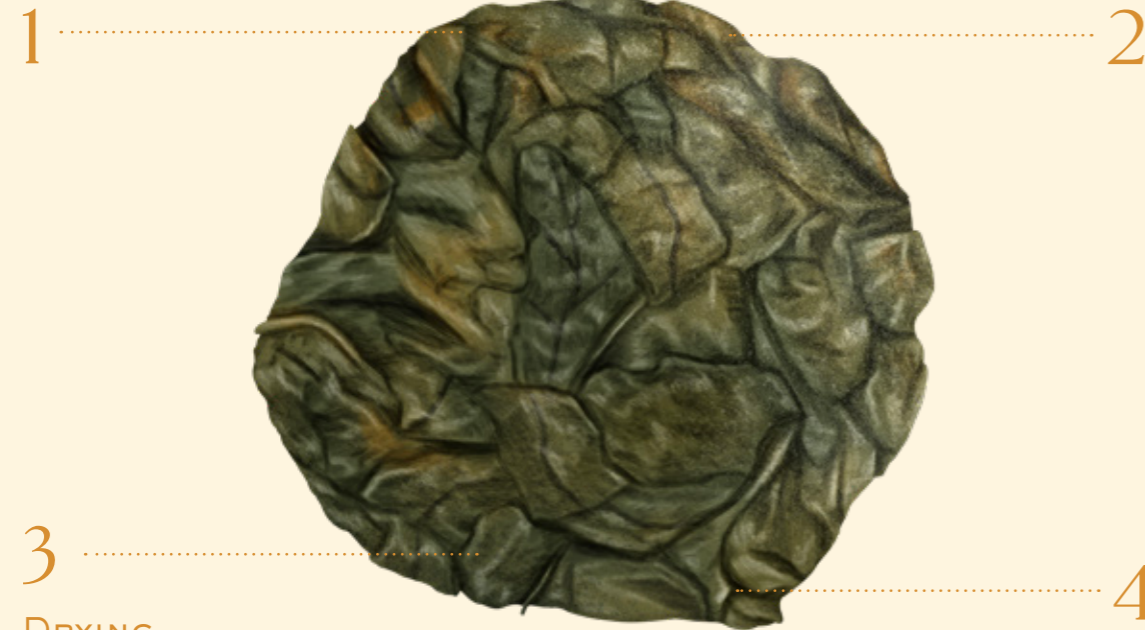
PREPARATION OF SEASHELLS

CULTIVATION -

Coca plants are cultivated in fertile soils and under the shelter of the forest, protecting them from direct sunlight. Cultivation is manual and without the use of pesticides, respecting ancestral traditions.

HARVEST -

Once the leaves reach maturity, they are collected by hand.



3 DRYING -

The freshly harvested leaves are spread out in the sun to dry.

4 CONSERVATION -

Once the leaves are completely dry, they are stored in fabric bags.

COLLECTION -

Seashells are collected from beaches near the Sierra Nevada. This activity is carried out respecting natural cycles and without disturbing marine life.

CRUSHING -

Once collected, the shells are cleaned and crushed to a fine powder.



3 CALCINATION -

The shell powder undergoes a calcination process. It is heated in traditional ovens at high temperatures until it turns into quicklime.

4 HYDRATION -

The quicklime is mixed with water, transforming into hydrated lime or "lime". It is then left to dry and stored.



THE POPORO and ancestral knowledge

CHEWING THE COCA LEAF-

The dry coca leaf is chewed, forming a ball or "bolo" in the mouth.

ADDING LIME-

With the poporo's stick, a small amount of lime is taken and mixed with the coca leaf bolo in the mouth.

SACRED INTERACTION-

The combination of the coca leaf and lime releases the alkaloids of the coca, providing mental clarity and a deeper spiritual connection.

› DURING THIS MEDITATIVE PROCESS, MARKS CAN BE MADE ON THE POPORO, REPRESENTING LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS. THE RING OF LIME AROUND THE CALABASH FORMS WHEN RUBBING THE STICK COATED WITH SALIVA AND LIME. OVER TIME, THESE RESIDUES ACCUMULATE TO FORM THICK LAYERS THAT EACH MAN MOLDS TO HIS LIKING.



THE ELABORATION OF THE POPORO

IT IS A RITUAL THAT EMBODIES THE
SACRED RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE MAN OF
NATURE
IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
FROM THE SIERRA NEVADA

When "poporear" (using the poporo), a man organizes his thoughts. Just as a woman reflects her reflections in each stitch of the backpack she weaves, men imprint theirs in each movement they make with the poporo's stick.

The creation and use of the poporo is a ritual that embodies the sacred relationship between man and nature in the indigenous communities of the Sierra Nevada.

› EVERY STEP, FROM CULTIVATION TO CEREMONY, IS CARRIED OUT WITH DEEP RESPECT AND REVERENCE, REFLECTING A TRADITION THAT HAS ENDURED OVER THE CENTURIES.



SYMBOLISM OF WEAVINGS

...SERANKUA CROSSED THE THREAD OF THOUGHT GIVEN TO HIM BY JABA SE AND LIFTED IT THROUGH THE CENTER, BRINGING FORTH THE HILL GONAWINDUÚA, WHICH WAS A HILL BOTH UP AND DOWN, AND THUS IT BECAME THE AXIS OF CREATION...

MAMA RAMÓN GIL (OGT, 2009)

The loom in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is more than a tool; it is a reflection of the cosmological world of its indigenous inhabitants. Its structures represent geographical locations and tutelary beings, interconnected with colors and animals. For these peoples, "weaving" refers not only to the creation of objects but symbolizes their relationship with the cosmos and the environment.

Weaving has a profound ritual and educational significance. In the ceremonial temples, the loom is both a tool for learning and discipline. During the Poporo ceremony, young people are instructed in the art of weaving and the oral traditions of their culture.



Sierra Nevada Peaks. 2023.
Photography by: Federico Osorio

The attire of the indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is distinguished by the use of traditional hats. Although their form varies among the peoples, all share a meaning rooted in tradition: it is an emblem of wisdom. Its design and white color evoke the snow-capped peaks, the home of the wise and the essence of ancestral wisdom. The long black hair symbolizes the mountains, connecting the individual again to the territory

The relationship between the individual and the territory is not only reflected in the body but also in clothing. During the Poporo ritual, the hat is awarded to the man. The Arhuacos call theirs Tutuzoma. Meanwhile, in the Kogui and Wiwa communities, the Mamos wear distinctive hats: the Kogui the Namanto and the Wiwa the Mamtu. Although other Wiwa and Kogui men traditionally weave palm hats, today it is rare to see the Wiwa with them due to external influence, opting more for commercial hats.



TUTUSOMA -

TUTU -

KURSUNO -

ATTIRE

ASSURANCES

The Mamos use "assurances" as elements of power and protection, which the indigenous people wear on their wrists. These are made with cotton threads, some spun to the right and others to the left, placing them on the corresponding hands. There are different types of assurances, some more difficult to obtain than others, depending on the energy of the wearer and what the Mamo deems appropriate.



THE BACKPACKS OF THE PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA

The backpacks of the Sierra Nevada are not simply utilitarian objects; they are living symbols of the rich history, tradition, and culture of the peoples of Santa Marta. Each backpack is a canvas that narrates ancestral stories, traditions, and worldviews, making them true pieces of art and cultural heritage.



ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN -

Women play a central role, being the main weavers and transmitters of this ancestral art. Men, on the other hand, are often in charge of collecting materials.

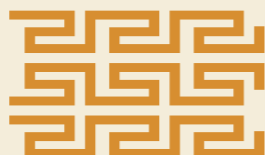
DESIGNS AND MEANINGS OF THE BACKPACKS

The designs can represent elements of nature, everyday events, ancestral stories, or spiritual symbols. For example, shapes that evoke mountains, rivers, or animals not only allude to their physical representation but also to the lessons and values that these elements convey within the community's worldview.



URUMO - CARACO

It represents the creation of the world, the conception of time.

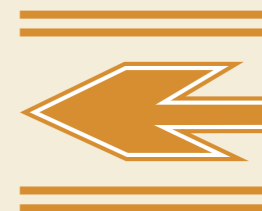
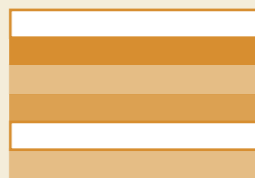


MAKURU - GALLINAZO

It is related to death, with the spirit responsible for liberating a person.

GWIRKUNU - CERROS Y LAGUNAS

It represents the fathers through height and the mothers as depth.



GARWA - PADRE DE LOS CAMINOS

Garwa corresponds to a mythological being who laid out the paths and therefore made them inhospitable and difficult to traverse so that only the indigenous can dominate them.

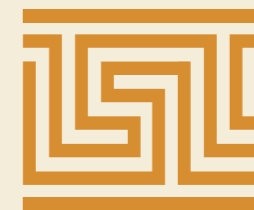


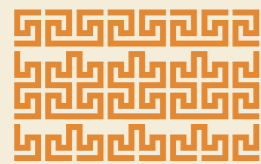
SARIWUWU - LOS MESES DEL EMBARAZO

This backpack must be woven by the Arhuacan woman during her pregnancy and then given at the baptism. Thus, for each month that passes, a horizontal stripe is added as a symbol of gestation. When completed, it is given to the Mamo who uses it in rituals for the benefit of the future baby.

KANZACHU - HOJA DE ÁRBOL

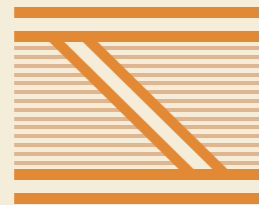
Tree leaf represents the trees and plants, particularly the coca leaf used by the Mamos for the Ayu.





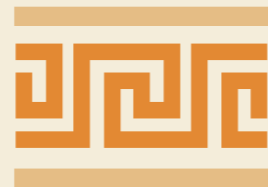
**GAMAKO -
RANA**

Some animals have the responsibility of singing to the mothers, fathers, and phenomena like the frog, which is depicted on the backpacks. However, there is also the possibility that this figure comes from engravings found on stones.



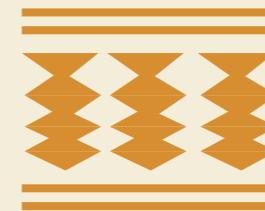
**ZIKAMU -
GUSANO
CIEMPIÉS**

It represents the animals that live inside the houses and for the Arhuacos, this animal may have been a Mamo in a past life and is now fulfilling another mission in the Sierra. However, this also relates to death.



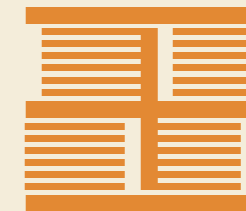
**KAMBIRU -
GARABATO/
COLA DE
ALACRÁN**

An ancient and indigenous tool used for various activities such as cleaning pastures and crops, as a hook or "guinda" inside or outside the houses where personal or load backpacks are hung.



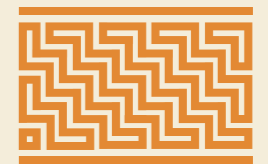
**HAKU -
SERPIENTE
DE CASCABEL**

The rattlesnake is the quintessential symbol of time and space (...) The snake is a living calendar. The design or engraving of the skin of the snake itself is the scheme of the map or division of the Arhuaco space. And in the zigzag movement of the snake, the indigenous people encapsulate the idea of movement.



**KUTÍA -
SEMILLA
SAGRADA
- COSTILLA**

It is firmness, foundation, basis, not only of animals and objects but also of the culture itself (...) it is a combative figure in the service of the most precious, cultural identity, the "Traditional Law."



**KUNSUMUNU
CHEYRWA -
PENSAMIENTO
DE HOMBRE**

It is firmness, foundation, basis, not only of animals and objects but also of the culture itself (...) it is a combative figure in the service of the most precious, cultural identity, the "Traditional Law."

PROCESS FROM THE BEGINNING *of* MAKING BACKPACKS *from the* SIERRA NEVADA

01

COLLECTION OF MATERIALS-

It all starts with the gathering of raw materials. Cotton and fique are the most common materials.



PREPARATION OF FIBERS-

Once collected, the fibers undergo a process of cleaning and sorting, before being spun and dyed.

02



03

DYEING OF FIBERS -

Color is an essential part of the backpacks and is what gives them life. To dye the fibers, natural dyes are used, extracted from various plants, flowers, fruits, and tree barks. This traditional technique not only ensures vibrant colors but also the durability of the dye.

WEAVING -

With the dyed fibers, women begin the weaving process. This is an art that is learned from a young age and perfected over the years. Using traditional techniques, the women weave intricate patterns and designs that tell stories and represent the community's worldview. Depending on the complexity, this process can take from days to months.

04



05

FINISHING AND DETAILS -

Once the main part of the weaving is finished, the finishing touches are applied. This can include adding borders, handles, or even additional details that enrich the backpack's design.

06

QUALITY CONTROL -

Before a backpack is considered finished, it undergoes a quality control check. It is verified that there are no errors in the weaving, that the colors are appropriate, and that the backpack is functional and durable.

07

BLESSING OR RITUAL -

In some communities, before using or selling a backpack, a ritual or blessing is performed. This act aims to infuse the backpack with positive energies and blessings for its user.

USES OF THE BACKPACK

Beyond being a fashion or decorative item, backpacks have a practical and everyday use in the lives of the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada. **They are used to carry food, tools, seeds, and sometimes small children. In addition, they serve as a means of exchange in celebrations and rituals.**





BACKPACKS

POPULAR CULTURE

› THE BACKPACK IS MORE THAN A UTILITARIAN OBJECT; IT IS A MANIFESTATION OF FERTILITY AND FEMININITY, SYMBOLIZING THE MATERNAL WOMB AND ITS CONNECTION TO THE COSMOS.

The impact of these backpacks has transcended the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, becoming icons of fashion and popular culture in Colombia and beyond its borders. It's not uncommon to find these backpacks in fashion shows, boutique stores, and in the wardrobes of fashion enthusiasts around the world. However, it's essential to remember and respect their origin and the profound cultural significance they represent.

The backpack is more than a utilitarian object; it is a manifestation of fertility and femininity, symbolizing the maternal womb and its connection to the cosmos. Its weaving starts from a center and develops in a spiral, expanding to form the base. Then, it progresses in a cylindrical shape around this base, passing through nine stages that evoke the phases of a baby's development in the womb. This weaving process reflects the nine layers of the universe according to the indigenous worldview.

› THE KOGUI AND THE WIWA USE FIQUE BACKPACKS AND COTTON AS A COMPLEMENT TO THEIR CLOTHING, WHILE THE ARHUACOS AND KANKUANOS MAKE THEM IN VIRGIN WOOL AND FIQUE.





MUSIC, DANCE, AND SINGING AS SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

In the indigenous communities of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, music, singing, and dancing are traditions deeply rooted in their cosmogony, serving as means to communicate with the divinities of the land.

Since the dawn of their creation, each element was consecrated with a chant given by the ancestors. Music is a manifestation deeply connected to the worldview of the Indigenous Peoples for the following reasons:

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION -

Music is a way to connect with the divine. Through their songs and rhythms, the indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada invoke their ancestors, establish dialogues with the spirits of nature, and pay tribute to deities.

TRANSMISSION OF WISDOM -

Songs and melodies are vehicles for transmitting stories, myths, teachings, and ancestral wisdom, keeping the collective memory of the people alive.

RITUALS AND CEREMONIES -

Music is an essential component in ceremonies and rituals. Whether to celebrate important events, make "pagamentos" (offerings), or seek harmony with nature, music accompanies and enhances these sacred practices.

INDIGENOUS MARRIAGE

IN THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA

Indigenous weddings have gained popularity due to their deep symbolism and respect for Mother Nature. They are officiated by the Mamos, spiritual leaders of the communities in the Sierra Nevada. The unions are carried out in traditional huts or in selected areas of luxury hotels in the region, ensuring privacy and the intimate nature of the event, where only the couple is present..

THE CEREMONY HAS SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS:

› **CONFESSION:** A MOMENT FOR THE COUPLE TO SYNCHRONIZE WITH NATURE, CONNECTING THEIR THOUGHTS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT.

› **CLEANSING:** A PERIOD OF INTROSPECTION AND SURRENDER, WHERE BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ARE RELEASED TO MOTHER EARTH.

› **OFFERINGS:** AN ACT OF GRATITUDE, IN WHICH THE EARTH IS SPIRITUALLY RECOGNIZED AND THANKED.

THE CLIMAX
of the **CEREMONY** occurs when the
MAMO places threads on the hands and feet
THE COUPLE,
symbolizing the — **BALANCE** AND
CONNECTION of their lives with the
ENERGIES OF THE — EARTH,
THE SUN — and THE MOON

THIS SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE LASTS ABOUT TWO HOURS AND CAN BE CONDUCTED AT ANY TIME OF THE YEAR.



CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF ANIMALS

Animals hold great cultural significance for the indigenous peoples of the Sierra, especially for the Arhuacos. These animals are often present in their rituals and ceremonies and are considered sacred and symbolic beings.

› SNAKES, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE SEEN AS REPRESENTATIVES OF DUALITY AND FERTILITY. THEY ARE ATTRIBUTED HEALING POWERS AND RESPECTED AS MESSENGERS OF THE GODS.

› MAMMALS, SUCH AS DEER AND MONKEYS, ARE CONSIDERED BEINGS OF WISDOM AND GUARDIANS OF THE FORESTS..

› BIRDS, LIKE HUMMINGBIRDS AND MACAWS, ARE SYMBOLS OF BEAUTY AND FREEDOM. THEIR PRESENCE IS BELIEVED TO BRING GOOD LUCK AND FORTUNE.

› CRICKETS AND CICADAS ARE APPRECIATED FOR THEIR SINGING AND ARE BELIEVED TO TRANSMIT SPIRITUAL MESSAGES.

› CARNIVORES, SUCH AS PUMAS AND JAGUARS, ARE REVERED FOR THEIR STRENGTH AND BRAVERY. THEY ARE CONSIDERED GUARDIANS OF THE TERRITORIES AND PROTECTORS OF THE COMMUNITIES.



› AMPHIBIANS, LIKE FROGS, ARE CONSIDERED INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN THE EARTHLY AND SPIRITUAL WORLDS. THEY ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE THE POWER TO PURIFY AND PROTECT COMMUNITIES. "EVERYTHING HAS LIFE AND SPIRIT, BUT FROGS ARE PARTICULARLY SACRED BECAUSE THEY SING TO THE WATER."

THE HARLEQUIN FROG

› A FROG CONSIDERED EXTINCT FOR 30 YEARS HAS RE-EMERGED:
› THE STARRY NIGHT HARLEQUIN FROG

Less than five centimeters long with beautiful black skin and white spots, these marvelous amphibians live only in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. For the Arhuaco people, the gouna—name of the Harlequin Frog in the Arhuaco language—is an indicator of life cycles and nature, a sort of biological calendar.

For example, the reproductive cycle of the Starry Night Harlequin Frog is used as a reference for cultivating products, like a special type of corn that is the basis of the diet for young people in training to become spiritual leaders or mamós. For the peoples of the Sierra, frogs are particularly sacred because they sing to the water.

Birds and their Significance

› THE ANDEAN CONDOR
(*VULTUR GRYPHUS-
ANDEAN CONDOR-
GÜITARA* IN Iku)
WATCHES OVER THE
MOORS AND SNOW.



Birds play transcendental roles intertwined with fundamental aspects of communal coexistence and ecosystem preservation, linking them to their cosmogony of the universe..

This guide aims to recognize and highlight some bird species that, in the case of the Arhuaco people, have a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual importance, whose roles, symbolism, and presence have been and continue to be, fundamental for the conservation of both the heart of the physical world and the spiritual world in the magnificent Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The endemic Santa Marta Hummingbird (*Chaetocercus astreans-Santa Marta WoodstarBisiyungüe* in Iku) is responsible for sowing and protecting the Ayu seed (sacred coca plant).

A bird that is highly respected for bringing notices and aiding in decision-making is the Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana-Squirrel Cuckoo- Mama chicua* in Iku), teaching the lesson of learning to listen.

Some birds, like the group of raptors, have tasks related to a climatic context, said to attract rain or announce winter like the Laughing Falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans-Laughing Falcon- Guako* in Iku).



› ANOTHER INSPIRATION FOR THE BEHAVIOR OF THE MAMOS IS THE BARN OWL (*TYTO ALBA-BARN OWLIMUN* IN WIWA), WHOSE EXAMPLE IN NATURE REPRESENTS THE PURITY OF THE SOUL.

Others are tasked with guarding the Sea of the Sierra and therefore do not ascend to the snowy peaks, like the Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis-Brown Pelican-Duanabojo* in Iku), which must watch from below.

Some bring messages from beyond, and can announce illness or death, like the Black and White Owl (*Strix nigrolineata-Black and White Owl-Bunku* in Iku).

For sacred pagamento materials, there is a strong link with endemic species, as represented by the Santa Marta Parakeet (*Pyrrubra viridicata-Santa Marta Parakeet-Nanguewa* in Iku).

The Military Macaw (*Ara militaris-Military Macaw-Mrabu* in Iku (U with a diagonal bar)), holds a deeply rooted value in culture and pagamentos, its feathers can be used for spiritual cleansing and bad energies.

Some birds, like the Crested Oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus-Crested OropendolaNuluka* in Iku), set an example of cooperation in the community, teaching the lesson of building houses with the help of others.

And some represent the punishment that can be suffered for being disobedient, like the Common Pauraque (*Nyctidromus albicollis-Common Pauraque-Siví* in Iku), who, for not following advice, ended up homeless (Biological Context: this bird nests on the ground).



CHAPTER

IV

MAIN

DESTINATIONS TOURIST

AND EXPERIENCES

› "THIS EXPERIENCE FOSTERS
GENUINE RESPECT FOR THE
TERRITORY, TRADITIONS LOCAL
AND BOTH NATURAL
RESOURCES AS CULTURAL."

The various indigenous communities offer immersive experiences that allow for an exchange of knowledge and cultures of the indigenous people of the highlands. The experience aims to showcase the day-to-day life of community members, thereby fostering a cultural exchange that revalues the customs and native language of the communities.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND EXPERIENCES

- › Hosts share stories, knowledge, and the importance of responsible use of natural resources.
- › Visits to ceremonial houses and talks with community members.
- › Crafting and the process of making backpacks.
- › Spiritual cleansings and insurance.

ECOTOURISM

- › Ecological walks.
- › Harvesting food.
- › Bird watching.

AGROTOURISM AND GASTRONOMY

- › Preparation of traditional foods. *The sancocho is popular in the communities.*
- › Use of sugar mills.

Participating in the activities offered in the different communities, visitors are invited to deeply reflect on environmental conservation and care. This experience promotes genuine respect for the land, local traditions, and both natural and cultural resources. Furthermore, it allows visitors to appreciate and value the effort and dedication with which the community protects and maintains its customs.





THE
FOUNDATIONS
OF
| ANCESTRAL
IDENTITY
IN THE REGION

› LOCATED IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA IN COLOMBIA, THE LOST CITY, ALSO KNOWN AS "TEYUNA" OR "BURITACA", IS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURES IN SOUTH AMERICA.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE -

Built in the 9th century, the Lost City serves as a living testament to the advanced Tayrona civilization, which flourished long before the European discovery of America. While Machu Picchu in Peru often receives global recognition, Teyuna is actually 650 years older. This city was an important political, social, and economic center for the Tayrona, and its architectural structure reflects a deep connection with nature and an advanced understanding of mountain engineering and urban planning.

THE TAYRONA PEOPLE -

The Tayronas were among the most organized and sophisticated indigenous tribes in Colombia. They were not only experts in goldsmithing and pottery but also had a profound astronomical knowledge, influencing the construction and orientation of their cities.

LOST CITY TEYUNA NANA

CONSTRUCTION METHODS -

The architecture of the Lost City stands out for its adaptability to the terrain. The terraces, stone staircases, and plazas were built in harmony with the mountainous landscape, demonstrating a deep understanding of topography and a desire to coexist with the natural environment.

DISCOVERY -

Teyuna remained hidden from the modern world until 1972. Although it was known to the local indigenous peoples, it was rediscovered for the rest of the world by *guaqueros*, treasure hunters who stumbled upon the stone stairs while searching for gold objects.

It consisted of 200 structures including circular houses, plazas, ceremonial areas, food storage sites, and paths that formed a complex of terraces connected by stone stairs. The restoration process took place between 1976 and 1982, and in 1981 the archaeological park of the Lost City was opened to the public.

EXPEDITION Lost City

DURATION 4 DAYS
COP 1.750.000

DAY 1

- › SANTA MARTA
- › MAMEY
- › CAMP 1

DEPARTURE FROM SANTA MARTA TO MAMEY

2 HOURS

HIKE TO CAMP 1

3-5 HOURS ABOUT 8KMS

OVERNIGHT IN HAMMOCKS OR BEDS WITH MOSQUITO NETS.

DAY 2

- › CAMP 1
- › MUTANZI
- › CAMP 3

BREAKFAST

WALK TO THE INDIGENOUS VILLAGE OF MUTANZI

2 HOURS

BATHING IN THE BURITACA RIVER

WALK TO CAMP 2 AND LUNCH

40 MINUTES

HIKE TO REACH CAMP 3

4 HOURS

OVERNIGHT IN HAMMOCKS

DAY 3

- › CAMP 3
- › LOST CITY
- › CAMP 2

HIKE TO THE LOST CITY

1 HOUR 1200 MASL

1200 STONE STEPS BUILT BY THE ANCIENT TAYRONAS

TOUR TO LEARN ABOUT THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL, ETHNOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL AREA, WITH FREE TIME TO ENJOY THE PLACE AND THE HEALING ENERGY OF THE MOUNTAIN

2 HOURS

RETURN TO PARAISO TEYUNA CAMP, LUNCH

HIKE TO CAMP 2

5 HOURS ABOUT 10 KMS

OVERNIGHT IN HAMMOCKS OR BEDS, DINNER AT THE CAMP

DAY 4

- › CAMP 2
- › MAMEY
- › SANTA MARTA

BREAKFAST

EARLY DEPARTURE FROM CAMP 2, HIKE TO MAMEY

7 HOURS

LUNCH AND A 4x4 RIDE TO SANTA MARTA OR THE TRAVELER'S FINAL DESTINATION



KUTANZAMA /KUTANZAMA

DURATION-

1 day

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha until Perico Aguao, kilometer 58. Then walk from the entrance to the reservation for 20 minutes to the community.

DIFFICULTY-

Low

HIKING-

2 kilometers

TOUR COST-

COP 200.000 to COP 500.000

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

\$120,000 per person

This contribution supports the sustainability of communities, the conservation of paths and homes, the care of the school, the promotion of our community, and more, to ensure you have the best experience.

ACCESS-

- It must be coordinated directly with the communities
- In the low season, access is only on weekends and holidays
- Groups of minimum 5 people and maximum 12

Kutzanama or Katanzama is an Arhuac community with a privileged location on the seashore between the Don Diego River and Palomino, easily accessible and just minutes from the main road. It is the only community settled by the sea, on a sacred beach area where bathing by visitors is prohibited.

Just a 25-minute walk from the main road (Troncal del Caribe), Katanzama is usually visited by tourists seeking a unique experience with nature and its culture, aim

ACTIVITIES-

- Conversations with Mamo Camilo or members of the community
- The offering of assurance and planting a tree as a gesture of gratitude to Mother Nature
- Visit to the ceremonial house
- Contemplating the majesty of the Sacred Tree
- Walking along the beach and visiting sacred sites, where you connect with nature and the purity of the water while exploring the river circuit of Madre Vieja
- If you are lucky, you might see the snow-capped peaks from the beach
- Spend the night in a traditional house
- Bonfire, dinner and musical ceremony with the Mamo
- For more information, you can contact members of the community directly:

[@ARHUACOTRAVEL](#)

GOTSEZHY



Located in the Guachaca River basin, 450 meters above sea level, Gotsezhy is a hidden charm of the Wiwa town, founded in 1986 by the respected Mamo Ramon Gil. This settlement is home to more than 50 Wiwa families, being one of the main enclaves of this community in the department. Upon visiting it, you will find yourself enveloped in the genuine hospitality of its inhabitants and fascinated by the serenity of its sacred lagoon.

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe via Santa Marta to Riohacha to Guachaca, kilometer 30. Then you can walk for 3 hours to the community or do the tour in one hour in a 4x4.

DURATION	1 day	2 day
HIKE	2.5 km	10 km
TOUR COST	COP 600,000- COP 700,000	COP 800,000- COP 900,000
DIFFICULTY	Medium	

ITINERARY-

DAY I

› Departure from Santa Marta towards Guachaca

1.5 HOURS

› Trekking through trails that lead through both peasant and indigenous territories

3 HOURS

› Welcome talk and offering of assurance, a traditional gesture of gratitude and protection

› Traditional lunch

› Visit to Matuna Waterfall to enjoy a refreshing swim in its crystalline lagoon, accompanied by local members

› Learning how to extract sap from the Maguey plant to get fique fibers, which men offer to women for later dyeing and making backpacks and crafts

› Practical workshop on backpack weaving and talk about its deep cultural significance

› Dinner followed by rest in traditional dwellings or outdoor hammocks

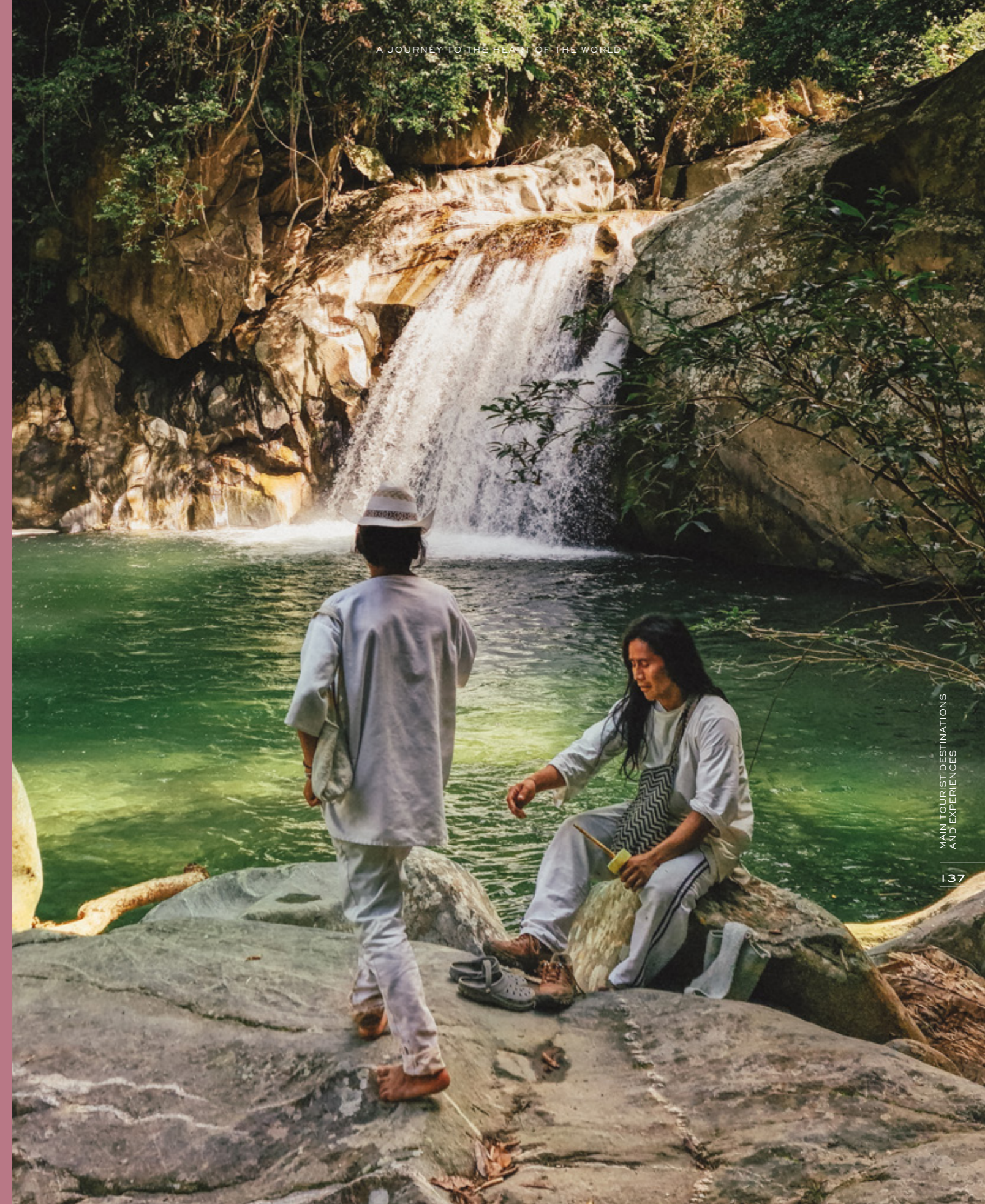
DÍA 2

Tour around Gotsezhy, immersing in talks about the rich culture and traditions of the Wiwa people

› Lunch

› Return hike

If time is short, Gotsezhy also offers a one-day experience, departing from Santa Marta at 5:00 am and traveling by 4x4 to the vicinity of the community, ensuring an equally unforgettable trip



BUNKUANY: *THE NEW LOST CITY*

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Calabazo village, kilometer 21. Then a 3-hour hike to the community or a 1-hour 4x4 ride.

DURATION-

1 day|

HIKE-

10 km

DIFFICULTY-

Medium

TOUR COST-

COP 400,000 - COP 800,000



Bunkuany, often referred to as the “New Lost City,” is an emerging gem in the Sierra Nevada. Its well-preserved ruins and archaeological remains of this ancestral city evoke the majesty and mystery of the Lost City, offering visitors a similarly enriching experience.

ITINERARY-

- Departure from Santa Marta to El Calabazo village
1.5 HOURS
- Trekking through jungle trails, culminating at the first ruins
3 HOURS
- Welcome talk and exploration of the terraces. In group trips, there is the option to coordinate the participation of a Mamo, to enrich the journey with a profound cultural exchange.
- Traditional lunch.
- On the return journey, a stop is recommended at the Madre Sierra hotel or a swim in one of the crystalline rivers found along the way

For those who desire a more extended experience, some operators offer two-day tours, including a visit to the enigmatic Donama stone and accommodation options, thus complementing the experience in Bunkuany. It is important to note that the cost of the tour may vary depending on the additional activities selected.

MULKWAKUNGUI

Mulkwakungui, a Kogui settlement, is located in the Quebrada del Sol hamlet, on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Although it is a Kogui community, in Quebrada del Sol, members of the Kogui, Arhuacos from the Kandumake community, and peasants coexist, enriching the cultural diversity of the area. This cohesion is clearly reflected in the local school, where children from different cultural backgrounds learn together, keeping their respective traditions alive.

DURATION-

1 day

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Los Linderos village, kilometer 51. Then a 1-hour 4x4 ride.

DIFFICULTY-

Low

HIKE-

1 Km

TOUR COST-

COP 500,000 - COP 700,000

ITINERARY-

- Departure from Santa Marta to Los Linderos hamlet
1.5 HOURS
- Ascent on an unpaved road to Quebrada del Sol
- Welcome by members of the peasant community
- Crossing the upper part of the Buritaca River towards Mulkwakungui
- Welcome talk at the Sacred Tree, energy recharge ritual, and offering of assurance
- Various activities in the community: harvesting cacao, using the sugar mill to prepare drinks, collecting coca leaves, and purchasing crafts and backpacks
- Lunch
- In the upper part of the Don Diego River, swimming is possible, and crossing the Kandumake community, a settlement of some Arhuaco families
- Return to Quebrada del Sol and Santa Marta



DONAMA STONE IN BONDA

DURATION-

1 day

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Bonda

DIFFICULTY-

Low

HIKE-

1 Km

TOUR COST-

COP 300,000 - COP 500,000

Bonda is a small town of indigenous origin living off agriculture and ecotourism. Located near the Manzanares River, its main natural attractions revolve around the waters descending from the Sierra Nevada. The carved stones of Pozo de Bondigua and the famous Donama Stone are the main attractions of the region. This monolith, about four meters in diameter and three meters high, has many petroglyphs believed to represent nature's codes.

It is believed that the carving was done by the Tayrona between 500 and 1525 BC. Although its true meaning remains a mystery, the stone holds great spiritual and symbolic importance for the indigenous populations of the area.



ITINERARY-

- Departure from Santa Marta to Donama Stone in Bonda
- A 1-hour journey
- Walk to La Liza waterfall
- Lunch
- Return to Santa Marta
- This is the most basic excursion, but usually, the visit to Donama Stone is combined with other plans around the Sierra Nevada



TAIRONAKA

Taironaka is an eco-lodge that blends recreation with culture in the heart of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Visitors can immerse themselves in the magic of the region while discovering the legacy of the Tayronas. Accompanied by expert guides, they will explore ecological and archaeological trails that highlight the rich heritage of the place.

DURATION	1 day
HIKE	1 km
DIFFICULTY	Low
TOUR COST	COP 350,000 - COP 600,000

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to the Don Diego River.

ITINERARY-

- Departure from Santa Marta towards the Don Diego River
- A 15-minute walk through an ecological trail or a 5-minute boat transfer
- Tour among gardens and terraces
1 HOUR
- Visita el museo de la cultura Tayrona
- Lunch
- Return to Santa Marta
2 HOURS



BUNKWIMAKE

Bunkwimake, located on the eastern bank of the Don Dieguito River, is a hidden treasure an 8-hour walk from the Don Diego hamlet on the Troncal del Caribe. Delving into this ancestral Arhuac territory, travelers find a hardworking, supportive community deeply connected to their culture and Mother Nature. They are governed by the revered law of origin NIWIKUNSAMU. Here, life revolves around agriculture, with corn, cassava, beans, and various fruits being the pillars of their sustenance and economy.



DURATION-

3 days

DIFFICULTY-

High

HIKE-

30 Km

TOUR COST-

COP 1,300,000 - COP 1,500,000

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Don Diego. A 7 to 8-hour hike to the community.

ITINERARY-

DAY 1

› Departure from Santa Marta to Don Diego hamlet

› Hike through tropical forests

6-7 HOURS

› Arrival at Bunkwimake and welcome by the ka'duku (welcome at the sacred tree)

› Lunch, rest, and free time to bathe in the river

› Tour of the community and explanation of their organization and architecture

› Dinner, bonfire, and dialogue with the Mamo

› Visit to sacred sites

› Lunch at a local family's house

› Afternoon dedicated to learning about traditional crafts

› Return to accommodation and hike to a viewpoint to watch the sunset

› Dinner followed by a bonfire and talk with the Mamo

DAY 3

› Breakfast

› Ceremonial farewell with the Mamo

› Visit to the Kandumake temple

› Crossing the river on traditional rafts

› Lunch at Quebrada del Sol

› Motorcycle transfer to the borders and then back to Santa Marta

› Sierra Nevada to Palomino

DAY 2

› Wake up and greet the sun

› Energy discharge ritual in the river

› Breakfast

POZO CAIMÁN, SEWIAKA, SEYDUKWA AND TUBBING

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Palomino

This fascinating tour explores the Palomino River basin, where visitors have the opportunity to connect with the Kogui Seywiaka community, visit an Arhuac family in the enchanting Seydukwa, accompanied by Mamo Marcelino, and marvel at the pristine waters of Pozo Caimán. The adventure continues as they descend in tubing towards the town. Ideal for nature, sport, and culture enthusiasts, this circuit invites immersion in the essence of the land, sharing knowledge and traditions, and experiencing the energy and indigenous worldview. If lucky, they might spot the majestic Colón and Bolívar peaks, summits of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

DURATION-

1 day

DIFFICULTY-

Medium / high

HIKE-

8 km

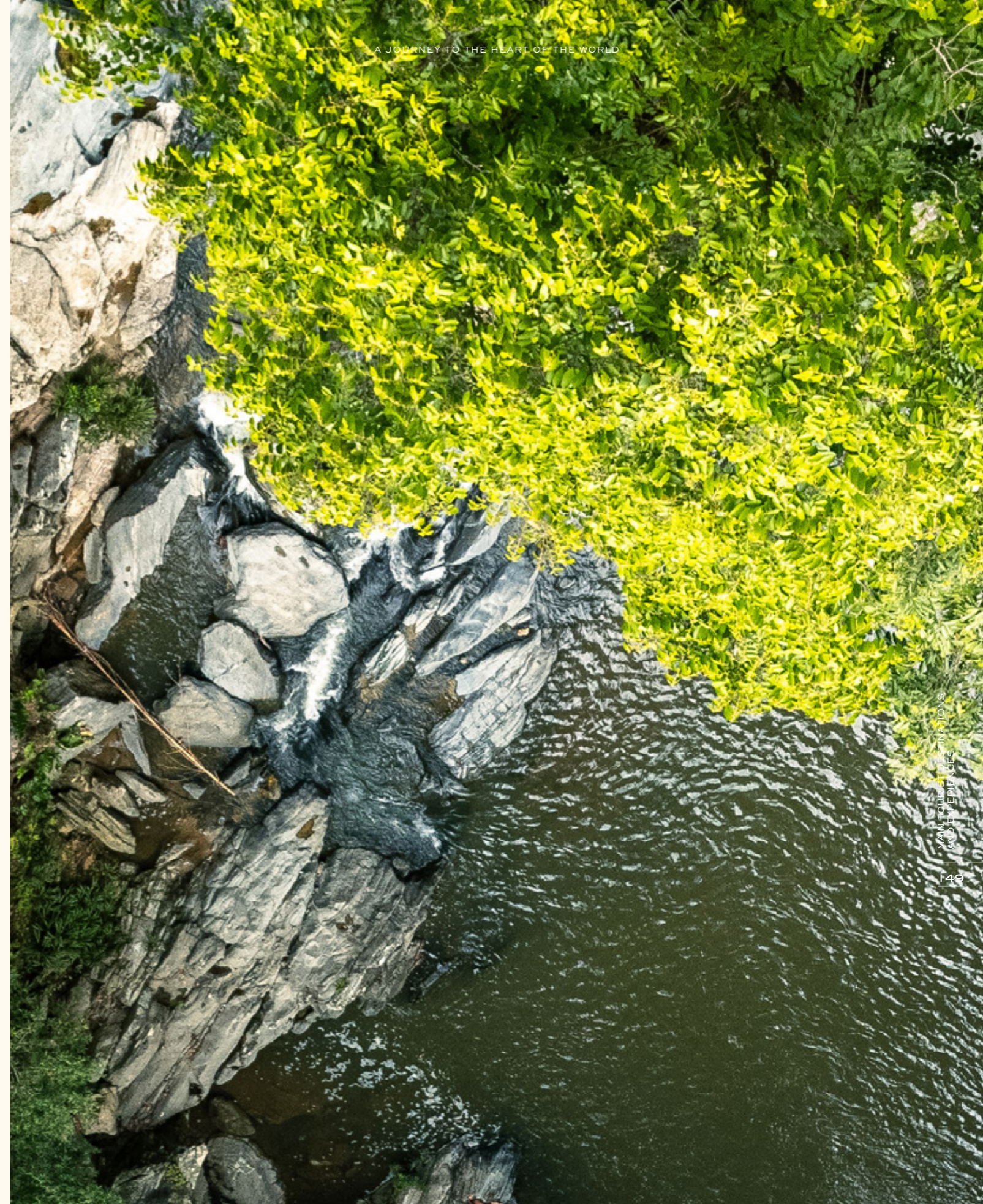
TOUR COST-

COP 500,000

ITINERARY-

- Departure from Santa Marta to the Palomino River
- Before entering sacred territory, a small energy recharge ritual and release of bad thoughts
- Hike with stops along the River to Seywiaka **2 HOURS**
- Explanation of organic cacao cultivation and harvesting
- Explanation of the importance of the coca leaf
- Receipt of assurance and gratitude to Mother Nature
- Hike to Pozo Caimán, crossing the Palomino River and swimming in crystal clear natural pools **30 MINUTES**
- Journey to Seydukwa **10 MINUTES**
- Talk with the mamo, rest, and typical lunch. *The specialty is the trifásico sancocho.*
- Tour of the village, ceremonial houses, use of sugar mills, talks on backpack making and the use of poporo
- Return to Palomino or a one-hour hike back to the starting point in tubing from the Palomino River

This experience can be extended by 1 or 2 days to visit the Kogui community of Kasakúmake and the traditional Arhuaco village of Gumake. This experience is designed for those who wish to explore the unknown paths of the Sierra Nevada.



ATIGUMAKE

Deep in the Sierra Nevada, along the Palomino river slope, lies a pristine Arhuac community, strategically located closer to the snowy peaks. The region boasts almost untouched vegetation, where nature displays its full splendor. The journey is not only a physically challenging expedition but also a spiritual journey. Here, visitors have a unique opportunity to explore and connect with ecosystems that are fundamental to the worldview of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada, allowing immersion in a world filled with energy and ancestral wisdom.

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Palomino. An 8 to 9-hour hike to the community

DURATION-

3 days

DIFFICULTY-

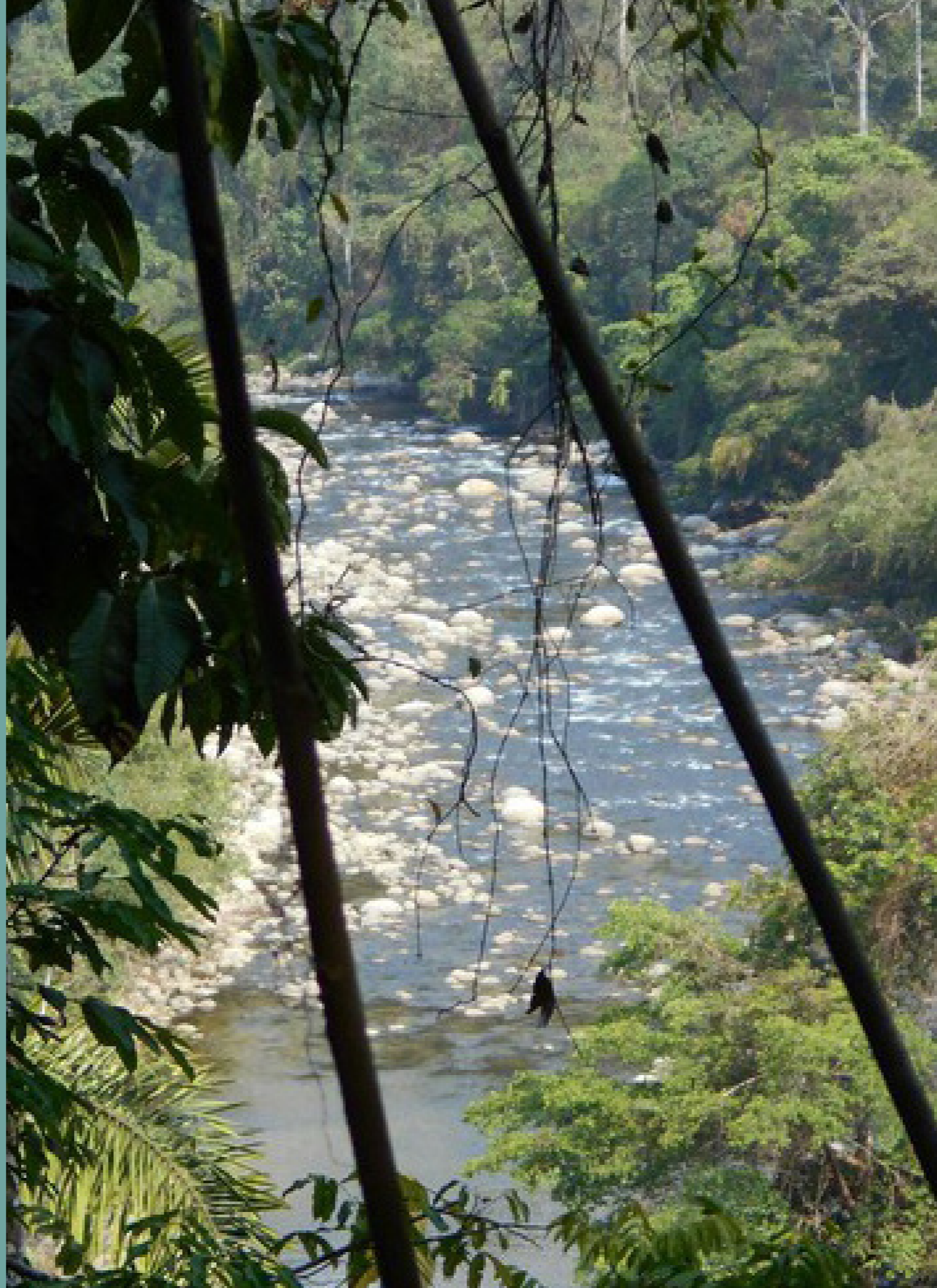
High

CAMINATA-

35 Km

TOUR COST-

COP 1,300,000 - COP 1,500,000



ITINERARY-

DAY 1

- › Enter through the Palomino district at 7 am.
- › Arrival at destination at 3 pm.
- › Lunch in the community.
- › Rest time and preparation for dinner.
- › Night of bonfires and enriching conversations.

DAY 2

- › Start the day with an energizing breakfast.
- › Excursion to the emblematic waterfall of the region.
- › Participate in pagamentos, sacred rituals.
- › Tour the town: learn about its history and culture.
- › Discover sacred places and ancestral stories of the territory.
- › Lunch with local flavors.
- › Refresh with a bath in the river.
- › Dinner in the community.
- › Bonfire and conversations with the Mamo, spiritual leader.

DAY 3

- › Start with a traditional breakfast.
- › Departure towards Palomino at 7 am.
- › Lunch at Mamayse.
- › Arrival in Palomino at 3 pm.
- › Continue the journey towards the city of origin.

SEYKUANAMAKE

This is not an ordinary place; it's a sacred territory, filled with ancestral stories. Although it has been affected by illicit crops, it's currently undergoing a vigorous restoration process. The Arhuac indigenous communities of the region have invested efforts to plant native trees, infusing life back into the land. Access to this refuge begins in the peasant village of Perico Aguao, located just 1 km from the Don Diego River. The journey, which takes about 5 hours, is usually done on mule or horse due to the demanding terrain.

HOW TO GET THERE -

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Perico Aguao.

DURATION	2 days
HIKE	15 km
DIFFICULTY	High
TOUR COST	COP \$1.000.000

ITINERARY-

DAY 1

- › Departure from Santa Marta at 6 am to Perico Aguao.
- › Breakfast.
- › Purification ritual to free oneself from negative energies.
- › Departure towards the sacred territory.
- › Stop at viewpoints for bird watching and to see the snowy peaks and understand their meanings.
- › Arrival at the community and ceremonial welcome act and pagamento.
- › Lunch and brief rest.
- › Walk around the community and ceremonial places.
- › Bonfire and knowledge sharing encounters.
- › Dinner.

DAY 2

- › Sun ritual at 5 am.
- › Collection of firewood for the sacred space and preparation of breakfast.
- › Breakfast.
- › Bath in the river
- › Return to Perico Aguao. ABOUT 6 HOURS
- › Lunch.
- › Return to Santa Marta.

The cost usually includes round-trip transportation, mule freight, muleteers, guides, contribution to the community, contribution to the mamo, insurance, food, and lodging. Groups of 5 to 12 people.



ANCIENT CITY OF THE CONGO

ITINERARY-

DAY 1

› Depart from Santa Marta to El Congo at 1,200 meters above sea level.

4 HOURS

› Hike

1 HOUR

› Tour of 21 discovered terraces and talk about the ancient Tayrona civilization.

› Lunch

› Visit to the cantarrana pools.

› Overnight in an eco-hotel or farmhouse inn.

DAY 2

› Breakfast.

› Visit the terraces and hiking in nearby areas, rivers, or viewpoints, as chosen by the group.

› Lunch.

› Return to Santa Marta.



Discovered in 1983, El Congo is an ancient city and archaeological site of the Tayrona civilization. It is believed to have been home to about 5,000 people who lived near 800 terraces. This architectural marvel, comparable to the Lost City Teyuna, stands out for its residential terraces, stone paths, and ceremonial areas. It represents the skill and deep respect of our indigenous ancestors towards nature.

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Troncal del Caribe road from Santa Marta to Riohacha up to Los Linderos hamlet, kilometer 51. Then a 1-hour journey in 4x4.

DURATION-

2 days

DIFFICULTY-

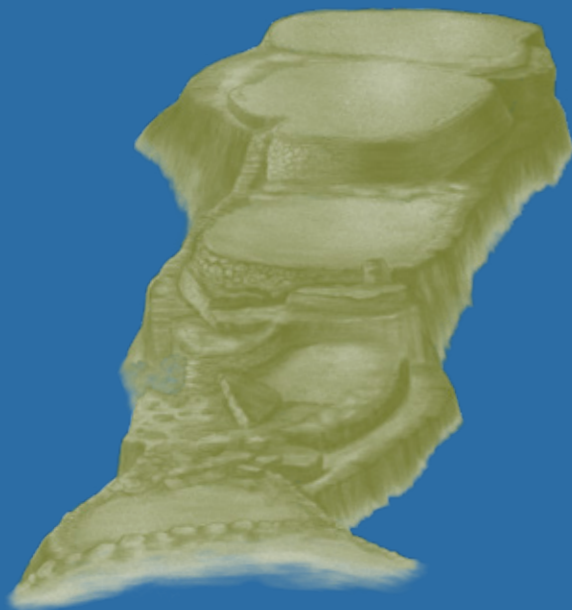
Low

HIKE-

11 Km

TOUR COST-

COP \$1.000.000



CHERUA (TUNAGAJA)



Immerse yourself in an unforgettable coffee tour in Santa Marta, where you will have the chance to share authentic moments with the Kogui community in Cherua. Not only will you learn about coffee processing, but you'll also explore lulo and honey farms, enjoy ancestral bonfires, bathe in natural pools, and experience intercultural activities like dances and crafts.

HOW TO GET THERE-

Take the Santa Marta to Ciénaga road until the town of Palmor in Ciénaga.

DURATION-

2 days

DIFFICULTY-

Low

HIKE-

4 km

TOUR COST-

COP \$1.000.000

DAY 1

› Depart from Santa Marta to Ciénaga, taking the Rio Frio route. you'll arrive at Palmor.

1 HOUR AND 50 MINUTES

› Typical breakfast of the region.

› Journey to Cherua, located at 1,320 meters above sea level.

A 2-HOUR

› Hike to the community.

A 30-MINUTE

› The community will welcome and guide you on a walk through their lands.

› Lunch.

› Visit a sacred pool and a lulo farm.

› Coffee and dinner at sunset, bonfire, local stories, and traditional dances.

› Accommodation will be in a cozy farmhouse.

DAY 2

› Start the day watching the sunrise, accompanied by organic coffee offered by the indigenous people.

› Breakfast.

› Coffee tour

A 3-HOUR

› Visit the apiary and learn about honey and the work of beekeepers.

› Lunch and return to Santa Marta.

› There are experiences of 2 to 4 days depending on the agency and available experiences.

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- "...FOUR SOULS
GUARDIANS, THAT OF THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE
SIERRA, ARHUACO, KOGUI,
WIWA AND KANKUAMO, WEAVE
A PROTECTIVE MANTLE
ABOUT MOTHER EARTH."

A TRIP TO THE SIERRA NEVADA IS MORE THAN
VISITING A DESTINATION IS NOT A RANDOM TRIP.
IT IS A SPIRITUAL MEETING, A PLACE
TO DREAM, LEARN AND VALUE.
AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH
THE OLDER BROTHERS AND THEIR CONCEPTION OF
HARMONY AND NATURAL HAPPINESS DESCRIBED FROM
THE STATE OF THE INTANGIBLE WORLD.

INDIGENOUS TOURISM GUIDE
IN THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA