

MagicOfColombia_2025

A long time ago in a land quite close, we visited the headquarters of AMA Waterways in Calabasas. They were in a building that was previously the lavish headquarters of the Lockheed Corporation before they got common sense and moved to the suburbs of the Washington, DC area. After some discussion with the AMA representative, we signed up for their "Magic of Colombia" trip in May 2025. This was a new trip for them and the first one was supposed to be in November 2024. There were difficulties and delays, so the first one actually was in April 2025.

So, it turns out that they were trying to find new areas for river cruising and decided to develop the river cruising on the very wide and long Magdalena River in Colombia, South America. This effort included a new ship, excursion boats, docks, and interface with the local community. We left Los Angeles on COPA air to Panama City and then went to Barranquilla in Colombia. As is usual for us, we arrived a day early so we had time to explore the city. I was surprised that the airport was a 40-minute taxi drive to the hotel in the city, which was among several newer 10 story buildings. We decided to visit the shore of the Magdalena River as it ran through the city; there was some sort of humongous reddish building with a food court nearby along the river. I was surprised at the amount of surplus water hyacinth floating down one side of the river. It was a Friday evening and there were several hundred people with colorful costumes and their own live music and dancing, parading down the waterfront. The event was a tournament of many cultural dance troupes from local schools

The next morning, we got a taxi and tried to get to the assigned location to meet the ship. We looked across the wide river and the ship was there near the other side in the river. A boat shuttle took us to the ship and then returned us back to the shore where there was a cultural dance presentation. Barranquilla is a modern city, known for cultural events and community involvement.

The next day, the hotel ship was off up the 700-meter-wide Magdalena River with its never-ending supply of water hyacinth. We got into small 20-passenger excursion boats and visited town of Nueva Venecia with all its homes on stilts in the water. Several excursions on the trip were erroneously labeled as "Walking Tour". These were boat trips to see the trees, iguanas, birds and waterways, and then tours of the towns with a moto-rickshaw, bicycle-rickshaw, or van transport. I did not elect to walk anywhere; I really could not anyway. This was a really first-class tour operation; the boat staff was exceptionally friendly. The food was based on traditional Colombian fish and fruits. All meals were delicious and well-conceived for our quite American palate; several dishes were wonderful even though we did not know what they were. At some ports, the local people came aboard to show their talents.

After a week of visiting the river and the towns along it, we arrived in Cartagena, where Chris went on a walking tour of the fortifications of the old walled city. We later took a "Hop-On, Hop-Off" bus tour around the city and its highlights. We stayed at two different 50-story deluxe hotels across the street from a small beach with many umbrellas. There were many low-priced places to stay in the city as well.

There were two major excursions from Cartagena: 1. A taxi ride to the "Aviario National" in Baru, about an hour drive around the harbor away. The taxi driver was drafted to assist in pushing my wheelchair around some pretty poor gravel/dirt/paved pathways. The bird show was interesting and there were a large variety of birds in the park and participating in the show. After all, Colombia has the most different bird species of any country in the WORLD. Caveat: The top 6 countries all have part of the Amazon rain forest. 2. We signed up online for a crowded 40-person boat tour of the Rosario Islands where there were various activities such as Aquarium, snorkeling, lobster delivered to boat, shore lunch and beach activities. Finally, there was the one-hour high-speed bouncy boat ride back to downtown Cartagena. Later in the trip, the airport was only a 10-minute drive from our hotel. I want to go back!