

Taco Libre's Journey Set to Start in Cartagena

Cartagena has been a city of new beginnings for us.

In November of 2016, at Club de Pesca, surrounded by the sea and the glow of the colonial city, we promised each other to love and cherish one another. But beyond that, we also vowed to keep building our dreams together, to support each other's passions, and to never stop seeking new adventures.



Club de Pesca, Nov. 2016



Club de Pesca, Oct. 2025

Nearly a decade later, Cartagena welcomes us again — this time not in wedding attire, with guayaberas and dresses, but with a rooftop tent, patience, and our new companion, Taco Libre, ready to carry us into the next chapter of our journey.

We expected the “true adventure,” with all the bumps in the road, to start once we were on the actual road driving the Panamerican Highway in South America. But life wanted to test us right away. In the whirlwind of planning, checklists, and logistics, Mafe managed to forget the most obvious thing of all: her Colombian passport! Truly a rookie mistake. As someone born in Colombia, that document is not optional, it's required for entry. By the time we realized it – on the eve of our flight to Colombia from Oklahoma, not Florida – it was too late. All we could do was board the plane, joke and laugh about the situation (Mafe being stranded in a Colombian jail and Scott starting the adventure alone with Taco Libre) and in all seriousness, with the hope that the Colombian immigration officer would show some grace.

Our flights, as if to match the theme of chaos, were full of delays. We left Oklahoma City on Delta with just enough time to make our connection in Atlanta, until a mechanical issue left us sitting on the plane at the gate for almost an hour. That was exactly the time we needed to make our international flight to Bogotá. When we landed, we sprinted through the airport, weighed down by our backpacks: Mafe's “portable office” stuffed with laptop, extra monitor, Starlink, notepads, keyboard, and Scott's drone and camera equipment adding to the load. We made it to the gate breathless, the plane still visible, but the jetway already pulled back.



Plane from Atlanta to Bogotá.
Jetway gone, and we are inside looking out.
Like that movie moment: will we make it?

And then, a small miracle. A man at the counter called the tower, who called the pilot, who, against all odds, agreed to reopen the door. The jetway was reconnected and we boarded, relieved, only to be delayed once again by another mechanical issue. By the time we reached Bogotá, we only had one hour to clear customs, deal with immigration, and make our final connection to Cartagena. And again, another delay. Strangely enough, those delays worked in our favor: without them, we would have been stranded in airports overnight. Instead, we made it through!

Immigration in Bogotá was our initial biggest hurdle. Mafe's heart raced as she handed over her U.S. passport and very casually said, "let me tell you sir that I lost my Colombian passport" to which he replied, "let me tell you ma'am that unless you get a new one, you will not be allowed to leave the country." And with that, off to the races again to make our final flight. We made it to Cartagena, but our luggage was not so lucky. It took us multiple trips to the airport before we could recover our bags late the next day.

Taco Libre's arrival took even longer — a week of navigating Colombian bureaucracy, uncertainty, inspections, permits, and offices — but we used that time to rediscover Cartagena.

Walking through the narrow colonial streets, with flowered decorated balconies, and colorful houses, every corner felt alive with music, color, and history. The palenqueras strolled by with baskets of fruit balanced on their heads. Their presence is as much a part of Cartagena's identity and culture as these women from San Basilio de Palenque symbolize Afro-Colombian culture, strength and tradition. Speaking of fruits, Colombia is known for its fruit variety, and this time we discovered a new flavor: corozo. Its juice is tart and refreshing.



Art mirrors life in Cartagena, and nowhere is that more vivid than in Plaza San Pedro Claver, where we stopped to admire the sculptures of Edgardo Carmona, a dear friend. Among his figures, one of the most striking depicts a palenquera, her basket balanced just as gracefully as the women we had seen on the streets. Seeing her in iron, frozen in motion yet full of energy, made us appreciate even more the living vibrancy of the city — how the culture, history, and daily life of Cartagena are captured both in its people and its art.

Not far from the historic walled city lies Getsemaní, Cartagena's bohemian art neighborhood. Its streets are alive with color and creativity. The walls are covered in murals depicting local culture, and cultural icons, like Gabriel Garcia Marquez or "Gabo" the famous novelist and Nobel Prize winner, famous for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and for creating magical realism.



One detail that always catches our eye in Cartagena is the door knockers. They're not just decoration, they carry history. In colonial times, the shape of a knocker told you about the family behind the door: lions for nobility, fish for merchants and sea traders, even lizards for resilience and adaptation. The bigger the knocker, the higher the family's status.



And of course, no travel was complete without food. One of the first things we did upon arriving was devour a crispy arepa con huevo — made with corn flour, crispy on the outside, with a whole

egg hidden inside. We also enjoyed some delicious ceviche, arroz de coco (coconut rice) and patacón pisao, a twice fried, flattened green plantain – a true staple of the Colombian Caribbean coast.



Cartagena is a major port for Colombia and it's a living history. It was in fact a major port for the Spanish crown, a fortress against pirates, and a battleground for independence. Its walls and fortresses, like Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas, still stand as reminders of battles fought and resilience earned. Cartagena was one of the first cities in Colombia to declare independence in 1811, earning the nickname “La Heroica” – *The Heroic City* – for the courage of its people.

In case you are wondering if there was any dancing this time around... yes there was! We shut down our wedding on the dance floor, and this time we shut down Havana Club in Getsemaní. We danced the night away to two live salsa groups.

Despite the delays, and the bumps in the road, we've made the most of every moment. Together we have found the balance between patience and exploration, and it has reminded us that the ups and downs are part of the joy of traveling and the adventure. Mafe has been able to work with her meditations, and Scott has been taking Spanish classes at a local school.

Finally, with paperwork done and Taco Libre with us, the South America adventure truly begins. Cartagena gave us our marriage, now it gives us our starting line on the road ahead that is waiting for us, and for which we are ready.

Pictures will be posted on Instagram @tacolibreoverland and Facebook @TacoLibre25 if you want to check them out.

Until the next stop!

October 2, 2025