

Myth or Truth About Colombians

It's not for nothing that travelers and overlanders always say Colombians are among the kindest and warmest people you'll ever meet. About a month before we left, at the Colorado Overland Expo, that seemed to be the theme among all the presenters, and it melted Mafe's heart every single time someone said it. Now, we've had the chance to experience it for ourselves, again and again.



First (random) act of kindness. In Mompós, our first overnight stop after Cartagena, someone suggested we try the local artisanal rum, *Ñeque*. The next day, we stopped by a little house where a man sold fruit *granizados* (shaved ice with local fruits). We started chatting about all sorts of things, as one does in Colombia, and the conversation led to *Ñeque*. The owner explained how to drink it properly, with mint and cinnamon, and before we knew it, his *mensajero* (the person who runs errands for the business owner) offered to go find some for us at “el Mono’s.” He hopped on the owner’s bike and disappeared down the road. Half an hour later, he was back, bottle in hand. That’s how we ended up with *Ñeque* – Colombian moonshine – delivered right to us by a total stranger’s willingness to give is a taste of a truly local drink.

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By the way, Scott has made some good cocktails with it!



Second act of kindness. Before leaving Cartagena, we joined a local overlanding chat group to get tips on routes, hidden spots, and good camping areas. Within a day of posting a question about Santander, a man named Juan replied and invited us for *un tinto* in Bucaramanga. We met up with him, his wife Nancy, and a few other overlanding friends, he had invited to meet us, and we instantly connected. They shared travel stories, favorite hidden routes, and a lot of laughs. Before we could even reach for our wallets, Juan and Nancy insisted on paying for our coffee and several regional treats he had ordered for us. They gave us their contact information, told us to call if we ever needed anything, and even offered us a place to stay if we came through their town.

Since then, they’ve stayed in touch, sending us the contacts of friends and fellow travelers as we’ve driven through Santander. That sense of community is something we’ll never forget.

Third act of kindness.

A few days later in Los Santos, that same kindness found us again, only stronger!

We were trying to figure out where to camp for the night when we stopped in a small town to use an ATM. By pure luck (or bad luck?), our local debit card had just expired. So we went into a small bank branch with the hope of getting some cash from our local Colombian account. True to form, Mafe asked the woman behind the counter if she happened to know a safe place where we could park for the night. A young man, Mauricio, overheard and asked, “How many people?” Then he smiled, showed us a photo on his phone, and said, “This is the best view in town.” It really did look amazing. “It’s my *finca*,” he said. “You can stay there, right at the edge of the Chicamocha Canyon.”



He did not want to charge us, but we insisted. He only asked that we give 30,000 pesos (about \$7) to the woman who looks after his land, Carmen. Before we left, he guided us to his home so we could fill our water tank with his garden hose. While we were filling up, he called Carmen to let her know we were coming, he told her, “*Aquí va una señora y un señor gringo,*” which made us laugh, “show them where to park at the rim of the canyon, where we’re planning on building the cabaña.”

When we arrived, Carmen, a sweet older woman who lived with her son in a tiny, almost shack-like house, greeted us with the warmest smile. She showed us where to park, and more than once offered to cook for us. We declined, and handed her the 30,000 pesos, she didn’t want to take it and offered again to cook for us. Politely, we declined and she went back to her home.

That evening, under the Colombian stars, thanks to Mauricio’s kindness, we spent the night in one of the most breathtaking places we’ve ever camped, right on the edge of the Chicamocha Canyon, with views of the Andes mountains, the river below, and absolute peace. It was magical: just us, *Taco Libre*, and the sound of the wind moving through the deep valley.

The next morning, we stopped by to say goodbye to Carmen. She was in tears – her son had been in a motorcycle accident that morning. He was bruised and bleeding, so we immediately offered to drive him to the nearest hospital. She was so grateful and insisted on giving us something in return. She first offered a baby chick, we declined. She then offered a plant. She then offered the chick and the plant. We declined again, of course, and not to appear ungrateful, we explained we couldn’t take either the chicken or the plant on the road. Her insistence and her need to give even when she had so little, was extremely moving. We took her son to town for medical care and continued on our way.



This was the view from the tent when we woke up.

Barichara.

Our next stop was Barichara, one of Colombia's most beautiful colonial towns. By pure luck, we arrived just in time for the *Fiestas de Barichara*, which happen to fall on the long weekend for *El Día de la Raza, or Columbus Day*, and Mafe's birthday! The whole town was alive with music, dancing, and that unique Colombian charm and encanto. There were live bands playing Colombia music in the main plaza, food stalls, fireworks, and several parades.

And then something funny happened, as we were walking through town, we spotted a vehicle rigged up almost exactly like ours, with California plates. Scott practically took off running after it. We ended up meeting another couple doing the same thing we are, driving south, all the way to Argentina. We exchanged contact information, and who knows, maybe we've already met one of those travel buddies you find once and cross paths with again and again on the road.



So, it is not a myth that Colombia has the kindest and warmest people, especially towards foreigners, and you know what else is not a myth? No one in the world parties like Colombians. We danced at the fairground to live bands, even one from the Colombian Army!

It was the perfect ending to our second week on the road with *Taco Libre*.

More soon, on Colonial Towns and from our next stop in the magical department of Boyacá.

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