

Medellín GEARE guide



This guide provides a brief overview of living in Medellín, with some recommendations and advice on how to make the most of your experience.

Table of Contents

Packing and Prep	2
Obtaining a Colombian ID — IMPORTANT	3
First week	5
Getting around Medellín	6
Metro system	6
Uber	8
Taxis	9
Google maps	9
Bus system	10
Financial	10
General info:	10
Debit/Credit cards:	11
Opening a Colombian bank account (From Rebecca's Experience):	11
Communication	12
Finding an apartment	13
Cultural tips	13
EAFIT	14
Traveling	14
General Tips	14
Barranquilla - Carnaval	15
Bogotá	15
Cartagena	16
Salento	16
Medical	16
Other helpful sites:	17



Packing and Prep

- You'll need a visa for Colombia, but Purdue will help you with obtaining this.
 - The process is relatively easy because you will be walked through every step. (When we went, the program director, Heidi Parker, even went to the Colombian Consulate in Chicago for us to pick the visas up)
 - When you receive your visa, it will come in the form of a special sticker in your passport.
- Toiletries are generally expensive in Medellín, so keep that in mind as you're packing (for example, they sell toothbrushes with security tags on them)
- If you're planning on staying in a hostel at any point (most likely you will) you'll want to bring a lock to store your luggage safely in a locker, and a towel for showers (you can save like 90% of the room in your bag on trips where you'll be staying in a hostel by getting a [thin microfiber travel](#) towel to bring)
- Everyone wears pants in Medellín, so you'll stick out if you wear shorts. Especially for females, it's important to pack mostly pants. (Although you could definitely bring some shorts for around the house, trips to the coast, etc.)
- Most banks will let you order foreign currency if you do it in advance. It's helpful to get about COP \$200.000 from your bank before you leave. This will give you a bit of money for taxis, hostels, and food for your first couple of days without having to worry about finding an ATM.
- IMPORTANT: bring a photocopy of your passport and visa with you, and try to keep it with you at all times (until you get your Colombian ID)
- Vaccines:
 - As long as you're up to date on your usual vaccinations, you won't need any other vaccines before leaving.
 - If you're going into more rural areas, it's a good idea to get the Yellow Fever vaccine.



- It's totally fine to get this in Medellín, and can easily be done at Clinica Las Vegas— a hospital that's about 10 minute walk from EAFIT. (It may actually be easier to do in Medellín because there is oftentimes a Yellow Fever vaccine shortage in the US.)
 - Just ask for “vacunación” at the hospital help desk, and they'll direct you to the right office.
 - When I went, the vaccine was COP \$70.000.
 - Keep in mind that it takes about 2 weeks for the vaccination to take effect, so it's a good idea to do this when you first arrive in Medellín.

Obtaining a Colombian ID — IMPORTANT

- You'll need to get a Cédula de Extranjería (foreigner's ID) with your TP-3 visa.
- It's important to do this within the first 15 days of arriving in Colombia, or you can be fined.
- To obtain your Cédula, you'll need the to do the following:
 1. Obtain proof of blood type. Here's how to do it:
 - NOTE: the immigration office needs **physical proof** of your blood type— they won't just take your word for it
 - If you go to PUSH before you leave, they can provide you with a card that lists your blood type
 - If you have ever donated blood to the American Red Cross they provide a printable card with your blood type
 - You can also get proof of blood type in Medellín at Clinica Las Vegas with a quick blood test
 - Go to Clinica Las Vegas, and on the second floor there's a desk labeled “Laboratorio”



- Ask for a blood test (Tipo de Sangre), provide your passport for identification, and pay for the blood test (it costs about \$12.000 COP)
 - The clinician will draw a small sample of blood, and then you'll need to return to the Clínica the following day to get the results (a paper with proof of your blood type)
 - *NOTE: If you do go to Clínica Las Vegas for the blood test, I'd recommend just getting your yellow fever vaccine while you're there. (See "Packing and Prep > Vaccines" for more info on this.)*
2. Make copies of your passport and **stamped** visa. This can be done in Centro Comercial Oviedo near the money changing service at the El Poblado entrance
 3. Fill out [this form](#).
 4. Go to the Medellín immigration office (Calle 19 # 80A-40, Barrio Belén La Nubia) **with your passport, visa, copies of your passport and visa, and proof of blood type**. Tell them you need a "Cédula de Extranjería." You'll meet with an immigration officer, and they'll get your information and take your ID photo. After that, they'll give you your "Cédula Number." This number is really important as you'll be asked for it when using a credit card, buying alcohol, etc.

NOTE: The immigration office usually opens at 8am, and we'd recommend trying to arrive at 7:50am. The wait to meet with an immigration officer can get really long, and arriving early will save you a lot of time waiting.
 5. Once you've gone the immigration office, you'll just need to wait a few days, and then return to the immigration office to pick up your physical Cédula card once it's ready. To check if your Cédula is ready, [go to this site](#), click the date, and look for your number on the list of cédulas available for pickup:



Está aquí: En la página de Migración Colombia en: Cédulas para reclamar

CLICK HERE extranjería ya está lista para ser entregada en los Centros Facilitadores de Servicios Migratorios de su ciudad.

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Ahora usted puede saber el estado del trámite de su cédula de extranjería a través la línea: **6055454**
Realice su consulta, con la opción: **3**

CÉDULAS por entregar

GOBIERNO DE COLOMBIA

- Vicepresidencia
- MinRelaciones
- MinInterior
- MinHacienda
- MinMinas
- MinProtección
- MinTransporte
- MinVivienda

First week

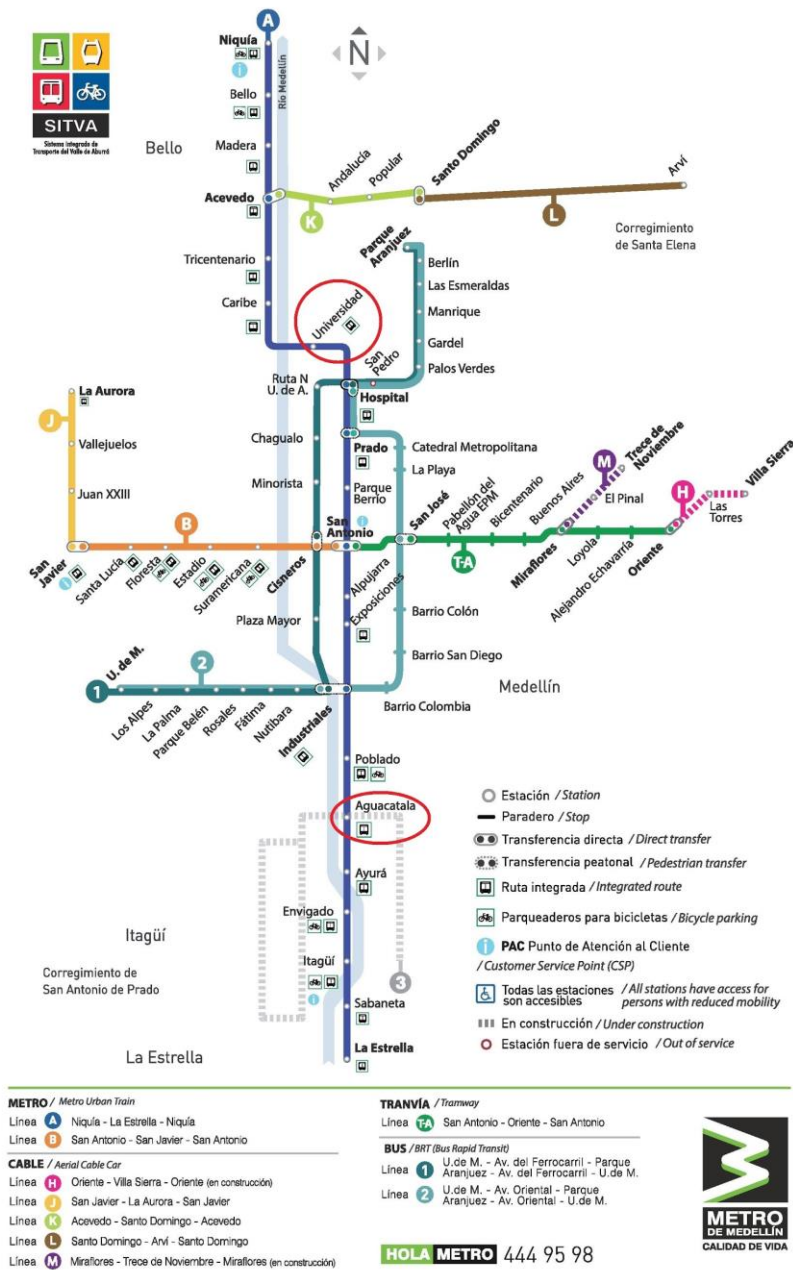
- Obtain your foreigner's ID** (See "Obtaining a Colombian ID — IMPORTANT" for more information on this)
- Open a Colombian bank account** if you want to save money on foreign transaction fees (See "Financial > Opening a Colombian bank account")
- Go on a tour of the city** to get to know some great spots. We'd highly recommend [this one](#). It's free, in English, and a great introduction to the city. Registration opens up 1.5 days before the tour itself.
- Go to a few social events** you'll see in the WhatsApp groups. It's really easy to make friends right away if you just put yourself out there, and makes the experience so much more fun.
- Check out the EAFIT campus.** You'll need to go in from the main entrance on Av. Las Vegas and check in with the security guards since you probably won't have a student ID at this point (you'll get that at orientation.) *Note: You and any guests will need to provide identification when checking in at the main entrance without a student ID.*
- Start to familiarize yourself with the public transit system.** This can be a good thing to ask Colombian friends/your buddy to help you with. The sooner you familiarize yourself with the bus, metro, etc., the more money you can save on Ubers and taxis.



Getting around Medellín

Metro system

- The metro system is really simple to use once you've taken it a few times. You'll most likely use line A (North-South) for the most part, although there's also a shorter B line that travels East-West too. See more info on the map:



- To ride, you'll need to get a metrocard at the ticket both within the metro station. You'll just go up to the booth and tell them how many trips you want (6 is the maximum if we remember correctly). Then, you'll pay and they'll give you your card.



- *NOTE: The Medellín metro reuses their metro cards, so on the last trip you'll need to feed it into the turnstile (as opposed to just scanning it) and the turnstile will take the card. (This will make more sense once you've seen the turnstiles.)*
- The easiest way to use the metro is to put your destination into google maps navigation, and choose the "public transit" option. It will tell you exactly which station to get on/off at, and even includes any transfers to the "metro-plus" bus system.
- The metro-plus essentially a bus system that connects directly with the metro line and extends its reach. (See lines 1 & 2 on the metro map.) It's separate from the city's regular busses, which don't connect directly to the metro.
- In addition to temporary metrocards, the Medellín Metro system offers reloadable Civica Cards, saving you a lot of time at ticket booths every time you run out of rides. There are a few spots to get these, but we suggest getting one at the Itagüi station because the line is much shorter. All you'll need to provide is your cédula. The Civica card also has lower rates and has free transfers between the Metro, Metro-plus, Tranvía, and Metrocable.
 - *NOTE: If you're planning on opening a bank account in Medellín, read that section to learn about getting a debit card with a Civica chip in it.*

Uber

- Uber is technically illegal in Colombia but is still widely used by foreigners and locals
- Just be sure that you sit in the front passenger seat. That way, if the police pull you over, the driver can just say "oh this is my friend," and generally the police won't give them a fine.
 - *NOTE: The police only pulled one of our Uber drivers over once the entire time we were in Colombia-- it really doesn't happen often.*
- Don't call for an Uber right next to a taxicopio (a fleet of taxis). Walk a couple blocks (if it's safe) and call for one there because the taxi drivers might get mad.
- TIP: DON'T SLAM THE DOORS IN CARS (it's a cultural thing in Colombia and people will get really annoyed at you)



Taxis

- REMEMBER: DON'T SLAM THE DOORS IN CARS
- Taxis are also super cheap, but like Uber, the cost still adds up if you're taking taxis every day.
- Taxis are perfectly safe to hail during the day, but stick with Uber at night. (Even during the day, it's better to use Uber if you can.)
- Be sure the taxista starts the meter. Some taxi drivers will try and rip off foreigners by keeping the meter running from the last trip. The meter should always start at COP \$3.200, and go up from there. (Unless rates have changed from last year)
- Minimum fare for taxis is COP \$5.000
- It's a good idea to use navigation in the taxi to your destination to keep taxi drivers from taking you on an unnecessarily long route with the goal of charging you more money.
- For safety (especially girls) it's a good idea to sit directly behind the taxi driver when you're alone.
- Legal taxis should have license plates on both the front and back, a matching plate painted on the side of the doors, and the taxi company on the side.
- Shared airport taxis are white taxis and can be found near Centro Comercial San Diego at the Texaco gas station (couple blocks from Exposiciones Metro station). It should cost COP \$60.000 for the car (COP \$15.000 per person)
- To get back from the airport, you can take a shared taxi or a green bus (COP \$9.000). Just make sure the bus is going to Centro Comercial San Diego.
- HEY, DID WE TELL YOU? DON'T SLAM THE DOORS IN CARS

Google maps

- Walking directions
- Plugging in addresses



- Colombians say Waze works the best (plus you can put the verbal instructions in Spanish for Uber drivers if you need)

Bus system

- Medellín has lots of other bus lines that you'll see around. They're separate from the Metro system and reach the outer neighborhoods. However, there are no good maps of their routes.
- Most busses cost COP \$2.200, and you'll see the cost in the front window as the bus pulls up



- Pay as you get on. Leave out the back door.
- Street vendors might get on the bus to sell snacks or sing. You are not obligated to buy anything from them (put up your hand and say “No gracias”) or pay them for the performance.

Financial

General info:

- Colombia uses the Colombian Peso (COP), and it is about \$2.850 (2.85 mil) COP to \$1 USD depending on the current exchange rate



- Colombia is still a very cash-heavy country, so you should expect to be using cash often. I generally only used my card at ATMs, restaurants, and for larger purchases like grocery shopping.
- The best way to get a good exchange rate on COP is to withdraw cash from an ATM once you arrive in Colombia. (There are ATMS right in the airport when you land if you didn't bring any COP.) You'll get a much better exchange rate this way than you will at a money exchange office. The rates are especially high at airport money exchanges so try to avoid this.

Debit/Credit cards:

- Be sure to notify your bank(s) that you will be traveling out of the country so your card(s) don't get blocked
- Also, check to see if your debit/credit cards will work in Colombia at all. Most do, but if you bank with an online only bank (ex: Simple,) your card might not work in Colombia. Discover credit cards don't work in Colombia either.
- With an American debit card, you can withdraw from any ATM in Colombia, but keep in mind that you can run into some pretty high foreign transaction fees depending on your bank. (For example, Chase bank charges \$5 + 3% on all foreign transactions.)
- A good way to get around this is to either use a card with low foreign transaction fees, or open a bank account in Colombia (more on that later)

Opening a Colombian bank account (From Rebecca's Experience):

- If you have an American debit card with high international fees (like Chase), I would **highly recommend** opening a bank account. It's really easy, and it will save you hundreds of dollars in international transaction fees.
- I opened a Bancolombia ahorros ("savings") account, which is the most popular bank in Colombia. I'd recommend using that one.
- To open a Bancolombia ahorros account, here's what you'll need to do:



1. You will need decent Spanish skills, so I'd recommend bringing someone to help if you don't feel confident with your Spanish.
 2. You'll need to **bring a cédula or passport, but in my experience, you won't necessarily need any funds to open the account.**
 3. Go to the nearest Bancolombia branch-- they're everywhere, just look them up on Google maps. Ask to open an ahorros account, and fill out the proper paperwork.
 4. After opening the account, you'll need to transfer funds from your American bank account to your new Colombian bank account via an international wire transfer. I would recommend using [Xoom to transfer the money](#), as their rates are the cheapest. The initial transfer will take about a week to initiate, so you will need to have another form of money in the meantime. (I just used my Chase card until my Bancolombia account was funded.)
- It's really convenient to have a Colombian bank account because you it allow you to do bank transfers within Colombia (which is a pretty popular method of payment for rent, trips, etc.)
 - Bancolombia offers a debit card with a "civica card" built right into it. I'd highly recommend getting it. Basically it's a regular debit card, but you can also transfer funds from your savings account to use on the metro, and it scans on the metro turnstiles just like a regular metrocard. It will save you a lot of time waiting in line to buy new metrocards, plus the civica rate for metro rides is a little lower. (See "Getting around Medellín > Metro System" for more information on what a civica card is)

Communication

- When you get to Medellín, you'll want to get a SIM card. The three main providers are Claro, Movistar, and Tigo. The American equivalences are more or less:
 - Claro = Verizon (more expensive, better coverage)
 - Movistar = AT&T (middle of the road)



- Tigo = Sprint (less expensive, worse coverage)
- You can also choose a prepaid or postpaid plan
- It's also a good idea to set up a Skype account if you don't already have one. This is useful for if you need to make calls to US numbers that don't use WhatsApp (for example: Purdue, banks, help lines, basically any business)
 - You can load your account with credit to call the US (unlimited minutes for \$2.99/month)

Finding an apartment

- You can find a lot of apartments on www.compartoapto.com
- Ask your buddy if they have any suggestions on where to look for apartments
- Sometimes people will post in the WhatsApp group chat advertising places
- If you are unsure/uncomfortable reading the contract, your buddy should be willing to help you to make sure you aren't ripped off
- Contracts can be for 1, 2, 3, or 6 months - just make sure you don't sign for an entire year, though those are rare to find

Cultural tips

- Don't wear shorts
- No Dar Papaya
- Don't slam car doors!
- People tend to greet each other before getting to the point
- Uber drivers will call you almost every time
- No one is ever on time for anything - people leave at or after the time the event is supposed to start



EAFIT

- Video from Purdue South America programs study abroad site detailing past student experience in Medellín: <https://engineering.purdue.edu/GEP/Study-Abroad/Latin-Spain-Programs>
- Size of EAFIT: ~12,000 students
- Professors are more casual and class sizes are smaller
- Classes in English aren't necessarily guaranteed
- Not much homework
- Spanish classes at EAFIT (first one is free)
- Classes are usually scheduled for 3 hours once a week though they rarely will go the full three hours. If the class is going to last about 2.5-3 hours then the professor will give a 10-15 minute break in the middle of class.
- As the foreigner, you will most likely be one of the last people picked for group projects.

Traveling

General Tips

- Plane tickets are generally really cheap within Colombia. Round trip would cost between US \$60-90.
- VivaColombia is the cheapest airline but it also has a lot of extra luggage and check-in fees. Try to make sure you check-in and print your boarding pass before you get to the airport. Also, if you're just going on a weekend trip, you should be able to pack a backpack and not have to pay for luggage.
- Airport security is really to get through - about 5-10 minutes! Also, there are not as many restrictions on traveling with liquids in your carry-on so you can take a bottle of sunscreen through security.
- Planes may be more expensive than buses, but they are way faster. Buses have to go over mountains, use windy roads, and make stops along the way so they are really slow. For example, the bus to Bogotá takes about 8 hours but the flight is only 30 minutes long.



- Regional buses leave from Terminal del Norte and Terminal del Sur depending on if you are traveling to the north or south. Bus companies don't usually have schedules online so you will have to go to the terminal to find out times.
- If you do take a bus, be mindful of thieves and watch your bag. Try not to travel with too many valuables. Never put your bag under the bus or even under your seat. Try to keep your bag in your lap at all times unless you are certain that it is safe.
- Some hostels will require you to check-in with your passport and will not accept your cédula so always travel with a copy of your passport just in case.
- Always do research on where you're travelling to in order to get more in depth information and more specific details. It makes your travel a lot safer.

Barranquilla - Carnaval

- Barranquilla hosts a carnaval sometime between mid-February and early March
- Consists of parades, street partying, and costumes
- Make sure you get your tickets to the parade in advance
- It is very common for people to spray foam or throw flour onto your face since it part of the traditions. Just be careful since pickpockets tend to steal your phone or wallet out of your pocket while you're wiping off your face. Keep things in safe places and one hand on it the entire time

Bogotá

- Do the Bogotá graffiti tour (<http://bogotagraffiti.com/>)! It's free, in English, and gives an awesome background on some of the city's history and you get to see a bit of downtown.
- Suggest staying in the Aurora Hostel - very comfy, welcoming, and reasonably priced
- Museo de Oro has thousands of pieces of gold from various eras in Colombian history. It usually costs COP \$4.000 but on Sunday it is free though very crowded.
- Catedral de Sal is outside of city in Zipaquirá. This is cathedral that has been carved out of an old salt mine and has many beautiful crosses and statues. Bring your cédula for a discount on the entrance fee (COP \$30.600). Free tours in both English and Spanish or you can walk around by yourself.
- TransMilenio is the city's bus system and is even more crowded than the MetroPlus. Try to avoid it if you can and use Uber or taxis instead.
- Monserrate is a mountain on the edge of the city that has a church on the top. Offers great views of the city, especially during sunset. Take the cable cars to the top.



Cartagena

- We did not spend that much time in Cartagena itself since we were mainly using it as a stopping off point to travel to Casa en el Agua.
- Casa en el Agua (<http://www.casaenelagua.com/>) is an eco-hostel island located in the Caribbean Ocean and is only accessible by boat. It is a little pricey by Colombian standards but is totally worth it. It is very relaxing, beautiful and offers a variety of water activities. It is also located near Islote which is the most densely populated island in the world. Suggest going for a couple of days to relax and destress. Make sure you bring all the cash you need since the hostel does not accept card there are no ATMS nearby.
- The city is full of tourists and is generally overpriced but you can still find some great deals.
- The city is hot (~90F) but locals still wear pants. However, you would not feel out of place wearing shorts there since all of the other tourists are doing it too.

Salento

- Located in Valle de Cocora and only accessible by bus. There are some buses that run directly from Medellín to Salento but you would have to go to the bus terminal to find the schedule.
- Located in the coffee region of Colombia so if you want to go on a coffee farm tour and try really good coffee this is the place.
- Hike Valle de Cocora (takes about 5 hours at a reasonable pace). The valley is known for its wax palm trees, cloud forest, and hummingbird house. Note that the valley is a lot higher in elevation so you may feel some side effects from elevation sickness.
- Activities: hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, coffee farm tours
- Also the starting point for many hikes into Los Nevados. It is strongly recommended that you use a company and guide for hikes in Los Nevados since there are no maps for the trails and you could easily get lost.

Medical

- The EAFIT health center is free to students but it sucks (in my opinion)
 - There's no online scheduling, so you can either call them or just go in and schedule an appointment at their reception desk
 - Keep in mind that you'll need to scan your EAFIT ID to get in the door of the health center



- I'd recommend using the international health insurance that Purdue study abroad provides for medical service
 - You'll need to call the number listed on your insurance card, and they'll ask you about your symptoms/availability for an appointment. Then, they'll actually just find a covered doctor near where you live and schedule an appointment for you.
 - The ER in Medellín is more like an immediate care in the US, so don't be surprised if the international insurance sends you the name of a hospital and tells you to visit their ER. In my experience, it's relatively quick to go the ER, and they'll just have a doctor see you. (I had to do that for tonsillitis in Medellín.)
- The nice thing about medicine in Colombia is that you almost never need a prescription. The doctor will just tell you which medication to get, and you can buy it over the counter at any pharmacy.
 - Medications also tend to be very cheap in Colombia
 - Occasionally I ran into the problem of a medication being run out at almost every pharmacy, so if you have a specific medication you take all the time (ex: birth control), I'd recommend you bring it with you from the US.

Other helpful sites:

- <http://friendsofmedellin.com/blog/> - tips for Medellín and a good place to find an apartment
- <https://www.compartoapto.com/antioquia/en-arriendo-medellin> - where we found our apartment
- <http://seecolombia.travel/blog/> - helpful tips and great things to do around Colombia
- <https://theculturetrip.com/south-america/colombia/> - other helpful tips and guides