

9. HISTORICAL GEMS

Tatacoa Desert



The Tatacoa Desert or "Sadness Valley", the second largest arid zone in Colombia after the Guajira Peninsula, has one of the most attractive sceneries in Colombia. It occupies 330 square kilometres of land in ochre and gray brushstrokes of green cactus. The Tatacoa or the Valley of Sorrows, as named by conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada in 1538, for traces of deterioration noted in its territory is not just a desert, but a tropical dry forest. As revealed by scientists, during the Tertiary Period Tatacoa was a garden with thousands of flowers and trees that have gradually been drying up to become a desert.

The area is heavily eroded and crossed by dry canyons that develop transiently in the winter months. These mysterious shapes are created on clay surfaces, creating labyrinthine gullies in the landscape that can reach 20 meters deep. The Tatacoa Desert is a geographically privileged location, from there, you can observe 88 constellations.

San Agustín - World Heritage

San Agustín lies 2 km from the town with the same name. The archaeological site extends over a territory of 2.000 km², at an altitude of only 1.800 m (5.905 ft), with snow covering the top. In the pre-agricultural period, from 3300 BC to 600 BC, San Agustín was occupied by a society with a rudimentary stone technology using basalt chips. Nothing is known about their political or social structure, but it is assumed that they were kinship-based. The Alto de Los Idolos is on the right bank of the Magdalena River and the smaller Alto de las Piedras lies further north: both are in the municipality of San José de Isnos. Much of the area is a rich archaeological landscape, with evidence of ancient tracks, field boundaries, drainage ditches and artificial platforms, as well as funerary monuments. This was a sacred land, a place of pilgrimage and ancestors worship. These hieratic guards, some more than 4 m (13 ft) high weighing several tones, are carved in blocks of tuff and volcanic rock. They protected the funeral rooms, the monolithic sarcophagus and the burial sites. The main archaeological monuments are Las Mesitas, containing artificial mounds, terraces, funerary structures and stone statuary; the Fuente de Lavapatas, a religious monument carved in the stone bed of a stream; and the Bosque de Las Estatuas, where there are examples of stone statues from the whole region.



Opening Times for Attractions in San Agustín

Site	Weekdays		Weekends	
Arch. Park San Agustín	Mon - Fri	08.00h - 16.00h	Sat - Sun	08.00h - 16.00h
Arch. Park Alto de los Idolos	Mon - Fri	08.00h - 16.00h	Sat - Sun	08.00h - 16.00h

Tierradentro - World Heritage

Tierradentro, several monumental statues of human figures can be seen in the park, which also contains many hypogea dating from the 6th to the 10th century. These huge underground tombs (some burial chambers are up to 12 m wide) are decorated with motifs that reproduce the internal decor of homes of the period. They reveal the social complexity and cultural wealth of a pre-Hispanic society in the northern Andes.



Popayan

Popayan - is well-known because of its beautiful colonial architecture and its contributions to Colombian cultural and political life. It is also known as the "white city" due to the colour of the most of colonial houses and places in the city downtown, where several churches are located, such as San Francisco, San José, Belén, Santo Domingo, San Agustín and the Catedral Basílica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, known locally as "La Catedral". In 2005, Popayán was declared by the UNESCO as the first city of gastronomy because of its variety and meaning to the intangible patrimony of Colombian culture.

