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IS COLOMBIA A GOOD DESTINATION FOR ECOTOURISM?

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IS COLOMBIA A GOOD DESTINATION FOR ECOTOURISM?
Nota de aceptación

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GLOSSARY

1. **ADVENTURE TOURISM**: trips or excursions with the specific objective of participating in the activities for exploring a new experience, normally is risky and with a controlled danger associated with personal challenges in a natural environment or exotic outdoors scenery.

2. **AGROTOURISM**: activity that consist on offering the tourists the possibility of sharing time with the locals and their culture learning how they work and participating on their whole production from the very beginning until they even can taste the final product processes.

3. **ARCHIPELAGO**: a large group of islands.

4. **CAYS**: a small, low island composed largely of coral or sand.

5. **CONCESSION**: something conceded by a government or a controlling authority, as a grant of land, a privilege, or a franchise.

6. **ECO HABS**: It is an ecological type of house.

7. **ECOTOURISM**: responsible trips to natural areas taking care of the environment as well as being careful with the inhabitants of these areas.

8. **GUADUA**: a very high plant similar to bamboo but their stems have prongs, are thicker and full of water.

9. **MESTIZOS**: the mixture of different cultures.

10. **MULATOS**: the individual born from the union of a white person and a black person.

11. **NON CONVENTIONAL SOURCES OF ENERGY**: are the sources of energy available worldwide that are sustainable for the environment but that are not used in the country or are given a marginal use and they are not commercialized.

12. **PARAGLIDING**: a sport resembling hang gliding, in which a person jumps from an aircraft or high place wearing a wide, rectangular, steerable parachute.
13. **PRECOLOMBINE**: the period before the trips and discovery of Christopher Colombus in America.

14. **RAPPEL AND CANNING**: rappel is descent of a vertical surface, as a cliff or wall, by sliding down a belayed rope that is passed under one thigh and over the opposite shoulder or through a device that provides friction, typically while facing the surface and performing a series of short backward leaps to control the descent. An canning is the same but on a wet surface.

15. **SOW**: to scatter seed over (land, earth, etc.) for the purpose of growth.

16. **SPELEOLOGY**: the exploration and study of caves.

17. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**: implies a broad view of human welfare, a long term perspective about the consequences of today's activities, and global co-operation to reach viable solutions.

18. **TERMALES**: baths made with warm mineral water.

1. INTRODUCTION

This work is about Colombia because it is the country where we were born and in despite of what many people say and think, we can tell that it is a very beautiful country with plenty of good things to offer.

As is known, Colombia is a country full of troubles, such as, violence, drugs, and many other things that media shows every day. Because of this we think that the country has got a very bad image around the world and this is why foreigners don’t want to come to Colombia, and through this work we want to show that this country has also a good side, which is the one that we have to take advantage of.

The principal objective of the dissertation is to answer if Colombia is a good destination for ecotourism. And we will be able to see if it does or not through the whole work.

Another reason for doing this work is to show how amazing this country is and like this, start changing the bad image that it has, trying to attract all types of international tourists, specially the mid adults (between 20 and 35 years old.). This can be possible only by giving complete facts of the touristic destinations avoiding erroneous information and with this improve the international advertising of the country as a tourism destination.

The topic chosen for this dissertation is ecotourism; the objective is to help develop the ecotourism knowing that Colombia is full of beautiful places and plenty of nature. The tourism is very good for the country in many ways, good for the economy, because it's a lucrative activity and it could be developed encouraging foreigners and nationals to invest trying to increase the budgets of the different country’s regions enlarging their tourism capacity.
As well as good for the economy of the country, it is good for the image, because as the tourists travel to our country, and as they feel the security and the accommodations the touristic destinations offer, they will change their concept instantly and will start changing the others’ automatically based on their own experiences.

Finally it is excellent for developing infrastructure, because as tourists come, it becomes more and more evident the necessity to improve the facilities and the accommodation, which will be possible with the incomes provided by these tourists.

2. THEORY

2.1 DEFINITION

The ecotourism is a term that has been present in the industry for more than twenty years, but no one has been able to give a definition. Not just the governments are the only ones who have accepted the task of defining it, but also professors, tour operators, conservation organizations and development organisms. There are a lot of definitions that are used all around the world.

The International Tourism Society (TIES) has defined ecotourism as “responsible trips to natural areas taking care of the environment as well as being careful with the inhabitants of these areas.” ¹ Nowadays this is a very lucrative business, knowing that it provides more than the ten percent of the employment all around

the world and the eleven percent of the world’s gross domestic product. The number of tourists moving around the world has a growing tendency.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS

There are some differences between the ecotourism and the normal tourism, and this is because of the effort that the ecotourism does in conservation, education, responsibility among the travelers and the active participation of the communities.

Based on the investigation we can name some characteristics of the ecotourism

- The activities are developed in rural areas far from the cities.
- It can be developed in natural parks and protected areas.
- It helps develop ancient rural economies especially in mountains.
- The touristic offer has low environmental impact, it is extremely careful with nature and local population.
- It tries to discover the natural and cultural reality.

The developing of tourism in natural environments can become a threat for the ecosystems and also for local tribes and cultures if we don’t plan it and give it a good management.

The everyday more growing number of tourists can end into a big disaster concerning the natural environment. From another point of view we can see that as much as we receive more visitors we can start harming the beautiful and respectful local communities. Mass tourism can provoke changes in the climate as well as in the currency and the political and social characteristics of the country.

But in despite of all this, the growing and development creates a very good opportunity for the conservation and the benefit of local communities. The

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3 Ibid. Elementos y características relevantes del ecoturismo.
Ecotourism will help us very much concerning to the incomes that the country needs and to the protection of national parks and other landscapes. The ecotourism is a good choice to help the sustaining development that apart from this we could not get help. Other things that ecotourism can help us with are, in offering a very good economic development in the local communities who can have fine income opportunities, and it also can help the country in transforming the locals into conservancy agents every day more and more efficient and enthusiastic.

2.3 AGROTOURISM AND ADVENTURE TOURISM

For matters of this work is very important to talk about this two concepts. The agrotourism is also a relatively new concept that consists on offering the tourists the possibility of sharing time with the locals and their culture learning how they work and participating on their whole production from the very beginning until they even can taste the final product processes. Typical activities form the region like harvests, fishing and other farming activities.

What makes this special is that visitors can stay in farms or haciendas where apart from having nice rest and a beautiful holiday they get directly involved with the producers of the area. It is also good for the locals because is a way in which they can have another income and new jobs could be required.

An example of this in Colombia could be going to the coffee route and staying in a coffee plantation farm. There the producer will show you the whole process for

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4 SOLLIER, JEAN JACQUES. Sustainable tourism. Tourism and Travel Teacher. Vatel Institute. Class notes.
having a good quality coffee. This process will go from the starting of the sow and will go until they can drink a delicious Colombian coffee.

If we continue with the adventure tourism, we also have to mention that it is a new term and that like the ecotourism it has a lot of different definitions and still not a general definition accepted by everybody. So a definition that we found suitable for the work is “a trip or excursion with the specific objective of participating in the activities for exploring a new experience, normally is risky and with a controlled danger associated with personal challenges in a natural environment or exotic outdoors scenery.”

After defining these two terms, we want to say that for purposes of this work both of them will be considered as part of the ecotourism. Maybe in the definitions they don’t say anything about taking care of the environment and the inhabitants but they do say that this activities are directly related with natural areas and also they present a relationship with the locals. And like these two relationships are make in a responsible way they fit under the definition of ecotourism chosen at the beginning of the work.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we are going to see how this work was made. Starting with this is important to know that most of this dissertation was made in an International Institute of Hotel and Tourism Management in Nîmes, France. Because of this, it was more difficult to get the information needed for the purpose of this work and we could say that this was a possible obstacle.

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The beginning of this work consisted in choosing the principal subject, and as you know it was chosen and it is the ecotourism in Colombia. And the reasons and objectives were already explained in the introduction of the work. Once the subject was chosen, it was necessary to expose it and justify the reasons which lead to choose the topic to Mr. Jean Jacques Sollier who is the tutor and director of the thesis programme, and he will decide if the this exposition was good enough to continue with the thesis.

After this first step and once the general topic was approved, we had to make a question regarding this general topic. The question asked was: Is Colombia a good destination for ecotourism, and at the end of the work after the analysis of all the information, we had to be able to answer this question even if the answer was not the one we were looking for.

Then when the question was made and approved, the plan of the work has to be done. This means that we had to make a sort of table of contents or present different topics chosen that will allow us to achieve the principal objective of the dissertation consisting in answering the question asked on the step before. Again this plan had to be approved depending if it was considered to lead to a sure answer.

When the work began, the first thing that was done was to gather all the necessary information. In this part we could identify four different sources: The first and easiest to use is the internet. We say that is the easiest to use because you can use it 24 hours and 7 days a week, and on top of that you can find magazines and newspaper articles, web sites and some times even books.

The problem that we identified with the internet was that there was not a very big amount of information regarding the ecotourism in Colombia. We did
information about tourism in general that anyways was very useful for this work but the lack of the precise information made it difficult for showing important things.

Another source that was used is the information received from all the classes in the programme of Master of Hotel Management in the Vatel International Institute especially in two subjects: Tourism and Travel and Tourism and Economics. Even though these two subject didn’t talk about Colombia, they were very useful in general topics like sustainable tourism, theme parks, tourism development and marketing among others necessary for the elaboration of this work.

A third source that was used due to the lack of information was the interviews with Colombian citizens specialized in some of the topics because of their personal experience and also we took advantage of other’s know how because they were born and lived most of their lives in some of the destinations mentioned on this work.

Finally, the last source used is the personal experience, we have been in most of the destinations used in the work and this kind of information is the best one because it’s something lived and no told by someone or read somewhere and this means is definitively true and it won’t be misunderstood.

The last step of this process in after all the information considered important is gathered, we proceed to analyse it and develop the work. You will be able to see this in the following chapters and to finish you will also see that the objectives of the work are achieved and this will appear in the conclusions of the work.

One last thing is a very important point, which is that this work is to be read by foreigners. So because of this it is very important to emphasise in the different destinations and that is why a very important chapter of this work is dedicated to this.
describe the most amazing places with the aim of attracting the most amount of tourist possible.

4. IMAGE OF COLOMBIA

Colombia is a country that is known for the many different problems that we have, such as corruption, drug dealing and production, violence, murders, guerillas and insecurity. About fifteen years ago Colombia was rated as the first producer of cocaine and its derivates. In the year 2000 the country had around 163,300 hectares for the production of cocaine. During the 1990’s more than two thirds of the world’s kidnappings occurred in Colombia apart from that it had the most elevated number of murders.

However as time passes, Colombia is improving as from the year 2002 to 2005 there was a reduction in kidnappings of around 77%. In this same period there was also a reduction of massacres of 80% and a reduction in the murders of 32%.

The image of insecurity that Colombia has affects the national tourism industry. The guerillas groups threat tourist to come and enjoy a wonderful holiday but despite of this more tourist are being attracted to Colombia in the last years. The principal reason is because of the effort of Álvaro Uribe who is the actual president and also because of the armed forces. Uribe took the power in 2002 and since then he has managed to take away guerillas and other rebel groups from the big cities and other places of tourist interest this means that he has improved the

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security all around the national territory and not just that the economy is improving and the country is every day more stable.

With all of this positive things that have came in the resent years Colombia is starting to change its negative image. We can see that, because some of the most important international media are giving positive information about Colombia in economical, social, security and tourism matters among others.

Some of them are: The editor of the Lonely Planet\(^9\), one of the most important tourist guides in the world, said that Colombia is in the top ten best destinations for 2006. It describes Colombia as a modern and exiting place full of friendly and nice Colombians.

The New York Times published two articles named “Bogotá ya no es solo Para los Valientes”\(^{10}\) and “La ruta del café”\(^{11}\) These articles included photographs and very good things about Colombia like: “Bogotá, the fourth biggest city in South America with more than seven million people is a city with restaurants, international museums and a charming colonial neighborhood”\(^{12}\). “Bogotá is a fabulous place to visit. Traveling in the land of coffee is easy; the owners of the Haciendas Cafeteras offer themselves to take the visitors to the towns around and to make tourism”\(^{13}\).

Bogotá was ranked as the destination number 21 in the article form The New York Times called: “The 53 places to go in 2008”\(^{14}\). The article has a picture of Plaza de Bolivar which is the most important and it also mentions the city’s cultural diversity, colonial charm and the international investors.

A very important British newspaper name the Guardian published some of the pages in the travel section of Cartagena. They included very nice photographs and it talks about the good security and the history of the city. In the article Seth Vikram \(^{15}\) said that this is going to be very good for Colombia, it will give trust to the tourists and that the tourism can have a good development if it takes into account the small and sustainable projects that are actually beginning in the country.

### 4.1 DESCRIPTION OF COLOMBIA

Colombia is part of the Latin America’s andine countries and it is located in the northwest of South America. The principal city of Colombia which is also the one with the largest extension is the capital Bogotá. Other important cities are Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Pereira, Ibague, Manizales, Pasto, Neiva, Cúcuta, Armenia, Santa Marta y Villavicencio.

Colombia is a large country and it is full of diversity. In the list of the largest countries in South America is in the fourth place after Brazil, Argentina and Peru. It has got an area two times bigger than France and more than five times the area of New England. This large territory if full of different climates and vegetation in there you will be able to find the snow peaked mountains in the Andes and in the other hand the hot regions in the seaside as well as the humid regions in the Amazons.


Apart from the large territory, this country is the second in population in South America after Brazil.

Colombia has an extension of 1.141.748 squared kilometers and it includes in the Caribbean Sea the San Andres and Providencia archipelago which is conformed by three islands: San Andres, Providencia, Santa Catalina and a group of cays and some other islands located in the continental Caribbean platform like the ones in Cartagena, Tierrabomba, Barú and the archipelagos of Rosario and San Bernardo as well as the Fuerte and Tortuguilla islands. In the Pacific Ocean we can find the islands of Malpelo, Gorgona and Gorgonilla.\(^{16}\)

Colombia is also divided in five big regions: One of them is the Andina region that includes the three mountain chains of the Andes and two beautiful valleys. Two coast regions that are the Caribbean and the Pacific. The region that contains all the plains is the Orinoquia. Another very important which is full of vegetation and where you can find many animal and other species is the Amazonia region.

The actual population of Colombia is due to the mix of the many different cultures. One is the mix of the Indians that were here before the discovery with the Spanish and also the black people from Africa who were working as slaves in the time of the colonization. Actually the Mestizos represent the 47% and then we have the Mulatos who represent around the 24% of the total of the population. The white people are not even the 20% and the Indian communities that still live are just the 2.2%.\(^{17}\) Colombia has a population of around 41 million people based on the National census in 2005, with this amount of people it is the third most populated country in Latin America after Mexico and Brazil.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) Conoce a Colombia, Joaquín y Fabiola. [http://inicia.es/de/xuacu/colombia.html](http://inicia.es/de/xuacu/colombia.html)


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The official language in Colombia is the Spanish but we have around 180 different dialects protected by the government which are spoken by the Indian local communities such as the araukaes, the caribes, the yumagüi, the tupiguaraní and the chibchas\textsuperscript{19}.

Colombia has one festival for each of the days of the year. The most famous of them are the Ferias of Cali and Manizales, the Corralejas of Sincelejo, the Black and white carnival in Pasto, the Baranquilla carnival, the flower festival in Medellín, the Iberoamerican theatre festival in Bogotá, the San Pedro festival in the departments of Huila and Tolima, the international Coleo festival in Villavicencio.

During this time is when most of the tourists come to Colombia. Also we receive many visitors during the celebration of the independence of Colombia, which takes place the 20\textsuperscript{th} of July as well as for Christmas traditional parties.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS OF ECOTOURISM IN COLOMBIA

Colombia is a very special country in which you can find the combination of the Amazon, Pacific, Andes, Caribbean and the beautiful landscapes of the plains. A very important thing is that in this country, visitors will be able to find all what they are looking for and without masses of other tourists, so they can calmly enjoy their trip. As I showed before Colombia is a very good destination because we have cultural highlights, vegetation and animals, all the possible climates and most of all in this country you will find very friendly and kindly people.

\textsuperscript{19} Organización de los Estados Iberoamericanos. http://www.oei.es/quipu/colombia/col01.pd
There are many places in this country that can be popular as ecotourism destinations, but for this work we chose the ones that we thought are the most important and as well the most visited by national and international tourists.

We will start talking about the national parks which in fact are protected by the government. There are 53 natural areas that belong to the National Natural Parks system. The aim of this organization is to involve the community through the development of activities taking care of the environment and that will bring them economic benefits.

National Natural Parks
Figure 1

![Map of national parks in Colombia](http://www.parquesnacionales.gov.co/pnn/portel/libreria/php/decide.php?patron=01.01)

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Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia. [Link](http://www.parquesnacionales.gov.co/pnn/portel/libreria/php/decide.php?patron=01.01)
4.2.1 Parque Nacional Natural de los Nevados

The first area that we are going to talk about is called the natural park of the snow peaked mountains. It is located in the highest part of the Central Andes mountain chain. Many municipalities belongs to this park and these are Villa Maria in the department of Caldas, Salento in the department of Quindio, Pereira and Santa Rosa de Cabal in the department of Risaralda and finally Casablanca, Villa Hermosa, Libano, Santa Isabel, Anzoategui and Ibague in the department of Tolima. The park was created in 1974 and has an extension of 58.300 hectares and its temperature is between 3°C and 14°C.  

Parque Nacional Natural de los Nevados

Figure 2

You can access the park in many different ways everything depends on the area that you want to visit in this park. If you take the road from Manizales to Murillo in Tolima - the Security Cabin of Las Brisas and 10 km from this point are the snows of the Nevado Del Ruiz. From Las Brisas you can also go to the Laguna Del Otún and you will take about 4 hours to arrive. You can also go to the Laguna Del Otún, but you have to take the road Manizales to Villamaría and then to Playa Larga, this will take around 3:30 hours.

This park has not got a developed infrastructure and because of this it has not restaurant services, this means that all the travelers will have to bring their own food. People who want to stay in the camping zones which are located in Arenales, Cine and Laguna Del Otun are recommended to bring fruits and food rich in calories.

As a result from the colonization of the department of Antioquia around the 1850’s many people decided to migrate to the national park which makes them and their families the actual residents of the park. Another 35% of these residents come from the departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá, and more of the half of the residents of the park comes from the departments that surround it.23

The most important mountain in this park is the Nevado Del Ruiz its height is 5.400 meters over the sea level, it is a volcano that covers an area of 200 squared kilometers approximately. It is the most important snow peaked mountain in the park, knowing that it is the highest one and it has an easy access for the visitors. The principal crater of this mountain is about 300 meters thick and has 150 meters of depth.

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23 Ibíd. Datos Generales. Cultura y Sociedad.
The most attractive locations of the park are:

- Nevado Del Ruiz 5.300 meters.
- Nevado DEL Tolima 5.200 meters.
- Nevado De Santa Isabel 4.950 meters.
- Nevado Del Cisne 4.800 meters.
- Nevado Del Quindio 4.800 meters.
- Laguna Del Otún 3.900 meters.
- Termales Del Ruiz 3.600 meters.
- Termales Del Rancho 2.600 meters.
- Cascada De Gualí 4.000 meters.
- Laguna Verde located south from the Nevado Del Cisne.

### 4.2.2. Tayrona National Park

This park is also part of the National Natural Parks system. It has an extension of 15.000 hectares which are divided in 3.000 hectares in water and the other 12.000 in land; this gives the park the possibility of having different sea and land ecosystems. It was created at the end of the 1960’s and it is located in the Caribbean region in the department of Magdalena 34 kilometers away from its capital Santa Marta. The temperature in the park oscillates between 25°C to 30°C.

The principal characteristic of the park is that it counts with a huge variety of dry forests and tropical humid forests as well as coral reefs. It also has more than 100 different mammals’ species as the tigrillo, the deer and threatened birds species such as the Condor which is a National bird, the lonely and the white eagles.

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Tayrona is one of the most visited parks as visitors come from all around the country as well as international tourists.  

Tayrona National Park

Figure 3

The park is amazing because visitors can have a good time in the beautiful beaches and slowly they can start entering the forests through ancient paths made with rocks that will lead them to the local Indian groups that live in this area. If the visitors want to stay and take advantage of the impressive nature they can do so in the Cañaveral beach where the Eco Habs offer a comfortable accommodation, with Tayrona architecture and a capacity for 4 or 6 people. There is also another zone where you can stay named Arrecifes, this is a camping area, with a capacity for more than 50 tents.

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26 Ibid. Tayrona. Datos Generales. Go to annex A.
As this park is very visited, there has been a development of tourism programs with the aim of improving the services provided and to make visitors conscious about the importance of taking care the biological diversity in this area. Thanks to these programs many of the members of these local communities are working together as specialized tourist guides.\textsuperscript{28}

### 4.2.3 Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is a snow peaked mountain that does not form part of no one of the Andes mountain chain. It has an extension of 383,000 hectares and its height is 5,775 meters over the sea level. This park was created in 1977, its temperature is between 0 a 27\textdegree C and it is located between the departments of Guajira, Cesar and Magdalena.

After being a historical place for the local cultures who were developed and who let an important legacy before disappearing in the battles of the time of the conquest. The Sierra Nevada is today populated by the Ijakas, Kogis, Wiwa and the Kankuamos. Each of these tribes has its proper language, which are the different dialects that were mentioned previously and also they have their own territories. There are also some countryside people living in the bottom part and their principal activity is the agriculture.\textsuperscript{29}

There are many precolombine cultures in the country, and the Tayrona is considered one of the most developed. They have been living here for millions of years in the Sierra Nevada. This community disappeared without leaving any trace of their knowledge and their social organization. Some of the legacy that they left

\textsuperscript{28} Personal experience. Visit to Tayrona Park.
is the paths made of rocks that are considered part of the most important archeological treasures in the country.

There is a zone in this mountain named Pueblito which is the word for small town in Spanish. This area is located 3 hours away in a walking distance. This is one of the most important Tayrona civilization cities and we could say that is the only one with easy access for the visitors. In here you can see bridges, channels, ladders and some other things that allow people to know how developed the Tayrona’s were.

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

Figure 4

Visitors willing to discover the most wonderful things of the mountain should try to visit Ciudad Perdida or the lost city. This is one of the biggest prehispanic cities in the continent. In despite of Pueblito the access to this wonder is a lot more difficult.
because the journey for going to the Ciudad Perdida takes almost one week to go and return. You can make the whole journey by foot or the locals offer the possibility to ride horses but not for the entire trip. Apart of this long trip a special permission is needed for going there. The permission is given by the government and you also will have to go with a local guide\textsuperscript{31}.

Nowadays we have some several Indian communities who live in the Sierra Nevada. This community is very representative for the country, knowing that they keep intact their traditions and culture staying away from the civilization. Because of this the kogis normally leave in the upper part of the mountain making it difficult to reach them.

A very interesting thing in the Sierra Nevada is that here we can see a good development of the ecotourism because in addition of taking care of the environment it works together with the local communities. We can see this interaction when he locals work as expert guides, when the country side people use their homes as restaurant or small hostels providing the tourists basic accommodation and security.

The economy of the Sierra Nevada is based on the agriculture. The principal products are the coffee, sugar cane, cacao, and platano. They also have extensive areas of grass where the cattle place a very important role. In 2001 the apiculture appeared as a new activity in la Sierra Nevada with the objective of commercializing the products for different purposes.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Etnias de Colombia. Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. 
http://www.etniasdecolombia.org/etnoturismo.asp

4.2.4 Gorgona Island

The name of this island was given due to a character of the Greek mythology who had the hairs made of reptiles which could be found in this island\textsuperscript{33}. The area was declared national park in the year 1984 because before this island was a prison. Apart from the beautiful vegetation and landscapes, there is a very special thing about the island and is that every year the Yubartan whales come here to have birth.\textsuperscript{34}

It is located in the west part of the department of Cauca in the Pacific Ocean approximately 56 kilometres away from the coast and 160 kilometres away from the port of Buenaventura that is the most important port in Colombia. It has got an extension of 61.687.5 hectares from which 60.087.5 correspond to water and the other 1.600 corresponds to land. The temperature is around 27°C. Next to this island we can also find the small island of Gorgonilla that also makes part of this attractive park.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35} Op cit. Parque Nacional Gorgona.
Thanks to the enterprise Aviatur, who is taking care of the park, the island has an infrastructure for receiving tourists with two systems of lodging consisting in 16 comfortable rooms and two sea view houses with a capacity to welcome 83 people.  

It also has a Conference room for 50 people in the Casa Payán. For security reasons camping are not allowed. There is also a restaurant for the visitors offering the typical food form the region. Gorgona is one of the best places in Colombia for diving and in the diving station they will provide all the necessary equipment for a good dive.

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The most important places to visit are:

- White Beach.
- Pizarro Beach.
- Palmeras Beach.
- Yundigua Beach.
- La azufraida.
- The old dock.
- The old prison and prison history museum.
- Casa Payán.
- Ecostore
- Archaeology museum.
- Diving Station.

The easiest access to the island is in motorboats from Guapi and the time estimated is around 2 hours. You have to start the trip before the sunset because the winds can increase the waves and it could be dangerous. Another way to arrive to the island which takes much longer is taking a boat from Buenaventura that takes 10 to 12 hours to get to the island.

4.2.5 San Gil

This place is ideal for everybody, children, teenagers, adults and even old people will enjoy its wonderful charming. The landscapes, trees, plants and other kinds of vegetation are the ones who welcome the visitors to spend a very nice holiday in San Gil. The park of Gallineral is one of the most beautiful places of the department of Santander and of Colombia.

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39 Ibid. Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia
40 Op cit. BEDOYA, Juliana.
San Gil is located in the department of Santander 96 kilometres away from Bucaramanga and 327 from Bogotá, the climate is warm and the temperature is around 30º C all the year long. It has an area of 145 squared kilometers. The principal attractions are conformed by the Gallineral Park, the Fonce River, rock made paths, hanging bridges, gardens and the natural flowed pool which makes this town as a dreamed destination for the tourists.\footnote{Web oficial de la capital turística de Santander y centro de deportes extremos. \url{http://www.sangil.com.co/}}

This park is called like that because it has been cultivated with 1867 trees and about the 80% of them are the ones called Gallineros. The particular thing about these trees is that in their branches they have a plant that resembles to an old man’s beard and some of them are that big that they look like elegant curtains that are constantly moving by wind and give the park a romantic and beautiful style. Besides this, the Gallineral is the only natural park located inside an urban perimeter and it is rich in flora and fauna. From the park people organise different plans like rafting events or camping in Fonce’s riverside.\footnote{Toda Colombia en un solo lugar. \url{www.elespacio.com.co/publicaciones/descubriendo/gallineral}.}

In San Gil, the Gallineral is located between the principal road that goes to Bucaramanga and the Fonce river. In this park you can find different enterprises that offer the practice of extreme sports like kayaking and rafting in the Fonce River. Another very important thing is that this park is known by the diversity of vegetation, it has a lot of plants and trees full of beautiful colours.

You can happily enjoy with any type of restriction which in some way facilitates the practice of plenty of activities like ecological walking, horse strolls through different paths, ecological camping to the riverside and the exploration of different natural
zones. All the time you will be surrounded with nature and breathing the fresh air provided by all the nature that you can find in these places.

In the recently years new alternatives of tourism has been developing in this region like rafting using the advantages of the amount of rapids that it has. Commercializing this service as an exciting adventure it also started the exploitation of the speleology because there are a lot of caves and caverns full of attractions. We can also found the rappel, the canning, the mountain biking, the kayaking and the camping. 43

4.2.5.1 Principal Activities 44

**Rafting and kayaking**

These sports are practiced in rafts or kayaks in the rivers’ rapids which must have some special characteristics and conditions in order to receive people willing to practice these types of sports. The distance of navigation are between 10 and 30 kilometres and in matters of time they last around 1 or 3 hours. The more common routes start in different points of the Fonce River and they finish in the Gallineral Park. There are more difficult routes that go to Pescadero through the Chicamocha River among others.

**Speleology**

This is a very important tourist attraction especially for the ones who love the unknown and the strong emotions. The department has got a variety of caves that


44 Ibíd. San Gil Colombia.
can be explored by visitors as long as they go with expert guides that really know the exploration area.

The caves that can be explored are:

- The Indian Cave.
- The Yeso Cave.
- The Cow Cave.
- The Antique Cave.
- The Guacharos Cave.
- The Dona Pola Cave.

The equipment necessary for the exploration of the caves will be provided by the company making the tour.

**Rappel and Canning**

The rappel is a sport that consists in descending a rocky surface hanging form a rope. There are many good places where you can practice this sport in this area but the best one is located approximately half an hour away form San Gil.

In the other hand we have the canning which is basically the same thing that rappel but the big difference is that canning is practiced in wet surfaces while rappel is just in dry. The best place for the canning is Juan Curi waterfall that is 80 metres high.
**Mountain Biking**

This is a much practiced sport in all the national territory but especially in this region. Nowadays there is a professional motocross track and several routes for mountain biking that have been designed by the tourists companies who apart from this provide the guides, bicycles and other security equipment necessary for this kind of sport.

**Paragliding**

Enjoying this extreme sport from the Jovito hill that is located about ten minutes away from San Gil is an incredible journey through the awesome landscape in which you will descend 400 metres. You will see how the town looks form the sky or if you like the adrenaline you can ask the guide to do some acrobatics. The flight costs around 10 € per person. Other places where you can take off are the Saint Joseph Valley, Pinchote, Curit, Barichara and the best of all but only for experts the Chicamocha canon.

**Bungee Jumping**

This amazing adventure is just 6 kilometres away from San Gil in a big and resistant bridge over the Fonce River. The jumps are between 20 and 30 metres height and the security is the best thanks to experts that we have in this subject. People who want to jump will find all the security equipment and it will be provided by the experts who supervise this activity.
**Trike**

The trike is the most amazing activity in San Gil because it consists in flying above 300 metres of height and from the air visitors can admire the beauty of the landscape, it is an unforgettable experience. The flights are made in ultralight planes that take off in the abandoned airport of Pozos located 30 minutes away from San Gil and there are flights during the morning hours.

**4.2.6 The Coffee Route**

Another destination is the coffee route. This route is located in the coffee region which covers four departments, Quindío, Risaralda, Caldas and the north of the Valle del Cauca. They are located in the centre of the country. This region is very important for the economics of the country and apart from that, it is a region where people are known for welcoming visitors even if they are national or international. This is a very good thing for the tourism development because when tourists are treated in a nice way and with respect, they feel like at home and for sure they will leave the country with the aim of coming back in the future.

In this area we can find plenty of good things and nice people. There are many different activities and attractions like museums, theme parks, outdoors activities, extreme sports, paths and landscapes through the coffee plantations that will take you to the heart of the region and help you understand the locals who have coffee in their blood. If you need directions you can pull over anywhere and you will find people willing to help you.
The most important tourism attraction and activities are:

*Termales De Santa Rosa*  

They are located in the department of Risaralda 8 kilometers away from the village of Santa Rosa de Cabal, its height is 2050 meters over the sea level and the temperature is around the 16°C. Here visitors can refresh and relax themselves in the thermal waters having the awesome sensation that they are in a cold night just surrounded by nature while warm water covering their bodies.

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45 Rutas de Motos AKT. [http://www.demotos.com.co/media/pdfs/rutas/ruta01.pdf](http://www.demotos.com.co/media/pdfs/rutas/ruta01.pdf)

46 Turiscolombia. [http://www.turiscolombia.andes.com/eje_cafetero2_termales_santa_rosa.1](http://www.turiscolombia.andes.com/eje_cafetero2_termales_santa_rosa.1)
If you come here, you will have to pay around 5 € for adults and the children will pay the half of the fee. This includes parking, ecological paths, and different thermal pools for adults as well as for children.

**Rafting in the Vieja River**\(^{47}\)

It is located in the department of Quindío near the village of Quimbaya it has got a very nice warm climate and its height is 1600 meters over the sea level. The special thing of this rafting, is that the rafts are not the usual rafts that everybody knows.

These are very particular because are completely natural as they are made of guadua which is a kind of wood and completely local manufacturing. Each raft is made by 15 guaduas each one of 6 meters length and tied with bejucos which are like strings but those that grow in some kinds of trees, and has a capacity for 15 people. This type of rafting is not considered an extreme sport, the aim of it is enjoy the nature, landscapes and have a nice day with your family and friends in an 8 kilometers journey, which can be done in the day or at night.

**Kayaking in the Barragan River**\(^{48}\)

If you prefer the strong emotions rather than enjoying the natural rafts, you can come to the Barragán river that it’s is located in the department of Quindío between the Capital which is Armenia and a town named Barcelona. This river has got a number 3 category classification in the international rapids classification. The

\(^{47}\) Ibid. [http://www.turiscolombia.andes.com/eje_cafetero_balsaje_la_vieja.htm](http://www.turiscolombia.andes.com/eje_cafetero_balsaje_la_vieja.htm)

\(^{48}\) Op cit. [http://www.demotos.com.co/media/pdfs/rutas/ruta01.pdf](http://www.demotos.com.co/media/pdfs/rutas/ruta01.pdf)
rout lasts about two hours and is around 7 kilometers long, it is recommended for people between 14 and 50 years old for security reasons.

**Canopy in Alcalá**

This is located in the department of Quindío in a place known as the Saman forest 27 kilometers away from Armenia or 26 kilometers away from Pereira which is the capital of the neighbor department Risaralda. The climate is warm and its height is 1400 meters over the sea level. In this place visitors are going to have an adventure with all the security needed through a 2000 meters way which is divided in seven segments like this: The Flight of the Platanal, The Flight of the coffee, The Flight of the Helicolinas, The Flight of the Guadual, The Flight of the Nogal and The Flight of the Cafeteritos. It has also got climbing walls and hanging bridges.

**Ecologic horse strolls**

They are located in the department of Risaralda, in a place called Cerritos in the outskirts of Pereira, taking the road that goes to Cartago. In this place the tourist will enjoy the beautiful landscapes of the valleys of the Valle del Cauca and Risaralda going through coffee plantations and other harvests sowing the productivity of the region. You can take the strolls at any time of the day and even during the night and you will have the possibility of going with an expert local guide who will explain all that you need to know of the region and also on the way you can meet some of the local customs.

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50 Interview with Jaime Duque. Habitant of Pereira Risaralda.
Paraquiliding in La Merced

La Merced is a village located in the north of the department of Caldas; 96 kilometers away from its capital Manizales. This is considered to be very nice for practicing this type of sports. The flight is done between the highest parts of the mountains surrounding the Village and you will experiment the time of your life with lots of adrenaline and the duration is between 20 minutes and half an hour. If you are a beginner, you will be accompanied by an expert and he will provide you the security equipment necessary.

Viewpoint in the Barbas River

It is located in the department of Risaralda 30 kilometers away from Pereira in the limit with its neighbor department Quindío. The entrance is in the coffee highway in a small town called Cantamonos. It is a place that combines the exciting nature of the Barbas’ River canon where the forest that protects the river is the most important attraction besides the other leisure activities like golf. Other attractions are the Barbas River viewpoint, walk through the old royal path and bath in Barbas River.

Valle del Cocora

Located in the department of Quindío approximately 30 minutes by car away from the village Salento, its height is between 1800 and 2300 meters and the climate is quite cold. The temperature is around 15°C. The entrance is in the coffee highway

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51 El portal del eje cafetero.

www.ciudadeje.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=473&Itemid=262


taking the exit to Salento. After Salento you will have to take an unpaved road but very secured and great landscapes.

In this zone you will find a biodiversity of ecosystems where you can find the Palma de Cera Del Quindío that is a kind of palm considered Colombia’s national tree. In the valley you can also do walks, horse strolls and enjoy the typical trout as a meal.

**Panaca (National park of the agriculture)**

It is an interactive and cultural park and also works as a summer camp in holidays located in Quimbaya. Is a theme park where you will be able to enjoy the beauty of the countryside lifestyle. The park let the visitors to meet the agriculture in an interactive way by inviting them to participate in the different procuresses that are done.

The park offers a variety of services that will make the visitors feel really comfortable like: 7 restaurants, first aid experts, resting areas, ATMS and baby sitting among others. The park is divided in 8 parts: cattle farming, poultry farming, pig farming, the world of the dog, silk manufacturing, Agro ecology, the world of the horse and agronomy. It has also 5 exhibitions: Cattle exhibition, trained animals exhibition, pig races, canine ability and the world of the horse.

The entrance fee for the park is 13 € per person and it includes:

- Entrance to the park.
- Cattle exhibition.
- Panaca exhibition.
- Pig race exhibition.

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54 Panaca. [www.panaca.com.co/home.html](http://www.panaca.com.co/home.html)
55 Prices since december of 2007.
• The friendly world of the dog.
• The world of the horse.
• Interpretative path.

**The National Coffee Park**

It is located in the department of Quindío in the 6th kilometer on the way Montenegro – Pueblo Tapao in a zone with a very nice and warm weather and full of incredible vegetation as well as the most amazing landscapes.

It is a theme park that shows the coffee culture. It offers to the visitors the coffee museum, the garden of the stories, mechanic attractions (Karts, roller coaster, coffee train, splash mountain, panoramic wheel, Red baron, crazy cars, crazy boats and cable car among others), Indian cemetery, the typical village, the viewpoint tower, 4 kilometers path through different coffee landscapes, path of the arriero, show of the orchids and horse strolls.

There are four different passes for this park depending on the number and the type of attractions that you want to visit:

- The economic pass has a cost of 6 € and includes:

  - Entrance to the park.
  - Coffee cable car 1.
  - Coffee cable car 2.

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57 Prices since December 2007.
• The recreation pass has a cost of 10 € and includes:
  o Entrance to the park.
  o Coffee cable car 1.
  o Coffee cable car 2.
  o Coffee train Armenia.
  o Coffee train Montenegro.
  o Show of the orchids.
  o Coffee show.

• The 5 Adventure pass has a cost of 11 € and includes:
  o Entrance to the park.
    o You can choose the five attractions you prefer except for the horse strolls.

• The multiple pass has a cost of 16 € and includes:
  o Entrance to the park.
  o Coffee cable car 1.
  o Coffee cable car 2.
  o Coffee train Armenia.
  o Coffee train Montenegro.
  o Right to go into all the attractions some for one time and some others for as many times as you want.
4.3 INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure in Colombian has been evolving in the recent years. The process of globalization that began in the 1990's concentrated its efforts in the modernization of the infrastructure to get ready for the global competition. The national and international private sector started getting involved in the different projects concerning the infrastructure; this gave as a result a very important progress.58

The infrastructure is very important for the tourism in general and obviously for the ecotourism as well. The country has got a good infrastructure for receiving national and international tourists but what we really want to say is that especially for ecotourism is more difficult to have the proper infrastructure. The reason for this is that because of the complex geography of Colombia, most of the best destinations are difficult to reach. Nevertheless the country has been doing a very important effort for this to change and like this they will make the visitors feel very comfortable and also this means that it will have the capacity for more visitors.

4.3.1 Telecommunications

The telecommunications sector has been encouraged increasing the service coverage to all the places in Colombia despite of the complexity of the geography. These made the sector become attractive for the economy of the country. The idea is to create a pleasant climate for investment, for the enterprises to modernize and extend their technologies. The high levels of competition and investments are pushing its development and technological innovation.

58 Proexport Colombia.
The strategies for the telecommunications are changing; the National government is developing new actions to make guarantee the access to the basic telecommunication service to the entire population. The traditional services are transforming into other services with more added value. A fast growing of the Internet and mobile communication is perceived.\(^{59}\)

Local and national and international long distance calls, mobile phones and personal communication services are some of the services offered in the national territory. Besides that the government is giving incentives to the private sector as it invests in the postal services, television networks and long distance calls services.\(^{60}\)

In the future, the business sector in Colombia is going to demand technology with added value for new mobile technologies and internet. The families with less income level are going to be the future clients of the traditional services while families with medium and high income level will demand the broad band services and also full service packages.

### 4.3.2 Energy

The 66% of the energy in Colombia is hydroelectric. But nowadays other possibilities of generation of energy are being developed like natural gas with is almost the 30%, coal with a 6% and finally the solar energy and diesel.


In the recent years the country advanced and attracted private investment for the transmission and distribution of the energy. Like this the country wants to guarantee the best quality conditions.\textsuperscript{61}

Some of the goals of the country in this field are\textsuperscript{62}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Promote the use and development of non conventional sources of energy.
  \item To attract private international or national investors to continue developing the energy infrastructure of the country.
  \item Build energy infrastructure plants in the areas that are not connected.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{4.3.3 Aqueduct and Sewer System}

In the modernization process and the global opening in the 1990’s, the necessity of improving the operation and finance of the public services like aqueduct and sewer system was very notorious, so the private sector starts playing a very important role in the country. Before this year, the government was completely in charge of these public services, but the money coming from the private sector made changes for a better service and happier customers.

With the new constitution of 1991, the law 142 of the year 1994 in Colombia allows the participation of the private sector in providing public services. In the other hand the government makes efforts to stimulate the loyal competence between the

companies in this sector and plays a role of regulator and supervisor because it wants to be sure that the service provided is along with the law.\textsuperscript{63}

The 91\% of the population has access to drinkable water and the 86\% has access to the sanitary services. Comparing the average of Latin America and the Caribbean, the service of aqueduct and sewer system in Colombia is better. This means that almost all the national territory is provided with water which we can say that is the most important resources and this is very important for the tourism.\textsuperscript{64}

4.3.4 Transport

In the last years the country has increased the investment in transport infrastructure in all the possible areas of the territory. Improving the transport infrastructure quality is a strategic goal for the government and with this it tries to optimize the competence and the productivity.

4.3.4.1 Roads

The road system in the country is divided in three big parts and its total extension is 162,000 kilometres. The basic system consists in seven big roads that cross the country from north to south and eight intersections and connections that go from west to east with an extension of 16,527 kilometres but only 12,000 of them are paved. The secondary and third roads are 145,473 kilometres which make possible the communication between different regions and principal cities.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} DOMINGUEZ, TORRES, Carolina. URIBE, BOTERO, Eduardo. Evolución de servicios de acueducto y alcantarillado durante la última década. Universidad de los Andes. Marzo 2005. [PDF]

\textsuperscript{64} Op cit. [Source Title]

\textsuperscript{65} Op cit. [Source Title]
The roads in Colombia are very particular. There are not as good as the ones in Europe or North America. The roads are full of turns and in most part of them there is just one line per car and there is not a division between the line that goes one way and the one that goes the opposite way, this can be dangerous. Because of this the speed limit is 80 km/h so that there are not lots of accidents.

Because of the difficult terrain and other factors lots, of money is needed for the construction and maintenance of good roads and infrastructure. For this reason the country has to look for these financial resources in different organizations. For example the United States helps Colombia through the Plan Colombia\textsuperscript{66} giving us money for developing the plan named “Carreteras por la Paz” which means roads for peace. Colombia also looks for resources with private investors through concessions.

\subsection*{4.3.4.2 Railways}

Besides roads, railways are the second way of transportation used in the country. Something that we have to mention is that the railways are only used for the load transportation. There is a tourist train that goes from Bogotá to the village of Nemocón but is important to understand that the system is not as developed as for the transport of people. At the moment it has got 3.991 kilometres of active railroads.

There are two principal systems\textsuperscript{67}:

One of them is the Pacific railway system. It has 500 kilometres of extension and it goes through all the department of the Valle Del Cauca. It is used for transporting basically sugar, coffee, cereals and wood.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. Proexport Colombia.

The other is the Atlantic railway system. It has an extension of more than 1,500 kilometres and it communicates the principal consumption centres of the country (Bogotá and Medellín) with the Atlantic coast. It is used for transporting coal, cement, steel, coffee, cereal, potatoes and fertilizers.

Nowadays the government is paying special attention to the renovation and construction of the railways. Because of this the Atlantic railways are managed by Ferrocarriles Del Norte de Colombia FENOCO through a concession made in June 1999 and the Pacific is managed by Tren de Occidente S.A. also through a concession. The goal is to improve the transport of coal by communicating the mines with the cities and ports of the country.\textsuperscript{68}

4.3.4.3 Urban Transport

The urban transport in Colombia has been changing in the recent years. From an obsolete and old urban transport system, the country is changing to a massive and modern transport system. Bogotá is the leader city, implementing this new system and it has become an example for other important cities like Cali, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Pereira and Cartagena as well for other Latin countries like Peru, Chile, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Honduras.\textsuperscript{69}

Transmilenio, is the new project that has its fundament in important principles like the life quality, respect of the users time, and productivity. This has made an important variation in the capital citizens, knowing that it has improved significantly the urban transport in Bogotá, decreasing the journey time, the contamination

\textsuperscript{68} Instituto Nacional de Concesiones. INCO. http://www.inco.gov.co/FormsWeb/WF_Default
Go to annex B.
\textsuperscript{69} Op. cit. Proexport Colombia.
index as well as the traffic accidents. The private participation and the change on incentive among the principal enterprises have made this project successful.\textsuperscript{70}

Medellin has a different but effective urban transportation system, the subway that generates development, and higher levels of life quality of Medellin citizens. Now a days it has active 28 stations and it has been functioning for eleven years, offering comfort, security, economy and effectiveness. The Metro cable, a kind of cable car that is another massive transportation that works in Medellin. Its purpose is to improve the mobility capacity of the population.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{4.3.4.4 River Transport}\textsuperscript{72}

Colombian geography is rich in natural resources and this implies that we have to take advantage of it. This is why the transportation in the rivers is very important especially the load transportation. There are several important rivers for this type of transport but we are going to talk about the two principal rivers.

The Magdalena River is the biggest in Colombia. It has an extension of 1540 kilometres and it communicates the interior of the country with the Caribbean Coast. 80\% of this kind of transport in Colombia is made in this river. The most transported products are minerals, coal and cement.\textsuperscript{73}

The Meta River is located in the Northeast of the country and it has an extension of 1200 kilometres from which 900 kilometres are good for this kind of transportation. This river is very important for the communications in this part of the country and it

\textsuperscript{70} Transmilenio Sistema Integrado de transporte masivo. \url{http://habitat.aq.upm.es/bpal/onu02/bp129.html}

\textsuperscript{71} Metro de Medellin. \url{http://www.metrodemedellin.org.co/portal/}

\textsuperscript{72} Go to annex D.

\textsuperscript{73} Encarta MSN \url{http://es.encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761556626/Magdalena_(r%C3%ADo_Colombia).html}
helps a lot in the trading with Venezuela. The principal products transported in this river are construction materials, beverages, food and livestock.\textsuperscript{74}

4.3.4.5. Sea Transport\textsuperscript{75}

The principal way of communication between the Colombian market and the rest of the world is the sea transport. Through this type of transport the 96\% of the international products are shipped.

Nowadays there are other new ports dedicated to the international commerce. These ports are divided in regional and specialized ports. The most important ports are in Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cartagena, Santa Marta and Tumaco. The Specialized ports are dedicated basically to the transport of coal, petrol and bananas and the 77\% of the international trading is made through them.\textsuperscript{76}

4.3.4.6 Air Transport\textsuperscript{77}

The air transport in Colombia not only has had an important development but it has also improved in technology. There are 73 official airports in Colombia but only 11 of them are international airports that are located in Bogotá, Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Cucuta, Pereira, San Andres, Santa Marta, Bucaramanga and Leticia. The government has been giving incentives for the private companies who want to get involved in the management and operation of the airports.

In the recent years the country has been trying to attract private investment for improving the capacity and the service of the international airport of El Dorado.

\textsuperscript{74} Colombia Link. http://www.colombialink.com/01_INDEX/index_geografia/index_geografia_hidrografia.html
\textsuperscript{75} Go to annex. D
\textsuperscript{77} Go to annex D.
which is the biggest one in Colombia and it is located in Bogotá. This airport moves
the 35% of all the national passengers and the 70% of the total of international
passengers in Colombia. The project consists in the construction of a new terminal,
to remodel the actual terminal, remodel and construct the way of access.  

This improving of the international airport in Bogotá is very important considering
that Colombia is the first country in South America and it needs the proper
infrastructure to become the getaway of this continent. Also it could be an airport in
which lots of international flights will have to stop not just pick up passengers but
refuel and other things. What we want to say is that we have to take advantage of
the location of our country and be prepared for it.

4.4. BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING THE ECOTOURISM IN COLOMBIA

The tourism does a very important contribution talking about the eradication of
poverty in the country and it also helps in giving new job opportunities as well as in
developing the economy in the communities that really need it. But all of this will
only be possible if the local communities living in the tourist areas like national
parks do it in the right way, what we mean is that they have to give the right use to
the natural resources by replacing what they use and improving the facilities.

In the tourism, a very important factor for helping the fight against the poverty are
the hotels who offer different possibilities of jobs in the communities with less
resources and they also give a backup to this communities giving the education
and other programmes that benefit the locals.

The sustainable tourism can and has to go further than this. The Hoteliers must be aware of the impact that they can cause in the environment because of their operations. In first place they have to pay attention to the cost of the water and electricity consumption and also to the quantity of garbage that they can generate.

In second place they must be careful with the companies that provides them all the raw materials that they need for providing their services, this means that they have to try to look for less plastic materials and change them for natural materials. This is important because the hotels will have a good image and at the same time they are taking care of the environment.

There are two facts that make possible the relation between the tourism and the reduction of poverty. The first one is that the tourism plays an important role in the economy of the countries with low level of incomes and high levels of unemployment which is the case of Colombia and we can see this because in the last four years the industry created 3200 new jobs.\(^7\) The second fact is that the tourism comes with several advantages which are intangible like being proud of the local culture and to appreciate the importance environment and the local cultures.

Another thing that we have to mention is that if the country continues with the growing tendency of receiving every time more and more tourist. This is directly translated in receiving more money. This is good not only for the government but also for the different enterprises and at the end for the individuals. With this money the companies can invest on improving themselves, but if we think in the hotel and tourism enterprises the improving of them will end up on happier customers and attracting more tourists.

\(^7\) Operación Hotelera en Colombia. 2006. 
A very important benefit is changing the bad image that we have. The voice to voice marketing is very good and the people feel comfortable receiving it because normally it comes from family, friends, colleagues or people that they know in general. So the point is that, the international tourists have to feel very welcomed and have a unforgettable amazing experience in this country so that when they go back home, they will talk to the people that they know only good things about the country, and the best of this is that is a completely free marketing.

Also we can say that tourists just coming especially for ecotourism purposes will obligatory see that we have more than this type of tourism. So this is very important because they have to be attracted by the country and probably they will want to discover more of it making an extension of their stay or they will want to come back in the future.

We can say that the development of tourism in Colombia represents great advantages for the country and its people like the eradication of poverty, the job opportunities that it generates, the push that it does to the economy, feeling of belonging, the growth of our culture and the improvement in natural parks and other tourism zones.

4.5 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

The national promotion of tourism in Colombia is made by the Fondo De Promoción Turística de Colombia. This figure is a group conformed by ANATO, COTELCO and ACODRES that is in charged of the management the resources available for the tourism promotion and was created by the law in 1996. In the other hand the international promotion is also made by this group plus organizations like Proexport Colombia and the Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo.
The objective is to give a good management of the resources coming from the companies of the country which are destined only for the marketing and promotion of tourism as well as to improve the competence in the sector and to increase the national and international tourism. 80

The national marketing has many distribution channels. The principals are:

- Internet.
- Newspapers.
- Tourism Magazines (Viajar).
- Travel Agencies.
- Tour Operators

As we can see here the national promotion is almost everywhere which is very good for tourists, for the tourism companies and for the country. The thing is that the international promotion is not as good as the national.

There are some articles that say that Colombia is a very good place for spending the holidays, but we think that it should be a stronger effort from the government and the private tourism industrials in this subject because the international tourists are the ones who will spend the most amount of money inside the country and if they really have a nice holiday they are going to start promoting the country and they will want to come back.

4.6 ECOTOURISM IN COLOMBIA

Talking about ecotourism, we can say that the practice of this type of tourism is very recent in the country and because of this is very difficult to have historical registrations or statistics. But what we can affirm is that there are lots of places through the national territories ideal for the ecotourism. Some activities related to the environmental resources are being developed by the government with the System of Natural Parks and also by the private sector with some enterprises like the ones in San Gil for example.

The private companies are really making an effort to develop the sustainable tourism as they educate locals with environmental subjects to familiarize them with the terrain that surrounds them. Not also the locals, but the visitors have to have a previous education of how to take care of each of the destinations. This is the reason why in some of them we have now tourist information centres (TIC) with specialized people with the capacity of giving all the information necessary for a successful holiday for all the characters involved: the environment, the locals and the tourists.\textsuperscript{81}

The occupancy rates in Colombia have been growing since 1999 to 2006, they have passed from approximately 53900 rooms to around 57500 in 2006. This means that the number of tourist is increasing as time passes which demonstrates that Colombia is a good destination. But we can see more good news here and is that even if this number is increasing the capacity of the hotels is not still 100% and this tells us that Colombia has to continue with the efforts of attracting tourists until

\textsuperscript{81} Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. República de Colombia. Política para el desarrollo del ecoturismo.


But not everything is good in the development of ecotourism. What was said before is not present in every destination, actually in most of them. And as a consequence the tourist won´t have all the information that he needs provoking in most of the cases a bad experience. There is also the lack of the required infrastructure like roads, places to stay and public services among others. Another bad thing is that there is not enough international marketing and the planning for the incoming visitors is not well done.

The National Government has been making efforts for improving the ecotourism, knowing that for the country development, this type of tourism is quite important. It is an instrument that helps the conservation of natural resources and at the same time provides great job offers to the locals and the small enterprises. One of the projects created by the National Government is the “Plan Nacional de desarrollo hacia un Estado comunitario” which supports sustainable tourism.

Another plan is “Turismo para un Nuevo país, which means tourism for a new country; plan sectorial de turismo 2003 – 2006” where the government is making a long term vision for development of the ecotourism, the document affirms that in 2020 this activity will be one of the seven fundamental activities that the government will pay more attention to. \footnote{83}{Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. República de Colombia. Política para el desarrollo del ecoturismo. \url{http://www.mincomercio.gov.co/econtent/Documentos/turismo/2005/Publicaciones/PoliticaEcoturismo.pdf}}
All these things exposed here make us think and realize that the country has the capacity for receiving tourists and for being a good destination but definitively we still have to make a great effort for improving everyday more.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this work we have shown the different faces of Colombia but always emphasizing the tourism sector. The most important part of this work is that the question in the beginning of the work was answered during it and the objectives were accomplished.

The first and most important conclusion is that Colombia is in fact a good destination for Ecotourism. The reasons for this conclusion is that Colombia is a country with a very nice culture, a huge variety of fauna and flora, it has all the different possible climates, friendly and gentle people, landscapes without contamination and free of tourist masses. The combination of all this characteristics that we have in Colombia is unique and it won’t be found anywhere else in the world.

However, the country needs to develop tourism infrastructure because as is shown in this work we have plenty of places to visit, but most of them don’t have the proper facilities to receive as much tourists as we can, although the government is making efforts, so that this development goes as fast and as better as possible.

The private sector is also very important in this field because they are the ones who are investing in this sector. These investments are good for them because as they invest and bring capital to the industry the government gives them incentives and many other benefits. It is also good for the country, principally because coming from abroad can be seen as exportations which is very good
balance of payments. It is also good for activating the economy of local communities that have no economic activity but tourism.

The other important conclusion of this work is changing the image that Colombia has. At the beginning of the work we spoke about the negative image of Colombia that many people have because they don’t know the real country. They just know the terrible images often showed in newspapers and television. But in this work we have shown and described the amazing country that it is and that in despite of all the negative things and problems, going to Colombia is an opportunity that can’t be missed.

So finally we can say that Colombia is one of the best destinations not only for ecotourism but for any type of tourism and that with time it is going to be even better because as visitors come to the country, it will be evolving in this field and being prepared for offering all that visitors expect and developing everyday more.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In first place we would like to say that the destinations that already have a conscious of what ecotourism means, and are developing they must continue with that. The government and the private sector are very important for this, giving their support and more than that helping them. The other ones that are not they should learn form the others and start a responsible development.

Continue involving the participation of the locals with the aim of giving them good and loved jobs and more than that giving the tourists what they want to see, the real country. Also continue with the improvement and development of the necessary infrastructure for receiving tourists all around the territory.
Another thing that we have to take into consideration is that Colombia has a very important geographical location; we could say that is the entrance to South America. Taking advantage of this location is that flights coming from the south of the continent to Central or North America could stop in Bogotá or some of the others international airports. What we want to say is that Colombia could be a transit country and these transit visitors could be also converted in longer stays.

The government has to continue trying to attract the national and international private sector investment in the industry. They have to continue giving benefits for those investing in the country’s tourism. If new hotels come here it means more jobs are offered and more money is entering the country, not just that but they will have to give education and infrastructure to the region where they want to provide their services.

Another important recommendation is the Improvement of the international marketing of Colombia. This means that all around the world people have to know about the tourism destination that Colombia becoming. They could create an organism especially for this like for example Maison de la France for France. Talking about this type of promotion is important to target all type of people but we think that the most important is the young adults, people between 20 and 35 years old.

The reasons for recommending this are because this people are in the capacity of paying a trip, we will have the capacity of making them in love with Colombia and they will like to come back in the future with their children. At this age is when people are able to come to a not very well known country, and finally, because they are in the physical capacities for practicing the type of activities described in this work.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A

Tayrona Park

Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona. Brochure.
ANNEX B
RAILWAYS TRANSPORT

86 Instituto Nacional de Concesiones. INCO. http://www.inco.gov.co/FormsWeb/WF_Default
### ANNEX C

**SEA TRANSPORT**

Port traffic\(^{87}\)

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<th>Puerto</th>
<th>Principales Productos</th>
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ANNEX D

SEA, RIVER AND AIR TRANSPORT

Instituto geográfico Agustín Codazzi.

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