This guide includes La Popa Monastery, San Felipe Fortress, a walking tour of the Walled City, and more. The photo above is the entrance to Casa Pestagua, a boutique hotel in the Walled City.
Toms Cartagena de Indias Cruise Port Guide: Colombia

Includes a HopOn bus tour map and details for a private van tour of the city with a guided walking tour and descriptions/photos of tourist sites.

In 1533, Conquistador Pedro de Heredia established Cartagena de Indias. His vision was that it would become an important port city. He looted South America and shipped the valuables, such as the gold from tombs, back to Spain.

It wasn't long before Cartagena became a target for pirates. In 1586, Sir Francis Drake of England invaded, destroyed much of the city, and held the rest of it for a costly ransom.

After the ransom, Spain decided to fund an extensive defensive system. Huge walls were built to enclose the city with a network of small forts and batteries. This work culminated with San Felipe Fortress, one of the best defensive systems ever constructed.

Cartagena continued to grow in importance. It became one of the three seats of the Inquisition in America, a slave port, and the port where gold was loaded on ships to Spain.

Cartagena is rich in history. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Cruise ships dock on Manga Island about 4.4 km (2.7 miles) from the Old City. This guide describes our tour with stops at the 400-year old La Popa Monastery, San Felipe Fortress, a walking tour through Old Town, and stops at the Joyeria Caribe Emerald Museum and Factory, and Pierino Gallo Shopping Center.

I loved the one-mile walk through the Old City. We walked through narrow, clean streets lined with gorgeous, very colorful, and well-maintained Spanish Colonial buildings. We stopped at Santo Domingo, the oldest church in Cartagena. We made a rest stop for cold drinks at the Hard Rock Cafe. Then we visited Saint Peter Claver Church. Saint Peter spent 40 years defending, protecting, and nursing newly arrived slaves. I wish I had spent more time at the church and museum to learn more about this holy man. Pope Leo XIII wrote, "No life, except the life of Christ, has moved me so deeply as that of Peter Claver."

NOTE: there are some important travel safety concerns in Colombia. See the section on Crime in Cartagena for links to the US Department of State Travel Advisory and Crime Report.

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CAVEAT
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Tom Sheridan
Cruise Ship Dock Location

Cruise ships dock in the industrial, cargo ship area. It's a 1000-foot walk along the harbor to the cruise terminal. There's a bird sanctuary with friendly and colorful macaws, flamingos, and toucans, duty-free shopping, and a Juan Valdez Coffee shop. Many tourists stop at this area when they return from shore excursions. Google calculates it is 4.4 km (2.7 miles) and 55 minutes to walk from the ship to the walled city.

Cruise ships might also dock at Muelle (pier) Turistico. It's a tiny dock. It has been used by cruise ships in the past, but I'm not sure it is still being used. Our ship docked at the location of the ship in the photo below.

Crime in Cartagena

Before visiting a new port, I read travel advisories. It's just a few pages. If risks involve more than pickpockets, I list relevant excerpts from the advisories, create my assessment of the travel risk, and plan accordingly. I've shown this process below. Please DO NOT consider MY BELIEFS on travel safety as a recommendation. Read the relevant government travel advisories and crime reports. Determine what is safe for you. Make your shore excursion travel plans for your preferences and your risk tolerance.

See https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12118

US Department of State Travel Warning October 3, 2012
See http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_5778.html

Excerpts that caught my attention:

• “Security in Colombia has improved significantly in recent years, including in tourist and business travel destinations like Cartagena and Bogota, but violence by narco-terrorist groups continues to affect some rural areas and large cities.”

• Cartagena, as well as other large cities in Colombia, shares many of the same problems that plague the majority of the world’s biggest cities. On a daily basis, the most prevalent threat to Americans in Colombia’s largest cities is street crime. The most common types of crime include, but are not limited to, muggings, assaults, general thefts, credit card fraud, and burglaries. Criminals are quick to resort to physical assault and commonly use knives and firearms in the commission of crimes.

• Crime levels in the major Cartagena tourist areas of Centro Historico, Bocagrande, and Castillogrande are considered comparably lower but are continually areas of much petty theft.
• **Do not use inter- or intra-city bus transportation**, or travel by road outside urban areas at night. Buses in Cartagena are also dirty, have poor safety features, and are off limits for diplomatic personnel.  

• **Taxi related crime** occurs when a taxi driver stops abruptly to allow a counterpart to enter the vehicle. The two individuals will then rob the passenger and in some cases take the passenger to as many Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) as possible.  

• **Taxis** hailed off the street in Cartagena Historical Center, and in front of major restaurants and hotels in the Bocagrande and Castillogrande areas are considered generally reliable. Most hotels, restaurants, and stores will call a taxi company for a passenger, and the taxi generally arrives in a matter of minutes.

**My Beliefs/Assessment Re Safety for Our Shore Excursion in Cartagena:**

• Do NOT ride public buses. Only take cabs from safe areas or have a hotel or store call a cab for you.  

• Crime in Cartagena is similar to other large cities. It's risky to wander around in unfamiliar areas unless you know where the “bad areas” are. Do NOT travel alone. Travel with, or stay near, other tourists. The main streets and squares with many tourists are probably safe. Use a local guide when traveling back streets. A guide knows trouble spots and can recognize and avoid potential problems.  

• Pickpockets and petty thieves are in large cities. I limit what I carry and wear security belts.  

• Dress down to blend-in. Do NOT wear expensive looking jewelry, watches, or carry valuables.  

• The US Department of State describes Cartagena major tourist sites of Centro Historico, Bocagrande, and Castillogrande as lower crime areas where petty theft is common.  

For **My safety concerns**, a ship's tour or private tour with a local guide would be fine. We opted for a private tour. Quoted prices were $45-55/person depending on size of the group. We joined a tour organized by one of our fellow passengers. I'm embarrassed that I do not have her name to mention her in this guide.

Centro Historico impressed me as a beautiful, well manicured, clean area. We walked the streets and felt safe. Aside from the safety issue, I wanted a guide to explain the sites and show me the route through the maze of streets. The only problem was aggressive street vendors pestering us to buy soda, water, and souvenirs.

**GPS Coordinates for Tourist Sites**

I use GPS coordinates to pinpoint sites on Google and Bing Maps, create travel routes, and estimate travel time and distance. Google shows a single GPS location as a down pointing green arrow and places a red balloon at the nearest street address. Bing shows a single GPS location as a blue dot. GPS coordinates can be used in street, satellite, birdseye, terrain, aerial and earth map views.

When you use the “Get Directions” function, the route map shows locations as A, B, C, etc.

Open this guide in one window on your computer and Google Maps in a second window. Copy and paste the GPS coordinates on the map. The map on the next page is plotted using coordinates from this list.

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Our private van tour route is shown on the **map on the next page** as a blue line. This route is 18 km and one hour driving time, one-way, from the ship to Pierino Gallo Shopping Center. Cruise ships dock on Manga Island. The major tourist areas are Centro Historico, San Diego, Bocagrande, and Castillogrande.
La Popa Monastery  GPS = N 10 25 10.18, W 75 31 32.89

We drove on a switch back road lined with stations of the cross to the top of the hill. The Convent of La Popa is a 400 year-old monastery dedicated to the Virgin of Candelaria. She is a patron saint of Cartagena credited with delivering the city from the ravages of disease and pirates. The monastery was once used as a fortress. Today, it is a museum and a chapel. It has a commanding view over the city (photo below).
San Felipe Fortress  (Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas)  

GPS = N 10 25 17.59, W 75 32 23.81

The fortress was built between 1536 and 1657. It's an outstanding defensive design, strategically located to protect the city by land and sea. Canons were positioned to attack any ship attempting to dock. The entrance has a maze of tunnels. Battlements were designed so that if one part of the castle were lost to the enemy, the rest of it could still be defended.

We stopped for 15 minutes to take photos. The street vendors were so aggressive that I took a few pictures and got back in the van.

Touring the fortress takes about 45 minutes. I spoke with people on our ship who walked up the fortress. They described it as strenuous, but judged the view worth the climb.
Websites to download maps and information on Cartagena


Download tourist brochures including city map

Link to view city walking tour map to museums

Link to view city walking tour map around the plazas
http://www.cartagenadeindias.travel/paseo_por_ampliada.php?la=en&id=6&page=0

Walking Tour Map of the Old City from Teatro Heredia to Parque de La Marina

Our walking route is shown as blue dots on the map below.
The tour is described in detail on the following pages.
The Walled City
There are two districts in the walled city; namely, San Diego, and Centro Historico. San Diego is at the northeastern section of the city. It is a wealthy, high-end area with some upscale hotels. We drove through the area and stopped in Centro Historico for our walking tour from Theater Heredia to La Marina Park.

Walking Tour of Centro Historico, the Old Walled City

Teatro Heredia  
GPS =  N 10 25 35.59, W 75 33 5.02
We began our tour at Teatro Heredia (photo right). It's one of the most beautiful theaters in Latin America. It's named after conquistador Pedro de Heredia, the founder of Cartagena.

We walked through a maze of narrow streets lined with well-maintained, beautiful, and very colorful Spanish Colonial buildings, churches, and squares. It was Christmas day of 2012. We were the only people in the streets; there were some people in the squares. I was delighted there were few people obstructing my photos of the gorgeous buildings.

We walked 1.6 km (1 mile). It took an hour. The streets and sidewalks are flat and easy to walk. The only steps are at entrances to churches and other buildings. It was sunny, hot, and extremely humid. We took a 10-minute break at the Hard Rock Cafe for a cold drink and to use the toilets. NOTE: be prepared for hot and very humid weather walking through old town. Unlike the area along the shore, there is not much of a breeze.

Photos of narrow streets in the Old City.
It was Christmas Day. We were the only ones on the streets.
The buildings are colorful.

Iglesia de Santo Domingo  GPS =  N 10 25 27.47, W 75 33 7.46

Iglesia Santo Domingo is the oldest church in Cartagena dating back to 1534. There were some problems building the church. The structural support had to be changed, and the bell tower is crooked. Some believe the devil jumped on the tower and tried to make it collapse, but he only succeeded in making it crooked.
The outside of the church is plain, but it's beautiful inside.

**Plaza Santo Domingo is popular with tourists.** There are cafes with outside tables to relax over a drink and enjoy the view. El Marques is an upscale boutique hotel and spa. There is also Botero's bronze reclining woman statue (photo below)
Parque de Bolivar & Palacio de la Inquisicion
GPS = N 10 25 23.22, W 75 33 4.91
Plaza de Bolivar has the Cathedral, Gold Museum and the Inquisition Palace. I had no interest in visiting the Inquisition Palace to see how people were tortured. We took some photos and continued our walk.

Hard Rock Cafe  GPS = N10 25 21.10, W 75 32 59.02
The heat and high humidity were taking a toll on us. We stopped to relax with a cold drink and use the toilets. The cafe is next to Plaza de la Aduana which has a statue of Christopher Columbus. It's only a 500-foot walk from Hard Rock Cafe to San Pedro Claver Church.

Iglesia de San Pedro Claver GPS = N 10 25 18.47, W 75 33 3.34
Pope Leo XIII wrote, "No life, except the life of Christ, has moved me so deeply as that of Peter Claver"
One million slaves were brought from Africa to Cartagena. This 17th century church honors Saint Peter Claver, the patron saint of slaves and the first Saint canonized in the Western Hemisphere. For almost forty years, this Jesuit Priest worked in Cartagena de Indias, defending, protecting and nursing newly arrived African slaves. In the Americas, they would cultivate the open country, work in the mines, and serve as personal attendants.

See [http://www.cartagenainfo.net/saintpeterclaver/](http://www.cartagenainfo.net/saintpeterclaver/) for background on Saint Peter Claver, the church, and museum. In retrospect, I wish I had spent more time here to learn more about this holy man. Visitors walk up to the altar to see the relics (Photos below).
Parque da La Marina  **GPS = N 10 25 14.70, W 75 33 7.48**
We boarded the van and drove to Bocagrande. It has high-rise buildings, restaurants, hotels, nightclubs, and is one of the best places to shop.

**Joyeria Caribe Emerald Museum and Factory**  **GPS = N 10 23 57.01, W 75 33 31.50**
It's more than a jewelry store. We saw replicas of the mines and could handle “rough emeralds” as found in nature. We watched workers making jewelry and visited the showroom to see an impressive display.

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**Pierino Gallo Shopping Center**  **GPS = N 10 23 49.78, W 75 33 47.09**
This shopping center is on two levels. It features several jewelry stores, leather goods, and coffee. We parked in front of the store. There were security guards inside and outside the stores. People who purchased jewelry had no safety concerns. They simply boarded the bus and we drove back to the port. The good thing about shopping as the last stop of the tour is that you don't have to walk through the streets carrying expensive jewelry or leave it on the bus while you are visiting tourist sites.
List of stops on the tour

Stop 1 – Bodeguita Cruise Port  
Stop 2 - Pastelillo  
Stop 3 - Torre del Reloj  
Stop 4 - Castillo de San Felipe  
Stop 5 - Rafael Nuñez  
Stop 6 - Boquetillo  
Stop 7 - San Francisco  
Stop 8 - San Martin  
Stop 9 - Casino Rio  
Stop 10 - Caribe  
Stop 11 - Laguito  
Stop 12 - Bahia  
Stop 13 - Base Naval

I did not use the HopOn bus in Cartagena, but I have used, and been pleased, with Citysightseeing tours in other cities. It's a British company; they list the price on the website as 16 Pounds Sterling ($ 25 USD).

For more information, see http://www.city-sightseeing.com/tours/co...#tourlandingposition
If you have any questions about the tour, send them an email. They'll respond in about a day. .
User Feedback Is Welcome

Goal
My guides are designed to help you plan a great cruise vacation by providing information such as where the ship docks, location of tourist sites, public transit, walking tour maps, things to see and do, travel issues unique to the port, etc. Knowledge of ports is important when planning shore excursions because you have to make many decisions and commitments long before your ship docks. I believe the information in this guide is accurate, however you are responsible to verify accuracy of the information that you use to plan your vacation.

Information on cruise ports frequently changes such as bus routes, admission fees to sites, rental car locations, etc. Cruise Critic is the best source for up-to-date, detailed information on travel details for shore excursions, reviews of cruise ships, etc. There are many knowledgeable people on Cruise Critic who are willing to share their expertise and travel experience. I highly recommend www.CruiseCritic.com; it's free to join.

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Tom Sheridan