

COLOMBIAN GOLD RUSH

Take in this gem before the mass of tourists descend, says Scottish travel editor *Katie Wood*

The number of destinations available direct from Scottish airports has mushroomed in recent years but there are still some countries we can't connect to without a change of plane.

With London airports increasingly congested and prone to flight delays, and with Paris's Charles de Gaulle as chaotic as ever, my jump-off point of choice for a variety of destinations is Schiphol in Amsterdam – it's an airport that actually works.

Consistently voted best airport in Europe at the Business Travel Awards in the UK, timings of its Scottish departures are designed to dovetail where possible with the intercontinental network and most have an average transfer time of less than two hours.

Regular connections – between two and six a day – on KLM Royal Dutch Airlines are offered from Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Glasgow.

Out of its 150 worldwide destinations, the top leisure destinations from Scotland are Beijing, Dubai, Hong Kong, New York and Thailand. This year, though, it has a plethora of new routes, including some interesting long-haul options such as Mumbai, San José, Costa Rica, Minneapolis, Mauritius and Cartagena in Colombia – the last of which I visited recently to experience its world business class offering.

From early 2018 the airline is bringing in impressive new cabin interiors to business on its Airbus A330 fleet. The world business class cabins of its Boeing fleet are already in service.

It's fun in your own little pod of secluded luxury: totally private, with a comfortable full-flat seat, a 12-language in-flight entertainment system, a 3D flight-tracking system, and meals by trendsetting Dutch chefs.

It's well worth the quick hop off, hop on at Amsterdam to get to Colombia, where a fabulous South American experience awaits.

The capital city of Bogota I can take or leave. This city of 10m people has appalling traffic and a microclimate that leaves you sweating one hour and shivering the next. It's shabby but not chic enough for all the hassles and – apart from the impressive gold museum, a few



From its buildings to its fruit sellers, right, Cartagena is a joyous riot of colour

bijoux streets (guarded by armed private security), and some large-scale, thought-provoking graffiti – I'd give it a swerve. If you do go, take the walking tour offered by bogotagraffiti.com and check out the political street art that resulted in death for the artist. Street trafficking of drugs is still an everyday sight. The Netflix show *Narcos* remains essential pre-tour viewing.

Cartagena, however, is a different ball game. This old fortified city has Unesco world heritage status and some of the most beautiful Spanish colonial architecture in South America.

More Caribbean in atmosphere, the city has a palpable vibrancy and was one of

the first sanctuaries for freed African slaves. Its most beautiful attractions are inside the ancient city walls, built to protect the seaport from pirates. Here you find brightly coloured houses, shaded courtyards and bustling squares.

Once through the city gate with its famous clock tower you reach the main square, Plaza Bolivar. The old cathedral, gold museum and notorious Palace of the Inquisition await. The latter is a chilling affair, with a museum illustrating the gruesome past, complete with the instruments of torture used. It's a mere two-minute walk from the pavement where the visage of every Miss Colombia from decades past to present day are emblazoned on the pavement – Colombian men still come to stare daily.

The most interesting barrio of the city, however, is the less touristy Getsemani. Once characterised by drugs and crime, it is now one of Latin America's newest hot spots, with 200-year-old buildings, hostels, boutique hotels and brilliant nightclubs such as Cafe Havana, with a salsa and live music scene to justify the long queues for entry.

Brightly coloured buildings, locals sitting outside their modest homes, street art and countless street food vendors are the backbone of this wonderful district. It's standing room only for the candlelit 9pm mass in the Iglesia de la Trinidad. This feels like the real Colombia, and it's absolutely intoxicating.

I particularly enjoy discovering a city through a walking tour on the theme of its local food and drink, and the one I took in Cartagena was a real highlight.

The Literary Menu of Garcia Marquez is a gastronomic walk in Cartagena de Indias that serves some of the snacks, fruits and drinks that the characters of the writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez taste in his books. In three hours you visit nine must-see places and stop to taste delicious local food and drinks six times.

See tiendafoodies.com/paseos/cartagena/el-menu-literario-de-garcia-m/.

Tourism to Cartagena has grown by more than 200% in the past decade, and international hotel groups are moving in fast – so, just like Havana, don't hang around but get there fast, as it's a gem right now.

KLM offers economy flights from Scotland to Cartagena from £560 return, and business from £2,299 return inc taxes and charges, 020 7660 0293, klm.co.uk; procolombia.co.uk

SCOTTISH NEWS

● A direct route between the capital of Scotland and the capital of America will operate from next summer. It's the first time there has

been a direct route between Edinburgh and Washington DC. United Airlines will operate the service from May 23, 2018, offering daily flights. United will continue to operate year-round flights to New York Newark and Chicago.

● Ski Total offers the Aosta Valley with a firm favourite, the Chalet Hotel Breithorn in Champoluc, from

£788pp, travelling on January 6, 2018. The Breithorn is a well-established chalet hotel. It has been restored and modernised but kept the traditional Alpine features and character, with an open fire, wooden vaulted ceilings and a spa area. The price is based on two adults sharing and includes return flights from Edinburgh to Turin, transfers, free wi-fi, and catered accommodation

including buffet breakfast, afternoon tea and four-course evening meals with wine. 01483 791 935, skitotal.com

● Teletext Holidays is offering seven nights in Caleta de Fuste, Fuerteventura, from £383 per person based on two adults sharing. Staying at the four-star Elba Carlota Beach and Convention Resort on a

half-board basis, flying from Prestwick on November 19. teletextholidays.co.uk

● London Southend airport has launched up to 16 direct flights a week between London and Glasgow, with one-way fares from £29.99. The services on new Flybe jet aircraft offer an alternative to bigger, more congested airports.