# Newsletter

## A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

2 June 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

## Cartagena de Indias: Colombia's Caribbean Jewel of History and Culture

Nestled along Colombia's Caribbean coast, Cartagena de Indias stands as a city of rich history, vibrant culture, and sun-drenched landscapes, blending colonial charm with modern energy.

Founded in 1533, Cartagena's fortified walls tell the story of a strategic port, once plundered by pirates, now recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its cobbled streets, lively plazas, and brightly painted colonial homes transport visitors into the depths of Latin America's historical legacy.



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With its tropical climate, Cartagena offers year-round warmth and stunning beaches, from Bocagrande's buzzing coastline to the pristine sands of Isla Grande. Beyond its shores, the city's Afro-Caribbean influences, indigenous traditions, and European heritage fuel a rich artistic and culinary scene, where vallenato music, cumbia rhythms, and flavors like coconut rice and fresh ceviche define local identity.

Cartagena also bursts into celebration with its legendary festivals. The Barranquilla Carnival, Colombia's biggest festival, showcases a spectacle of dance, music, and dazzling parades, while Semana Santa's solemn religious processions attract thousands.

A city of timeless beauty and living history, Cartagena remains a cultural beacon of the Caribbean, drawing in travelers with its colorful streets, colonial treasures, and festive spirit.

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# National Botanical Garden of Havana: A Natural Treasure for Science and Conservation

Just 25 kilometers south of Havana, the National Botanical Garden (JBN) stands as Cuba's largest and most important botanical reserve, blending scientific research, conservation, and ecotourism in a stunning natural environment.



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Founded at the request of Fidel Castro and led by German botanist Dr. Johannes Bisse, the project took nearly two decades to develop, officially opening to the public on March 24, 1984. Today, its 550 hectares host over 3,000 plant species, including Cuba's largest tree collection and flora from various tropical regions worldwide.

The JBN meticulously recreates Cuba's diverse ecosystems, from pine forests and coastal mangroves to humid jungles and dry woodlands, reflecting the country's rich plant geography. Visitors can explore the renowned Cuabal vegetation, a landscape praised by international horticulturists.

One of the garden's most iconic attractions is the Palmetum, boasting one of the world's most extensive palm collections, featuring native and exotic species from across the globe.

Recent renovations have enhanced visitor experiences, including a repaved road system, a new food plaza, upgraded Japanese Garden bridges, and artificial ponds. A new Colors Garden spanning 1,000 square meters will soon open, adding to the garden's scientific and recreational appeal.

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The JBN is also introducing adventure tourism, featuring Havana's first canopy zipline, a mountain biking trail, a ropes course, and a mogote climbing route. These attractions align with global ecotourism trends, providing unique perspectives on the forest canopy and native landscapes.

The garden serves as a vital conservation site for migratory and endemic birds, with 120 species recorded—including eight Cuban and 12 Caribbean endemics. At least 34 species nest within the reserve, some of which are listed in Cuba's Red Book of Threatened Vertebrates.

With its fusion of research, biodiversity conservation, and recreational attractions, the JBN continues to be a pillar of Cuban environmental education, offering a space for exploration, learning, and family-friendly engagement with nature.

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# Baracoa's Chocolate Legacy: A Tradition of Passion and Resilience

In Baracoa, Cuba's chocolate capital, the legacy of cacao cultivation and chocolate production remains deeply woven into the town's identity. For José Alexander Eugellés, who has worked in Baracoa's chocolate factory for 28 years, crafting chocolate is more than a profession—it's a way of life, inherited from his father and shared with his sister.



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The factory, inaugurated in April 1963 by revolutionary leader Che Guevara, processes all of Cuba's chocolate, relying on Baracoa's unique climate and fertile soil for high-quality cacao. With annual rainfall of 1,500–2,500 mm and an average temperature between 24–28°C, the region remains Cuba's top cacao producer, contributing 75% of national output.

The chocolate-making process in Baracoa's factory demands 24-hour shifts, beginning with roasting cacao seeds at 150°C, followed by shelling, grinding, and pressing to extract cocoa butter. The resulting cocoa powder becomes the base for artisan chocolates, natillas, and confectionery blends.

A recent $8.5 million investment modernized production lines, replacing older machinery with Swiss and Italian technology, doubling processing capacity from 3,000 tons annually. However, in October 2016, Hurricane Matthew devastated cacao farms, severely impacting exports to Europe, reducing shipments from 400 to just 250 tons.

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Despite hardships, chocolate remains a lifeline for Baracoa, sustaining hundreds of families and preserving traditions dating back to the early 19th century, when cacao first arrived via Santiago de Cuba. While locals may not know the legend of Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god who gifted cacao, their dedication to this craft ensures that Cuban chocolate remains a symbol of resilience and pride.

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# The Citadelle Laferrière: A Symbol of Freedom and Strength in Haiti

At nearly 900 meters above sea level, atop Bonnet à l'Évêque mountain, stands the imposing Citadelle Laferrière, considered the largest fortress in the Americas.

This massive stone structure, built between 1805 and 1820 by order of Henri Christophe — a hero of Haitian independence and self-proclaimed king — was designed to defend the newly freed nation from possible French reconquest.



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Covering around 10,000 square meters, the citadel's towering walls reach up to 40 meters high. Inside, it could house 5,000 soldiers, along with food, water, and weaponry for long-term resistance. Many of its cannons were seized from European colonial forces. Constructed using traditional techniques, including a mixture of quicklime, molasses, and animal blood, the fortress is a testament to ingenuity and resilience.

Beyond its military function, the citadel embodies the indomitable spirit of the Haitian people. Its construction was a bold act of sovereignty, and its enduring presence serves as a powerful historical symbol of resistance.

In 1982, UNESCO declared the Citadelle Laferrière a World Heritage Site, along with the Sans-Souci Palace and the Ramiers buildings, forming part of the National History Park. Today, the citadel stands as one of Haiti's premier tourist destinations. Visitors can reach it from the town of Milot, either on foot or horseback, along a winding mountain trail.

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From its summit, on clear days, one can see all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, a reminder that this fortress is a beacon of liberty for a nation that rose against slavery and colonialism.

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# San Luis Potosí: Cultural and Historical Heart of Mexico

San Luis Potosí, capital of the state of the same name, stands as a vibrant cultural and economic center in Mexico's central highlands. Founded on November 3, 1592, the city owes its origin to the discovery of gold and silver mines in the nearby Cerro de San Pedro, earning it the nickname "Potosí" in reference to the legendary mining wealth of Bolivia.



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At an altitude of 1,860 meters above sea level, San Luis Potosí combines a privileged natural setting with an exceptional architectural heritage. Its historic center, recognized as a Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is home to baroque and neoclassical gems such as the Metropolitan Cathedral and numerous colonial mansions.

The city hosts important cultural venues such as the National Mask Museum, which displays an extensive collection of traditional Mexican masks, and the Federico Silva Museum, the only one of its kind in Latin America dedicated exclusively to contemporary sculpture. These institutions reinforce the city's artistic identity.

Major events such as the Procession of Silence, held during Holy Week, attract thousands of locals and visitors in a solemn and emblematic display of Potosí devotion. Likewise, the National Fair of San Luis Potosí (FENAPO), held in August, offers a mosaic of popular culture, performances, gastronomy, and tradition.

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San Luis Potosí's energy is also reflected in its green spaces, such as Tangamanga Park I, one of the largest urban parks in the country. From the city, travelers can easily access destinations like the Huasteca Potosina—famous for its waterfalls and jungles—and Real de Catorce, a charming former mining town and designated Pueblo Mágico.

With a state population nearing three million, San Luis Potosí enjoys a semi-arid temperate climate and modern infrastructure, including an international airport and efficient land transportation.

Rich in history, culture, and natural beauty, San Luis Potosí remains a vital crossroads of tradition, modernity, and living heritage in contemporary Mexico.

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