

COLOMBIA

TRAVEL GUIDE 2026

BAHÍA SOLANO

A one-hour flight from Medellín drops you between jungle and ocean: humpback whales from June to October, baby turtles heading to sea and the cove of Utría.

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THE ESSENTIALS

WHALES, TURTLES AND RAINFOREST ON THE PACIFIC

Bahía Solano sits on Colombia's northern Pacific coast, in Chocó, where wet rainforest runs right down to dark-sand beaches. No road connects it to the rest of the country: you fly in, about an hour from Medellín, to José Celestino Mutis airport in the town center. Eighteen kilometers (11 mi) down the road is El Valle, home to El Almejal beach, the Valle River and the turtle programs.

From June to October, humpback whales come to these waters to mate and give birth, and from July to December sea turtles nest on the beaches around El Valle. To the south lies Utría National Natural Park, more than 64,000 hectares (158,000 acres) of mangrove, reef and rainforest on the land of Afro-Colombian communities and the Emberá people. It rains here almost all year, and that's exactly why everything is so green.

WHERE IT IS

Northern Pacific coast, department of Chocó. The airport is in Ciudad Mutis, the town center; El Valle is 18 km (11 mi) away by road, about 40 minutes.

GETTING THERE

Medellín (Olaya Herrera airport) to Bahía Solano: about 1 hr, on Satena and Clic. There's no road link to the interior of the country.

WEATHER

Warm and very humid year-round, usually 24 to 27 °C (75 to 81 °F). It rains most months; February is the driest and August the wettest.

DOCUMENTS

Colombian ID (cédula) for residents; passport for foreign visitors. For Colombian minors, tarjeta de identidad or registro civil (birth certificate). You also need a yellow fever vaccination card, with the shot given at least 10 days before: it's required to enter Utría.

MONEY

Colombian peso (COP). Bring enough cash from Medellín: don't count on ATMs, and cell signal and internet are limited on the beaches.

LANGUAGE

Spanish. The area is home to Afro-Colombian communities and the Emberá people, who keep their own language.

TIME ZONE

Colombia time (UTC-5), no difference.

PLUGS

Types A and B, 110 V, 60 Hz, same as the rest of Colombia.

DON'T MISS

HIGHLIGHTS

01
UTRÍA NATIONAL NATURAL PARK

A cove ringed by rainforest, with mangroves, reefs and trails like Estero Grande and Cocalito. From El Valle it's about 40 minutes by boat or roughly a three-hour hike, always with an authorized local guide.

02
HUMPBACK WHALE WATCHING

From June to October, humpbacks come to the Chocó coast to mate and calve. Boat trips leave from Bahía Solano and El Valle; in 2026, local operators are running the season from June 15 to October 20.

03
TURTLE RELEASES IN EL VALLE

Playa Cuevita, a 9 km (5.6 mi) beach, is one of the most important nesting beaches in the region. From July to December, local projects protect the nests and release the hatchlings into the sea.

04
THE VALLE RIVER AND THE CHADÓ FALLS

The Valle River, the largest in the area, is explored by canoe through the jungle. Twenty-five minutes by boat from El Valle is Playa Chadó: follow the Cascadas River past pools and small falls to the Chadó, which forms a big swimming hole just before it meets the sea.

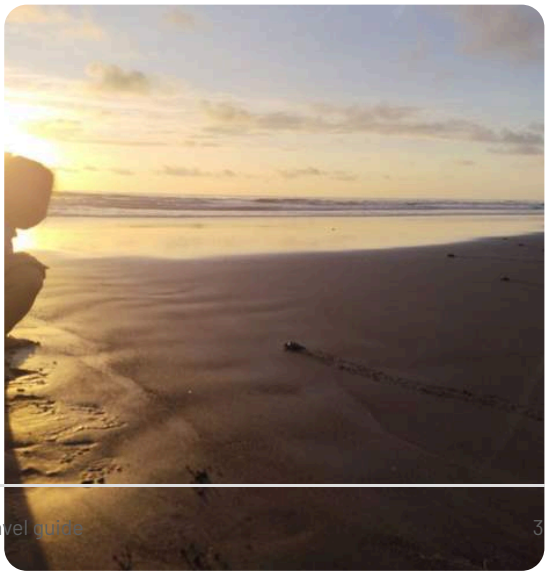
05
MECANA AND THE PACIFIC BOTANICAL GARDEN

Just 3.6 km (2.2 mi) from the airport, a 168-hectare (415-acre) reserve created in 2009 between rainforest and sea. Go for hikes, birdwatching and kayaking through the mangroves and up the Mecana River.

06
PLAYA HUINA

About 25 minutes by boat from Ciudad Mutis, a calm beach where you can spot dolphins and, in season, whales.





PLAN YOUR TRIP

WHEN TO GO

People come to Bahía Solano for the wildlife more than the sun. June to October is humpback whale season, and July to December is turtle nesting and release season. July, August and September give you both, though August is the rainiest month. If you'd rather have less rain for beaches and trails, go from January to March: February is the driest month, but there are no whales.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

BEST

JUL – SEP

The best time to go.

GOOD

JUN · OCT – MAR

A good time, with a catch on weather or crowds.

RAINY

APR – MAY

More rain: keep plans flexible.

WHAT YOU NEED TO TRAVEL

For Colombian passport holders: you only need your ID to travel to Bahía Solano, but three things must be in order: your yellow fever vaccine, the town's tourism contribution, and the Utría entrance fee if you visit the park. Traveling on another passport? Requirements differ, so message us and we'll check yours.

- ID: Colombian ID (cédula) for residents; passport for foreign visitors. For Colombian minors, tarjeta de identidad or registro civil (birth certificate).
- Yellow fever vaccine given at least 10 days before, with a valid vaccination card. Colombia's National Parks have required it to enter Utría since May 2025 (Ministry of Health Resolution 691 of 2025), and Chocó is one of the risk areas where the Ministry of Health asks travelers to get vaccinated. Some travel packages also require it. You can check your record at mivacuna.sispro.gov.co.
- Bahía Solano Tourism Contribution: under the town's revenue code (Agreement 04 of 2018), tourists arriving through the airport pay one day's minimum wage per person, about COP 58,400 in 2026. Residents are exempt. Tour operators quote different amounts, so confirm the current figure before you travel.
- 2026 Utría entrance fees for Colombians and residents: COP 28,000 for adults and COP 19,000 for ages 6 to 25.
- In Utría, an authorized local guide or interpreter is mandatory, there's a short orientation talk before entering, and entry and exit hours are 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- No single-use plastics allowed in the park. National Parks recommends rubber boots on the trails and buying accident insurance.

Checked in October 2026 with Colombian National Natural Parks: Utría National Natural Park. Rules change, so confirm with the official source before you travel, or message us and we'll help.

WHAT WE'D TELL A FRIEND

BOKANA TIPS

1 Get vaccinated early

Your yellow fever shot needs to be given at least 10 days before you travel. It's free at vaccination sites across Colombia; bring your card or make sure you show up in the official registry.

2 Cash and a digital detox

Don't count on ATMs, and many places take cash only. Withdraw it in Medellín. Signal on the beaches is weak, so download maps and bookings before you go.

3 Pack for rain

It rains almost all year. Bring a rain jacket, quick-dry clothes, bug spray and dry bags for your phone. For the trails in Utría, rubber boots.

4 Utría: early and with a guide

The park admits visitors from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., and only with an authorized local guide. Leave El Valle early so you can enjoy the cove and the trails without rushing.

5 Build in a buffer day

Airlines warn that schedules and frequencies can change for operational reasons. Don't book an important connection on the same day you fly back.

6 Respect the wildlife

At turtle releases, don't use flash or touch the hatchlings, and follow the instructions of the people who care for the nests. For whale watching, pick licensed local operators who keep their distance and don't chase the animals.

7 Check the security situation

In May 2025 the ELN guerrilla called an armed strike in Chocó. Before you go, check conditions with your agency and official channels, and travel with licensed operators.

TRAVEL MINDFULLY

Bring no single-use plastics into Utría and always go with local guides, so your entrance fee stays with the communities who care for this land. At turtle releases, let the hatchlings reach the sea on their own, and choose hotels, boat operators and kitchens run by local people.

WHERE TO EAT

OUR RESTAURANT PICKS

Chosen for their food, their track record and what past diners say. Price: $ budget · $$ mid-range · $$$ splurge.

LA ROSA DEL MAR $$

Pacific fish and seafood · El Valle

★ **4.7** · 193 reviews on Google Maps

El Valle's most-reviewed restaurant: Pacific home cooking with fresh fish, seafood and set lunches that come with soup and juice.

What diners love: Reviewers praise the fish soup, the freshness of the fish and shrimp, fair prices and the warmth of the owner, Rosa. Some ate there every day of their trip.

Order: Fried red snapper with patacón (twice-fried green plantain) or lobster in coconut sauce

Open until 9 p.m.; there's a set lunch at midday.

JUGOS DÓNDE PILAR $

Juices, ice cream and desserts · Main street, San Rafael neighborhood (El Valle)

★ **5.0** · 54 reviews on Google Maps

The place to taste Pacific fruit: juices and ice cream made with borojó or sour guava, coconut sweets and homemade cakes.

What diners love: People call it the best borojó juice they've ever had, and rave about the coconut sweets, the envueltos (sweet corn wraps), the chocolate cake and how kind Pilar is.

Order: Borojó juice or ice cream

It's diagonally across from the police station.

EL MANGLAR, ASADERO Y TIENDA DE ARTESANÍAS $

Rotisserie chicken and home cooking · Road to El Almejal, just past the bridge (El Valle)

★ **4.8** · 42 reviews on Google Maps

Open from breakfast through dinner, which is rare in El Valle, with a crafts shop that also sells viche, the local sugarcane spirit.

What diners love: Diners single out the rotisserie chicken, burgers and tamales, the good seasoning, the prices and the owner's warm welcome.

Order: Rotisserie chicken

Open until 10 p.m., handy when everything else has closed.

RESTAURANTE DEL ECOLODGE EL ALMEJAL $$

Pacific cooking · El Almejal beach (El Valle)

★ **4.6** · 287 reviews on Google Maps

The ecolodge has been running on the beach since 1982 and is the base for many whale and turtle trips. Its dining room is the most complete option on this beach.

What diners love: Reviews highlight the food, attentive service and the setting between rainforest and sea.

Order: Catch of the day

If you're not staying there, message ahead to ask whether they serve outside guests.

LA MAREA $$

Seafood · Ciudad Mutis (Bahía Solano)

★ **4.5** · 30 reviews on Google Maps

One of the best-rated seafood spots in town, open late and with a cocktail menu.

What diners love: People like the seafood stew, the tuna dishes, the margaritas and the atmosphere. Several warn of long waits.

Order: Seafood stew (cazuela de mariscos)

Open until 11:30 p.m.; don't go in a hurry.

Ratings and review counts checked in October 2026; they change over time. Review summaries are our own. Hours and prices vary, so check before you go.

LOCAL FLAVORS

WHAT TO EAT

PESCADO ENCOCADO

Catch of the day simmered in coconut milk. It's one of the signature flavors of Pacific cooking.

BOROJÓ JUICE

A thick, tart fruit native to Chocó, served as juice, blended with milk or as ice cream. Try it in El Valle.

ARROZ DE PIANGUA

Rice with piangua, a small clam gathered in the mangroves. You'll also find it in empanadas.

TAMAL CHOCOANO

The Chocó take on the tamal, one of the region's classic dishes. Look for it at home-style breakfasts.



BOKANA
TRAVEL

PICTURE YOURSELF IN BAHÍA SOLANO? LET'S PLAN IT TOGETHER.

Join one of our groups on your own, or bring your people on a private trip.
Scan the code or message us.

Chat with us on WhatsApp

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SOURCES

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Google Maps (fichas consultadas el 4 oct 2026)
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