



TRIÁNGULO DEL CAFÉ: Preserving the coffee cultural landscape of central Colombia

TRIÁNGULO DEL CAFÉ: background and issues

Central Colombia, an area whose cultural identity is interwoven with a century old tradition of coffee growing and production, is facing a new threat of destabilization because of the decline of yields due to climate change and lower global prices. Many experts have stated that because of the finicky nature of the coffee plant, Colombia might have already reached its “Peak” in crop yields and coffee supply may never rebound. Many century old coffee plantations have found another source of income to deal with the economic and environmental vulnerabilities of coffee farms: tourism.

Overcoming the Fear, Colombia as a tourism destination

Portrayal of Colombia in popular culture, especially in film and in fiction, has made the country synonymous with civil conflict, cocaine trafficking, Marxist guerillas, kidnappings, and terrorism. But, Colombia is a country that today is still little understood and offers more cultural and geographic diversity than any other country in South America. Despite its relatively small size, Colombia is estimated to have approximately 46 million inhabitants, and is the second most biologically diverse country on Earth, home to about 10 percent of the world’s species. The rich biodiversity is a result from Colombia’s various ecosystems, ranging from lush tropical rainforests to open savannas.

Although real safety hazards still exist in Colombia, former President Alvaro Uribe’s “democratic security” strategy pushed rebel groups back away from major cities, highways and tourist sites. Colombia is not just for the brave traveler anymore. Security conditions have improved dramatically, spurring domestic and international travel throughout the country. Colombia received 1.4 million foreign visitors in 2010, according to official statistics, and continued investment in the tourism sector assures this trend is on the rise.

Triángulo del Café

Tucked away into the mountains of central Colombia, the Colombian Coffee-Growers Axis (Eje Cafetero), also known as the Triángulo del Café (Coffee Triangle) is a region famous for growing and producing the majority of Colombian Coffee, considered to be some of the best coffee in the world. The cultivation, processing, and trading of coffee has grown into a 100-year tradition, symbolic of the national culture and earning recognition worldwide. Colombia has become the 2nd biggest coffee producer, behind Brazil, and the largest producer of the Arabica bean, considered to be the highest quality bean.

The deeply rooted coffee tradition has left a unique legacy defining the regional culture, with unique and rich manifestations of music, food, architecture, and education. The farming region expands to six farming landscapes, 18 urban centers, 47 municipalities, and 3 major Colombian cities in the departments of Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindio. Of the 500,000 Colombian coffee growing farms,

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95% are made up of rural families that own less than 12 acres of coffee plantation on very challenging landscapes. The typical farm is located on steep mountains with slopes over 55 degrees, “which articulate the form and the design of the coffee landscape, its architectural typology, and the lifestyle of its communities; thus, its authenticity.”

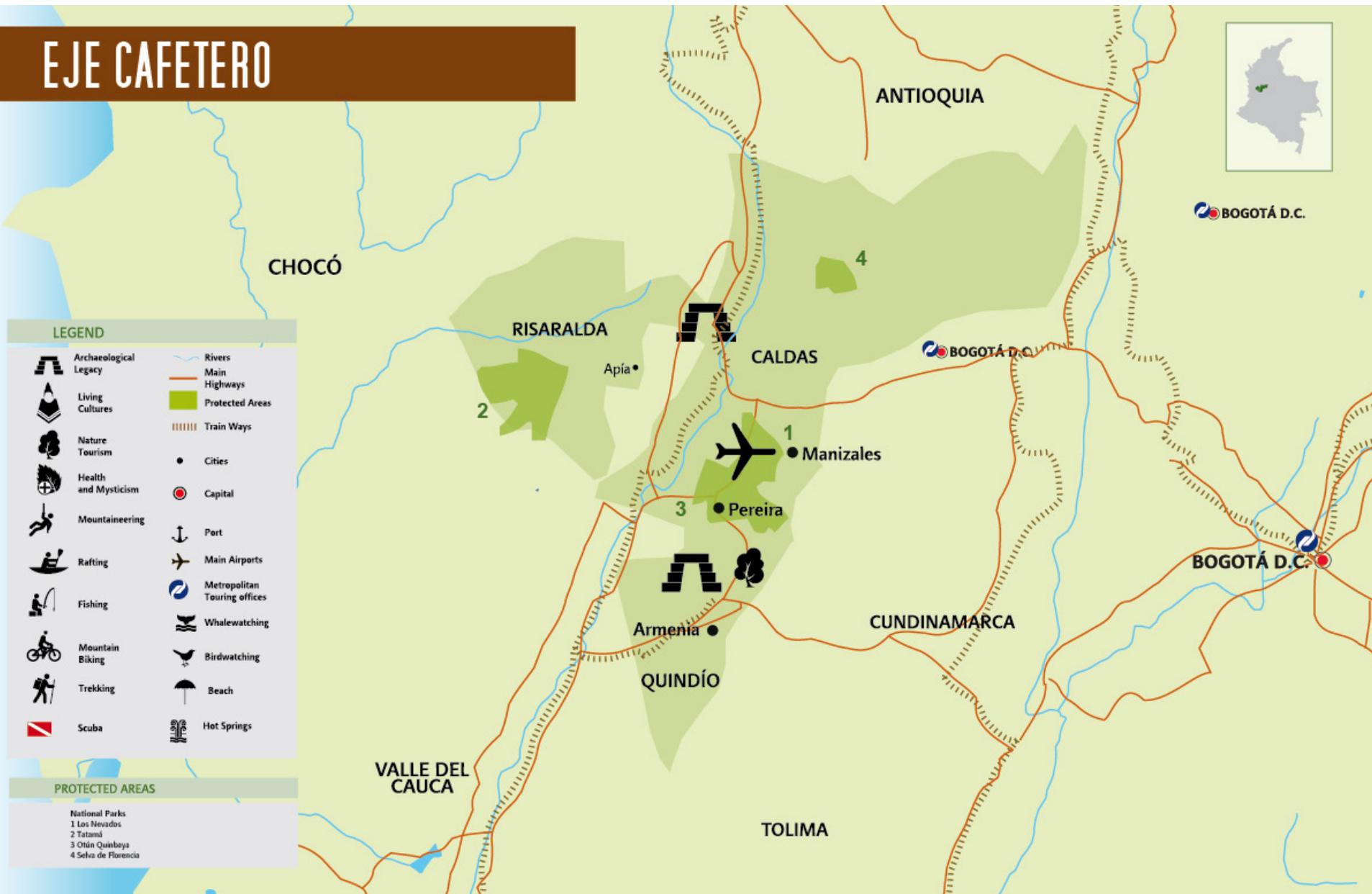
The typical small plots of land and production system organized into small community cooperatives has shaped the way of life for the Cafeteros, defining the legacies, heritage and traditions passed down from generation to generation. The typical architecture in the urban settlements is a mixture of Spanish colonial and regional adaptations, as well as the coffee growing process with their slanted roofs. In rural settlements, the Hacienda house is both the dwelling unit and the center of economic activity on the farm. The interconnection of the social, cultural, and the productive landscape results in an unparalleled homogeneous cultural identity unequaled by any other coffee-producing region in the world.

However, the fragmentation of land ownership, lower education level present in the agricultural community, and current state of the economy make the small Cafeteros vulnerable to changes in their environment. Regional climate change associated with global warming has caused Coffee production to decline since 2006 from 12 million 132-pound bags to 9 million bags in 2010. Average temperatures have increased one degree Celsius, disrupting the specific climatic requirements of the Arabica. Changes in climate coupled with dropping coffee prices have raised an urgent concern that a prolonged crisis could seriously threaten a number of rural areas and possibly cause farmers to turn to coca to earn enough money to support their families – as did many rural farmers who turned to coca following the price crisis of the 1990’s.

In order to deal with these vulnerabilities in the 90’s, some of the more affluent farmers started opening up their hacienda homes to tourists. Turning to tourism as means to generate income, the haciendas that operated as small Bed and Breakfast Inns grew to become vibrant vacation destinations for Colombia’s middle class. Although little information is available on the total number and quality of the region’s Coffee Plantation B&B’s, only the 20 best make up the “Haciendas del Café”: the coffee plantations marketed to international visitors by the Triángulo Del Café tourism organization.

Furthermore, in an effort to increase tourism in the area, the Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers is trying to attract international visitors by changing the local food culture in restaurants by adding “international flavors” and with the addition of a “Disney style” theme park that has no relevance to the coffee producing region. The Triángulo del Café is in danger of losing its authenticity, and the very qualities that spurred the original growth in tourism to the region.

EJE CAFETERO



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | Archaeological Legacy | | Rivers |
| | Living Cultures | | Main Highways |
| | Nature Tourism | | Protected Areas |
| | Health and Mysticism | | Train Ways |
| | Mountaineering | | Cities |
| | Rafting | | Capital |
| | Fishing | | Port |
| | Mountain Biking | | Main Airports |
| | Trekking | | Metropolitan Touring offices |
| | Scuba | | Whalewatching |
| | | | Birdwatching |
| | | | Beach |
| | | | Hot Springs |

PROTECTED AREAS

- National Parks
 1 Los Nevados
 2 Tatamá
 3 Otún Quimbaya
 4 Selva de Florencia

TRIÁNGULO DEL CAFÉ: project proposal

Hacienda tourism has only been a luxury for the most affluent farmers, with enough resources and adequate water supply to run a successful operation. Although Colombia is the fourth country in the world by magnitude of total freshwater supply, adequate water supply for many of these rural communities has become a strong barrier to entry into the tourism market. The rural population, which accounts for about 23% of the national total, has the lowest coverage rates, with only 71% having access to safe water and 54% to adequate sanitation.

I am particularly interested in researching the Hacienda B&B model in the Triángulo del Café, and how it can become an important part of the fabric of the community: providing an authentic experience while spurring economic growth and generating income for these rural communities. Incorporating sustainable water strategies into the B&B development model, specifically rainwater harvesting, will lower some of the barriers to entry so that Haciendas can provide adequate water supply and alleviate storm water runoff hazards in this high mountainous region.

I will focus my research on developing three case studies over the course of two trips to Manizales, Colombia where I will stay with family. The first case study will coordinate with the first trip in the Summer of 2012, and I will focus on the Hacienda Venetia in Manizales, Colombia. This Hacienda B&B is a successful example of how a coffee farm can expand into the hospitality industry without losing its cultural authenticity. The typical architecture of the Hacienda will allow me to study the Passive Design and regional architectural adaptations that minimize energy use. I will research the social, cultural, and economic effects the Hacienda B&B and regional tourism has had on the farm and the family. Furthermore, I will research the ability of the farm and the B&B to incorporate sustainable water strategies, including rainwater harvesting techniques and water runoff collection from the coffee production process, and how that grey water can be re-used in their business. These sustainable water strategies will not only allow the inhabitants of the Hacienda to have further ownership and control of their water rights and responsibilities, but it can allow them to control costs and expand their revenue-generating operations while promoting resource conservation and protection of their watershed.

With the lessons and strategies developed from the Hotel Venetia Case Study, I will do another Case Study for the Fernanda Family Farm in Quindio, Colombia, who does not have a B&B operation on the farm or main water supply to the house. The family has to travel through the forest to the “toma de agua” to bring back potable water to the house. By applying the same sustainable water strategies, rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling, I will research how the farm can expand their operations and convert their Hacienda House into a B&B to generate additional income for the Fernanda Family.

A third case study will be finalized and presented to a cooperative made of a couple of smaller farms, the Cooperativo de Cafiquiltores de Antioquia, during my second trip. Using the Hacienda model, the community made up of the small farms can increase tourism revenue by operating a small hotel or B&B in their own town center, providing the eco-traveler the opportunity to experience the beauty of the rolling hills, and venerable coffee farms and businesses available in the community center. Finally, during my second trip, I hope to present my findings to individual families and Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers - an organization that has funded 180 clinics, 6,000 schools, and provided 200,000 rural homes with electricity in the Triángulo del Café - in an effort to help fund the expansion or conversion of the Hacienda into B&B's.



Finca Cafetera - Familia Fernanda



Hotel Venetia - Manizales, Colombia



Finca Cafetera - Familia Fernanda

TRIÁNGULO DEL CAFÉ: budget

Lodging	N/A
Airfare - Summer 2012	\$1,200
Airfare - Summer 2013	\$1,200
Food & Personal Expenses during both trips	\$1,100
Travel in Manizales (taxis/bus)	\$700
Hacienda Accommodations (5-night stay)	\$600
Supplies & Equipment/Overhead	\$200
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TOTAL	\$5000



Finca Cafetera - Familia Garzon

Crop yield on the Garzon family farm has dropped 70% in the past five years due to rising temperatures and unpredictable rains.

TRIÁNGULO DEL CAFÉ: sources

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