

## Colombia: Cartagena, Historic Fortress City

### Organization of American States and Pan-American Development Foundation

Cartagena, Colombia, one of three important modern ports of that country, is historically one of the most interesting and exciting cities in the Western Hemisphere. The excellent harbor is protected by islands and promontories. Pedro de Heredia founded the city in 1533 and it soon became one of the most important cities on the Spanish Main. To it the Spaniards brought the rich treasures of the interior for shipment to Spain. The city became a rich prize to be attacked again and again by pirates and buccaneers. To withstand these attacks the Spaniards constructed walls enclosing the city and some of the most imposing fortresses found anywhere in the New World.

### Image Descriptions:

The tower of the Cathedral seen from Plaza Bolivar. The Cathedral is one of the oldest in the New World. It was begun in 1538 and completed in 1586. The elaborate tower is in sharp contrast to the simplicity of the main part of the building. Note the combination of sculpture, painted walls, and the definitely Moorish dome of tower. The interior treatment of the Cathedral shows the same elaborateness as the tower.

The house of the Marquis Devaldehojos. This view of the interior, just inside the 17<sup>th</sup> century doorway, shows the balcony of the second floor and the old slave bench in the entrance hall. Note the heavy door and the iron-studded treatment in the decorative design. The large knocker is still used.

Surrounding the old city is the great outer wall with steps ascending at intervals and doorways leading into passages inside and beneath the wall.

Scene of Cartagena

The approach to San Felipe shows these great stones which were used in the foundation. These were moved by slave labor brought to Cartagena to build the fortifications. It is said that the greatest European engineers of the time directed the construction.

Looking out from the top of San Felipe fortress through one of the cannon openings in the walls, note the old canon rustling in Cartagena's humid climate. Below lies the harbor where pirate ships repeatedly attacked the rich city. It is from these great fortresses that cannon fire was poured upon the ships as they tried to take the harbor. Thousands of men, including many North American colonists, lost their lives in these attacks. Lawrence Washington, half-brother of George Washington, participated in one of the last attacks on Cartagena, that by the British under Admiral Vernon. With him were many other Virginians. Mt. Vernon was named for the Admiral.

Another of the historic buildings in Cartagena is the Church of La Santa Cruz, located on La Popa, the highest hill in the vicinity of the city. This church served as a landmark for sailors on the high seas for many years. Because of its height it was also an important observation point for spotting invading forces. Today the church has been restored by the government and is one of the famous sights of the city. Every February it is the scene of the great fiesta of Candelas. As a part of this fiesta thousands of men, women, and children carry lighted candles up the hill to the church.

This detail of part of the Church of La Santa Cruz shows the reconstruction. The convent is to the left and part of the church can be seen beyond it. Today La Popa still serves as an observation point. Ships coming into the harbor are sighted by a lookout at this point who telephones in the news of its approach.

The entrance to Cartagena Bay is a narrow passageway called Boca Chica, which means 'Little Mouth.' On each side of this opening are massive fortifications. In the picture, an ocean liner is passing through the passageway. Notice the fortifications on either side. A chain used to be stretched between these two forts at night to prevent pirates from making surprise attacks under cover of darkness. The fortress on the right – the larger of the two – is the famous San Fernando. Note its tower projecting above.

The fortification of San Fernando built on the tip of the island which forms one side of the opening into Cartagena Bay. Notice the sentry towers and the openings in the wall through which cannon were fired. A lighthouse has been built on the wall.

This is the wall of San Fernando as seen from the tower. Note the stone masonry, the lookout towers, the thickness of the walls, and the width of the top of the wall.

Surrounding the vital part of the fort is the moat which protected it from land attack. Thousands of bats now fly out from the openings where cannons once fired. Note the slope of the walls and the opening for cannon on the top of the wall at the far end.

Today the city is a port for the great oil fields of the interior of Colombia. This view shows the pipe lines extending down the pier where tankers are loading.

The ancient walled city is also serving today as an important naval base. Warships ride at anchor in the harbor.

Sentries again stand watch at Cartagena.