



FEBRUARY 2022 | VOL. 21

TOUR UPDATE



The Newsletter of mikesworldtour

Tour Highlight:

February 2022
Villa de Leyva, Colombia



Small Town, Big Square

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A QUICK HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, & SOCIAL OVERVIEW

Founded in 1572 with the official name Villa de Santa María de Leyva, this town is in the network of official heritage towns in Colombia due to its colonial architecture that is still intact. It has become a very key tourist point for the country, and is on a tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sights. The Spanish had created the city, so that its soldiers could settle here and obtain land. The main goal was to solve unemployment and create a food pantry for the larger surrounding towns. The square here is so big because there were some military exercises that were practiced in the main square. Consequently, there was a lot of conflict because indigenous people were already living here cultivating land for their survival. The Spanish moved the original town a little south in 1582 to comply with the Law of the Indies.

Villa de Leyva



Some quick tips for Villa de Leyva :

- Nothing in the city is more than a 10 minute walk so no need for ubers or taxis (there really aren't any here)
- Wear sunscreen outside, the sun is super strong and you will get burnt (prior experience :(
- The drive from Bogotá here is about 3.5 hours depending on traffic

EXPERIENCES

Having being founded in 1572, its location away from trade routes has preserved many of the colonial architecture in the city. Walking through here feels like you are taken back in time (sorry for the cliché but it's true) with various activities and good food throughout the city.

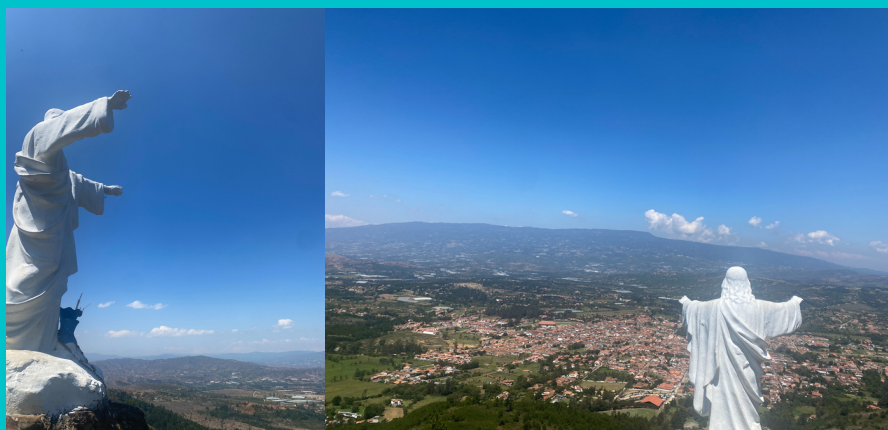
PLAZA DE MERCADO



Every Saturday a live local market with locally produced food and drinks opens up in the city. I was lucky enough to be here on Saturday and will cover what I ate in the food section. Here you can find fresh produce and coffee. The city is attempting to improve the location the market is in which has led to controversy because the merchants say the temporary relocation place is not sufficient to set up the market. The market square has been used by merchants for the last 50 years and represents the town's culture.

MIRADOR EL SANTO

After about a 45ish minute hike (depending on your abilities I'd say expect 30-1.15 hours) you can reach the mirador with expansive views of the entire city. The position of the saint is intended to be watching over the entire city. The hike is fairly easy with a steep rock incline at the end that may provide a challenge. The hike is totally worth it with beautiful sites of the city that you can spend hours just sitting there looking over the landscape.



Villa de Leyva, Colombia

ATVS



Villa de Leyva offers many adventure activities such as horseback riding and ATVs. We rode ATVs (called cuatrimotos in Spanish) and obviously from the picture I elected not to drive (*laughing face emoji). It is a really easy process where the companies pick you up from the city center and you drive around 15 minutes to their site, and then get to ride the ATVs for about an hour. There are many different companies throughout the city, so I'd recommend you do your research to get the best price (ours costed \$62,000 pesos = ~15 USD).

CHOCOLATE MUSEUM

Entrance to the museum is free with a purchase in the store. To be honest the museum was underwhelming, there was no real information on the how the chocolate was made, and you can't really see the process of how they make it. The good part about the museum is that I had bought chocolate bars to get in that were actually really good! The museum was established by La Chokolateria of Villa de Leyva. There is also a restaurant that is connected which we did hear good things about with great aesthetics.



PLAZA MAYOR



At over 14,000 meters squared in area, this plaza is one of the largest in all of Latin America. Pretty impressive for a town with a population of less than 17,000. Like most plazas in Latin America, there is a church on one of the sides of the plaza that was built in the 17th century. The house where the first conference of the provinces of New Granada was held is located in the plaza. There are various restaurants and stores throughout the plaza. When I was here there was an astronomy event going on (see tents in pictures) allowing visitors to outstanding view of the sky and stars at night through a telescope.

Villa de Leyva, Colombia

WANDER THE STREETS

I do not usually recommend wandering streets aimlessly because that is such a waste of time while you're traveling. Villa de Leyva is an exception though. The colonial architecture is so intact throughout the city that just walking through the streets and looking in the stores was so cool. Since the city is not super big it is really easy to walk throughout the whole city within a day. I really enjoyed just looking at the various architecture throughout the streets on a bright sunny day. Total vibes am I right!?!?



FOOD

MUTE (CORN SOUP)



Right in the plaza de mercado you can try a wide range of local dishes. I went for the mute which is a soup with corn served with chicken. You are probably thinking that looks nothing like the corn I am used to. That is because they use locally grown corn here for the soup which is a lot bigger than normal. This hearty dish really filled me up before the hike and was really delicious. I had it for breakfast, but it is offered for other meals as well.

A traditional dessert that has Spanish and French origins, the milhoja was absolutely delicious. It has dulce de leche on top and then "bread" which I am putting in quotes because in Villa de Leyva it is very thin that its not really bread. Inside is also a sweet cream feeling that was so so good. If you have a sweet tooth like me this is a perfect dish for you to try when you are here.

MILHOJA



I do not have a picture (sadly) but at this restaurant called Happy Monkey in Villa de Leyva I had a mushroom and chicken lasagna that had plantains too. It sounds like a weird combo, but the sweetness of the plantain with the heartiness of the lasagna was actually so delicious. I highly highly recommend you try it if you are ever here.

See You On the Next Stop on the Tour!