

# BIOGRAPHY™

## A Magical Trip to the Homeland of Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The recent passing of Colombia's only Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez inspired us to explore the beauty, mystery, and sheer implausibility of his native country and its influence on his celebrated writings. Take a look at Marquez's larger-than-life Colombia with travel tips to make a magical trip there yourself.

**KAREN CATCHPOLE • APR 23, 2014**

"The truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality," author Gabriel Garcia Marquez once told *The Paris Review*. "The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination."

Garcia Marquez was able to harness that complicated reality and use it as inspiration as he perfected a Latin form of fiction dubbed "magical realism." His most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967, has sold more than 30 million copies worldwide in dozens of languages. Other celebrated works include *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), and *The General in His Labyrinth* (1990).

Garcia Marquez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, though good old-fashioned reporting is where it all started. In 1955 he produced a 14-part newspaper series about a shipwrecked Colombian sailor who ultimately accused his country's navy of negligence. That reporting got him noticed by editors and by the government and political pressure ultimately inspired Garcia Marquez to move to safer ground in Europe. That series of articles was turned into a non-fiction book called *The Shipwrecked Sailor* in 1970. Garcia Marquez's *News of a Kidnapping*, about Colombian narco terrorist [Pablo Escobar](#), was published in 1996 just a few years after Escobar's death.

But it is fantastical fiction that Garcia Marquez, often simply called Gabo, remains most known for following his death on April 17, 2014 at the age of 87. Here's how to visit Colombia and experience your own magical realism.

### Cartagena: Setting for Life & Literature

Though Garcia Marquez spent most of the past few decades living in Mexico City (he died at his home there), he also had a large persimmon-colored house built in the 1990s, in the center of Cartagena. The enclosed complex looks out onto the Caribbean just beyond massive stone walls built by the Spanish in the 16th century to keep pirates away from the gold they hoarded in the city.

Many of the author's most famous works, including *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *The General in His Labyrinth*, and *Love and Other Demons*, were set in this UNESCO World Heritage Site city where simply wandering through the meticulously restored streets past pristine colonial buildings is inspiring. Those who want to get a bit more Gabo can book the self-guided [Gabo's Cartagena audio walking tour](#) (\$32 includes an audio guide in five languages, including English, and a printed route map).

True Garcia Marquez fans will want to take part in the three-hour guided [Route of Garcia Marquez tour](#) which takes in 37 sites in historic central Cartagena, all of which are directly linked to scenes and characters from the author's work and life (\$145 for one person, \$20 per person after that; participants must have read the books mentioned above).

**Insider Tip:** In 2007 *Love in the Time of Cholera* was made into a movie starring [Javier Bardem](#). It was partially shot in Cartagena and you can now sleep in the bed Bardem used during filming by booking the main suite of apartment 201 at [Casa Pombo](#), an elegantly restored boutique hotel in a building which dates back to 1585.

## Aracataca: Birthplace & Muse

Welcome to Macondo. Anyone who's read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* will recognize hot, dusty, implausible Aracataca as the model for the main setting in one of Garcia Marquez's most widely read books. Garcia Marquez was born in Aracataca in 1927 and spent his early childhood there with his grandparents. The town is also referenced in his novella *Leaf Storm*.

"I feel Latin American from whatever country, but I have never renounced the nostalgia of my homeland: Aracataca, to which I returned one day and discovered that between reality and nostalgia was the raw material for my work," reads a quote from the author that's reprinted on a huge hand-painted mural on the edge of town.

In Aracataca you can tour the simple and charming Caribbean style home where Garcia Marquez was born and lived with his grandparents, Gabo's school, and the church where he was baptized. Sights linked directly to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* include the renovated train station and the statue of Remedios the Beauty, which immortalizes the character from the book who was so beautiful that she ascended into heaven.

In 2006 residents of Aracataca voted down a referendum to change the town's name to Aracataca-Macondo. However, love for their most famous native son remains strong. While Colombia declared three days of national mourning following the author's passing in 2014, Aracataca observed five days. Local officials are currently negotiating for the right to inter some of the author's ashes in Aracataca.

**Insider Tip:** Tim Buendia, a Dutch expat who moved to Aracataca and legally changed his last name to Buendia after the family portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is now guiding [The Legend of Gabriel Garcia Marquez tour](#) throughout northern Colombia. Two week itineraries (which can be customized) start and end in Cartagena and include relevant sights in that city before traveling on to Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Tayrona National Park, the Guajira region, Palomino, Minca, Aracataca, and back to Cartagena (\$2,850 per person including 4-5 star accommodation, guide, ground transportation and most meals).

## Mompox: Life on the River

Time seems to have stopped in Mompox (sometimes spelled Mompos), which exists in a pleasant stasis that leaves the visitor with nothing to do but notice the mysterious details of this riverside town. The warm breeze off the wide and ambling Magdalena River stirs up dust devils. Donkeys tread where cars should be. Bats head out on secretly urgent nighttime missions.

"Garcia Marquez's wife was from nearby Magangué and she went to high school in Mompox," says Richard McColl, owner of [La Casa Amarilla](#) and a terrific source of local history. "Since the couple met while young we can assume that a young Gabo spent a good deal of time here."

Garcia Marquez certainly traveled on the Magdalena River as a boy, an experience he describes in his memoir *Living to Tell the Tale*. The town also provided inspiration and settings for *The General in His Labyrinth*, a re-imagining of Latin American revolutionary hero [Simon Bolívar](#) who was a frequent visitor to Mompox. Though his novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was not set in Mompox, the movie version, starring [Rupert Everett](#), was shot in Mompox in 1987.

**Insider Tip:** Book a room at beautifully restored [Portal de la Marquesa](#), a riverside hotel that opened in 2013 in a historic building which served as a stopover for Bolívar.

Garcia Marquez's relationship with Colombia went both ways. In 2012 Colombia adopted "magical realism" as one of the country's official tourism slogans.

