

Colombie : Chapeaux melons et jupes de laine Quito, 8th of August

More than one month ago, we left the northern hemisphere to “the other side”. You probably wonder what we’re thinking about that. Well, to have the head up-

ful colonial city with bright colors, formerly gate of entry of the Spaniards and their black slaves, gate of exit of thousands of pounds of gold extracted from the

stations in the streets of Cartagena brought with them the army: the city center was one of the most secure places in the whole country. David took advan-



Promenade à dos de Chiva

side down can be sometimes very pleasant: what we appreciate more than anything is to be able to see the tip of our feet and to enjoy their adhesiveness. !

Our last newsletter dates back to May, and our adventures being rather intense, we did not find time to share our discovery of Colombia with you. Everything started in Cartagena, beauti-

New World to enrich Europe which will never be grateful to it. WE arrived little time before the presidential elections on the 28th of May, so we spent a pleasant forty in this city, as people all advised us not to travel in so unstable times. However, we did not shut ourselves in our hotel room the D-day, as some recommended it. On the contrary, the polling

tage of the situation to walk in the streets with his camera around his neck without fearing to be attacked by one of the numerous robbers of the city. Finally, these elections 2006 were the quieter of the Colombian history. The results did not surprise anybody: reelection of Uribe with 62% of the voices: a success higher than that of 2002! It

almost made him forget the 55% rate of abstention. The security policy of Uribe since the beginning of his first mandate has apparently changed the face of the country. We have to say that it's partly right since we experienced it, at least on the major roads and main cities. Finally,

Brazil, we decided to take the risk to cross Colombia in direction of Ecuador. To start this trip, we joined an astonishing French family: Bénédicte, Charles and their 3 years old and 10 months old children travel by RV from Mexico to Argentina. In their big RV bought in the

fresh capital located at 2200 meters. We spent three days on the road with this nice family: we were first anxious to get troubles, but were finally amused to see how Colombian people were surprised to discover a real house within the RV. Even the militaries who controlled us so often could not believe it:

some tourists traveling in their RV! We suspected some of them to stop us just to be able to have a guided tour of the RV. After a quick and nice stay in Bogotá, where an exceptional collection of gold objects dating back to the pre-Colombian times is exposed, we kept on traveling towards the south, until Popayán, a small city formerly prosperous because it was located on the road of the gold conveyed from Peru to Cartagena. Popayán is the capital of the department of Cauca, where indigenous people and campesinos fight a lot for their rights.



Secret de Guambiano

we could not resist to the beautiful and huge Colombia. So, rather than running towards a far and Portuguese-speaking

United States 8 months ago, we left Cartagena to Bogotá, leaving behind us the suffocating climate of the tropics for the

First, we visited the members of the CRIC (Regional indigenous council of Cauca), a 30 years old organization which fights for the rights of the indigenous people of the area. From this organization was born the ONIC (National indigenous organization of Colombia) which defends the rights of the 82 indigenous tribes of Colombia which represent only 2% of the population of the country. Fifteen days before we visited the CRIC, a demonstration in the indigenous reserve of La Maria-Piendamó at one hour of Popayán had taken place. More than 18000 people, natives, campesinos and defenders of Human Rights gathered to protest against the signature of the TLC (Free Trade Treaty with the USA) and to claim



Enregistrement du témoignage d'un Guambiano à la Maria-Piendamó

their rights defined in the constitution of 1991. As the President Uribe refused to discuss with the demonstrators, they decided to occupy the Pan-American road, paralyzing the economy of the south of the country. The State reacted immediately, sending the tanks

Colombia by the paramilitaries and by the State itself since 2002? Do people know that tens of others indigenous, still alive, are persecuted and receive daily threats from which they cannot protect themselves? Do people know that the Colombian State, an “example

the CRIC. Not only Vicente is in this case: Antonio Kilinda, young gobernador, has already been the target of the State who attempted twice to murder him. He cannot sleep anymore in his house and do not see his children anymore to protect them.



Chapeaux Melon et jupes de laine

and the helicopters used for the Plan Colombia (Plan partly financed by the United States to fight the narco-traffic and the guerrilla) against the demonstrators who had no weapons. The buildings belonging to the Indigenous reserve were entirely ransacked and partly burned, and tens of people, women and children included were injured and a native boy assassinated. Fifteen days after this tragedy, the indigenous and campesinos from Cauca dared to meet again and invited us to join them to listen and record their testimonies. As foreign visitors, we can help to make the problems of the indigenous be known by the rest of the world. Who speaks about their cause outside Colombia? Do people know that more than 300 indigenous leaders were assassinated in Co-

of democracy”, kill those who dare to claim their rights? With our video camera, we recorded the testimony of Vicente Otero Chate, ex-mayor of Caldonio who played an important part in the consultation on the TLC (Free Trade Treaty): at the end of 2005, he was arrested while going to Ecuador and sent to jail without criminal charge. He was said to be a guerillero because the police had found weapons in the property of Vicente. His neighbors testify to have seen the police placing the weapons there before Vicente returned to his house. Thanks to national popular demonstrations and the work of the Human rights organizations, Vicente was released but remains in release on probation and still receives threats coming from the State according to him and

“Our lives are in danger because of the fights between the army and the guerrilla but if we protest, we are murdered!”. David and I also had to be careful. In each public meeting of the CRIC, people warned us, spies of the State and paramilitary are present. We had to be careful and could not reveal our names to anybody, even the journalists of the local television channels who would have liked to interview us to give a little exoticism to their report. They are not so many tourists in that remote place of Colombia!

Although partly hidden to the public, the armed struggle really exists. The CRIC has tens of hours of videotape showing the confrontations between the army and the guerrilla in Cauca, taking civil people between

their fires and destroying the little that those poor populations have. Silvia, small city located at 60 kilometers of Popayán, is the center of the Guambiano activity. Next to the town starts the land of the

spent all that time in Cauca to help the guerilla: they were sent to jail for a few more months! David and I had the unpleasant experience of being controlled by the army whereas we were shooting land-

stay a little more in the town and tried to learn more about the Guambiano culture on the spot. We met Segundo, a taita or guambiano spiritual leader. To save his culture and the knowledge and wisdom of his



Le Ying et le Yang : Anna Julia et moi

“What’s the weather like in France?”,
“Can you dance salsa?”

Guambianos called Guambia. To be able to enter this land, we had to address ourselves to the gobernador, highest authority of the Cabildo de Guambia, to ask him the authorization to travel inside the land of his people. Unfortunately, he refused to let us go, giving us rather vague explanations: However, we understood that we would have taken a risk while entering in Guambia, especially with a video camera : we could be seen as spies by the guerrilla who hides in the mountains, or as guerilleros by the army who patrols and try to control the area. Five years ago, some German tourists were kidnapped by the guerrilla. They were released a few years later but, instead of going back home, they were accused by the army to be guerilleros and to have

scapes around Silvia. Some soldiers in duty thought we were filming them so they arrested us. Their behavior gave us the feeling that we were guilty before even being suspect. They questioned us and searched us and later obliged us to show them what we had shot. Fortunately, we only had with us shots of landscapes, and not the compromising declarations of several indigenous leaders. When the militaries realized we were only “poor tourists” in their region, they started to be much friendlier and asked us all kind of silly questions: “What’s the weather like in France?”, “Can you dance salsa?” “What’s a déjà vu?!”

As we could not leave Silvia to Guambia and more remote places, we decided to

ancestors, he created a natural healing center with a group of native women. We then met the 6 dynamic women whose convictions are inalterable. According to them, Western medicine is not the solution to the current diseases as while eliminating a disease, it creates another one in the body. They are against vaccinations, multicolored pills and antibiotics and cultivate their own medicinal plants from which they make syrups, extracts, ointments and offer to all those who need it free consultations with a Guambiano traditional healer. In their garden, at the laboratory or in the kitchen, they never give up their bowler hat, their wool skirt and their shawl. Their identity is in their clothing, their words, their language and their gesture. To be



Au chaud dans ma cuisine

indigenous today and to live ones culture in Colombia or elsewhere, one needs to fight. When will we understand that the survivors of the New World contribute to the ba-

lance of our planet? When will we realize that the death of Sons of the Earth will sign the death sentence to all of us? To all our Colombian and

Guambiano friends, gracias, ungua ungua.

Julie Baudin

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