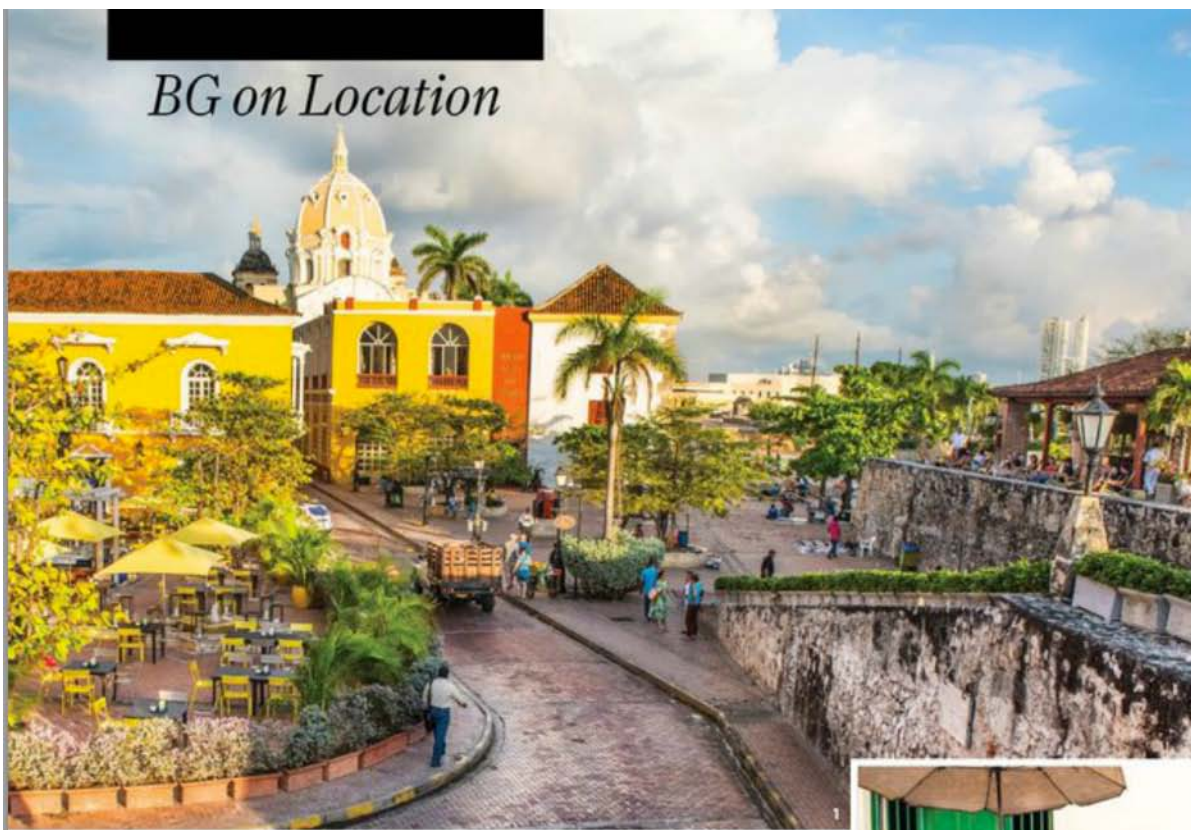


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BG on Location



1 Plaza Santa Teresa's brightly colored buildings and cobblestone streets. 2 The colonial boutique hotel Casa San Agustín. 3 Local produce vendors line the streets. 4 The Sofitel Santa Clara, originally a seventeenth-century convent.



CARTAGENA, Here We Come

ESCAPE TO THIS COLOMBIAN PARADISE WITH *Nausheen Shab's* GUIDE TO ITS MOST VIBRANT ATTRACTIONS.

It's the color that captures your attention first. Cartagena's washed-out yet striking facades coated in cerulean blues, Creamsicle oranges and citrus yellows and dashed with fiery fuchsia bougainvillea focus your gaze down the Old City's mazelike cobblestone streets. Next your eyes take in the captivating seventeenth-century colonial architecture of the fortified UNESCO World Heritage site, carving through the crystalline blue Colombian skies. Nearly every building's door is studded with a slithering aquatic knocker. It's almost as if you stepped into Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Then you turn a corner, stumble upon vibrant, ruffle-adorned Cartagenans, either peddling delectable pineapples or salsa-ing to the ringing notes of Latin-Caribbean beats. Then comes the inevitable question: "Why have I never been here before?"

Cartagena, named after its Iberian forebear, provides an enticing mix of culture, cuisine and climate. And as it is only a four-and-a-half-

hour direct flight from New York City, it's no wonder the port town has become a magnet for jet-setters—with its fresh-off-the-boat ceviche, luxuriously diverse accommodations and contagious salsa clubs. Jimmy Buffet said it best when he sang "I Want to Go Back to Cartagena," because once you arrive, it is a full-on Latin love affair.

Stay

The town's hotel scene has had a recent facelift, and by 2016, Sheraton, Four Seasons and Viceroy hotels will join an already fabulous list of places to stay. Originally a seventeenth-century convent, **SOFITEL SANTA CLARA** is arguably the pinnacle of the brand's hotels in the world. Its courtyard and seemingly infinite arches demand your attention, as does its SoSpa and Restaurante 1621 featuring a Fernando Botero sculpture.

Otherwise, opt for a boutique hotel such as **CASA SAN AGUSTIN**, a lush colonial spot with an equally seductive restaurant, Alma, or the



TCHERASSI HOTEL + SPA, whose white-clad, modern layout features fashion designer Silvia Tcherassi's clothing boutique. If sybaritic privacy is what you seek, reserve one of many opulent villas, such as **CASA DEL HOBO**. (Sofitel Santa Clara: Calle del Torno 39-29, 800 763 4835, sofitel.com; Casa San Agustín: Calle de la Universidad No. 36-44, 800 745 8883, botelcasasanagustin.com; Tcherassi Hotel + Spa: Calle Plaza Fernández de Madrid, Calle 38 # 6-21, 57 5 664 4445, tcherassihotels.com; Casa del Hobo: Calle Cocquera de Hobo No. 38-73, 57 310 631 2923)