



## 48 Hours in Salento: The Coffee Region's Picturesque Pueblo

Posted by Gwendolyn | Nov 28, 2017 | Pueblos, Rest of Colombia | 0 🗨️



Salento is a sleepy pueblo in Colombia's coffee region that is definitely worth visiting. Salento is a relatively small pueblo – it occupies just 12 calles by 10 carreras. And it's a place where horses trot down the street unmounted and roosters can be heard crowing in the morning.

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Like many [Colombian pueblos](#), the white-walled homes and shops in Salento have vibrantly painted doors and windows in eye-catching shades of cobalt, tangerine and turquoise.

The above photo is the Main Square in Salento where palm trees fill the central square in the sleepy Colombian pueblo.



Roosters and horses frequently roam the empty streets of Salento

Life centers around the main square, where the Our Lady of Carmen church is the main focal point on the northwest side. And where on the weekends, access is cordoned off to allow for food stalls, souvenir vendors and covered restaurants.

I grew up in a small town like this on the banks of the Missouri River back in the States and know all too well that not much ever happens in these places.

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Town folk have the time to stop and say hello to you and ask you where you are from. No one really minds if you walk down the middle of the street as there aren't that many cars anyway. And a minor event, like someone's dog going missing, will keep the whole town in conversation for several days. Maybe even weeks.

There isn't a lot to do here either. But that is kind of the point of visiting. Salento is nestled in the Central Cordillera of the Andean mountains. It's a place to come to reconnect with nature. Somewhere to take long hikes and indulge in lots of food.



Horses are a common sight in Salento, as are the 360 degree views of the Andean mountains

It is for all these reasons that Salento is the perfect destination for a bit of respite from the overwhelming population in Medellín (with about 4 million in the metro area) plus avoid the pollution of Medellín. But the journey isn't for the faint-hearted though. Allow for an 8.5-hour bus ride along windy mountainous roads. Each way. But the destination far makes up for the inconvenience.

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Should you decide to venture into this part of the coffee region, then don't leave without my guide to 48 hours in Salento:



Jesus Martin is a multi-level cafe that serves the best cup of coffee in Salento

## Day 1 in Salento

### 6.30AM – Coffee First

Every day needs to start with a decent cup of Colombian joe. For the best cuppa and ambience in town, head to Jesus Martin. This quirky multi-level cafe was so inviting that I didn't want to leave.

I might even prefer it over some of my favorite [Poblado independent coffee roasters](#). You can have brunch here too, but I would highly recommend venturing to my next location instead! (Carrera 6. Between Calle 6 and Calle 7.)

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The name says it all, Brunch is the only place in Salento to go to for a hearty breakfast

## 7:15 am – Breakfast at Brunch

[Brunch De Salento](#) is a compact diner just a few blocks from the main square. Owned by an Oregon native that has lived in Salento for over 6 years, this establishment has become one of the must go-to eateries in town, particularly for breakfast.

With good reason. The American influenced menu offers a dizzying array of choices. The portions are also American sized.

A unique twist in this establishment is that you can order anything off the menu at any time of the day. A backpacker at the table next to me choose to have a bowl of chili for breakfast. It was drizzling rain outside, so I could understand the decision.

I opted instead for the Midwest breakfast delicacy of biscuits and gravy. This dish consists of three soft – slightly sweet – dough biscuits covered in a pork sausage gravy. The gravy is white sauced

Unfurnished  
Apartments

Visas

based combining the drippings of the cooked pork sausage with a bit of white flour and milk and cooked until bubbly and thick.

If you haven't indulged in this Southern comfort food, then this is quite possibly the only place in Colombia to try it. It is not a dish I find often on restaurant menus outside of the U.S., so was delighted to see it included. For me, it wasn't quite like home – it never is! – but it was pretty darn close to being authentic.

If that is a stretch too far for your tastes, then consider the enormous breakfast burrito. The Australian couple sitting next to me wisely choose to share a portion.

Stuffed full of chorizo, cooked potatoes, scrambled eggs, mushrooms and oozing with cheese, it is the perfect choice to set you up for the day ahead. [Poblado brunch spots](#) eat your heart out – literally!. (Calle 6. Between Carrera 4 and 3).



The Cocora Valley near Salento is filled with Colombia's national tree, the wax palm

## **8:30 am – Hike the Cocora Valley**

Coming to Salento without hiking the Cocora Valley would be like going to Paris and not visiting the Eiffel Tower. You just have to do it.

What makes the Cocora Valley special are the hundreds of Quindío wax palms that sweep the landscape. The wax palm is the national tree of Colombia and this valley is their principal location. The six-hour hike winds through dense jungle forest before depositing you in an open valley dotted with these magnificent trees as far as the eye can see.

To get to the Cocora Valley you'll need to grab a seat in one of the many Willy jeeps that transport tourists the 7 miles (11km) out of town to the start of the trail. During the weekday, the jeeps depart from the main square. At the weekend, you'll need to join one of the jeep convoys leaving

from Calle 3, between Carrera 4 and Carrera 3.  
Cost is a mere 3,200 pesos each way per person.

The trail isn't very well marked and has a few obstacles. I'd recommend reading our detailed Cocora Valley hiking guide coming soon this weekend on this website – complete with information on what to bring and how to follow the trail – before you set out.



Trout is the local delicacy of Salento and this version in garlic cream sauce from Punto y Coma is the best

## 7:30 pm – Devour the Local Trout

The specialty dish of this region is trout, which is sourced from the local rivers. Most of the restaurants include trout in some guise on their menus.

Unusually, I hadn't researched the best restaurants in town before arrival, so I found myself wandering in and out of a few cafes trying to find somewhere suitable to eat. And I noticed three police officers standing guard outside the local station. I motioned to my friend – with the



better Spanish – to ask them if they had any recommendations.

One of the rather large constables pointed to Punto y Coma on the opposite corner of the square. My Finnish friend proceeded to ask, *'Is it a good place?'* The uniformed man poked his bulging belly and replied, *'I eat there every day!'*

As the way with small towns – and back to my point about not much ever happening in them – the friendly policeman kindly walked us to the restaurant in the drizzling rain to make sure we got to the right place.

Packed with locals and a sprinkling of foreigners, the food did not disappoint. We both ordered the *trucha al vapor ajillo* for 22,000 pesos. The pink like salmon fish arrived smothered in a garlic cream sauce and was served with a platter sized crunchy *patacone*. I think there as a small side salad too, but had no room for that! (Carrera 6. On the corner of Calle 5.)



Tejo is the national sport of Colombia and can be played at Los Amigos in Salento

## 9:30 pm – Try your Hand at Tejo

If you have any energy left, then head over to Los Amigos. At the back of this dive bar are seven tejo pits, where you can try your hand at Colombia's national sport. We previously looked at [playing Tejo](#) in Medellín.

If you haven't heard of Tejo yet, well it's pretty simple. You throw a two-pound metal object that looks like a squat cone with a flat top, towards white triangular tiles called wicks, which are filled with gunpowder. The object is to cause an explosion.

About the only other rule that I could find is that you must drink beer whilst playing.

I was never successful at creating a spark. However, the prevalent smell of gunpowder, which reminded me of exploding fireworks, and the occasional waft of grey smoke filling the room indicated that others were. (Carrera 4. Between Calle 4 and Calle 3.)



Le K'fée is a great little cafe for a coffee and light breakfast in the heart of Salento

## Day Two in Salento

### 8:30 am – Breakfast at Le K'fee

Le K'fee is a modern cafe off the main tourist area of Salento. The compact interior has a single cobalt suede effect bench lining one wall which is adorned with geometric patterned cushions. Opposite are two seater tables and wooden chairs whose seat backs and rods are painted in mis-matched shades of lemon, baby blue, black and bubble gum pink. The copper effect painted door is in the process of being covered with foreign coins.

Le K'fee is a cozy place to start your day with a cup of coffee. Also available are a wide selection of homemade cakes and pastries. There is also a limited brunch menu of granola, chia pudding, scones and homemade jam, which includes a fresh juice and hot drink for 15,000COP. (Corner of Calle 3 and Carrera 4).



Stop at the Cala Foto Studio in Salento to snap a picture in front of the town's iconic Willys Jeeps

## 10:00 am – Snap a Memory

Just off the main square is Cala Foto Studio. In the back of the shop, on a gravel courtyard, are two heavily decorated Willy Jeeps.

For a small fee, you and your companions can don a wide-brimmed sombrero and a poncho which are characteristically found on the older gentlemen of the town. Then have Carlos Eduardo Rodriguez snap a photo for you.

The Willy Jeeps are a common sight around town as they serve both as taxis for tourists and as essential farm vehicles. Apparently, many of these 4x4s were originally built for the US military, but found their way to Colombia after becoming surplus equipment at the end of the Korean War.

A quintessential picture of Salento. Definitely worth capturing. (Near the corner of Calle 6 and Carrera 6).



Carrera 6 is the main shopping street in Salento where you can find all of your souvenirs

## 10:30 am – Stroll Carrera 6

From Calle 5, start your stroll down Carrera 6. This buzzing street is considered the main shopping street in town and where you should head for any essential souvenirs.

A lot of the shops appeared to be selling jewelry, but you can also pick up a hammock, some coffee, a sombrero, and some original artwork too!



Hike up the mirador in Salento for great views of the city and surrounding mountains

## 11:00 am – Hike the Mirador

At the end of Carrera 6, you will find a series of stairs leading up the hill. Climb up and take in the views.

Sadly, it was raining most of the time I was in Salento, so I never actually made it up myself. But the waiter at Brunch informed me that there are two breathtaking viewpoints from the top. One that looks out over the town, and another that

takes in the view of the coffee farms in the distance. Maybe next time.



The Food Trucks in Salento is a great area to grab a quick alfresco snack

## **12:00 pm – Grab a Snack at the Food Trucks**

For a quick snack, head to the the elusive Food Trucks. This very trendy gravel courtyard is filled with a handful of street food vendors.

I tried some of the charcoal roasted pork belly. Also available were crepes, waffles, salads, arepas, and burritos. The al fresco picnic tables make it a great casual place to grab a quick bite before you head off to your afternoon adventure. (On Carrera 2. Between Calle 6 and 7).



Taking the premium coffee tour at Ocaso is an essential activity in Salento

## 2:00 pm – Coffee Tour

Venturing into the heart of Colombia's coffee region and not going on a coffee tour is about as sinful as coming to Salento and not hiking the Cocora Valley. There are several operators and tour types to choose from. I choose to go on the [Ocaso Premium Coffee Tour](#).

This immersive three-hour experience includes an in-depth explanation of the history of coffee in Colombia and how coffee goes from seed to your cup. Additionally, you get a chance to pick your own coffee beans from the farm.

The tour ends with an hour cupping experience, where you learn to distinguish different characteristic aromas of coffee and taste the difference in various preparation methods.

Our guide Arlez spoke impeccable English and was extremely knowledgeable. I thought I already knew a lot about coffee, but learned substantially more on this tour.



For great Indian food in Salento, head to La Eliana

## 7:00 pm – Dinner at La Eliana

If you are craving Indian food, then La Eliana is the restaurant to head to. You don't really expect to find decent Indian food in Colombia, much less in a small town like Salento, but La Eliana did not disappoint.

All the curries are made from scratch and are bursting with flavor. You can even choose your spiciness level. I chose a thai green chicken curry with rice. I also ordered the roasted eggplant dip, which was served with warm flatbread. Both tasted fresh and authentic. (Carrera 2. Between Calle 6 and Calle 7. Next door to the Food Trucks.)





Coffee Tree is a boutique hostel in Salento nestled on the quiet outskirts of town

## Where to Stay in Salento

[Airbnb](#) and [HostelWorld](#) are both great sites to peruse for accommodation in Salento. But if you are too lazy to research, then my recommendation would be [Coffee Tree Boutique Hostel](#).

Don't let the name put you off. While this establishment does have dorm rooms and caters mostly for backpackers, they also offer some exquisitely furnished private rooms too.

As goes with the name, the interior is very boutique. It's location on a stand-alone two-acre plot of land away from the main tourist streets, which means it is quieter and has better views than lots of options. Additionally, it includes a free breakfast of either eggs or pancakes, served with a fruit salad and banana.

The staff all speak English and are extremely helpful in helping you to arrange tours. And they can provide ideas for your stay in Salento. Oh, and did I mention they have a good selection of wine and cold beers for purchase that you can drink on the spacious veranda snuggled up in a fleece blanket? (Carrera 9, Calle 9-06)

## Bottom Line: Picturesque Salento

Whether by air or land, traveling to Salento is a highly recommended getaway from the big city bustle of Medellín.



Location of Salento

## How to Get to Salento

**By Bus** – Buses leave several hours a day from the South Bus Terminal in Medellín. [Flota Occidental](#) operates the service. Cost is 45,000 pesos one-way.

Both buses I took had many amenities to make for a comfortable ride. The return bus even had a toilet and seat back TV screens showing 15 movies in English and dozens more in Spanish. The service is scheduled to take 6.5 hours. However, due to recent rains and mudslides causing one-way roads, our journey was 8.5 hours.

**By Plane** – Whilst I enjoyed the mountain views on my bus drive, you may want to consider flying from Medellín to Armenia and then taking a bus from there. With [cheap flights](#) often available

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from the [Medellín airport](#), this option will not only save you a couple of hours, but would be a little more pleasant too.

**By Car** – I assume the car journey is the same as the bus. If so, expect a slow and arduous journey!!!

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### Gwendolyn

A native of Glasgow, Missouri, USA, Gwendolyn has lived most of her adult life abroad including long stints in London, England and Daegu, South Korea. In 2014, she left a successful career in investment banking to pursue her passion for travel. Her search for a more location independent career has led her to teaching English online to Chinese kids. In her spare time, she keeps a blog entitled 'Memories Not Material Things' that provides practical advice

to other over 40 adventurers thinking of embarking into the digital nomad world. Follow Gwendolyn on [Facebook](#) or read her blog [here](#).

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