

STORIES FROM THE HEART OF COLOMBIA

Archipiélago de San
Andrés, Providencia
y Santa Catalina

Stories from the Heart of Colombia A podcast by Procolombia

Editorial committee

María José Silva
Julia Correa Vásquez
Paola Méndez Rodríguez

Editorial direction

Andrés Barragán Montaña

Graphic design

Mateo L. Zúñiga
Andrés Álvarez Franco
Cristine Villamil Ramírez

Illustration

Andrea Santana Quiñones
Diana Londoño Aguilera

Edition

John Güecha Hernández
Alexander Klein Ochoa
Juan Micán González
Leonardo Realpe Bolaños
Nicolás Sepúlveda Perdomo

Original Locution

Nick Perkins

Original photos

Photos 1, 2 y 6: Nick Perkins

Photo 3: mochilaosabatico (Photographer). *Diving at Caribbean sea, at San Andres Island.* [imagen digital]. Extradited from <https://www.shutterstock.com/es/image-photo/diving-caribbean-sea-san-andres-island-1177987789>

Photo 4: Ossa, Guillermo (Photographer). *Islas San Andrés Colombia Sur.* [imagen digital]. Extradited from <https://www.shutterstock.com/es/image-photo/san-islands-colombia-south-america-2044557551>

Photo 5: Ossa, Guillermo (Photographer). *Islas San Andrés Colombia Sur.* [imagen digital]. Extradited from <https://www.shutterstock.com/es/image-photo/san-islands-colombia-south-america-2044557551>

This editorial article has been prepared by ProColombia. Its content is protected by the laws of the Republic of Colombia on intellectual property and does not reflect the position of the National Government, ProColombia or the entities that have intervened in the project, so they will not assume any responsibility for what is expressed there.

Hello, and welcome to Stories from the Heart of Colombia, a podcast by Procolombia.

I'm Nick Perkins and I've been living in Colombia since 1999.

I love cycling, hiking and traveling to unusual places. For a long time, I'd been dreaming of visiting every Department in Colombia on one round trip, but I hadn't been able to do it until this year, when I was finally able to plan the trip of my dreams. A trip that would take me to each of Colombia's 32 Departments, plus its capital, Bogotá, to spend a day or two, exploring the magical geographies, witnessing their immense biodiversity and soaking up the majestic vistas, all while enveloping myself in the warmth of their peoples.

In each episode of the podcast, I explore emblematic places in one Department. On my journey, I learn about the customs and cultures of the people I meet, and I record a travel diary of their experiences, stories and legends. The diary becomes an intimate and very personal record of the flavors, colors and sounds I discover in this land of infinite horizons.

Colombia has something for everyone.

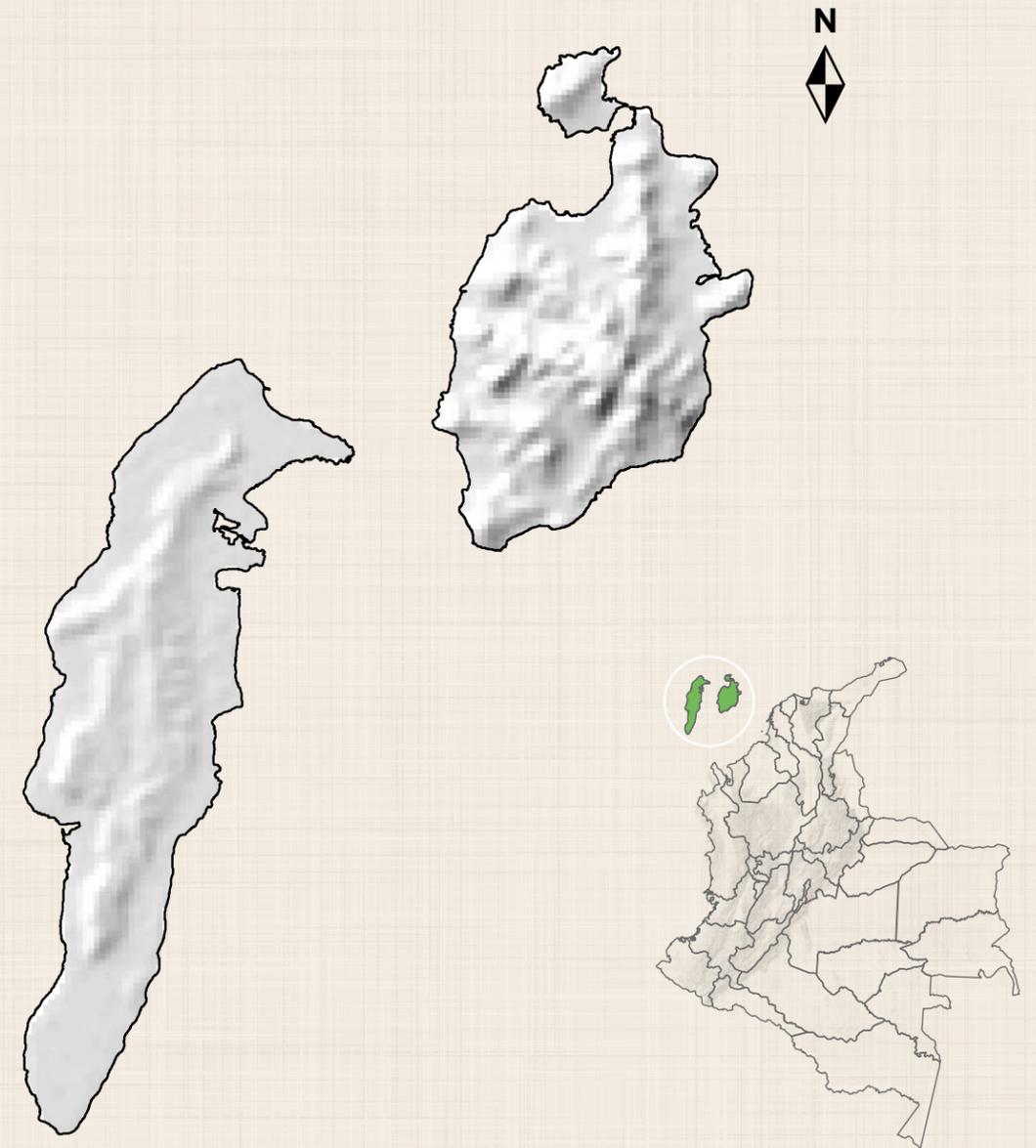
Join me on this unprecedented, sonic journey around one of the most diverse and fascinating countries on earth.

I'm Nick Perkins, and this is Stories from the Heart of Colombia.

Archipiélago de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina

So, in today's episode of the podcast I find myself in Colombia's northernmost Department, the archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. Three islands in the Caribbean that belong to Colombia, that have a long and very interesting population history, and just waiting to meet my guide, the biologist María Fernanda, who's gonna take me out to the coral reef; we're going to talk about coral reef recovery projects.

So I just met María Fernanda Maya, my guest today on the podcast. We've come down to the San Andrés marina. It's a beautiful day: blue sky, few white clouds in the sky. When I arrived yesterday afternoon I arrived in the middle of a rainstorm; it was an absolutely torrential rain, the skies were gray, the sea was rough, and I thought "what are we going to do tomorrow?" But, as it's often the case in this part of the world, today is a completely different day and, also, because of all of the rain yesterday, the sea is incredibly clear.



So, we're going to have a great day out on the water. María Fernanda is a marine biologist. She's been living in San Andrés for 18 years, she said. She's actually from right in the middle of Colombia, up in the mountains of Armenia, in Quindío, where I was a few weeks ago. And she's spent her, I guess, entire adult life here in San Andrés, working in her profession. She's director of — in fact I'll say what she is. It's a beautiful name, I think its translation in English is really nice. She's a Coral Gardener, and so she has a foundation which is dedicated to looking at how to recover the coral reef. Using different techniques which have been tried and tested, and have worked in different parts of the world and bringing them into the context of San Andrés, and looking at how best to plant and care for and grow coral, and then transplant it back into its natural environment.

And we've got a couple of dives today, one of which is called The Pyramid, and it suffered a lot of damage and deterioration over the years, and it's one of the projects that María Fernanda is working on now of coral recovery. So, obviously we won't be recording under the water, but once we emerge María Fernanda will be talking about what we saw, she'll be contrasting what she knew from before and highlighting the different areas which her foundation has been able to get back to resembling something of its original state. I think it's important to note that basically anywhere you go into the ocean in this department of Colombia you will find absolutely beautiful coral reefs; the marine life is absolutely spectacular. I don't want to give you the idea that everything's deteriorated and in process of recovering. So, the other dive site that we're going to go to is one of the classic dive sites in San Andrés. We will, I guess, I hope, see things in their natural state.

So, I'm really looking forward to this, it's going to be a great day. It's the only... The first and



only episode of the podcast, where I'll be under water. So, sadly I won't be recording whilst I'm under the water. So, our guide and boat man have just arrived!

—¡María Fernanda, vamos a ver esta belleza!

👤 María Fernanda: ¡Vamos!

So, Jaime was just telling us a little bit about where he's brought us, it's a very poetic-sounding place, it's called 'Trampa Tortuga', which is roughly translated 'the Turtle Trap'. And it's right at where the San Andrés coral reef begins. So, just where the boat's moored at the moment. We're in open water, but just a few tens of meters away you can see the waves breaking on the coral reef barrier which extends all the way from here to one of the many keys of the island. We're gonna be going on a 50-minute dive, more or less, somewhere between ten and twenty-odd meters in depth; I'm used to it, it's a pretty easy dive that we're going to be doing now. The water is crystal clear, I mean, we're at a depth of 10 meters at the moment and I can see all the way down to the ocean floor. And there are a number of different things we're gonna see on the way, one which could be some rays, maybe some sharks, and when we come out of the water I'll talk to Jaime again and, especially, María Fernanda about more precisely what we've seen and what it means for the local ecosystems. So, let's go dive!

So, María Fernanda and I decided that we'd actually do the interview part of my meeting today after our immersions. I got to be seasick this early for the first time in my life, but only on the boat, so we had a couple of absolutely amazing dives: one where we went down to somewhere around and about, I think, our deepest depth was about 30 meters. We spent most of the time between 20 and 25

meters, it was about a 40-minute dive; and the second dive was amazing, we went to a place called The Pyramid which is basically a coral structure which rises up off the seabed and you can spend absolutely ages diving in and around the coral outcrops. It never gets steeper than eight meters, so there's no decompression at all needed, but that's enough of me talking about it; I'll let María Fernanda tell us about it in her own voice.



Now I understand. So, what happened was: we were on the deeper of the two dives, we came across this absolutely enormous brain coral almost two and a half meters across, and so Mafe was just explaining to me that's what she was so excited about; she was basically showing me the enormous dimensions that coral structures can achieve in these waters. I mean, two and a half meters across for a piece of brain coral is pretty big; it's a really impressive sight. And the other thing she was showing me is that this particular reef, although it has suffered—as all reefs all over the world have—it's a very vibrant reef. So, where you can see that some of the corals have died up—even some of the brain corals—others have come and made use of the substrate upon which to attach themselves and start to grow once again, so you've got a natural renovation of coral. And I did ask Mafe when we were in the boat, I said, you know, "has something been done? Did something happen? Is this because of an initiative?" And she said "No no no, it's just that our local ecosystem works, it's a very vibrant ecosystem in which the coral does tend to replace itself. And we'll talk a little bit later about some of the parts of the island that haven't been 'quite so lucky' in their vibrancy and what Mafe is doing to protect and then also actually to repopulate the reefs. For now, I just wanna stick with the coral and the marine life.

So making the most of being with María Fernanda, who's an expert on local corals and other marine life, I asked her to talk a bit more about what we'd seen on our two dives today. We had one slightly deeper dive and one shallow dive, and I asked her especially to talk about things that had caught her attention today as somebody who dives very often in these waters. And she said that, although she dives frequently, every time she dives is like the first time. She's fascinated every time she goes under the water. And she loves from the smallest of the little gudgeons that live in

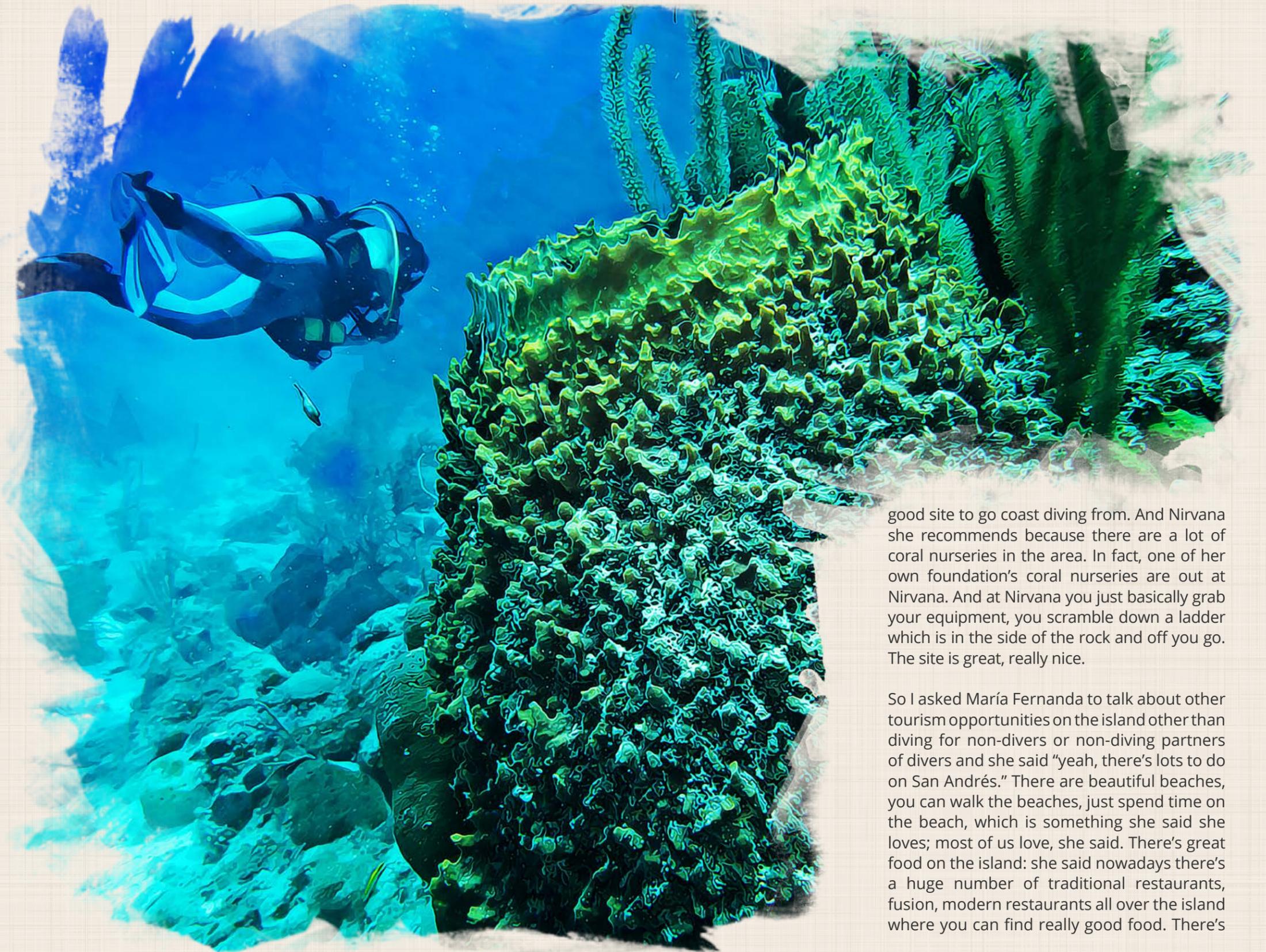




holes in the rocks, she says, and from there on everything else. And she said she was particularly interested today in seeing a fish that she almost never sees; it's quite rare. Which is what they call in Spanish the 'pargo pluma', it's the hogfish, and she said that although they do use a name similar to a seabream in Spanish, it has no relation to that particular fish. It's the hogfish, *Lachnolaimus maximus*. And that was one of the... She said it's one of the highlights of our dives today for her. And then, she said something else really caught her attention. She said it was an absolutely tiny gudgeon, about the size of a fingernail, she says. And she thought it was just... It was beautiful, because she was under the water, super peaceful and this tiny little fish just caught her eye, and, yeah, it's nice. So, as she said, from the smallest, to the rarest and she loves all life under the ocean. And she said that other fish that we saw today, that she finds interesting were some of the stone bass that we saw. There was a school of young stone bass, which have huge importance for the local economy; she also was particularly interested in the Allegheny pearl dace that we saw, she asked me if I remembered, it was on a first immersion. We saw a school of Allegheny pearl dace. And she said, that other than those, that she was particularly interested and she always loves seeing these millions and millions of fish of all the different colors that we saw.

I then asked María Fernanda to talk to us a little bit about further diving opportunities — I'm only on the island for just a few hours, we've only got time for two immersions. But I asked her to talk a little bit more about what you would do if you had perhaps another five immersions, another three or so days on the island or even more. And she said, "well, it would be absolutely incredible if you could stay for 3 days more," she said, "you'd be able to dive at least some of the 30-odd dive sites that there are on the island," and she said "you wouldn't get tired of any of them." She said all of them have a similar

aspect because of their geographical position on this small island. She said most of the dive sites are in the western side of the island, but on the eastern side there is a whole other world of diving which are deep dives. But amongst the shallow dive sites she mentioned is Blue Hole, which she said is absolutely incredible. We couldn't go there today because of the sea conditions, but if the conditions are right you can go to Blue Hole; she said it's an amazing site because it's got quite a shallow terrace and you descend quite gradually. But then there's a drop off the shelf, and that goes really deep, so you can follow that down. And she said down there you can see very often nose sharks, reef sharks, and just recently there were reports of hammerhead sharks sighted out there; there are midnight parrotfish, which she said is something that you cannot miss when you're in San Andrés. Other sites that she likes, that she mentioned, were La Montañita, Los Morgan, Nirvana and El Faro; and she said you're gonna find all sorts of different types of coral, regardless of where you dive. And, if you're not a diver, she said, you can also appreciate the coral just snorkeling around the island. I said it's something you can't miss if you're not a diver, or even if you are a diver because you can get to the coral reef on San Andrés very, very easily. And, again, she's mentioned again to check on the weather conditions, but if they're right you can go snorkeling in really shallow waters; you don't need to know how to breath-hold. And she said, "you'll see perhaps one of my favorite corals is one of the simplest in terms of colors, I find it one of the most elegant in terms of its structure, and almost impossible to believe that it's actually an animal, which is the elkhorn coral." And she said, "you'll find as well among the elkhorn coral parrot fish swimming around all over the place, which you can see snorkeling." And a lot of the diving in San Andrés she mentioned is from a boat, but there are opportunities for coast diving. She said Nirvana, for example, is a



good site to go coast diving from. And Nirvana she recommends because there are a lot of coral nurseries in the area. In fact, one of her own foundation's coral nurseries are out at Nirvana. And at Nirvana you just basically grab your equipment, you scramble down a ladder which is in the side of the rock and off you go. The site is great, really nice.

So I asked María Fernanda to talk about other tourism opportunities on the island other than diving for non-divers or non-diving partners of divers and she said "yeah, there's lots to do on San Andrés." There are beautiful beaches, you can walk the beaches, just spend time on the beach, which is something she said she loves; most of us love, she said. There's great food on the island: she said nowadays there's a huge number of traditional restaurants, fusion, modern restaurants all over the island where you can find really good food. There's

also a lot of eco-tourism and birdwatching opportunities on the island. And she said the local botanical garden is absolutely spectacular. It's eight hectares of dry tropical forest. It's a conservation area where there are paths you can walk around which are being semi-paved to protect the ground, so it's great. There's a viewpoint, a four-story-high viewpoint that you can climb up and she said you can basically see the whole of San Andrés from there. It's absolutely great. You can also go horse riding and she said there are also lots of places where you can go to enjoy listening to some local traditional music and she said those are a few of the things that you can also do in San Andrés.

And talking of music, I've just left Maria Fernanda and I'm heading off now to the other side of San Andrés to meet a local musical legend who's known as the father of Colombian reggae, played in a number of different bands and is credited with bringing and spreading reggae music to and throughout Colombia: Job Saas. And I'm going out to meet him in his farm, Paradise Farm. And, interestingly, my interview with Job Saas will be the first and only interview in this series of podcasts which will be conducted in English, as Job Saas' mother tongue is known as San Andrés and Providencia Creole, which is basically a Caribbean version of English.



"Yeah, welcome, my name is Job Saas. You know, well known as the farmer singer, you know, by all my people in our territory, you know? San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. Well, I am from San Andrés, born in San Andrés, you know, but I consider myself a son of the whole archipelago, you know, the three islands. We all, we are one, you know? We are all one people and one territory. As the Music Association that we have, you know that we've got, music is one of the biggest representation of the culture in the island, you know? So we have our organization, the Raizal Indigenous Musician Movement. So we're working on the island brand of the music; the island brand of the music is Creole music. No matter what type of rhythm of genre you work on — can be Reggae, can be Calypso, Soca, Haitian — but all music that's made in the island is Creole music, you know? It's close in our brand, Creole music. So that's the mission we have as musicians, to create, to create spaces, you know, to visualize our music, to show our music or our culture, you know? Because this is one of the problems we have in the island, that our culture is not being visualized, you know? The people come to the island and they don't see the music, they don't see the dancing. Then so we take it into hand, as Association to do this. No, well, yeah, thank you man, and enough love and respect to everybody who checks this podcast, you know? And keep... always our culture and our music is the backbone of our culture, no? That our music and our fishing and all these things are the backbone of our culture, you know? So, we keep working on that. Enough respect man, One Love."



PROCOLOMBIA
EXPORTACIONES TURISMO INVERSIÓN MARCA PAÍS