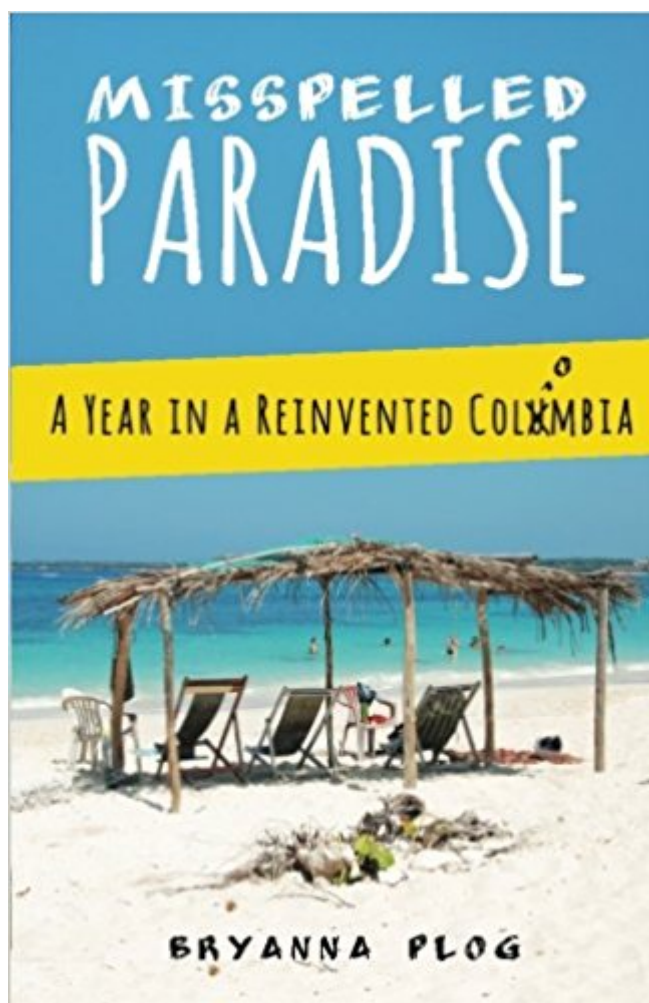




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Misspelled Paradise: A Year In A Reinvented Colombia



Synopsis

What does Colombia bring to mind? This South American country has sometimes been misrepresented, only known for cocaine, guerrilla groups, coffee, and Shakira's hips. In 2011, Bryanna Plog spent a year in the country to find out what the headlines might be missing (headlines, that let's face it, sometimes misspelled the country as Colombia). As a volunteer middle school English teacher in an impoverished community outside of Cartagena, Colombia, Plog recounts with delightfully understated wit her year traveling Colombia's cities, deserts, and rain forests (fairly successful ventures), her attempts to hold class on a regular schedule (less successful), and her quest to eat meals that didn't include rice (a complete and utter failure). Through her teaching and traveling, Plog realizes Colombia is a place closer to a paradise than a country supposedly off-limits to travelers. Instead of having to survive encounters with drug cartels or avoiding kidnappings, Plog discovered her biggest problems included trying to get her students to pay attention in class, the country's strangely undrinkable coffee, and the searing Caribbean heat. Misspelled Paradise gives an honest and lighthearted look at the history, culture, and diversity of this complex Latin American country. Colombia may be struggling with poverty and civil conflict, but over the year she gets to know the country and its people, Plog also sees it celebrate its passion for life with raucous street parties powered by champeta, vallenato, and reggaeton music, crates of tiny watery beers, its eighteen national holidays, and a never-ending parade of beauty pageants. Misspelled Paradise is a book for readers of memoir and travel writing and anyone who is interested in travel to South America. It gives an honest look at the ups and downs of teaching abroad and how one teacher and traveler was surprised and captivated by a culture and country so unlike her own. Plog takes her readers to the mountainous streets of Bogotá and to the small island of Isla Barú, to the deserts of the Guajira Peninsula and to the jungles of the rain forest, to the inside of her sweltering classrooms and to the sweeping beaches of the Colombia's Caribbean coast. Learn, be surprised, and laugh out loud as you journey through a reinvented Colombia.

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Customer Reviews

In 2011, author Bryanna Plog spent a year in Colombia as a volunteer English teacher through Harvard-based WorldTeach and Colombia-based Volunteers Colombia. She returned to Colombia in 2013 for two weeks to visit old friends and new places. Bryanna has traveled to or lived on six continents including Antarctica (Asia is still on the list). She holds a BA in communication and in global studies from Pacific Lutheran University, where she also minored in English writing and environmental studies. Originally from western Washington, she is currently a park ranger with the National Park Service.

I bought *Misspelled Paradise* because I knew that I would be able to relate to the author's story. As an international educator myself, I related to almost all of it. I felt her pain as she suffered through the tropical heat, strange insects, and power shortages. However, I also identified with the warmth expressed by the locals, the gorgeous scenery, and visits she made to quaint villages. Plog's sense of humor was evident throughout the book and I enjoyed her take on her fellow teachers and the students she taught. I haven't traveled to Colombia yet, but her description of Cartagena made me want to go there very soon. I found Plog's memoir a humorous, light-hearted and entertaining read.

I enjoyed reading Bryanna Plog's account of her year living and teaching in Colombia. It is not a travelogue of what to see and what to do, but a heartfelt explanation of the people she met and the places she went as seen through her eyes, discerned through her mind, and experienced through her emotions. I particularly enjoyed her often humorous descriptions of the difficulties that she encountered and often overcame. It is obvious that she prefers to deal with a bad situation by facing it with a light heart -- sometimes in the form of mocking sarcasm, sometimes through joking incredulity -- rather than wallowing in despair or self-pity. Overall, it was a pleasure to glimpse her genuine affection for the people and their culture. No matter how alien their ways might be to someone from the American Northwest, she seems to meet them where they are without trying to

make them become just like her. Yes, she does want to help, (why else would you volunteer to teach for a year in one of the poorest places in Colombia?), but her help would make them better Colombians, not imitation Americans. If you like to expand your horizons by reading of places and people that are different than your own experience, read this book. If you like to read about the "adventures" of traveling to and living in a foreign culture, read this book. And, if you like to read about how a heart can be captivated and captured through a cross-cultural experience, then read this book

Bryanna Plog's, *Misspelled Paradise*, is insightful and delightful. Her year of teaching in an impoverished community just down the coast from the World Heritage Site and international resort city of Cartagena, is an account that should be read by anyone interested in Colombia. In her year in Colombia, she also visited other regions including the capital, Bogotá and Leticia, in the Amazon. Bryanna goes far beyond a simple account of her observations and travels, to explain the evolution of Colombia and the effects. She came knowing very little and left impassioned by the land and the people. Her book was especially excellent for me as a visitor to Colombia in the year between her teaching and her return visit. However, it is not at all necessary to have been to Colombia, to thoroughly enjoy reading *Misspelled Paradise*. I highly recommend you do and maybe someday we will all cross paths in Colombia.

Fantastic book! I read this book just before my wife and I traveled to Colombia. We are Americans who travel a lot in Spanish speaking countries and spent our first winter after retiring in one of them. This book captures what it is like to live in a Latin American country, when you get beyond the resorts and all-inclusive enclaves. The author is a young American woman who lives, works, shops, eats, and travels in Colombia for a year when she works as an English teacher in a small and rather poor town in Colombia. The author views things the way an American would, the way a traveler will return home and tell (hopefully) amusing stories about their experiences. She provides good factual background about the area where she teaches and the other areas she visits. Then she describes her experiences visiting these places. She describes her experience as a teacher, her interactions with her fellow American teachers, the local teachers, the students and parents. Compared to life in the US, everyday life in Latin America can be "always an adventure" and the author captures this in a light hearted yet substantive way.

A fun look at a country with color and flair only an English teacher could provide. The words on the

page open a world of flavor, sights and smells of a culture I would have most likely never experienced on my own. Through the author's eye's I have been able to take a peek at Colombia's rich heritage, topography, and people. Thank you Bryanna, for a journey I will remember.

This wonderful book kept me amused and fascinated by telling the story of one woman's exploration of a culture quite different from her own. While telling her personal story, she deftly explored the history, economics, communications, politics, music, education system, travelling conditions for the low budgeted traveler, ethnicity, natural history, and daily life of the people of Colombia. She writes with humor and detail, passion and precision. I very strongly recommend this book, even for those who have no interest in traveling to Colombia, just for the fun of it.

I am freshly returned to the U.S. after visit Panama. Other travelers had mentioned how much they enjoyed Columbia , especially the people. So, I want to get the perspective of someone who had spend time there . I enjoyed her insights and perspective on the country and the people in it.

To a Colombian, I imagine this book would be like describing brushing your teeth, its just what you do. But for everybody else, its explaining what the daily things are, what they are for and why they are important. If you want to go to Colombia you should read this book. If you want to teach ANYWHERE you should read this book.

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