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La Guajira, COLOMBIA

「危険な秘境」南米コロンビアのグアヒラ半島

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Until recently, La Guajira was considered the Wild West of Colombia, a lawless region where drug traffickers and armed rebels had more power than the government.

Order has returned, and with it so have visitors willing to trek to this remote northern province blessed with natural resources and beautiful landscapes.

The gateway to La Guajira is the dusty administrative capital of Riohacha. Once a strategic pearl

trading port under Spanish rule, Riohacha's importance has since declined. The breezy waterfront still makes for a pleasant stroll, including a wooden pier that reaches into the coffee-colored ocean. Here along the promenade I got my first look at local culture from artisans selling colorful woven bracelets and bags on the sidewalk.

Riohacha has few tourist sites of its own, but is a good base for exploring deeper into La Guajira's rural interior. I visited four attractions of this diverse province, including a coal mine, an Indian ranch, empty beaches and a flamingo lagoon.

My first excursion was to the world's largest open-air coal mine, El Cerrejón. About 3,000 of the mine's 9,100 employees live on-site in what could be called an industrial resort complete with an Olympic-size pool, 9-hole golf course, hotel and restaurants.

The mine covers 690 square kilometers, an area larger than Tokyo's 23 wards. Viewed from an observation deck in the distance, the pit looked like an endless sandbox littered with toy trucks. In reality, the gigantic machines dwarfed our tour bus. Coal extraction occurs 24 hours a day almost year round to meet

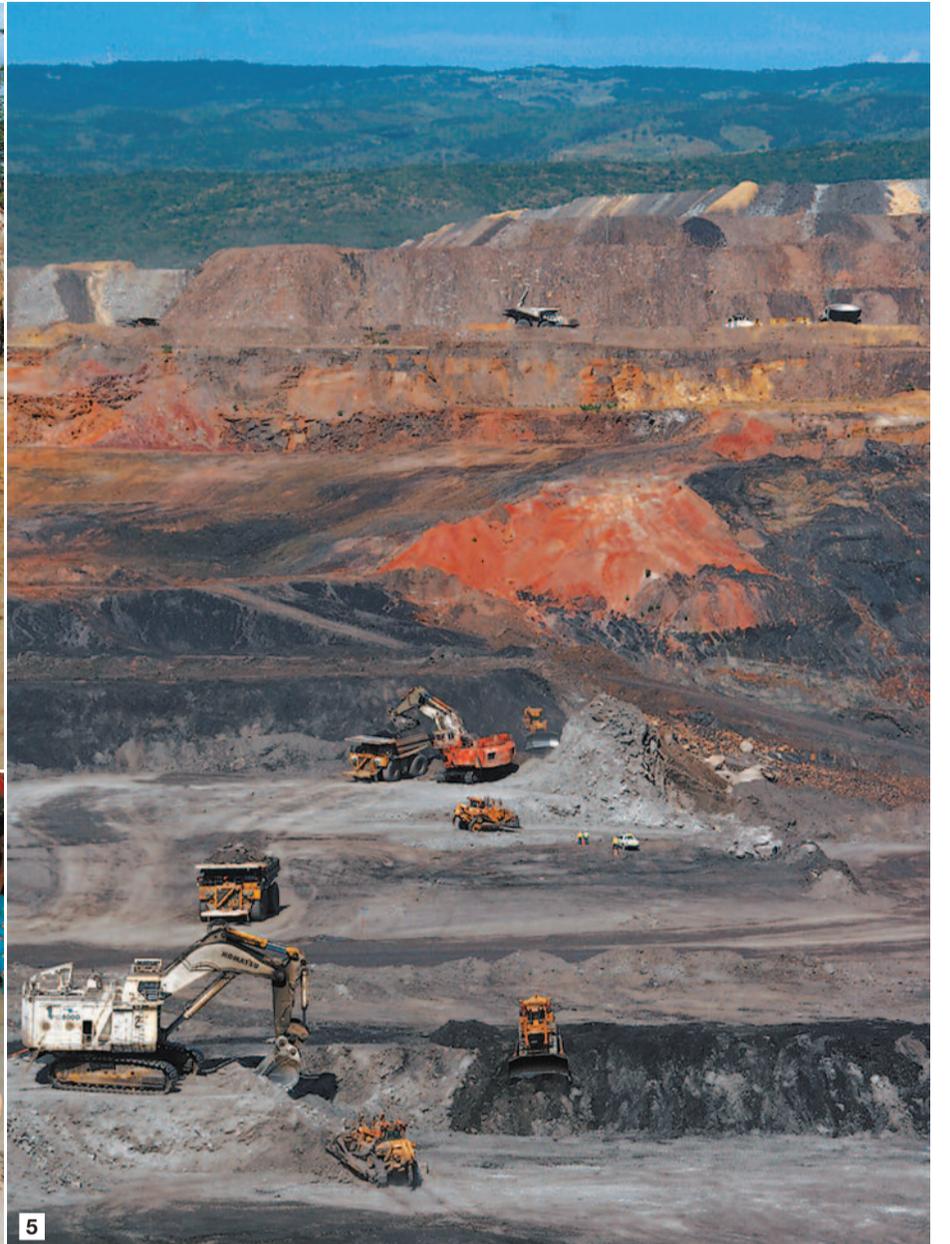
demand in North America and Europe.

The foreign-owned mine creates jobs for locals, but not everyone is pleased. Only 15 percent of profits go back to the native Wayúu Indian community. Long before borders were mapped, this territory was theirs. Even today these natives go without passports and identity papers. Based on their language and style of dress they can cross freely into neighboring Venezuela, where more tribes reside.

ワユウ族の「ホテル」で一夜を

With tourism on the rise, some Wayúu welcome outsiders to their ranches. I spent the night at one ranch 20 minutes south of Riohacha, where 156 Wayúu live a simple yet meaningful existence.

Vanessa was our 23-year-old host who explained in Spanish the cus-



麻薬と武装ゲリラが覇権を握っていた南米コロンビア北部の秘境、グアヒラ半島。最近では治安が安定し、観光客も増えつつあります。この半島へは、スペイン植民地時代に真珠貿易の港町だったリオアチャを拠点とするのが便利。旅の筆者が訪れた名所は、面積が東京都23区より広い世界最大の露天炭坑エル・セレホンと先住民ワウ族の居住域、フラミンゴが多数生息するラグーンなどです。

ベネズエラと国境を接するグアヒラ半島の先住民ワウ族は、パスポートの必要なく地域内を移動。母系制で、最も影響力があるのは最長老の女性です。女の子の誕生

は男の子よりも盛大に祝福されます。観光客が増えるにつれ外部の人々を受け入れるようになった彼らとヤギ肉シチューの夕食をとった筆者は、屋外のハンモックで眠ります。宿泊施設としては粗野な造りですが、澄み切った夜空に満天の星を抱き、五つ星ならぬ千星ホテルともいえます。

ワウ族が「死後の魂が新たな人生を始める」と信じるペラ岬 (Cabo de la Vela) にも足を延ばし、フラミンゴの群れにも遭遇した筆者は、雄大な大自然の美しさに圧倒され、かつては麻薬で危険だったグアヒラ半島が、いまや立ち去り難い魅力を持った、別の意味で「危険な」場所になったと評しています。(の)

- 1 リオアチャから車で4時間かけても行く価値がある、ペラ岬 (Cabo de la Vela) からの絶景
- 2 ワウ族の居住域にあるハンモックで眠る宿泊施設
- 3 ワウ族の伝統的な踊り「chichamaya」
- 4 ワウ族居住域の編み物職人
- 5 世界最大の露天炭鉱エル・セレホン。東京都23区がすっぽり入る広さ
- 6 リオアチャの海岸にある遊歩道。日中の熱気が収まった夕方の散歩にぴったりの場所
- 7 織物のバッグやプレスレットを売るグアヒラの少女
- 8 スペイン語で「エビ」を意味する Camarones 近くのラグーンで見かけたフラミンゴ



toms of her people. The *chichamaya* dance was especially vibrant as girls in red capes chased a man moving backward in circles until he fell down.

After a dinner of stewed goat over rice, Vanessa invited the visitors around a campfire to learn more about the ways of the Wayúu. Interestingly, their society is matrilineal, meaning lineage is through the mother. The most powerful member of the clan is the oldest woman, and the birth of a girl is more celebrated than having a baby boy.

Accommodations were rustic. There was little running water, and I slept outside in a hammock. Vanessa joked that while some hotels have five stars, her ranch has 1,000 — and that night they were shining brightly across the clear Guajiran sky.

Ask Colombians of a dream destination inside their country, and you're likely to hear the reply "Cabo de la Vela." When a Wayúu dies, the soul is said to go to Cabo de la Vela to begin a second life. I was excited to spend two days of my first life on this isolated cape where pristine beaches reward those who make the difficult four-hour journey from Riohacha.

I joined a group tour with five friendly Colombians eager to experience this wilderness of unlimited sea, sun and sky. After a bumpy ride across unmarked desert trails, we reached El Cabo, a settlement with huts on the beach offering hammocks and basic meals to backpackers.

There's not much to do except relax and enjoy the solitude of a place far from civilization. I spent another night in a hammock, and then

headed back to Riohacha to arrange the last excursion that required an early start to visit a flamingo-filled lagoon.

At 6 a.m. the next day I was in a taxi traveling west to Camarones, which means "shrimp" in Spanish. I hired a boatman to row me closer to flamingos that number in the thousands when conditions are right. Due to recent rain, the lagoon was deeper than the birds prefer, and only nine flamingos showed up to poke through the mud with their beaks in search of a seafood breakfast.

Colombia is finally shedding its outdated reputation of being a dangerous destination. A promotional campaign cleverly sums up the change with the slogan, "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay." With stunning natural beauty and a rich indigenous culture, La Guajira is indeed a "risky" place.

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