

RETURN TO THE HEART OF THE WORLD

by Peter Chrzanowski

I was finally here at this very makeshift launch. It was a natural sort of a grassy patio in front of the little clay, stick and mud hut of the Kogi family we had just met the night before. They had actually saved our butts, taking my glider and other camping supplies on to their empty donkey, and motioning to our remaining crew of now only five, to follow them, all in hand signals and their Kogi dialect. The father spoke a few words of broken Spanish and offered us a place at their house for the night. It was getting dark on the steep jungle trail to the top of the ridge and there was no room anywhere for even a makeshift campground. We were so thankful and still determined to reach the final village, which was somewhere up and over this last range of seemingly never ending ridges. We had come into the Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta from the northern Caribbean Coast of Colombia. Eight of us had started the trek a week ago and it had been an incredible ordeal ranging from stories of FARC guerillas just ahead of us, to swarms of bugs, to not always so friendly Indigenous tribes which at times would simply not allow newcomers to pass them by.

My stomach was again grumbling with dysentery and I really wondered if I should ever fly. But the hike downwards to Taminaca, the goal of this trip, was even less inviting. It was at least three hours long and the downward trudge along virtual goat paths and would be a lot tougher than just paragliding down. Or so, I thought, justifying my obsession to soar in this Sierra. It was ten AM and I had to make my decision now. I had asked our new Arhuaco friend, guide and part time porter of my glider, Argemiro to clear a few of the shrubs in front of my new makeshift launch with his machete. He did a beautiful job cutting weeds at the edge of the hut. The Kogi Family seemed to really like this micro landscaping as well.

I took a look behind me and to the right. Small whiffs of Clouds were beginning to stream in over the last ridge behind us, as they built up from the south, or the Caribbean facing portion of the Sierra. Beyond this ridge, which had been so painstakingly cleared for more than a millennium by the Kogis, was a series of rain forest covered ridges, which got progressively larger, over which we had climbed, up and down, over the last week. This was the Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta, the highest Coastal Mountain Range in the world. It had peaks in excess of 5700 metres (19,000ft) only thirty kilometers from the Caribbean coast, making the range a host to the most diversified flora and fauna in the world. There were over 650 species of birds in this relatively small area, more than in all of North America combined, packed into this relatively small and very impassable zone, with no roads, but only narrow mule paths (I would later call them " Mulostradas").

But why fly here? There had been various stories of paragliders in the area in the past. I could not confirm any of these. They ranged from a tale of two Germans crashing and burning somewhere around Taminaca 16 years ago, and being chased out of the area by a band of Machete wielding Kogis. I wondered about that tale though as all the Kogis we had met till now were very peaceful and it just not seemed in their nature at all to ever get violent with newcomers. There were stories of wild air currents where pilots

were supposedly slammed into the adjoining mountain side, shortly after takeoff. But there was also an account told to me of one Colombian paraglide pilot who against all odds reached a high snow covered ridge at dusk, bivouacked the night to take off at 6am. The result was an incredible sled ride which must have took well over an hour, all the way or at least 5,000 meters or 17,000 vertical feet, to land just three kilometers from the beaches of Santa Marta.

The Sierra had a very special meaning to me. It was my catharsis, my climax to many of my life's favorite activities, or in a slightly twisted way, perhaps, my own personal holy grail. I'll try not to get too melodramatic, but, well, the area had me severely under its skin. I had wanted to fly here so bad. Ever since I had been a youth of twelve years old or so, I had dreamed of coming here. At that age as many young boys do, like building tree forts, daydreaming of Robinson Crusoe, reading Jules Vernes novels and ones by Mark Twain, the thought of visiting exotic place really had dominated my psyche. To add to all this, I had been leafing through a National Geographic magazine, an August 1970 issue, I believe, and came across this incredible article about the Sierra Nevada. Here were pictures of these snowy covered peaks which were surrounded by a seemingly impenetrable jungle on the North Coast, and flanked by a very inhospitable, ultra dry, sun parched rocky outcrops, a Peruvian like altiplano or grass covered high savannah on its southern flanks. To add to the mystery of the place, the area was inhabited by these incredible looking Indigenous peoples, Arhuaco, Arsario and Kogi tribes which wore the glistening white robes, complete with white caps which supposedly symbolized the white peaks of their sacredly beheld Sierra. Later another NGS Coffee Table book, " Secret Corners of The World", further spurred my intrigue to somehow, sometime, make a visit to this enchanted place.

At age 14 I had the fortune of having my rather adventurous parents take me on a trip of a lifetime to South America overland. We traveled through 18 countries, in 14 months by Volkswagen camper, beginning in Fredericton, New Brunswick, going south all the way to Tierra Del Fuego and back, to Canada's east coast. There was a several day stint on a boat from Panama to Peru, but otherwise we backtracked overland all the way up to Venezuela before putting our car on a boat to Norfolk USA, on the long way back home. This Odyssey just fed my appetite further for seeking out adventure and probably molded me to later instinctively seek out reclusive places such as The Sierra Nevada for a future visit. The mysterious Mountain Range remained, this bizarre, untouched land, was attainable now only in my dreams.

In early teens I was really taken in by the whole early extreme skiing craze. It was when it all began with early French mountaineering greats such as Patrick Vallencant and Jean Marc Boivin, whom I both met and actually climbed and skied off Huascarán (Peru's highest peak at 22,000ft) together, back in 1978. Jean Marc (a tidbit of paraglide history here) was actually the first to paraglide off Mt' Everest's summit and had a long history of a first ski, hang glide and paraglide descents. These French men soon had become my well worshipped heroes, and seemingly unattainable icons of sorts, to a youth who had wanted so badly to leave his own extreme mark in this world.

1979 I was back in Peru where I had secured an odd sort of summer job for the last four summers. It consisted of carrying survey gear around at relatively high elevations

around an earthquake fault, being a research assistant. This job was a great stepping stone to climbing more peaks and glaciers in the area and skiing them as the famed Frenchmen had. On the last rip in 79 we had actually planned with a few friends to stop in Colombia on the way home and attempt to climb and ski in my long cherished Sierra Nevada. Instead fate had it another way. I had an incredible climbing and skiing accident on a Mountain called Ranrapallca, where I fell skiing and cart wheeled down a sheer 55+ degree face for at least 900 meters or 2700 vertical feet, then waited half conscious for a rescue as my Peruvian climbing partner Amerigo ran to Huaraz and organized a rescue party which reached me three days later. How I survived this, my own " Touching The Void" of sorts still baffles me to this very day.

Getting back to dreaming about the Sierra, I returned to Canada, moved to BC's West Coast and continued climbing, skiing and trying to embark on an adventure filmmaking career. Paragliding came into my life in 1976 when John Bouchard was making his " Wild Things " a copy of the ITV in the United States. These were the early eighties We were all beginning to watch the early " French again" exploits of legends like Christophe Profitt climb peaks, take out their paragliders, being more early ram air parachutes at the time, and huck themselves of high Alpine peaks. One weekend, Mark Twight , well known American Alpinist and author of Extreme Alpinism showed up in Vancouver with four Wild Things gliders. It was late fall, November, I think , raining hard in Vancouver , so we drove eastward towards Cache Creek and found a natural bowl above a riverbank accessed from the bottom by a dirt road. We virtually threw each other off, under Mark's guidance all weekend and that is how we were introduced to paragliding. Over the next twenty years I endured a great many mountain flights, a couple hundred in the first two years, but only one or two a year in the following twenty years. Then, I discovered actual "thermallung" or going up, only four years ago or so. Therefore my paragliding history itself is rather peculiar. That is perhaps why I still instinctively forward launch when a reverse would be better suited for the task - it's just been a lot of years, running off obscure alpine launches.

After years of films and adventures an opportunity finally came up where we were able to organize a climbing skiing expedition to our very special Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta. I had tried so hard to find an excuse to make a documentary film here. In 1996 a famous British documentary "An Elder Brother's Warning, From The "Heart of The World" aired at festivals and television world wide. My long lost memories of the white robed and capped Arhuaco and Kogis suddenly came back. The Kogi Elders had invited the filmmakers, charmingly actually calling them "The BBC" to hear their message to the world or us deemed as "The Younger Brother". It was an early message about them experiencing climate change and pollution never felt before. We the "younger brother" had been banished from what they believe is thus "The heart of The World" represented so by The Sierra Nevada Massif. Their job is as the gatekeeper to protect their sacred peaks and the entire area known to them as "The Heart Of The World", or where they believe all life began and later we, the younger brother were banished and spread out in the world to wage wars, create pollution, therefore we were not welcome back to the sacred peaks of their Sierra. After the BBC interview, the Kogi elders symbolically put a wooden barrier over this meticulously handcrafted bridge. Little did I know that I would be myself one day standing at the end of such an intricately made piece of art which made up this bridge.

Our 98/99 expedition to The Sierra was incredible but we were never allowed to climb and ski the "sacred" snowy peaks. We did get higher and further than any other foreigners in years, were respectful and in turn treated very well by both Kogis and Arhuaco tribes. We made two separate attempts to climb to the peaks. One from the side of Valledupar and Nabusimaki, or the south flank of the Sierra. We reached over 3000 meters but were asked not to continue to the snows by an Arhuaco elder. We thus turned, hiked down and drove around to Colombia's north Coast and the city of Santa Marta, South America's oldest city. Columbus first landed on an island offshore. From here we hired mules and with the help of various mentors and guides proceeded upwards into the Sierra from this rainforest covered, plush side of the mountain range. Village after village following the Palomino river we passed various barriers and check points put in place by the various Indigenous Communities, their way of shielding themselves from too much of our technology and " little brother" thinking.

In 1995 Juan Mayer, then minister of Colombia's Environment made an incredible breakthrough. All warring parties, The FARC Guerilla, the paramilitaries, the drug growers as well as the surrounding campesinos or peasants and farmers had agreed to set a national park aside giving the Indigenous tribes made up of Arsario, Arhuaco, Ika and Kogi tribes an unprecedented control over the area, and allowing them to choose who they allow in and out. The four tribes have been heralded as unique, especially the Kogis who escaped the Spanish which never followed them into the rugged and forbidden Sierra. Thus, the area has remained the way it has for several thousand years with the Kogi living the way they always have, something very rare in this world. There is also no trace of a cross or churches anywhere in the upper communities as no missionaries were welcomed here and one Jesuit Mission was even burnt down by the Arhuacos in the past. The Indigenous people kept their clothing, their traditions and for the most part they still exist the way they always have.

While the Arhuacos are more curious about some mechanical and electronic items we possess, the Kogis up higher really live closest I could imagine to a stone-age existence. They eat whatever they can, as we would term "organically" grow, make clothing from local cotton and other plants and even carry water only in traditional gourds. They are monogamous and have middle sized regular families. But perhaps the most amazing part of their heritage is the fact that their Mamas or Elders spend a nine year portion of their life, from infancy on, in a dark hut or even a cave, to be shielded totally from light as they are mentored by a caretaker Mama to help them develop a sixth sense up to the claim of possessing telepathic capabilities. Sometimes these Mamas venture back into their cave for an additional nine years if their powers need refreshing, Making the total time of living in darkness eighteen years. It takes the time as long as our education through high school, I guess.

And so we learned a lot on our first two trips into the Sierra. I managed to make a film "Journey Into The Heart of The World" out of the entire trip. We even gave the natives a demonstration of what skis were for, but despite our theatrics, the Arhuacos nor the Kogis were impressed enough to let us by to reach the sacred snows. It was still an incredible experience and we were all taken so by the sheer hospitality that these mountain guardians had extended to us. In later years I shared my experiences with the

likes of Wade Davis, a renowned National Geographic "Explorer in Residence" as well as an ethno botanist, widely know for his books "One River". Serpent and The Rainbow and "Light At The Edge of The World". Wade had lived with the Kogis in the Seventies and was greatly amused that they should let our rag tag team in as far as they did and even wrote about it in an NGS Book , " Voices From The Summit ". Calling us "The Canadians" in his introduction to our trip. It was an honor to have our trip acknowledged, but then I also thought this would be my last foray into The Sierra.

Then, in 2004 I started paragliding more and more frequently. My new obsession with the sport and having only recently discovered there is " Thermalling" beyond just hucking off mountains in paragliders, I embarked on shooting a feature length documentary film on the sport ,soon to be dubbed "Airhead Diaries". Sky, FLYTECH , SKY COUNTRY and soon SOL paragliders came on to the production as equipment sponsors and so the filming odyssey began.

The film soon became my personal journey of flying obsession, along with that of a few characters from our flying community in Pemberton, British Columbia, Canada. In a short intro, Pemberton is a junction of three incrdibly beautiful valleys situated a twenty minute drive just north of Whistler, British Columbia. As I developed my script , the picture and stories took me to Yelapa, Valle De Bravo , Mexico, and Peru where I hoped to go back to filming a more personal introspective on how mountains drew me in first to climbing, skiing and now to flying amongst them. To this day I recall the weightless pleasures of powder skiing, and now relate these weightless feelings, to those of really, just wanting to fly.

In the meantime I had been contacted by an American couple who started emailing me about additional information on the Kogis and life in The Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta. It turned out Inna and her husband Vantroig were practitioners of Gostic teachings and had been running courses and seminars out of their home in New York and later out of New Jersey. I had never taken an interest in being someone's actual guide into an area, but when the possibility of a fully covered trip to my Sierra of Childhood dreams again presented itself, it was an opportunity I just could not refuse. This was early 2007, I believe. The emails and phone calls persisted between Inna and myself over the course of a year or so. Before long I agreed to take Inna and her husband into the Sierra in exchange for my trip. I was in the middle of beginning to edit "AIRHEAD DIARIES" but the bait was just too great. Besides, I thought I would take in my paraglider and attain a flight above where I was unable to ski on that last trip.

We finalized the date of our departure would be some time in first week of January 2008 and I slowly began organizing logistics and enlisting proper team mates for what I knew was to be a very iffy and arduous journey in. From the word go I had been fortunate to meet a Colombian climber, Andrea Molina, who was of Himalayan stature having climbed up to 7000 meters on Tibet's Shishapangma. Andrea also had the lucky charm to be allowed by the Arhuacos to the snowy summits of the Sierra Nevada on a mission to study and count Condor populations in the area. As a result she managed to climb, El Guardian, a 500+meter peak and one of the Sierra's more notable summits.

Then, I enlisted Kaja, a bright young Polish information consultant working in Panama and nearby next door. I just had a good feeling about Kaja and that's how my expeditions often just come together so. Rounding off the team were Dominik a Polish, National Geographic published photographer and his Colombian wife Claudia. I had met the couple just a year before as their rag tag, expedition yacht named "Stary" or "Old" in Polish pulled up to Vancouver on a journey south from the Northwest Passage. Dominik and Claudia had also been on the southern side of the Sierra and actually watched a friend's presentation on our last trip there at a festival in Poland. Joining them lastly was Patricia, Claudia's sister, who was a Colombian psychologist eager to also learn the local Indigenous perspectives on all the recent changes in the Sierra. These had included a great deal of talk about FARC guerillas in the area over the last six years, as well as massive fumigation of Coca plants by the US administered "war on drugs" Legacy or "Plan Colombia". This was their bid to enlighten the area with additional sale of helicopters to the Colombian Military, not to mention the huge pharmaceutical contracts given out for the deadly chemicals that were now seeping into the earth and every day of the Kogis, Arsarios and Arhuaco tribes lives. We later were shown their devastating affects of the spraying by one Arsario elder.

The Colombian people were by now just very sick of the FARC or (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas). The once ideologically political movement which had departed the cities for the outmost jungles and regions of Colombia was once looked at as a heroic "peasant's army", based on the age old "Robinhood" principles and . FARC was often viewed favorably by the more poorer masses who often saw the rich corporate elite as little more than taking Colombia's riches en masse to their headquarters and villas, often based in Miami. But then things got out of control. At one time government backed paramilitary gangs had their revenge massacring thousands of villagers who were known to stand by the side of the FARC. And this is how the "La Violencia" had since seized this country so. Shortly before our trip, the country was in turmoil again awaiting a revered hostage swap to be organized by Chavez and documented exclusively by Oliver stone, a media circus was ready to be staged for each side's political gain. Now FARC is most famous for still holding 3200 hostages in the mountainous jungles of Colombia. Their main income comes from kidnapping, extortion and the sale of Cocaine, a far cry from it's idealist Marxist philosophies of times gone by.

As we gathered and readied for our trip into the Sierra from the town of Santa Marta, various stories of guerilla activity filtered down to us. Nevertheless, we decided to arrange to go for it and approach the Sierra from this Caribbean side as we had done nine years ago. Andrea had already done some significant legwork and even found a mule driver willing to guide and take us upward. But first, we had to pass the worst zone of all, or the town of Palomino, a ramshackle array of stray boxy huts along the highway bordering the sea. Palomino was a no man's land, a place where stray aboriginals often became stuck leaving or rather losing their Sierra behind, often plagued by alcoholism and the wicked side of "little brother's universe". This was a town of outcasts and opportunists, middlemen between drug lords, the buyers and sellers, as well as an entry point to the most criminal elements imaginable in Colombian society. Yes, Palomino was not a nice place; you could almost feel the negative energy. So as our hired van with driver arrived here on January tenth, Andrea and I had braced ourselves for it. Nevertheless, a self appointed guide had soon intercepted our meeting

with our long sought out mule driver. Suddenly there was a special fee to pay by each expedition member towards "trail construction by the Community ". The fee was not too large and we decided to quickly pay this guy before more shysters in Palomino would learn of our presence here, and each respectively would dream up some new tax or levy to pin on us, the visiting group of gullible "Gringos" which had ended up on their doorstep to the Sierra.

We ended up getting away rather cheaply from this first roadblock presented by Palomino. We paid less than \$10 a piece, had grabbed our mule driver, 4 mules and soon the eight of us, Octavio, the mule driver and his brother Rafael were on our way into the foot hills. I was also armed with printed photographs from our last trip. These proved very helpful as the Indians recognized the people and places we had been to back in 1998/99 and it gave them confidence in us having been here before. I clumsily took these out every time a new Kogi or Arhuaco started demanding or questioning the nature of our trip. Unfortunately, two of the Mamas we had known were now dead. One Mama Santos, had been murdered by a pupil, the other Mama Fillo was hit by a car in Santa Marta. Yet another Kogi friend whose photograph we carried had died with his daughter on a land mine left under a trail by the FARC.

We hiked in 42 degree heat and 90% humidity for two and a half days staying in designated mule driver huts, designed for visitors from many like our own caravans, or the only way to really transport goods up and down the Sierra. We stayed with one Arsario homestead and even met an entire regiment of the Colombian Army by the time we reached Savannah Culibra, an Arhuaco Community half way to Taminaca. We stayed here three days contemplating how we would continue our trek. Our mule driver refused to go further, being rightfully scared of FARC stories ahead of us, whom he was deathly afraid of, but mainly of them taking his mules which belonged to someone else in Palomino who he would have to answer to if they were ever to be lost.

The local Arhuaco Mamas also asked us to stay and wait before going onward. They were worried that if we were kidnapped by the FARC, as many tourists had been in Colombia's volatile past, the army would then come in scouring the country side in their quest for us, and peace again would be delayed in the Sierra. Within the next day, however, the army garrison upon which we had come across had moved up to our Savannah Culibra and then was off towards a higher base in Jumandito with an already higher outpost put in by helicopter several days ago. And so by dawn the next morning the local Arhuaco Mama had summoned us for a dawn ceremony, wishing us a safe departure. This consisted of some symbolic rituals involving using little strands of cotton symbolizing food, water and gifts, as well as receiving ceremonial string bracelets which were to protect us from anything evil on the journey upwards to Taminaca. Vantroig and Inna had decided to stay here and take their time learning the ways of the Arhuaco Mamas, their medicine and spiritual beliefs. The six of us soon enlisted Argemiro, a 28 year old, strong Arhuaco man who had offered his services as a guide and porter.

Just the day before I had taken out my glider and gave the entire Community a ground handling demonstration. The whole village of Savannah Culibra, at least fifty people or so turned out to watch. They seemed to love the idea of flying under my bright blue plastic like bag. I had a lot of explaining to do in order to make them realize I could not just fly

away from this one clearing in the jungle, but needed an appropriate launch, somewhere up and above, and ideally on the ridge above Taminaca, which I had remembered so well from my trek through here nine years ago. I had just received my glider, a brand new, Advance , Sigma Six for this trip, so I thought this may be a great time to give thanks and take some pictures.

Soon we were on our way again, this time without mules, each carrying their personal gear with Algemiro carrying my glider and some common cooking gear from our crew. Patricia stayed behind in another village part way up and then five of us continued to the point I described at the beginning, or meeting the Kogi family with the empty donkey.

Now here I was, poised for the launch of my life on a wing I had not flown before, the dysentery was still curdling in my stomach, but the adrenaline was keeping me focused for a good forward launch. To top it all off I left the reserve behind to save on weight as I fell. It was ten AM and I could not, or rather should not wait any further. Muttering "CLEAR !" I pulled up the glider, took a few steps and the first stronger thermal took me upwards immediately. A lot of things were going through my head during this inaugural flight. I looked over my shoulder to the right and immediately saw a large bird easily spiraling its way along the grassy slopes towards the top of the ridge. I was in a thermal as well, but I thought going way up like this was entirely premature. I did not know the area , or the state of the valley winds in such a thermic mountain environment. Sure, I could go up, but what about coming down? As I gained altitude, I also noticed that a formidable cloud layer had now formed along ridges upon ridges of Sierra foothills separating me from the beaches of the Ocean, my dreamed of flying destination. I also knew that by 11 am or so the winds started howling down on the Coast from the Sierra itself. This I think was a major Katabolic effect as the southern side of The Sierra developed heavy thermals due to its thermal prone dark rocks and topography. By contrast to many Coast Ranges the wind howled each afternoon from the Sierra down mountain towards Santa Marta and the Coast, not an ideal scenario for paragliders which could be blown out to the ocean as a result.

I therefore opted not to try my luck flying to the Coast. Also the air immediately around me was turning more and more turbulent. As I flew towards Taminaca, two smaller valleys merged in below me. Immediately the convergence of air was felt in my glider. The flight itself was truly spectacular as the snowcapped peaks of Cristobal Colon and Simon Bolivar appeared directly in front of my glider. Below small Kogi farms passed by as I stood on the speedbar and decided to straightline it for Taminaca before something unexpected happened. I had chosen a path on a field to land on as I knew from my previous visit that concealed everywhere around, and especially in the tall grass, were scores of granite boulders of various sizes, something that was not nice to hit while on one's final approach to the LZ.

I made my final spiral towards my chosen location when unexpectedly out of nowhere, two Kogi women carrying firewood appeared. I was on my final approach and in order not to scare them or even come close to hitting them, I steered left into the tall grass. Sure enough a boulder the size of a medium television set had appeared right in my path, but somehow I stalled the glider just right and impacted it, only lightly with my

feet. The two Kogi women looked on rather amazed at this clumsy bird man under his blue plastic bag appearing out of the sky above them. This was the first time I actually ever kissed the ground. I was soooo thankful for the relatively safe flight. Then, within minutes while I was packing up my glider incredibly strong gusts of wind began howling through the valley and right through the spot where I had just landed. I had been very lucky. If I had been in the air another fifteen minutes, I really do not know what might have happened to me. But now I was just thankful to have survived the twenty minute or so flight. It was a short flight, but this was The Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta and somehow this flight became an example of so many goals and flanked by so many wishes and memories. It was only twenty minutes but really seemed like a lifetime in the air. I will cherish it forever.

After landing, having a swim in the River I met new Colombian friends who had moved to Taminaca from Colombia which had chosen to live amongst the Kogis. They made me Coca tea and had me rest in a hammock while Dominik, Claudia, Andrea and Argemiro hiked down the three hours to meet me. Then, I put my glider for a fee on another mule train going down valley by another trail. We then hiked back up to our huts and Kogi hosts, from where I had taken off earlier this morning. We picked up Kaja who had remained here still sick with her stomach.

Next day we reached Savannah Culibra, met up with Vantroig and Inna and soon were headed back down towards Palomino again and the end of our journey. As we approached the town, a full day's march later, I rode a mule myself for the last few hours. Our entry into Palomino was perhaps most memorable, an almost surreal culmination to the trip. As we came out of the jungle, it was twilight and the first electric lights appeared, then came the music from ghetto blasters and TV sets, then the noise of the cars and the trucks was next. The grand finale came with the wild cries of an Evangelist screaming about The Lord Jesus in Spanish on the roadside pavement, outside a chicken restaurant we immediately gravitated towards. Welcome to Civilization!

I spent the next ten days or so recovering from my return to The Sierra gently soaring in Bucaramanga, thanks to the hospitality of Ritchie from www.colombiaparagliding.com. Then I met another new friend and pilot Pier Lambarti, an Italian Surgeon based in Barranquilla where I took in the carnival and from where I began taking my flights back home to Vancouver, only to now reminisce my Return to The Heart of The world.