

## **Santa Marta, the Banana Port of South American**

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Santa Marta, located in the northwest part of South America, is about 700 miles north of the equator and 2100 miles due south from New York.

The small harbor, which looks like a large amphitheatre, has an opening one and one half miles wide. The slopes are covered with thorn tree and cacti instead of the palm trees, so typical of the tropics. It extends in a northeast southwest direction, and is sheltered on the north and northeast, from the prevailing Northeast Trades, by a long rocky spur of the San Lorenzo Range. These almost bare hills jut out abruptly from the land and end in two islands. A beacon is placed on the larger island, while a beacon and a lighted buoy on the inner spur guide the pilots when ships are in that part of the harbor. Two buoys direct their course farther south.

In the inner harbor under the northern headlands, where the minimum depth alongside is 27 feet, two docks are built parallel with the shore. Each dock accommodates one ship. The long wharves enable cargo to be taken from all holds at the same time. The only mechanical handling equipment which the port possesses are the electric conveyors used for loading bananas. Ships use their own tackle for other cargo which they discharge or receive here. Cargo is handled by ships' slings directly to or from the freight cars. The exports are, in order named, bananas, coffee, hides and skins and dividivi. There are not port facilities for storage or for bunkering.

Santa Marta is built on the alluvial plain of the Manzanares River. The city may be divided into four sections; the center being the oldest. The narrow streets faced with low buildings, all lead to the cathedral.

The important market occupies the center of the business district. The railroad which diagonally cuts across the little city puts one section north of it. In this treeless area, most of the laborers, who work on the docks, live. In El Prado, in the south, the United Fruit Company has built attractive bungalows for its employees. Here in direct contrast to the north, grow many flowering bushes and trees.

Seaward of El Prado are the tall masts of the Wire Tropical Radio Telegraph Company. This wireless station gives communication with important Colombian cities and the outside world.

South of Santa Marta is the banana region. This region blocked out by the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta Mountains on the east and the delta lands of the Magdalena River on the west, furnishes an ideal situa-

tion for banana plantations. The mountains give protection, from the Northeast Trades, to a broad sloping alluvial plain, and the melting snows and frequent rains of the upper slopes supply the water needed for irrigation. High temperatures vary but little and the region ranks high in the hours of sunshine.

The Santa Marta Railway begins at the docks and ends about 58 miles to the south. A ride over this road takes one through the cacti and thornybush covered hills, across the wide savana pastures, past little clusters of adobe or sheet-iron huts set in clearings in the tropical-scrub forest and into the banana region.

About three-fifths of the banana area belong to private Colombian planters but the United Fruit Company, which owns the rest, buys the fruit from the private planters, transports it to the docks and ships it with their own.

The banana plantations seem cut from the same pattern. Each has its master drainage ditch and its many canals. The fertile friable soil is a sandy loam, containing 30 per cent clay and 70 per cent sand.

The root-stalks are set in rows, the plants cultivated and three allowed to grow from each stalk. At the end of twelve to fourteen months the plantation is producing and continues to pay for about six or seven years. Each plant bears a stem of fruit, which weighs on an average, fifty pounds.

Plantations are divided into sections and the fruit in each section is cut once and in some seasons twice each week. The cutting gang consists of the man who selects the stems, the cutter, and the backer. "Thin" bunches are selected for shipments to Europe; "fuller" bunches for New York and New Orleans.

After the bunch has been selected, the cutter, using a long sharp-pointed pole, breaks the trunk of the banana plant and it bends over. The backer then catches the stem on his shoulder, the cutter severs it from the plant with his machete and the backer carries it to a cart, waiting in the nearest grass-covered lane in the section.

These carts carry the stems to the loading platforms or directly to trains on the sidings. At various times during the day the cars are assembled and sent in long trains to Santa Marta.

After the incoming cargo has been discharged and the holds cooled the bananas are loaded. This requires about twelve hours. The cars are run in on the docks; the fruit is carried from the cars past inspectors and placed in the canvas pockets of the conveyors which move to the holds of the ship.

In the holds men remove the stems from the conveyors and arrange them in the different compartments; two layers of standing stems, one horizontal. Fresh air, kept at a temperature of 56 degrees, is circulated through the compartments. Temperatures are taken every six hours.

Each year the United Fruit Company brings thousands of stems from the banana plantations in Santa Marta to the United States.