

Yellow

Yellow. Expected of course, all the taxis in Santa Marta are yellow. El conductor wears an unusual cap. It reminds you of a tam 'o shanter except is as yellow as his beloved vehicle, yellow, solid yellow. Moreover, the sports shirt is yellow as well as the matching pants—even shoes, polished leather, perhaps tango shoes you see our man tango.

Our man's regalia was striking, not only the consistency of yellow but the contrast with his dark brown skin. Colombian culture reveals citizens from Nordic features to the African and Middle-eastern ancestors. This canary conductor expressed the cool color against the vividly illuminated yellow.

However this is only the appetizer to this banquet. He is a musician without an instrument but with an internal rhythm and back up voice as tango, samba, rumba, a variety of Latin rhythms play the taxi's CD stereo. Recorded at the Copa Cabana in New York City, yellow man assists the gusto with voice and percussion on the steering wheel. The dashboard provides just the right sound for counter rhythm.

It's the voice that carries the across Santa Marta journey. No Italian crooner this firebrand, or bossa stylist, pure Latin, pure joy sings from his mustached mouth. He booms, he softens; he energizes each syllable. Throughout his performance, a broad smile peers through the rear-mirror at the two passengers smiling back at him.

Taxi cabs in Santa Marta a tacit protocol. Initially, chaos is the only description. Two-lane roads often and immediately widen to three and four or more lanes as buses, eighteen wheelers, mini-buses, taxis, bicycles, and donkey carts vie for speed or nonchalance as the case may be. The neophyte experiences fear of life and limb, often with eyes closed. The literal right of passage finds ultimate expression in the horn. Horns blast ubiquitously to pass a bus by crossing a yellow line, pulling out in traffic, or a passing inquiry, or acknowledging a pretty girl.

But the system works, it really does. And the fear factor among aliens to Colombia dissipates, though it does not disappear. This complex system works. For example, the horn is a critical aspect of safety. Unless you jump at the jolt of a horn near you backside, the quick blast of a horn makes sense in Santa Marta.

Senor Yellow shows a conservative flair with horn use. He's rather more ambitious with the steering wheel and the techniques of weaving a darting. Of course, his forte is music, singing and beating out the rhythm. This swallows his attention and more often than not dictates a sudden swerve. At drives end, his smile broadens with discernable English, "Go dance me?"