

Understanding Money in Colombian Pesos When Shopping with Cash

When I first arrived in Cali, the prices looked terrifying — a coffee for “*five thousand*,”

THE 5-SECOND CONVERSION

Drop the last 3 zeros, then divide by about 4 to get US dollars.

The peso hovers around **4,000 to a dollar** — always check the current rate before a big purchase. This is a gut-check, not exact math. And note: Colombia writes **\$5.000** with a period as the thousands separator, so that's five thousand pesos, not five.

\$5.000 COP	→	≈ \$1.25 USD
\$20.000 COP	→	= \$5 USD
\$50.000 COP	→	≈ \$12.50 USD
\$100.000 COP	→	= \$25 USD

1 Know your bills & coins

Each bill is a different color, so they're easy to tell apart once you're used to them. Coins under 1,000 are handy for rounding.

BILLS (PESOS)

2.000 5.000 10.000 20.000 50.000

100.000

COINS (PESOS)

50 100 200 500 1.000

3 Learn the “mil” shortcut

Mil means thousand. A vendor may say “**cinco mil**” (5,000) — or just “**cinco**” (five), dropping the *mil* entirely. So “**¿cuánto? — quince**” almost always means 15,000, not 15 pesos. Context tells you.

2 Carry small bills — always

Taxis, market stalls, and corner **tiendas** often can't break a 50.000 or 100.000. Break big notes at supermarkets, pharmacies, or restaurants, and hoard the small ones for street buys. ATMs love handing out 50.000s and 100.000s — break them early in the day.

4 Cash is still king

Colombia runs on cash outside the big stores — markets, taxis, tips, and small shops all expect it. Carry a card as backup, but bring enough cash for the day. Keep your larger notes tucked away, separate from your daily spending money.



JACKIE'S RULE

*I keep a fold of small bills — 2.000s, 5.000s, 10.000s — in one pocket for daily buys, and larger notes tucked away. **It's saved me from the “sorry, no change” shrug more times than I can count.***

Exchange rates change daily — figures here are rough guides for quick mental math, not financial advice. Check a current rate before any large purchase.

Say It in Spanish: **Peso Numbers**

These are the number words you'll hear most while shopping with cash. Say them out loud a few times — and remember, at a market they almost always mean **thousands** (see the tip below).

NUMBER	SPANISH	SAY IT LIKE
5	cinco	<i>SEEN-koh</i>
10	diez	<i>dee-ESS</i>
20	veinte	<i>BAYN-teh</i>
25	veinticinco	<i>bayn-tee-SEEN-koh</i>
35	treinta y cinco	<i>TRAYN-tah ee SEEN-koh</i>
50	cincuenta	<i>seen-KWEN-tah</i>
100	cien	<i>see-EN</i>
200	doscientos	<i>dohs-SYEN-tohs</i>
300	trescientos	<i>tres-SYEN-tohs</i>

\$320.400

FULL EXAMPLE

trescientos veinte mil cuatrocientos pesos

tres-SYEN-tohs • BAYN-teh • meel • kwah-troh-SYEN-tohs

Built from pieces you already know: **trescientos veinte** (320) + **mil** (thousand) + **cuatrocientos** (400).



THE MARKET SHORTCUT

Heard at a stall or taxi, these words almost always mean **thousands** — vendors drop the “mil.” So **“cinco”** means *cinco mil* = 5.000 pesos (≈ \$1.25), and **“veinte”** means 20.000 (≈ \$5). When in doubt, add three zeros.

Pronunciations are gentle approximations to get you understood, not textbook phonetics. USD figures use a rough rate of ~4,000 pesos per dollar — check the current rate.