



# COLOMBIA WILL SEND DEEP-WATER EXPEDITION TO EXPLORE 300-YEAR-OLD SHIPWRECK THOUGHT TO HOLD TREASURE - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*Photo: This undated photo taken by Colombia's Anthropology and History Institute and distributed by Colombia's Ministry of Culture, shows sunken remains from the Spanish galleon San Jose, on the sea floor off Cartagena, Colombia*

Colombia's government announced plans Friday for a deep-water expedition to explore the mythical galleon San José, sunk in the 18th century in the country's northern Caribbean and believed to contain cargo valued at billions of dollars.

The first phase of the scientific research into the deep waters around the shipwreck will collect information to determine which pieces are suitable and possible to extract. The wreckage is 600 meters (almost 2,000 feet) deep in the sea.

Colombia located the galleon in 2015 but it has since been mired in legal and diplomatic disputes, and its exact location is a state secret.

The government says it will invest around \$4.5 million this year in an archaeological exploration of the 62-gun, three-masted galleon that sank in 1708 after being ambushed by an English squadron on its way to Cartagena.

For the first phase of the investigation, the Colombian government does not intend to partner with private companies, said Alhena Caicedo Fernández, general director of the Colombian Institute of Archaeology and History (ICANH) during a symposium on the galleon held Friday in Cartagena.

The expedition would start in spring depending on weather conditions.

Oceanographer and navy Rear Adm. Hermann León Rincón told reporters the expedition involves submerging robotic equipment that is connected to a navy ship. From there, using cameras and keeping a detailed record of its movements, he said, the robot will be positioned in connection with a satellite that is in geostationary orbit.

The robotic system was acquired by Colombia in 2021 and has the capacity to descend up to 1,500 meters (4,900 feet) deep.

Carlos Reina Martínez, archaeologist and leader of the submerged cultural heritage of ICANH, said the operation seeks to discover what

life was like for the 600 people on board the boat when it sank and to study daily life, the cargo, artillery and merchandise of the colonial era in America.



"It is time to claim the heritage elements for which the remains of the galleon should be valued," said Juan David Correa, Colombia's minister of culture, who insisted that the value of the wreck is patrimonial and not monetary. "History is the treasure."

The ship has been the subject of a legal battle in the United States, Colombia and Spain over who owns the rights to the sunken treasure.

Colombia's government said Thursday that it formally began arbitration litigation with Sea Search Armada, a group of American investors, for the economic rights of the San José. The firm claims \$10 billion corresponding to what they assume is worth 50% of the galleon treasure that they claim to have discovered in 1982.

The ship is believed to hold 11 million gold and silver coins, emeralds and other precious cargo from Spanish-controlled colonies, which could be worth billions of dollars if ever recovered.

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