

National Shrine Basilica of **Our Lady of Las Lajas, Narino, Columbia**

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Considered the most beautiful church in Columbia, the National Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Las Lajas was built between 1916 and 1949. It sits on a 130- foot tall bridge over the Guáitara River canyon.

The Las Lajas Sanctuary is famous for its stunning architecture, apparitions of the Holy Virgin and a mysterious image, nobody knows the origins of.

It is believed that in 1754 Our Lady appeared to an Amerindian lady, Maria Meneses de Quiñones and her deaf-mute daughter Rosa, at the place where the church now stands, when they were caught in a storm.

As the women hid between the gigantic *lajas* (slab of rock), they saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus. Fearing ridicule by the villagers, Maria kept mum about this incident but they kept returning there to pray, though the apparitions never reoccurred. Later, Rosa died. As the village prepared for her funeral, Maria carried Rosa's body to the *lajas* and prayed. There, a miracle took place - Rosa was brought back to life, could speak and hear! When the astounded villagers, brought by Rosa to the place she was revived, there on the rock they

saw a brilliant, life-size image. This was a surprise to the mother and daughter, who had never seen that before! The image was of Our Lady giving the Rosary to St. Dominic and a friar's chord to St. Francis.

No one could explain the image or its mystery. Over time, people began to chip away at the rock but the image remained undisturbed. Later when the image was studied by geologists, they found no paint or pigment on the rock. And in spite of boring into it three feet deep, the image remained as it was!

Las Lajas Sanctuary received canonical coronation from the Vatican in 1952. And it was made a minor basilica in 1994.

