A unique biological wonder, Caño Cristales, is a river located in the province of Meta in Colombia. The most beautiful river in the world gains its name due to its striking colors. Besides its brilliant colours, it also boasts of crystal pure water that allows one to see right down to the bottom.

Caño Cristales is commonly referred to as the Liquid Rainbow – a river with five colours. The river is pretty small – the length of Caño Cristales is less than 100 km (60 miles) while its width is 20 m only. Caño Cristales is indistinguishable from any other river for most of the year. However, for a brief period of time every year, Colombia’s Caño Cristales blossoms in a vibrant explosion of colours – shades of red, blue, yellow, black and green – something that happens nowhere else on the Earth.

It is considered to be one of the oldest rivers on Earth as much of the riverbed of Caño Cristales is covered with rocks composed of quartzite. These stones are part of the Serraina de la Macarenia tableland. This formation formed approximately 1.2 billion years ago. These comprise some of the oldest exposed rocks known to man.

Caño Cristales is an extremely fast flowing river. It possesses numerous waterfalls and rapids. Many deep cavities have been carved in the geology of the river bed.

Caño Cristales is located on the border of three large ecosystems. These are the Eastern Llanos, the Andes, and the Amazon rainforest. Each of these contributes its own high diversity of flora and fauna to the river. One of these is the source of its dazzling colours in the river. This is the aquatic plant *Macarenia clavigera*. It blooms in vast quantities on the rocks on the riverbed, and is bright red in colour.

Many used to think that it was the algae or moss giving the river its colours, but it turns out that during the short span between the wet and dry seasons, when the water level is just right, this unique species of plant that lines the bottom of the river turns into a sparkling red. Depending on which month it is, the time of day and amount of sunlight coming through, the *Macarenia clavigera* can appear anywhere from bright red to a deep purple, yellow and green or combination of these colours.

A mix of aquatic plants and tricks of light combines to turn its water a whole spectrum of colours.