

# EXPLORE!

## TRIP NOTES



### Central American Highlights (CAQ 2017)



TRIPDURATION  
**16**  
DAYS



**Tour Style:** Classic  
**Tour Pace:** Full On

**Tour Type:** Small Groups  
**Accommodation**  
**Grade:** Standard

**Trip Code:** CAQ

#### Trip Highlights - Central American Highlights

- ✓ Volcanoes - Enjoy the vistas over active and dormant volcanoes throughout the trip, including the three impressive cones overlooking the picture perfect city of Antigua, Guatemala
- ✓ Guatemalan Highlands - Experience the land of the Maya by visiting the colourful local market at Chichicastenango and the indigenous villages around Lake Atitlan, witnessing Maya ceremonies.
- ✓ Copan - Learn more about the ancient Maya culture at this UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the greatest Maya ruins in the Americas
- ✓ Suchitoto - Enjoy the charms of this pretty colonial town beside the shores of Lake Suchitlan
- ✓ Leon and Granada - Learn about the history behind the dictatorship and revolutionary wars in Nicaragua

#### Trip Essentials

**Accommodation:** 4 nights Premium Hotel  
2 nights Simple Hotel  
8 nights Standard Hotel  
1 night Standard Camping

**Included Meals:** 5 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners

**Start Point:** Join trip: Antigua  
**End Point:** Trip ends: San Jose  
**Transport:** Bus, Boat

**Countries:** Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica

## Central American Highlights

On this two-week adventure through Central America, we discover colonial towns in Nicaragua and El Salvador, admire the incredible volcanoes of Nicaragua and Guatemala, and search for wildlife in Costa Rica. We are surrounded by Maya culture as we uncover the rich history of the Maya kingdom at the ancient site of Copan in Honduras, and bring this into the present day through our visits to local villages at Lake Atitlan and the wonderful indigenous market of Chichicastenango.

### Why Book this trip

Experience five Central American countries in just two weeks, crossing 2500km in 15 days. Learn about the Maya history and culture from ancient times at the Copan Ruins, Honduras, to present day at the colorful Maya market of Chichicastenango. Stay in the pretty colonial towns of Suchitoto in El Salvador, and Leon and Granada, Nicaragua, and view wildlife at Cano Negro Wildlife Refuge in Costa Rica.



### Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

### Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

### Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

### Tour Pace: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.

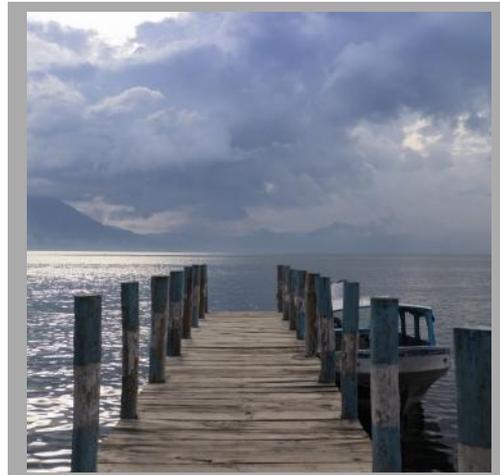
## Your trip itinerary

### Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

### Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your Tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and



organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

## DAY 1 Join tour Antigua (Guatemala)

Our tour starts in Antigua de Guatemala, where we will check-in to our conveniently-located hotel which will be our base for the next two nights. Famed for its well-preserved Spanish Mudejar-influenced architecture, this graceful colonial city was founded early in the 16th century. Set in a beautiful valley between the volcanoes of Agua, Fuego and Acatenango, its cobbled streets and pastel-coloured buildings make it one of the most charming and picturesque cities in Central America. Despite the damage caused by a series of earthquakes and floods over the centuries, Antigua's colonial heritage has seen it designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 2 Walking tour of Antigua, free afternoon to explore

This morning's walking tour takes us to some of the spectacular colonial churches for which the city is famed, including those of San Francisco, Santa Clara, La Merced and Las Capuchinas. Some of the churches have museums and ruins attached which you can choose to enter later in the afternoon. The city is also famous for its jade, not only green but the rarer black and lilac, and we will visit a museum explaining more about this industry. This afternoon has been left free for you to continue exploring at your own pace. You may choose to do a short hike up Cerro de la Cruz for panoramic views of the city, or enjoy a bit of bargain hunting in what is regarded as one of the best cities for shopping in Central America. There is everything here, from high-end jewellery to street vendors selling locally-produced crafts and textiles. Alternatively, try the choco-museum for a Mayan hot chocolate, which comes with pure chocolate, hot milk, honey and chili powder to mix to your personal taste.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 3 Travel to Panajachel; boat trip on Atitlan Lake

This morning, we continue our journey to the town of Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlan, which will be our base for the night. An old volcanic caldera, Lake Atitlan is considered to be one of the most spectacular lakes in the Americas and is certainly the deepest in Central America. Encircled by the volcanoes of Toliman, Atitlan and San Pedro, the lake's fertile shores are sprinkled with small communities of farmers and fishermen who still uphold the traditions of their Maya ancestors. Panajachel itself is an old Spanish settlement which has attracted visitors to this charming setting for years. Today, it is one of the region's most popular tourist spots, filled with galleries, handicraft shops and cafes, and is a good place to start our exploration of the area. This afternoon, we head out by boat to explore two of the many Mayan villages surrounding the lake. Santiago Atitlan lies at the base of the volcanic peaks of Toliman and Atitlan, and is home to the Tzutujil Maya people. The Tzutujil can trace their ancestry back to the post-classic period of the Maya (around 900-1500 AD). They still wear a traditional form of dress, with the women in particular sporting colourful blouses with embroidered geometric and bird designs. This is a busy village with lots of visitors and locals going about their business. Our second stop, on our return to Panajachel, is to the quieter island of San Antonio and the textile and ceramic co-operatives found there. Returning to Panajachel by boat, we have the remainder of the evening to explore the town and enjoy dinner in one of its many excellent restaurants.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 4 Chichicastenango Market then drive to Guatemala City

After an early start, we will head north towards the highlands of the El Quiche Province and the bustling town of Chichicastenango. Steeped in Maya culture, the town is famed for its market, where you can buy everything, from chickens and copal, to pigs and pottery. The best way to enjoy the market is to throw yourself into the melee and haggle with the traders, or escape to the beautifully colourful cemetery located just a short walk from the market. Following our visit, we travel to Guatemala City. Time allowing, we may enjoy a city tour in our vehicle before arriving at our hotel.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 5 Visit the UNESCO Site of Copan, free afternoon

Today we need to depart at around 4.30am to beat the traffic in Guatemala city and get on the road to Copan. The journey takes approximately 6 hours including the border crossing into Honduras, and we arrive into Copan where a local guide will escort us around the spectacular ruins - one of the richest archaeological sites to be uncovered in Central America and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Anyone familiar with Catherwood's incredible drawings (which first appeared in John Stephens' 1841 narrative - 'Incidents of Travel in Central America and Yucatan'), will recognise scenes and objects from this marvellous site. Stephens actually bought the entire site from a local farmer for just \$50. The Great Plaza is one of the most amazing achievements of the Classic Maya period and contains the greatest collection of Maya sculpture anywhere in Meso-America. Next door is the Acropolis - a group of massive pyramidal structures where royal power was once concentrated. Ascending one structure is the famous Hieroglyphic Stairway. Composed of some 2500 individual glyphs, its sides flanked by serpentine birds and snakes, this is the New World's longest inscribed Pre-Columbian text. Copan has been the subject of exploration and investigation since the 1830s. Remarkable finds continue to be unearthed by archaeologists, making it the most thoroughly researched and understood of all Maya sites. This afternoon has been left free for those who want to explore the site independently, or visit the accompanying museum of statues found in the site (not included). Alternatively, you may choose to participate in one of several optional activities in the area including horse riding or visiting the macaw mountain project, a tropical bird reserve that cares for rescued or endangered birds of the American tropics.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 6 Journey to Suchitoto (El Salvador)

This morning we have 2 border crossings, passing back into Guatemala before crossing through another Honduran border and then through into El Salvador. Driving through scenic countryside, we arrive at the pretty town of Las Palmas, with its charming walls covered with drawings by the town's children. We make a little stop at the town's handicraft markets before continuing on to Suchitoto. Nestled between the mountains and Suchitlan Lake, this charming colonial town, with its cobblestone streets and pretty houses, is a little slice of El Salvador at its timeless best. The town was once at the heart of the country's indigo trade. Today, as a rapidly developing centre for art and culture, Suchitoto is filled with craft shops and a rich vein of historic and cultural highlights, making it a wonderful place to explore and spend the next two nights.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 7 In Suchitoto, optional boat trip on the lake

Today has been left free for you to spend as you wish. In the morning you may take a boat trip out onto the lake, where over 200 bird species have been recorded, including hawks and falcons. In the afternoon, options include paying a visit to the nearby Cascada Los Tercios - a 30 metre-high waterfall which flows over an impressive cliff of tightly packed hexagonal basalt rocks, or making pupusas, the typical food of El Salvador. These corn or rice 'tortillas' are stuffed with cheese, refried beans, meat, herbs and vegetables, before being grilled on a hot plate. They are sold throughout the country and are part of the staple diet of any self-respecting Salvadoran.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 8 Transfer to the colonial town of Leon (Nicaragua)

Before leaving El Salvador this morning, we will stop off in Ilobasco - a town famous for its ceramics. The journey today is a long one, and including the stops totals approximately 13 hours. We travel through rich agricultural land towards the Honduran border, following the Gulf of Fonseca before crossing from Honduras into the Pacific lowlands of Nicaragua. We finish our journey in the charming colonial town of Leon, where we will spend the next two nights. As the country's capital for 200 years, Leon is still considered the intellectual centre of Nicaragua, and was at the heart of the revolutionary years of 1978 to 1989. Lying in the shadow of seven volcanoes, its old buildings and massive cathedral contribute to the elegant atmosphere of a city that seems almost to have been trapped in time.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Room Available**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 9 Free Day; optional hike to Cerro Negro Volcano

After yesterday's long travel day, today has been left free to explore this colonial gem at your own pace. Alternatively, you may choose to enjoy one of the optional excursions available in the area. One option is a hike on the nearby Cerro Negro Volcano - one of the most active volcanoes in Nicaragua. The hike takes approximately 1.5hrs at a moderate pace, and there are stunning views

across to the Pacific ocean as well as the surrounding countryside. The fun is in bouncing down the volcano, as we run/jump/walk down through the scree. For something less exertive, Las Penitas Beach is a great place to relax for the day, whilst a visit to San Juan Venado Mangrove Reserve provides the opportunity to spot wildlife including crocodiles, caiman and iguanas.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Room Available**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 10 Travel to Granada via Masaya Volcano National Park

This morning we depart for the volcanic landscapes of the Masaya Volcano National Park. Before our arrival, we take a stop at Nicaragua's capital, Managua, for a short tour of the city and views over Lake Managua. From there, we continue to one of Nicaragua's most stunning natural highlights, the Masaya Volcano National Park, which was the country's first national reserve and is home to two volcanoes and five craters. All being well, we will view the simply astounding geothermal activity at the Santiago Crater, before paying a visit to the park's visitor centre, where we will learn a little more about Central America's seismic history. Leaving the park, we head to Masaya market to appreciate the town's leather goods as well as other handicrafts. We'll end our day in another of Nicaragua's colonial gems. Atmospheric Granada is situated at the foot of Mombacho Volcano on the north-west shore of Lake Nicaragua. It was the first colonial city in Nicaragua, founded in 1524 by the conquistador Hernandez de Cordoba. Its magnificent setting, set off by baroque and renaissance buildings, is a visual delight and a superb location for our next two nights' accommodation. On arrival, our city tour will take in highlights such as the Parque Central, the monument to the War of Independence, the plaza and the San Francisco Convent. We also aim to visit the Casa des Tres Mundos and the neoclassical Bishop's Palace.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 11 In Granada; explore the city or optional sea kayaking

Today has been left free for you to discover more of the city at your own pace. Granada is the perfect city to explore on foot, wandering through narrow lanes and alleyways and uncovering hidden delights amongst the lush greenery and historic buildings. Alternatively, you may choose to visit Las Isletas by boat or sea kayak. This group of tiny islands just offshore is dominated by the Volcano Mombacho. Your Tour Leader will be more than happy to help arrange any excursions that you are keen on.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 12 Head to San Juan del Sur on the Pacific Coast

This morning, we head for Nicaragua's Pacific Coast for a chance to relax. Basing ourselves in San Juan del Sur for the night, this once sleepy fishing village is now a thriving coastal resort and a favourite for travellers and locals alike. The variety of restaurants that line its waterfront overlook a bay that is lined with fishing boats and yachts. The town itself still retains a laid back ambience, providing us with a perfect place to break the journey and enjoy some welcome beach time. You may wish to visit some of the neighbouring beaches at Playa Mayagal or Maderas.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 13 Travel to Cano Negro Wildlife Refuge (Costa Rica)

This morning, we cross the border into our final country of Costa Rica, with distant views of the Rincon de la Vieja Volcano. Our destination is the Cano Negro National Wildlife Refuge, where we will spend the afternoon enjoying a walk. Cano Negro lies in the centre of a flight path for millions of migrating bird species, making it an ideal stopping off point for glossy ibis, green backed herons, Nicaraguan grackle and roseate spoonbills.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 14 Optional wildlife boat trip, before driving to Sarapiquí

This morning, there is the option to take an early morning boat trip along the Rio Frio, in search of monkeys, sloths, iguanas and caimans. After breakfast, we continue on to La Virgen de Sarapiquí. A magnet for adventure-seekers, the Sarapiquí region contains a number of national parks and reserves, including the Braulio Carrillo National Park and the Sarapiquí Protected Zone. It is famed for its

rich natural diversity and is home to the endangered Green Macaw. Tonight, we will camp among the flora and fauna of this rainforest setting. Our accommodation is in fixed tents with en suite facilities.

Overnight: **Standard Camping**

**Your own tent available**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 15 Morning free. Afternoon head to the capital, San Jose

This morning has been left free to enjoy any number of optional excursions in the area. You may choose to hike, horse ride, or 'fly' through the jungle canopy on a zip-wire, some 20-30 metres above the rainforest floor. Costa Rica has been rated as one of the best whitewater rafting destinations in the world and this morning also provides an opportunity to tackle the foaming torrents of the Sarapiquí River. Classified as a Grade III river, the Sarapiquí is fringed by lush vegetation that provides an ideal refuge for toucans, monkeys, parrots and all manner of birdlife. This makes it the perfect setting in which to combine exhilarating rafting with a stunning natural backdrop. All safety equipment will be provided and the excursions are run by professional and trained guides. This afternoon, we continue through the scenic grandeur of the Braulio Carillo National Park to San Jose, Costa Rica's colourful capital. Founded in 1738 and set in a fertile valley blanketed in a lush abundance of coffee and sugar cane plantations, the city is one of the youngest and most cosmopolitan capitals in Central America. A final evening in the city provides a fitting end to our remarkable journey across this incredible region.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Room Available**

**Swimming Pool Available** 

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 16 Tour ends San Jose

Our tour ends after breakfast this morning.

 **Included Meals:** None

## Accommodation and Meals

### Accommodation Notes

During this trip you will be spending one night in a fixed camp in Costa Rica. These tents are very large, walk-in tents with two large single beds in each, a fan, bedside table and lamp and duvets. Each tent has ensuite toilet and shower facilities.

### Food & Drink

Included meals: 5 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

## Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

### Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

#### Guatemala

**Lunch £:** 4.00 - 6.00

**Dinner £:** 8.00 - 10.00

#### Honduras

**Lunch £:** 7.00

**Dinner £:** 10.00

#### El Salvador

**Lunch £:** 8.00

**Dinner £:** 12.00

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## Nicaragua

**Lunch £:** 8.00 - 10.00

**Dinner £:** 10.00 - 12.00

## Costa Rica

**Lunch £:** 13.00

**Dinner £:** 13.00

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## Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

## Guatemala

**Bottle of Beer £:** 2.00 - 4.00

**Water £:** 1.00 - 2.00

## Honduras

**Bottle of Beer £:** 1.75

**Water £:** 2.00

## El Salvador

**Bottle of Beer £:** 1.20

**Water £:** 1.70

## Nicaragua

**Bottle of Beer £:** 2.00

**Water £:** 0.80

## Costa Rica

**Bottle of Beer £:** 1.80

**Water £:** 1.30

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## International Departure Taxes

Please allow US\$ 30 for border crossings.

## Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

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## Optional Excursions

Antigua - Coffee Finca - US\$ 25; Jade workshop US\$48

Copan - Macaw mountain US\$ 15, Horse riding US\$ 25, Hot Springs - USD\$ 35

Suchitoto - Indigo Dye Museum US\$ 25; Lake Suchitlan US\$ 25 (based on 4 people), Cookery classes USD\$ 12 per person (minimum 5 people)

Leon - Las Penitas and Juan Venado Reserve US\$ 45; Iguana farm US\$ 25; Cerro Negro Hike US\$ 30

Granada - Boat to Las Isletas US\$ 25 based on 4 sharing, Kayak US\$ 35, Canopy/zip lining US\$ 40

San Juan del Sur - Surf lessons US\$ 35hr. Board hire US\$ 10 per half day

Canoe Negro - Boat trip US\$ 30 pp; Night walk US\$ 20pp (minimum 6 people)

Pozo Azul - Nature walk US\$ 27, Canopy/zip lining US\$ 56, Rafting US\$ 58 Snake garden US\$ 30

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## Tipping - Tour Leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

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## Tipping - Local Crew

Local Crew: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow US\$50 for tipping.



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## Foreign Exchange

### Guatemala

**ATM Availability:** Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

**Local Currency:** Quetzal

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange.

**Where to Exchange:** Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

### Honduras

**ATM Availability:** Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

**Local Currency:** Lempira

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange.

**Where to Exchange:** Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

### El Salvador

**ATM Availability:** Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

**Local Currency:** US Dollar

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange.

**Where to Exchange:** Most major towns. Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival. Exchanges at border.

### Nicaragua

**ATM Availability:** Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

**Local Currency:** Cordoba

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange. USD can be used in some places in Nicaragua.

**Where to Exchange:** Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

### Costa Rica

**ATM Availability:** Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

**Local Currency:** Costa Rican Colon.

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange. USD can be used in some places in Costa Rica

**Where to Exchange:** Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

## Joining your Trip

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

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## Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at [www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk), in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

## Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

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## Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Important Information

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE  
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers [www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore](http://www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore) who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

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### Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at [www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety](http://www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety)

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting [cr@explore.co.uk](mailto:cr@explore.co.uk) or 01252 379438.

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### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

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## Visa Information

El Salvador: Citizens of the UK and most EU citizens do not require a visa. Nationals of Canada, Greece, Portugal and USA must buy a tourist card (current cost 10USD) on arrival, this is valid for 30 days from entry.

Costa Rica: Citizens from the UK, US, Canada and most EU countries do not require a visa for a stay up to 90 days. Citizen of Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland do not require a visa for stays up to 30 days.

Nicaragua: Visas are not required for UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens.

Honduras: Citizens from UK, New Zealand, Australia, New Zealand and most EU national do not require a visa.

Guatemala: Visas are not required for UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens.

Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related issues with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

USA: (including those in transit) Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) - where you apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), which applies if you enter the country by sea or by air. This must be done on line - <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely to be refused boarding.

You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover.

If you have visited Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan since 2011 or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot travel with an ESTA and instead you will need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel.

Please note for your ESTA application you will be required to supply Point of Contact information. Explore's USA contact information will be listed on your final documentation which you will receive approximately 3-4 weeks before departure. If you are leaving for the USA before this, please call the Explore team to get this information. (Not necessary if in transit)

For further information please check out the US embassy website. Visa applications - <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/apply.html>

Canada: An electronic travel authorisation (ETA) is required by British citizens transiting via Canada. For more information see the official Canadian government website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp>

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

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## Vaccinations & Protection

### Guatemala

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificate if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

### Honduras

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificate if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

### El Salvador

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificate if travelling from infected areas. A detailed

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### **Nicaragua**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

### **Costa Rica**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

## **Preparing for your Trip**

### **Climate**

#### **Guatemala**

In the high plains (1524m-1981m) the climate is temperate all year round. In lower areas the climate is semi-tropical. The mountains can be cool especially at night. In general, the dry season in Guatemala lasts from Nov - April. From May to October there are often fine mornings and clear evenings but afternoon rains tend to be heavy. The Peten lowlands tend to be rainy all year round though less so from February to April.

#### **Honduras**

Climate change varies depending upon altitude. Mid range temperatures reach about 28°C. Rainfall is low to moderate with May to October being the wettest season. Temperature ranges in the lower reaches of the slopes and along the coast are more constant, with less rainfall.

#### **El Salvador**

Has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The Pacific lowlands are hot; the central plateau and mountain areas are more moderate. The rainy season extends from May to October. Rainfall during this season generally comes from low pressure over the Pacific and usually falls in heavy afternoon thunderstorms. From November through April, El Salvador is dry and hot.

#### **Nicaragua**

Tropical, with little seasonal variation in temperature. The heavy rainy season is May to October but it can rain at any time along the Caribbean coast of Rio San Juan. There are 3 main climactic zones, the hot tropical lowlands and the cooler hill region, which has a larger range of daily temperature.

#### **Costa Rica**

Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page. Costa Rica has a tropical climate with high temperature humidity and rainfall. The average temperature is 21°C in the highlands and variable in the lowlands. The rainy season is from May to November and the summer from December to April, but it does still tend to rain, usually in short bursts. Bear in mind that Costa Rica has 12 microclimates and weather can vary significantly in one day.

### **Clothing**

Lightweight clothing is essential though a warmer sweater is advisable for cooler evenings in the highlands. A waterproof is essential. The jungle lowlands are hot and muggy, and it can rain at any time of year. Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts are recommended on jungle walks.

### **Equipment**

Bring a torch, water bottle, insect repellent, high factor sunscreen, beach towel, and a waterproof bag for your camera. Binoculars are very useful for bird and animal spotting. An umbrella can be useful in short downpours.

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## Footwear

Comfortable walking boots or shoes and trainers or sandals.

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## Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of luggage and a day bag. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - don't overload yourself. Sleeping bags are not required.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

# General Information

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## Country details

### Guatemala

**Population:** 13,276,517

**Size of Country:** 108,890 sq km

**Major Language:** Spanish

**Religion:** Catholic and Protestant

**Time Difference to GMT:** -6

### Honduras

**Population:** 8,249,574

**Size of Country:** 112,492 sq km

**Major Language:** Spanish

**Religion:** Roman Catholic and Protestant

**Time Difference to GMT:** -6

### El Salvador

**Population:** 6,134,000

**Size of Country:** 21,040 sq km

**Major Language:** Castilian

**Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Time Difference to GMT:** -6

### Nicaragua

**Population:** 5,891,199

**Size of Country:** 130,373 sq km

**Major Language:** Spanish

**Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Time Difference to GMT:** -6

### Costa Rica

**Population:** 4,608,426

**Size of Country:** 51,100 sq km

**Major Language:** Spanish

**Religion:** Christian, Roman Catholic

**Time Difference to GMT:** -6

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## Electric Supply & Plugs

### Guatemala

2 Pin Flat

### Honduras

2 Pin Flat

### El Salvador

2 Pin Flat

## Nicaragua

2 Pin Flat

## Costa Rica

2 Pin Flat

## Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award-winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family-run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

### Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

### Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group ([www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

## Booking Your Holiday

### Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

### Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

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## 100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

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## Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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