

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Central American Explorer (CAE 2017)



TRIPDURATION
25
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic

Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups

Accommodation

Grade: Standard

Trip Code: CAE

Trip Highlights - Central American Explorer

- ✓ Copan - Learn more about the ancient Maya culture at this UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the greatest Maya ruins in the Americas
- ✓ Antigua - Explore this elegant colonial city, overlooked by three volcanoes
- ✓ Panama Canal - One of the Modern Wonders of the World
- ✓ Monteverde - Search for the beautiful quetzal in this remarkable cloudforest reserve
- ✓ Caribbean - Relax on the beautiful Bocas De Toro archipelago and Roatan Island
- ✓ Leon and Granada - Discover these lively colonial cities, historic rivals for the title of capital city of Nicaragua

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 21 nights Standard Hotel
3 nights Premium Hotel

Included Meals: 10 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Panama City

End Point: Trip ends: Antigua

Transport: Bus, Flight, Ferry
Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala

Countries:

Central American Explorer

From verdant rainforests to smouldering volcanoes and long sandy beaches, Central America is one of the world's most magnificent regions. On this epic 25-day adventure we discover the highlights of Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. Explore the colonial cities of Leon, Granada and Antigua. Relax on white-sand beaches in the Bocas del Toro archipelago and on Roatan Island. Visit the fascinating site of Copan and discover nature in Monteverde Cloudforest and Rincon de la Vieja.



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.

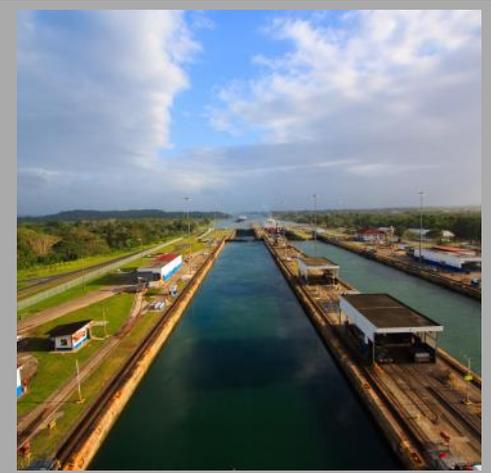
Your trip itinerary

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 in Panama City (Panama)

Arrive Panama City and check-in to hotel. Panama City was built on the back of the trade and plunder from the Spanish colonies in South America, and was the start of the trans-isthmus trade route. Gold and silver were carried along the King's Highway by mule across the rainforest to the Caribbean, which naturally led to unwanted attention, specifically from the Welsh buccaneer Sir Henry Morgan, who led a raid resulting in the ransack of the original city in the 17th century.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Panama Canal visit; afternoon free to explore the city

This morning we will visit the Miraflores Locks to see the famous Panama Canal and appreciate the scale of this engineering miracle. Running 50 miles, the canal was carved out of the rainforest and through hillsides, lakes were dammed and locks built. After a serious French attempt costing in excess of 20,000 lives, the US successfully completed this remarkable endeavour after 10 years of toil in 1914. This afternoon has been left free for you to indulge in a little exploring of your own. You may like to visit 'Casco Viejo', the heart of colonial Panama City. Its ramparts were built to fend off marauders and encircle the promontory, and a stroll along the top affords us views of the 'Bridge of the Americas' and far in the distance the skyscrapers of the modern town, a total contrast to the Spanish plazas & colonial buildings all around you.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Public bus to David then head to Boquete

This morning we take a public bus to Panama's beautiful southwest Chiriqui Province. This region is home to the Volcan Baru, a volcanic peak that at 3475m is the highest point in the country. The volcanic soil makes this a productive region, abundant in coffee and banana plantations, sugarcane crops and livestock. Heading for the provincial capital of David, we transfer into the cool fertile highlands to the town of Boquete. Located amidst a spectacular natural setting Boquete is a perfect base for walking into the surrounding hills, relaxing, or bird watching.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Drive and boat to the Bocas del Toro Archipelago

With a morning to enjoy time in Boquete before we depart in the afternoon for Almirante Port, from where we take a boat to the Isla Colon and the small town of Bocas de Toro, our base for exploring the stunning archipelago and the equally spectacular Parque Nacional Marino Isla Bastimentos. The archipelago itself is made up of a number of beautiful forested islands lying in the warm Caribbean waters just to the south of Costa Rica and the laid back beaches and dazzling reefs make this the ideal Caribbean paradise to relax or explore.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 5 In Bocas del Toro, optional boat trip around the islands

We have a full free day today to enjoy fully this lovely island. There are a number of optional activities that you might like to try. The island is ringed with stunning beaches and there are opportunities to snorkel or dive the rich waters off shore. You may like to take a boat trip around the archipelago, which will go dolphin spotting or visit one of the outlying islands, such as Isla Bastimentos with its lovely beaches and tropical forests. The marine park itself can also be visited and is an important nesting ground for sea turtles, as well as being an important reserve for an abundance of marine and land based life.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 Journey to Sarapiquí (Costa Rica)

Returning to the mainland by boat we turn north and head on a full day's drive to the Costa Rican town of Puerto Viejo Sarapiquí. We cross the border at Guabito, into the Caribbean lowlands of Limon Province. Puerto Viejo lies at the confluence of the Puerto Viejo and the Sarapiquí rivers, an area of tropical rain forest that was once an important hub on the Caribbean trade routes. The area lies in the

shadow of the Central Cordillera Mountains, sandwiched between the Braulio Carrillo N.P. to the west and the Tortuguero N.P. and Barra del Colorado National Refuge to the east.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Travel to Arenal; optional evening bathe in hot springs

This morning we have a chance to explore a little more of Puerto Viejo and its environs. This area has been in the forefront of conservation for a number of years and La Selva biological station on the outskirts of town has done a great deal to involve the local community directly in the research and conservation of the area. You may like to take a walk along one of the many trails, or perhaps take a boat ride along the river, to see for yourself some of the beautiful forest that covers this fertile region. In the afternoon we drive, skirting the great central volcanic massif, past fertile farmlands, rich with a diversity of tropical crops, bringing us within sight of Arenal, Costa Rica's most active volcanic cone. This classic cone, which rises to 1,633m and is covered by a tangled mass of vegetation on one side whilst the other is starkly barren and scarred by lava flows. We recommend an evening bathe in the nearby thermal baths this evening (optional).

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Drive to Monteverde Cloudforest Reserve via Arenal Volcano

This morning we have the included to visit the still active Arenal Volcano, set in an area of national park covering some 9,884 acres. The volcano has been fairly constantly active since the late 1960s and that and the impressive manmade Lake Arenal, the largest in Cost Rica, has helped the area to regenerate through tourism. After our visit we continue to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, one of the last remaining places in Central America where the famous, Resplendent Quetzal occasionally sighted here. The reserve covers an area of 10,522 hectares and contains within it a staggering diversity of flora and fauna; 2,000 species of plant, 400 species of birds and 100 different species of mammals.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 Guided reserve walk; optional canopy tour and night walk

An early start this morning; we will include a guided walk of the reserve, searching for a glimpse of the three-wattled bellbird or the Quetzal, whose feathers were traded as valuable items throughout pre-Columbian America. You can spend the rest of the day exploring further, you may wish to participate in the many amazing optional activities around the Reserve such as; Canopy Tour, sliding down wires through the canopy, exploring the forest more sedately on suspension bridges strung at canopy height, or visiting the butterfly farm, orchid garden and ecological farm. Another option is the fascinating night walk.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 10 Transfer to Rincon de la Vieja and visit the national park

We continue our journey, to Rincon de la Vieja, located close to the Nicaraguan border in the Guanacaste Province. A still active volcano the area is lush and pristine region of lagoons and craters, punctuated with steaming vents and pools of boiling mud. The changing elevation ranges of the park have resulted in a variety of quite different habitats that house a variety of vegetation and wildlife. On arrival we will have a short visit to the National Park as tomorrow the park is closed

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 11 Free day; options include walking or a canyon climb

Today there will be plenty of time to enjoy some of the many optional activities on offer. These include walking, walk to mud and hot springs, or perhaps the Rio Blanco Canyon climb and swing or horse-riding.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 12 Travel to Ometepe (Nicaragua); optional walks

Crossing the border into Nicaragua this morning a short drive brings us to San Jorge, the departure point for ferries to Ometepe Island. Ometepe is made up of two volcanoes connected by an isthmus; indeed its name comes from the Nahuatl language and means 'two hills'. The perfect cone of Concepción volcano soars from the depths of Lake Nicaragua to 1610m, only just dwarfing the neighbouring Maderas volcano at 1394m. We leave the time here free to explore at your own pace and there are many things to do during our time here. You can explore by local bus or truck, perhaps searching out pre-Colombian petroglyphs carved by the indigenous people, or taking in some of the highlights of the island and some short walks on the volcanic slopes (all optional). The forests echo with the sounds of howler monkeys and parrots and the canopy hides sloths and hawks amongst its lush foliage. Alternatively you could visit the San Ramon Falls. For the less energetic, some of the black sand beaches are the perfect spot to drink in the stunning views across the lake.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 13 Free day to discover Ometepe Island

Today is left free to further explore these amazing volcanic islands.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 14 Journey to the mainland and head to Granada

We return by boat to San Jorge this morning and from there drive to Granada. Atmospheric Granada is a colonial gem, situated at the foot of Mombacho volcano on the northwest shore of Lake Nicaragua. It was the first colonial city in Nicaragua, founded in 1524 by the conquistador Hernandez de Cordoba and is set off by baroque and renaissance buildings which is a pure visual delight. We plan a city tour this afternoon, which will include visits to the Parque Central, the Monument to the war of independence, the plaza and the convent of San Francisco, which holds the largest collection of stone sculptures from the early Americans who lived in Granada before the Spaniards.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 15 In Granada; free day to explore the colonial city

Granada is the perfect city to explore on foot, wandering the narrow lanes and alleyways, discovering hidden delights amongst the central Plaza and historic buildings. It is possible to visit Las Isletas by boat or sea kayak - a group of tiny islands dominated by the Volcano Mombacho, located just offshore. You can glide through the forest canopy on a zip line - a remarkable experience, or venture farther afield, into the surrounding area, a prosperous agricultural centre growing hemp and tobacco. There are also possibilities to arrange visits to the Mombacho Cloud Forest. Your tour leader will be more than happy to help arrange any excursions you may like to try.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 16 Drive to Leon via Masaya Market

We drive to the old colonial capital of Leon today, lying in the shadow of the Cordillera de los Maribios Mountains. Heading northwest from Granada we stop at the famous market town of Masaya to visit the Masaya volcano. From here we continue to the Nicaraguan capital of Managua. In comparison with colonial Leon and Granada, Managua is not the most attractive of Nicaragua's cities but it does have its own curious, if somewhat unorthodox, charm. Badly damaged in the 1972 earthquake, the city is gradually being rebuilt. We plan a short tour to see some points of interest. We then drive to Leon, today considered the intellectual centre of Nicaragua, Leon was founded in 1525 and was the capital for 200 years. In the afternoon we will have a walking tour of Leon, where our local guide will introduce us to some of the city's most important sites visiting Plaza del las Armas, the Cathedral arguably the largest in Central America and a UNESCO heritage site and the Sandinista Murals and Ruben Dario Park, named after one of Latin America's most renowned poets. The city of Leon was home to the revolution that shaped Nicaragua's future, and since then it has played a

EXPLORE! Share your experiences with us



crucial part in the social and political history of the country. On our walking tour we will see many murals depicting the civil war and the revolution - a testament to the importance of this movement in the country's turbulent history.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 17 Free day for optional Cerro Negro Volcano hike

Today we have some free time, and the intrepid amongst us may head out of the city to summit Cerro Negro, an imposing active volcano just a short journey from the city of Leon. The ascent takes around an hour, and although the climb is only around 500m, the path is steep and tough. The absence of trees on the slopes of the mountain provides fantastic 360 views of the area one we are at the crater rim, and if we are lucky, we may see the smoke and gas often emitted from this central crater. 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 a wealth of wildlife, including crocodiles, caiman and iguanas.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 18 Transfer to Tegucigalpa then fly to Roatan (Honduras)

Early this morning we depart from Leon, before crossing the border into Honduras and continuing our journey to the capital, Tegucigalpa. Founded by the Spanish in 1578, the city was once a trading centre for the locally mined gold and silver for its colonial masters and its ideal location must have made it a pleasant respite from the oppressive heat of the coastal regions. From here we will fly to the beautiful Bay Islands, home to some of the best diving and snorkelling in the Caribbean. The 3 islands lying some 50km off the Honduran coast are a marine wonderland, with reefs that teem with life. For the next two nights we base ourselves on the island of Roatan, the largest of the islands and the perfect location from which to enjoy the spectacular beaches and rich waters of this underwater haven.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 19 On Roatan, choose to relax on beaches, kayak or snorkel

Here you are free to do as much or as little as you wish. The obvious activity for most people who come to these islands is to explore the offshore reefs, part of a chain that is only second in size to the Great Barrier Reef itself. There are a number of dive shops on the island for any qualified divers (don't forget to bring your certification with you) and the snorkelling is second to none, with reefs that are alive with corals and sponges and colourful reef fish of every size, shape and hue. It is also possible to hire boats and kayaks to explore farther afield, or go fishing. Those who prefer to stick to dry land might like to stroll through the palm fringed lanes and wander the island in search of macaws, toucans and parrots, or perhaps just some peace and quiet at the nearby Sandy Bay's resort or visit the nearby botanical gardens.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 20 Head back to the mainland and travel to Copan Ruinas

Leaving our island paradise early this morning, we head back to the mainland for a full days travel. Our destination today is the magnificent Mayan ruins of Copan. Travelling around the town of San Pedro Sula in the rich hot fertile lowlands of the Sula Valley, we arrive at Copan Ruinas, a lovely village of adobe buildings very close to the ruins themselves.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 21 Visit the UNESCO Site of Copan, free afternoon

This morning we visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site with a local guide. Everyone 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 for US\$ 50 from a local farmer! The Great Plaza is one of the most amazing achievements of the Classic Maya period (AD 750) and contains the greatest collection of Maya sculpture anywhere

in Meso- America. The famous Hieroglyphic Stairway is composed of 2500 individual glyphs; its sides flanked by serpentine birds and snakes. We have the whole day to enjoy this special place, leaving you plenty of time to explore on your own. In the afternoon you may like to visit the museum dedicated to the site, or visit some nearby hot springs or to macaw Mountain (optional).

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 22 Drive to Antigua (Guatemala); walking tour of the town

We head into Guatemala this morning, to the stunning city of Antigua, set in a beautiful valley between the volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango. An orientation tour of this graceful old colonial city, with its cobbled streets and lovely old buildings identifies it as one of the most charming in the country and shows how it can justly claim to be one of the most picturesque in Central America, despite the damage caused by a series of earthquakes and floods over the ages. This afternoon we intend to take a walking tour of the town. Much of Antigua has been repeatedly devastated by earthquakes, but still it retains a graceful charm and its buildings and ruins give it the air of a snapshot in time.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 23 Free day to explore Antigua

The next two days are free to explore more of the city and its environs as you wish. Antigua itself deserves at least a day's wandering, you may like to visit churches, colonial buildings, museums as well as spending time shopping in its many markets. Alternatively may like to visit the close by Mayan site; Iximche, once the capital of the Cakchiquel Maya, founded in the 15th century. Set within pine forests the ruined city was once believed to be home to some 10,000 people at its height, until the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors resulted in its eventual destruction in 1526.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 24 In Antigua; choose to visit Panajachel and Lake Atitlan

If you would like to head out of Antigua today, you have the options of visiting the decidedly different towns of Panajachel or Guatemala City. On the shores of the spectacular Lago de Atitlan, Panajachel is an old Spanish settlement that has attracted foreigners to its charming location for years and today it is one of the area's premier tourist attractions. The lake itself is an old caldera, its deep waters surrounded by the towering volcanic peaks of its neighbours. This is an ideal place to shop for those last minute presents, or just enjoy the ambience of its lakeside setting. In contrast, Guatemala City, the bustling country capital, is situated on a high plateau (1495m) and possesses all the usual contradictions found in large Latin American cities: elegant tree-lined boulevards and high-rise architecture alongside crowded shanties. It also has a number of sites and museums that are worth visiting, including the Ixchel Museum, with its displays of Guatemalan textiles and arts, or the majestic Palacio National in the Plaza Major.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 25 Tour ends Antigua

Our tour ends this morning in Antigua.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 10 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.

Panama

Lunch £: 7.00

Dinner £: 10.00

Costa Rica

Lunch £: 13.00

Dinner £: 13.00

Nicaragua

Lunch £: 8.00 - 10.00

Dinner £: 10.00 - 12.00

Honduras

Lunch £: 7.00

Dinner £: 10.00

Guatemala

Lunch £: 4.00 - 6.00

Dinner £: 8.00 - 10.00

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.

Panama

Bottle of Beer £: 3.00

Water £: 0.70

Costa Rica

Bottle of Beer £: 1.80

Water £: 1.30

Nicaragua

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 0.80

Honduras

Bottle of Beer £: 1.75

Water £: 2.00

Guatemala

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00 - 4.00

Water £: 1.00 - 2.00

International Departure Taxes

Please allow US\$40 for border taxes.

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.

Optional Excursions

Panama City tour US\$10

Boquete - Walking tour in the rainforest US\$25; Bird watching US\$35; Coffee tour US\$20

Bocas del Toro - Full day snorkel excursion US\$25

Sarapiquí - River boat trip US\$23

Arenal - Hotspring US\$65 (with dinner); US\$15 Las Termalitas.

Monteverde - Butterfly Gardens US\$15, Reptile and Amphibian Centre US\$15, Nightwalk US\$25, Hanging bridges US\$35, Zipwire Canopy US\$45.

Rincon De La Vieja - Horse riding US\$ 45

Ometepe - Guided tour US\$ 25, Volcano Maderas / or Concepcion walk US\$ 35 (min. 2 persons).

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, Mombacho Cloud Forest Canopy Tour US\$ 55.00 based on 4 sharing, Kayak US\$ 25

Roatan - Diving US\$ 30 one tank, Snorkel - US\$15, Glass bottom - US\$25

Copan - Visit to Hot Springs US\$ 35, Macaw Mountain US\$ 10 +US\$5 tpt

Antigua - All prices depending on numbers - minimum 3

Lake Atitlan inc. boat trip US\$80-23; Guatemala City US\$ 90-30; Pacaya volcano US\$65 (based on 5) and US\$39 (based on 15) ; Jade workshop US\$48; Day trip to Tikal US\$350 (inc guide and lunch) - subject to availability - please book with your Tour Leader on arrival

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.

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\$65 for tipping.

Foreign Exchange

Panama

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 not widely accepted outside Panama City.

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

Local Currency: Balboa.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US dollars are legal tender in Panama. Notes should be in good condition, otherwise they might be difficult to use.

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.

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.

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

EXPLORE! Share your experiences with us



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.

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.

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.

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, 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>.

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.

EXPLORE!

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 who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

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

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 or 01252 379438.

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.

Visa Information

Panama: Citizens from the UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canada do not require a visa for a stay up to 30 days. However, on entry you will be required to show that you have either 500USD in cash or a credit card.

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.

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 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 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.

Vaccinations & Protection

Panama

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.

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.

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 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.

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 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

Panama

Panama has a tropical climate with high temperature and humidity, the average temperature 30°C. The rainy season is from May to November and the summer from December to April. The rainfall is of a tropical nature, falling for 1-2 hours in the afternoon.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

A torch, water bottle, insect repellent, high factor sunscreen, beach towel, camera film, waterproof bag for camera and motion sickness tablets/patches for the boat. If intending to snorkel you may wish to bring your own equipment and anyone intending to dive on Roatan will need to bring log books and certification. Binoculars are very useful for bird and animal spotting. An umbrella can be useful in short downpours.

Footwear

Comfortable walking boots or shoes and trainers or sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of luggage and a daysack. The flight from Tegucigalpa to Roatan has a maximum baggage allowance of 13KG, so don't overload yourself. There is an additional charge of US\$1.50 per lb of additional weight. You can also take 1 piece in the cabin of 10lbs (4.5kg).

Luggage allowance on trip: 14Kg

General Information

Country details

Panama

Population: 3,405,813

Size of Country: 75,517 sq km

Major Language: Spanish

Religion: Roman Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: -5

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

Nicaragua

Population: 5,891,199

Size of Country: 130,373 sq km

Major Language: Spanish

Religion: Roman Catholic

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

Guatemala

Population: 13,276,517

Size of Country: 108,890 sq km

Major Language: Spanish

Religion: Catholic and Protestant

Time Difference to GMT: -6

Electric Supply & Plugs

Panama

2 Pin Flat

Costa Rica

2 Pin Flat

Nicaragua

2 Pin Flat

Honduras

2 Pin Flat

Guatemala

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) 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

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.

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.

These trip notes were printed on 21/08/2017 08:40:14