

# EXPLORE!

## Tour Notes



### Central American Explorer (CAE 2014)



TOUR  
DURATION  
**25**  
DAYS



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

**Tour Type:** Small Groups  
**Tour Comfort:** Standard

**Tour Code:** CAE

#### Tour Highlights - Central American Explorer

- ✓ Panama Canal - One of the modern wonders of the world
- ✓ Bocas De Toro - Beautiful Caribbean archipelago
- ✓ Monteverde - Cloudforest reserve, home of the Resplendent Quetzal
- ✓ Ometepe Island - Twin volcanic peaks rising from Lake Nicaragua
- ✓ Leon and Granada - Beautiful colonial cities, historically rivals for the title capital of Nicaragua
- ✓ Roatan Island - Spectacular reefs and stunning beaches
- ✓ Copan - Famous Maya ceremonial centre
- ✓ Antigua - One of the finest colonial cities in Central America

#### Tour Essentials

**Accommodation:** 24 nights Standard Hotel

**Included Meals:** 9 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners

**Start Point:** Join tour: Panama City

**End Point:** Tour 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 exhilarating adventure we see the highlights of Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala



### 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.

### Tour Comfort: 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 tour 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 Rooms 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 Rooms 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:** None

## 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:** None

## 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

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 Rooms 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 Rooms 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

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## 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**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 13 Free day to discover Ometepe Island

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

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

## DAY 16 Drive to Leon via Masaya market; tour of Leon on arrival

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. Still considered the intellectual centre of Nicaragua, Leon was founded in 1525 and was the capital for 200 years. The old buildings with wrought iron balconies, the massive cathedral (arguably the largest in Central America), the arched colonnades and narrow streets all add an elegant atmosphere to this quiet city, which seems almost lost in a time warp. On arrival we will enjoy a walking tour of the city, visiting the Plaza de Armas, the Cathedral, the Sandinista Murals and Ruben Dario Park, named after one of Latin America's most renowned poets.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

**Single Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

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## DAY 17 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 three 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** None

## DAY 18 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.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 19 Free day; go for walks or visit botanical gardens

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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## 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 Rooms Available**



**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## 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 Rooms 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

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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: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Rooms 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: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Rooms Available**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 24 In Antigua; choose to visit Chichicastenango or Panajachel

The decidedly different venues of Chichicastenango and Panajachel are also options for your time here. Panajachel, on the shores of the spectacular Lago de Atitlan, 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. 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 Nacional in the Plaza Major

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**  
**Single Rooms Available**

 **Included Meals:** None

## DAY 25 Tour ends Antigua

Our tour ends this morning in Antigua.

 **Included Meals:** None

## Accommodation and Meals

### Food & Drink

Included meals: 9 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners included in the price of this tour. 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 Tour

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

### International Departure Taxes

Please allow US\$40 for border taxes.

There is a 15USD exit charge payable at the airport.

### 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

Panama City - City tour of Casco Viejo US\$10

Boquete - Coffee tour US\$40; walking tour US\$10

Bocas De Toro - Boat tour with snorkel US\$25. Including Bastimiento Reserve US\$35

Sarapiquí - Tirimbina Reserve US\$40 inc. transport; Boat trip US\$20.

Arenal - Hotspring US\$35 (with meal).

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

Rincon De La Vieja - Horse riding US\$ 35, N Park US\$10 + transport US\$ 10.

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

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

Copan - Visit to Hot Springs US\$ 35, Macaw Mountain US\$ 10.

Antigua - Lake Atitlan US\$ 45 inc. boat trip US\$70-35 depending on numbers; Guatemala City US\$ 25, Chichicastenango US\$ 16 (based on 7-18 pers.)

; Visit Lake Atitlan and Chichicastenango US\$57 (based on 5 ), US\$40 (based on 10) and US\$27 (based on 15) ; Pacaya volcano US\$65 (based on 5) and US\$39 (based on 15) .

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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

### Panama

**ATM Availability:** There are some ATMs in Panama City, but we do not recommend relying on them as your only source of spending money.

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are not widely accepted outside Panama City.

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques are not always easy to exchange.

**Local Currency:** Balboa.

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** It's important to carry all your funds in US Dollars (NOT Sterling, which is not so readily exchanged). It is advisable to take some US\$200-250 of your total spending money in cash in mixed denominations. Items of a personal nature such as laundry. US\$ bills must not have any marks or tears.

**Where to Exchange:** Large towns.

### Costa Rica

**ATM Availability:** ATMs are widely available though can be temperamental. Generally accept Cirrus and Maestro, Visa or Mastercard.

**Credit Card Acceptance:** In major restaurants.

**Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques are not always easy to exchange. US\$ Travellers cheques can usually be changed on Days 1, 5 and 11.

**Local Currency:** Costa Rican Colon.

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** US Dollars are legal tender in Costa Rica and they are accepted in most restaurants, hotels and shops. It is advisable to carry approximately US\$200-300 cash of your total spending money, in mixed denominations. Please note that US \$100 bills are often not accepted. (Pound Sterling is also not readily exchanged.)

**Where to Exchange:** San Jose and major towns.

### Nicaragua

**ATM Availability:** Available in most cities and towns. We do not recommend relying on them as your sole source of spending money

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are of limited use, but may be brought along 'just in case'.

**Travellers Cheques:** We do not recommend

**Local Currency:** Cordoba

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry your funds in U.S. currency (NOT Sterling, which is almost impossible to change). It is advisable to bring at least US\$300 - \$400 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denomination notes (in good condition). Note: US dollar bills with the series CB-B2 year 2001 will not be accepted for exchange. Also be aware that \$100 bills are often not accepted.

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

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## Honduras

**ATM Availability:** Available in most cities and towns. We do not recommend relying on them as your sole source of spending money.

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are of limited use, but may be brought along 'just in case'.

**Travellers Cheques:** We do not recommend

**Local Currency:** Lempira

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry your funds in U.S. currency (NOT Sterling, which is almost impossible to change). It is advisable to bring at least US\$300 – \$400 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denomination notes (in good condition). Note: US dollar bills with the series CB-B2 year 2001 will not be accepted for exchange. Also be aware that \$100 bills are often not accepted.

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

## Guatemala

**ATM Availability:** Available in most cities and towns. We do not recommend relying on them as your sole source of spending money.

**Credit Card Acceptance:** Credit cards are of limited use, but may be brought along 'just in case'.

**Travellers Cheques:** We do not recommend

**Local Currency:** Quetzal

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Carry your funds in U.S. currency (NOT Sterling, which is almost impossible to change). It is advisable to bring at least US\$300 – \$400 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denomination notes (in good condition). Note: US dollar bills with the series CB-B2 year 2001 will not be accepted for exchange. Also be aware that \$100 bills are often not accepted.

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

## Joining your Tour

### 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

For passengers making their own travel arrangements, please ensure you join the group as described on day one of the tour itinerary. If you are considering purchasing your own airline tickets, you can book these through any travel agent, directly with an airline or through an online flight consolidator. In all cases, we would be happy to arrange transfers to and from the joining point of your tour if required.

### Joining Tour Abroad

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for time and place of rendezvous with tour leader

### 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 joining **any** of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour. Your insurer may charge an additional premium for certain activities.

If you require travel insurance for your tour, Explore Worldwide is an appointed representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Our travel insurance policy is specially tailored to the needs of the adventure traveller and will cover you for any included activity on any Explore trip. You can either purchase this at the time of booking or call us on 0844 499 0903 after you have booked.

### 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.

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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 (If flights transit): According to US law, passengers will have to disembark, collect luggage and clear immigration before re-boarding for the onward flight.

Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, US and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). This applies if you enter the country by sea or by air on a carrier participating in the visa waiver scheme, holding a return/ onward ticket. The passport requirements are that it must be machine readable, and must contain a digital photograph of the holder and also an integrated circuit chip that stores biographic information.

All passengers travelling to the USA under the Visa Waiver Programme must provide their details online no later than 72 hours prior to travel. British travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely to be detained and sent home

When completing an application for transit you should enter the words 'In Transit' with your final destination location in the address lines of 'Address While in the States' field on the application. Anyone applying for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ESTA) to travel under the Visa Waiver system will be charged a fee of 14USD (9GBP).

For more information, and to apply online, please visit the following website at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>. Once obtained, the application will be valid for a period of two years, or for the validity of your passport (whichever is shorter).

For more information about who is eligible for the VWP, or any other questions you may have regarding your eligibility, or machine readable passports, please contact your local consular office, or visit [www.usembassy.org.uk](http://www.usembassy.org.uk)

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.

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## **Vaccinations & Protection**

### **Panama**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on malaria. All passengers please note: Foreign Office now advise that from the 01 Nov 2008 yellow fever certificates will only be required for those entering Panama from an 'At Risk' country for yellow fever transmission. If you are planning on booking the Chagres NP option we recommend as a precaution measure to get a vaccination against yellow fever as this area is considered at risk. 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**

Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure. Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. 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. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on malaria. Please note: If you are entering from any of the following countries (Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, French Guyana, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia and Sudan) are now required to produce an International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis documenting yellow fever vaccination before entry to Costa Rica will be granted. Certificates are valid 10 days after the date of vaccination. 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. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on malaria. Please note: If you are entering from any of the following countries (Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, French Guyana, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia and Sudan) are now required to produce an International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis documenting yellow fever vaccination before entry to Costa Rica will be granted. Certificates are valid 10 days after the date of vaccination. 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. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on malaria. Please note: If you are entering from any of the following countries (Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, French Guyana, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia and Sudan) are now required to produce an International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis documenting yellow fever vaccination before entry to Costa Rica will be granted. Certificates are valid 10 days after the date of vaccination. 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 Tour

### 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 daysac. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage – don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 18Kg

## General Information

### Food

The prices for meals and 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. 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 £:** 10.00

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**Dinner £:** 13.00

#### **Nicaragua**

**Lunch £:** 5.00

**Dinner £:** 8.00

#### **Honduras**

**Lunch £:** 7.00

**Dinner £:** 10.00

#### **Guatemala**

**Lunch £:** 9.00

**Dinner £:** 17.00

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### **Drink**

#### **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 £:** 1.20

**Water £:** 0.70

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### **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

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**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

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## 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 & 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, elephant, 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.

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## Our commitment to the environment

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 and traditions, 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: The Sunshine Orphanage (which cares for abandoned children in Luxor, Egypt), Education for All (sponsoring children through their secondary education in Morocco), The Hope Foundation (helping an Indian Village to recover from the 2004 Tsunami) and the Mufindi Orphanage, which support AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation, Travel Operators for Tigers (helping save the Bengal Tiger from extinction) and Friends for Conservation. We have also adopted a beautiful Sri Lankan Elephant called 'Serendip'.

We are delighted to have received a Five Star sustainable tourism status from the Association of Independent Tour Operators in recognition of our on-going commitment to sustainable tourism.

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## Cool Earth

Explore are delighted to support Cool Earth to reduce carbon emissions through preventing the illegal deforestation of the South America rainforest. One of the top sources of global carbon emissions, rainforest deforestation equivalent to the USA's annual



emissions, it also destroys flora and fauna, sometimes to the point of extinction. It also degrades the lives and communities of the 350 million residents of the rainforest.

Cool Earth prevents the deforestation through its support of local communities as forest guardians and by focussing on areas in immediate danger of deforestation. It has so far protected over 350,000 acres of rainforest, with each acre saving an emission of 260 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, as well as protecting rare animals and plants. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year. In addition to mitigating emissions, when you travel with Explore, you are helping to protect the source of 20% of the world's fresh water and oxygen, as well as the livelihoods of the 1.6 billion people who are reliant on the rainforest. [www.coolearth.org](http://www.coolearth.org)

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## Earth Matters

- [The Travel Foundation](#)

Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website [www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk)

- [Tourism Concern](#)

Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group [www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)

- For further information on responsible travel go to <http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/>

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## Know before you go

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 <http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety>

## 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.

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### 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.

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 2013 and 31st December 2014.

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### Tour 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: 2014 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2014. 2015/16 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2015.

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