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## Ficha viaje



### VOLCANO TRAIL 17 DAYS, ANTIGUA TO SAN JOSÉ

From the crystal-blue ocean teeming with marine life to tropical rainforests alive with jungle melodies, take the road less travelled on this trip through Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica with other travellers your own age.

This is one of our most exciting trips, filled with breathtaking scenery and a chance to experience local culture with a 2-night homestay on the island of Ometepe. Enjoy a blend of public and private transportation, which not only keeps costs down but also gives you a chance to really meet the locals.

## Resumen del viaje

Laughing with the locals during a journey on a chicken bus, opportunities to go whitewater rafting, exploring Mayan ruins and hiking through a cloud forest.

### Places Visited

- Costa Rica
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Nicaragua

## Itinerario ampliado

### DAY 1 ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA

Arrive in Guatemala City and continue on to Antigua, one hour's drive away through the mountains. Please try to arrive before 6pm for an important group meeting where you can meet the Chief Experience Officer (CEO) and the other group members.

Once the third largest city in all of Spanish America, Antigua served as Guatemala's capital city for more than 200 years until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1773. In 1979 UNESCO declared Antigua a World Heritage site, and Antigua today is a peaceful colonial city that is a pleasure to explore. Walk through quiet cobblestone streets past rebuilt stucco homes with heavy, beautifully carved wooden entrances.

The point of reference for finding one's way around Antigua is the Central Park, and the place to be in the late afternoons/evenings. You can pick up a map from the tourist office located on the ground floor of the Palace of the Captains-General on the south side of the central park. Explore the museums, colonial buildings and soak up the atmosphere in this delightful city, one of the best-restored Spanish colonial cities in the world.

Antigua has various specialties that make shopping here very worthwhile. Textiles sold here and in the nearby towns are of the highest quality, beautifully designed and woven on foot looms or the more traditional back-strap loom. Jade, in carved statues and jewellery, is sold in several factories and shops in town and silver jewellery is sold in the better shops and also in a silver factory in nearby San Felipe de Jesus. The city also offers good buys in ceramics and antiques as well. For the museum and gallery buffs, one of the best in the Central America is found in the Hotel Casa Santo Domingo. It houses colonial religious, contemporary Latin American and pre-Colombian art pieces. These form only part of the galleries and museums of the 5-star Hotel Santo Domingo, formerly a Dominican monastery.

Antigua is a popular centre for Spanish study, and here you will find dozens of schools and a collection of students from around the globe. Because of the international population, there is no shortage of restaurants, bars and activities available in Antigua. You'd have to try very hard to get bored!

This tour departs Antigua mid-day on Day 2. If you are interested in exploring the city and its nearby attractions, it is recommended you book additional pre-trip accommodation nights.

### DAY 2-3 COPÁN, HONDURAS

The Mayan ruins of Copán are fascinating, beautiful and unique among Mayan cities. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, Copán contains some of the most important Mayan ruins found to date, and many unusual artistic features. Visitors walk through grassy plazas filled with intricately carved and decorated monuments, statues and staircases. Huge carved faces stare at you from ancient walls and bring the place to life, causing renewed wonder at the mysterious disappearance of such a creative civilization.

The colonial highland town of Copán Ruinas is a charming and relaxing place. This town has a lot more to offer than just the ruins. Opt to explore the nearby hills on horseback and check out some

lesser known Mayan sites along the way or check out a local private macaw reserve that is also home to a large variety of other birds on the property. If neither of those appeal, you can journey to some local hot springs for a relaxing soak.

Estimated Travel Time: 8 hours

Approximate Distance: 200 km

#### **DAY 4-6 ROATAN, THE BAY ISLANDS**

After another full day of travel through the hills of Honduras, we arrive at the coast and ferry across to paradise. A SCUBA diving haven amidst what is part of the second largest barrier reef in the world, Roatan is a Caribbean-style island made famous for its marine treasures. Crystal blue waters invite swimming, diving, snorkeling, or simply relax on the white, sand beaches of the Bay Islands. You will also get a break from practicing Spanish because as a former British colony, many locals here speak English.

Roatan is surrounded by over 100km (62 miles) of living, protected reef that is home to thousands of species of fantastically coloured fish and marine life. The beaches of the western end are some of the most beautiful in the world, with clear turquoise water, powdery white sand and swaying coconut palms. While many people spend their days immersed in the warm, blue Caribbean waters and enjoying excellent fresh seafood, you may also opt to venture into the hilly interior by bicycle or scooter. The botanical gardens offer relaxed walking amidst exotic plants and racing "Jesus Lizards", a species of lizard that runs on its hind legs, even over water! In nearby Sandy Bay the Institute for Marine Sciences and the Roatan museum are definitely worth a visit.

Estimated Travel Time: 12 hours

Approximate Distance: 350 km

#### **DAY 7 TEGUCIGALPA**

Leave Utila by ferry and catch a glimpse of Honduras's famous Mosquito Coast. Spend the full day travelling from sea level to the highlands, through rainforest and along scenic mountain roads, ending in Tegucigalpa.

Tegucigalpa, or "Tegus" as it's known by the locals, has been the capital city of Honduras since 1880. Located in the southern part of Honduras, Tegucigalpa is nestled in a valley at an elevation of approximately 3000 feet, surrounded by a chain of tree-covered mountains. This creates an ideal climate; Tegucigalpa is tropical yet cool, with less humidity in comparison with other major Central American cities. Already a settlement of indigenous Lenca people, the Spanish arrived in the area during the mid-16th century and began transforming it into a major mining centre for silver and gold. Evidence of this can be seen in several colonial buildings such as the cathedral of St. Michael Archangel.

Estimated Travel Time: 12 hours

Approximate Distance: 350 km

#### **DAY 8-9 GRANADA**

Nicaragua has flourished in recent years and boasts both friendly people and impressive natural beauty. Granada's colonial charm is complemented by the active volcanoes and lakes that surround it, and there are many fun easy day trips available. Hike, cruise, or just explore the city's markets

and museums. Walking is probably the easiest way to see all the sights of Granada, your tour leader will give you an initial orientation walking tour of the city and then you have plenty of time to explore in more depth.

Granada is Nicaragua's third largest and oldest city and retains its traditional Spanish colonial character. It's sometimes called "The Great Sultana" because of its beautiful colonial architecture. In the warm evenings you can usually find friendly neighbours visiting and chatting with each other from rocking chairs in the open front room of their homes. You'll walk along cobblestone streets and see brightly painted buildings. Frequently live local music is played in the square, and good nightlife is easy to find. Granada is located on the shores of Lake Nicaragua and has a long park ideal for strolling. For a relaxing afternoon, you can spend a couple of hours in a boat touring some of the 350+ "Isletas" or little islands by found nearby Granada in Lake Nicaragua. Other optional activities include visiting the nearby extinct Volcán Mombacho, now shrouded in vegetation, or Masaya Volcano National Park, which is home to an active volcano. The nearby markets of Masaya house vendors selling great Nicaraguan handicrafts such as hammocks, ceramics, and paintings.

Estimated Travel Time: 12 hours

Approximate Distance: 370 km

### **DAY 10-11 OMETEPE**

From the town of San Jorge, we cross Lake Nicaragua by ferry to arrive at Ometepe Island. Also known as La Mar Dulce (the Sweet Sea) and Lake Cocibolca, Lake Nicaragua is the largest lake in Central America and the tenth largest freshwater lake in the world. Forty-five rivers flow into the lake and it is home to the world's only species of freshwater shark. The setting is dramatic, with two towering volcanoes dominating the island's landscape; Volcán Concepción at 1610 m (5281 feet), and Volcán Maderas, at 1340m (4395 feet). The wildlife on this island is abundant and includes several species of monkeys and green parrots. Howler monkeys are especially interesting, their scary roar (you'll think it's a jaguar) can be heard for several miles.

As you journey to the hotel, you'll pass plantain plantations and several small villages, giving you a chance to see how rural Nicaraguans live. If you enjoy a challenge, hiking Maderas volcano might be the right optional activity for you! If not, check out the pre-Colombian petroglyphs, try out the Tarzan swing at a nearby jungle swimming hole or enjoy the beach.

Estimated Travel Time: 5 hours

Approximate Distance: 60 km

### **DAY 12-13 MONTEVERDE, COSTA RICA**

Costa Rica is a natural gem because of its breathtaking flora and fauna. Travelling into the cool cloud and rainforests of Monteverde, we have a glimpse of how lush ecosystems truly are works of art. Take time to bird watch, ride a horse, mountain bike, or ride a zip line over the rainforest canopy.

Spend two days exploring Monteverde and the Forest Reserve, truly a nature lover's paradise. Local guides are extremely knowledgeable about the area and passionate about conservation of this precious ecosystem. The unique community has several local co-operatives worth visiting including artist collectives and a cheese factory. If you're there at the right time of year, you may be lucky enough to see the Resplendent Quetzal, one of the most beautiful and elusive birds in the world. Optional activities include walking across a series of suspension bridges through the jungle canopy,

a butterfly garden and a thrilling canopy zip line.

If you have pre-booked the Costa Rica Adrenaline Theme Pack, your ziplining experience will be on Day 13.

Monteverde or \\\"Green Mountain\\\", is exactly what you find at the end of the long, rutted dirt road through the mountains. The surrounding pastures were once covered with dense forest, but today only a small piece of it remains. That piece of forest has been preserved as the Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve. Cloud forest is much like a rainforest, but much of the moisture comes not from falling rain but from the condensation left by the nearly constant cloud cover that blankets the tops of mountains in many parts of the tropics. Monteverde Reserve covers 1600 hectares of forest and is home to a great variety of wildlife. More than 2,000 species of plants, 320 bird species and 100 different species of mammals inhabit this small area. The Santa Elena Reserve, another park contiguous with Monteverde, is less well known and visited but also worth seeing. All proceeds from this park profit the local community.

The village of Monteverde was founded in the 1950s by Quakers from the United States. Looking to leave behind the constant fear of war and objecting to being forced to support continued militarism through their taxes, the Quakers chose Costa Rica because of its commitment to a non-militaristic economic path - Costa Rica's army was dissolved in the 1940s. Since its founding, Monteverde has grown slowly as others who shared the original Quaker founders' ideals moved to the area. Although the Quakers came here to farm the land, they recognized the need to preserve the rare cloud forest that covers the mountain slopes above their fields. The community is very different from those on the coast, and offers several souvenir shops and the Quaker cheese factory, which is definitely worth a visit. Make sure to try their ice cream!

Estimated Travel Time: 10 hours

Approximate Distance: 240 km

## **DAY 14-15 LA FORTUNA / ARENAL**

Set on the northern plains of Costa Rica, Arenal Volcano sits on the southeast shore of artificial Lake Arenal (77 square kilometres, or 48 square miles). Separating the mountain ranges of Guanacaste and Tilarán, the lake was created by a hydroelectric dam. Winds sweeping off the Caribbean Sea reach speeds of 48 to 72 km/hr (30 to 45 mph), across Lake Arenal you can find one of the best locations in the world to go windsurfing. The volcano, once quite active, has been in a dormant state since the beginning of 2011 but still is a dramatic backdrop to the town of La Fortuna.

If you have pre-booked the Costa Rica Adrenaline Theme Pack, your choose your adventure and canyoneering activities will be on Day 15.

La Fortuna, the town near the foot of the volcano is an excellent base for adventure. Hike the area's nature trails, swim in chilly La Fortuna waterfall or join a canopy tour and catch a bird's eye view of the forest greenery. Other optional activities include full-day Class III & IV white water rafting on the Toro or Arenal Rivers, mountain biking, caving, horseback riding, or a tour of the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge. Like much of Costa Rica, the area is a birders' paradise, with over 600 species as permanent residents. After a long day of exploring, the Baldi Hot Springs might just be the answer to your tired muscles. Soak in one of the natural thermal baths and hope for the clouds to part long enough for a glimpse of Arenal's slopes shaped by multiple eruptions.

Estimated Travel Time: 4 hours

Approximate Distance: 50 km

## **DAY 16 SAN JOSÉ**

Return to San José for our final night on the town.

Located in the central highlands, San José enjoys a moderate climate. Like most cities, San José has its good and bad sides. It is the centre of government, theatre, and art, as well as of air pollution and congestion. It has beautiful parks and museums, and a few beggars on the streets. It is big and often noisy, but even from its crowded downtown streets, you'll often enjoy a view of the surrounding lush mountains.

Start your exploration of the city in the main plaza, a great place to people-watch. A mime, juggler, marimba band, magician, or storyteller may be performing for whatever is collected when the hat is passed. Artisan booths are common, creating a regular arts and crafts fair atmosphere.

A source of pride for the Ticos (Costa Ricans) is the National Theatre. Inaugurated in 1897, the building was paid for by coffee growers through a voluntary tax on every bag of coffee exported. The National Museum, housed in the Bellavista Fortress, offers exhibits on pre-Columbian art, colonial art and furniture and religious art within a 19th century building that was converted from a military fortress after the army was abolished.

The Museum of Costa Rican Art, located in La Sabana Park, used to be the international airport and the museum is now housed in the old terminal building. The Jade Museum is on the 11th floor of the Instituto Nacional de Seguros building. In addition to the marvelous collection of jade objects, there are pre-Columbian ceramic and stone works as well as displays with archaeological and ethnographic information. The Gold Museum is located underneath the Plaza de la Cultura. Its spectacular collection of indigenous gold art belongs to the Central Bank of Costa Rica.

The best and least expensive places to buy souvenirs in San José are the markets. The two main ones are the ones in Plaza de la Cultura, which is an outdoor open market, and the Central Market, where handicrafts are sold along with boots, fish, flour, herbal remedies, shirts and everything else you can imagine. Always watch your belongings and be ready for crowds. If you plan on spending a few days in San José after your tour, there are a number of activities within the city and area that you can participate in, many of them outdoors.

Probably the hardest thing you will do in San José, other than get safely across busy streets, is keep the street numbering systems straight. Street and avenue numbers are posted on buildings at the corners of some intersections. Keep looking as you walk, and you will eventually find one.

Estimated Travel Time: 5 hours

Approximate Distance: 150 km

## **DAY 17 DEPART SAN JOSÉ**

## Incluido

- Orientation walk around Granada, Excursion to the Bay Islands.
- 2 breakfasts, 2 dinners. (Allow USD360-450 for meals not included.)
- Simple hotels (14 nts), homestay (2 nts).
- Public bus, boat, ferry, van, taxi, walking.
- Chief Experience Officer (CEO) throughout.
- Small group experience; Max 16, avg 10.

## No Incluido

Flights to and from destination.

## Condiciones

**TRAVEL VISAS:** All countries require a valid passport (with a minimum 6 months validity). Contact your local embassy, or consulate for the most up-to-date visa requirements, or see your travel agent. IT\\S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HAVE THE CORRECT TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION.

## **Hoteles**