

Overseas Adventure Travel[®]

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide[®]



New! Panama & Costa Rica: From Canal to
Cloud Forest

2026

Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

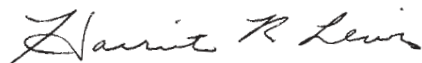
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis

Chair

Overseas Adventure Travel

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Panama Canal, Panama

New! Panama & Costa Rica: From Canal to Cloud Forest Small Group Adventure

Panama: Panama City, Panama Canal, Clayton | **Costa Rica:** San José, Tortuguero, La Fortuna, Alajuela

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

13 days starting from \$4,995

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/cap2026pricing

Discover the intersection of human ingenuity and natural splendor in two of Central America's most beloved destinations. In Panama, experience one of mankind's most astounding achievements—the Panama Canal—which represents a culmination of toil, diplomacy, and engineering prowess unmatched in the modern world. Then, venture off the expertly engineered path in Costa Rica, where it's easier to be at one with nature than anywhere else in the world.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 12 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation
- 28 meals—13 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 6 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Lunch)
- 14 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.



WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

Pacing: 7 locations in 13 days with some early mornings

Physical requirements: Spend 2 days at altitudes of 6,000-6,500 feet. Travel by riverboat and minibus over rural streets, unpaved roads, and rugged paths and trails. You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted and participate in 6-8 hours of physical activities each day on uneven ground and steps.

Flight Time: Travel time will be 2-11 hours and will most likely have one connection

View all physical requirements at www.oattravel.com/cap

COSTA RICA & PANAMA: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

Unbeatable Value: Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

People-to-People Experiences: Spend *A Day in the Life* of San Francisco de Dos Ríos village for an intimate glimpse into the day-to-day lives of everyday people, including students at a local school. During your visit, you'll also savor traditional, homemade fare during a **Home-Hosted Lunch**.

ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Depart U.S. • Arrive Panama City, Panama
2-4	Panama City
5-6	San José, Costa Rica
7-8	Tortuguero
9-11	La Fortuna
12	Alajuela
13	Return to the U.S.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Colombia: Medellín & Colonial Cartagena
PRE-TRIP: 6 nights from **\$1,995**

Antigua & Tikal: Guatemala's Colonial Capital and Mayan Ruins
POST-TRIP: 5 nights from **\$1,995**

ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Medellín** before your Colombia pre-trip extension from **\$70** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Panama City** before your main adventure from **\$100** per room, per night

Panama & Costa Rica: From Canal to Cloud Forest

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

6 nights in *Colombia: Medellín & Colonial Cartagena*

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive in Medellín, Colombia

Day 2 Medellín • Visit Comuna 13 • **Controversial Topic:** Pablo Escobar's Colombia

Day 3 Medellín • Explore Guatapé

Day 4 Medellín • Explore Plaza Botero & Antioquia Museum • Fly to Cartagena

Day 5 Cartagena • Walled City visit

Day 6 Cartagena • San Felipe Castle

Day 7 Fly to Panama City, Panama • Begin main trip

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive Panama City, Panama

- Destination: Panama City
- Accommodations: Hotel in Panama City

Morning/Afternoon: Depart from the U.S. today and fly to Panama City, Panama's capital and largest city. Upon arrival, join fellow travelers who took our optional pre-trip extension, *Colombia: Medellín & Colonial Cartagena*. Your Trip Experience Leader or a member of our local staff will meet you at the airport and help you transfer to your hotel.

Set off on an orientation walk of the area with your Trip Experience Leader later this afternoon.

Dinner: On your own tonight. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to suggest a local restaurant.

Evening: At leisure. You might relax at your hotel after your long flight, or discover some of the many bars and cafes throughout Panama City.

Day 2 Explore Panama City

- Destination: Panama City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in Panama City

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll gather with our fellow travelers for a Welcome Briefing with our Trip Experience Leader before boarding a bus bound for *Panama Viejo* (Old Panama). Discover its cultural touchstones as we stroll through the ruins here—majestic stone structures set among emerald fields and an abundance of towering native trees.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll head to the Miraflores visitor center, where we'll embark on a walking tour of the locks that form the Panama Canal. After our guided visit concludes, you're free to continue exploring the locks independently before we return to our hotel.

Dinner: Toast to the discoveries ahead during a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is free. Perhaps visit the Pedro Mandinga rum bar for a taste of Panama's homemade libations, or take an evening stroll on the beach.

Day 3 Cruise Panama Canal • Visit Panama Canal Museum

- Destination: Panama City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel in Panama City

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll head to the marina for what is sure to be one of the highlights of your adventure: a morning cruise along a section of the Panama Canal.

The notion of building a path between the seas here is as old as the voyages of Christopher Columbus, but it wasn't until 1879 that Frenchman Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, made the first attempt. The enormity of the effort proved too great, and the project languished until 1902, when Teddy Roosevelt brought the idea to life.

In 1913—a full year ahead of schedule and nearly \$23 million under budget—the Panama Canal was completed. It officially opened on August 15, 1914, and a dream became a reality. A journalist who witnessed its opening wrote, "This canal is both a first and a last ... man will never again build with such scope, such imagination." Now, more than 40 ships a day,

or more than 14,000 annually, traverse its 50-mile length—eliminating a 9,000-mile trip around the tip of Cape Horn.

Lunch: We'll enjoy lunch onboard as we cruise.

Afternoon: After our cruise concludes, we'll learn more about Panama's legendary waterway at the Panama Canal Museum before returning to our hotel.

Dinner: On your own.

Evening: The evening is yours to do as you please. You might choose to discover Panama City's cafes and shops at your leisure.

Day 4 Clayton • Emberá village visit

- Destination: Panama City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel in Panama City

Activity Note: Today we'll visit an indigenous village by dugout canoe. Agility and balance are required for embarking and disembarking the canoe, and you may get sprayed during your ride.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning we'll board a bus for Corotu pier. From here, we'll depart for the Emberá Drua village by dugout canoe, a mode of local transportation. As one of Panama's seven indigenous tribes, this tight-knit community of only around 100 people embraces their traditional way of life and practices age-old customs passed down through generations. We'll learn about the tribe's culture, communication, and artisan crafts during our visit.

Lunch: Gather with the Emberá tribe to savor a traditional lunch together.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll return to Corotu pier by dugout canoe, and then transfer to our hotel by bus. The balance of the day is yours to explore independently.

Dinner: On your own.

Evening: The evening is yours to make your own discoveries. Return to your hotel to relax or ask your Trip Experience Leader for appealing late night suggestions.

Day 5 Fly to San José, Costa Rica

- Destination: San José
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in San José

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The morning is yours to make your final discoveries in Panama independently before we make our way to the airport.

Lunch: On your own. You might wish to purchase something at the airport to enjoy as we fly.

Afternoon: Our short flight to San José departs early this afternoon. Upon arrival, we'll make our way to our hotel. After receiving our room assignments, our Trip Experience Leader will lead us on an orientation walk of the neighborhood surrounding our hotel.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free for independent discoveries. Perhaps you'll venture out for a drink at one of San José's lively bars.

Day 6 Explore San José

- Destination: San José
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in San José

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a tour of downtown San José, including some of the landmarks of the city, such as the National Park, San José's largest park. As we stroll, we'll discuss the brief but deadly civil war that rocked the country in the spring of 1948. From there, we'll make our way to the Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, which is home to more than 3,500 pre-Columbian artifacts, including ceramics and gold and stone objects. We'll have some time to explore the treasures on display here prior to lunch.

Lunch: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to offer suggestions.

Afternoon: We'll reconvene early this afternoon to visit the National Theater, considered one of the country's most impressive architectural accomplishments. Then, we'll return to the hotel and enjoy some free time.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free for independent discoveries.

Day 7 San José • Fly to Tortuguero

- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pachira Lodge or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to the airport for our flight to the Caribbean coast. Here, we'll board a boat and cruise to Tortuguero.

Remote Tortuguero is home to 111 species of reptiles, 60 species of mammals, 309 species of birds, and 57 species of amphibians—including the endangered green sea turtle, for which it is the Western Hemisphere's most important nesting site. If you arrive during nesting season, which fluctuates between mid-July and mid-October, you might observe legions of sea turtles descending upon the beaches to lay their eggs and bury them in the sand.

Lunch: At the hotel.

Afternoon: You'll have a few hours of free time for independent exploration. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide recommendations for activities around the lodge and in the town.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You're free to spend the evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll embark on a Tortuguero night walk to discover wildlife.

Day 8 Tortuguero National Park • Explore canals by boat • Nature walk

- Destination: Tortuguero
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pachira Lodge or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart our hotel this morning and walk to the nearby pier. Both natural and man-made canals are the primary means of transportation in Tortuguero. The Canales de Tortuguero were created in 1974 to allow inland transportation between small villages and larger towns on the coast. Now, various lagoons and meandering rivers are accessible in something other than the traditional dugout canoes of the area. When we arrive, we'll embark on a cruise along this intricate tangle of freshwater canals in search of such local denizens such as caimans, iguanas, and birds. Perhaps you'll spot the famed Jesus Christ lizard, or Green Basilisk Lizard, nicknamed for their strange ability to run on water. Or, maybe you'll catch sight of a sleepy sloth reaching from branch to branch in search of a green, leafy snack. Tortuguero has no shortage of wildlife—you are bound to witness local creatures meandering the tropical canopies and winding canals.

Lunch: At the hotel.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll embark a cruise for our second tour of the canals. En route, we'll stop to discover Tortuguero town, where we'll enjoy the Caribbean flavor of this unique village, which has no roads, no sidewalks, and no cars. Brightly colored *pueblos* (small homes) are stacked along the water's edge and are a stark contrast to the jungle's verdant green, before returning to our lodge.

Then, you may enjoy free time—your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide recommendations. Later, we'll walk along the hotel's trails to observe the region's diverse flora and fauna—perhaps glimpsing the sloths, monkeys, green macaws, and toucans that call this protected area home.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You're free this evening to explore the grounds, go into the town, or relax at the hotel's bar.

Day 9 Fly to La Fortuna

- Destination: La Fortuna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Magic Mountain Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll have some free time to enjoy our hotel amenities before we check out of our hotel and transfer to the airport for our flight to La Fortuna. Known as the “front yard of the Arenal Volcano,” La Fortuna is a town of thermal spas and verdant hills.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in La Fortuna.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll drive to our lodgings in La Fortuna. After we check in, you'll have time to relax or explore independently.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

Evening: You are free to spend the evening as you wish. You may retire early, relax with other travelers at a local bar, or go for a walk around the vicinity.

Day 10 *A Day in the Life* of San Francisco de Dos Ríos school • Home-Hosted Lunch

- Destination: La Fortuna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Magic Mountain Hotel or similar

Activity note: Please note that we are unable to visit the local elementary school on weekends or during the months of December–March and the first two weeks of July.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today we'll drive to a local grocery store, where we'll pick up some fresh produce and other necessities for the lunch we'll later enjoy. Take this opportunity to speak with local people as they go about their shopping and observe the daily rhythm of life. After, we'll drive to San Francisco de Dos Ríos, a small village where we'll spend *A Day in the Life*. Our time here includes a visit to a local elementary school, followed by lunch in the home of a local family.

Upon arrival, we'll meet a community leader who will be our host throughout the day's activities.

The community leader will guide us to the local elementary school, where the children will warmly welcome us in colorful costumes and perform a dance traditional to the area. Being that this is a remote area, most (if not all) of the children come from families that work in the agricultural sector, many of whom never received a formal education.

During our visit, we'll spend some time with the students one-on-one, talk with their teachers, meet the principal, and learn about Costa Rica's universal educational system. Long a national priority—and a focus of government spending following the abolition of its army—Costa Rica's policy of universal education has resulted in a literacy rate of 96%. Take this opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the Costa Rican education system—perhaps you're curious to know what prompted the country to put such an emphasis on education, or maybe you'll ask if everyone agrees with the abolition of its army.

Next, we'll split into smaller even smaller groups for our short drive to the homes of some local families for a **Home-Hosted Lunch**. Upon arrival, we'll be greeted by members of our host family, and then get to know them better while we work together to prepare our lunch with some of the ingredients we purchased earlier this morning.

Lunch: Sit down with a local family in their home for lunch. Costa Rican cuisine is simple and wholesome, and today's lunch will be a *casado*, a traditional Tico meal of rice and beans, salad, and a main dish prepared with vegetables, meat, or fish.

This will be a great opportunity to ask them about rural life, any customs they practice, and more.

Afternoon: We'll bid our generous hosts farewell and drive back to our hotel, where you'll have some free time. Perhaps you'll discover Costa Rica's native flora during a stroll around the property, or you may try to catch a glimpse of the region's eclectic wildlife, including toucans and sloths.

Dinner: On your own.

Evening: Tonight is free to spend as you wish. You may ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 11 Travel to La Fortuna • Arenal Volcano National Park • Optional Forest Canopy Ride

- Destination: La Fortuna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Magic Mountain Hotel

Activity Note: Today's visit to Arenal Volcano may not be available (weather permitting).

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll have some free time following breakfast to enjoy our hotel's amenities. Then, we'll drive to Arenal Volcano National Park, where we'll begin a nature walk along the Peninsula Trail and the shores of Lake Arenal. As we stroll, we'll get a closer look at Arenal Volcano—one of Costa Rica's most active volcanoes—and have an opportunity to spot the tropical wildlife. The national park is home to more than 500 species of birds, including toucans as well as monkeys and coati.

Lunch: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to make recommendations.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll drive to our lodgings in La Fortuna. After we check in, you'll have time to relax or explore independently.

Or, you can fly above the rain forest on an optional Forest Canopy Ride. Strapped into our harnesses and wearing thick leather gloves, we'll head to the first of ten platforms high up in the treetops, where we're sent off on the ride of our lives. Whizzing from tree to tree on the zip-line, we'll witness stunning panoramic views of the forest below.

Dinner: Toast to your Central American discoveries during a Farewell Dinner this evening.

Evening: You are free to spend the evening as you wish. You may retire early, relax with other travelers at a local bar, or go for a walk around the vicinity.

Day 12 La Fortuna • Transfer to Alajuela • Overland to Villa Blanca Cloud Forest

- Destination: Alajuela
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Hotel

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel and transfer to the district of Alajuela to discover the Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Reserve. Nestled within Costa Rica's central highlands near San Ramón, this lush private reserve encompasses more than 2,500 acres of pristine cloud forest—part of the larger Los Angeles Biological Corridor. Upon arrival, we'll set off on a guided 2-hour nature walk through this mist-draped landscape, a haven for biodiversity and conservation research.

Established to protect one of the country's last remaining stretches of pre-montane tropical cloud forest, Villa Blanca is known for its rich ecosystems and commitment to sustainable preservation. With elevations ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 feet, the reserve boasts high humidity, steady rainfall, and a mild climate that nurtures dense vegetation and an abundance of wildlife. More than 200 bird species have been documented here, including the endemic coppery-headed emerald and the striking resplendent quetzal.

Our expert guide will help us identify the region's extraordinary flora and fauna—from bromeliads and tree ferns to howler monkeys

and poison dart frogs. Keep an eye out for elusive mammals like the ocelot or kinkajou, and listen for the calls of toucans echoing through the canopy. After our guided exploration, you'll have time to wander the peaceful trails on your own, soaking in the beauty and serenity of this hidden gem in the heart of Costa Rica.

Lunch: At the hotel.

Afternoon: You'll have the remainder of the afternoon to do some exploring on your own like going for a nature walk or hike in search of wildlife.

Before dinner, you'll gather with your fellow travelers to recap your journey during a Farewell Briefing.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations. Perhaps you'll venture into

town to find *patacones* (fried plantains with beans and cheese) and a glass of *chiliguaros*, a local drink made with Costa Rican liquor.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—enjoy the sounds of the Costa Rican rainforest at night or enjoy a drink at the bar with fellow travelers.

Day 13 San José • Return to U.S. or begin post-trip extension

• Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your flight home, or travel to *Antigua & Tikal: Guatemala's Colonial Capital and Mayan Ruins* post-trip extension.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

5 nights in *Antigua & Tikal: Guatemala's Colonial Capital and Mayan Ruins*

Day 1 Transfer to Antigua

Day 2 Explore Antigua • Discover Casa Santo Domingo

Day 3 Antigua • Overland to Guatemala City • Fly to Flores

Day 4 Petén • Explore Tikal

Day 5 Explore Flores Island • Fly to Guatemala City

Day 6 Guatemala City • Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

Forest Canopy Ride

(Day 11 \$80 per person)

Take a thrilling ride through Costa Rica's lush forest canopy with a local guide. A slow paced, 20-minute uphill hike is followed by a safety talk at the departure point. Then, strapped into your harness and wearing thick leather gloves, you walk to a platform where the instructor sends you off on the ride of your life. Whizzing from tree to tree on a zip-line, you experience the thrill of flight while being safely suspended. For those more comfortable with a little assistance, a "taxi ride" is also available. This means that you and an instructor zip through the canopy together—the instructor handles the braking while you enjoy the ride.

This tour should be reserved prior to your departure to guarantee space. The tour can also be booked on-site, but space could be limited.

PRE-TRIP

Colombia: Medellín & Colonial Cartagena

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|---|---|
| » Airfare from Medellín to Cartagena | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 6 nights accommodation | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 11 meals—6 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 2 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 8 small group activities | |

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Discover hidden riches when you extend your journey to include Colombia, whose borders are now open to travelers after decades of being closed. Our adventure takes us from Medellín—a former cartel capital that is now a model of urban innovation—to the seaside splendor of Cartagena.

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive in Medellín, Colombia

- Destination: Medellín
- Accommodations: Hotel Poblado Plaza

Morning/Afternoon: Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Medellín, Colombia. Please refer to your individual air itinerary for details.

Evening: Upon arrival in Medellín, an O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel.

Day 2 Medellín • Visit Comuna 13 • Controversial Topic: Pablo Escobar's Colombia

- Destination: Medellín
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Poblado Plaza

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following a Welcome Briefing at our hotel, we'll set out for Comuna 13 via Medellín's award-winning public transit system, which connects the city's lower-income mountainside neighborhoods with services and opportunities in the center, and has been essential to Medellín's dramatic revitalization.

Once considered one of the most dangerous *comunas* (neighborhoods) in the city, Comuna 13 is now a model example of Medellín's transformation. Upon arrival, we'll learn more about Medellín's checkered history during a conversation about Pablo Escobar, the Colombian drug lord and "King of Cocaine" whose infamous cartel is synonymous with Colombia's second city. As we discuss this **Controversial Topic**, we'll learn more about the local community's positive feelings toward Escobar during his lifetime—a surprising and stark contrast to popular opinion.

Then, our Trip Experience Leader will guide us through the neighborhood, where we'll see firsthand how the community has changed and learn how local leaders aided this transformation.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll return to our hotel. The balance of the day is yours to do as you please.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to make recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 3 Medellín • Explore Guatapé

- Destination: Medellín
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Poblado Plaza

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to Guatapé, a colorful village located in the countryside outside of Medellín. En route, we'll stop at a local restaurant known for its *arepas*, English muffin-like flatbreads made from cornmeal that are stuffed with a savory filling. We'll have a chance to make these savory Colombian staples before continuing our journey to Guatapé.

Upon arrival, we'll board local *motochivas* for driving tour of the town's famed *zócalos*, brightly colored panels that decorate houses and the local church. This area is peaceful now, but was once the scene of conflict between government and paramilitary forces in the late 20th century—a history we'll learn about as we continue to explore on foot. Our discoveries

conclude with a visit with a local artist, who will share even more of the history of Guatapé's *zócalos*.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Guatapé.

Afternoon: Following lunch, you'll enjoy some free time before we return to our hotel in Medellín.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 4 Medellín • Explore Plaza Botero & Antioquia Museum • Fly to Cartagena

- Destination: Cartagena
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Bantu

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today's discoveries begin at the Plaza Botero. The plaza has an open-air collection of 23 sculptures by Medellín-born artist Fernando Botero, whose exaggerated figures have been shown in the world's greatest museums and galleries. We'll also venture inside the Antioquia Museum, which houses one of Latin America's most prominent international art collections—including works by Balthus, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, and Salvador Dalí.

From there, we'll head to the airport to catch our flight to Cartagena.

Lunch: On your own. You might choose to purchase something at the airport to enjoy during our afternoon flight.

Afternoon: We'll touch down in Cartagena in the late afternoon. Officially known as Cartagena de Indias—so named because Spanish explorers believed the port would become part of a spice trade route to India—Cartagena is one of South America's most colorful cities. Presiding over sandy beaches and sweeping ocean views, Cartagena still exudes both a colonial elegance and a tropical Caribbean flavor. From its inception, Cartagena's riches made it a tempting target for pirates, as well as British and French forces, and Spain spent lavishly on its fortifications, a large portion of which have survived the centuries.

After making our way to our hotel and checking in, join your Trip Experience Leader in a brief orientation walk this evening to get acquainted with the city.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 5 Cartagena • Walled City visit

- Destination: Cartagena
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Bantu

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll head to Cartagena's oldest section, the *Ciudad Amurallada*, or Walled City, which is encircled by 12-foot stone walls and considered to be one of the best-preserved walled cities in the world. We'll enjoy a stroll through the narrow, flower-lined streets of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Then we'll head to Bocagrande, a neighborhood known for its scenic stretches of beaches and trendy restaurants. The morning's discoveries conclude with a panoramic tour of the Castillo

Grande neighborhood, located on a peninsula lined with luxury living spaces and popular beaches.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll return to the hotel. You'll enjoy a few hours of free time to relax or explore independently before we re-group for a walking tour of the Getsemani neighborhood, the oldest part of the city.

After our tour concludes, the balance of the day is yours to do as you please.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is yours to do as you please. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at one of the city's many lively bars.

Day 6 Cartagena • San Felipe Castle

- Destination: Cartagena
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Bantu

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The day begins at one of Cartagena's most conspicuous and commanding structures, the 17th-century San Felipe Castle. From its inception, Cartagena's riches were desired by coastal pirates and defended by Spaniards, who eventually built the fortress to protect their prized city. Explore the labyrinthine tunnels that run underground, or enjoy panoramic views of the city from atop the castle walls. We then head to La Boquilla, a small village near the beach. During our time here, we'll have the opportunity to interact with residents to get local perspectives of life in Cartagena. On the beach, we'll discover cumbia, a Latin America dance style, during a drum and dance lesson.

Then we'll head to Bocagrande, a neighborhood known for its scenic stretches of beaches and trendy restaurants.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Free for making your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll visit the massive cathedral on Plaza Bolívar, completed in 1602 after being partially destroyed in 1575 by Sir Francis Drake. Or examine the treasure trove of gold and ceramics found at the Museo de Oro y Arqueología.

In the early evening, a traditional carriage ride through the historic neighborhoods of Cartagena will bring us to a Farewell Dinner.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend your final night in Colombia as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 7 Fly to Panama City, Panama • **Begin main trip**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll make our way to the airport to catch our flight to Panama City and begin our *Panama & Costa Rica: From Canal to Cloud Forest* adventure.

POST-TRIP

Antigua & Tikal: Guatemala's Colonial Capital and Mayan Ruins

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|---|---|
| » Airfare to Guatemala City from Petén | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 5 nights accommodation | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 10 meals—5 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 3 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 4 small group activities | |

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

After your Costa Rica adventure, continue to Guatemala—a land where ancient traditions and natural beauty collide. Begin in the colonial city of Antigua, nestled between volcanoes, before journeying north to the Petén region. Explore the jungle-cloaked ruins of Tikal, uncovering the secrets of this ancient Maya capital, then unwind on colorful Flores Island. Your journey concludes in Guatemala City, where vibrant culture and layered history come to life.

Day 1 Transfer to Antigua

- Destination: Antigua
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Villa Colonial or similar

Breakfast: Enjoy a light buffet at the hotel.

Morning: After concluding your [BASE Trip Name] adventure, you'll transfer to the airport in San José via Guatemala City to Antigua, Guatemala.

Lunch: On your own. You may like to pick something up at the airport to enjoy during your flight.

Afternoon: We arrive in Antigua mid-afternoon and transfer to our hotel. You'll have some free time to settle in.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You are free to spend your first evening exploring independently.

Day 2 Explore Antigua • Discover Casa Santo Domingo

- Destination: Antigua
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Villa Colonial or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today, we'll explore Antigua. Founded in 1542, this vibrant and charming city was the hub of Spanish power more than 200 years ago. As we begin exploring the city on a walking tour led by our Trip Experience Leader, you'll notice the Spanish influence in all that surrounds you. Though an enormous earthquake in 1773 destroyed almost all of the architecture, many colonial structures still

remain. Feast your eyes on the restored, as well as crumbling, monuments of its past—they all have a certain Old-World charm. You'll behold a mixture of vine-covered facades, tiled rooftops, and intricate detailing—all reminiscent of the Spanish style. By keeping everything closer to the ground and reinforcing the structures with piles of brick and mortar, 18th-century builders tried to ensure that the tremors of an earthquake would not wreak the havoc they had done in the past.

Then, we'll drive to the Casa Santo Domingo, a cultural complex housing two of Antigua's best museums—one featuring Spanish colonial art and another of classic Maya art. The complex is set within the ruins of the Spanish colonial monastery of Santo Domingo.

Lunch: At a local restaurant, featuring Guatemalan cuisine, which is influenced by indigenous Maya traditions and Spanish colonial techniques.

Afternoon: Return to the hotel and enjoy some free time to relax and freshen up. Perhaps you'll hike to Cerro de la Cruz to take in sweeping views of the city, where you can stroll past ruins on the way up and enjoy sweeping views of Antigua and Aqua Volcano.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to make recommendations.

Evening: Your evening is free to enjoy the streets of Antigua by night, use the hotel amenities, or retire early.

Day 3 Antigua • Overland to Guatemala City • Fly to Flores

- Destination: Petén
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Villa Maya Lodge or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today, we'll depart Antigua and drive to Guatemala City, the lively capital of Guatemala. We'll discover Avenida Reforma, "Reform Avenue," a main boulevard that was once a memorial site to commemorate the victory of the liberal reform of 1871. Unfortunately, after the severe earthquakes of 1917–1918, many homes and buildings were destroyed along the boulevard. Today, it's a restored park with several monuments and statues to honor the many Mexican and Guatemalan leaders.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for a recommendation. Perhaps you'll try chicken *pepián*, a spicy stew of meat, fruit, and vegetables that is often considered Guatemala's national dish.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll drive to the airport for our flight to Flores. Upon arrival, we'll transfer to Petén where we'll check in to our hotel. After settling in, join your Trip Experience Leader and fellow travelers for an orientation walk around the vicinity of our hotel.

Dinner: At the hotel, featuring a variety of local favorites, as well as traditional American fare.

Evening: You are free to spend the evening as you wish, walking the grounds of the hotel, enjoying a nightcap at the bar, or resting before tomorrow's discoveries.

Day 4 Petén • Explore Tikal

- Destination: Petén
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Villa Maya Lodge or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll transfer to northeast to Tikal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and perhaps the most remarkable of all the classic Maya cities. It is here that a magnificent civilization reigned from about 300 to 900 AD. Nestled within Tikal National Park, the grounds are expansive and complex, and it's difficult to determine which is more impressive—the accomplishments of man or those of nature. The towering structures rise above the leafy canopy and fight for your attention with the assortment of animals and exotic birds. Within the park, it's possible to spot howler monkeys gliding through the treetops, raucous macaws and colorful toucans perching on branches, and wild turkeys wandering the forest floor.

The Tikal site comprises about six square miles with about 3,000 structures, including temples, pyramids, tombs, palaces, ball courts, and terraces. The Maya had a complex cultural caste system that relied heavily on deity worship. Often perceived as a violent sect, they sacrificed to their gods both in their temples and on the playing fields of their ball courts. Oftentimes the entire losing team was sacrificed in the name of sport.

At its peak some 1,500 years ago, Tikal was home to an estimated 100,000 Maya, and it was one of the most important urban centers of its time. Its size is intimidating, and its setting is lush and teeming with wildlife. Standing back and just observing the immensity of it all can be quite striking.

Lunch: Included at Tikal site.

Afternoon: When we return to our hotel, enjoy a couple hours of free time. There are many mysteries to ponder today, and after our day at ancient Tikal, you may enjoy a lively conversation about the famous, and infamous, Maya civilization with fellow travelers.

Dinner: We'll drive to a local restaurant on Flores Island.

Evening: Enjoy free time this evening to rest up for tomorrow, reflect on the day's discoveries with fellow travelers, or use the hotel amenities.

Day 5 Explore Flores Island • Fly to Guatemala City

- Destination: Guatemala City
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Clarion Suites

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy the morning exploring colorful Flores Island as you wish. Perhaps you'll stroll along the causeway in the historic Old Town or return to the wonders of Tikal with its looming temples and ancient Maya ruins.

Lunch: On your own in Flores.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll drive to the airport for our return flight to Guatemala City. When we arrive, we'll check in to our hotel.

Dinner: On your own in Guatemala City. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide you with options.

Evening: Enjoy your last evening in Guatemala as you wish. *Zona Viva* is buzzing with nightlife, so perhaps grab a drink with fellow travelers and recap your explorations so far.

Day 6 Guatemala City • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Colombia:** You will need an additional passport page, for a total of 3.
- **Post-trip extension to Guatemala:** You will need an additional passport page, for a total of 3.
- **Both a pre- and a post-trip extension:** You will need 3 pages total.

No Visas Required

Travelers with a U.S. passport do not need any visas for this adventure, including the optional trip extensions.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Travel Protection Required:

For new bookings starting 1/1/25, Overseas Adventure Travel requires all travelers purchase travel protection with Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000, due to the remote nature of your adventure.

O.A.T. Travel Protection:

If you **purchase your Travel Protection Plan** through O.A.T., no further action will be needed, as the Medical Evacuation coverage and Medical Expense coverage meets these requirements.

Your Own Travel Protection:

If you purchase your own travel protection, we recommend you review the plan to ensure Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000 is included. Once you confirm your plan meets the requirements, you will need to email the following information to **TravelCoverage@oattravel.com**:

- Traveler Name(s)
- Reservation Number
- Trip Protection Provider
- Policy Number
- Date of Purchase
- Copy of your Policy Documents

You can also contact our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814** to review this policy. You will be required to provide proof of coverage by 60 days prior to departure at the latest.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

Hotel Letter for Minors

Colombia in particular is *very* strict about traveling with minors if you are not their parent. Not only will you need documentation to enter the country, but also a permission letter from a parent for hotel stays. If you will be traveling with a minor who is not your child—such as a grandchild, niece/nephew, or ward—you must contact both us (so we can document your relationship to the minor in question) and the embassy of Colombia (to be advised on exactly what documents are need).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Is This Adventure Right for You?

Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure. We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

PACING

- 7 locations in 13 days with one 1-night stay and some early mornings

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted and participate in 6-8 hours of physical activities each day on uneven ground and/or steps
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals

ALTITUDE

- 2 days at altitudes of about 6,000-6,500 feet

CLIMATE

- Panama and Costa Rica have tropical climates with high temperatures reaching 90°F, high humidity, and moderate-to-heavy rainfall
- As narrow isthmuses, Panama and Costa Rica are influenced by many meteorological systems, making weather prediction difficult

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over rural streets, unpaved roads, and rugged paths and trails
- Travel via 22-passenger air-conditioned minibus and riverboat

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- Some of our lodgings may be quite small or family-run

- In rural areas, our lodgings may have limited services; rooms may not include TV, phone, or air-conditioning

Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at www.cdc.gov/travel or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

Vaccine Required

Yellow Fever Vaccination

The yellow fever vaccination is required for travelers taking the optional pre-trip extension to Colombia or are visiting another South American country (Peru, Bolivia, Colombia or Brazil) prior to arriving in Panama or Costa Rica. The vaccine must be administered 10 days before your arrival.

You should discuss the vaccine with your doctor to see if he or she recommends it and if your health allows for it. (He or she can offer a suggestion tailored to your personal medical history.) We recommend that you research costs before making a decision as the yellow fever vaccination can be expensive and is not covered by most insurance plans. If you and your doctor decide the vaccination is right for you, then he or she will issue you a Yellow Fever Card, also called an International Certificate of Vaccination. This is your proof of vaccination; you should bring it with you on the trip.

If you and your doctor decide the vaccination isn't right for you, then have your doctor issue an official vaccination waiver. An official waiver is a letter that meets these requirements:

- It must be on business letterhead paper or on the Yellow Fever Card itself. (Some versions of the card have a space for this purpose.)
- It must be signed by a doctor.
- It must be stamped using the same stamp that the doctor uses on a Yellow Fever Card.
- It must state the reason for the waiver. (For example: "patient has compromised immune system" or "patient is at high risk for severe side effects".)

TIP: Take your Yellow Fever Card with you when traveling. If you cannot receive the vaccination for medical reasons, bring a letter from your medical provider stating so. If any of the countries on this itinerary makes a last-minute change to its entry policy before you leave, having one of these documents with you could make all the difference.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- For travelers on any of the optional extensions: At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for the extensions. Anti-malarial medication can have strong side effects, so be certain to ask your doctor first. At time of writing, the CDC characterized the malaria risk on our extensions as “low”, so your doctor may not feel medication is needed.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

At the time of writing, the State Department warned that Pseudoephedrine is banned in Guatemala since it can be used in the manufacture of methamphetamines. (Note: Pseudoephedrine is common decongestant in the U.S.; it is in brand name medications like Sudafed.)

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.

- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- In Costa Rica tap water and ice at most of our hotels is safe to drink, but check with your Trip Experience Leader.
- In Guatemala, tap water is not safe for drinking. We recommend you drink bottled, filtered, or boiled water only.
- You should be fine if you brush your teeth with tap water in one of our hotels or get a drink with ice in one of the restaurants we use.
- Bottled water is not included on your base trip, but your Trip Experience Leader will arrange access to a jug of filtered water where you can fill your own bottle from home. One bottle of water will be provided per day on your Guatemala pre-trip.
- You can purchase bottled water, which is readily available throughout Central America.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for the meal you take on your own.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street.
- In Guatemala, be careful with uncooked fruit or salads washed in local water.
- Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe—avoid lettuce and other unpeeled produce. (Fruits and salads in Costa Rica are generally safe.)

Electricity Supply

Barring the occasional and unpredictable power outage, electricity is readily available on this adventure. However, power outages are more common in Costa Rica than in the United States. Travelers who are dependent on the electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power just in case.

Also, because some hotels or lodges rely on generators for electricity, the lighting may be considerably dimmer than what you are used to. And at many lodges, your room will be in a separate building from the main reception—and the pathways are not always well lit. We suggest that you bring a small flashlight.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as cash, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants.
- **U.S. dollars are widely accepted in Costa Rica.** Bring small denominations (\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20) in good condition.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Panama

United States currency is legal tender in Panama, and it circulates freely with the Panamanian balboa, which only printed in coin form and divided into 100 centesimos. Because U.S. dollars are legal currency, you will not need to convert money in Panama.

For those interested in collecting coins (or just curious) centesimos coins are of identical size, denomination and metal as U.S. coins, but with different designs. The coins of both nations are used interchangeably in Panama, so you may get centesimos in your change even if you paid in U.S. dollars.

Costa Rica: Costa Rican colon (CRC)

Colombia: Peso (\$)

Guatemala: Guatemalan quetzal (Q)

How to Exchange Money

U.S. dollars in small denominations (\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20) are widely accepted in Costa Rica, so there is no need to obtain local currency before your trip. If you do need local currency, it is better to exchange money at a bank or use a local ATM, rather than change money at the airport (the airport as a poor exchange rate). Torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted for exchange or payment.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We

recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Panama: ATMs are available in large cities, but small towns may not have any international ATMs that take American cards.

Costa Rica: ATM networks are common in the larger cities, somewhat available in small towns, and hard to find in rural areas or in national parks.

Colombia: Typically ATMs are widely available in the larger cities like Bogotá, Medellin, and Cartagena but may be hard to find in smaller towns or rural villages. Our Trip Experience Leaders suggest changing about \$100 per person into Colombian currency at the airport when you first arrive. They have found that some of the ATMs at the airport and near the hotels don't work with U.S. cards.

Guatemala: ATMs are available throughout large cities and small towns.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Panama: Credit cards are accepted in most hotels, restaurants, and shops. However, you will need cash for taxis and small Mom-and-Pop type stores.

Costa Rica: Visa and MasterCard are the most readily accepted credit cards in Costa Rica

Colombia: Credit and debits cards are widely accepted in Colombia, though you may still run into some smaller shops and restaurants that will not accept them.

Guatemala: Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted, though not every shop will take cards, so it is best to ask if your card is accepted before deciding on your purchase, and having a couple different cards can be useful.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$10–\$14 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1–\$2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** If you are dining on your own, bear in mind that it is common for restaurants in this region to add a service charge (usually of about 10%). If so, there is no need to tip.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number. It is considered polite to give a \$1 or so to the driver if he/she carries a bag or parcel for you.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Please note: For your convenience, tips to O.A.T. staff can be paid in U.S. dollars or local currency. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: www.rome2rio.com

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner).

Communicating with Home from Abroad

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Internet

Some hotels in Costa Rica have WiFi service, but it may be limited in some way. For example, it might be available in the public areas only (and not in the rooms), it may be a slow connection, and it may be a service that you are charged for. In other hotels, the only Internet access is through the hotel's computer station in the lobby or business center.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Panama: +507

Colombia: +57

Costa Rica: +506

Guatemala: +502

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Varies by international airline. The current industry standard is 50 lbs for checked luggage and 15 lbs for carry-ons .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches.
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Guatemala post-trip extension: International flights are the same as the main trip. However, the local flight to Tikal has a small carry on restriction of 10lbs .	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p> <p>For the post-trip extension to Tortuguero: There are weight limits for your luggage on the boat to Tortuguero. These limits are smaller than the ones on your international flight. To meet the smaller limits, but still be able to bring as much as the main trip allows, you have the option of leaving excess luggage in storage at the hotel in San Jose. To use this left luggage storage, you'll need an extra bag, preferably one that locks.</p>	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.

- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the *FAQ* section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **A small, lockable bag for the post-trip extension:** There are weight limits for your luggage on the boat to Tortuguero. These limits are smaller than the ones on your international flight. To meet the smaller limits, but still be able to bring as much as the main trip allows, you have the option of leaving excess luggage in storage at the hotel in San Jose. To use this left luggage storage, you'll need an extra bag, preferably one that locks.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

Most of your clothing should be lightweight and loose fitting to combat heat and humidity. Some previous travelers have suggested clothing made from cotton, linen, or another natural breathable fabric as a way to stay cool. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Rain gear:** You'll want good, light rain gear all year round, but it is especially key from mid-May to November when it will rain almost every afternoon. Choose rain gear you are comfortable in and dry footwear, such as light hiking boots with a built-in Gore-tex liner. Previous travelers have also recommended bringing an extra pair of hiking shoes during the rainy season.
- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, so choose your footwear carefully. You can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful on some days. We recommend bringing water-going footwear for your raft ride—your choice of waterproof sandals, boating shoes, beach shoes, neoprene booties, strap-on sandals, or “aqua shoes.”

- **Quick-dry fabrics:** You can buy shirts and pants designed for travel in a tropical climate. These clothes are made of comfortable cotton/synthetic blends, and will dry out faster. In general, avoid jeans and other heavy cotton trousers because they don't dry as fast.
- **Laundry:** Our lodges feature laundry services for a fee, so you'll be able to have laundry done during the trip.

Style Hints

- Dress on our trip is functional and casual
- You may want to bring one slightly dressier outfit for dining on your own at nicer restaurants or for the Farewell Dinner, but that is completely at your discretion.

Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each travelers packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don't forget a reusable water bottle—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable and/or quick-drying fabric. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts. A couple long-sleeved shirts for layering are recommended for nights in the mountains.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting is best. Avoid tight-fitting jeans.
- ☐ Walking shorts: Cut long for modesty
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater as motor coach air conditioning can be cold
- ☐ Shoes and socks: A pair of sturdy walking shoes (or similar supportive sports shoes that offer good traction) is a must. A second pair of shoes—ones that can get dirty and wet—are also recommended, especially for the rafting excursion and muddy days. For socks, consider bringing a couple heavy pairs for hiking and a couple pairs that can get wet.
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood or poncho
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor for sun protection
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear

- ☐ Swimsuit

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

From May through November, please add:

- ☐ Rain pants: A pair of pants in a quick-drying material that can get wet or a pair of waterproof pants. Due to the tropical weather, it may rain any time of the year, but a pair of “rain pants” is especially useful in the rainy season.
- ☐ Poncho or raincoat with a hood: More useful than an umbrella on nature trails. Keep in mind that it will be warm, so look for something that adds water protection without adding bulk or warmth.
- ☐ Previous travelers have also recommended an extra pair of hiking shoes during the rainy season

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo but most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- ☐ Sunglasses.
- ☐ Because of the active nature of this trip, we suggest a strap for your glasses and/or sunglasses.
- ☐ A working flashlight is a must! We suggest that you bring a small flashlight because of dim lighting (some lodges are limited by their generators) or to use on the path to your room at night (in some lodges your room will be in a separate building from main reception area).
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 30 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET
- ☐ Light folding umbrella (for walking in town during a rainstorm).
- ☐ Refillable water bottle
- ☐ Travel alarm clock, or watch with alarm
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues

- ☐ Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser
- ☐ Folding walking stick, for uneven trails
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger

Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: A strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional for travelers on any of the extensions: Anti-malarial medication—discuss with your doctor first

At time of writing the U.S. State Department had the following warning for Guatemala: Pseudoephedrine is banned in Guatemala since it can be used in the manufacture of methamphetamines. (Note: Pseudoephedrine is common decongestant in the U.S.; it is in brand name medications like Sudafed.)

Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts’ generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity in most of Central America is the same as in the U.S., 110–120 volts.

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built.

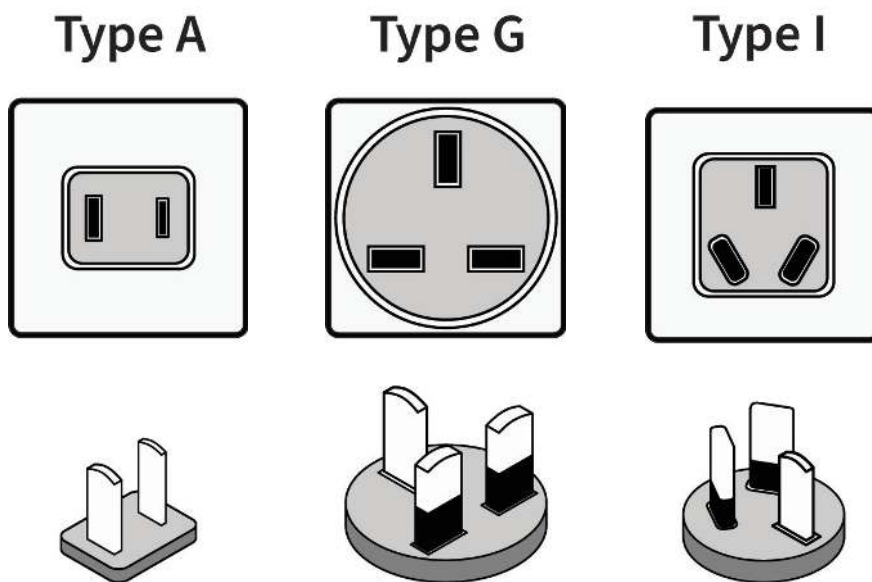
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. By far the most common plug type in Central America is Type A, which is the same as a standard U.S. plug. (Occasionally in Guatemala, you might find Types G and I as well. But these are not common.) Because electric plugs in this region are American-style, you will not need an adapter.

Panama: A (same as the U.S.)

Costa Rica: Type A (same as the U.S.)

Colombia: A and B

Guatemala: Type A (same as U.S.). Occasionally, you might find G or I, but they are rare.



Availability

Barring the occasional and unpredictable power outage, electricity is readily available on this adventure. However, power outages are more common in Costa Rica than in the United States. Travelers who are dependent on the electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power just in case.

Also, because some hotels or lodges rely on generators for electricity, the lighting may be considerably dimmer than what you are used to. And at many lodges, your room will be in a separate building from the main reception—and the pathways are not always well lit. We suggest that you bring a small flashlight.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Costa Rica: As a narrow isthmus, Costa Rica is influenced by the many meteorological systems in the area and it is nearly impossible to predict the weather accurately. But generally, Costa Rica has a tropical climate with high temperatures, high humidity, and moderate-to-heavy rainfall. The country can be divided into four climate zones: the central valley, the high mountains, the Pacific slope, and the Caribbean slope.

- **Central valley:** This includes the area surrounding the capital, San José. This is the most moderate of Costa Rica's four zones. Days are less hot and humid, and nights are much cooler. But because the influence of the surrounding mountains, fog can gather over the highlands, causing cloudy skies or delays at San José airport.
- **High mountains:** The mountains surround the central valley, and act as a barrier between them and the coast. It can be cool and windy at higher altitudes in the mountains. Some of the mountain passes are as high as 11,000 feet, where temperatures can drop into the 30s °F at night, but usually the nighttime temperature is in the 50s.
- **Pacific slope and Caribbean slope:** Costa Rica's western Pacific slope is hot and humid with heavy rains from May through November, especially near the shore. The Caribbean slope to the east is equally hot and even wetter. Note that the humidity, more than the heat, is the biggest inconvenience in either area. Generally the humidity will start high and then decrease significantly toward the late afternoon hours, except during the rainy season, when the humidity increases throughout the day, resulting in an afternoon shower.
- **Seasons:** As a tropical country, Costa Rica does not have four seasons like North America. Instead, the country has two distinct seasons—rainy and dry (except the Caribbean slope which does not experience a dry season and experiences cold fronts throughout the year). The rainy season generally runs from May to mid or late November; the dry season is December through April. Because temperatures are fairly steady all year long, the real difference between the two is in the humidity and the amount of rain. The dry season will be less humid, with clearer skies, but the rainy season will have fewer crowds and better foliage (it is also known as the green season). During the rainy season it is very common to have clear skies or even sun in the morning followed by a brief but strong shower in the afternoon, rather than rain all day long.

Panama: Panama's climate is tropical, with hot and humid weather most days, although temperatures do vary slightly by location and altitude. On both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, the annual average temperature is 84°F, and the more mountainous regions fall in the 50–66°F range. But even in cooler areas an average humidity of 80% can make things uncomfortable. The high and low temperatures don't change much from season to season. Instead the seasons tend to be defined by rainfall. The dryer season, relatively speaking, is from January to March. Rain is more frequent on the Caribbean Coast than on the Pacific Coast. As a comparison, Panama City (Pacific) sees an annual average rainfall of 70 inches; Colon (Caribbean) sees 136 inches.

Cartagena, Colombia: Cartagena sits on the Caribbean Sea, on the northern coast of Colombia. Most days are typically tropical—hot and humid days with highs in the upper 80s or 90s. However, because of the high humidity, it can often feel hotter. The dry season runs from December to April and the rainy season is between October and November.

Medellin, Colombia: Medellin may be squarely in the tropics, but its elevation (almost 5,000 feet above sea level) offsets the tropical heat and gives the city a pleasant spring-like climate. Temperatures don't vary much throughout the year—the high is almost always in the 70s or 80s; the low is usually in the 60s. Rainfall is possible any day of the year, but is more common during spring (April and May) or fall (October and November).

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use www.weather.com for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA			PANAMA CITY, PANAMA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	77-66	73	0.6	89 to 76	90 to 62	24
FEB	78-66	69	0.2	90 to 76	88 to 59	13
MAR	80-67	68	0.8	90 to 77	87 to 59	10
APR	81-68	70	1.8	89 to 78	87 to 63	18
MAY	79-68	78	9.0	87 to 78	90 to 76	26
JUN	79-68	83	9.5	86 to 77	92 to 80	22
JUL	78-68	82	8.3	87 to 77	93 to 78	23
AUG	79-67	81	9.5	86 to 77	93 to 78	23
SEP	78-66	84	12.0	86 to 76	93 to 79	24
OCT	77-66	85	11.8	85 to 76	93 to 81	26
NOV	77-67	79	5.7	86 to 76	93 to 79	26
DEC	77-66	76	1.6	87 to 76	93 to 70	28

MONTH	CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA			MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	85 to 75	88 to 70	0.2	79 to 64	87 to 48	2.1
FEB	85 to 76	87 to 70	--	80 to 65	86 to 49	2.6
MAR	86 to 77	86 to 70	0.1	80 to 65	86 to 52	4.0
APR	86 to 78	86 to 73	1.0	79 to 65	88 to 58	7.1
MAY	87 to 79	87 to 76	3.8	79 to 65	88 to 60	7.6
JUN	87 to 79	88 to 75	4.2	80 to 65	87 to 51	5.4
JUL	87 to 79	88 to 74	3.4	80 to 64	86 to 45	4.7
AUG	87 to 79	88 to 76	4.7	80 to 64	86 to 48	5.5
SEP	87 to 78	89 to 77	5.2	79 to 64	88 to 56	6.2
OCT	86 to 78	89 to 78	8.8	78 to 64	89 to 64	8.0
NOV	86 to 78	90 to 77	5.3	78 to 64	89 to 62	5.8
DEC	86 to 76	90 to 73	1.3	78 to 64	89 to 58	3.3

MONTH	ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	71 to 53	--	0.0
FEB	73 to 54	--	0.0
MAR	76 to 56	--	0.2
APR	77 to 58	--	0.5
MAY	78 to 61	--	1.8
JUN	75 to 60	--	2.8
JUL	74 to 60	--	3.4
AUG	74 to 61	--	2.2
SEP	74 to 60	--	4.1
OCT	72 to 59	--	1.9
NOV	73 to 57	--	0.4
DEC	71 to 55	--	0.1

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

Costa Rican Culture

Costa Rican culture is a vibrant fusion of indigenous heritage and Spanish colonial influence with a hint of Jamaican, Chinese, and other immigrant cultures. But if you had to name the cultural trait shared by almost all *Ticos*—as they affectionately refer to themselves as—regardless of their specific ancestry, it would be *pura vida* (pure life). Costa Ricans use this term to say hello, goodbye, to toast, or even as a laid back reaction to something bad happening—similar to saying, “oh well, so it goes.”

While you may dismiss it as marketing banter (and it *is* a big marketing phrase), the *pura vida* attitude of the country can be seen through not only in the laid back nature of the people, but also through their progressive social and environmental policies.

Costa Rica may be a small country, occupying just .03% of the world's landmass, but the country holds 5% of the world's biodiversity. Situated between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, Costa Rica boasts lush mountains, active volcanoes, and verdant valleys. The country's nutrient-rich soil is ideal for cultivating cash crops like coffee, pineapples, sugar, and bananas. In fact, Costa Rica is one of the largest exporter of bananas in the world. While the agricultural industry dominates Costa Rica's economy, it also emits large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. As a result, the nation has been implementing new agricultural practices and making strides toward becoming a carbon-neutral country.

Costa Rica's former president, Jose Figueres, sparked the country's passion for environmental change in 1948 when he eliminated the nation's military. This bold move boosted funds for environmental protection, healthcare, and education. Costa Rica provides universal healthcare to all residents and expatriates living in the country, and the healthcare system ranks higher than the United States. Funding for education has also proved beneficial. Costa Rica is one of the most literate Latin American countries in the Western Hemisphere with a 97.9% literacy rate. This sustainable way of life, and these economic and environmental efforts, are why Costa Rica was named the world's happiest country in 2016 by the New Economics Foundation.

One unshakeable tradition, deep-rooted in *Ticos*, is that they are remarkably friendly and welcoming. *Ticos* act with humility and see boasting as ill mannered. This stems from their belief in *quedar bien* (to remain well), or the desire to leave a good impression and to not appear as rude. This idea of *quedar bien* goes hand in hand with their tranquil nature. Violence of any kind is especially rare, and hostility is almost never seen.

Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica and is spoken with a distinctive accent. Costa Ricans replace the diminutive ending *-tito* with *-tico* (hence their nickname). Not only do they refer to native Costa Ricans as *tico*, they will add it to adjectives to make them sound small, affectionate, or cute. For example, in standard Spanish *un poco* means “a little,” and the diminutive is *un poquito* (a little bit), but Costa Ricans usually say *un poquitico*.

Language

You can have some great “conversations” with local people who do not speak English, even if you don’t speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling.

Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style, to better relate to older and more traditional people, especially in villages. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

Warning: Riptides and Strong Currents

The beaches in Costa Rica can have strong currents and riptides. Sometimes there are no lifeguards. If you decide to go into the ocean, please use caution.

Expectations in Colombia

Colombia has long been a closed destination for Americans, and is slowly opening for American tourism. The most important things for you to pack are your sense of adventure, an open mind, and an understanding that service and standards will not be what you are used to. While the people are friendly and the country’s beauty is vast, there will be some things that surprise you. There are few people in Colombia who speak English, including at hotels and restaurants. (Come prepared to practice your Spanish.) Many hotels were once private homes, so the rooms may be smaller, darker, or noisier than you expect. In some areas, hotels will have fans but not air-conditioning.

The locals will love to help you, but service is not up to American standards. The staff will be friendly, but, again, will most likely not speak English and may be slower than expected. Be prepared for a leisurely meal, and allow extra time if you have a specific request. Patience with this developing country is important. Our advice is: When in Colombia, do as Colombians do.

Taking Photographs

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

Panamanian Cuisine

The diverse population of Panama influences the local cuisine, with an emphasis on Spanish, American, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous elements. Generally, dishes are spicy or highly seasoned. Most meals are based around coconut rice, beans and fried green plantains (*patacones*.) You'll find a lot of fried foods—even at breakfast—so you may have to navigate around that if you're dieting or working around health issues. Breakfast options include eggs, toast, and fruit, but you'll also find Panamanian *tortillas*—a deep-fried corn batter topped with eggs and cheese. Spotted rooster (*gallo pinto*) is a kind of porridge made with rice, beans, and pork.

Chicken is a staple—as *sancocho*, a chicken stew unique to Panama—attests. You'll often find pork and beef on the menu, as well. You would expect seafood, as Panama means “abundance of fish”, and you'll find everything from red snapper to crab and octopus. *Langostino* (jumbo shrimp) and lobster are available, but are pricey due to overfishing. Traditionally, Panamanian seafood is offered fried, grilled, *al ajillo* (prepared with a spicy garlic sauce) and *a la española* (sautéed with tomatoes and onions). Fresh fruit is a constant, with pineapple, papaya, melon and banana always in evidence. However, vegetables are a bit harder to come by. The hot, humid climate here doesn't sit well with vegetables that thrive in more temperate regions.

If you're just feeling a bit peckish, try some Panamanian-style *ceviche*—uncooked fish and onion marinated in lemon juice. Or investigate the meat-stuffed cornmeal pastries known as *empanadas*. Panama also boasts its own version of the *tamale*, which is similar to the Mexican snack, but served in banana leaves. And even if you're a confirmed tea drinker, Panamanian coffee is a must.

Costa Rican Cuisine

Meals in Costa Rica are all about simple preparations with fresh local ingredients. Emphasis is put on the natural favors of the meats, fruits, and vegetables rather than seasonings or sauces. As a result, Costa Rican cuisine has a reputation for straightforward cooking that is tasty but can

be slightly repetitive. You can build more variety into your meals by trying different vegetables and fruits, which are often supersized compared to the ones at home because of the fertile volcanic soil.

In Costa Rica, there is a tradition of attending *ferias*, or a farmer's market, every week. The variety of vegetables, tropical fruits, and fresh meat and seafood allows Costa Ricans to draw from a staggering amount of fresh ingredients. While here, make sure to try dishes such as:

- **Gallo Pinto:** A breakfast dish made of rice and beans mixed with bell peppers, onions, and cilantro.
- **Sopa Negra:** A black bean soup.
- **Olla Decarne:** A slow-cooked beef stew with root vegetables, like carrots, taro root, and cassava. Some versions may even feature corn or plantains.
- **Sopa Mariscos:** A tomato-based soup with fresh seafood.

Some lighter snacks worth a try are:

- **Patacones:** Fried and flattened plantain chips made with green plantains that have a savory taste.
- **Tamals:** Similar to the Mexican tamale, but with garlic instead of spices.
- **Chifrijo:** A dish that combines *chicharrones* (fried pork rinds), frijole beans, and rice, and then tops the whole thing with avocado, salsa, and maybe a hint of lime juice.

If you're looking to satisfy your sweet tooth, then be sure to try:

- **Arroz con leche:** Rice pudding that is a popular dessert and is a bit creamier than its American counterpart.
- **Flan:** A custard-like base with a caramel sauce at the bottom—at local restaurants or bakeries.
- **Pipa Fria:** A tropical drink served as a chilled coconut cut open at the top to allow a straw to reach the refreshing coconut water inside.

Colombian Cuisine

If you want to understand the national cuisine, **bandeja paisa** is essentially Colombia on a plate. This is a hearty platter filled with red beans, ripe plantain, white rice, pieces of **chicharrón** (crispy pork rinds), avocado, chorizo sausage, **carne en polvo** (a finely ground flank steak), and a fried egg. This traditional, filling meal would sustain workers all day. Other popular dishes include:

- **Sancocho:** A hearty soup that includes large pieces of chicken with chunks of corn on the cob, plantains, and herbs served with **salsa de hierbas**, a spicy cream and herb sauce.
- **Sancocho de pescado:** A delicious seafood chowder made from chunks of local fish simmered in coconut milk.

- **Aborrajados:** These are plantains that are stuffed with cheese and deep fried.
- **Carimañolas:** *These are yuca fritters and served as an appetizer.*
- **Arepas:** Similar to tortillas, these are fried corn flatbreads topped with anything from shredded beef to roasted goat to grilled seafood, cheese, fruits, veggies, and more.

Guatemalan Cuisine

Like most Central American countries, the cuisine of Guatemala is a fusion of Mayan, Spanish, African, and Caribbean influences. Corn, an indigenous crop common to pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican societies, is indispensable to many Guatemalan dishes. Other common ingredients of Guatemalan gastronomy are beans, plantains, rice, cocoa, tomatoes, pork, and chicken.

Popular dishes include:

- **Chicken Pepian:** *The national dish of Guatemala*—chicken in spicy pumpkin and sesame sauce.
- **Kak'ik:** A turkey soup that gets its kick from coriander, achiote, and chili peppers.
- **Chiles rellenos:** Roasted peppers stuffed with rice, cheese, meat, and vegetables.
- **Tamales:** meat, corn, and veggies steamed inside a plantain leaf.
- **Tamales especiales de fiesta:** Holiday tamales which are a souped-up version of the original with more filling.
- **Spiced Mango:** Sliced green mango, seasoned with chili and lime.
- **Elotes:** Roasted ears of corn.
- **Rellenitos:** Guatemalan donuts that are made up of cooked plantains mashed with refried bean paste, sugar, and cinnamon, and then deep-fried.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Panama

In Panama, locally made items can be found at good prices. Look for leatherwear, beaded necklaces strung by local Guaymí Indians, native costumes, jewels and precious stones, straw products, electrical equipment, handicrafts of carved wood, ceramics, papier mâché artifacts, macramé and mahogany bowls.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica offers superb craft items at very good prices. Some of the most common souvenirs include wooden bowls, vases, or carvings. Unless it's marked as responsible or sustainable wood (plantation grown wood), these souvenirs may be contributing to the deforestation of Costa Rica. If the item is not marked, please consider asking about the wood's origin before purchasing.

Bargaining: In general, bargaining is not a common practice in Costa Rica, even at the stands of street vendors. Prices at shops and stores are fixed, just as they are in the U.S.

Colombia

You can find many local crafts throughout Colombia. Traditional *mochilas* (woven bags with indigenous textile designs) are both practical and typically Colombian. Hats like the *sombrero vueltiao*, which is made from cane fibers by the Zenu tribe, or *sombrero aguadeno* (a version of the Panama hat) are also popular. Lastly, if you are in the market for a high-end purchase, Colombia is known for gold and emerald jewelry.

Central America

Central America offers a variety of fine craft items at good prices. The region is known for its textiles, handicrafts, wood carvings, jewelry, jade, leather goods, ceramics and basketry. If you're in search of locally made products at a good price, browse the markets. You'll find a good mix of traditional and modern crafts at the Central Market and Craft Market in Guatemala City.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your

responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.

- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Panama

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 29,157 square miles
- **Capital:** Panama City
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language; English and Panamanian are also spoken.
- **Location:** Panama is bordered by Costa Rica and Colombia.
- **Geography:** Panama is a west-to-east S-shaped isthmus. At its narrowest point, it is about 40 miles wide. A mountain range, the Cordillera Central, runs down its center.
- **Population:** 3,309,679
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant 15%
- **Time Zone:** Panama is on Eastern Standard Time. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6am in Panama City.

National Holidays: Panama

In addition to the holidays listed below, Panama celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/09 Martyr's Day

05/01 Labor Day / May Day

11/03 Independence Day

11/05 Colon Day

11/10 First Attempt for Independence at La Villa de los Santos

11/28 Independence from Spain

12/08 Mother's Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Panama: A Brief History

The first known inhabitants of Panama—the Cuevas and the Coclé—were wiped out when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, eradicated by weapons and diseases brought from Europe. The Spanish settled along the Pacific Coast and founded Panama City in 1519. Spaniards headed south to Peru in search of gold and the riches that they brought back drew the attention of pirates. It wasn't long before travel through the Caribbean was ripe with the threat of piracy. Many of the Spanish people brought it all the way back to Europe via Cape Horn in an effort to protect their cache.

As a result, the once-rich Panama slipped into poverty. When Colombia declared its independence in 1821, it claimed Panama as a province. It wasn't until 1846 that the U.S. became involved in the region, signing a treaty to allow America to build a railway from the Pacific to the Caribbean, and to defend it with force. U.S. interests aligned with the revolutionary ambitions of Panama's opposition party, and the former supported the latter as it declared its sovereignty in 1903. Soon after, a new treaty was signed, granting the U.S. a canal zone ten miles wide and five miles on either side.

Canal construction began in 1904. The original lock plan called for one three-step set of locks at Gatun, one step at Pedro Miguel and a two-step set at Sosa Hill. Later the Sosa Hill locks were moved further inland to Miraflores. All lock chambers were built with the same 100 by 1,000 feet dimension, and are built in pairs, allowing for two lanes of traffic. It took four years to build all of the locks.

The first complete Panama Canal passage by a self-propelled vessel took place on January 7, 1914. At the end of construction, the canal cost Americans around \$375 million—which, unlike any other such project on record, was under budget. In fact, the final figure was \$23 million below the 1907 estimate, in spite of landslides and a design change to create a wider canal.

The canal treaty also granted the U.S. liberal rights to intervene in Panamanian affairs, resulting in tense relations. The U.S. relinquished its right to interfere with Panama's affairs outside the Canal Zone in 1936, but it wasn't until 1999 that Panama formally gained control of the canal.

In 1984, General Manuel Noriega—once head of Panama's secret police and once a CIA operative—rose to power as dictator. Over the next five years, he murdered his opponents and stomped on attempts at democracy, trafficking drugs and laundering money along the way. The 1989 election results seemed to promise new leadership, but the winning candidate was beaten on national television and the election annulled. Still, Noriega declared himself the winner and announced a state of war with the U.S. The killing of an unarmed U.S. soldier fueled these flames.

“Operation Just Cause” was launched with 26,000 U.S. troops to bring down Noriega and bring democracy to Panama. More than 2,000 civilians lost their lives in the operation, and thousands were left homeless. Noriega fled, claimed asylum in the Vatican embassy, and was ultimately captured and convicted of money laundering.

Panama has seen six presidents since, its first female president among them, with Laurentino Cortizo holding the Presidential office since 2019. Privatization has increased, infrastructure has improved, and more attention has been paid to health care and education.

Costa Rica

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 19,730 square miles
- **Capital:** San José
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language; English is also spoken.

- **Ethnicity:** White (including mestizo) 83.6%, mulato 6.7%, indigenous 2.4%, black 1.1%, other 6.2%
- **Location:** Costa Rica is bordered by Nicaragua, Panama, the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea.
- **Geography:** Costa Rica has very little flat land. The plains along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts are characterized by tropical forests and beaches. The interior of the country is mountainous and precipitous.
- **Population:** 5,181,000 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 76.3%, Evangelical 13.7%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.3%, other Protestant 0.7%, other 4.8%, none 3.2%
- **Time Zone:** Costa Rica is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5am in José.

National Holidays: Costa Rica

In addition to the holidays listed below, Costa Rica celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

1/1 New Year's Day

4/11 Santamaria National Holiday

5/1 Labor Day/May Day

6/17 Father's Day

7/25 Annexation of Guanacaste

8/2 Los Angeles Virgin Day

8/15 Mother's Day

9/15 Independence Day

12/1 Army Abolition Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Costa Rica: A Brief History

Small tribes inhabited the area now known as Costa Rica as early as 8000 BC. Clay figurines and decorated vessels suggest that trade and observation of ritual began very early. When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1502, he chose the name "Costa Rica," which means "rich coast," because he believed the land would yield vast amounts of gold. However, Spanish conquistadors soon discovered Costa Rica did not contain the mineral wealth they had hoped for. Instead, what they found were tribes of farmers and artisans. These indigenous people were exploited for their labor by the early Spanish settlers, but harsh treatment and foreign diseases wiped the majority of the native population within a century. Because Costa Rica was lacking in precious metals, as well as a supply of indigenous labor, it attracted only a few Spanish colonists. As a result, the population grew slowly and Costa Rica remained a poor colony.

In the mid-19th century Costa Rica declared independence, shortly after Guatemala did. Spain, which had shown limited interest in Costa Rica during the previous decade, did not attempt to force the colonists back to the crown.

The early years of independence were difficult for the young nation. Over the next five decades, Costa Rica experienced numerous coups and power struggles. In the 1870s, Tomas Guardia named himself ruler for life. He immediately set about building a railroad from San José to the Caribbean coast. The project bankrupted the nation, but it also laid the foundation for a thriving banana industry by establishing large plantations near the tracks.

In 1889, President Bernardo Soto opened the door to democratic reforms by sponsoring Costa Rica's first free and open elections. Soto also advocated freedom of the press and the peaceful transition of power. His reforms ushered in a period of great advancements in education and the arts.

The first three decades of the 20th century were a time of order and tranquility. Each president advanced democratic liberties and continued to expand the education system. But economic depression and uneven distribution of wealth led to a brief civil war in 1948. The government responded by expanding social welfare programs, extending suffrage rights to women, imposing a progressive income tax on the wealthy, enacting new economic reforms, and stabilizing Costa Rica's finances.

Costa Rica is by far the most democratic country in Central America. The people are literate and politically involved. There is a healthy respect for freedom of expression and a commitment on the part of both political parties to work together for the good of the nation. Most importantly, the democratic reforms of the 1940s and '50s have ushered in an age of peace and prosperity that has lasted several decades.

Costa Rica is a small country, but the people enjoy a relatively high standard of living. The country's wealth is very evenly divided, resulting in a strong middle class. Costa Rica spends a greater percentage of its national income on education than any other country in Latin America, resulting in a highly educated citizenry. In fact, more than 96% of all Costa Ricans can read and write.

Thanks in part to the establishments of the Central American common market in 1960, manufacturing has become an important part of Costa Rica's economy. The United States is Costa Rica's chief trade partner. Major exports include textiles and clothing as well as building materials. Despite the important role of manufacturing in the economy, however, about half of Costa Rica's population makes their living from agricultural pursuits. Staple crops include sugarcane, coffee and bananas.

Colombia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 439,736 square miles
- **Capital:** Bogotá
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language.

- **Ethnicity:** Mestizos (mix of European and Amerindian) 58%, White 20%, Afro-Colombian 21%, Amerindian 1%
- **Location:** Colombia is bordered by Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea.
- **Geography:** Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America—roughly the size of Texas and California combined. In the west, low peaks rise over the flat Pacific lowlands. Moving inward, these give way to the three mountain chains that run across the center of the country. Mountain peaks of up to 13,000 feet soar over these central regions. Moving further east, the countryside descends to grassy lowlands, and then to the coastal areas on the Caribbean Sea.
- **Population:** 46,736,728 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 90%, other 10%
- **Time zone:** Colombia is in Eastern Standard Time. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6am in Bogotá

National Holidays: Colombia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Colombia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Epiphany, Feast of the Sacred Heart, and Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

03/25 St. Joseph's Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

June Corpus Christi (moves each year)

07/20 Independence Day

08/07 Battle of Boyaca Day

10/12 Columbus Day (usually observed on closest Monday)

11/05 All Saint's Day

11/12 Independence of Cartagena

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

Colombia: A Brief History

Among the cultures scattered in Colombia's Andean region before Europeans arrived were the Tayrona, Sinú, Muisca, Quimbaya, Tierradentro, and San Agustín, known for intricate goldwork, pottery, and rock paintings. The first recorded Spanish visit occurred when Alonso de Ojeda, an officer of Columbus' second voyage, stepped ashore in 1499. He sought the mythical land of El Dorado, and the Amerindians' gold made him think he'd found it. Several expeditions followed and short-lived settlements arose; the oldest, established in Santa Marta in 1525, still stands.

At first, local tribes tolerated the visitors, but they rebelled when it grew clear that the colonists meant to enslave them. They were no match for Spaniards' advanced weapons. Colonial towns prospered for 200 years, including the port of Cartagena (founded in 1533). It was a prosperity

borne on the backs of enslaved Africans, who soon outnumbered indigenous people. Through the 18th century, there were sporadic rebellions, but the fight for independence gained strength when Napoleon abolished the Spanish monarchy. This divided Colombia, but a great liberator arose: Simón Bolívar of Venezuela, who defeated the Spanish at the Battle of Boyaca in 1819.

Colombia joined Venezuela and Ecuador to form the Republic of Gran Colombia, but it dissolved after ten years due to political differences. By 1849, these coalesced into two political parties. The Conservadores had centralist views, believed government should align with the Catholic Church, and favored a limited voting pool. The Liberales wanted a decentralized government, separation of church and state, and broad voting rights. This division set the tone for numerous wars until 1899. Colombia was relatively quiet from 1902–1947, but conflict between the Conservadores and Liberales boiled over in 1948 during “La Violencia,” which killed 300,000. A 1953 coup by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla did not result in reforms. In 1957, both parties united as the National Front, overturning the general and agreeing to share power for 16 years.

The National Front ended in 1974. Meanwhile, left-wing guerrillas were surfacing, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the April 19 Movement (M19). They had complicated relations with the growing drug cartels in Medellín and Cali. Some guerillas used the drug trade to fund their activities, while others rejected the cartels, going so far as to kidnap cartel members. Many cartels started death squads, ostensibly for protection. In reality, many death squads were paramilitary groups used to terrorize civilians into cooperating with the cartels. By 1990, violence threatened to paralyze the country.

By 1992, government control was strengthened by the death of Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellín cartel. In the late 90s, conservative Andres Pastrana accused President Samper’s campaign of being financed by drug money. He won the 1998 presidential election with a plan to combat drug trafficking, strengthen democracy, and improve Colombia’s human rights record. Vowing to continue Pastrana’s “Plan Colombia,” right-wing hardliner Alvaro Uribe was elected president in 2002. Uribe had studied at Oxford and Harvard, and his father had been killed by FARC. For the first months of his presidency, the war grew intense. But a breakthrough occurred in 2003 with a peace treaty between the government and the right-wing paramilitary AUC. Uribe was re-elected in 2006, and succeeded by Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, who surprisingly began peace talks with FARC, signing an accord in 2016. Santos won the Nobel Peace Prize, and his administration improved human rights policies. Relations with Venezuela have fluctuated due to ideological differences. Still, Colombia has provided Venezuela with food and medicine to mitigate shortages as presidential control of Venezuela remains disputed.

Guatemala

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 42,042 sq miles
- **Capital:** Guatemala City
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language of Guatemala; 23 Amerindian languages (including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca) are also spoken.

- **Ethnicity:** Mestizo, European, K'iche, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q'eqchi, and indigenous.
- **Location:** Guatemala is bordered by El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Belize, the Pacific Ocean, and the Gulf of Honduras.
- **Geography:** Located in Central America between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Honduras, Guatemala is mountainous in the interior with plains along the coast.
- **Population:** 14,918,999 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs
- **Time Zone:** Guatemala is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5am in Guatemala City.

National Holidays: Guatemala

In addition to the holidays listed below, Guatemala celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

05/01 Labor Day / May Day

06/30 Army Day

09/15 Independence Day

10/12 Dia de la raza

10/20 Revolution of 1944

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Guatemala: A Brief History

In the present day, the lands once occupied by the ancient Mayan civilization fall within the boundaries of Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. Guatemala, a country of over 14 million that officially recognizes several Mayan-derived Indian languages—along with Spanish—has many direct descendants of the ancient Mayans among its people. The ancient Mayan culture is believed to have taken shape between 1500 BC and AD 100 in the Pacific highlands of Guatemala and El Salvador. Beginning around AD 250, Mayan civilization entered what is now called its Classic Period, when the great city-states whose ruins define *La Ruta Maya* began to be built. This period lasted until about AD 900, after which many Mayan cities were abandoned. Some cities, however, particularly on Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, survived centuries longer, in a post-Classical period that extended as late as the 16th century.

At the beginning of the Classical Period, Tikal (now in Guatemala) was already well established. Early in the third century AD, a king named Yax Eb Xoc ruled Tikal and began a dynasty that lasted for the next 400 years. Yax Eb Xoc and his successors expanded their city-state by conquering surrounding kingdoms until Tikal had a population estimated at 100,000 by the middle of the sixth century. Then Tikal itself was conquered by Caracol (now in Belize), which ruled the area for over a century. A ruler named Moon Double Comb brought renewed greatness to Tikal early

in the eighth century, building most of the great temples that still stand around the Great Plaza today. Tikal declined around AD 900, at the end of the Classic Period, with its population slowly dispersing and its buildings becoming overgrown by luxuriant tropical vegetation.

When the Europeans arrived in the 16th century, they encountered several remaining Mayan groups. Spanish soldiers under Pedro de Alvarado completed the conquest of Guatemala in 1548 after pitting several of these indigenous groups against each other. Once it began, Spanish rule continued here until 1821. At this point, Guatemala briefly became part of Mexico before joining a short-lived federation known as The United Provinces of Central America.

The early years of the 20th century were marked by dictatorships and foreign influence. After the dictatorship of General Jorge Ubico was overthrown in 1944, Guatemala experienced its “ten years of spring,” an extended period of reform, progress, and personal freedom. In 1960, the U.S. supported government, the paramilitary, and the Cuba-backed left-wing insurgents began a brutal Guatemalan Civil War sparked by a number of social and economic factors. The low point of the 36-year internal conflict was the violent presidency of Rios Mont. During his rule thousands of unarmed civilians were killed.

In 1986, the election of President Vinicio Cerezo brought reform and a period of relative peace. In 1994, the Commission for Historical Clarification sought to end 36 years of violence and corruption; a peace accord was signed in 1996. Since the end of the civil war, a series of successful reforms and democratic elections has inspired hope for the country’s recovery.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

General

Nature of the Rainforest, Costa Rica and Beyond by Adrian Forsyth (1990, Natural History) Although based in Costa Rica, biologist Forsyth used his experience to explain the basic ecology and conversation of any rainforest. Over 100 wonderful photographs complement the text.

A Brief History of Central America by Lynn V. Foster (1985, History) A good overview of the economic and cultural history of the region. An earlier book by the same name but written by Hector Perez-Brignoll is also good, but isn't as up-to-date as this edition.

Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata (1984, Natural History) An engaging overview of the ecology of a tropical rain forest as written by two biologists. First published in the 1980s, but subsequently updated and re-issued.

The Maya

The Maya by Michael D. Coe (2015, Archeology) An introduction to the extraordinarily sophisticated Mayan civilization that flourished in the jungles of Mexico and Central America 1,500 years ago and presents many details about specific sites.

Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (2004, History/Biography) An overview of the Maya through short biographies of their rulers.

Maya Art and Architecture by Mary Ellen Miller (1999, Art) Organized thematically, this book by Yale art historian Mary Ellen Miller surveys the art and architecture throughout Mayadom. She makes use of the latest discoveries at Tikal, Copan, Palenque and other Maya sites to present the range of art from architecture, to sculpture, ceramics and murals. This book may not be easy to find in stock at your local store, but can be found online.

Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico by Ronald Wright (1989, Culture) Eight million people in Guatemala, Belize, and southern Mexico speak Mayan languages and maintain their resilient culture. Traveling through Central America's jungles and mountains, Wright explores ancient roots of the Maya, their recent troubles, and survival prospects.

The Mosquito Coast by Paul Theroux (1981, Literature) A taught psychological tale of a man who abandons civilization for the wilds of Honduras.

Panama

How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt & the Panama Canal by Ovidio Diaz Espino (History) An intriguing look into the treachery, behind-the-scenes financial wrangling and Roosevelt-era dollar diplomacy that resulted in both the Panama Canal and the establishment of Panama as an independent nation.

Panama Canal by Cruise Ship by Anne Vipond (Guidebook) An outstanding guide to the Panama Canal that features a mile-by-mile guide to the transit, a history of the building of the canal, and a detailed pullout map.

The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870–1914 by David McCullough (History) McCullough reveals the full scope of the Panama Canal with page-turning storytelling ability. Capturing the international intrigue, it reads more like a suspense novel than a historical account.

The Tailor of Panama by John Le Carré (Novel) Set in Panama, this thriller by master storyteller John Le Carré includes spymasters, corrupt officials, arms manufacturers and other unsavory types.

Costa Rica

Two Weeks in Costa Rica by Matthew Houde and Jennifer Turnbull (2012, Travel Narrative) The true-life misadventures of a young couple touring in Costa Rica, told in a breezy, upbeat style.

Happier Than a Billionaire: Quitting My Job, Moving to Costa Rica, and Living the Zero Hour Work Week by Nadine Hays Pisani (2011, Memoir) Humor mixes with struggles in this observational book about the experience of living abroad as an ex-pat in Costa Rica.

The Wildlife of Costa Rica, A Field Guide by Fiona Reid, Twan Leenders, Jim Zook, and Robert Dean (2010, Field Guide) Portable enough to take along on a walk in the forest, this latest Zona Tropical guide includes 450 of the most common animals you are likely to encounter.

The Birds of Costa Rica by Richard Garrigues and Robert Dean (2007, Field Guide) A compact yet thorough guide from Cornell University Press that includes a range maps, key information on identification and habitat, and multiple illustrations. Useful for a birding enthusiast.

Monkeys Are Made of Chocolate: Exotic and Unseen Costa Rica by Jack Ewing (2005, Natural History) Written by an American who has lived in Costa Rica for more than 30 years, this book explores how plants, animals, and people interact. Each chapter is an essay that shows a new side of the overall theme.

Colombia

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), ***Love in the Time of Cholera*** (1985), and ***Of Love and Other Demons*** (1994) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Literature) Reading anything by this Nobel Laureate will provide tremendous insight into Colombian life, along with lyrical passages that mix the real with the magical, and plenty of humor. *Years* is the sprawling tale of a family that founds a town and their subsequent relations with the inhabitants. *Cholera* is a sometimes-difficult tale about the complicated diseases that we call love and romance. And *Demons* is the tragic story of a girl who may have rabies and her romance with the priest who was hoping to cure her.

The War of Don Emmanuel's Nether Parts (1990), ***Señor Vivo and the Coca Lord*** (1991), and ***The Troublesome Offspring of Cardinal Guzman*** (1992) by Louis de Bernières. (Fiction) These three novels (“The Latin American Trilogy”) take place in an unnamed country, but were inspired by

the author's experiences in Colombia. Here, the stories of mystical indigenous deities, corrupt politicians, idealistic philosophers, hardened guerilla fighters, and lovestruck peasants are woven together in a web of magical realism and that is at once terrifying, hilarious, and affectionate.

The Sound of Things Falling by Juan Gabriel Vasquez (2011, Fiction) This tale charts the dissolution of a flawed professor, his marriage, and the entire city of Bogota as even law-abiding citizens become entrapped in the pervasive drug trade.

Guatemala

Breaking the Maya Code by Michael D. Coe (3rd Ed. 2012, Anthropology). The scientific detective story of how Mayan inscriptions were deciphered to reveal the fascinating history of this ancient civilization, told with eloquence by a retired professor of anthropology at Yale University.

I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala by Rigoberta Menchu (1983, Autobiography). Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, this Guatemalan woman speaks eloquently of her struggles against the military for a decent way of life. A compelling testimony to the power of a strong-minded, ordinary person and her love for her land.

Suggested Films & Videos

Panama

NOVA: A Man, a Plan, a Canal—Panama (2004, documentary) An interesting and informative documentary on the sheer engineering feat that is the canal. Hosted by David McCullough, the author of *A Path Between the Seas*.

The Tailor of Panama (2001, drama) The film adaptation of the classic John Le Carre spy thriller.

Costa Rica

La Apuesta (1968, Pseudo-Documentary) Shot in 16mm format and narrated by a voiceover, this film follows two peasants who make a bet to see who can get from San Antonio de Escazú to Limón. At the time, there was no road to this Atlantic port, so it made crossing extremely difficult.

Colombia

Love in the Time of Cholera (2007, Drama/Romance) A fanciful yet dramatic story about a 50-year love triangle, patience, magic, and (of course), cholera. Based on the masterful Garcia Marquez novel of the same name and starring Javier Bardem and Benjamin Bratt.

Maria Full of Grace (2004, Drama) A teenager becomes a drug mule to earn money for her family. This film deals with some difficult and controversial topics, but was acclaimed for its moving performances.

Embrace of the Serpent (2015, Docudrama) Two scientists search the Amazon for a sacred healing plant with the aid of Karamakate, a shaman and the last of his people. With its striking black and white cinematography and vivid portraits of Amazonian people, it was Colombia's first Oscar-nominated film.

Colombia: Wild Magic (2015, Documentary) A well-received wildlife documentary about the country's amazing biodiversity, with stunning wildlife and landscape shots.

Guatemala

Ixcanul (2015, Drama) Directed by Jayro Bustamante, this film tells the story of María, a seventeen year old girl in an arranged marriage, who lives on the slopes of an active volcano in Guatemala.

La Camioneta (2012, Documentary). Directed by Mark Kendall, this documentary features the journey of inactive American school busses that are repaired and repurposed in Guatemala by workers who are targeted by gang violence.

Granito: How to Nail a Dictator (2011, Documentary) Footage from a 1982 documentary about a hidden genocide against the Mayans in Guatemala helps to convict a former dictator decades later. The title refers to how a film became a *granito*—a tiny grain of sand—that helped tip the scales of justice in Guatemala.

The Houses Are Full of Smoke (1987, Documentary). This powerful three-part documentary exposes the history of clandestine operations and U.S interventions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua since the 1950s.

El Norte (1983, Drama) This groundbreaking film is the story of a brother and sister fleeing persecution in Guatemala and traveling north (*el Norte*) through Mexico and into the United States. Filled with surreal images, it's a heartbreaking tale of hope and survival (Roger Ebert called it "a *Grapes of Wrath* for our time.")

Useful Websites

Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

www.oattravel.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

TripWhistle

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



To/From U.S.
 Internal flight
 Land route
 Boat route

0 Miles 40

GUATEMALA
POST-TRIP EXTENSION

MEXICO
Belize
Honduras
El Salvador

Tikal
Flores
Antigua
Guatemala City

From San José

Caribbean Sea
Pacific Ocean

MEDELLIN & CARTAGENA
PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

Venezuela
Colombia

San Felipe Castle
La Boquilla
Cartagena

Panama City
Medellin
Guatapé

Caribbean Sea
Pacific Ocean

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