

Overseas Adventure Travel®

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

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



Route of the Maya

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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Tikal National Park, Guatemala

Route of the Maya Small Group Adventure

El Salvador: San Salvador | **Honduras:** Copán Ruinas | **Guatemala:** Guatemala City, Santa Catarina Palopó, Antigua, Petén | **Belize:** Belize City

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

16 days starting from \$3,895

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

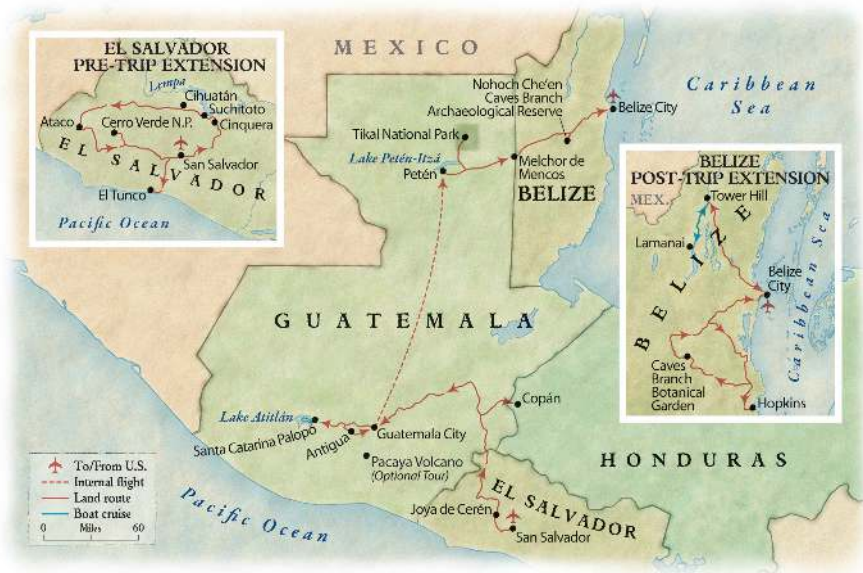
For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/myr2026pricing

Journey to Central America to witness the handiwork of the Maya civilization, an empire that emerged from the rainforests, flourished for centuries, and then mysteriously vanished in the ninth century. From ruins to rural villages, we'll trace the footsteps of the Maya culture as only O.A.T. can, with our small group meeting the Maya's modern-day descendants where they live and work.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 15 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 and 1 internal flight
- 34 meals—15 breakfasts, 11 lunches, and 8 dinners
- 19 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.



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Depart U.S.
2	San Salvador, El Salvador
3-4	Copán, Honduras
5-6	Guatemala City, Guatemala
7-8	Santa Catarina Palopó • Lake Atitlán
9-11	Antigua
12-13	Fly to Petén • Tikal
14-15	Belize City, Belize
16	Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderate

Pacing: 7 locations in 16 days with some early mornings

Physical requirements: Some long transfers, including three 7.5-hour drives with regular stops, and 1 internal flight on a turbo propeller plane. Walk four miles up steep slopes and steps in Tikal and Copán, and spend one day at altitudes above 8,000 feet

Flight Time: Travel time will be 3-11 hours and will most likely have one connection

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

CENTRAL AMERICA: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

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

People-to-People Experiences: Interact with local musicians at the bustling Libertad Plaza in San Salvador as they play you a tune and experience *A Day in the Life* of San Antonio Palopo village, including a community lunch in the home of a local family.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Discuss **Controversial Topics** like the exploitation of vulnerable laborers while visiting a local school situated near a garbage dump—and supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation**.

PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

El Salvador: Colonial Suchitoto & the Flower Route

PRE-TRIP: 4 nights from **\$995**

Coastal Belize: From Hopkins to Belize City

POST-TRIP: 4 nights from **\$1,595**

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 **El Tunco** before your El Salvador pre-trip extension from **\$190** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **San Salvador** before your main adventure from **\$150** per room, per night

Route of the Maya

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *El Salvador: Colonial Suchitoto & the Flower Route*

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive San Salvador, El Salvador

Day 2 Overland to Suchitoto • Explore Suchitoto

Day 3 Suchitoto • Explore Cinquera

Day 4 Explore Cihuatán • Overland to Ataco • Explore Ataco

Day 5 Explore Cerro Verde National Park • Begin main trip

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive San Salvador, El Salvador

- Destination: San Salvador
- Accommodations: Barceló San Salvador or similar

Afternoon: Arrive today in San Salvador, Central America's second-largest city and the capital of El Salvador. You will be greeted by an O.A.T. representative at the airport who will assist you with the transfer to our hotel. There, you'll meet your Trip Experience Leader and fellow travelers, including those who took our optional pre-trip extension to *El Salvador: Colonial Suchitoto & the Flower Route*.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: Free to spend as you wish.

Day 2 Explore Joya de Cerén • San Salvador

- Destination: San Salvador
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Barceló San Salvador or similar

Activity Note: If Day 2 falls on a Monday, we will visit Joya de Cerén on Day 3 instead.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll meet our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing in the hotel lobby.

Then, we'll depart by bus for Joya de Cerén, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the first of four Mayan archaeological sites we'll discover on this adventure. Located just outside of San Salvador, Joya de Cerén is aptly nicknamed the "Pompeii of the Americas," because—like Pompeii—it features remarkably intact dwellings that were preserved for centuries after being buried by volcanic ash.

Dating from about CE 600, the ruins here were the homes, communal baths, and public buildings of ordinary people—not, as at most other sites, the monumental temples of royalty. This site was discovered in 1976 and is still being excavated. Evidence suggests that the inhabitants were able to evacuate as the eruption destroyed their village, but they left utensils and textiles behind that provide revealing glimpses of Maya life more than a millennium ago. We'll spend some time exploring here with a local guide.

Lunch: A Welcome Lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll next head to the historic downtown area of San Salvador and walk towards San Salvador Cathedral, an imposing structure in the center of the city and the burial site of Oscar Romero, a prominent Roman Catholic priest and archbishop of El Salvador in the 1960s and 70s. Speaking out against human rights violations and begging the military to stop killing civilians, Romero often clashed with the local government and the Catholic Church. In 1980, he was shot while celebrating Mass, presumably during an organized attack by a Salvadoran death squad.

We'll spend some time here before we walk to the site marking the beginning of the capital's expansion in the 16th-century: Libertad Plaza. Installed in 1911, the Monument to the Heroes rests in the center of the square and commemorates Central America's one hundred years of independence from Spain. While here, we'll interact with local musicians, and perhaps even hear a few songs. Afterwards, we'll head back to the hotel, where the remainder of the day is free for you to explore on your own.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend your time as you please this evening. Maybe you will gather with fellow travelers at the hotel lounge to discuss today's discoveries, or explore more of the surrounding area.

Day 3 Overland to Copán Ruinas, Honduras

- Destination: Copán
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Don Udo's Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Our overland transfer today involves a bus ride of up to 7.5 hours where we travel from El Salvador through Guatemala and then end our journey in Honduras. We will break up the long border crossing with stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Check out of our hotel and depart to the border of Honduras bound for the town of Copán Ruinas, the gateway to the mysterious Copán ruins. After passing through the Guatemalan border, we make our way to a local restaurant in Guatemala for lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We then continue our drive to the Honduras border. After arriving at the hotel, our Trip Experience Leader will guide us on a short orientation walk around the hotel to familiarize us with the surrounding area. Following the orientation walk, enjoy the rest of the day to explore on your own.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: You are free to make independent discoveries tonight.

Day 4 Copán • Explore Copán ruins

- Destination: Copán
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Don Udo's Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out to explore the crown jewel of the Mayas' endeavors: Xukpi (to the Maya), now known as the ruins of Copán. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980, Copán is Honduras's most significant pre-Columbian site and the most elaborate of all Maya cities, earning it the title "Athens of the Maya World."

In CE 250, the Maya—the Western Hemisphere's most advanced culture—began constructing elaborate cities that flourished until about CE 900. With a local guide and our Trip Experience Leader, we spend the whole morning at the ruins exploring its sprawling ball court, adorned with markers resembling macaw heads; and the Great Plaza, scattered with altars and lined with carved stone columns called stelae. Among the ruins here that have helped unveil Maya history is Altar Q, a rectangular stone altar with carved portraits of all of Copán's rulers, from the founder, Yax Kuk Mo, to the last ruler, Yax Pac.

The most complex remnant is the Hieroglyphic Stairway—63 steps with 2,500 glyphs, or symbols, carved into the stone, transforming the pyramid's steps into the Maya's longest historical record. The ancient Maya belief system gave extraordinary importance to precisely measuring and recording the dates of events, such as the reigns of rulers, and many of Copán's monuments—and those of other Maya centers—are elaborate sacred calendars. During our visit, we'll also keep an eye out for the unique birds that inhabit the surrounding jungle.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: You have the afternoon free to discover the area on your own. Perhaps you'll choose to venture to the Sculpture Museum of Copán, which is an extension of the ruins we visited earlier. The building was planned to reflect the central concepts of the Maya worldview. Inside, there are nearly 60 exhibits, 3,000 pieces of sculptures, and 6 restored buildings of some of the most important elements of the adjacent ruins.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. You can take some time for yourself, explore the surrounding area, or meet up with fellow travelers to discuss the day.

Day 5 Overland to Guatemala City, Guatemala

- Destination: Guatemala City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Clarion Suites or similar

Activity Note: Our border crossing today involves a drive of up to 7.5 hours over roads that may be bumpy or uneven at times. As we travel from Copán to Guatemala City, we will break up the crossing with stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll begin the day by journeying to the Guatemalan border. After passing through the border into Guatemala, we head to Guatemala City through a patchwork of farmland.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll continue on to our hotel in Guatemala City.

After checking in, you will have the remainder of the afternoon for your own independent explorations. Maybe you'll visit the Plaza Fontabella, or marvel at more Maya art at the *Museo Popol Vuh*.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: Continue your local discoveries on your own this evening. *Zona Viva* is buzzing with nightlife, so perhaps grab a drink with fellow travelers and recap your explorations so far.

Day 6 Grand Circle Foundation visit: Safe Passage school and nonprofit • Controversial Topic: The impact of Guatemala City's garbage dump on the local community • Explore Guatemala City

- Destination: Guatemala City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Clarion Suites or similar

Activity Note: We cannot visit the school on weekends, holidays, from June 15–July 2, and from October 20–January 20 when it is closed for vacation. When the school is unavailable, we will enjoy an alternative visit to the Maya archaeological site of Kaminaljuyu.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Visit Safe Passage School, located in one of Guatemala City's poorest neighborhoods. In this area surrounding the city's garbage dump, countless families are forced to make a living by picking through endless piles of trash, looking for anything of value they can resell. Due to extreme poverty, many of the area's adults and children are illiterate.

Grand Circle Foundation

Safe Passage School

Total donated: **\$75,515**

Partner since: **2014**

Safe Passage School is run by a local nonprofit organization that is trying to improve the lives of vulnerable residents through education and job training. The more than 550 children enrolled in this program—which is supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation**—can attend this full-day school through the second grade. They receive financial assistance to cover the cost of public school enrollment, school supplies, and uniforms, as well as hot meals, homework help, medical care, and sports and art programming. The nonprofit also assists the children's parents by providing them with access to an adult literacy and social entrepreneurship program called CREAMOS. During our time here, we'll meet a few Safe Passage students—from young children to adult learners—and discuss how they're managing to rise above their difficult circumstances. We'll also enter a couple of classrooms, where we'll have the opportunity to help students with their homework and glean insight into the education system.

Later, we'll also delve even deeper into the **Controversial Topic** of the dump when we sit down in one of the classrooms with a CREAMOS participant and local mother. For decades, more than 12,000 families have relied on the dump as a means of income, scouring the more than 3,200 tons of garbage deposited daily for recyclables. The conditions are both dangerous and unsanitary, and over the years, many have gotten sick, injured, or even killed—in fact, in 2016, a landslide occurred, killing fourteen and leaving dozens gravely injured.

Safe Passage has begun to make some progress, but the organization is not nearly large enough to address the magnitude of the issue. We'll

hear a local speak about her experience at Safe Passage, followed by a Q&A. Feel free to ask any questions you may have during this time.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Continue your explorations of Guatemala City on a panoramic bus tour. First, we'll explore the historic city center, where colonial-style buildings stand side-by-side with modern galleries and eateries. While here, we'll see the neoclassical Metropolitan Cathedral and the ornate National Palace of Culture. Then, we'll hop on our bus again to enjoy views of the city's stately Civic Center, the red Baroque façade of the Iglesia Yurrita, the striking Brutalist architecture of the Bank of Guatemala, and the bustle of Reforma Avenue.

After we return to the hotel, the remainder of the day is open for you to explore on your own.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll venture to a local bar and grab a drink with fellow travelers, or retire to your room.

Day 7 Overland to Santa Catarina Palopó • Visit San Andres Itzapa

- Destination: Santa Catarina Palopó
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Villa Santa Catarina or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel this morning and begin our transfer to Santa Catarina Palopó. Along the way, we'll stop for a tour of the small town of San Andres Itzapa—a pilgrimage site for many Mayans—where we'll visit the Temple of San Simón, also known as Maximón. While there are myriad interpretations of San Simón, most worshipers

believe he grants wishes. We'll get a firsthand glimpse into the journey these devotees make during our visit. Your Trip Experience Leader will facilitate conversations between the locals and your small group.

Lunch: On your own in the town of Tecpan. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Afternoon: We'll continue our transfer to Santa Catarina Palopó, arriving the mid-afternoon. Santa Catarina Palopó is a quiet town, drawing visitors with its volcanic vistas and proximity to Lake Atitlán. Upon arrival, we enjoy a short orientation walk of the area surrounding our hotel with our Trip Experience Leader before checking in and having some time to do what you wish. You are free to settle into your room and relax, or begin exploring the views of the surrounding area. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. Continue getting acquainted with the scenic views of this volcanic landscape on an evening stroll, join fellow travelers at the hotel bar for a nightcap, or simply relax in your room after the day's discoveries.

Day 8 Cruise Lake Atitlán • A Day in the Life of San Antonio Palopó • Lunch with a local family

- Destination: Santa Catarina Palopó
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Villa Santa Catarina or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Board a boat and cruise on scenic Lake Atitlán. Encircled by three towering volcanoes—San Pedro, Toliman, and Atitlán—it's been called "the closest thing to

Eden on Earth.” And with a depth of more than 1,000 feet, it’s also the deepest lake in Central America. There is no road that rings Lake Atitlán, so we’ll travel to one of its lakeside villages by boat, arriving for our ***A Day in the Life*** experience.

After we disembark our boat, we take a short walk to the lakeside town of San Antonio Palopó. Accompanied by a local guide and your Trip Experience Leader, we’ll see the ways the people of this Maya Kaqchiquel village have kept many of their ancient practices alive through everyday life and in the murals decorating the village.

Our first visit of the morning will be to a textile demonstration, where members of the community will show us the weaving process from start to finish. During our visit, we’ll learn how cotton is picked, cleaned, and turned into thread; how vegetables and plants are turned into dye; and how the dyed threads are woven using traditional methods and patterns that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Next, we’ll head to a local market, where we’ll tap into the flow of daily life as merchants and shoppers buy and sell their daily goods—perhaps including fine textile products like the ones we learned about today.

Then, we’ll stop in at the home of a midwife and leader of the community. In Maya culture, being a *comadrona* (as a midwife is called) is not a career but a calling: you are either born with the “gift” or you are not. As the midwife will explain to us, she incorporates the use of medicinal plants and works alongside the Guatemalan healthcare system.

After, we’ll visit the home of a local family. Typically, many generations live under one roof, as we’ll see today when we meet members of our host’s family. Then, we’ll begin helping with lunchtime preparations.

Lunch: We’ll sit down with our hosts for a shared lunch. Our meal is an excellent chance to get to know our hosts in their home setting.

Afternoon: Next, we’ll stop by the community’s pottery cooperative, a craft for which the village is highly regarded. Here, we’ll learn about the ancient practices still utilized today and even witness parts of the production process. San Antonio Alpopo is home to many such cooperatives, each designed to preserve and strengthen traditional Maya practices.

We’ll then leave for our hotel, where the remainder of the day is free for your own discoveries.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is open for your own discoveries. You may retire early to rest up after today’s activities, or join fellow travelers in the hotel lounge to toast to your adventures so far.

Day 9 Optional Canopy & Hanging Bridges tour • Visit Sololá • Overland to Antigua

- Destination: Antigua
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Camelias Inn or similar

Activity note: If you are joining the Optional Tour, please check out and have your luggage ready before departing the hotel.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The morning is yours to make your own discoveries in Santa Catarina Palopó. You may choose to walk through the shifting series of botanical terraces at the Hotel Atitlan Gardens.

Or, you can choose to join our optional *Canopy & Hanging Bridges* tour at the Atitlán Nature Reserve, a 247-acre reserve located near the lakeshore.

On this excursion, we'll hike through the region's dry pine forest, walking along seven hanging bridges suspended in the verdant canopy, while admiring the landscape's volcanoes and waterfalls. We'll have the opportunity to view the region's distinct wildlife up close. Then, when we reach the top of the valley, we'll enjoy a descent by zip-line that brings us back to solid ground.

Afterwards, we'll head to Sololá, one of the largest Maya cities in Guatemala. Upon arrival, we'll visit one of the most vibrant markets in the highlands—often called one of the best markets in Central America—witnessing colorfully dressed locals selling meat, vegetables, fruit, housewares, and clothing.

We then begin our transfer together to Antigua.

Lunch: At a local restaurant on the road to Antigua.

Afternoon: We resume our journey to Antigua after lunch. After we check in to our hotel, we'll enjoy an orientation walk of the area with our Trip Experience Leader. We'll behold a mixture of vine-covered facades, tiled rooftops, and intricate detailing—all reminiscent of the Spanish style. Founded in 1543, "La Antigua" served as the seat of Spain's colonial government—whose influence extended beyond Guatemala to southern Mexico, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and parts of Costa

Rica—until the Spanish Crown ordered its relocation to the site of what is now Guatemala City in 1776.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You are free to make your own discoveries this evening. You can take some time for yourself, or perhaps you'll take a walk to Central Plaza, just a few blocks away, to glimpse the colorful colonial architecture illuminated at night. And, maybe you'll slip into a nearby bar to enjoy live music with locals.

Day 10 Explore Antigua

- Destination: Antigua
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Camelias Inn or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart the hotel to Cerro de la Cruz, or Hill of the Cross, located just north of the city. On a clear day, the hill offers sweeping views of Antigua with the towering Volcán de Agua in the background. We'll explore here with your Trip Experience Leader before heading over 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.

Afternoon: Spend the afternoon on your own in Antigua, discovering this charming colonial city. From the towering volcanoes to the smallest architectural detail, Antigua is a revelation. Wander the winding streets at your own pace, linger in a small café, or shop for handmade crafts. The day is yours to savor the beauty of this Guatemalan community.

Perhaps you will peruse the stalls selling textiles and crafts at the *Mercado de Artesanias*, or explore the ruins of *Las Capuchinas*, a temple built in 1736.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: Your evening is open for you to explore as you wish. Perhaps you'll relax in your room, or grab a drink at a local bar.

Day 11 Antigua • Optional *Guardians of Knowledge: Resilience of the Maya* tour

- Destination: Antigua
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Camelias Inn or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The day is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll wander the shops at Parque Central or taste fried plantains made in the market, climb the Hill of the Cross at your own pace for a panoramic view of the city, or visit the Cathedral.

Or, join us for an optional tour to the town of San Antonia Aguas Calientes, where we'll meet two groups of women who are dedicated to preserving the ancient knowledge and cultural heritage of the Maya people in the modern age.

First, we'll meet the members of Mak'an Ya', a group of indigenous women who work as guides to enlighten travelers about traditional Maya culture. With them, we'll get an introduction to the Maya people's use of medicinal plants, and their reverence for storytelling as a means of preserving the civilization's long history. We'll also observe and participate in a few traditional rituals and ceremonies that the Maya people use to revere their ancestors and connect with the natural world.

We'll then drive to meet with another organization in town: Chokojol Juyu, an association of women weavers who practice and preserve the ancient techniques used by the Maya people so that they may be passed on to future generations. Enjoy an immersive, hands-on demonstration as you get the opportunity to practice traditional craft techniques such as backstrap weaving, and learn about their importance in the community.

Lunch: If you've elected to join our optional tour, your Maya cultural experience continues over lunch as you enjoy a traditional ceremonial dish. As you share your meal together, you'll learn about the important role that food fills in Maya culture. Otherwise, lunch is on your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer recommendations.

Afternoon: Today's optional tour concludes after lunch, and you'll have the afternoon to spend on your own. Perhaps you'll stroll the city and feast your eyes on the restored, as well as crumbling, monuments of Antigua's past—they all have a certain Old-World charm. The city is primarily a study in late-Colonial Baroque-style architecture, since most of its earlier buildings were destroyed in earthquakes. 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.

You may also make your way to the Colonial Museum, which houses a large collection of colonial artwork, ranging from religious paintings and statues to recreations of colonial trade work such as pottery making and blacksmithing. Or, you can search for carved jade and silver jewelry trinkets at some of the local stores. Whatever you decide to do, today is your day to mingle with the locals and get a true sense of Antigua's daily life.

We'll reconvene at the hotel and head to Santa Ana, where we visit the home of a local family that makes chocolate. Here, we'll learn about the process of making chocolate and even try our own hand at this craft before sitting down for dinner with this local family.

Dinner: Enjoy a meal of local specialties with our gracious hosts. This is a great opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their day-to-day life and ask any questions you may have.

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

Day 12 Explore colonial Antigua • Meet local artist • Fly to Petén

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

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning, we'll have free time to relax or make last-minute discoveries in Antigua. Then, we'll drive to San Felipe de Jesus. Upon arrival, we'll meet with a local artisan and his family. This artist will introduce us to his craft: ceramic birds. In a group as small as ours, we'll get an in-depth look into the creative process behind this art and be able to ask any questions we may have.

We'll the drive to Guatemala City, where we'll board a flight later today.

Lunch: On your own in Guatemala City. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll transfer to the airport in Guatemala City for our flight to Petén. After we arrive, we'll board a bus and drive to a restaurant for dinner.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: After dinner we'll drive to our lodge, located in the heart of Petén, and check in.

Day 13 Explore Tikal ruins

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

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: Depart the lodge for Tikal, where our Trip Experience Leader will then lead a city tour of this magnificent 1,800-year-old complex and UNESCO World Heritage Site. At its peak, Tikal was home to an estimated 100,000 Maya, and it was one of the most important urban centers of its time. Immersed in the Petén jungle in 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 Tikal site comprises roughly six square miles and contains about 3,000 structures—including temples, pyramids, tombs, palaces, ball courts, and terraces—the tallest of which rise above the leafy canopy and vie for your attention with the assortment of animals and exotic birds. Within the park, it's possible to spot a great variety of wildlife.

As we tour today, we'll visit Tikal's Great Plaza and see the 144-foot-high Temple of the Grand Jaguar, the tomb and memorial of Maya ruler Moon Double Comb, who was buried with many treasures, including 180 pieces of elaborately carved jade. We'll also see the Plaza of the Seven Temples, dating from the Late Classic period and including an unusual triple ball

court. And we'll enter El Mundo Perdido, the "Lost World," where 38 structures surround a central pyramid in yet another "neighborhood" within the vast expanse of Tikal. While Tikal's history remains relatively unknown, its ruins stand as a testament to Maya engineering and culture.

Lunch: At the on-site restaurant.

Afternoon: Set out for our hotel. Upon arrival, we'll have some free time before dinner. 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: At the lodge.

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 14 Overland to Belize City, Belize • Discover Cahal Pech archaeological site

- Destination: Belize City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Golden Bay Belize Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Our border crossing today involves a drive of up to 7.5 hours over roads that may be bumpy or uneven at times. As we travel from Guatemala to Belize, we will break up the crossing with stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the lodge.

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel and begin our overland transfer to Belize City. After crossing the border between Guatemala and Belize, we'll pass through the border and continue on for a visit to Cahal Pech—a site with more than 30 archaeological discoveries revealing centuries of Maya history. Located in

Belize's Cayo District, hilltop Cahal Pech was the palace grounds for a noble Maya family dating back to as early as 1200 BC, and was mysteriously abandoned in the ninth century.

After exploring the site, we'll head to a restaurant for lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Continue on Belize City, where we'll check in to our hotel. Your Trip Experience Leader will lead an orientation walk around the vicinity of your hotel, after which you'll have free time before we gather for dinner.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Free to rest or explore independently. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer suggestions.

Day 15 Nohoch Che'en Caves Branch Archaeological Reserve • Belize City

- Destination: Belize City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Golden Bay Belize Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning, we set off to explore the Nohoch Che'en Caves Branch Archaeological Reserve—an extensive network of limestone caves. The Caves Branch River flows through nine caves, making it an ideal location for cave-tubing. We'll embark on a walking tour of the caves with a local guide, then begin an exciting tubing tour.

Lunch: Enjoy a picnic lunch at the caves.

Afternoon: We'll return to Belize City and have some time free for your own discoveries before dinner.

Dinner: Cap off your adventure with a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: You'll have the freedom to spend your last evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a drink with fellow travelers at a local bar or relax in the hotel lounge.

Morning: Transfer to the Belize City airport this morning to fly home to the U.S. Those joining our *Coastal Belize: From Hopkins to Belize City* post-trip extension will depart for Hopkins later today.

Day 16 Belize City • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *Coastal Belize: From Hopkins to Belize City*

Day 1 Transfer to Hopkins, Belize

Day 2 Boat ride to South Water Caye • Snorkeling excursion

Day 3 Visit Botanical Garden • Overland to Belize City

Day 4 Lamanai archaeological site • Boat ride • Tower hill

Day 5 Belize 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.

Canopy & Hanging Bridges

(Day 9 \$60 per person)

Our excursion begins at the Atitlán Nature Reserve, a 247-acre reserve located on the lakeshore, where we'll hike into the region's tropical forest, walking along hanging bridges suspended in the verdant canopy, while admiring the landscape's volcanoes and waterfalls. Then, when we reach the top of the valley, we'll enjoy a thrilling descent by zip-line (8 in total) that brings us back to solid ground.

Next, meet the members of Chokojol Juyu, an association of women weavers who practice and preserve the ancient techniques used by the Maya people so that they may be passed on to future generations. Enjoy an immersive, hands-on demonstration as you get the opportunity to practice traditional craft techniques such as backstrap weaving, and learn about their importance in the community.

Finally, learn about the importance of food in Maya culture as you share a traditional Maya ceremonial dish with your fellow travelers.

Guardians of Knowledge: Resilience of the Maya

(Day 11 \$75 per person)

Travel to the town of San Antonia Aguas Calientes, where we'll meet two groups of women who are dedicated to preserving the ancient knowledge and cultural heritage of the Maya people in the modern age. Alongside the members of Mak'an Ya', a group of indigenous women who work as guides, you'll learn about medicinal plants, and the importance of storytelling, ritual, and ceremony in Maya culture.

PRE-TRIP

El Salvador: Colonial Suchitoto & the Flower Route

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Accommodations: 1 night on the Pacific Coast at Boca Olas Resort or similar, 2 nights in Suchitoto at Hotel Los Almendros or similar, and 1 night in Ataco at El Pueblito de Don Luis or similar
- » 8 meals—4 breakfasts, 2 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » All transfers
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

The smallest country in the Americas, El Salvador is a gem often overlooked by international travelers. Discover its friendly people and flourishing culture, explore lush forests and towering volcanoes, and visit traditional villages along the Ruta de las Flores.

Day 1 Depart U.S. • Arrive San Salvador, El Salvador

- Destination: San Salvador
- Accommodations: Boca Olas Resort or similar

Afternoon: Arrive in San Salvador today. An O.A.T. representative will greet you at the airport and assist you with your transfer to your hotel.

Dinner: On your own.

Evening: Free to spend as you wish.

Day 2 Overland to Suchitoto • Explore Suchitoto

- Destination: Suchitoto
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Los Almendros or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Gather in the hotel lobby with our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing.

Then, journey towards our next destination, Suchitoto, a beautiful colonial town brimming with Salvadoran history and culture. As we traverse the countryside roads of El Salvador, witness the dense forested landscapes transform to flat farming fields. Upon arrival, we'll take a short walk to a local restaurant.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy a stroll to our hotel, where we'll check in and receive our room assignments. Following check in, you have the freedom to explore on your own. Perhaps you'll discover the fading white façade and deep mahogany columns of Iglesia Santa Lucia, a colonial-style church, or take a boat ride on Suchitlan Lake, an artificial lake brimming with various bird species.

Later, our group will reconvene in the hotel lobby later to stroll the city's cobbled streets on a walking tour, concluding back at the hotel.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The remainder of your evening is on your own. Maybe you will retire to your room to rest up for tomorrow's discoveries, or join fellow travelers at the hotel bar for a nightcap.

Day 3 Suchitoto • Explore Cinquera

- Destination: Suchitoto
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Los Almendros or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out for the town of Cinquera. During our visit, we will learn from a local guide how this small village acted as a stronghold of guerrilla resistance during El Salvador's civil war. We'll witness the evidence of Cinquera's past firsthand in the bomb and bullet damage to several of its buildings, as well as the tail of a downed military helicopter on display in the town square.

After learning more about Cinquera's history, we'll board our bus again for a short drive to Parque Ecológico de Cinquera. There, we'll explore this 9,689-acre rain forest preserve filled with winding hiking trails, lush landscapes, and a small waterfall.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: After, we'll walk to the Cinquera Museum. Here, a local guide will delve into the history of *guerrillas* in the area. We'll view the guns and uniforms typically used by these revolutionaries during this violence-ridden time. At the end of our tour, our guide will provide first-hand testimony of his personal involvement in the *guerrilla* movement and how deeply it impacted his life. In a group as small as ours, we'll be afforded the unique opportunity to ask any questions we may have and come away with a deeper understanding of this time period.

Following our discoveries at the museum, we travel back to our hotel in Suchitoto, where you can make independent discoveries for the rest of the afternoon. Perhaps you'll make your way to the gallery of a local artist called Arte Anil and learn about the production of indigo. Suchitoto's economy was dominated by the production of the indigo plant until the 19th century when synthetic dyes collapsed the market for pure indigo. You will explore the history and process of indigo with this local artist as you try your hand at this intricate dye-making technique.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of the evening as you wish. You may choose to retire early to your room, or explore the nightlife in Suchitoto at a local bar.

Day 4 Explore Cihuatán • Overland to Ataco • Explore Ataco

- Destination: Ataco
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: El Pueblito de Don Luis or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out for the archaeological site at Cihuatán, the ruins of the complex capital city of a post-Maya, pre-Hispanic civilization. The city was founded sometime around the year CE 900, after the collapse of the Maya empire. Cihuatán was burned to the ground by unknown invaders, and then lay forgotten until excavation began in 1925. We'll explore the site and discover its temples, ball courts, and artifacts alongside a local guide.

We will then depart Cihuatán and continue on to the village of Ataco.

Lunch: On your own in Ataco. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Afternoon: Experience the village of Ataco on a walking tour led by a local guide. The village is known for the elaborate murals that adorn many buildings throughout the town. Boasting a population of under 20,000 people, you'll get a distinct sense of small-town life here and have the opportunity for meaningful exchanges with locals.

Then, we'll drive to our hotel. Upon arrival, we'll check in and receive our room assignments, and you'll have some time to relax before dinner.

Dinner: We'll come together at the hotel to share our stories over a Farewell Dinner.

Evening: Enjoy the evening free to wander through this ancient city, taking in its architecture, charming streets, and local shops.

Day 5 Explore Cerro Verde National Park • Begin main trip

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Travel to Cerro Verde National Park, nestled amidst three imposing volcanoes. Cerro Verde is home to an abundance of

plant and animal life, especially birds—the park is a nesting ground for 17 species of hummingbirds alone.

We'll explore the rainforest this morning, and cap our stay with a discovery of Izalco Volcano, which—prior to entering a period of dormancy in 1966—was known as the “Lighthouse of the Pacific” due to its near-continuous eruptions for the previous 160 years.

Lunch: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Afternoon: Depart for our hotel in San Salvador, and meet the rest of our traveling companions to begin our main adventure along the *Route of the Maya*.

POST-TRIP

Coastal Belize: From Hopkins to Belize City

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Accommodations: 2 nights in Hopkins at a centrally located hotel and 2 nights in Belize City at the Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina or similar
- » 8 meals—4 breakfasts, 2 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » All transfers
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Discover Belizean history that spans millenia—from the preclassic Maya period to the 20th century. Tap into local culture as you uncover the ruins at Lamanai, and witness the country's natural treasures such as the pristine reef at South Water Caye.

Day 1 Transfer to Hopkins, Belize

- Destination: Hopkins
- Included Meals: Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel in Hopkins

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel in Belize, City, and begin our transfer to Hopkins.

Lunch: In Hopkins, we'll enjoy an included lunch of traditional Garifuna (a local Afro-indigenous cultural group) cuisine.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll check in to our hotel in Hopkins, a tranquil beach town located on the southern shores of Belize. Apart from its idyllic setting, it is considered the country's cultural center of the Garifuna population. The Garifuna are of mixed African and indigenous American ancestry and primarily hail from the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent.

After checking in to our hotel and enjoying time to settle in, our Trip Experience Leader will lead an orientation walk around the vicinity of the hotel. The rest of the day is free to spend as you please.

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

Evening: Enjoy free time to rest or explore on your own. Perhaps you'll take a peaceful stroll along the water.

Day 2 Boat ride to South Water Caye • Snorkeling excursion

- Destination: Hopkins
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in Hopkins

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll board a boat this morning for South Water Caye, an island situated in the middle of Belize's largest marine protected area. Home to hundreds of species of fish and coral, the barrier reef here is the second-largest in the world. From angel fish to sting rays and sea turtles, witness the vast biodiversity of the reef when you put on your snorkel gear and hop into the water.

Later this morning, we'll return to the pier and board a boat headed back to Hopkins.

Lunch: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: The rest of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll head back to the beach and bask in the sun. Or, maybe you'll go into the village and enjoy conversing with locals. Alternatively, your Trip Experience Leader can provide activity suggestions.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free to rest at the hotel or explore.

Day 3 Visit Botanical Garden • Overland to Belize City

- Destination: Belize City
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Golden Bay Belize Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning, we'll transfer to Belize City, stopping along the way to explore a renowned botanical garden. Cultivated in 2008, the Caves Branch Botanical Gardens were intended to raise awareness about the diversity and importance of Belizean flora and fauna. During our tour, we'll have the opportunity to enjoy the aroma of plants such as lemongrass and all-spice leaves, as well as see how coffee, cacao, papaya, and pineapple grows (depending

on the season). The gardens are also home to the largest collection of epiphytes, including orchids and bromeliads.

Lunch: On your own at the lodge, located on the premises of the botanical gardens.

Afternoon: We'll finish our drive to Belize City this afternoon, and check in to our hotel upon arrival. The remainder of the day is free to explore. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a drink with fellow travelers at a local bar or relax in the hotel lounge.

Day 4 Lamanai archaeological site • Boat ride • Tower hill

- Destination: Belize City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Golden Bay Belize Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today we'll explore the ruins of Lamanai, a Mesoamerican archaeological site that was once a major Maya city. Lamanai was occupied for more than three millennia, from the early preclassic Maya period and Spanish and British colonial periods into the 20th century. Most of the area was excavated in the 1970s, including notable structures such as the Mask Temple, Jaguar Temple, and High Temple.

Lunch: Enjoy a picnic lunch at Lamanai.

Afternoon: We'll walk to a nearby pier and board a boat for the Orange Walk District, an area in the northwest corner of Belize. Here,

we'll walk through Tower Hill, an ancient village boasting both Mayan and colonial history.

Later this afternoon we'll return to the hotel and you'll have free time to explore. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for activity suggestions.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries.

Day 5 Belize City • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport today for your return 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:** For the main trip only, you will need 5 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to El Salvador:** No additional passport pages are needed.
- **Post-trip extension to Belize:** You will need an additional blank page, for a total of 6.
- **Both pre and post-trip extension:** You will need a total of 6 blank passport pages.

Reminder: Confirm Your Name & Passport Match

The government of El Salvador requires us to provide a list with the full names of all travelers as they appear in their passport. For the local airline flight to Tikal, your Trip Leader will take a copy of your passport as requested by the Regional Office in charge. Please check your name on your invoice and confirm it matches the passport you will travel with. If not, please contact us no later than 90 days prior to departure.

No Visas Required

Travelers with a U.S. passport do not need any visas for this adventure, including the optional trip extensions. However, entry fees are needed to enter/exit certain countries.

Entry Fees

During this trip, you will be required to pay several entry fees (sometimes called border-crossing fees or tourist cards). These fees cannot be included in your tour price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. They include:

- A \$12 tourist card tax when you enter El Salvador
- An entry fee of \$4 when you enter Honduras

The amount and the enforcement of these fees are entirely at the discretion of the local governments; they are subject to change at any moment without prior notice. These taxes and fees must be paid in cash (U.S. dollars). Traveler's checks will not be accepted.

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.

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).

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 16 days with some early mornings
- Some long transfers, including three border crossing days featuring 7.5-hour drives with regular stops, and 1 internal flight

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted, stand up for 45 minutes at a time, and participate in 6–8 hours of physical activities each day
- Our activities include two 5-mile walks with steep slopes, uneven roads, and steps on Day 4 in Copán (90 stairs) and on Day 13 in Tikal (300 stairs)
- 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

- 1 day at altitudes above 8,000 feet
- 4 days at an elevation of 1,800 feet in El Salvador and Copan
- 4 days at an elevation of 200 feet in Peten and Belize

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from about 55–85°F
- Temperatures can reach up to 80°F with a humidity of 85% in El Salvador and Copan
- Temperature can reach up 85°F with a humidity of 85% in Peten and Belize

- The lowlands of northern Guatemala and Belize are hotter, with tropical temperatures that may hit 100°F and regular rainfall, most of which occur May–October

TERRAIN

- Travel on rugged paths and trails, cobblestone streets, unpaved roads, and uneven ruins

TRANSPORTATION

- Travel by 18-passenger air-conditioned minibus (no toilet on board), and 18-passenger boat
- Three 7.5-hour drives with regular stops, one 2-hour boat ride (round trip), and a 1-hour internal flight

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- The hotels, villas, and family-run lodgings on this trip feature amenities that will be more basic than travelers may be accustomed to. Rooms are smaller than those in the U.S.
- Some hotels do not include air conditioning, and one villa does not feature television
- Safety deposit boxes may be available in either your room, or the lobby, depending on your hotel
- Water temperature and pressure may vary
- Bed sizes may vary
- All accommodations feature private baths, but some may not include a hair dryer

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)

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- Optional: Altitude sickness medication. A few of the places we visit during our adventure are at altitudes greater than 5,000 feet above sea level. According to our Trip Experience Leaders, the altitude has not been an issue for the majority of past travelers. However, if you are sensitive to altitude or have never been to high altitudes before, it may be worthwhile for you to speak with your doctor.
- At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for this itinerary.

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

- Tap water in this region is not safe for regular drinking. We recommend you drink bottled 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.
- One bottler of water per day is included in your program price.
- You can purchase bottled water, which is readily available throughout Central America.
- Carry a bottle in your daypack at all times.
- Bottled drinks and juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled, are safe to drink.
- Carry a handkerchief to dry the tops of bottled drinks before and after opening.
- Central America does not have facilities for recycling plastic.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for meals you take on your own.
- If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, you will need to choose and select which meals best accommodate your needs.
- When dining on your own we recommend you avoid uncooked foods, such as green salads and raw vegetables, as they may have been washed with unpurified water.
- You also might want to avoid meats sold from vendors on the street, as they may not have proper refrigeration.
- Be cautious with non-pasteurized milk products. Fruit you peel yourself is usually safe.

Electricity Supply

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) may want to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

Avoid Insect Bites

It is important that you bring insect repellent—and wear it—because mosquitoes are present in every country we visit on this adventure. Mosquitoes tend to come out after rainfall, so they will be worse just after the local rainy season (see the Climate chapter), but they can be active at any time of year.

In addition, the U.S. State Department reports that some of the countries we'll visit have experienced a rise in mosquito-borne diseases over the past five years, such as dengue fever. The best preventative measures against such diseases are: wear insect repellent, cover exposed skin, and make use of window screens or mosquito netting when provided.

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't be used in shops or restaurants.
- **You will be able to pay with U.S. dollars on the majority of this trip;** See "Currency" section for details.

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.

Guatemala: Guatemalan quetzal (Q)

Honduras: Honduran Lempira (HNL)

El Salvador: U.S. Dollar (\$)

Belize: Belize Dollar (\$)

How to Exchange Money

Because U.S. dollars are accepted in most countries on this itinerary, you may not need to exchange much money for local currency. The easiest way to obtain local currency is by using an ATM. The ATM will dispense local currency and your bank at home will convert the amount into U.S. dollars.

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.

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

Honduras: ATMs are available throughout large cities and small towns in Honduras.

El Salvador: ATMs are available in large cities and small towns in El Salvador.

Belize: ATMs are available in 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.

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.

Honduras: Major American credit cards and debit cards with credit card logos are accepted throughout Honduras.

El Salvador: Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in El Salvador.

Belize: Major American credit cards and debit cards with a credit card logo are accepted in Belize.

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:** Your Trip Experience Leader will tip waiters for included meals. 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.

Please Note: Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and optional extensions for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your adventure. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. 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 Skype or 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.

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.

Guatemala: +502

El Salvador: +503

Honduras: +504

Belize: +501

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 10 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. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
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.	

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. Due to the small size of the airplane, you will not have the option to pay for second luggage on local flights for this trip.

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. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.
- **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.
- **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

Temperatures are comfortably warm year-round. Most of your clothing should be lightweight, loose fitting, and made of cotton. You'll want good, light rain gear. Especially from May to October, it can rain almost every afternoon, so you'll want rain gear you are comfortable in, and dry footwear, such as light hiking boots with a built-in Gore-tex liner. 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.

- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, sometimes over rough and slippery surfaces, so choose your footwear carefully. Water proof sandals for Belize is highly recommended. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction and you can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful on some days, but are not a must.
- **Walking sticks:** Many past travelers have recommended bringing a folding walking stick, sold in most camping stores. An alternative is a folding ski pole. This is very useful when exploring ruins and trails that have no handrails.

Style Hints

- Dress on our trip is functional and casual. Formal clothing is not necessary.

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 fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. 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 fits.
- ☐ 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 recommended. A pair of sport sandals with secure ankle strap (such as Tevas or Merrell) may be useful. For Belize, a pair of water proof sandals is highly recommended. 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.

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

- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET (30%–35% strength)
- ☐ Light folding umbrella (for walking in town during a rainstorm).
- ☐ Refillable water bottle
- ☐ Travel alarm clock, or watch with alarm
- ☐ Moisturizer and sun-blocking lip balm
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues
- ☐ Moist towelettes (not individual packets) and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser
- ☐ Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb
- ☐ Folding walking staff, sold in most camping stores, preferably rubber-tipped
- ☐ Electrical transformer & plug adapters
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- ☐ Photocopy of your passport – we recommend that you always keep your passport in your hotel room safe and carry a photocopy with you instead.
- ☐ Lightweight binoculars (recommended if birding)

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: Altitude sickness medication
- ☐ Optional: 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.)

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.

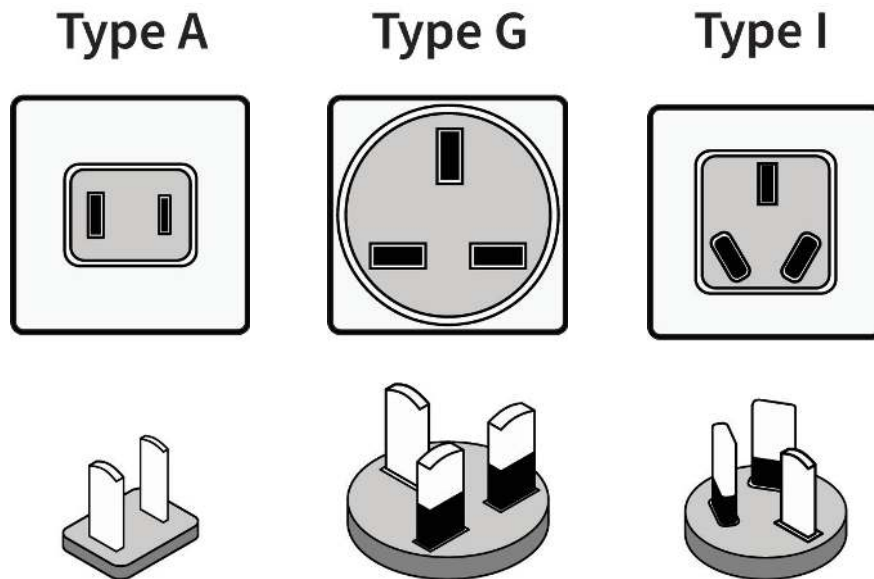
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. By far the most common plug type in Central America is Type A, which is the same as a standard U.S. plug. (Occasionally, you might find European-style sockets, like Types C, G, and I as well. But these are not common.) Because electric plugs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

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

Honduras: Type A (same as U.S.)

El Salvador: Type A (same as U.S.)

Belize: Type A (same as U.S.)



Availability

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. In some places, the electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different adventure or ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Guatemala: Guatemala is characterized by three main climate zones—the cool highlands towards the west and south, the tropical zones along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, and the tropical jungle area (known as the Petén) in the northern lowlands. The highlands, where we spend most of the trip, are represented by Guatemala City’s temperatures, and are very pleasant. The low plains of the northern section—around Tikal and Flores—are hotter, with tropical temperatures and regular rainfall all year round. The most rainfall in the low plains occurs between May and October.

Honduras: The majority of Honduras experiences a tropical climate, high temperatures year-round with a dry winter from November to April and a rainy summer. April, the last month of Honduras’s dry season, is the warmest month. During the rainy season, slight drop in temperature is not a respite, as the season also brings higher humidity. A small portion of Honduras, the Caribbean lowlands, has a tropical wet climate, high in temperatures and humidity, with rain all year-round. The Caribbean coast of Honduras on the northeast side is known for its hurricanes, swept inland from the Caribbean islands.

El Salvador: El Salvador’s climate is generally tropical, with warm or hot days and cooler nights. There isn’t much seasonal variation in the temperature but temperatures do vary by location and altitude. On the Pacific coast, the average temperature is higher than in the interior or in the mountains. The main difference between the seasons is rainfall. The rainy season tends to be from May through October. The rest of the year tends to be dry, but hazy.

Belize: Belize enjoys a tropical climate, with a dry winter and a wet summer. April and May are considered the hottest months of the year, with May having frequent thunderstorms as the rainy season is ushered in. Due to the frequent rain and the high humidity, Belize is lavish with green tropical forests. Much like many other countries along the Caribbean coast, Belize is threatened by hurricanes, typically from July through to 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	ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA			GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	71 to 53	--	0.0	72 to 55	90 to 49	4
FEB	73 to 54	--	0.0	75 to 56	90 to 45	3
MAR	76 to 56	--	0.2	77 to 58	90 to 46	4
APR	77 to 58	--	0.5	78 to 60	90 to 48	5
MAY	78 to 61	--	1.8	78 to 62	92 to 58	14
JUN	75 to 60	--	2.8	75 to 62	93 to 69	23
JUL	74 to 60	--	3.4	74 to 61	93 to 64	20
AUG	74 to 61	--	2.2	74 to 61	93 to 65	20
SEP	74 to 60	--	4.1	73 to 61	94 to 73	23
OCT	72 to 59	--	1.9	73 to 61	92 to 65	15
NOV	73 to 57	--	0.4	72 to 58	91 to 59	7
DEC	71 to 55	--	0.1	72 to 57	91 to 54	5

MONTH	COPAN, HONDURAS			SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	65 to 55	--	3.5	83 to 65	85 to 45	0.4
FEB	71 to 58	--	0.8	85 to 66	84 to 44	0.0
MAR	78 to 58	--	0.4	86 to 67	85 to 51	0.4
APR	81 to 60	--	1.8	87 to 70	86 to 54	1.2
MAY	80 to 64	--	4.1	84 to 70	93 to 68	5.3
JUN	77 to 64	--	11	82 to 70	95 to 70	12.4
JUL	83 to 64	--	2.9	83 to 69	95 to 63	11.1
AUG	89 to 63	--	4	83 to 69	96 to 67	13.2
SEP	84 to 65	--	7.8	81 to 69	96 to 74	12.9
OCT	73 to 62	--	3.9	82 to 68	94 to 68	8.5
NOV	69 to 58	--	1	82 to 67	89 to 58	1.4
DEC	67 to 57	--	1.7	82 to 66	87 to 51	0.2

MONTH	BELIZE CITY, BELIZE		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	80 to 70	95 to 72	4.5
FEB	80 to 71	95 to 71	2.6
MAR	83 to 74	93 to 68	1.9
APR	85 to 76	91 to 68	1.7
MAY	87 to 79	91 to 69	4.0
JUN	87 to 79	92 to 76	8.6
JUL	86 to 79	92 to 75	8.1
AUG	86 to 78	94 to 74	7.0
SEP	86 to 77	96 to 75	9.5
OCT	84 to 75	96 to 76	10.0
NOV	82 to 73	96 to 74	7.0
DEC	80 to 71	96 to 74	6.7

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.

Central American Culture

Central American culture is rich and diverse, with roots that stretch from the Spanish conquest and African slavery to one of the most dominant Indigenous societies of its day—the Maya.

African culture is most strongly evident along the Caribbean coast, the legacy of the Spanish can be felt almost everywhere in Central America—from the language and charming colonial plazas to the cuisine and quiet hours of the *siesta*. And while we glimpse the ancient Maya civilization in the ruins of pyramids and sanctuaries scattered throughout the jungles of Central America, their cultural legacy is felt everywhere.

A little more than a thousand years ago, the Maya civilization flourished in Central America, reaching intellectual and artistic heights that no one in the New World and very few in Europe could match at the time. Then, whether through drought, deforestation, warfare, climate change, or a combination of causes, many of their greatest cities were abandoned. It is often stated that the great Mayan civilization “vanished,” but Mayan culture certainly wasn't lost.

Millions of modern-day descendants of the Maya still populate the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize—speaking Mayan languages, worshipping Mayan gods, preserving Mayan heritage, and keeping Mayan culture alive.

Spanish is the official language in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize. English is the national tongue in Belize, however, reflecting its history as a British colony. But there are actually many other languages spoken in Central America—and with so much of its population descendants of the ancient Maya, it should come as no surprise that more than 20 Maya languages are still spoken. There are also several endangered languages (such as the Pipil language in El Salvador or Lenca in Honduras) that are spoken by just a handful of people.

The Spanish conquest of the 16th century also left its mark on religion, and about 75% of Central America's population is Roman Catholic (the other 25% is mostly Protestant). But it is not unusual to find Mayan and other indigenous religions practiced concurrently with Roman Catholicism in many families.

From a mix of cultures that can be traced back thousands of years to lush landscapes that are home to some of the greatest biodiversity in the world, Central America is like nowhere else on earth.

Language Barrier

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.

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.

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.

Honduran Cuisine

Honduran cuisine is quite diverse, reflecting indigenous pre-Columbian, Spanish, Creole, and African influences. Corn, seafood, meat, poultry, tortillas, beans, rice, bananas, and yucca appear in form or another in many traditional Honduran dishes. You may come across dishes like these:

- The Honduran version of *papas* in El Salvador is the **baleadas**, a classic favorite made with refried beans, **mantequilla** (Honduran-style sour cream), cheese, avocado, and scrambled egg, folded into a handmade flour tortilla.
- **Machuca:** A traditional dish in which boiled, mashed plantains are cooked with a jalapeño and garlic paste.
- **Plato tipico:** A heaping platter of grilled pork and beef served with rice, fried plantains, beans, marinated cabbage, tortillas, the works!
- **Sopa de frijoles:** Or black bean soup, a Honduran appetizer of black beans, coriander, paprika, and tomatoes—made even better when you add in a few corn tortilla strips and dollops of sour cream.
- As one would expect, coffee is consumed throughout Honduras. Popular non-alcoholic drinks include a blended milk and fruit shake called **licuado**, and a sweet rice and milk beverage called **horchata** (or with *jicaro* seeds instead of rice in southern Honduras) that has spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and vanilla, and is served over ice.

Salvadoran Cuisine

The cuisine of El Salvador has accepted unmistakable influences from the Spanish and Native American groups, such as Cacaopera, Mangue, Mixe, Alaguilac, Maya Ch'orti', Poqomam, Pipil, Lenca, and Xinca. There are also influences from the domestic Lenca, Maya and Pipil indigenous groups. Maize, corn, and flour are the main components in most dishes, and there is an extensive array of beef, pork, chicken, and seafood. Popular dishes to look for:

- **Pupusa:** The national dish of El Salvador is made from a thick corn cake with masa dough and stuffed with cheese, refried beans, or **chicharrón** (fried pork belly). It is a dish usually served with **curtido** (spicy cabbage slaw) and tomato salsa.

- **Tamal pisque:** This comfort food is made from seasoned corn masa with refried beans. You can expect it to be wrapped in banana or plantain leaves.
- **Ceviche:** A common South American dish, originally from Peru. It is made with fresh seafood in lemon (or lime) juice seasoned with chili peppers, chopped onions, salt, and coriander. For El Salvador's variation (**ceviche with pink sauce**), the seafood used includes clams, oysters, fish, shrimp, snails, octopus, squid, and conchas—a local breed of black clam. Shrimp ceviche is a popular variation in El Salvador and is known for its prominent pink color.
- **Fried cassava:** (Also known as yuca fries) A popular dish often served with **curtido** (spicy cabbage slaw) and **chicharrón**.
- **Semita bread:** A sweet dessert bread filled with jam. A national favorite is *semita* bread filled with pineapple.

Belizean Cuisine

Belize's cuisine is a melting pot of flavors and tastes that reflect its myriad cultural influences, including Caribbean classics like **rice and beans**, often paired with meat or fish. Several Belizean dishes draw on Mexican and Maya culture, such as **chimole**, a savory chicken stew flavored with local spices including **achiote**, a paste made from annatto seeds. Dishes to look for:

- **Salbutes:** This Belizean snack is a small fried corn tortillas topped with a mix of cabbage, chicken, avocado, and home-made hot sauce.
- **Tamales:** Similar to those in Mexico but Belizean's are wrapped in plantain leaves.
- **Conchita pibil:** Slow-roasted pork and vegetables served in a soft tortilla. This is a classic Maya dish that has been eaten in this region for thousands of years.
- **Johnny cakes:** (Also called journey cakes) Are made with flour and coconut milk and often baked in a fire hearth—then cut in half and slathered with refried beans and cheese.
- **Cow's foot soup:** An authentic ancient Belizean specialty—you never know, you might be head over heels for slow-simmered soup made from cow feet, onions, and other spices.
- **Cassava pudding** and **soursop ice cream:** Popular Belizean deserts made from the sweet and tart soursop fruit.
- **Dukunu:** A sweet dessert dish made from cornmeal, coconut, brown sugar, and African spices.

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

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

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.

Honduras

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 43,278 square miles
- **Capital:** Tegucigalpa
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language; Amerindian languages are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Mestizo 90%, Amerindian 7%, black 2%, white 1%
- **Location:** Honduras is bordered by Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the Pacific Ocean

- **Geography:** Located in Central America, Honduras is mountainous in the interior with plains along the coast.
- **Population:** 8,746,673
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 97%, Protestant 3%
- **Time Zone:** Honduras is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5am in Tegucigalpa.

National Holidays: Honduras

In addition to the holidays listed below, Honduras 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

4/14 Americas Day

05/01 Labor Day / May Day

09/15 Independence Day

10/3 Morazon's Day

10/12 Discovery of America Day

10/21 Honduran Armed Forces Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Honduras: A Brief History

Today, the lands once occupied by the ancient Mayan civilization fall within the boundaries of Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. 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. The Classic period lasted until about AD 900, after which many Mayan cities were abandoned. Some cities survived centuries longer, however. When the Europeans arrived in the 16th century, they encountered several remaining Mayan groups.

In 1502, Christopher Columbus landed near what is now Trujillo and named the land Honduras, or "depths," after the deep waters found off the coast. In 1524, Spanish forces under instructions from Hernán Cortés established a colony there. Cortés arrived a year later and ordered the establishment of Nuestra Señora de la Navidad and Trujillo. The years that followed were marked by unrest, with the conquerors, the established government, colonists, and the local population all feuding. In 1536, Pedro de Alvarado conquered Honduras, defeating an indigenous uprising led by Lempira, chief of the Lencas. The defeat of Lempira and a quieting of Spanish infighting led to an increase of economic activity, including gold and silver mining, which brought hardship to the native Hondurans and African slavery to the area.

After Honduras declared independence from Spain in 1821, it joined a short-lived federation of Central American countries. Although the federation fell apart and Honduras became an independent republic, it continued its push for Central American unity. The early years of the 20th century were marked by conflicts with Guatemala and Nicaragua, the growth of the thriving

banana industry, and a rise in U.S. influence after uprisings and coups had become more frequent. The connection between the banana industry and the interference of outside other countries led to the coining of the term “Banana Republic.”

The Great Depression would eventually strike a blow to the banana companies, as well as workers throughout the country. Stability came from Tiburcio Carías Andino, who was elected in 1932. Although he earned a reputation as a strongman known to limit personal freedoms, the new president brought relief to Honduras. He ruled for the next 16 years in an era of relative peace. Following his term, reform continued to arrive in Honduras despite ongoing violence and the occasional coup. A mix of reform and unrest continued to define modern Honduran history for years to come.

In the 1980s, President Robert Suazo launched social and economic projects with backing from the U.S., which supported guerillas fighting neighboring Nicaragua. Rafael Leonardo Callejas took office in 1990 with promises of economic reform. One of his greatest achievements in office was gaining more civilian control of the military and local police forces. Today, Honduras continues to enjoy a period of peace—both internally and with its neighboring countries.

El Salvador

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 8,124 square miles
- **Capital:** San Salvador
- **Languages:** Spanish is the official language; Nahua is also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Mestizo 86.3%, White 12.7%, Amerindian 1%
- **Location:** El Salvador is located in Central America, bordered by Guatemala, Honduras, and the Pacific Ocean.
- **Geography:** El Salvador features two mountain ranges on either side of a central plateau. The mountains and plateau take up most of the country (about 85%); the remaining land is a coastal area known as the Pacific Lowlands.
- **Population:** 6,141,350 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 57.1%, Protestant 21.2%, Jehovah’s Witnesses 1.9%, Mormon 0.7%, other 2.3%, none 16.8%
- **Time Zone:** El Salvador is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5am in San Salvador.

National Holidays: El Salvador

In addition to the holidays listed below, El Salvador 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

03/26 National Day of Life, Peace and Justice

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

05/10 Mother's Day

06/17 Father's Day

08/04 Celebrations of San Salvador (3 days)

09/15 Independence Day

11/02 All Saints' Day

12/25 Christmas Day

El Salvador: A Brief History

The earliest inhabitants of El Salvador were most likely scattered tribes who lived in caves roughly 10,000 years ago. By the time the Spanish arrived in the 1520s, the local inhabitants were the Pipils, a group that traces their roots to the Aztecs. As with many societies in the region, the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century changed everything. Led by Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish began an attack on the Pipil lands in 1524, and although the Pipil initially withheld their advances, after a year-long struggle Cuscatlan fell to the Spanish.

While the military conquest meant that El Salvador was now part of Spain's vast empire, in reality Spain was very far away. And with the ever-changing political divisions within the empire, El Salvador's government reported (at different times) to regional authorities in Mexico, Guatemala, or Panama. In the absence of a direct governmental presence, local families began to rise to prominence within El Salvador by controlling the colony's agriculture. Known as the "fourteen families", many of these were descendants of the Spanish colonists who set up a plantation system for growing cash crops in high demand, such as indigo. Large parcels of land were owned by the elite, but worked by impoverished—or enslaved—indigenous people and Africans.

By the 1800s, revolutions against other European powers began to inspire the local population to break off from Spain's colonial rule. Hoping for better trade and more say in their government, the merchant class—along with several indigenous groups who were seeking better treatment—joined together in a revolt against the Spanish on November 5, 1811. The 1811 revolt was unsuccessful. But only ten years later, on September 15, 1821, five provinces—El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—succeeded in breaking off from Spain.

Many Salvadorans remained as impoverished and disenfranchised as they had been under the Spaniards. Their discontent with the lack of reforms led to a several small rebellions. The most famous of these uprisings was in 1833, when Anastasio Aquino led a rebellion that took the city of San Vicente, but it later fizzled out once he was captured. In 1838, the federation dissolved (but it is not forgotten—Independence Day is still celebrated on September 15).

For the next 80 years, El Salvador's history would be dominated by a single crop—coffee. With the release of artificial dyes, the indigo plantations that were such a mainstay of the economy became obsolete. Coffee became the new cash crop, and one by one the wealthy converted their lands into coffee plantations. By 1920 it was estimated that roughly 95% of El Salvador's economy was based on coffee, but that only 2% of the population controlled the profits from the crop.

In the end, it was the stock-market crash of 1929, and the severe drop in coffee prices, that pushed El Salvador into a new phase. In 1932, an uprising of peasants and displaced coffee workers was met with a brutal response by the government. Roughly 30,000 people were killed *La Matanza* ("the Massacre" or "the Slaughter"), many for simply being suspected of having taken part in the uprising. As a result, the country was placed under military control and a series of dictatorships began.

From the 1930s through the 1970s, El Salvador was controlled by military dictators and authoritarian governments. Throughout the 1970s, the Catholic Church had largely sided with reform groups. In particular, the outspoken Archbishop Oscar A. Romero had used his position to denounce social injustice and the use of torture by the government. On March 24, 1980 he was assassinated while saying Mass at a hospital in San Salvador; for many this was the turning point that changed unrest to a civil war. From 1980–1992, the Salvadoran Civil War was fought between the FMLN and the government troops. During this time, the government used the power of "death squads"—groups of soldiers authorized to execute citizens, even civilians—to frighten and control the population. More than 75,000 people are thought to have died in the conflict.

In January of 1992, the opposing sides reached an agreement and a cease-fire was declared. The FMLN was declared a legitimate opposition party and received promises of certain reforms, such as land distribution. Both sides were granted amnesty for human rights abuses that occurred during the war. Perhaps to everyone's surprise, the agreement has worked better than expected. Land distribution was carried out in the 1990s, and the FMLN has become a left-wing party that participates in elections. (In 2009, FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes won the election for president.) However, the amnesty granted for acts committed during the civil war continues to be highly controversial.

Belize

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 8,867 square miles
- **Capital:** Belmopan
- **Languages:** English is the official language of Belize, with Spanish commonly spoken; Creole, Mayan dialects, Garifuna, and German are also spoken.
- **Location:** Belize is in Central America, bordered by the Caribbean Sea, Guatemala, and Mexico.
- **Geography:** The Belize landscape is divided into the mountainous region to the south and the coastal plains to the north.

- **Population:** 347,369 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 40.1%, Pentacostal 8.4%, Seventh Day Adventist 5.4%, Anglican 4.7%, Mennonite 3.7%, Baptist 3.6%, Methodist 2.9%, Nazarene 2.8%, Jehovah’s Witnesses 1.7%, other 10.5%, none 15.5%
- **Time Zone:** Belize is on Central Standard Time, one hour behind of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 7am in Belize City.

National Holidays: Belize

In addition to the holidays listed below, Belize 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

03/09 National Heroes and Benefactors Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

05/24 Commonwealth Day

09/10 St. George’s Caye Day

09/21 Independence Day

10/12 Pan American Day

11/19 Garifuna Settlement Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Belize: A Brief History

The roots of Belize culture began with the development of the Mayan civilization on the Yucatan Peninsula—including the lands today known as Mexico, Guatemala, western Honduras, and Belize—more than 3,000 years ago. Prior to this, small groups hunted and farmed the area, domesticating crops including corn and beans. The Mayan culture thrived, however, creating a vibrant civilization skilled in agriculture, arts, science, and architecture. The city of Lamanai (now in Belize) was occupied for more than 3,000 years and had one of the longest occupation spans of the Mayan world. It is set in tropical rainforest and offers spectacular views of the surrounding jungle from its temples. Lamanai is Mayan for “submerged crocodile” (the true Mayan word is *Lama’an’ain*, but the shortened version is often preferred). Archaeologists have mapped over 700 structures in Lamanai; only five are partly excavated.

At its peak around AD 250, the Mayan city-states equaled or surpassed its European counterparts. The area of Belize was the location of many of these achievements, and was home to an estimated 400,000 people at that time. In the tenth century, the culture broke down due to a number of complex internal issues.

When the Europeans arrived in Belize in the 16th century, they encountered several Mayan groups that still remained. When the Spanish began the conquest of the Yucatan in 1527, the Mayans offered resistance, but eventually succumbed—in part because they were weakened by disease. After a period of conflict between European powers—particularly Spain and Britain—over ownership of trade in the area, the British drove off the Spanish. In 1852, the area was declared a British colony known as British Honduras.

Despite threats from the Mayans and economic stress in the early 1900s, British rule continued. Cruel treatment of workers in mahogany camps, however, led to a series of demonstrations that are credited with starting a political movement in Belize that led to the labor reforms of 1941 and 1943. When the governor devalued the dollar in 1949, several independent groups were united against the colonial rulers, beginning the Belize independence movement.

It wasn't until 1961 that the British were willing to grant independence. However, a longstanding Guatemalan claim on the land delayed this from happening until the 1970s. Between 1975 and 1981, the Belizean government took their issue before the international community. In November of 1980, the UN passed a resolution demanding independence to Belize. It came a year later with the passing of the Belize Act of 1981.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

General

A Brief History of Central America by Lynn V. Foster (2007, History) A good overview of the economic and cultural history of the region that covers everything from the Mayans to the Spanish conquest and aftermath of the civil wars in the countries of Central America.

Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata (1987, Natural History) An engaging overview of the ecology of a tropical rain forest as written by two biologists.

A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central American by Oscar Martinez (2016, Journalism) This collection of investigative pieces by a Salvadoran journalist offers a very sobering portrayal of the gang violence, corruption, and human trafficking that continues to shatter the lives of so many of the poor in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The President by Miguel Angel Asturias (1997, Fiction) Guatemalan writer and diplomat Miguel Asturias won the Nobel Prize for Literature with this tale of a ruthless dictatorship in an unnamed Central American country (one assumed to be Guatemala). First published in 1946, it remains a fascinating portrait of life in a totalitarian state.

The Full Montezuma: Around Central America with the Girl Next Door by Peter Moore (2000, Travelogue). Intrepid Australian travel writer Peter Moore plans a romantic sojourn through Central America with the new love of his life (“the girl next door”). But, as usual, things don’t go as planned and Moore hilariously documents it all.

Route of the Maya

Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (2008, History/Biography) One of the only comprehensive, kingdom-by-kingdom histories of the ancient Maya with short biographies of every ruler and hundreds of illustrations.

The Maya by Michael D. Coe (9th Ed. 2015, Archaeology) A comprehensive overview of the Mayan civilization that flourished in the jungles of Mexico and Central America 1,500 years ago. As far as introductory texts on the topic, this is considered the gold standard.

Maya Art and Architecture by Mary Ellen Miller (2014, Art) Organized thematically, this book by Yale art historian Mary Ellen Miller surveys the art and architecture throughout Mayan world, incorporating the latest discoveries at Tikal, Copan, Palenque and other Maya sites to present the range of art from architecture, to sculpture, ceramics and murals.

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.

Honduras

The Mosquito Coast by Paul Theroux (1981, Literature) A taught psychological tale of a man who abandons America and takes his family to the jungles of Honduras to create a civilization better than the one he left.

Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother by Sonia Nazario (2006, Non-Fiction) A heart-pounding account of the unforgettable quest of a Honduran boy looking for his mother, who had been forced to abandon her starving family eleven years ago to search for work in the United States.

El Salvador

Bitter Grounds by Sandra Benitez (1998, Historical Fiction). As El Salvador's main export in the early 20th century, coffee reigned as the center of the economy in the country for decades, with wealthy families owning the necessary land, and poorer families working it. The Prieto Clan is one such family, who has worked for a wealthy coffee plantation owning family for generations. Follow three generations of mothers and daughters of the Prieto Clan, from 1932 to 1977, as they live through the struggles of average life and the political tensions leading up to El Salvador's Civil War.

Miguel Marmol by Roque Dalton (1995, Biography). Dalton details El Salvador in the early 20th century, the rise of the worker's movement and the communist part, the effects of the Martinez dictatorship, and the hopes of the ordinary civilians during the political and historical struggles.

Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District by Manlio Argeuta, translated by Edward Waters Hood (1998, Fiction/Romance). Set during the Salvadorian Civil War of the late 1970s, *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District* is a love story between the poet Alfonso and his peasant lover Ant as they face an uncertain future.

Tyrant Memory by Horacio Castellanos Moya, translated by Katherine Silver (2011, Historical Fiction). Set during the reign of Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, a pro-Nazi mystic who served as President of El Salvador from 1932 until 1944, *Tyrant Memory* focuses on the month between an attempted coup in April 1944 and when Martinez stepped down in May 1944. The novel's narrative switches between Haydee Aragon as she dives into politics and her son, Clemente, a reporter who said the wrong thing at the wrong time, as he flees from Martinez's capture.

Belize

The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw, One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird by Bruce Barcott (2008, Non-Fiction) The dramatic tale of one woman's quest to stop a dam that would inundate the forest home of jaguars, tapirs—and the last of Belize's scarlet macaws.

Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico by Ronald Wright (2000, History/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.

Suggested Films & Videos

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.”)

Honduras

Morazán (2017, Drama/History). General Francisco Morazán, a Central American politician born in Honduras, fights to transform Central America into a single nation as the Federal Republic of Central America.

Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley (2014, Drama/Documentary). Based during the coup d'état to overthrow Honduras elected president in 2009, *Resistencia* is about the farmers of Aguan who, in opposition to the coup, occupy palm oil plantations owned by a major supporter of the coup.

El Salvador

Salvador (1986, drama) Oliver Stone co-wrote and directed this critically acclaimed (yet little seen) powerful drama starring James Woods as a burnt-out American freelance journalist who gets in way over his head while covering the Salvadorian civil war. The film garnered two Academy Award nominations—Woods (Best Actor) and Stone (Screenplay).

Romero (1989, Biopic) This moving portrayal of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador (played by Raul Julia), who fought for social reforms while his country was in turmoil and paid for it with his life.

Belize

The Mosquito Coast (1986, adventure) Filmed on location in Belize, Coast follows an ex-pat American family looking for an ideal life in Central America. But the ideal proves elusive due to the increasingly stubborn and strange behavior of their father.

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

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

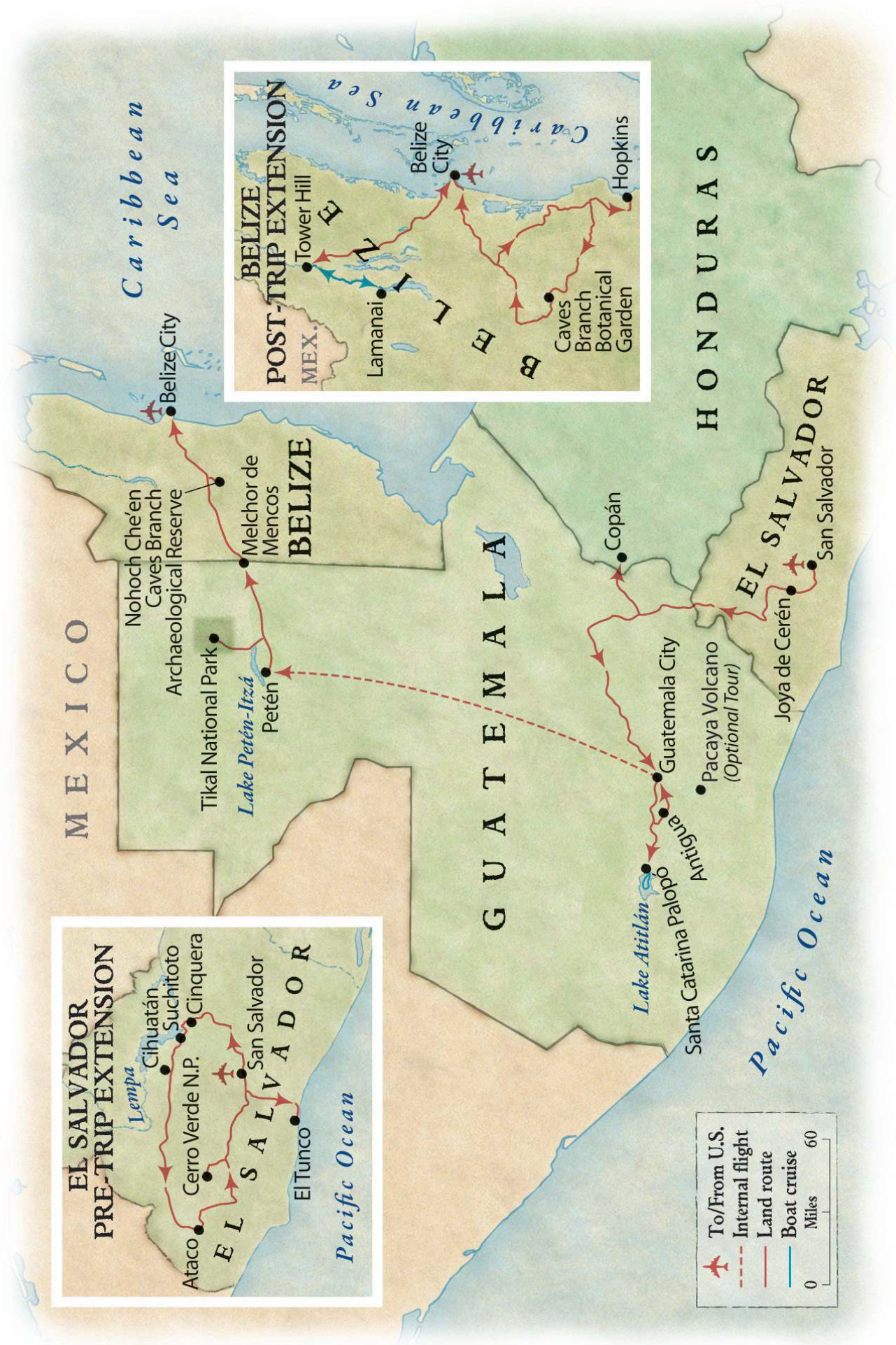
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

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



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