TOUR CODE

CS1

ADVENTURESABROAD

COSTA RICA EXPLORER

with Copán, Honduras

11 days

Updated 14/03/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in San Jose*

Today we arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Overnight in San Jose. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *San Jose - Tortuguero*

This morning we travel by bus from San Jose through Braulio Carillo National Park, one of Costa Rica's largest. Later we visit a working banana plantation and pass through a region known for its cocoa production. We then board our riverboat and spend the afternoon journeying through myriad interconnecting rivers and canals that take us finally to the Caribbean coast and Tortuguero Park.

The park is a water thoroughfare which is a 160 km (100 mile) stretch of natural rivers, lagoons and estuaries, and connecting man-made waterways that run almost to the Nicaraguan border. The canal is the main "highway" of the northern coastal region, complete with directional signs and branches from the main trunk route.

As we go along the canal, keep a keen lookout for views of pastel-coloured toucans and monkeys of various type; if we're lucky, a lazy sloth hanging from a branch, and maybe a coati or two roaming the forest. Stands of mangroves and water hyacinth appear here and there. Scattered along the way are people, too -- fishers and farmers whose dugouts serve all the purposes of pickup trucks elsewhere. Mostly the banks remain wild, and the calls of monkeys and whistles of birds predominate over the noises of humans.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 3 *Tortuguero: Forest Walk & Village*

Tortuguero Park is a fascinating place to explore. An early morning boat ride offers an opportunity to observe an awakening coastal rain forest full of lush vegetation and unique bird life.

After lunch we visit the village of Tortuguero accessible only by river boat; you may choose to walk on the Caribbean beach where several turtle species lay their eggs each year. We will visit the Tortuguero Museum with its excellent displays pertaining to the ecology of the area and an informative video presentation specific to turtle conservation in Tortuguero and the entire Caribbean region.

NOTE: The exact order of our activities in Tortuguero may vary depending on weather and other variables.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Tortuguero - Baldi Hotsprings - Arenal Volcano*

After an early breakfast we travel by boat 1½-hour from Tortuguero to the Cano Blanco dock. From there we continue by road (+/- 5 hours) to the La Fortuna / Arenal area.

We travel through rolling hills covered with sugar cane fields to overnight near Arenal Volcano. We make a stop at the Baldi Hotsprings (located near Arenal and outside the Risk Zones established by the National Prevention of Risks and Emergency Commission). Here a geothermally-heated river flows through beautifully landscaped grounds featuring many plant and tree species and great birdlife. We will have time to relax in or around the various pools (bring a towel). The springs feature several hot pools with different temperatures fed by individual springs and three swim-up bars.

This evening (weather & volcanic activity permitting) we can view the volcano.

Overnight at Arenal / La Fortuna. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Arenal - Monteverde Cloud Forest*

Today we travel through a rustic rural countryside to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve area (+/- 4 hours).

Covered in a mantle of moss, ferns and orchids, this private reserve is home to over 400 species of birds and a great number of animals. The forest is created by the winds, particular temperature and moisture conditions, and mountainous topography which combine during the dry season to hold a steady cloud cover along the continental divide. The rains and the moisture in the air nourish trees and plants rooted in the ground, as well as many plants that live at the upper levels of the forest, and take their nutrients directly from the mist and dust that pass through the air. The result is an enchanted fairy-tale environment where trees are laden with orchids, bromeliads, mosses and ferns that obscure their branches, where the moisture and mild temperatures and sunlight filtered by the forest canopy encourage the exuberance of begonias, heliconias, philodendron and many other tropical plants in every available space on the ground.

This afternoon we have a guided tour of the "Butterfly Garden" where butterflies and other endemic insects are raised and protected in a controlled environment allowing scientists to study them -- their place in the food chain and their response to things like increased pollution and climate change.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Monteverde Cloud Forest*

We have a full morning exploring the cloud forest reserve with the help of a local naturalist guide. There is more to the forest than the trees and lesser plants. Of over 320 bird species, the most notable is the quetzal with its long arc of tail feathers. Assorted trogons in addition to the quetzal inhabit the reserve, along with more than 50 varieties of hummingbird. About 500 kinds of butterfly are found at Monteverde. Among the more than 100 mammalian species are howler, white-faced and spider monkeys, coatis and their cousins, raccoons; as well as the rarely observed pumas, ocelots, jaguars, tapirs, and kinkajous.

This afternoon you may choose to go on an optional "Canopy Walk" excursion, located within the cloud forest. Suspension foot-bridges are strung across deep gorges allowing one to get a bird's eye view of the forest from a totally different perspective than we experienced this morning. At a leisurely pace, one can complete this easy and fascinating walk in about 90 minutes. Your Tour Leader can help you plan this activity (optional cost approx $25-40, subject to

change).

REMEMBER: This can be a wet and windy place by definition. You should be prepared for varied conditions.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Monteverde - San Jose*

Today we return by road to San Jose.

Time permitting, we recommend a visit to the Gold Museum in downtown San Jose (optional), easily the country's best with thousands of different examples of Pre-Columbian gold artifacts (the museum closes at 16:30).

Overnight in San Jose. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *San Jose, Costa Rica - San Pedro Sula, Honduras*

Today we fly from San Jose to San Pedro Sula.

Honduras, the centerpiece of Central America, is a vibrant country with a rich agricultural landscape intermixed with succulent tropical forests. The slow pace, natural beauty and low-profile tourism make this destination particularly appealing to travelers. As a nation once situated in a region of turbulent political and economic history, today the country is peaceful and beginning to develop a tourist infrastructure partly based on eco-tourism. The whole region is considered a biodiversity hotspot due to the numerous plant and animal species that can be found here.

Depending on our arrival time into San Pedro Sula today, we will take a brief drive through the center of the city. This Spanish colonial city is the second largest city in Honduras, situated in the Sula Valley.

Overnight in San Pedro Sula. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *San Pedro Sula - Macaw Mountain Bird Park - Copan*

Before leaving the city today, we will visit the Museum of Anthropology and History. The museum displays will take you through the Pre-Columbian to modern day history of the Sula Valley. The museum also has a wide range of Mayan artifacts.

We then travel by road from San Pedro Sula to Copan.

Archaeologists have demonstrated that Honduras had a rich, multi-ethnic prehistory. An important part of that prehistory was the Mayan presence around the city of Copan in western Honduras, near the Guatemalan border. Today the colonial town of Copan is is peaceful, quaint and interesting, with cobblestone streets and tiled roofs.

In the afternoon we will visit the Macaw Mountain Bird Park & Nature Reserve, one of Central America's best loved secrets. This is an innovative tropical bird reserve that cares for rescued and endangered birds of the American tropics. The Park's owners were lucky enough to purchase one of the last old growth forests close to Copan, and the nine-acre nature reserve has an extraordinary forest including mahogany, indio desnudo (gumbo limbo), chico zapote, Spanish cedar and fig trees. The tropical forest here has been augmented by reintroducing native species and some tropical ornamentals into this natural botanical garden. Blue Morpho butterflies are a delightfully constant presence along the

streamside trails. This private collection has grown to more than 40 birds representing 15 species, including parrots and toucans.

Overnight in Copan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Copan: Site Tour*

This morning we will visit the Copan archaeological site. The Mayan ruins of Copan are fascinating, beautiful and unique among Mayan cities. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, Copan contains some of the most important Mayan ruins found to date, and many unusual artistic features. We will tour the sight on foot, walking through grassy plazas filled with intricately carved and decorated monuments, statues and staircases. Huge carved faces stare at you from ancient walls and bring the place to life, causing renewed wonder at the mysterious disappearance of such a creative civilization.

Often called the "Athens of the New World," Copan features some of the Mayas' most impressive accomplishments in architecture, in astronomy, in sheer civic organization. After our guided tour of the archaeological site we will visit the world famous Sculpture Museum, designed to give the visitor a sense of how the ancient Maya viewed their world, and recorded its most important aspects in architectural and freestanding sculpture. The Ball Court at Copan is the second largest in Central America; and nearby is Copan's most famous monument, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, the work of King Smoke Shell. The flight of 63 steps bears a history, in several thousand glyphs, of the royal house of Copan.

This afternoon you will have some free time to explore the colonial town of Copan.

Overnight in Copan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Copan - San Pedro Sula - Departure*

Today we travel by road to San Pedro Sula. Departure from San Pedro Sula*

* NOTE: LAND ONLY participants must take into account the journey time back to San Pedro Sula (+/- 2.5 hours) when booking their flights. Passengers with early flights may have to spend an additional night in S.P.S. at their expense.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.