TOUR CODE

CS2

ADVENTURESABROAD

COSTA RICA & GUATEMALA

with Copan, Honduras

19 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, Honduras - Antigua, Guatemala*

Today we depart early from Copan and head to Antigua in Guatemala. The journey takes us across a patchwork of landscapes and spectacular vistas.

Antigua may be the most outstanding and best-preserved colonial city in Spanish America. Travellers are overwhelmed by the natural beauty and wealth of historic monuments. The Spanish Colonial style permeates every part of the town: its houses, churches, squares, parks and ruins, also its traditions and folklore as well. Antigua is a city of charm and color where you can see and buy an overwhelming variety of attractive, handmade products that honor the traditions of generations of artisans.

The city, founded in 1543, was the seat of Spanish colonial government for the Kingdom of Guatemala, which included Chiapas (southern Mexico), Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Throughout its history the city was repeatedly damaged by earthquakes, and always rebuilt, bigger and better. But on July 29, 1773, the day of Santa Marta, earthquakes wrought such destruction that officials petitioned the King of Spain to allow them to move the capital to safer ground, which led to the founding in 1776 of present-day Guatemala City. Today its monumental bougainvillea-draped ruins, and it's preserved and carefully restored Spanish colonial public buildings and private mansions give form to a city of charm and romance unequaled in the Americas. In 1979 UNESCO recognized Antigua Guatemala as a Cultural Heritage of Mankind site.

Overnight in Antigua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Antigua: Walking Tour*

This morning we will enjoy a walking tour of Antigua, located in a valley and surrounded by many green small hills and three volcanoes: Agua, Fuego and Acatenango. We will explore both the restored colonial buildings as well as those left as ruins throughout the city. Among the intricate colonial buildings and interesting museums we will visit on our tour, we will explore the ornate La Merced church, the ruins of the Capuchinas convent and the San Francisco Cathedral, where pilgrims go to see the tomb of Saint Hermano Pedro.

Wandering down the cobblestone streets of this magical city or through the central plaza to view the mermaid fountain, you will quickly realize why people call Antigua "the colonial jewel of the Americas" and why most vow to return. Our tour will take us to the impressive town square (plaza) where travelers are often drawn to the beauty and activity. The massive trees offer friendly shade, and combined with the cold drinks and snacks sold by countless vendors, it is a prefect place to beat the heat. Around the perimeter of the central park are many buildings of note, including the Palacio de los Capitanes, and the Museo de Arte Colonial (Colonial Art Museum). Directly east of the plaza is the Santiago Cathedral, which has been damaged and rebuilt many times. This cathedral is said to contain somewhere within the remains of Don Pedro de Alvarado, conquistador of Guatemala.

We will see these sights and more. Then after lunch you will have some free time to explore Antigua on your own. The whole city is full of historic buildings, monuments, fountains and ruins… as well as restaurants, markets and cafes.

We also visit the Kojom (music) Museum in Jocotenango durig our time in Antigua.

Overnight in Antigua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Antigua: Free Day*

Today you are free to explore Antigua. Sit and relax in the Plaza de Armas, the central square, and enjoy the view of the Palace of the Captains General, the old City Hall and the remains of the Cathedral and Archbishop's Palace, excellent examples of Spanish colonial architecture.

Overnight in Antigua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Antigua - Chichicastenango - Panajachel*

This morning we depart for Chichicastenango (locally known as Chichi) where we will tour this world famous market. On Thursdays and Sundays there is a large market here where vendors sell handicrafts, food, flowers, pottery, wooden boxes, condiments, medicinal plants, candles, pom and copal (traditional incense), cal (lime for preparing tortillas), grindstones, pigs and chickens, machetes, and other tools. In the central part of the market plaza are comedores (small eateries). Among the items sold are textiles, particularly the women's blouses. The manufacture of masks, used by dancers in traditional dances has also made this city well known for woodcarving. Our walking tour through the market will bring us to the 400-year old church of Santo Tomas. It is built atop a Pre-Columbian platform, and the steps originally leading to a temple of the pre-Hispanic Maya civilization remain venerated. Shamans still use the church for their rituals, burning incense and candles. In special cases, they burn a chicken for the gods. Each of the 18 stairs that lead up to the church stands for one month of the Maya calendar year.

This market is reputedly the largest outdoor market in Central America, and it attracts buyers and sellers from near and far. Originally only the indigenous population of the Quiche region frequented the market, but its fame has reached all corners of Guatemala and beyond.

After our time at the market we will drive south to the town of Panajachel, on the shores of Lake Atitlan. Arguably one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, Atitlan owes its grandeur to its enormous size and spectacular, volcanic setting.

Lake Atitlan was formed after a volcanic eruption. Three stately volcanoes, Atitlan, Toliman and San Pedro rise gracefully from its southern shore, their perfect cones reflected in the azure mirror of the lake.

Overnight in Panajachel. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Panajachel & Lake Atitlan*

Today we will take a boat tour around Lake Atitalan and will see some of the many lakeside villages. Our journey today takes us across the shimmering waters of Lake Atitlan, nestled beneath the three volcanoes of San Pedro, Atitlan and Toliman. When we visit Santiago de Atitlan you will notice the unusual headdresses that the locals wear which are called Tocoyal and consist of 12 metres/40 feet of material. This is easily the most beautiful and fascinating village on the lake, as well as the largest, with a population of almost 15,000 people if the outskirts are included. Built on the slopes of Volcano Atitlan, is it surrounded on three sides by water and faces Volcano San Pedro across a small bay. Originally the capital of the Tzutuhil Indian nation, Santiago was turned into an important missionary and trading outpost after the Spanish conquest. Today Santiago is one of the most traditional Indian villages in Guatemala, with a purely Indian population that lives much as it did hundreds of years ago.

As our boat approaches Santiago's shore, you will see dozens of women standing knee-deep in water, washing their families' clothes against the rocks, often with babies in colourful slings on their backs. This sets the mood for the rest of our visit. Just wander through the streets of this village and you will catch a firsthand glimpse of indigenous life as it is today.

As we walk around we see towering volcanoes and spectacular scenery. Flowers are abundant; the white blossoms on coffee plants, bright wildflowers and hibiscus cover the landscape. Once again colour is the focus, costumes which are very vibrant are worn by nearly everyone. The women's costume consists of white and purple huipiles embroidered with birds and flowers, bright red skirts and unique headdresses made from narrow, woven red bands (sometimes over twenty feet long) that are evenly wrapped around their heads until a wide brim is formed. The men's outfits are equally vibrant, with purple and white striped knee-length pants, white shirts and multi-coloured sashes worn nowadays with cowboy hats.

While in Santiago we also see Maximon-the mayan "Judas Esacriot" diety. Maximon ("mah-shee-mon") is a popular post-Columbian Mayan folk deity who apparently blends aspects of the Christian Saint Simon with a Mayan god, perhaps Maam, an underworld god.

Overnight in Panajachel. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Panajachel - Iximche - Guatemala City*

This morning we travel to Guatemala City. Our journey takes us through the spectacular volcanic landscape of Guatemala's western highlands to visit Iximche en route, an excellent Maya site which became a model of civic planning. Most of the buildings here were erected around four large courtyards, and there are also two smaller courtyards at Iximche that may have been used for religious ceremonies. Terraces were levelled from the natural terrain to accommodate platforms for temples, palaces, and other structures. The structures had roofs of thatch or of wooden beams and plaster and have long since perished. Ball courts were common at all civic and religious centers, and at Iximche there are two ball courts, one of which has been restored.

Overnight in Guatemala City. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Guatemala City - Flores - Tikal Site Tour*

Today we fly to Flores and, on arrival, embark on a guided tour to experience the wonder of Tikal, possibly the most magnificent of all Mayan sites.

Here we discover ancient temples, pyramids and stone structures dating from 500 BC. The five great pyramids of Tikal give this ceremonial centre a majestic grandeur unique among Maya cities. The height of the temples, crowned with tremendous roof combs; the complicated assemblage of the palace structures of the central Acropolis; and the complexity of the chronology of the North Acropolis are staggering to anyone visiting Tikal for the first time. In ancient times Tikal functioned mainly as a ceremonial centre in which the aristocratic elite and their priests ruled, dictated, and directed the activities of the architects, builders, craftsmen, and labourers. All endeavours in the region of Tikal were directed to enhance the city, to glorify the gods, to amass wealth, and to acquire tribute for the ruling upper strata of society. To sustain this activity for over a thousand years demanded a well-disciplined peasantry.

Overnight near Tikal. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Flores - Guatemala City*

After some free time to explore Tikal on your own, we fly back to Guatemala City.

Overnight in Guatemala City. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Departure*

Departure from Guatemala City.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.