TOUR CODE

GU7

ADVENTURESABROAD

GUATEMALA

with Copan, Honduras

12 days

Updated 06/03/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in San Pedro Sula*

Arrive San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

Overnight in San Pedro Sula. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *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 3 *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 4 *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 5 *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 6 *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 7 *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 8 *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 9 *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 10 *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 11 *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 12 *Departure*

Departure from Guatemala City.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.