TOUR CODE

MY2

ADVENTURESABROAD

MAYAN DISCOVERER

with Tikal Extension

19 days

Updated 22/03/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Managua*

Today we arrive in Managua, Nicaragua.

Overnight in Managua. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Managua: City Tour - Granada: Walking Tour*

The country of Nicaragua derives its name from Nicaro, the name of the Nahuatl-speaking tribe which inhabited the shores of Lago de Nicaragua before the Spanish conquest of the Americas, and the Spanish word Agua, meaning water, due to the presence of the large lakes Lago de Nicaragua (Cocibolca) and Lago de Managua (Xolotlan), as well as lagoons and rivers in the region. At the time of the Spanish conquest, Nicaragua was the name given to the narrow strip of land between Lake Nicaragua and the Pacific Ocean. This is the largest yet most sparsely populated country in Central America.

This morning we will start our day with a sightseeing tour of Managua. We will begin with a visit to the Acahualinca Footprints Museum, showing us footprints from humans and animals escaping from a volcanic eruption between 6,000 to 10,000 years ago. The tracks are petrified Paleo-Indian human footprints left behind in volcanic ash and mud, and are the oldest human footprints and prehistoric record of human existence in Managua. We will also visit historical sites such as the Old Cathedral, destroyed by the earthquake of 1972, the Presidential House, the National Palace of Culture, and the waterfront.

After our sightseeing in Managua we will drive to Granada, considered to be one of Latin America's most beautiful colonial cities. This ancient town on the shores of mighty Lake Nicaragua is full of history and Spanish colonial charm and is one of the oldest European settlements in the western hemisphere. Actually, it is the oldest city founded by Europeans on mainland America, that still exist in its original location. Granada is historically one of Nicaragua's most important cities both economically and politically.

As with all colonial cities in Central America, Granada is built around its main square (Parque Central) that represents the city's social, cultural, and economic hub. Around the Parque Central visitors find Granada's cathedral, the city hall, important banks, cultural centers, as well as myriad small shops and stalls selling traditional food and handcrafts.

In the late afternoon we will enjoy a walking tour of the historic city center.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Granada: Las Isletas, Masaya Volcano National Park & Masaya Market*

We start our day with a private boat cruise on Lake Nicaragua. This journey will take us through the Granada Isletas, an exotic tropical archipelago of 365 tiny volcanic islands. Granada is a port on giant Lake Nicaragua, and a boat journey

to visit Las Isletas just offshore is a must for any traveller. Some of the 365 islands are inhabited and most are covered with a vast variety of unusual vegetation. This is also an area rich with bird life.

Canals separate many of the isletas where fishermen, seated patiently on Indian rafts, wait for a bite. Of archaeological interest is the Fortress of San Pablo, placed strategically on an island opposite the city. The fortress was built in the mid-18th century to protect Granada from the marauding pirates. It was restored in 1974. Pre-Columbian archaeological stone pieces were found on Pensacola Islet and are on exhibit in the Museum of the San Francisco Convent.

In the afternoon we will enjoy an excursion to the famous Masaya Volcano National Park, Nicaragua's first national park, established in 1979 and considered one of Nicaragua's most interesting and beautiful natural phenomena. We will explore the crater rim of this active volcano, which resembles a lunar landscape, and will visit the park museum.

We will also visit the Masaya Marketplace, well known for it's local handicraft selection, such as leather goods, artistic weavings, and colourful traditional clothing. Here we will see a large selection of beautiful and inexpensive paintings in the Nicaragua Solentiname artist styles.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Granada: Ometepe Island Excursion*

Today we will enjoy a full-day excursion to Nicaragua's famous Ometepe Island, one of the most impressive sights in Central America. The name Ometepe means 'two hills' in the native Nahuatl language. The island measures 276 square kilometers and it houses two majestic volcanoes connected through a small strip of land. The two volcanoes, Concepcion and Maderas, are joined by a low isthmus to form one island in the shape of an hourglass.

Ometepe is somewhat isolated from the rest of Nicaragua and therefore maintains its special mystery and charm. After driving along the southern shore of the lake to the boat dock, we will board the ferry for the 1.5 hours ferry ride on Lake Nicaragua to Ometepe Island. When we arrive at Ometepe Island we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of the island, including petroglyphs, Charco Verde, Maderas Volcano and Concepcion Volcano. Concepcion Volcano is still active, and most recently erupted on December 5, 2007. For lunch we will make a break at Santo Domingo Beach, and then we will explore the harbour town of Moyogalpa. At the end of our day we will then travel by ferry back to the shore where we begin our drive back to Granada.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 5 *Granada - Leon*

This morning we depart Granada and drive to Leon. Home to more than 12 colonial period churches, including Central America's largest church, and Nicaragua's greatest passion, poetry, Leon is also the cradle of Nicaragua's 20th century revolutionary movement. Leon was founded by the Spaniards as Santiago de los Caballeros de Leon and rivals Granada in the number of historic Spanish colonial homes and churches.

The first city named Leon was established in 1524 and was located about 20 miles east of the present site. The city was abandoned in 1610, after an eruption of the Momotombo volcano, located only a couple miles away, which left extensive damage in the form of flooding from Lake Managua. The inhabitants decided to move to its current location next to the Indigenous town of Subtiava.

Overnight in Leon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Leon: Walking Tour*

Our day will begin with a guided sightseeing tour of Leon with its interesting center featuring many old colonial houses, monuments, and churches. We will see the National University of Nicaragua, Leon Cathedral, the Plaza of Poets, the Plaza of the Revolution, the local marketplace, as well as many colourful political murals.

Leon Cathedral is the most prominent building of Leon and is the largest cathedral in Central America. Situated in the central plaza, the first construction of this huge building started over two centuries ago. From the rooftop we will have a superb view of the city.

The Ruben Dario Museum is housed inside the former home of Nicaragua's most beloved poet. We will also visit the 300-year-old Subtiava Indian Church in the Subtiava Indian neighborhood of Leon.

Your afternoon is free to explore Leon, where the people are very friendly, warm-hearted and generous.

Overnight in Leon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Leon - Managua, Nicaragua - San Salvador, El Salvador*

Today we depart from Leon and drive to Managua for our flight to San Salvador, El Salvador. If we have an afternoon flight, we may be able to visit some boiling mud at San Jacinto before leaving for the airport. This is an intriguing example of volcanic activity in the region.

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America and adjoins the Pacific in a narrow coastal plain backed by a volcanic mountain chain, and a fertile plateau. The origins of the city of San Salvador can be traced to before the Spanish Conquest. It is near the present location of San Salvador that the Pipil groups established their capital of Cuscatlan. Little is known about this city since its inhabitants abandoned it in an effort to avoid Spanish rule.

El Salvador is the country with the highest density of volcanoes on the American continent, and is truly a destination to discover and admire. Volcanoes have forged the history of this land and this is something you will experience when you discover the dramatic landscapes with impressive lakes, valleys and Mayan sites.

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

Day 8 *La Ruta De Las Flores*

Today's journey will take us through what is probably one of the most beautiful regions of El Salvador, where we visit the towns that are part of the 'Route of the Flowers.' This route received this title because of the many beautiful flowers and plants you can see and the stunning little mountain towns that you can visit. Every town has it's own charm and character, with their churches, markets and crafts.

This route takes us along the road between the city of Sonsonate to Ahuachapan. Here we find a series of towns with a wealth of cultural traditions. The first town will be Nahuizalco, characterized for having strong pre-Columbian traditions. This is one of the country’s most important indigenous and crafts populations. Baskets and furniture woven from natural fibers such as "Tule" and wicker dress up the streets.

In the heart of the route we find Salcoatitan. Its white colonial church in front of the Central Plaza is one of its main

attractions. It was here where the first coffee tree was planted, a profitable item that supports the local economy. We continue our tour towards Juayua, famous for its Black Christ. This beautiful town is of coffee tradition and it envelops an extraordinary climate and nature.

We will also visit the town of Apaneca before ending our day with a visit to Concepcion de Ataco, a pre-Columbian town established by the Piples tribe and located in the heart of the mountain where its cobblestone streets and lanterns provide a unique atmosphere.

We return to San Salvador at the end of our full day of sightseeing.

Overnight in San Salvador. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 9 *San Salvador Area: Joya de Ceren, Tazumal, Casa Blanca, San Andres & Santa Ana*

We start our day with a visit to Joya de Ceren, considered to be the most important archeological site in El Salvador. Along our drive we will see one of the petrified lava rivers of the last eruption of the Quezaltepeque volcano in 1917. We will stop to admire this beautiful landscape and visit the volcano's extinct crater, which is surrounded by beautiful flora. From here we continue our trip to the Laguna Caldera volcano, which was responsible of covering the village of Joya de Ceren 1,400 years ago. Today, this preserved city is considered to be a jewel of history and is known as the 'Pompeii of the Americas'.

Joya de Ceren, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993, is the only location in the whole Mayan culture where one can appreciate the day-to-day living styles of the pre-Columbian inhabitants. Everything here is well-preserved, thanks to the volcanic ash.

We also visit two archeological sites that are part of the same complex. At Casa Blanca we see a set of pyramids, some of which have a unique circular shape, a rarity in Mesoamerica. Here we will have the opportunity to go to an indigo workshop where we can witness the making of typical clothing. We will also visit the colonial city of Chalchuapa, built partly in the premises of this pyramid complex during the colonial period. In the historical center is one of the oldest churches in El Salvador. From here it is just a short drive to El Tazumal -- 'place of many lakes' -- and the largest pyramid ever discovered in the country.

During our sightseeing today we will also visit Santa Ana, the second largest city in El Salvador. The city has pre-Columbian origins and functions today as a major processing center for El Salvador's sizable coffee industry.

At the end of our day we return to San Salvador.

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

Day 10 *San Salvador - Suchitoto, El Salvador - Copan, Honduras*

This morning we depart from San Salvador and travel north to the small beautiful town of Suchitoto. This is one of the true hidden gems of El Salvador. Known for its central church and cobblestone road, Suchitoto is a place where one takes a step back in time.

Originally a Pipíl town, Suchitoto was the nation's capital for 15 years beginning in 1528. Today it's a quaint colonial town with several tourist attractions along its cobblestone streets and rich in cultural and artistic attractions. The town offers fantastic views of the Lake Suchitlan and Volcan Guazapa.

On our tour through the city center, we will learn about history and architecture of Suchitoto. The town has a very relaxed feel and is often referred to as the 'Antigua of El Salvador'. Constructed in 1853, the Santa Lucia Church is one of the best examples of post-colonial architecture in El Salvador and the main focal point of Suchitoto.

After lunch we will depart from Suchitoto and continue towards the border with Honduras. This is a spectacular drive through a lush green landscape to the quaint and charming colonial town of Copan for our overnight.

Overnight in Copan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *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 12 *Copan, Honduras - Antigua, Guatemala*

Today we depart early from Copan and head towards 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 13 ***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 travellers are often drawn to the beauty and activity. The massive trees offer 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.

Overnight in Antigua. Meal plan: Breakfast.

Day 14 ***Antigua - Chichicastenango & Lake Atitlan - 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. The manufacture of masks, used by dancers in traditional dances has also made this city well known for woodcarving. 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 fames has reached all corners of Guatemala and beyond.

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.

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 Boat Tour - Guatemala City***

This morning we will take a boat tour around Lake Atitlan and stop at the town of Santiago de Atitlan. Along the way we will learn about the local history and customs.

From Panajachel we will drive to Guatemala City, one of the largest urban centers in Central America and became the capital after an earthquake had destroyed Antigua in 1773.

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

Day 16 *Guatemala City - Flores - Tikal*

Today we fly from Guatemala City to Flores.

For many, the main reason to visit Flores is its proximity to Tikal, the most famous Mayan ruins in Guatemala. But the city itself is a wonder -- dense with colonial, red-roofed buildings, narrow cobblestone streets, a historic church and Spanish plaza, and restaurants that are easy to stumble upon walking the city's charming streets. Most will find that this island city is more than just a take-off point, but a memorable attraction in itself.

Overnight near Tikal. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Tikal Site Tour*

Today we have a guided tour to experience the mystique 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.