TOUR CODE

NI2

ADVENTURESABROAD

EL SALVADOR & NICARAGUA

the 'NEW' Highlights of Central America

14 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in San Salvador*

Today we arrive in San Salvador.

The smallest and most densely populated country in Central America, El Salvador 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.

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

Day 2 *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 by 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, with its white colonial church in front of the Central Plaza. It was here where the first coffee tree was planted. We continue our tour towards Juayua, famous for its Black Christ. 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 3 *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 4 *San Salvador - Suchitoto*

This morning we visit the Museum of Palabra y la Imagen, and David J Guzman and Divina Providencia (the church where Monsignor Romero was assassinated during the war).

We then travel north from San Salvador to the small beautiful town of Suchitoto, one of the true hidden gems of El Salvador. Known for its central church and cobblestone road, Suchitoto is a place where one can truly take a step back in time.

Originally a Pipil 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.

Overnight in Suchitoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Suchitoto: Town Tour*

On our tour through the city center, we will learn about the history and architecture of Suchitoto and visit several places of cultural and historical interest. 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. Constructed by the famous Salvadoran filmmaker and writer Don Alejandro Cotto, the Casa-Museo displays treasures (religious images, paintings, furniture) that reflect the cultural histories of Suchitoto and El Salvador. Spectacular gardens filled with flowers, trees, fountains, trails, and magnificent views of Lago Suchitlan complement the house.

We will also walk to the lake, one of the main attractions of the region with its abundance of birdlife, including pelicans, herons and storks.

Overnight in Suchitoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 6 *Suchitoto - San Salvador, El Salvador - Managua, Nicaragua - Leon*

This morning we will drive back to San Salvador for our flight to Managua, Nicaragua.

The country's name is derived 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 and Lago de Managua, 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.

On arrival in Managua we transfer by road to Leon, which is home to more than 12 colonial period churches, including Central America's largest church. Leon is also the cradle of Nicaragua's 20th century revolutionary movement. Founded by the Spaniards as Santiago de los Caballeros de Leon, it rivals Granada in its number of historic colonial homes and churches.

Overnight in Leon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *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 8 *Leon - San Jacinto Hotsprings - Matagalpa*

Today we depart Leon and travel towards the region north of Managua known as Matagalpa. En route we stop at San Jacinto, a little town about 20 kilometers northeast of Leon. Behind the village lie boiling mud holes, connected probably to the Telica volcano. The field is not big but it is interesting to walk around and see the fiercely bubbling holes, which differ in size and colour. Take care as the mud sometimes throws little rocks in the air and steam is continuously emitted.

Matagalpa is known for its cool weather, cloud forests, and coffee. Here we will walk through a mixed tropical forest and tour the organic shade coffee hacienda and coffee processing facilities.
Our overnight accommodation is within the Selva Negra cloud forest.

Overnight in Matagalpa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Matagalpa - Granada*

After a morning at leisure to enjoy the cloud forest, perhaps doing some walks and birdwatching, our journey continues by road to Granada.

Granada is one of Latin America's most beautiful colonial cities. Located on the shores of mighty Lake Nicaragua, Granada 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. Veracruz in Mexico was founded prior to Granada, but was relocated from its original location due to its destruction by natural disaster. 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), which represents the city's social, cultural, and economic hub. Around the Parque Central visitors find Granada's cathedral, the city hall, important banks, cultural centres, as well as myriad small shops and stalls selling traditional foods and handicrafts.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 10 *Las Isletas & Granada City Tour*

Today we will enjoy 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 visitor. Some of the 365 islands are inhabited and most are covered with a vast variety of unusual vegetation. This is also an area rich in 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. Pre-Columbian archaeological stone pieces were found on Pensacola Islet and are on exhibit in the Museum of the San Francisco Convent.

Later in the day we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Granada to cover what we did not see yesterday afternoon. We will visit the Casa de Tres Mundos, Granada Cathedral, San Francisco Convent, City Hall, and other historical monuments.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *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 12 *Masaya Volcano National Park, Masaya Market & White Towns*

Today's touring includes a visit to 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.

Los Pueblos de la Meseta is a series of tiny villages that was once the ancient center of the great Chorotega Indian empire that for centuries stretched from Costa Rica to Honduras. These old Indian settlements are home to some of Central America's most skilled artisans. Nicaragua's northern mountains have been the site of many rebellions against colonial, post-colonial and 20th century rulers. The region is also home to Nicaragua's most important crop coffee, fine hand rolled cigars, and an ancient method of gold mining. Our sightseeing will also take us to the famous 'White Towns' of Caterina, Diria, Masatepe and San Juan del Oriente. At the Caterina lookout we will have a great panorama over the Laguna de Apoyo volcanic crater lake and the city of Granada.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Granada - Managua: City Tour*

Today travel back to Managua and have a city tour on arrival.

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. The Acahualinca tracks 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.

Overnight in Managua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Managua.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.