Tour Code
MY1

ADVENTURESABROAD

MAYAN DISCOVERER

Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras & Guatemala

16 days

Created on: 28 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrival in Managua, Nicaragua - Transfer to Granada

Arrival in Managua, Nicaragua; transfer to Granada.*

* As per our usual policies, Land & Air customers will have their transfers to Granada included in their air package; early arrivals will have their transfers included if they book BOTH their air and any extra nights through us. Those booking their own air can purchase a private transfer from us (recommended) or make their own way to our Granada hotel.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Las Isletas, Masaya Volcano National Park, Laguna del Apoyo, Caterina Viewpoint

The country of Nicaragua derives its name from Nicarao, 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.

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 fish with nets. 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 Caterina viewpoint over Laguna del Apoyo, for a breathtaking view over Granada and Lake Nicaragua. Caterina, a small caldera village part of the Los Pueblos Blancos, is also the viewpoint where a young Augusto Sandino contemplated decisions and planned for the future liberation of Nicaragua.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Ometepe Island Excursion

Today we will enjoy a full-day excursion to Nicaragua's famous Ometepe Island.* The name Ometepe means 'two hills' in the native Nahuatl language; the island measures 276 square kilometers and 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. Concepcion Volcano is still active, and most recently erupted on December 5, 2007.

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.

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. Dinner on your own this evening.

* SOME PAST TRAVELLERS have chosen to do their "own thing" today, choosing to enjoy an unstructured day of relaxation and enjoying the charms of Granada. If this may be something of interest, you can confer with your Tour Leader regarding the nature of today's excursion as part of your decision making.

Overnight in Granada.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Walking tour of Granada - Leon

This morning we will start our day with a walking tour of the historic city center of 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 afternoon we will 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. While in Leon we will visit the Revolutionary Museum. 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.

Overnight in Leon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 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 Leon Cathedral, the Plaza of Poets, the Plaza of the Revolution, 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.

In the afternoon, we will tour the first city named Leon which 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Leon - Managua, Nicaragua - Fly to San Salvador, El Salvador

Today we depart from Leon and drive to Managua for our flight to San Salvador, El Salvador.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 San Salvador - Joya de Ceren - Suchitoto

We start our day with a visit to Joya de Ceren, considered to be the most important archeological site ever discovered 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, now known as San Salvador's volcano. We will stop to admire this beautiful landscape and visit the volcano's extinct crater 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 1400 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, which was 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 popular pre-Columbian inhabitants. Everything here is well-preserved, thanks to the volcanic ash.

Our last stop is the 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 can truly take a step back in time. Originally a Pipíl town, Suchitoto was the nation's capital for 15 years from 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Suchitoto: Indigo Farm & Walking Tour

Today we visit an indigo farm. India is thought to be the originator of the dye, but the ancient peoples of Central and South America also historically made it. A 6,000-year-old indigo fabric was discovered in Peru just a few years ago. The Maya people of Central America and Southern Mexico considered indigo sacred and used it only for ceramics and ceremonial clothing.

We'll also have a walking tour of Suchitoto on which we'll 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.

Overnight in Suchitoto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Suchitoto - Ruta de las Floras - Ataco

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.

Somewhere along today's route we will visit a coffee plantation before finishing our day in Ataco. Today we include lunch instead of dinner.

Ovrenight in Ataco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 Ataco, El Salvador - Copan, Honduras

This morning we depart El Salvador stopping in 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. From here it is just a short drive to El Tazumal -- 'place of many lakes' -- the biggest pyramid that has been discovered in the country.

Our route is a spectacular drive through a lush green landscape to the quaint and charming colonial town of Copan for our overnight.

Overnight in Copan.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Copan, Honduras - Panajachel, Guatemala

Today is a full day of travel across the border and into Guatemala. Our destination is the charming 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. 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Panajachel & Lake Atitlan

Lake Atitlan is volcanic in origin, filling an enormous caldera formed in an eruption 84,000 years ago. It is renowned as one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, and Aldous Huxley famously wrote of it: "Lake Como [Italy], it seems to me, touches on the limit of permissibly picturesque, but Atitlan is Como with additional embellishments of several immense volcanoes. It really is too much of a good thing."

This morning we will take a boat tour around Lake Atitlan, stopping at one or two of the villages along the shore. Along the way you will learn about local history and customs.

You'll have some time this afternoon to enjoy the town on your own. Due to the length of our day and for a bit of downtime, we leave dinner to your own account this evening.

Overnight in Panajachel.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 14 Panajachel - Chichicastanengo - Antigua

Today we and head to Antigua via a stop at Chichicastanengo and its famous market.

Our walking tour through the market will bring us to the 400-year old church of Santo Tomas, built atop a pre-Columbian platform, the steps originally leading to a temple of the Maya civilization. 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.

Continuing to Antigua, our route 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 beauty and wealth of historic monuments. The Spanish colonial style permeates every part of the town: its houses, churches, squares, parks and ruins, as well as its traditions and folklore. Antigua is a city of charm and colour where you can see and buy an overwhelming variety of attractive, handmade products that honour 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 World Heritage Site.

After our formal tour you will have free time to explore Antigua on your own.

Overnight in Antigua.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Antigua: Walking Tour

This morning we will enjoy a walking tour of Antigua, located in a valley and surrounded by many green small hills volcanoes. 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." Our tour will take us to the impressive town square (plaza) where massive trees offer shade; combined with the cold drinks and snacks sold by countless vendors, it is a perfect 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 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.

After our formal tour you will have free time to explore Antigua on your own.

Overnight in Antigua.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Antigua - Guatemala City - Departure

Today you transfer to Guatemala City Airport (45-60 minutes) in time to connect with homeward flights.

PLEASE NOTE: This tour can be extended to include the superlative Mayan site of Tikal - please refer to tour code MY2 for full details.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast