

EXPLORE!

Ancient Lands of the Maya

15 days

Guatemala, Honduras - Trip code GM



Ancient Lands of the Maya

On this trip through Guatemala, we explore the ancient lands of the Maya. We visit the early Mayan cities of Tikal, Quirigua and Copan (in Honduras). We also travel through the Guatemalan highlands, spending time in traditional mountain villages and local markets, including the colourful San Tomas Festival in Chichicastenango. On the way, we explore Lake Atitlan by boat and search for the elusive Quetzal bird in Biotopo Nature Reserve.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Antigua** - Explore this elegant colonial city set in a valley between three volcanoes
- ★ **Lake Atitlan** - Visit some of the villages and towns around this beautiful lake by boat
- ★ **Mayan sites** - Discover the huge Maya site of Tikal deep in the Guatemalan jungle, and the beautiful site of Copan
- ★ **Chichicastenango Market** - Experience the bustle and colour of this busy local market
- ★ **Nebaj** - Stay in this remote town in the Ixil Mountains and experience local life

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Guatemala City

Join tour Guatemala City and check-in to hotel. Guatemala City is the busy capital of Guatemala, most of which is modern build. However the colonial centre around the main square harks back to the time when the area was officially declared the new capital in the eighteenth century.



Accommodation: Hotel Pan American (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Short city tour of Guatemala City, head to Copan (Honduras)

We will start our day with a short orientation tour by bus of Guatemala City before heading to Copan in Honduras. This afternoon, you have free time to visit Macaw Mountain (optional).



Accommodation: Hotel Plaza Copan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Explore the Copan archaeological site, optional Macaw Mountain trip

Everyone familiar with Catherwood's incredible drawings (which first appeared in John Stephens' 1841 narrative - 'Incidents of Travel in Central America and Yucatan') will recognise scenes and objects from this marvellous site. Stephens actually bought the entire site for US\$ 50 from a local farmer! The Great Plaza is one of the most amazing achievements of the Classic Maya period (AD 750) and contains the greatest collection of Maya sculpture anywhere in Meso-America. The famous Hieroglyphic Stairway is composed of 2500 individual glyphs; its sides are flanked by serpentine birds and snakes. We have the whole day to enjoy this special place, leaving you plenty of time to explore on your own. The afternoon is free to either visit the museum dedicated to the site or visit Macaw Mountain.



Accommodation: Hotel Plaza Copan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Puerto Barrios, boat to Livingston

This morning we will stop en route at Quirigua, renowned for its fine Mayan carvings, covered with intricate glyphs which still remain a mystery to scholars and archeologists. Quirigua was dominated by Copan but was valued as a trading centre for the jade that can be found throughout the surrounding area. Independence from Copan was finally achieved under Quirigua's most powerful leader, Cauac Sky in 737AD. We will then continue to Puerto Barrios where we will board our launch and cross the bay to the lazy, laidback town of Livingston on the Caribbean coast. Here we can enjoy the colourful, lively Garifuna town, with its unique racial blend. In the evening there may be the chance to hear the increasingly popular local music or enjoy the fresh seafood in one of the many restaurants along the main street.



Accommodation: Villa Caribe (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Boat trip on the Rio Dulce, continue to Tikal

We start our day by heading west on the Rio Dulce by boat. The river squeezes through an impressive gorge of towering cliffs covered in a mass of jungle creepers with Egrets, pelicans and cormorants lining the shores. En route we will stop at the small community project of Ak Tenamit where you will have the opportunity to learn more about this educational support project that has been set up. From the town of Rio Dulce we will continue by bus to Tikal, possibly the greatest of all the Mayan cities, located in the heart of the Peten jungle. The ruins of Tikal can easily be compared with the masterpieces of Egypt and Greece. Initially settled about 600 BC, Tikal was abandoned by its rulers around AD 890 and totally deserted a hundred years later, overgrown by the jungle. Rediscovered in 1848, they comprise many great temples and pyramids. The city covers an area of more than 16 square kilometres with temples, palaces, causeways, ballcourts, spacious plazas, and hundreds of other architectural ruins - a superb example of sophisticated Mayan engineering.



Accommodation: Tikal Jungle Lodge (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Guided tour of Tikal, travel to Flores

We will have an early start to get into the site for a guided tour. The site is so large we leave you free time to explore at your own pace this afternoon. Those with a good head for heights could climb one of the pyramids which pierce the jungle canopy for splendid views over the whole area. In the afternoon we will drive to Santa Elena. This evening we have a chance to wander the streets of Flores Island. Situated on a small island in the tranquil Lake Peten Itza and joined to the mainland by a causeway, Flores remains a quaint and peaceful town.



Accommodation: Maya International (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Visit the Candelaria Caves, continue to Coban

Leaving Flores behind we head south into the southern mountains for a long day's drive through varied scenery. We drive to Sayaxche where we cross the river by ferry before continuing to the Candelaria Caves. Following our visit to the caves we continue onto Coban, where we will overnight.



Accommodation: Park Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Visit Biotopo del Quetzal Reserve, transfer to Antigua

This morning we have a very early start to travel the short distance to Biotopo del Quetzal Reserve, as it is the best time to go bird watching. We start the day with a walk in the cloudforest; if we are lucky we may see the elusive quetzal which feeds on the fruit of

the aguacatillo tree at dawn. The quetzal was sacred to the ancients of Central America and the plumed serpent god Quetzalcoatl was a supreme deity. Killing a quetzal was punishable by death and the 2ft long iridescent green tail feathers were worth more than gold. Today the resplendent quetzal is the Guatemalan national bird. Following our visit to the Biotope we will continue to Antigua.



Accommodation: Villa Colonial (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - All Saints Celebration Giant Kite Festival, drive to Lake Atitlan

This morning we will drive to Sumpango, just on the hills outside of Antigua to see the All Saints 'Giant Kites' Festival. On November 1st of every year the people of Sumpango, Sacatepequez put together these giant kites to fly during the Day of the Dead. The kites are made of cloth and paper with bamboo frames, they depict religious or folkloric themes and they are flown to honor the dead. The kites traditionally can take up to 40 days to build, they are held together with a glue made with a mixture of yucca flower, lemon peel and water, the ropes are made of the maguey plant (the plant that also brings us tequila!), and the tails are made from woven cloth. This tradition dates back 3000 years and still today is seen as a way of communicating with the beyond. After watching the spectacle we will drive to Santa Catarina, a small village on the shore of Lake Atitlan; there are always magnificent views of the impressive volcanic peaks of Atitlan (3537m), San Pedro (3020m) and Toliman (3158m) towering over the lakeside.



Accommodation: Villa Santa Catarina (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - In Santa Catarina; boat trip to visit villages inhabited by Tzutuhil Indians

The volcano-ringed Lake Atitlan is a place of stunning beauty. Some 24km long by 16km wide, it lies at an altitude of 1585m. On the first day, we include a boat trip to visit villages inhabited by Tzututils Indians, including Santiago Atitlan. Poignant reminders of the recent history of this village are visible as we visit the church, originally built in 1547, and we may see more traditional Mayan rituals at the shrine to Maximon. The second day is left free visit the popular town of Panajachel, where you can enjoy the comfortable climate, relaxed atmosphere and stunning setting. The lake changes hue at different times of the day and can appear green, deep blue, or grey, while at sunset it glows fiery red.



Accommodation: Villa Santa Catarina (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Visit to Chichicastenango then drive to Nebaj

Early this morning we drive to the famous market town of Chichicastenango, the 'sacred town' of the Indigenous Quiche. The Thursday market is a colourful affair which attracts people from the surrounding countryside to trade their produce and handicrafts. It is also the perfect place to pick up souvenirs of your visit. From here we continue our adventurous journey into the famous Ixil mountains. The drive is spectacular as we wind our way up through valleys and over hills, passing gushing rivers, heading north from Sacapulas. Finally we arrive at Nebaj, part of the Ixil triangle. Accommodation available in this remote area is simple.



Accommodation: Hotel Villa Nebaj (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Explore the Nebaj Valley

The Ixil are famous for their fine weaving (some of the best to be found in Guatemala), especially the geometric designs in purple, green, yellow and red on the huipiles (blouses) worn by the Indian women. We spend the day exploring and plan to follow a trail over and out of the Nebaj Valley to the neighbouring valley. Weather permitting, we will enjoy good views of the mountain range as we walk up over a pass and descend to the village of Acul. We are bound to come across colourfully dressed Ixil using the trails, but there are certainly few other foreigners in this isolated area.



Accommodation: Hotel Villa Nebaj (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Drive to Antigua via Iximche

We start this morning with a Textile demonstration from some of the local women before driving south. On route we will stop at the Mayan site of Iximche - a small site set in beautiful pine forests. After exploring the site we will then continue to Antigua de Guatemala, set in a beautiful valley between the volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango.



Accommodation: Villa Colonial (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available

DAY 14 - Tour of Antigua; free afternoon

After an orientation tour this morning you will have free time to explore Antigua further. An orientation tour of this graceful old colonial city shows how it can justly claim to be one of the most charming in Central America despite the damage caused by a series of earthquakes and floods over the ages. The afternoon is free to wander the timeless streets and hunt for souvenirs. One of its lively restaurants makes a perfect setting for our last meal together.



Accommodation: Villa Colonial (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Tour ends in Antigua

Our tour ends this morning in Antigua.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

We have planned the dates of this tour to coincide with the Day of the Dead Festival in Guatemala. This festival departure includes the All Saints Day celebrations and a giant kite festival.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 14



Transport

Bus
Boat



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

5 nights standard hotel
6 nights premium hotel
2 nights simple hotel
1 nights standard lodge

Trip information

Country information

Holidays to Guatemala

Climate

In the high plains (1524m-1981m) the climate is temperate all year round. In lower areas the climate is semi-tropical. The mountains can be cool especially at night. In general, the dry season in Guatemala lasts from Nov - April. From May to October there are often fine mornings and clear evenings but afternoon rains tend to be heavy. The Peten lowlands tend to be rainy all year round though less so from February to April.

Time difference to GMT

-6

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Catholic and Protestant

Language

Spanish

Holidays to Honduras

Climate

Climate change varies depending upon altitude. Mid range temperatures reach about 28°C. Rainfall is low to moderate with May to October being the wettest season. Temperature ranges in the lower reaches of the slopes and along the coast are more constant, with less rainfall.

Time difference to GMT

-6

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Roman Catholic and Protestant

Language

Spanish

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Copan - Macaw Mountain US\$10; re visit ruins US\$20. Antigua - Coffee and Music Museum US\$8; Pacaya Volcano US\$65 (min group of 4); Jade workshop US\$48

Clothing

Lightweight clothing and a sunhat are essential in mid-summer though a warm sweater or fleece jacket is necessary for cool evenings in the highlands. A waterproof is essential. The jungle lowlands around Tikal are hot and muggy, and it can rain at any time of year. Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts are recommended on jungle walks. Bring a swimming costume.

Footwear

Comfortable trail boots with ankle support are essential for visiting Maya sites because of the amount of walking/climbing involved. Also trainers and/or sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of luggage and a day pack. Remember, you are expected to carry your own baggage - don't overload yourself.

Equipment

Bring insect repellent, sunscreen, a sun hat, torch and a waterbottle.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Local Crew: Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow US\$50 for group tipping. 10% is expected in restaurants.

Country Information

Holidays to Guatemala

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£8.00 - 10.00

Beer price

£2.00 - 4.00

Water price

£1.00 - 2.00

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Quetzal

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange.

Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

Travellers Cheques

Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

Holidays to Honduras

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£7

Dinner price

£10

Beer price

£1.75

Water price

£2

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Lempira

Recommended Currency For Exchange

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Transport Information

Bus, Boat

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Guatemala: Visas are not required for UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens. Honduras: Citizens from UK, New Zealand, Australia, New Zealand and most EU nationals do not require a visa. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate. USA: (including those in transit) Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) - where you apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), which applies if you enter the country by sea or by air. This must be done on line - <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely be refused boarding. You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover. If you have visited Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan since 2011 or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot travel with an ESTA and instead you will need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel. Please note for your ESTA application you will be required to supply Point of Contact information. Explore's USA contact information will be listed on your final documentation which you will receive approximately 3-4 weeks before departure. If you are leaving for the USA before this, please call the Explore team to get this information. (Not necessary if in transit) For further information please check out the US embassy website. Visa applications - <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/apply.html> Canada: An electronic travel authorisation (ETA) is required by British citizens transiting via Canada. For more information see the official Canadian government website: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp> Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Holidays to Guatemala

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Holidays to Honduras

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended.. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.
