

Central America Highlights

**Guatemala-Honduras
El Salvador-Nicaragua
Costa Rica -Panama**



Can you imagine ?

Amazing Mayan ruins
Dramatic Landscapes
Colonial gems of Antigua, Leon & Granada
Extraordinary landscapes of volcanoes
through Nicaragua
Physical beauty & vivid colours of
El Salvador
National Parks & Wildlife Refuges of Costa
Rica
Distinct local cultures
The Engineering miracle of the Panama
Canal
Outstanding natural beauty of Panama
Warm Hospitable people

26 days of Colour & Adventure

Depart Guatemala City 17 April, End Panama City 12 May 2018 NZ\$8795
Single room supplement NZ\$1650

Imagine ... the best of Central America all on one fabulous adventure

Optional extensions to Tikal or Cuba

For colourful history, local flavour, fab food and music – you just can't beat this adventure

Latin Link Adventure

Central America 2017

****International flights to Guatemala City & Panama City then home, are in addition to costs stated above .**
The most direct route is with Air New Zealand via Houston with connections on United Airlines direct to Guatemala and back from Panama City. Or American Airlines via Los Angeles.
Airfares range between \$2400- \$2800, we will advise the best option at the time of booking.

Central America Highlights

The best of Central America all in one fabulous adventure. Starting in colourful Guatemala, Antigua is the colonial centre of the New World. Lake Atitlan and its three volcanoes are truly breathtaking. There is the option to include a side trip to Tikal.

We travel across into Honduras to visit the World Heritage site of Copan. Then into El Salvador, a beautiful country of vivid colours, old colonial towns and warm friendly people .

Nicaragua, a land of extraordinary landscapes of volcanoes and lakes mixed with the colonial gems of Leon and Granada .

Costa Rica gives us beautiful National Parks, wildlife refuges and distinct local cultures . Besides the engineering miracle of the Panama Canal, Panama has some outstanding natural beauty in the north of the country through Bocas del Toro and Boquete.

Optional pre extension to Tikal or pre/post extension to Cuba

April

Day 1: Tues 17 Fly to Guatemala City

Welcome to Guatemala! You will be met by our Latin Link guide and transferred to your hotel in Antigua

Accommodation : Hotel Meson de Maria

www.hotelmesondemaria.com

Day 2: Wed 18 Antigua Walking Tour (B)

This morning enjoy a guided walking tour of Antigua. You will visit breath-taking colonial monuments and find out why this city was once the bustling centre of the region, for the Spaniards.



Day 3: Thurs 19 Antigua - Lake Atitlan (B)

This morning we travel to the colourful market town of Chichicastenango. On arrival your guide will show you the church which is an important and iconic monument for the indigenous and Mayan history. After visiting the market continue on to Panajachel, Lake Atitlan.

Accommodation: Hotel Jardines del Lago

Day 4: Fri 20 Lake Atitlan (B)

With three stunning volcanoes rising out of its emerald surface, Lake Atitlán is the best way to be introduced to the indigenous culture in the highlands of Guatemala. After breakfast your guide will take you by private boat to visit San Juan la Laguna, a very special town by the Lake. It is a quiet town, home to several textile co-ops and art galleries. After the tour take the boat back to the hotel in Panajachel.

Day 5: Sat 21 Lake Atitlan - Copan, Honduras (B)

Today we travel by bus across the border to Copan, Honduras.

Accommodation: Hotel Plaza Copan

Day 6: Sun 22 Copan - Ataco El Salvador (B,L)

This morning take a tour of Copan, known as the Paris of the Mayan archaeological sites. Located between beautiful valleys, Copan is famous for the elaborate and detailed stelae. This city has a special history, architecture, astronomy and art. Today, the site is one of the best-restored and elaborate Mayan cities. Copan features some of the Mayas most impressive accomplishments in architecture, astronomy and civic organization. Lunch at local restaurant. This afternoon we transfer across the border to the lovely mountain colonial town of Ataco, El Salvador.

Accommodation :Hotel Fleur de Lis

Day 7: Mon 23 Ataco – Suchitoto, El Salvador (B)

Walking tour around Ataco and then transfer to San Salvador where you will go to the historic center of the city and visit the Iglesia el Rosario, Palacio Nacional, Teatro Nacional, and the Metropolitan Cathedral, where the remains of Monsignor Romero rest. Transfer to Suchitoto, a charming town in the Northeast. Various locations in town have a great view over Lake Suchitlan. Guided walk in Suchitoto, visiting the church, market and corn mill, see the sun go down at Lake Suchitlan. Overnight in Suchitoto.

Accommodation: Hotel El Tejado

Day 8: Tues 24 Suchitoto (B)

Indigo is a natural colorant extracted from the Xiquilite plant. It was a very important element for the Mayans because they used it for magical & religious rituals, as a medicinal plant, for pottery and painting. During an Indigo workshop you will learn all about the process and enjoy designing your own scarf!

In the afternoon you will visit the archeological site of Joya de Ceren which was declared world heritage by UNESCO in 1993 recognised as the only location in the Mayan World where you can get an idea of the day to day living styles of the popular pre-Columbian inhabitants. Go visit one of El Salvador's Mayan ruins, San Andres, which was inhabited between AD 600 and 900. There is nice small museum on site.

Accommodation: Hotel El Tejado

Day: 9 Wed 25 Suchitoto – El Cuco (B,L)

This morning we travel to Jiquilisco Bay, a natural treasure in the eastern part of the country that is home to abundant plant & animal life, declared a RAMSAR site and a Biosphere Reserve. Visit to Puerto Barillas where you visit the Cacao plantation. Transfer to El Cuco . Around El Cuco you will find the most beautiful and remote beaches of El Salvador.

Accommodation: Hotel Miraflores Azul Surf Club

Day 10: Thurs 26 El Cuco (B)

Day at leisure with a number of options available

Option 1: Turtle visit - In the morning or afternoon you will visit one of the local community turtle farms.

You may be able to release baby sea turtles. Sea turtle eggs have been collected and re-nested in incubation hatcheries along El Salvador's coastline. You will be invited to hold a tiny, newborn sea turtle in your hands and release it near the shore.

Option 2: From the hotel you will go to the beach of Itipuca. The beaches at the east coast are the most beautiful in El Salvador, surrounded by tropical lush and volcanic landscapes. At the river mouth you will visit the mangrove forest by kayak. You will see lots of migrating birds and turtles. If you are lucky, you may get to see caimans as you paddle through the channels.

Option 3: Visit the rural school of Tempiscal where you can help out with the kids, enjoy celebrating with a piñata, play soccer or help them with English.

Day 11: Fri 27 El Cuco – León, Nicaragua (B)

Transfer to the port of La Union where you take the boat crossing the Gulf of Fonseca to Potosi in Nicaragua. Then transfer to the lovely colonial city of Leon .

Accommodation :Hotel Austria



León is the second largest city in Nicaragua, after Managua. It was founded by the Spanish in 1524 as Santiago de los Caballeros de León and rivals Granada, Nicaragua, in the number of historic Spanish colonial churches, secular buildings, and private residences.

The ruins of the city are known as "León Viejo" and were excavated in 1960. In the year 2000, León Viejo was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Day 12: Sat 28 Leon (B)

The tortilla is one of the most popular items in Nicaraguan cuisine, and is an important staple in it's everyday diet. You will be involved in the creative process of tortilla making, by having your own dough ball to shape into a tasty flatbread. You will assist the local cooks in charge of the kitchen by cooking the tortillas on a woodstove. When they have cooled down, you get to eat your tortilla with a Nicaraguan style breakfast prepared just for you.

Afterwards be impressed by the incredible forces of nature present at the boiling volcanic mudfields of San Jacinto. San Jacinto is a little town 20 kilometres northeast of León. Behind the village there are fumaroles, boiling mud holes, that are connected to the Telica volcano.

Day 13: Sun 29 Leon – Masaya - Granada (B,L)

Transfer from Leon to Granada. On the way you will stop to visit the Masaya Highlights: Masaya volcano, artisan market and Los Pueblos Blancos. Look inside an active volcano, explore a colorful market, have lunch at a crater lake and visit its surrounding villages all in one day! Before heading to the last stop of the tour, the Pueblos Blancos, where a tasty lunch is served at the Apoyo Lagoon. San Juan de Oriente, one of the so called White Villages, is the last destination. Here you witness local craftsmen producing fine ceramics out of clay.

Accommodation: Hotel Hotel con Corazon



Granada is a Nicaraguan city on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. It's home to multiple Spanish colonial landmarks that have survived repeated pirate invasions. The city's main plaza, Central Park, is dominated by the colorful, neoclassical facade of the Cathedral of Granada, dating back to 1583

Day 14: Mon 30 Granada (B,L)

Walking tour around Granada, then a visit to Las Isletas.

Situated at the foot of Mombacho volcano, Las Isletas consist of around 360 small islands, formed by a volcanic eruption 20,000 years ago. You are transferred to the harbour where you meet the captain and board a motor boat. During the tour your guide points out the exotic flora and fauna you encounter. You will make a stop at one of the islands where you enjoy lunch and a complimentary drink before returning to our hotel.

May

Day 15: Tues 1 Granada - Arenal Costa Rica (B)

Transfer to Peñas Blancas border. Then transfer to La Fortuna, Arenal, in the north central Costa Rica. Near the town of La Fortuna, the majestic Arenal volcano can be seen. Beneath the volcano's steaming peak, lies an area of natural beauty, amazing wildlife and plenty of outdoor activities for visitors: canyoning, horseback riding, rafting, mountain biking, zip line tours, canopy bridge walks and a gondola tramway above the forest.

Accommodation: Hotel Lomas del Volcán

Day 16: Wed 2 Arenal Volcano Hanging Bridges and Ecotermas Hot Springs (B)

You will visit the Arenal Hanging Bridges. This is a complex of suspension bridges and trails through beautiful rain forest. The terrain undulates and the trail crosses ravines with small waterfalls, over bridges with panoramic vistas over the treetops with a view of the Arenal Volcano. As you walk you may encounter wildlife, including toucans, poison dart frogs, howler, spider and the white-faced capuchin monkeys. The 2km trail is an easy walk and it loops back to the starting point.

Option: Enjoy a visit to the Ecotermales Hot Springs. This is a family-run hot springs resort featuring volcanically heated pools.

Day 17: Thurs 3 Arenal - Tortuguero (B,L,D)

You will be transferred to La Pavona Pier, the connection point with Tortuguero. At the main port lining the canals you will board a boat for transfer to your hotel in Tortuguero, the boat ride will be approximately 1 hour. Upon arrival lunch will be served at the Lodge. In the afternoon your guide will take you to the town for a leisurely walk where you will get a taste of local living.

Accommodation: Hotel Laguna Lodge

Day 18: Fri 4 Tortuguero (B,L,D)

Free morning to enjoy the pool, walk a forest trail, or simply relax before lunch. In the afternoon, you will enjoy the Wildlife-rich Tortuguero area, touring the navigable rainforest canals by boat. This tour will allow you the chance to see a large diversity of bird species, monkeys, sloths, crocodiles, and iguanas.

Day 19: Sat 5 Tortuguero – Puerto Viejo de Limón (B,L)

After breakfast, board the boat to bring you back to the docks lining the Tortuguero Canals. You will stop for lunch along the way at a local restaurant. A private transfer will take you to your next destination. The Caribbean coast city of Limon is the capital of the eastern province of the same name. This is an important port city with a multicultural population of Costa Rican, Chinese and descendants of 19th century railway workers from Jamaica. Limon has a distinct Caribbean culture, with cuisine based on seafood, tropical fruits, vegetables, and coconuts.

Accommodation: Hotel Caribblue

Day 20: Sun 6 Puerto Viejo de Limon- Bocas del Toro Panama (B)

Pick up at Puerto Viejo de Limón to Sixaola maritime's border. Take a regular boat ride to Almirante, Panamá.

Accommodation : Gran Hotel Bahia

Day 21: Mon 7 Bocas del Toro (B)

Bastimentos Island National Marine Park protects a vast area of coastal mangroves, inland rainforest and a marine ecosystem in the Bocas del Toro archipelago. The group departs by boat from Colón Island early in the morning to reach a ngobe village navigating through clusters of red mangrove, which provide sea creatures with a protective area during their reproductive and development stages these little Ngäbe indigenous villages are located deep inside the Caribbean mangrove. After the hike you will return to the village for lunch and have an opportunity to buy local handicrafts. In the afternoon we will go snorkeling or go to a nearby beach to spend the rest of the afternoon.

Day 22: Tues 8 Bocas del Toro - Boquete (B)

Once you arrive in Almirante our driver will be waiting for you to take you to your hotel in Boquete. This is a 4 hour transfer through beautiful scenery and small indigenous villages along the way.

In the afternoon you will go on a panoramic tour of Boquete. Explore the amazing enchanted cloud forest of Boquete. There is an opportunity to climb into 3 different mountain ranges in Boquete while learning about the unique geology. This tour passes by large coffee plantations, the famous Bajo Mono region of Boquete where the roaring Caldera river cuts through a deep valley surrounded by towering cliffs of Volcanic rock.

From there your tour climbs ever higher into the slopes of Volcano Baru where vegetable farms abound. Watch as the indigenous Panamanians work the land and see how they live.

Accommodation: Hotel Boquete Tree Trek Mountain Resort

Day 23: Wed 9 Boquete - Panama City (B)

Private transfer from Boquete to David to join a Air Panama flight to Panama City

Commence a Half day City and Canal Tour: The tour starts in the old colonial quarter, Casco Antiguo, founded in 1673 after the first Spanish settlement was burned down by pirates. It is home to the Presidential Palace, the National Theatre, the Cathedral and lots of other buildings with colonial architecture. It has plenty of little restaurants and souvenir shops. In 1977 Casco Antiguo became a World Heritage Site of UNESCO.

You will also drive along other interesting parts of the city like Balboa Avenue, the causway and financial district.

Accommodation: Hotel Tryp Panama Centro

Day 24: Thurs 10 Panama City & Colon (B)

Breakfast at the hotel. The Panama Railroad was the first railway ever to link one ocean to another. You will visit the Panama Canal Atlantic locks and the impressive San Lorenzo old Spanish fort, hidden in the jungle on the Caribbean Sea. After an early morning transfer to Corozal train station we will be seated in one of the comfortable cars of the Panama-Colon train. Once in Colon we will drive to the impressive Gatun Locks and cross the canal just behind the huge iron gates to reach the small road that will take us to San Lorenzo. In Gatun we will go up to the Locks Mirador to observe the fascinating display of the huge ships inside the narrow canal chambers!

Technical explanations will be given by a Gatun Locks specialist. On the drive back we will stop at the Miraflores Locks. This is one of the two sets of Locks located on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal.

Day 25: Fri 11 Panama City (B)

Day at leisure - explore the historical ruins of Panama Viejo or possible excursions boating in the canal, or bird watching or trekking in Soberania National Park

Day 26: Sat 12 Depart Panama City (B)

Breakfast at the hotel. You will be transferred to the airport.

Central America Highlights - Information Sheet

Cost: NZ\$8795 per person , single room supplement NZ\$1650

Inclusions:

3 - 4 star hotels all rooms with private facilities, all transfers, Tours accompanied by our local english speaking guides in each place, all applicable entrance fees. Meals as indicated **B**= Breakfast Included, **L** = Lunch Included, **D** = Dinner , Latin Link Tour Manager

Exclusions:

Tips & gratuities to local guides drivers, restaurant staff (suggest allow US\$150), items of a personal nature, meals not included

Please allow yourself USD \$30-40 per day for extra food and drinks – this is probably on the high side but best to be safe than sorry – you can always use what's left for the next trip!

Notes:

■ Visas are not required for any of these countries for NZ Passport holders

■ **Money**

ALL MONEY MUST BE IN US DOLLARS It is advisable to bring most of your money in US Dollars cash including some small US notes. Cash is much easier to change and gets much better rates. Bank Travel Cards and credit cards are feasible in the main centres .

■ **Travel Insurance** - is compulsory. We can offer a competitive premium - please enquire.

■ **Approximate Exchange Rates:**

Guatemala Quetzal 7=US\$1, Honduras Lempira 22=US\$1, El Salvador use US\$, Nicaragua Cordoba 28=US\$1, Costa Rica Colon 535 = US\$1, Panama Balboa 1 =US\$1

More info in your Pre-Departure Booklet – Available once confirmation of your place is made.

Pre Extension to Tikal

April

Sun 15: Fly to Guatemala City

Welcome to Guatemala! You will be met by our Latin Link guide and transferred to your hotel
Accommodation: Hotel Biltmore

Mon 16: Guatemala City - Tikal (B,L)

You will be transferred to the airport for your flight to Peten. On arrival you will be transferred to the Tikal National Park. There is nothing like Tikal. The majesty of the pyramids and the sheer enormity of the area make this the king of all Mayan pyramids. Enjoy the day exploring and discovering this fantastic place set in beautiful rain forest.

Parque Nacional Tikal is located in Guatemala, about 50 miles northwest of it's border with Belize. In this remote area, one of the greatest that endured for centuries. Set in the jungle canopy, the site including a handful of impressive At its peak some 1,500 years ago, Mayans.

As is the case with all Mayan discernible. Findings of pottery

Christ indicate that Tikal was inhabited then. By the time of Christ, the Great Plaza had already taken its basic form, with platforms and stairways on the north side.



civilizations of it's time established a city

today consists of over 3,000 buildings, tall temples that tower above the forest. Tikal was home to an estimated 100,000

sites, the origins of Tikal are only barely dating from a few hundred years before

Tikal is a place to admire, not only the engineering accomplishments of the Maya, but also the jungle splendors of the Peten region in Guatemala. The site of Tikal is a national park where the native flora and fauna still flourish relatively undisturbed. In addition to it's numerous well-excavated temples and pyramids, Tikal presents an excellent opportunity for animal and bird-watching. Along the paths, spider and howler monkeys, gray foxes and red coatis are often seen. Today, one can **sit atop a pyramid**, gaze at the Great Plaza and roof combs rising up from the jungle and imagine life more than a thousand years ago when the plaza was alive with activity and the city was surrounded by cultivated fields dotted with houses.

After the tour transfer to your hotel

Accommodation: Hotel Villa Maya

Tues 17: Tikal - Antigua (B)

You will be transferred to the airport for your flight back to Guatemala City then transferred to the hotel in Antigua to join the rest of the group

Additional cost : NZ\$ 1195 per person, NZ\$155 single room supplement

Based on a minimum of 2 participants

Includes: accommodation, transfers, tours as specified, airfares Guatemala City-Peten return including taxes, entrance fees, meals as specified

Optional Extension to Cuba

Day 26: Sat 12 Panama -Havana (B)

Fly to Havana, capital of Cuba and transfer to your hotel.

Havana was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982. It contains a wealth of colonial architecture, and the old city and streets around the Malecon (ocean-side walkway) are best discovered on a walking tour (tomorrow). Allow the traditional and modern sides of the enigmatic city to unfold before you.

In Havana there are many churches, museums and memorials all worth taking a further look at. Street after street is graced with grand facades, boasting massive wooden doors, barred windows and narrow sidewalks. This is Havana, a place you may have never known, but a place that you will never forget once you have been to it.

Accommodation: Casa Arrate Homestay

Day 26: Sun 13 Havana (B,L)

Explore this colonial city and feel the beat! There are wonderful churches, palaces and museums, colourful handicraft markets and the formidable Spanish castles of El Morro and La Cabana. Intriguing revolutionary monuments, including the Pavilion Granma, the Museo de la Revolucion and the Memorial Jose Marti, the Gran Teatro de La Habana, the oldest functioning theatre in the Americas. There is lots to see and do.

We have a half day guided walking tour so we can get the lowdown on the colourful history of this city.

Havana preserves more of its historic colonial legacy than any other city in the Americas. In 1982, UNESCO declared Old Havana a World Heritage Site, a notable 'living museum', in which no fewer than 144 buildings from the 16th and 17th centuries are preserved.

Day 27: Mon 14 Havana (B,L)

We have the day to explore the many museums and take the Ernest Hemmingway Tour.

The Museum of the Revolution is a must see as is the cemetery where the guards change every half hour at the mausoleum of Jose Marti. It's quite a spectacle.

Ernest Hemmingway Tour :

Travel 15km to the Finca Vigia, the farm that Ernest Hemingway bought in 1940. The Museum consists of Hemingway's house, a three-story tower, a guest bungalow and a garage. The exhibits attempt to show the flavour of Hemingway's life, with furnishings, hunting trophies, paintings and books that give us an insight into his personality. This farm is where Hemingway wrote several things, including *The Old Man and The Sea*, the novel for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Visit the Ambos Mundos Hotel, built in the 1920's and recently reopened after a long restoration. Off and on throughout the 1930's, Hemingway slept in room 511, a gloomy room, 16 metres square, with a double bed made of ordinary wood, two night tables and a writing table and chair. A plaque on the exterior wall reads 'The novelist Ernest Hemingway lived in the Hotel Ambos Mundos during the the 1930's.

Take a walk to El Floridita. "My daiquiri at El Floridita and my mojito at La Bodeguita" Hemingway used to say.

This has been Cuba's most famous restaurant since that time. Hemingway, John Ringling and various Cuban presidents have been regulars here because of the excellent food. Our special recommendation is that you do not leave the Island without trying one of the daiquiris concocted in the Floridita Bar. Have lunch at the Floridita.

Day 28: Tues 15 Havana – Trinidad (B,L,D)

After breakfast we depart for the quaint coastal town of Trinidad. You'll enjoy the rolling countryside stopping en route at Che Guevara's enormous monument at Santa Clara.

Trinidad is the best-preserved colonial city in Cuba, in the shadow of the Escambray mountains and was linked by road to the rest of the country in the 1950s.

Declared a national monument by the Cuban government, this city is very much as it was four centuries ago, the beauty of its baroque architecture and cobblestone squares hark back to a bygone era when Trinidad was a key player in the Caribbean slave trade.

Accommodation: Casa Maydi Homestay

Day 29: Wed 16 Trinidad (B)

Take a city tour to get orientated. This delightful 'museum' town is on the coast, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and has 50,000 inhabitants. Enjoy the lively and famous Cuban music.

The afternoon is free to explore the many museums, giving you a picture of life before communism and Fidel Castro.

Or you can relax and enjoy the Caribbean sunshine and the fabulous beach.

Day 30: Thurs 17 Trinidad – Pinar del Rio (B,D)

Time for an early morning dip in the Caribbean before it's time to leave this tropical paradise and travel through the countryside to the beautiful Pinar del Rio Province, famous for its tobacco and hops growing.

Accommodation: Casa Basita Homestay

Day 31: Fri 18 Vinales (B)

Vinales and especially the surrounding valley are among the top attractions of Cuba.

About 40 km north of Pinar del Rio in the Pinar del Rio province, the valley is stunning. The flat land, full of tobacco and palm trees is scattered with 20-30m mogotes. These are the remnants of the former plateau which is almost entirely washed away by water during the last couple of million years. The process is comparable with that in Cappadocia, (Turkey) but here the mogotes are completely covered with green vegetation.

Like everywhere in Cuba, the people in Vinales are very friendly. Today visit a tobacco farm and factory and see how it's done.

Day 32: Sat 19 Vinales- Havana (B)

Last day in Cuba. Return to Havana

Accommodation: Hotel Florida

Day 33: Sun 20 Depart Havana (B)

Transfer to the airport for your homeward flight

Additional Cost:

NZ\$2395 per person

Based on a minimum of 2 participants

Includes: accommodation in 3 star hotels rooms with private facilities , meals as specified (B=breakfast, L=Lunch,D = dinner) local English speaking guide , all transfers and tours as specified in itinerary

Latin Link Adventure

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