



### HACIENDA SAN LUCAS



A pretty hacienda owned by the same family for over a hundred years, about 15 minutes from Copan Ruinas. Wonderful kitchen with traditional log stove on which all meals are prepared, with fresh local ingredients. Garden with views directly over the river to the ruins. The tiny Sapos Maya site, perhaps a form of hospital (as apart from the famous toad there is also a carving of a woman giving birth) is on the property.

### THE LODGE AT PICO BONITO



Close to La Ceiba, on the edge of the Pico Bonito National Park. Comfortable wooden cabins with ceiling fans and individual terraces under the shade of cacao trees. Large restaurant and bar; pool. Butterfly house (for export) and serpentarium (for local education). Trails into the park, observation towers, bathing in the river. Excursions to Cuero y Salado reserve, white-water rafting.

# Honduras

*Bordering Guatemala and tiny El Salvador to the west and Nicaragua to the east, Honduras is a friendly country with jungle-clad mountains and both Pacific and Caribbean coast. A safe and peaceful country with a well-maintained road network, it has a long record of democratic government. For the visitor the main attractions are the fabulous Maya ruins at Copán and the beautiful Bay Islands.*

### Climate and when to go

The dry season is from December to May. Even during the wetter months showers are usually short and sharp and merely serve to freshen the air. The hottest months are July and August.



Copán



Bird park, outside Copán Ruinas

### The south and east

The capital, Tegucigalpa, known locally as Tegús, has a pleasant climate because of its altitude of 3,000 feet, and is the gateway to the Pacific coast. The eastern extreme of the country is known as **Moskitia**, or the Mosquito coast (the name comes from an Indian tribe rather than the insect!). Sparsely populated, with vast tracts inaccessible except by boat, much of the area is protected and any serious exploration takes dedication and time.

### Copán and the north coast

Close to the Guatemalan border, the town of **Copán Ruinas** is charming, with cobbled streets and very friendly people. The principal attraction here is the Maya site of **Copán**, known for its intricate 3-dimensional carvings, unique hieroglyphic stairway, and fully restored Ball Court. Inhabited up until the late 900's or so, archaeologists have identified 4 distinct phases, or levels, in the construction of the most impressive structures. The archaeological work involved has been immense: after nearly 100 years' work (it was rediscovered in 1839) only 25% of the site has been investigated.

A few hours' drive north is the commercial capital of Honduras, **San Pedro Sula**, a useful gateway for international flights. The coastal road heads east from here, past banana and pineapple plantations, to Tela and **La Ceiba**, the country's third largest city. Places of interest within easy reach include the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge, salt and freshwater wetlands with many birds and some manatees, and the **Pico Bonito National Park**, cloud forest with jungle trails and tumbling rivers, waterfalls and streams.



Copán



### The Bay Islands

The Bay Islands were for many years the haunt of pirates, and subsequently home to marooned slaves (so English is widely spoken). Nearest the coast are the islands that include **Cayo Cochino**, a National Marine Park. Further north **Utila** is popular as the cheapest place in the world to learn to dive (although it also has the most sand flies!). **Guanaja** has no roads, and the main town, built mainly on stilts, is often referred to as the 'Venice' of Honduras. Columbus landed here on his fourth and final voyage to the Americas and called it Los Pinos because of the large population of pine trees (most of which were knocked down by hurricane Mitch). **Roatan**, the largest of the Bay Islands, is about 40 miles long and hilly. The airport is at Coxen Hole (where cruise ships dock), which together with French Harbour are the largest towns. The western part of the island is the main tourist destination, with West End the most vibrant spot with a variety of bars, hotels and restaurants. Most visitors are here to dive or snorkel as the whole island is surrounded by a reef with wonderful coral.

All the islands are afflicted to some extent by sand flies, which affect sandy areas near the ocean and are active during the day. They leave a small red mark which usually disappears within 24 hours and does not normally irritate. A strong wind helps keep them away (the months with least wind are July and August).

There is plenty to see and do apart from diving, including visits to an iguana reserve, botanical gardens, or to see bottlenose dolphins, which are studied here. For the intrepid there is even a zip wire which descends in 11 stages to West Bay, the prettiest beach on the island.

### PALMETTO BAY PLANTATION



Individual villas set in 100 acres on a private bay on the north side of Roatan island, about 30 minutes drive from the airport. Airy restaurant and bar in front of a pool overlooking the ocean. All houses have a kitchenette, a spacious central sitting area, balcony, and two or three bedrooms. A lovely, restful spot.



West Bay



French Harbour



Canopy zip wire



Bottlenose dolphin



Roatan beach



# Guatemala/Belize Itineraries



## ANTIGUA, THE PETÉN, PUNTA GORDA, AND AMBERGRIS CAYE



*Focusing on less-visited Maya sites, and wildlife both above and below water.*

### Antigua, Guatemala

Days 1-2: Met in Guatemala City and driven to the Mansión del Pensativo in Antigua (see page 83) for 2 nights.

### The Petén

Days 3-7: Fly to Flores for 2 nights at the Jungle Lodge, simple, but right in the Tikal National Park, with a small swimming pool. Spend a day at Tikal before continuing to Chiminos Island Lodge on Petexbatún lagoon for 3 nights (see page 85), a good base for visits to the ruins at Aguateca and Dos Pilas.

### Rio Dulce and the Caribbean coast

Day 8: Boat and land transfer to Rio Dulce for a night at the riverfront Hotel Catamaran, with rooms built on stilts over the water.

### Punta Gorda, Belize

Days 9-11: Descend the tranquil Rio Dulce by boat, to Livingston, from where you catch a ferry (1½ hours) to Punta Gorda. Spend 3 nights at El Pescador, a 12 room cabaña lodge in the jungle on the banks of the Rio Grande. Activities include fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking or tours through the lodge's flower and fruit farm.

### Ambergris Caye

Days 12-15: Fly to San Pedro and transfer by boat to Salamander, for 3 nights. Eight simple but comfortable cabins sit on a private sandy bay, with excellent snorkelling and diving from the beach. Fly back to Belize City for onward connections.



Hotel Catamaran



Rio Grande, near Punta Gorda



Salamander



## ANTIGUA, ATITLÁN, TIKAL, CAYO DISTRICT AND PLACENCIA



*A combination of colonial cities, volcanic scenery, jungle, Maya sites and beaches.*

### Antigua, Guatemala

Days 1-3: Driven (45 minutes) from Guatemala City to Antigua for 3 nights at the stylish Posada del Angel (see page 83).

### Lake Atitlán

Days 4-5: Two hours from Antigua is the famous market town of Chichicastenango. Stop here on the way to Lake Atitlán for 2 nights at the pretty Casa Palopó, overlooking the lake (see page 84).

### The Petén

Days 6-7: Return to Guatemala City and fly to Flores. Driven to La Lancha, on Lake Petén Itzá, for 2 nights. Owned by Francis Ford Coppola, it is decorated with Guatemalan and Balinese

furnishings, and has a pool. Watch sunset at the Maya ruins at Yaxhá, the third largest classic Maya site in the country, and take a boat trip to Topoxté.

### Cayo District, Belize

Days 8-10: After an early visit to the fabulous Maya site of Tikal, driven across the border (3-4 hours) to Belize for 3 nights at The Lodge at Chaa Creek (see page 74).

### Placencia

Days 11-14: Driven (2 hours) to Belize City for a short flight south to Placencia and the intimate Turtle Inn (see page 73), for 3 nights' relaxation on the beach. Fly to Belize City for onward connections.



Arch street, Antigua



La Lancha



Xunantunich



Turtle Inn



# Guatemala/Honduras Itineraries



ANTIGUA, ATITLÁN, COBÁN,  
FLORES, COPÁN



*A thorough circuit visiting the less-travelled corners of Guatemala, including the extraordinary site of Semuc Champey.*

## Antigua, Guatemala

Days 1-2: Casa Encantada in Antigua is your base for the first 2 nights. A colonial hotel with garden, small plunge pool and roof terrace it is four blocks from the main square.

## Lake Atitlán

Days 3-4: Driven to Lake Atitlán (2 hours) for 2 nights at Villa Sumaya, a small, romantic and relaxing hotel with views over the lake and access only by water.

## Guatemala City

Day 5: Transfer to Guatemala City and the Hotel Quinta Real, overlooking the city, a beautiful property with character, gardens and pool.

## Cobán and the central region

Days 6-7: Driven (4 hours) to Cobán and the Hotel La Posada, a simple hotel in an old colonial house near the main square. The following day drive along the twisty but scenic road east to Lanquín and stay that night at El Recreo. Visit the Lanquín cave and Semuc Champey, an extraordinary limestone formation which has made a natural bridge over a roaring river.

## The Petén

Days 8-9: Continue north to Flores and Nit'un Lodge for 2 nights (see page 85). Watch sunset at the peaceful Maya site of Yaxhá and spend a full day at Tikal.

## Río Dulce and the Caribbean Coast

Days 10-11: Driven to Río Dulce (4 hours) for 2 nights at the Hotel Catamaran, on the Río Dulce. Take a boat trip to the *Carifuna* town of Livingston.

## Copán, Honduras

Days 12-14: Driven across the Honduran border to Copán, with a stop on the way to see the site of Quiriguá. Stay 2 nights at the Hotel Marina Copán, a pleasant colonial hotel on the town's pretty cobbled square. Guided tour of the impressive Maya site of Copán. The following day return to Guatemala City (5 hours) for onward connections.



Casa Encantada



Villa Sumaya



Hotel Quinta Real



La Posada, Cobán



ANTIGUA, CHICHI, XELA, COPÁN,  
PICO BONITO AND ROATAN



*A varied itinerary showing the highlights of Honduras and colourful market towns of Guatemala.*

## Antigua, Guatemala

Days 1-2: Two nights at the Hotel Casa Santo Domingo, a 15 minute walk to the centre, and on the site of a former convent, much of which is still being unearthed. Lovely gardens, and a large pool.

## Chichicastenango

Day 3: Driven (2 hours) to Chichicastenango the day before market day, for a night at the Hotel Santo Tomás, a colonial building full of antique furniture, with a small pool.

## Quetzaltenango

Days 4-6: Early visit to the market and afternoon transfer to Quetzaltenango for 3 nights at the Casa Manen, a charming small inn just two blocks from the pretty central square. Activities include walks to volcanoes, cloud forest and hot springs.

## Copán, Honduras

Days 7-8: Return to Guatemala City for a charter flight to Copán. 2 nights at the charming Hacienda San Lucas, just the other side of the river from the ruins (see page 86). Guided visit of the impressive Maya site of Copán.

## Pico Bonito

Days 9-10: Driven to San Pedro Sula for a short flight east to La Ceiba and 2 nights at the Lodge at Pico Bonito, set between two rivers amongst the tropical forests of Pico Bonito National Park (see page 86).

## Roatan

Days 11-15: Fly from La Ceiba to Roatan and driven to Palmetto Bay Plantation (see page 87) for the final 4 nights, after which you fly to San Pedro Sula for onward connections.



Hotel Casa Santo Domingo



Copán



Palmetto Bay