

new products on the shelf

Tara Tours has introduced a new 6-night *Fun in the Sun* package, staying at the all-inclusive **Royal Decameron Salinitas Resort**. Priced at \$1,087 pp dbl, the vacation cost includes roundtrip air from Miami and transfers; all meals at a choice of five restaurants; all drinks (alcoholic and non-alcoholic); daily excursions and all non-motorized watersports; tennis and nighttime entertainment. Tara Tours also offers a program combining a stay in San Salvador with sightseeing and time at the beach, as well as El Salvador combined with Guatemala. Call **(800) 327-0080** or visit taratours.com.

Ladatco Tours has two new deluxe, 10-day privately escorted programs. Its *El Salvador Explorer*, priced from \$3,295 pp dbl, highlights historic Suchitoto, the *Ruta de las Flores* and a stay at the boutique beach hotel **La Cocotera**. *El Salvador Adventure Explorer*, priced from \$4,078 pp dbl, features hiking, biking, rafting, kayaking, horseback riding and surfing from different hotel bases. Tours feature, roundtrip air from Miami, top accommodations, most meals, private transportation and activities/sightseeing arrangements. Call **(800) 327-6162** or visit ladatco.com.

CHECK-OUT LIST

Capital city: San Salvador

International airport: Comalapa International Airport
(San Salvador)

Nonstop air service from the U.S.: American Airlines,
Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Taca

Domestic airline: Taca

Entry requirements: Valid U.S. passport; tourist card
\$10 (purchase on arrival)

International departure tax: \$32 (included in airline ticket cost)

Tourist information: El Salvador is a member of Centroamerica-4, with a marketing office in Miami, (866) 597-2286;
elsalvador.travel



Restaurant at Las Cabañas de Apaneca in El Salvador.

a taste of... GUATEMALA

basic ingredients

Captivating Antigua: Located 30 miles from Guatemala City, Antigua is a picture-perfect colonial city, full of 17th and 18th century cathedrals, convents and residences. Indeed, it is Guatemala's most popular weekend-away from the capital. Additionally, its colonial treasury has earned Antigua UNESCO World Heritage site status. A citywide restoration program has given new life to the historic buildings framing the Plaza Mayor, including the imposing Royal Palace of the Captains General and the neo-classical cathedral, next door to the Archbishop's Palace. Along cobblestone streets, colonial homes are painted in a rainbow of colors, while historic mansions have been converted to elegant little inns, restaurants and boutiques. Antigua's religious monuments are superb: the San Francisco church with its treasury of frescoes and paintings, richly decorated La Merced convent, and the cloisters of Las Capuchinas. Other historic buildings now house a bevy of beautiful little B&Bs and luxury inns, as well as little gourmet restaurants and superb shopping boutiques.

Sky-High Lake Atitlan: Breathakingly beautiful, mile-high Lake Atitlan is ringed with towering volcanoes, and around its shores are Indian villages whose inhabitants are direct descendants of the Cakchiquel, Tzutuhil and Quiche cultures. Visitors stay in and around the town of Panajachel, departure point for boat trips on the lake. Recently, small lodges have been added in villages around the lake. Here, active travelers head out on the lake in canoes or kayaks, and climb volcanoes. Everyone enjoys visiting the local communities, shopping for fine crafts at weekly markets and joining in the celebrations that honor local saints and deities.

Mighty Tikal: While the Roman Empire was in decline and Europe was entering the Dark Ages, the Mayan civilization in Guatemala's great northern rainforest of El Peten was in its Golden Age. Among the largest of the early Mayan city-states, and in its ceremonial center, rose a forest of stone pyramids such as the 230-ft.-tall Temple IV, one of the tallest Mayan structures ever built. Modern-day adventurers can explore the pyramids, temples, sculptures, sacrificial altars, underground burial sites, astronomical observatories, ball courts and more at more than 20 excavated sites in El Peten—not only Tikal but Yaxchilan, Uaxactun, Ceibal, Yaxha, and more. Flores is the air gateway to the area, with flights not only from Guatemala City, but as of July 1, daily flights from Belize City on **Maya Island Airways**.

adding some spice

► There are no better places than the markets of the Maya to experience the most colorful traditions of Guatemala. Markets explode with flowers and fruits, and the most varied selection of important handicrafts. Weekly markets are magic; three come to mind—Solola on Friday, Totonicapan on Tuesday, and Chichicastenango on Thursday and Sunday.

► In Central America, the area of Guatemala was indeed the center of the Mayan world, connecting city-states in what are now the neighboring countries of Belize, El Salvador and Honduras by networks of footpaths and river routes. Today, good roads in these countries make it easy to design itineraries that follow *La Ruta Maya*. From Antigua, go overland to the beaches of El Salvador; from Tikal, go



Textile vendors in Antigua, Guatemala.

a taste of... HONDURAS

basic ingredients

Bountiful Bay Islands: In addition to direct international flights and cruise ships landing on the island of Roatan, daily air service links the international airport at San Pedro Sula and the domestic airport at La Ceiba to this pristine archipelago that covers about 92 sq. miles along the world's second largest barrier reef. Diving and snorkeling facilities draw beginners and experts to Roatan, the largest of the islands and the holy grail of scuba diving with 40 or more dive sites. While every kind of dive experience is here for the asking, sea kayakers, water skiers, anglers, snorkelers and beach lovers can also enjoy Roatan's seaside wonderland. Other attractions include the famous "dolphin experience" at **Anthony's Key Resort**, and there are botanical gardens to tour, canopy tours to zipline along, fishing villages to savor and fine beaches to find one's place in the sun.

Copan, City of Kings: Located in western Honduras, Copan is among the most spectacular Mayan cities in the Americas, accessible by road from San Pedro Sula. Its main ceremonial center covers about 75 acres with pyramids, temples, ball courts and dozens of intricately carved stelae portraying those who ruled this great city between the fifth and ninth centuries. The history of the Kings of Copan is recorded on the Hieroglyphic Staircase, and treasures found in the ruins are housed onsite in the brilliantly designed Museum of Sculpture. The ancient Copan is one of two UNESCO World Heritage sites in Honduras (the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve is the other). Visitors stay in the pretty, laid-back town of Copan Ruinas, a good base from which to spend some quality time at the Macaw Mountain Bird Reserve & Nature Park, go horseback riding and dip in local hot springs.

The North Coast: La Ceiba is the gateway to many of the country's most important natural wonderlands; nature lovers and birdwatchers are going to find the North Coast a superstar region. Many visitors base themselves in La Ceiba, taking day trips for class III and IV whitewater rafting on the Cangrejal. Others opt for a guided boat trip to explore the Cuero y Saldo Wildlife Refuge, a protected wildlife zone replete with manatees, crocodiles, howler and whiteface monkeys and birdlife galore. Also in this corner of Honduras is the Lancetilla Botanical Garden, the second largest botanical garden in the world. And Pico Bonito National Park, which embraces seven ecosystems between sea level and 7,000 ft., is a lush venue for rainforest hikes.

new products on the shelf

Upscale boutique lodgings continue to be the accommodation of choice in Guatemala. Two new ones for the road—in Antigua, **EI Palacio de Doña Beatriz** is the latest addition to the boutique hotel scene. The luxury hotel has two master suites, five jr. suites and five villas, as well as a pool, jacuzzi, terrace with solarium, restaurant, bar, library, colonial chapel, and wireless Internet. Rooms with breakfast start at \$215. Visit hotelpalaciodebeatriz.com.

On Lake Atitlan, the new **Laguna Lodge Eco-Resort**, overlooking the lake and volcanoes, is located outside the village of Santa Cruz Lagunilla and a 15-minute boat ride from Panajachal. There are seven indigenous suites, as well as a spa featuring native rejuvenation and relaxation treatments and a spa pool. Imaginative vegetarian meals are the order of the day, and guests have the use of kayaks, canoes, and snorkeling equipment. Rooms are priced from \$225, and include breakfast, high tea and boat transfer. Visit lagunalodgeatitlan.com.

CHECK-OUT LIST

Capital city: Guatemala City

International airport: La Aurora International Airport
(Guatemala City)

Nonstop air service from the U.S.: American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Spirit Airlines, Taca, US Airways

Domestic airline: Taca

Entry requirements: Valid U.S. passport

International departure tax: \$30

Tourist information: Guatemala is a member of the Centroamerica-4, with a marketing office in Miami, (866) 597-2286; visitguatemala.com

adding some spice

► The northern highlands, or the lands of the Lenca people, are mostly undiscovered and certainly untrampled. The most scenic access is overland through the cloud forests from Copan Ruinas up to the charming colonial town of Gracias—optimum time here is during the Guancasco or community festival held Dec. 12-16, coinciding with the *Festival of Santa Lucia*.

► La Mosquitia or the Mosquito Coast is perhaps the most adventurous cultural experience available in Honduras. Access is by 4WD vehicles, mule back, or dugout *pipantes* along the rivers of the Rio Platano Biosphere. Expeditions require a week's time and good physical condition. ►

