



## Central America Explorer

Active Immerse Yourself Tour | 19 Days | Physical Level 3

Panama City – San Jose – Monteverde – San Salvador – Ataco –  
Copan – Flores – San Ignacio – Belize City

Explore the best bits of Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize. You'll explore rainforests, ancient civilisations and colonial towns on this incredible journey.

- Meet the Embera tribe
- Rainforest canopy walk
- Mayan ruins of Tikla and Copan
- Colonial Antigua



### Central America Explorer inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated
- Touring with guides and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking Local Guides

*The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. meals, drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.*

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of South America on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people; prepare to be immersed in the authentic charm of the countries you visit. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional local guides throughout, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

### South America Active Immerse Yourself Tours:

Active tours combine the key sights with more energetic pursuits such as hiking and cycling. This allows us to explore more and discover the destination in greater depth. These tours are designed to provide a wide range of activities to ensure a varied and culturally immersive experience. These tours include:

- Cycling or walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

### Physical Level 3:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights. 'Central America Explorer' is rated 3 on the physical level scale. A good level of fitness is required as you need to be comfortable walking for 2-3 hours and covering longer distances.

- There will be several days of sightseeing on foot for a period of time and in some cases for an extended period of time.

Of course, our Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

### Joining Your Tour

The tour is 19 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 1 in Panama City and end the tour on Day 17 in Belize City. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## Itinerary – Central America Explorer

### Day 1: Fly Australia to Panama City

Meals Included: Dinner

Fly to the cosmopolitan capital of Panama, Panama City, arriving the same day due to crossing the International Date Line. You will be met at the airport and transferred to your city centre hotel. Depending on your time of arrival, the rest of the days is yours to start soaking up the local culture before a welcome dinner this evening.

#### Destination Information

**Panama City** – It is the largest city and the first most populated in the country. As the capital of the republic, it houses the headquarters of the National Government, along with the other governmental institutions. In the course of Panama City's history, spanning 5 centuries, it has influenced society, culture, literature, art, architecture, religion and the way of dressing.

### Day 2: Discover Panama City

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Spend the morning at Miraflores locks on the Panama Canal and learn a little bit about the history of this engineering marvel. Head to the Calzada de Amador for a fantastic panoramic view over the waterway. This afternoon, explore the Biomuseo, a museum of biodiversity housed in a building by Frank Gehry before touring the Casco Viejo, the old, colonial area of the city, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today's sightseeing involves 2 hours on foot.

#### Destination Information

**Miraflores Locks** – The Panama Canal locks, which lifts the ships 25.9 metres to the highest point of the channel at Gatun Lake, and then lowers them, were once one of the largest engineering works of its time. There was no other construction in reinforced concrete comparable in size until the construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s.

### Day 3: Meet the Embera tribe

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Travel deep into the Panamanian rainforest to visit a traditional village of the Embera people. Approximately 1 hour by road followed by a 30 minute boat ride, you'll be welcomed to the village with traditional music. Spend some time learning about this rainforest community's way of life, their history and their culture. You'll also share lunch with the villagers and be able to purchase handicrafts made by them. You will be transferred back to your hotel for the evening at leisure.



#### Destination Information

**Embera Indians** – The tribe came originally from the province of Darien in the south of the country resettled in the nearby Chagre River National Park in the 1970s. Their lives are based on fishing, hunting, farming and, until recently, artisan pottery. The Embera's relationship with tourists has only recently been established and its welcome is truly authentic.

#### Day 4: Into Costa Rica

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Transfer to the airport to fly to Costa Rica's capital city San Jose. Visit a coffee plantation planted in the rich soil around Poas Volcano, where you'll take a coffee tour. Enjoy a presentation, learn ancient cultivation techniques and taste the produce of the plantation as part of a delicious breakfast. Return to San Jose and check in at the hotel.



#### Day 5: Monteverde Cloud Forest

Meals included: Breakfast

Spend the day exploring the natural wonders of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. This reserve covers 26,000 acres of virgin forest which a huge amount of Costa Rica's native flora and fauna call home. The reserve shelters jaguars, pumas and over 450 species of bird, including the quetzal. Ride the Sky Tram and wander the hanging bridges through the forest canopy observing its incredible biodiversity. Check into your eco-lodge accommodation.

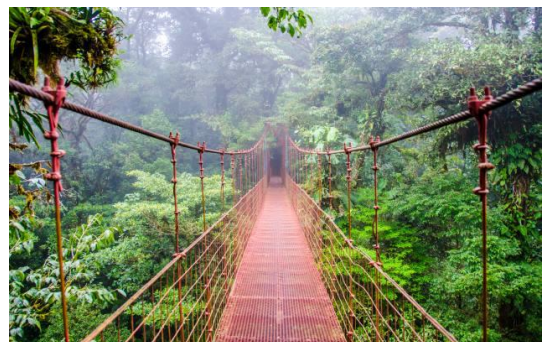
##### Destination Information

**Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve** – One of the most famous conservation areas in Central America, Monteverde consists of 26,000 acres of cloud forest, 90% of which is virgin. At 1,440 metres above sea level, the area is cloud forest rather than rainforest and within the reserve there are 2,500 plant species, 100 mammal species, 400 bird species and 120 reptilian and amphibian species. This is the best place to try and spot the resplendent quetzal, a beautiful bird native to Central America.

#### Day 6: Cloud Forest Walks

Meals included: Breakfast and Dinner

Spend the morning strolling through Monteverde on easy, well-maintained trails, learning more about it and its flora and fauna as you go. This afternoon is at leisure.



#### Day 7: Into El Salvador

Meals included: Breakfast

Transfer back to the airport and fly to El Salvador's capital city, San Salvador, which is perched on the slopes of San Salvador Volcano. Embark on a tour of the city, visiting the historic centre and the magnificent Church of el Rosario, the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral.



### **Destination Information**

**San Salvador** – The city of San Salvador is set in a valley surrounded by a skyline of dramatic volcanoes. Founded in 1525 by the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado, the influence of this European heritage is evident in the Baroque, Neoclassical and Gothic architecture, museums and art galleries throughout the city. Now, a quarter of El Salvador's population call the city their home creating a buzzing and lively atmosphere.

### **Day 8: Explore Suchitoto**

Meals included: Breakfast

Take a day trip to Suchitoto, a charming town with spectacular views over Lake Suchitlan. Take a walk around the sights and soak up the vibrant atmosphere before heading to Joya de Cerén. This fascinating archaeological site was once a town buried under layers of ash from the eruption of the Caldera Volcano and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Spend the night in the charming city of Ataco.



### **Destination Information**

**Suchitoto** – The cultural capital of El Salvador, Suchitoto is a charming, colourful town home to many artists. The striking Spanish church at its centre is a real highlight.

### **Day 9: Into Honduras**

Meals included: Breakfast

Travel towards the border with Honduras, stopping at Casa Blanca to visit an indigo workshop. Pop over the border and travel on to the town of Copán Ruinas, a peaceful place of cobbled streets and adobe buildings, and the gateway to the Mayan ruins of Copán, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### **Day 10: Explore Copan**

Meals included: Breakfast

Set out on a walking tour of the Mayan ruins of Copán. An important city during the Classic period of the Mayan Empire, it was abandoned in 1200. The ruins, in a lush spot just outside of town, has plazas, temples, a ball court and a magnificent hieroglyphic staircase, and is a delight to explore.



### **Day 11: Into Guatemala**

Meals included: Breakfast

Transfer from Copán Ruinas over the border into Guatemala and onto the city of Antigua, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. On arrival, the rest of the day is at leisure.

### Day 12: Explore Antigua

Meals included: Breakfast

A colonial city in the shadow of three volcanoes, Antigua is famous for its colonial Baroque architecture, which you will discover on a guided walking tour. As you wander, you'll learn about Guatemala's history and visit the cathedral, churches and a jade factory. This afternoon is at leisure with some optional tours, including a coffee tour or a hike on Pacaya volcano.



#### Destination Information

**Antigua** – Antigua served as the original capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala and has been designated UNESCO World Heritage site status due to its numerous well-preserved examples of Baroque architecture, churches and colonial buildings alongside historical ruins and picturesque parkland.

### Day 13: Fly to Flores

Meals included: Breakfast

Transfer to the airport and fly to the north of Guatemala to the town of Flores, which sits on an island on Peten Itza Lake. The rest of the day is at leisure to discover Flores for yourself.

#### Destination Information

**Flores** – Flores is a peaceful, colourful town set within the banks of the third biggest lake in Guatemala. It is well known for its beautiful scenery, cobbled streets and cultural activities.

### Day 14: Tikal

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Rise early to visit the ancient city of Tikal, once the heart of a powerful Maya kingdom. Here, towering stepped temples peep through the dense canopy, which you can navigate on boardwalks between structures and plazas, soaking up the sights, sounds and smells of the jungle as you go. Depart Tikal and travel over the border into Belize, heading to the bustling town of San Ignacio.



#### Destination Information

**Tikal** – The UNESCO World Heritage site of Tikal is the ruin of an ancient Mayan city, with first traces of civilisation in the area dating back to 1000 BC. It is one of the largest archaeological sites of this period, and the famous centrepiece, the Tikal temple, rises over 150 ft high.

### Day 15: Explore San Ignacio

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Visit a ceramics workshop with San Antonio's Women's Group and enjoy a cooking class where you'll make a typical dish of the Cayo region. Next, travel to the Xunantunich Archaeological Site for a guided tour. Set on a hilltop, this impressive Mayan site is reached by a cable ferry and contains some impressive sculpted friezes.

**Day 16: Belize City**

Meals included: Breakfast

Transfer to Belize City, stopping for a visit at Jaguar Paw Park en route, where you can try out some cave tubing if you're feeling adventurous! The remainder of the day is free at your leisure.

**Day 17 - 19: Belize City**

Meals included: Breakfast

Today you will be met and transferred to the airport for your flight back to Australia, arriving home in 2 days due to crossing the International Date Line once again.

## Central America Explorer Travel Information

### Visas

Australian passport holders currently do not require a visa to enter Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Belize. Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended return date to Australia. Wendy Wu Tours does not provide a visa service for Worldwide tours. To stay up to date with the latest visa requirements, visit [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au).

### Insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24-hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your local guides should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

### Eating in Central America

Food in Central America is a combination of influences of both the colonial Spanish and the Afro-Caribbean. Staple foods include rice and black beans, which are served at most meals, alongside plantain and grilled or sautéed meat or fish.

Typical breakfasts include Gallo Pinto – rice and beans stir-fried together and served with eggs and sour cream or cheese, whilst a typical lunch, casado, is rice and beans (not mixed) with meat and a salad. Both are delicious and seasoned beautifully with local herbs and vegetables. The indigenous people of the Central American region ate corn as a large part of their diet, and it still features today. Tamales, for example, were introduced by the Aztecs and are still eaten at celebrations, especially Christmas. These are a dough of cornmeal, lard and spices stuffed with meat, rice and vegetables and steamed in a leaf. Another food not too miss are empanadas, a delicious snack. Similar to a Cornish pasty but with a corn-based dough, these are filled with beef, chicken, cheese or fruit.

Whilst we strongly recommend trying as many local dishes as possible, Costa Rica and Panama offer a wide range of international foods.

### Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from business hotels to rainforest lodges. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality may exist between the Australia and Central America. All group tour hotels have private bathroom facilities and air conditioning where needed. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

### Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers between destinations. Roads in Central America have generally been improved over recent years, but please be aware traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. There may be sections of road where the surface may be comparatively bumpy but our drivers will do their utmost to lessen the impact.



**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

### Clothing

On this tour, you will be travelling through various regions of Central America with quite diverse climates. It is recommended to bring lots of layers including the following: T Shirts made of breathable materials, hiking pants, with the option to turn into a short pant (rain pants optional), a fleece jacket for colder parts and the evenings and a waterproof jacket as shell layer or a light rain jacket, a scarf and hat, warm socks. Some areas will be tropical, humid and warm. We recommend wearing light weight breathable clothing. Sensible walking shoes and a small back pack that fits into your main hand luggage to carry your daily essentials should also be taken.

### Souvenirs

There are plenty of interesting bits and pieces to buy as souvenirs in Central America, such as indigenous textiles, handicrafts and artworks, coffee and chocolate. There will be some opportunities during your tour to pick up souvenirs.

### Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by Local Guides. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in each group.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so.

### Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in South & Central America. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much. For your convenience, with years of experience in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on your Group Tour so your Local Guide will look after this aspect of the trip for you. This ensures the amounts paid are reasonable for you and still fair to the local people. The suggested total amount is specified for each Group Tour and will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is paid in USD or other local currencies if specified. Any additional tipping you feel is appropriate is welcomed at your discretion.

### After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive an email with your confirmation invoice, along with a link to our website where you can find your visa information (if applicable) and other important information. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

### Itinerary changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

### Before You Leave

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au).

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

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