

# TREASURES OF CENTRAL AMERICA – 2018

## OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 03 March 2018 – 31 March 2018

Tour Duration: 29 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$18,990

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,880

*There are few parts of the world that offer such diversity as awe-inspiring Central America. Our incredible 29-day itinerary features four of the most stunning countries in the region: Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala.*

Panama is the starting point for this tour with a boat cruise along one of man's greatest engineering masterpieces, the Panama Canal. Next stop is Costa Rica with its erupting volcanoes, spectacular wildlife and primeval cloud forest of Monteverde. For many people, the jewel in the crown of this sparkling tour is Guatemala. We visit the stunning colonial city of Antigua, before heading for the shores of magnificent Lake Atitlan, described by English writer Aldous Huxley as 'the most beautiful lake in the world'. Crossing the border into Honduras, we visit Copan, one of the most spectacular centres in the Mayan world, built around the fifth century AD, before crossing back into Guatemala to continue our journey north to the Rio Dulce and Livingston. Finally, we enjoy a candle-lit dinner in the heart of the breathtaking ruins of Tikal, the greatest of all the Mayan archaeological sites. This remarkable journey is an eclectic mix of breathtaking natural beauty, ancient heritage sites and diverse cultural experiences.

Tour Fitness Level: Moderate

# TREASURES OF CENTRAL AMERICA 2018

## TOUR ITINERARY

### 03/03/2018 Sydney – Los Angeles

Fly from your preferred capital city to Sydney, to connect with our flight to Los Angeles. Crossing the International Date Line, we arrive in Los Angeles on the same day.

Depart Sydney Qantas QF 11, 10.30

Arrive Los Angeles 06.25

On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

Crowne Plaza Los Angeles Airport

Los Angeles

### 04/03/2018 Los Angeles (B)

This morning we embark on a tour of some of the notable sights of Los Angeles including Hollywood Boulevard and the famous 'Walk of Fame'. We then return to our hotel with the afternoon free to relax.

### 05/03/2018 Los Angeles – Panama City (BD)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Panama City.

Depart Los Angeles Copa Airlines CM 473, 11.30

Arrive Panama 19.50

On arrival we transfer to our hotel.

Le Meridien Hotel

Panama City

### 06/03/2018 Panama City (BLD)

The most dynamic capital in Central America, Panama City has both a 'Manhattanesque' business centre and a marvellous heritage-listed old heart. Today we concentrate on the latter with our city tour of the area known as Casa Vieja, which abounds with superbly preserved and restored historic buildings. This was the second city of Panama, founded in 1673 after the destruction of the first city and constructed as a fortification to protect it from pirate attack. Today, the restoration of colonial convents and residences continues and gives a sense of how magnificent the area must have looked in past years. In the afternoon we drive to the Miraflores Locks for our first view of the magnificent Panama Canal.

### 07/03/2018 Panama City (BLD)

This morning we visit a fascinating community of the Embera Indians. Originally from the remote Darien rainforest area of Panama, these people dress very much as they did when Christopher Columbus arrived in the 1500s.

### 08/03/2018 Panama City (BLD)

Today we experience the Panama Canal by ship, train and coach. Completed in 1914, the 77-km stretch of water, affectionately known as 'the Big Ditch', remains one of the greatest engineering achievements in history. Commencing on the Pacific coast, our voyage takes us through the incredible locks of Miraflores and Pedro Miguel as well as the extraordinary Gaillard Cut. Disembarking in Gamboa, we continue by road to Colon on the Atlantic coast where we board the Panama Canal Railway – the world's first Trans-Continental rail route which cuts through dense jungle alongside the canal. We arrive back in Panama City in the evening after a momentous day.

### 09/03/2018 Panama City – San Jose (BLD)

Today we board our flight to San Jose, capital of Costa Rica.

Depart Panama City Copa Airlines CM 144, 09.05

Arrive San Jose 09.30

Today is a visual feast of sightseeing. We drive first to the famous Poas Volcano, just outside San Jose, where the view of the volcano from the rim of the crater is breathtaking. Heading towards the Caribbean zone of Costa Rica, we visit the La Paz Waterfall Gardens. After a short stroll along spectacular trails, we see the beautiful Magia Bianca Falls and the world's largest butterfly observatory.

Presidente Hotel

San Jose

### 10/03/2018 San Jose – Tortuguero (BLD)

After breakfast we drive to the Caribbean side of Costa Rica, to the stunning Tortuguero National Park. The park has an incredible biological diversity, due to the existence within the reserve of 11 different habitats including rainforest, swamps, beaches and lagoons. It is very humid due to its tropical climate and receives 250 inches of rain a year. Tortuguero is not accessible by road so we make the final part of our journey by boat. We stay at the delightful Evergreen Lodge, on the banks of one of the waterways that make up this extraordinary area. After lunch we enjoy a twilight river safari.

Evergreen Lodge

Tortuguero

### 11/03/2018 Tortuguero (BLD)

Today we again venture into the national park which is home to hundreds of endangered or threatened species, including jaguars, tapirs, ocelots, cougars, river otters, and manatees. As well as amphibians, reptiles and mammals, there are 300 bird species including the great green macaw and swallow-tailed hawks and vultures. The wide-open canals make viewing easier than at many other parks – superb for spotting crocodiles, giant iguanas, and basilisk lizards basking atop the branches. Many of the animals found here are under threat from fruit plantations, logging companies and hordes of cattle that use the grounds near the park gates for grazing.

### 12/03/2018 Tortuguero – La Fortuna (BLD)

We leave Tortuguero and drive to the shores of Lake Arenal where a boat awaits us. We cross the lake and continue by road to the town of La Fortuna, in the shadow of the mighty Arenal volcano. The rest of the day is at leisure. We stay in one of the country's most famous hotels with fantastic views of the volcano, where you can soak up the sight as you soak in the hotel's luxurious hot pools.

Arenal Kioro Hotel

La Fortuna de San Carlos

### 13/03/2018 La Fortuna (BLD)

The Arenal is one of the world's most active volcanoes and a truly stunning sight. Today we explore the area thoroughly and may even see the volcano erupt. We also explore the surrounding forest, which is home to a dazzling array of flora and fauna.

### 14/03/2018 La Fortuna – Monteverde (BLD)

After breakfast we cross the Arenal Lake to Monteverde. The Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve is acclaimed as one of the most outstanding wildlife sanctuaries in the Americas and includes

eight distinct ecological zones. It protects more than 400 species of birds and more than 100 species of mammals. In addition to the gloriously dazzling quetzal, we may see the endangered bellbird, or emerald toucanet. There are also 30 species of hummingbirds. Before dinner we enjoy a night hike through the forest, with the chance to see sloths, foxes, coatis, raccoons and many other animals.

**El Establo Hotel**

Monteverde

**15/03/2018 Monteverde (BLD)**

Early this morning we enjoy a guided tour through the Cloud Forest Reserve. The forest has a primeval feel and a staggering array of flora and fauna. After lunch we take the famous skywalk tour through the forest canopy, which gives unparalleled views of the lush surroundings.

**16/03/2018 Monteverde – San Jose (BLD)**

This morning we visit the amazing Selvatura Park. Bridges above the trees give us fantastic views of the cloud forest. After lunch we drive to San Jose.

**Holiday Inn Express Forum Hotel**

San Jose

**17/03/2018 San Jose – Guatemala City – Antigua (BLD)**

This morning we transfer to San Jose airport for our flight to Guatemala City.

**Depart San Jose Aviateca AV 732, 12.10**

**Arrive Guatemala City 14.30**

On arrival we make the 45-minute transfer to the beautiful colonial city of Antigua and check into our hotel.

**El Convento Boutique Hotel**

Antigua

**18/03/2018 Antigua (BLD)**

Considered the most beautiful city in all the Americas, Antigua has it all. Flanked by three majestic volcanoes, it is full of glorious Spanish colonial architecture, manicured parks, cobbled streets, superb restaurants, art galleries and shops. The best way to discover Antigua is on foot and this morning we enjoy a guided walking tour. The build-up to Easter begins two weeks prior, and on Sundays the whole town celebrates for many hours with a magnificent procession that winds its way through the narrow streets. We have plenty of time to enjoy this fantastic spectacle.

**19/03/2018 Antigua (BLD)**

This morning we board colourful chicken buses for the drive to San Miguel Escobar. We then transfer to 4WDs for the short ride to the coffee fields where we learn about coffee production and also take part in coffee picking. After lunch with a local family, we return to Antigua.

**20/03/2018 Antigua – Lake Atitlan (BLD)**

After breakfast we make the hour-long scenic drive to the charming town of Comalapa where we enjoy a tour of the local market. After lunch we continue our drive to glorious Lake Atitlan. The rest of the day is at leisure.

**Hotel Atitlan**

Panajachel

**21/03/2018 Lake Atitlan (BLD)**

The famous English writer Aldous Huxley described Lake Atitlan as “the most beautiful lake in the world”, and justifiably so. Formed by a volcanic cataclysm 84,000 years ago, the lake shimmers in a mountain valley surrounded by three lofty volcanoes. It is overlooked by a dozen charming villages whose inhabitants proudly wear traditional dress, which distinguishes one village from the next. Today we enjoy a leisurely cruise on the glorious lake, visiting a number of these communities.

#### 22/03/2018 Lake Atitlan – Chichicastenango – Guatemala City (BLD)

This morning we make the two-hour drive to the vibrant town of Chichicastenango. Each Thursday and Sunday the town hosts one of the largest and most colourful markets in all the Americas. Traders set up the night before and come from all over Guatemala to sell their wares. Stalls packed with stunning textiles, pottery, flowers, wooden masks and hammocks cram the narrow streets and squares and most of the traders wear the colourful, traditional national dress. The whole market exudes a vibrant atmosphere. After lunch we drive to Guatemala City.

**Westin Camino Real**

Guatemala City

#### 23/3/2018 Guatemala City – Copan (BLD)

After breakfast we begin our five-hour journey to the Guatemala-Honduras border. Soon after crossing into Honduras, we arrive at the beautiful colonial town of Copan. After lunch at our hotel we visit the fantastic bird park of Macaw Mountain.

**Marina Copan Hotel**

Copan

#### 24/3/2018 Copan (BLD)

Copan is considered by many to be one of the most spectacular centres of the Mayan world. This culture, one of the most important in Central America, flourished in the western part of Honduras. This morning we explore one of the largest and culturally lavish centres of the Mayan world. Built around the 5th Century AD, Copan, at its peak, had a population of more than 20,000.

#### 25/03/2018 Copan – Livingston (BLD)

After breakfast we cross back into Guatemala and head to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Quirigua – one of the major testimonies to the Mayan civilization. The ruins of Quirigua contain some outstanding monuments and an impressive series of carved stelae and sculpted calendars with the Great Plaza at its heart. After exploring the site we transfer to Puerto Barrios for our transfer by boat to the delightful town of Livingston.

**Hotel Villa Caribe**

Livingston

#### 26/03/2018 Livingston – Tikal (BLD)

This morning we explore Livingston. This unique town in Guatemala has a distinctly Caribbean feel and is one of the highlights of the country. Surrounded by jungle and water, boat transportation provides the only access. This is a settlement of the Garifuna people who speak their own language, as well as Spanish and English. We enjoy a boat tour on the Rio Dulce and after lunch board our coach for the journey north to Tikal.

**Jungle Lodge**

Tikal

#### 27/03/2018 Tikal (BLD)

Today we visit what is widely regarded as one of the world's greatest archaeological sites, the magnificent Mayan city of Tikal. Described as the 'New York' of the Mayan civilisation, Tikal is a sprawling complex of more than 3,000 structures deep in the heart of the jungle. Huge temples rise above the forest canopy and monkeys and colourful parrots are abundant in the surrounding area. It is an amazing place to conclude our tour of Central America.

#### 28/03/2018 Flores – Guatemala City (BLD)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Guatemala City.

Depart Flores Aviateca AV 7979, 07.35

Arrive Guatemala City 08.40

On arrival we will enjoy a tour of the city before we transfer to our hotel for our final night.

Westin Camino Real

Guatemala City

#### 29/03/2018 Guatemala City – Panama – Los Angeles (B)

Early this morning we transfer to the airport for the flight to Los Angeles via Panama City.

Depart Guatemala City Copa Airlines CM 389, 07.10

Arrive Panama City 10.40

Depart Panama City Copa Airlines, CM 472, 11.40

Arrive Los Angeles 16.50

On arrival in Los Angeles we connect with our flight to Sydney.

Depart Los Angeles Qantas QF 12, 22.30

#### 30/03/2018 In Flight

As we head back to Australia we cross the International Date Line.

#### 31/03/2018 Arrive Australia

Arrive Sydney 06.30

On arrival in Sydney we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian airport.