

Destination Honduras

The face of a nation changed forever on June 28, 2009, when a military coup removed Honduran President Manuel Zelaya from power. But the Honduran people are strong.

There's plenty going on in this rough and rugged country to complain about – coups, widespread corruption, deforestation, pollution, landlessness, a growing wealth gap, gangs, drugs, AIDS, constitutional changes, and the rebirth of old-school, extra-jurisdictional intimidation and murder – but you won't hear many complaints. It's not that Hondurans are eternal optimists – in fact, quite the opposite appears to be true – it's that they've decided to submit themselves to the passage of time. And like the pine-encrusted hillsides of the west, the verdant savannah and jungle of La Moskitia, the lolling Caribbean waters of the Bay Islands and the stifling hot alleyways of the frenetic city centers, the people of Honduras will abide.

With the global economic meltdown hitting full-tilt, money was on everyone's mind at the beginning of 2009. The left-leaning government, led by President Zelaya, pushed through legislation in the early part of the year to raise the minimum monthly wage by 11% to L\$5500 (around US\$290). Good news for factory workers, bad news for business owners. And while there certainly was much hemming and hawing on both sides of the debate, it seemed perfectly clear that the new wage, combined with the unstoppable tides of the global economy, were going to cause more Hondurans to lose their jobs – bad news for a country with an unemployment rate estimated at 28%.

Honduras' societal problems mirror those of many of its neighbors in Latin America – a legacy of landlessness, government greed and corruption, gangs, guns and narco-trafficking – and stem largely from a history of avarice and inequality. President Zelaya claimed to be trying to combat these problems – being so bold as to push for a referendum that would have rewritten the Honduran constitution – but the average Honduran, rich or poor, didn't seem to support the idea, and the Supreme Court ordered the military to arrest Zelaya and send him into exile. The coup d'état was the first in Honduras in over 30 years, and was vigorously denounced by the international community. And while it isn't clear at the time of writing how the ouster will play out, it's certain that Honduras will be a scarred nation for several years to come.

But instead of focusing on the bad things of the past, the Honduran people seem to look forward, hoping for small steps toward a better future: more protection from the estimated 20,000 gang members who have made this one of the world's murder capitals; protection for the beautiful natural areas such as Lago de Yojoa and Parque Nacional Jeanette Kawas (Punta Sal) that may one day bring tourists past the Bay Islands–Copan–La Ceiba trail and into the rural areas that make this country so unique; and they hope and fight for land reform.

But in the end, it's a battle to make this a better place. With so much to offer – from the mainstream beach resorts of the Bay Islands to the offbeat splendors of the largest tract of rain forest this side of the Amazon Basin – Honduras remains a place worth fighting for.

FAST FACTS

Population: 7.79 million

Life expectancy: 67.8 (men), 71 (women)

Population growth: 1.956%

Type of government: Democratic Constitutional Republic

Dominant religions: Roman Catholic (97%), Protestant (3%)

Literacy rate: 80%

GDP per person: US\$4400 (US\$46,000 per person in the US)

Urbanization 2.9% annual growth (48% currently live in cities)

People living with HIV/AIDS: 28,000

Arable land: 9.53% (18.01% in the US, 13.22% in Guatemala)

Getting Started

Honduras is just beginning to develop its tourism potential, and there is truly something for everyone here. There are high-end resorts and world-class food in the major resort areas of the Bay Islands, and to a lesser degree in the bigger tourist towns of the mainland such as Copán Ruinas, Tela, San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, the area around Lago de Yojoa and La Ceiba. Once you venture beyond this tourist trail expect back-to-basics lodging, less tourist infrastructure and adventure opportunities aplenty. While getting to Honduras is a snap, with many direct flights to San Pedro, Tegucigalpa and Roatán, prepare yourself for the inevitable headaches and ear-to-ear smiles of traveling in the developing world. Buses arrive late, the water in your hotel may go out for a day or two, and congestion, noise and pollution are part and parcel of everyday life.

Much of the country is a malaria zone, and international health organizations recommend taking malaria pills (if you decide to take them, you'll need to start your course one or two weeks before you arrive in Honduras). And like most of Latin America, you can't drink the tap water. Instead of bottled water, consider bringing a filter to help reduce landfill waste. See the Health chapter (p275) for more on staying healthy in Honduras.

WHEN TO GO

Like most tropical countries, Honduras experiences a rainy season and a dry season, known locally as *invierno* (winter) and *verano* (summer) respectively. In the interior, especially the west and south, the rainy season runs from about May to November. Rains usually come in the afternoon and last an hour or so. On the north coast and Bay Islands, the rainy season is later, from around September to December, with *nortes* ('northerners', cool storms from the north) possible into February. Hurricane season runs from June to the end of November. Hurricanes are most likely from September to October, though they rarely hit Honduras directly. However, even a far-off hurricane can send heavy rain Honduras' way and can cause flooding or minor mudslides.

Travel is easier during the dry season, especially for scuba diving and trips to La Moskitia. Then again, the forests and countryside are more lush during the rainy season. February and March are good months to visit because the weather is fairly stable across the country; the trails and roads are drying out but the trees and underbrush are still full and green.

You won't need much advance planning traveling to and around Honduras unless you come during the Easter week, or over Christmas.

COSTS & MONEY

Honduras is an inexpensive country overall, but a trip here can be pricey simply because of the activities you're likely to do, namely diving. US dollars and euros are widely accepted in the Bay Islands, but you'll need local currency (lempiras) for the rest of the country. It's becoming more and more difficult to exchange traveler's checks, and most travelers are now opting to use ATMs for their cash needs instead. Most cities have ATMs. See p263 for more on money matters.

Besides diving, accommodation will likely be your biggest expense. Hotel prices run the gamut in Honduras, the majority being high-budget or low-midrange, around L\$300 (US\$16) to L\$500 (US\$26) per night. Bare-bones budget travelers can often arrange homestays in the more

See Climate Charts (p259) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Passport and US cash – universal travel essentials
- Sunscreen – very expensive in Honduras
- Bug repellent – expensive and can be hard to find
- Toiletries – you'll appreciate having your preferred brands of tampons, pads, condoms, deodorant, etc
- Travel alarm clock – it's rare to find one in hotels, even high-end ones
- Copies of important documents – having a copy of your passport and plane tickets will make replacing them, if necessary, much easier
- A flashlight (torch) – you never know when the lights will go out...or when there will be no lights at all
- Diver certification card and logbook – bring them if you've got them; you don't want to repeat the Open Water course, do you?
- Extra eyeglasses or contacts – expensive and difficult to replace
- Rain gear and plastic bags – handy for travel in the rainy season, or anytime in La Moskitia

remote parts of the country, and can probably find lodging for around L\$200 (US\$10), though the cheapest hotels can be pretty grim.

Eating out will cost from around L\$60 (US\$3) to L\$200 (US\$10) per person per meal, once drinks, taxes, and tip are added in. You can save money by eating at street food vendors and no-name eateries, and by getting lunch or breakfast items at a grocery store instead of a restaurant.

The big-ticket item for most travelers is diving, plus the higher cost of hotels and restaurants on the Bay Islands. An Open Water course will cost L\$5000 (US\$264) to L\$6000 (US\$317). Fun dives cost from L\$665 (US\$35, one tank) to L\$1050 (US\$55, two tanks), but you can save some cash by booking a multi-dive package. Lodging and food tend to be more expensive on Roatán than Utila. Most dive shops on Utila have basic dorms, and offer students either two to four free nights or two free fun dives. A trip to La Moskitia can also be pricey, whether by tour or on your own.

Buses are a bargain, especially considering how big the country is. There are three classes of service: *ordinario* or *parando* (literally, stopping) is the classic 'chicken bus' that stops frequently to pick up and drop off passengers. *Directos* are generally safer, make fewer stops and cost only slightly more – for most travelers this is the way to go. Some popular routes are covered by the luxury or deluxe lines Hedman Alas, King Quality or Saenz Clase Primera. Prices are double or triple, but it can be a worthwhile splurge.

Taxis are safe and affordable, with fares typically charged per person. Expect to pay L\$10 to L\$20 (US\$0.50 to US\$1) per person within town, and from L\$30 (US\$1.50) for destinations out of town or at night.

Rental cars cost from L\$567 (US\$30) to L\$1134 (US\$60) per day, including taxes and insurance; internet access costs around L\$20 (US\$1) per hour; and laundry is around L\$70 (US\$3.70) per load.

TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY

Sustainable travel is all about respect. Respect the environment, respect the culture, respect the economy and respect the rules. There are some easy steps you can take to lower your impact, including offsetting your travel, hiring local guides, buying responsibly and staying the night in small villages rather than just visiting them on day trips. This encourages locals

HOW MUCH?

Moto-taxi ride L\$20
(US\$1)

Bottle of Salva Vida beer
L\$20 (US\$1)

Open Water dive
certification L\$5000-6000
(US\$264-317)

Plato típico L\$40 (US\$2)

Rafting trip on the Río
Cangrejal L\$760 (US\$40)

to preserve their culture and traditions, and mitigates the rampant urban migration that is affecting the cultural makeup of this diverse country.

Most travelers are quite conscientious about minimizing their physical impact: not littering, not disturbing flora and fauna (above water or below it), not buying food or gifts that are made from protected species. In Honduras, especially on the Bay Islands, limit your water use – take short showers! – and try reusing bottles and plastic bags to cut down on trash.

Controlling your ‘cultural impact’ is a bit more tricky. Taking photos is such an integral part of traveling – if you didn’t get a photo, were you really there? – but it’s vital that travelers exercise restraint in taking pictures, especially of local people, and doubly so if those people happen to be indigenous. Travelers may not realize how intrusive other habits are, like talking loudly or dressing sloppily, especially in a church or government office.

It’s also a great idea to put your guidebook down for the day (or even a week), leaving the tourist trail behind in search of your own adventures. This book has a GreenDex (p302) to get you started.

One last tip: even if you don’t speak Spanish, do learn how to use the formal tense, addressing individuals you don’t know with the formal *usted* instead of the *familiartu* or *vos*. It goes a long way in showing respect.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

While topics such as Copán archaeological site, the banana industry and the Contra War have been well studied and written about, others, such as non-Maya indigenous communities and environmental issues, have not. Gangs are a hot topic and have received extensive newspaper and magazine coverage; full-length books are still rare, though several are in the works.

TOP TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE

Let’s not sugarcoat it: Honduras is a dangerous country, and with the 2009 coup (p34), things were looking even more unstable when this book went to press. It’s well worth your time to check out the country’s political situation before you go. Here are some more details on Honduras’ security situation: there were 101 kidnappings in 2008 and 62 US citizens have been murdered here since 1995. Then again, the US and other parts of the developed world also have high murder rates and occasional kidnappings. So while you’ll need to keep your wits about you while traveling here, there’s no reason this should ruin your trip. We discuss specifics for staying safe within the regional chapters, but here are a few general tips.

- Take cabs at night. It’s super cheap, and whether you are going two blocks or two miles, it’s definitely worth it. You can skip the cab on the Bay Islands and Copán Ruinas, where the streets are tightly patrolled. A general rule: if there are a lot of people out, especially women and children, you are probably safe.
- Avoid municipal buses. City buses are regularly attacked by street gangs. Just take a cab.
- Leave the camera and MP3 player at home. We get numerous complaints about expensive cameras and MP3 players being stolen. In a country with a minimum wage of around L\$5500 (US\$300) per month, these luxury items (and conspicuous jewelry) are attractive targets.
- Skip the moonlight beach walk. Most of the country’s beaches are safe by day, but you should avoid them at night.
- Don’t walk down dark alleys. Heading down a dark alley to buy a dime bag is never safe.
- Don’t fight back. If you get robbed, just let them have the stuff. It’s all replaceable.
- Relax and have fun! The majority of visitors to Honduras have absolutely zero problems on their journey.

Honduras: A Country Guide (1991), by Tom Barry and Kent Norsworthy, and *Honduras: A Country Study* (1990), by the US Federal Research Division, are oldish but have concise historical information. *Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras* (2008), by Adrienne Pine, is a sociological study that uses violence and the export manufacturing (*maquiladora*) industry as a backdrop.

Enrique's Journey (2007), by Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Sonia Nazario, chronicles a 17-year-old Honduran boy's attempt to reunite with his mother, who left the family when the boy was just five to find work in the US.

The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America (1994), by Donald E. Schultz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz, discusses the role of the US in Central America during the region's tumultuous civil wars.

Don't be Afraid, Gringo (1987) is the intriguing firsthand story of peasant Elvia Alvarado's reluctant rise as a labor leader, and of the Honduran labor movement, flaws and all.

Bitter Fruit, by Stephen C. Schlesinger, is mostly about the United Fruit Company in Guatemala, but provides insight into the banana giant's impact on Honduras as well. *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (1995) and *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (2002), both by Lester D. Langley, are incisive accounts of the banana companies' political and economic influence in Central America and the Caribbean.

Alison Acker's *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic* (1989) lacks the detail and analysis of more recent studies, but is a worthy read.

Copán is one of the most extensively studied archaeological sites in the Maya world; many studies are highly technical but several have been written with a more general readership in mind. *Copán: The History of an Ancient Kingdom* (2005), by William L. Fash and E. Wyllys Andrews, is an excellent overview, while *Scribes, Warriors and Kings* (2001), also by Fash, is a fine on-site companion and is often sold at the Copán ruins' bookstore.

Los Barcos (The Ships; 1992), *El Humano y La Diosa* (The Human and the Goddess; 1996) and *The Big Banana* (1999) are all by Roberto Quezada, one of Honduras' best-known living novelists. *Gringos in Honduras: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1995) and *Velasquez: The Man and His Art* are two of many books by Guillermo Yuscarán, aka William Lewis, an American writer and painter living in Honduras.

INTERNET RESOURCES

A growing number of sites provide reliable up-to-date information on Honduras. Many are maintained by expats and are in English.

About Utila (www.aboututila.com) General info and news about Utila.

Honduran Tourism Ministry (www.letsghonduras.com) Website of the Honduran Tourism Ministry.

Honduras This Week (www.hondurasthisweek.com) Official site of *Honduras This Week*, Honduras' only English-language newspaper.

Honduras Tips (www.hondurastips.honduras.com) The website of the free tourist magazine.

La Ruta Moskitia (www.larutamoskitia.com) Good info on travel to La Moskitia.

Latin American Network Information Center (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/honduras/>)

Extensive list of links to articles and websites on everything from politics to sports to tourism.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/honduras) The source of updated Lonely Planet coverage.

Roatán Online (www.roatanonline.com) A charmless but comprehensive guide to all things Roatán.

Travel-to-Honduras.com (www.travel-to-honduras.com) Links to various services, including volunteer organizations.

TOP PICKS



SMALL TOWNS

Small towns are one of the joys of Honduras, where a bit of Spanish and a friendly manner can earn you plenty of lunchtime conversations and interesting insights.

- **Cocobila** – a quiet Miskito village on a thin strip of sand with trees between the Caribbean and a huge island lagoon (p241)
- **San Manuel de Colohete** – about as far down the road as it gets, this traditional Lenca village sees very few foreign visitors (p145)
- **Las Marías** – a Miskito-Pech village in the heart of the Reserva de la Biósfera del Río Plátano, and a perfect base for excursions in the area (p243)
- **Jewel and Pigeon Cay** – off the western tip of Utila, these sun-bleached islets are even smaller and mellower than Utila itself, and no less picturesque (p229)
- **Valle de Ángeles** – a quaint colonial village in the mountains (p80)
- **Chachauate** – a traditional Garífuna village on a picture-perfect Caribbean cay (p191)
- **Yuscarán** – on the way to Honduras' cigar country, this colonial town has winding cobblestone streets and several aguardiente breweries (p85)
- **Miami** – a cluster of thatched-roof homes on a rustic beach at the end of a long, sandy road near Jeannette Kawas National Park (p176)
- **San Marcos de Colón** – a cool, colonial refuge in the otherwise sweltering southern region, with a seldom-visited wildlife reserve nearby (p91)
- **Travesía** – a Garífuna village with an excellent beach and good accommodation options (p166)

FESTIVALS & PARTIES

Whether a local celebration or a national holiday, festivals and parties offer a unique window into the culture, history and lore of this nation.

- **Copán Ruinas** (Valle de Copán), every night is Saturday night in this backpacker hotspot (p119)
- **Feria de la Virgen de Suyapa** (Suyapa), February (p261)
- **Festival Nacional de Maíz** (Danlí), August (p86)
- **Garífuna Festival** (Baja Mar), July (p166)
- **Feria de San Isidro** (La Ceiba), May (p180)
- **Guancasco** (La Ruta Lenca), mostly December & January; dates vary by town (p140)
- **Noche de Fumadores** (Santa Rosa de Copán), August (p135)
- **Semana Santa** (Comayagua), the week before Easter (p160)
- **Semana Santa** (Tela), the week before Easter (p171)
- **Sun Jam** (Utila), August (p229)

WAYS TO GET WET & WILD

- **Diving off Utila** – some of the cheapest diving certification courses on the planet (p223)
- **Rafting the Cangrejal** – charge down Central America's best white water (p181)
- **Paddling a dugout canoe** – it's hard work, but the monkeys won't hear you coming (p246)
- **Stargazing from a hot spring** – but keep your swimsuit on...please (p139)
- **Snorkeling off Punta Sal** – some of the best shore snorkeling on the coast (p174)
- **Finding your own beach** – go ahead, head down that unmarked road. A lost beach paradise may just be waiting for you.
- **Ascending La Picucha** – you pass through seven microclimates on the way to the summit; we're sure you'll get wet in one of them (p103)

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE WHOLE COUNTRY (ALMOST)

Three to Four Weeks

Start your journey from **San Pedro Sula** (p109), heading overland to **La Ceiba** (p177) where there's something for everyone. Had your fill? Take the ferry over to **Roatán** (p202) or **Utila** (p221), spending at least three days diving, snorkeling and wearing flip-flops. Next, hop over to **Tela** (p169) for a day at the beach, the **Jardín Botánico Lancetilla** (p174) or **Parque Nacional Jeannette Kawas** (p174). Afterwards, head to **Copán Ruinas** (p119), where you can visit Honduras' only major archaeological site. If you like colonial towns, make your next stop **Santa Rosa de Copán** (p134), otherwise head straight to **Gracias** (p138), gateway to **Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque** (p141). Continue down through the southern half of the **Ruta Lenca** (p133) to **Comayagua** (p159) and back toward **Tegucigalpa** (p65), where you can head out to **Parque Nacional La Tigra** (p81) for hiking, or to **Valle de Ángeles** (p80) for craft shopping. From here, head westward to **Lago de Yojoa** (p151) for bird-watching in the morning, then to **Pulhapanzak Falls** (p151) in the afternoon.

Here's Honduras from top to bottom: from the highest peak to 30m underwater. It includes national parks, Maya ruins and offbeat colonial villages.



INTO THE WILD

Two to Three Weeks

Fly into **Tegucigalpa** (p65) where, appropriately enough, your tour begins with Honduras' first national park, **Parque Nacional La Tigra** (p81). Plan to stay the night at one of the two entrances and make an all-day loop hike. From La Tigra, head north to **Parque Nacional Cerro Azul Meámbar** (p154) with its well-marked trails, easy-to-follow signs and excellent campgrounds. Continue north to **Tela** (p169) and the beautiful **Parque Nacional Jeannette Kawas** (p174). Take it easy on a guided day trip, or rough it by hiking in from the tiny village of **Miami** and camping on the beach. Next head east of **La Ceiba** to the tiny Garífuna village of **Sambo Creek** (p190), a jumping off point for **Parque Nacional Marino Cayos Cochinos** (p191). Crystalline water and pristine coral reefs make this a divers' and snorkelers' paradise, not to mention one of the most photographed spots in Honduras. Back on the mainland, take a bus from San Pedro Sula to Gracias, where **Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque** (p141), and Honduras' highest peak, Cerro de las Minas, awaits. If your time and energy permit, head straight to **Parque Nacional Sierra de Agalta** (p102) to climb La Picucha mountain, one of Honduras' most challenging ascents, doable from either **Gualaco** (p105) or **Catacamas** (p100). Otherwise, return to Tegucigalpa for your flight home.



This trip takes you to Honduras' best national parks, from the rugged Parque Nacional Sierra de Agalta to coral-fringed Parque Nacional Marino Cayos Cochinos.

ROADS LESS TRAVELED

A WORLD APART: THE MOSQUITO COAST

Depending on your time, budget and tolerance for long land journeys, fly into La Moskitia or go overland – either way, make your way to **Belén** (p241) or **Rais Ta** (p241), neighboring towns on Laguna de Ibans. Take a day to get your bearings straight and check out the peaceful towns of **Plaplaya** (p240) and **Cocobila** (p241). Early the next morning, settle in for the five- to six-hour boat ride or one- or two-day hike to **Las Marias** (p243). There, arrange a mellow day trip to the petroglyphs or a more challenging three-day rain-forest hike to **Pico Dama** (p246). Back in Belén and Rais Ta, arrange a morning boat ride or flight to **Brus Laguna** (p247) for a night or two in the savannah cabañas. Afterwards, head back to Brus Laguna town, stock up on supplies and fly to **Wampusirpi** (p251) where – knock on wood – you'll be able to hitch or hire a boat ride into the **Reserva de la Biósfera Tawahka Asangni** (p251). Boat back to Wampusirpi and fly to **Puerto Lempira** (p252). Time permitting, bike to **Mistruk** (p254) or **Kaukira** (p254) for the day; otherwise fly from Puerto Lempira back to **La Ceiba** (p177).

An organized tour can be a good option for exploring this part of the country, visiting many of the places in this itinerary but saving you the time and hassle of arranging transport and other details. In fact, one of the best ways to see La Moskitia is on a seven- to 10-day rafting trip, starting in Olancho (see p238). The trip takes you down the lush Río Patuca and through the Tawahka region...an incredible journey.

This itinerary includes the Río Plátano and Tawahka Biosphere Reserves, and small Miskitu and Garífuna villages along the coast. A full tour takes two weeks, but you can hit the highlights in seven to 10 days. A five-day visit will feel rushed.



COBBLESTONES & CATHEDRALS

From **Tegucigalpa** (p65), head straight to **Santa Lucía** (p79), a pretty hilltop village that is often overlooked for better-known Valle de Ángeles. Loop around to **Yuscarán** (p85), a charming colonial town on the way to nowhere. Back in Tegucigalpa, head north to **Comayagua** (p159) with its soaring cathedral, broad Parque Central and traditional religious festivals. Next, go up and around to **Copán Ruinas** (p119), which in addition to its archaeological riches, is a picturesque and lively town, popular with backpackers. From here it's a short drive or bus ride to **Santa Rosa de Copán** (p134) and its recently restored city center and a boho bar scene. Continue south to **Gracias** (p138), a cool mountain redoubt with clay tile-roofed houses, cobblestone streets and great hiking nearby. This is part of the Ruta Lenca (Lenca Route), a string of small indigenous villages that eventually leads back to the main highway, and on to Tegucigalpa. An intrepid traveler could hike their way from village to village, stopping for a day in **La Campa** (p143), **San Manuel de Colohete** (p145) and **San Marcos de Caiquín** (p144), even extending the trip with backwoods romps to **San Sebastián** (p145) and **Belén Gualcho** (p137). Time permitting, continue your colonial exploration by zipping out to **San Marcos de Colón** (p91), an underappreciated colonial gem near the Nicaraguan border that serves as a gateway to a nature reserve brimming with monkeys.



This tour visits the places many travelers skip en route to bigger, better-known destinations. You'll appreciate having a car for part of this itinerary – buses to some of these towns are few and far between. Allow two to three weeks.

TAILORED TRIPS

BENEATH THE SURFACE

This Caribbean romp takes you to the best beaches, dive spots and snorkeling and maritime adventures the nation has to offer. From the US you can take a non-stop flight to **Roatán** (p202), thus avoiding San Pedro Sula or La Ceiba. In Roatán, look for a hotel and independent dive shop in **West End** (p207), or stay at a resort with its own dive shop in **Sandy Bay** (p215) or **West Bay** (p213). For more isolation, look for resorts further afield, at **Palmetto Bay** (p218) or **Paya Bay** (p220). Some of Roatán's most memorable dive spots include Hole in the Wall, West End Wall and Mary's Place. For snorkeling, West Bay is good (though showing increasing damage).

From Roatán, head across to **Utila** (p221) aboard Captain Vern's 'almost seaworthy' **catamaran** (p203) – we love the duct-taped windows. Laid-back Utila caters mostly to backpackers and independent travelers, with just a few up-scale resorts on the western end. Utila's best diving is on the north shore, though the sea mounts on the south side are gorgeous. For snorkeling, try Airport Reef, the Utila Cays and Blue Bayou beach.

Take the ferry back to La Ceiba and get onto a plane for **Guanaja** (p230). Instead of staying in Bonacca, the main town, head to one of the resorts around the island, all of which offer diving and snorkeling. The Pinnacle, Lee's Pleasure, Jim's Silver Lode and the Jado Trader are all favorite spots.

Fly back to La Ceiba for one last stop – **Cayos Cochinos** (p191). You can arrange a one-day snorkel or dive trip through Palma Real hotel or arrange an independent trip – snorkeling only – from one of the boatmen in Sambo Creek (p190). Plantation Beach Resort is the only hotel in Cayos Cochinos offering daily and weekly dive-and-lodging packages.

GIVING BACK & KEEPING IT GREEN

This sustainable adventure takes you to some of the nation's wildest areas and most remote towns. Begin in **San Pedro Sula** (p109), where you may be able to arrange volunteer opportunities through local NGOs, before heading on to La Moskitia. Forget the airplane, instead travel by 'chicken boat,' dugout canoe and foot to the **Laguna de Ibans** (p239) and on to **Las Marias** (p243). The grassroots tourist infrastructure here is bare-bones basic, but your money goes a long way toward developing school programs, keeping kids healthy and protecting an already-at-risk environment. From here, it's back to the mainland, where you can skip the mainstay attractions, opting instead to ascend **La Picucha** (p102) with a local guide, volunteer at a school near **Valle de Ángeles** (p81) or **Copán Ruinas** (p120), or help protect the wildlife of Parque Nacional Pico Bonito as a volunteer for **Guaruma Servicios** (p190). Along the way, check if your tour operator, hotelier and restaurant owner are able to do anything to help protect the environment and give back to the local community.

CARRIBBEAN SEA

Roatán
Utila
Guanaja
Cayos Cochinos



PACIFIC OCEAN

CARRIBBEAN SEA



PACIFIC OCEAN

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