

# Honduras

Tourism in Honduras crashed and burned in late 2009. When former President Manuel Zelaya was exiled to Costa Rica, all of the tourists went with him. Insurance companies pulled the plug and occupancy rates plummeted countrywide. But the little country that could, where Columbus cast his eyes starboard and spotted the lush tropical shores near Trujillo; where the Maya built a monumental citadel at Copán Ruinas that flourished for some five centuries; where laid-back Afro-Caribbean vibes permeate life on the north coast and the reef-rich Bay Islands; and where cobblestone colonial mountain towns flourish below misty mountaintops, has taken its worst year for tourism in the country's history and used it as an opportunity to reset. In the meantime, you can jungle-hop through the intriguing and wild Mosquito Coast, bathe in the crystalline waters of tranquil Utila and Roatán, bird-watch until your eyes bulge out in verdant cloud forests and wander forgotten colonial capitals like Gracias and Comayagua without a soul to share it all with. Go on. Honduras is waiting.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 112,090 sq km (about the size of England)
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$30 per day, more on the Bay Islands
- **Capital** Tegucigalpa
- **Costs** Budget hotel room US\$7 to US\$20, meal US\$2 to US\$7, open-water diving course on Utila or Roatán US\$240
- **Country Code** ☎ 504
- **Languages** Spanish; also English on Bay Islands
- **Money** US\$1 = L18.90 (lempiras); US dollars accepted on Bay Islands
- **Population** 7.79 million
- **Seasons** Rainy season (September to February, especially on the coast), dry season (December to May)
- **Time** GMT plus eight hours



## TRAVEL HINTS

Antimalarial medication should be seriously considered if traveling on the north coast or Bay Islands. Chloroquine – sold as ‘Aralen’ in most pharmacies – is the drug of choice. See p737 for dosage.

## OVERLAND ROUTES

Border crossings include Corinto and El Florido (Guatemala), El Amatillo and El Poy (El Salvador), and Guasaule (Nicaragua). There are twice-weekly ferries to Belize, and occasional hitchhiker possibilities to Nicaragua and Jamaica. There is no fee to leave Honduras, but entering is L60 (US\$3).

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bay Islands** (p408) Immerse yourself in this diver's paradise, both for its prices and the rich underwater world that makes up part of the Earth's second-largest reef system.
- **Copán Ruinas** (p369) Marvel at intricate stone carvings and epic ancient structures tracing back to an extraordinary Maya empire.
- **Gracias** (p381) Explore the sleepy former capital of Central America, now a cobblestoned refuge of colonial days gone by.
- **Lago de Yojoa** (p360) Discover misty cloud forests soaring above postcard-blue waters flush with birds and homebrews near the Pulhapanzak waterfalls.
- **Best journey** (p358) Buckle up for a bone-rattling ride through La Ruta Lenca, a series of little-visited highland communities with proud indigenous hearts.
- **Off the beaten track** (p427) Go into the wild on an upriver adventure into Central America's last untamed wilderness, the Reserva de la Biosfera del Río Plátano.

## CURRENT EVENTS

Little Honduras took the global center stage on June 28, 2009, when then-President Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a dramatic twilight raid on his home in the suburbs of Tegucigalpa. While Zelaya was forcefully ex-patriated to Costa Rica, international media and foreign heads of state jumped all over Honduras, calling it a military coup and condemning Honduran powers-that-be as totalitarian powermongers. But the 'coup' in Honduras may not have been a coup at all.

In the months leading up to the constitutional crisis, Zelaya was accused of abusing power, allegedly attempting to rewrite the constitution and moving forward with an illegal re-election campaign and plans to establish a National Constituent Assembly. Invoking its own constitutional law, the supreme court issued a court order for the armed forces to detain and remove Zelaya from office, with President of Congress, Roberto Micheletti, taking over as interim president with the support of the military, the judicial and executive branches of government and the Catholic church.

According to the Honduran Constitution it was a legal move. However, the armed forces made a crucial mistake: deporting Zelaya rather than holding him for trial (there's a list of crimes he is accused of, including treason and abuse of office) was not only illegal but allowed Zelaya to stand by defiantly, vowing to return to Honduras and reclaim the presidency. Three months after his removal, Zelaya made good on his promise, clandestinely entering the country and making his way to the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa. Meanwhile, Honduras held trans-

parent democratic elections in November 2009, electing Nationalist party candidate Porfirio 'Pepe' Lobo, a center-right conservative (the polar opposite of Zelaya). In a controversial move, Lobo signed a letter of safe passage for Zelaya days before his inauguration, allowing the ousted president to travel hassle-free to the Dominican Republic as a 'distinguished guest,' ending a three-month standoff at the Brazilian embassy. The day before Zelaya's departure, Congress approved an amnesty decree for all political offenses committed during the crisis, effectively giving the country internal closure on the matter.

All was not contentious, however, as Los Catrachos, the Honduran national soccer team – as if on cue – earned a trip to the 2010 World Cup after a dramatic last-minute US goal against Costa Rica sent them through. Honduras' first appearance at the big dance since 1982 breathed new life into a wounded country drowning in a wholly controversial year, but it was short-lived. Los Catrachos were sent packing in the group stage after failing to score a single goal.

## HISTORY

### Pre-Columbian History

More than 3000 years ago, pre-Columbian settlers made their homes and farms in the fertile Copán, Sula and Comayagua valleys – although humans are thought to have roamed these lands from about 10,000 BC. Recovered pottery fragments suggest separate settlements and groups traded with each other.

At around the same time as the European Dark Ages, Copán Ruinas, the southeasterly