



El Salvador

503 / POP 6.3 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Beto's (p297)
- ➔ R&R (p318)
- ➔ Balompie Cafe (p313)
- ➔ Danilo's (p304)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ La Tortuga Verde (p333)
- ➔ Hotel Mopelia (p306)
- ➔ Los Almendros de San Lorenzo (p338)
- ➔ Casa ILB (p293)

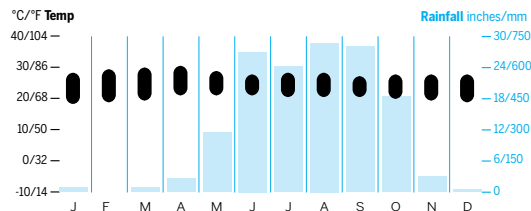
Why Go?

El Salvador is that little dynamo in Central America that past visitors just keep going on and on about. Glimpses of tropical paradise, lush tracts of pre-industrial national park, colonial splendor astride pristine volcanic lakes, searing colors and a fierce creative vision sit quietly in the shadows of an indomitable local pride. Here you'll find a glorious coastline with world-class waves, a culture-clad capital famed for its nightlife, hard-core war tourism and small-town charm by the plaza-load.

Salvadorans themselves are genuinely hospitable. Once departing en masse, many are now content to return home, the once enviable rite of passage now cut short by global economics and a growing sentiment that home might just be where the fresh start is.

When to Go

San Salvador



Dec & Jan End of the rain, bright green landscapes, perfect weather. Friendly, relaxed scene.

May–Aug Surf is up (so high you need to know what you're doing).

Jul–Nov Turtle nesting season! Chaperone baby sea turtles to their new homes among the waves.

AT A GLANCE

Currency US dollar (US\$)

Languages Spanish, Nahuat

Money US\$30 to US\$35 per day

Visas US\$10 tourist card for citizens of most countries

Time GMT minus six hours

Fast Facts

- **Area** 21,040 sq km (smallest in Central America)
- **Capital** San Salvador
- **Emergency** ☎911

Set Your Budget

- **Budget hotel** US\$15
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1.50
- **Three-hour bus ride** US\$1.70
- **Bean-and-cheese pupusa** US\$0.40
- **Surfboard rental per day** US\$10

Resources

- **El Salvador Travel** (www.elsalvador.travel)
ISTU's excellent new site.
- **Salva Natura Fundacion Ecologica** (www.salvanatura.org)
For reservations and information on Parque Nacional El Imposible and Parque Nacional Los Volcanes.
- **Search Beat** (www.search-beat.com/elsalvador.htm)
Topic-based lists of Salvadoran websites.

Connections

From Guatemala, enter through Anguiatú, San Cristóbal or La Hachadura. From Honduras, El Poy or El Amatillo are your two official options.

Many operators are now offering boat transfers from La Union, El Salvador to Potosi, Nicaragua. The best of these are La Tortuga Verde in El Cuco and Suchitoto Outfitters in Suchitoto. This is a both a time- and cost-effective way to continue your travels through Central America. For more detailed information, see Survival Guide on p352.

FIRST TIME IN EL SALVADOR

El Salvador is small so you don't need a lot of time to see a lot of the country; this itinerary can be done in a week. Start in the capital, **San Salvador**, to get your head around recent history in the excellent museums and galleries. If it's a weekend, party in **Zona Rosa** and **Colonia Escalon**.

Shake off the smog for a night or two in **Suchitoto** then veer west to **Lago Coatepeque** for a dip in the volcano lake. Next scoot along the **Ruta de las Flores**, ducking in and out of coffee plantations and waterfalls. Stay in either **Juayúa** or **Ataco**.

Reach an endpoint in **Tacuba** before braving **Parque Nacional El Imposible** all the way to the Pacific Coast at Barra de Santiago. Cruise along the **Costa del Balsamo**, stopping for a night or two in **Playa El Tunco**, then punch east along the highway to **El Cuco**, where you can arrange your boat to Nicaragua.

Essential Food & Drink

- **What to eat** A typical breakfast includes eggs, beans or *casamiento* (rice and beans mixed together), fried plantains, cheese, tortillas and coffee or juice. *Almuerzo* (lunch) is the largest meal of the day and often the most expensive. El Salvador street food is all about *pupusas*: round cornmeal dough stuffed with a combination of cheese, refried beans, *chicharrón* (pork rinds), or *revuelta* (all three), and grilled. Also popular in the evening are *panes* – French breads sliced open and stuffed with chicken, salsa, salad and pickled vegetables.
- **Where to eat** *Panaderías* usually offer a selection of morning cakes and coffee. Most *pupuserías* open at around 4pm and some work the same sidewalk space for years.
- **What to drink** *Licuada*s (fruit drinks made with water or milk); *horchata* (rice milk and cinnamon); and *refresco de ensalada* – a mixed fruit juice served with a spoon for the fruit salad floating on top, sangria style. Note that *refresco*, which means soft drink in many countries, here means lemonade.