

Welcome to Central America

From clear, turquoise seas to magnificent Maya ruins, lush cloud forests, bustling markets and coffee farms, Central America can be as chilled out or as thrilling as you wish.

Outdoor Adventures

In Central America, nature is all about discovery. Explore the ruins of Spanish forts on the Caribbean coast or boat deep into indigenous territories in a dugout canoe. Wildlife is incidental: a resplendent quetzal on the highland trail, the unruly troupe of howler monkeys screeching through the canopy or the breaching whale that turns your ferry ride into an adrenaline event. Adventure tourism means zipping through rainforest canopies, swimming alongside sea turtles or trekking to sublime cloud forest vistas. Eight countries with 300-plus volcanoes and two long tropical coasts make for a pretty big playground.

Ruins

With a culture that hearkens back 4000 years, the Maya are widely considered the greatest pre-Columbian civilization. Their territory sprawled from Mexico to Honduras, with ruins in five present-day Central American countries: from the lost temples of Tikal, soaring above the Guatemalan jungle canopy, to Mexico's otherworldly Palenque and Tulum, perched above the crashing surf. See life-like carved jaguars in Honduras' Copán, and find out why Chichén Itzá was voted one of the new seven wonders of the world.

Culture

Central America may be the size of Texas, but its tapestry of cultures has created a diverse and dynamic society. With more than 20 Maya languages spoken, Guatemala is the region's true indigenous heartland, though traditions are still held fast in many other groups throughout the region. The Spanish left their mark with gorgeous colonial plazas and silent hours of siesta. African culture permeates many parts of the Caribbean coast, from Congo rebel traditions to Garifuna drumbeats. And the last century brought the rest of the world, including Asians, Europeans and North Americans. Cosmopolitan nightlife marks Panama City, where colonial charm now mingles with skyscrapers.

Beaches

With a spate of deserted islands, chill Caribbean vibes on one side and monster Pacific swells on the other, Central America can deliver the best of all beach worlds. Scuba dive the Pacific with whale sharks, snorkel the world's second-largest coral reef off Belize or set sail in Panama's indigenous territory of Kuna Yala, where virgin isles wear nary a footprint. World-class breaks lure surfers psyched to have them all to themselves. Hello, paradise.



Why I Love Central America

By Carolyn McCarthy, Author

Trekking through rainforests, seeing indigenous culture and sailing between pristine Caribbean islands here opened up my sense of wonder. The wildlife viewing is astounding, from world-renowned parks to urban outskirts housing an errant sloth. For me, the region is a confluence – an explosion of nature, cultures and beliefs in a messy, musical arrangement that's everyday life in Latin America.

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