

HONDURAS

Honduras is both enjoyable and inexpensive and with a slow pace, natural beauty and low-profile tourism, allows for a most destination for travellers (well-armed with insect repellent). Despite its turbulent political history, this poor cousin of the region is a dream destination for those keen on keeping away from the crowds. With great snorkelling, diving and swimming around the Bay and Hog Islands, and excellent beaches around Tela and Trujillo, Honduras has a universal appeal. For the best walks, the Parque Nacional Celaque, 45km (28mi) southeast of Santa Rosa de Copán contains the country's highest peak, a lush cloud forest, the headwaters of 10 rivers and a majestic waterfall. Parque Nacional Pico Bonito, a few kilometres south of La Ceiba, has trails around an unexplored reserve and a challenging peak for mountaineers. The Mayan ruins of Copán are the most remarkable archaeological site and includes the Stelae of the Great Plaza, portraying the rulers of Copán, dating from AD613; the ball court and hieroglyphic stairway; and the Acropolis, which has superb carved reliefs of the 16 kings of Copán.

Electricity: 210V & 110V, 60 HZ

Time Zone: GMT/UTC -6

Dialling Code: 504

Climate

May through to June are great times to catch several town fairs and celebrations, including a weeklong carnival held in La Ceiba during the third week of May. The coastal lowlands are warm all year-round, while the mountainous interior can be cool and rainy, especially between May and October. On the Caribbean coast it rains practically all the time and floods can occur on the north coast.

Festival Calendar

1st two weeks of February - Festival of the Virgen de Suyapa, the patron saint of Honduras - Celebrated in Suyapa, just 7 km outside of the country's capital. People from all over Honduras attend.

March 15th – 20th - Cultural fair at the ruins of Copán

April 14th - Day of the Americas

April - Holy week

May 1st - Labour Day

3rd week in May - Carnival - The biggest, most impressive celebrations are in La Ceiba with parades, dancing and elaborate costumes.

September 15th - Independence Day

October 3rd - Francisco Morazan Day

October 12th - Columbus Day

October 21st - Army Day

December 6th – 16th - Central American Fair for Tourism and Artisans - Held annually in Tegucigalpa.

December 15th – 21st - Cultural fair held at the ruins of Copán

Currency

Travelling through Honduras can be easy as it is relatively inexpensive. Budgeting \$15 to \$20 USD per day should be adequate, depending on your personal tastes.

While both Visa credit cards and travellers' cheques are accepted, especially in larger cities, Honduras is one country where credit card usage entails a high commission rate, sometimes as high as 6%. So ensure that you have plenty of travellers' cheques or US currency to exchange. ATM machines are few and far between. It is very difficult to exchange any currency other than the US dollar.

Visas

Currently, most nationalities do not require a Visa for travel to Honduras. Please check with your local embassy prior to departure.

Health

Take precautions against Chagas' disease, cholera, dengue fever, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, malaria

Best time to go

There really is no a bad time to travel to Honduras. Technically, the dry season runs from November to April, yet most of the lowland areas receive rain year round. The rains normally come in short, strong spurts and then the skies clear up. Since you are probably going to experience some rain regardless of when you decide to travel, consider February to May, as many of the festivals take place during these months.

Upon arrival

Once you've reclaimed your baggage and cleared customs, you will be warmly welcomed to Honduras, assisted with your luggage and taken you to your hotel by private air-conditioned minivan/bus. Please do not leave the airport terminal building unless you have made contact with Amazing Peru staff. Also ignore the calls from taxi drivers as your private transport has been provided for you.

Food and drink

Drink only bottled water. Pasteurised milk is widely available. Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Avoid street food vendors and the cheaper restaurants.

What to eat

To try some typical foods, here is a selection of what we recommend.

Bananas

Coconut bread - Found on the Caribbean coast, and is delicious.

Baleadas - White flour tortillas filled with refried beans, cream and crumbled white cheese

Seafood - Fresh, cheap and delicious along the coast

Tapado - A stew of either meat or fish, plaintain, yucca and coconut milk

Tajaditas - Crisp, fried banana chips

Pinchos - Kebabs made with meat, chicken or shrimp

Pupusas - Thick flour tortillas filled with pork sausage and/or cheese

What to drink

Licuados - Blended fruit and milk drinks, popular since Honduras really has a good variety of tropical fruits to choose from

Flor de Caña - A good local rum

Horchata - Made with morro seeds, rice water and cinnamon

Highlights

Tegucigalpa

The capital of Honduras is a bustling city nestled into a bowl-shaped valley nearly 1000m (3280ft) above sea level. It has a fresh and pleasant climate, and the surrounding ring of mountains is covered in pine trees. The name Tegucigalpa means 'silver hill', as the city was a mining center in 1578.

Around Tegucigalpa

There are plenty of worthy attractions around Tegucigalpa, including the huge Gothic Basílica de Suyapa, 7km (4mi) southeast of the city center. The Virgen de Suyapa, patron saint of Honduras, is believed to have performed hundreds of miracles.

La Tigra National Park, 11km (7mi) northeast of the city, is one of the most beautiful places in Honduras. Located at an altitude of 2270m (7446ft), the pristine 7482ha (18,480ac) park preserves a lush cloud forest that is home to ocelots, pumas, monkeys and quetzal.

Bay Islands

Roatán, Guanaja and Utila - 50km (31mi) off the north coast of Honduras - are a continuation of the Belizean reefs and offer great snorkelling and diving. The islands' economy is based mostly on fishing, but tourism is becoming increasingly important. Utila retains low-key tourist facilities, while Roatán is gradually joining Guanaja as a more upmarket retreat. Most travelers head to the West End on Roatán, but

Utila is the cheapest of the three islands to visit. Whichever island you visit, just make sure you bring plenty of insect repellent.

Comayagua

Comayagua, northwest of Tegucigalpa, was the capital of Honduras from 1537 to 1880, and retains much evidence of its colonial importance. The cathedral in the centre of the town is beautiful. Built between 1685 and 1715, it contains much fine art and boasts one of the oldest clocks in the world. The clock was made over 800 years ago by the Moors for the palace of Alhambra in Granada, and was donated to the town by King Philip II of Spain. The first university in Central America was founded in Comayagua in 1632 in the Casa Cural, which now houses the Museo Colonial.

Copán Ruinas

This beautiful village with cobbled streets passing among white adobe buildings with red-tiled roofs has nearby Mayan ruins of the same name. There are hot springs a one-hour drive from the village and nearby Santa Rosa de Copán is a picturesque mountain village with a beautiful plaza and church. The archaeological site at the ruins is open daily and includes the Stelae of the Great Plaza, portraying the rulers of Copán, dating from AD613; the ball court and hieroglyphic stairway; and the Acropolis, which has superb carved reliefs of the 16 kings of Copán.

Tela

Tela for many travelers' is their favourite Honduran Caribbean beach town. It's a small, quiet place, with superb seafood, several good places to stay and some of the most beautiful beaches on the northern coast. It's basically a place for relaxing and enjoying the simple life. There are plans to boost tourism in the area, so see the place while it's still unspoilt and quiet. The best beach is east of the town, in front of the Hotel Villas Telamar. It has pale, powdery sand and a beckoning shady grove of coconut trees.

Trujillo

The small town of Trujillo has played an important role in Central American history. Columbus first set foot on the American mainland near Trujillo on August 14, 1502. The town sits on the wide arc of the Bahía de Trujillo and is famed for its lovely beaches, coconut palms and gentle seas. Although it has a reputation as one of the country's best Caribbean beach towns, it's not usually full of tourists, except during the annual festival in late June. Apart from the attractions of the beach, there is a 17th-century fortress, the grave of William Walker and a Museo Arqueológico.

El Tigre

This 783m (2568ft) high volcanic island in the Golfo de Fonseca is home to the quiet fishing village of Amapala, a couple of decent beaches and some good walks. Apart from the tranquility, there are good views and terrific seafood. Small boats and a car ferry access the island from Coyolito.

Hog Islands

The Cayos Cochinos, or Hog Islands, are a group of small, privately owned islands and cays, 17km (10mi) off the coast near La Ceiba. The islands were once inhabited by Maya, but got their name from the conquistador Cortés, who tried to farm them. There is good snorkelling and diving around the islands, some of which have black coral reefs. Boats to the islands can be hired from Nueva Armenia, 40km (25mi) east of La Ceiba. One of the islands has an up-market resort, but you should be able to camp on the cays if you ask the owners' permission.

Mosquitia

This vast, inaccessible region in northeastern Honduras is inhabited by small groups of Miskito, Paya and Sumo peoples. Travelers are attracted by the pristine wilderness and abundant wildlife, including manatees, monkeys, alligators and fine bird life. One of the downsides of the isolation is the nonexistent infrastructure, so be prepared to rough it, carry in food supplies and eat with local families. Attractions include the magnificent Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve and relaxing boat trips on the rivers and lagoons.

Parque Nacional Marino Punta Sal

There are mangrove forests, swamps, a small tropical rain forest, offshore reefs and a rocky point in this exquisite national marine park. The area, west of Tela, is completely unspoilt and undeveloped, so visitors need to take their own food and a tent or hammock. Getting to the park is an adventure in itself and takes about two days by a combination of bus, truck, boat and walking. Access will improve under plans laid

down by the Tela Bay Development Project, but the environmental impact of this scheme has not been calculated.

Hotels

All the hotels we recommend are clean, well located and comfortable hotels varying in services according to their category. We rarely use hostels as the price difference is negligible between a good hostel and a hotel. In places like the national reserves areas we do work with some very good lodges. It is important to remember that Honduras is a poor country and three star hotels here will not necessarily be the same as three star hotels in Europe or the US. We do endeavour to choose the best hotels in line with your budget. We will always quote you with good hotels on all our programmes but upgrades or downgrades will be available as per your request. However, as the price will decrease with downgrades, this will ultimately reflect in the services and standards of the hotel.

Flights

Unless otherwise stated, we provide all internal flights in your programme, excluding the airport taxes. We also provide international flights around Central and South America and can quote, upon request, your international flight to Honduras. We work directly with the best airlines in Central and South America but are not responsible for any changes in flight schedules or cancellations made by the airlines. This is the responsibility of the airline in question. We will always endeavour to minimise any delays or changes but cannot guarantee a successful outcome.

Insurance

It is a mandatory requirement that all our customers take out adequate travel insurance cover. Once you have obtained your insurance, it is company practice to check the validity and cover of your insurance policy and we hold the right to refuse travel to anyone whose insurance does not satisfy Amazing Peru's stringent criteria. These include cancellation and curtailment, death or injury, medical insurance, emergency repatriation, delayed baggage, loss and theft etc.