



**DISCOVERY GROUP TOURS**

# ALCIÓN: CENTRAL AMERICA DISCOVERY

22 days from **£4,174pp**

**PANAMA / PANAMA CITY / BOQUETE AND THE CHIRIQUÍ HIGHLANDS / COSTA RICA /  
CARIBBEAN COAST / MONTEVERDE AND THE CLOUD FOREST / NICARAGUA / OMETEPE  
ISLAND / GRANADA / LEON / EL SALVADOR / GULF OF FONSECA AND EASTERN EL  
SALVADOR / SUCHITOTO / HONDURAS / COPAN / GUATEMALA / ANTIGUA AND THE**



## WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

## OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

### WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

### TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

### THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love



## OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

Highlights of this three week overland escorted tour in Central America include the Mayan ruins of Copán, the Panama Canal and Ometepe Island, as well as the colonial cities of Granada, León, Suchitoto and Antigua.

	UK clients depart, arriving Panama City the same evening.
<b>DAY 1</b>	Overnight in the capital.
<b>DAY 2</b>	Explore Panama City and the Canal.
<b>DAY 3</b>	Travel west to the highland town of Boquete.
<b>DAY 4</b>	Travel to the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica
<b>DAY 5</b>	Continue to Sarapiquí.
<b>DAY 6</b>	Explore National Parks, bird watch, white-water raft or just relax.
<b>DAYS 7-8</b>	Visit the Monteverde cloud forest.
<b>DAY 9</b>	Cross into Nicaragua
<b>DAYS 10-11</b>	Explore Ometepe Island
<b>DAY 12</b>	By boat and road to colonial Granada.
<b>DAY 13</b>	Visit Masaya National Park
<b>DAY 14</b>	Travel to the former political hothouse of León
<b>DAY 15</b>	Drive through Honduras and into El Salvador
<b>DAYS 16-17</b>	Travel to Suchitoto and explore the town
<b>DAYS 18-19</b>	Visit the Mayan ruins of Copán.
<b>DAYS 20-21</b>	Cross into Guatemala and continue to colonial Antigua.
<b>DAY 22</b>	Depart for international flight or extension. UK clients arrive home the following day.

## ITINERARY

Jumping off from the Panama Canal, this really is a journey of discovery, revealing the highlights of 6 countries crammed into the isthmus linking Mexico with South America. Crowned by a chain of volcanoes, dotted with twinkling lakes, blessed with a balmy mix of tropical and temperate climate, and punctuated with lively indigenous villages, Mayan ruins and impressive colonial towns, these lands offer a breathtaking experience for visitors.

The area is especially rich in its biodiversity, and extensive national parks have been established in the sultry rainforests, along the sparkling coastline and across the rocky mountain slopes, where profuse wildlife can be observed in its natural habitat. Explore some delightful towns, hike, ride, raft, shop; there is something here to indulge every enthusiasm.

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**UK clients depart, arriving Panama City the same evening.**

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### DAY 1

#### **Overnight in the capital.**

Those passengers arriving on an international flight will be met at the airport by the tour leader or a local representative and escorted to the group hotel.

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### DAY 2

#### **Explore Panama City and the Canal.**

Your guided tour explores Central America's most cosmopolitan and wealthy capital, built along picturesque Panama Bay. The contemporary Hong Kong-style skyscrapers of the Paitilla district dominate the skyline at one end, whilst at the other lies the decaying, peeling colonial heart of San Felipe. After discovering the narrow streets, delightful plazas and overhanging balconies of this area you continue to Panama Viejo. This is the site of the city's original settlement until it was ransacked by the infamous British buccaneer Henry Morgan in 1671.

The excursion proceeds out of town to the Panama Canal and the Miraflores Locks. As the excellent visitors' centre elaborates, this extraordinary feat of engineering was started by the French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps in 1880, following his success with the recently inaugurated Suez Canal, but was only completed in 1914 after the Americans assumed ownership. To the delight of most Panamanians, the canal was returned to Panama on 31 December 1999.

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### DAY 3

#### Travel west to the highland town of Boquete.

Fly over western Panama to the city of David where you switch to a bus for the last stretch. The ascent to Boquete is the most scenic section of the trip as the road winds up through the mist and into the cloud forest. In the foothills of the Barú volcano the town of Boquete, with its cool, clean air, comes as a pleasant respite from the heat and frenzy of Panama City. This settlement in the heart of Panama's coffee-growing country is your base for explorations into the surrounding area.

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### DAY 4

#### Travel to the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica

In the afternoon a bus heading north takes you across the continental divide to the Caribbean coast. This beautiful road winds its way through forested mountain scenery before descending to the coast. A short, scenic road journey through wooded countryside brings you to the Costa Rican border. An anomaly in Central America, Costa Rica has long been a haven of stability; there's a democratic government, and they feel no need for a national army.

Starting along the road from Sixaola to Bribri vast tropical plantations stretch on either side as far as the eye can see. After an hour the road returns to the Caribbean coast. Long isolated from the rest of the Latin-influenced country, this region has a predominately English-speaking, Afro-Caribbean culture: a very informal, relaxed atmosphere pervades. Here there are exquisite volcanic beaches at Cahuita where you spend the night.

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### DAY 5

#### Continue to Sarapiquí.

From here it's another 4hrs onto Sarapiquí, a small town that has become a popular base in which to take advantage of the wonderful forested national parks in the area, dispersed between banana and pineapple plantations.

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## DAY 6

### Explore National Parks, bird watch, white-water raft or just relax.

From the lodge where we are based spend the day exploring this exciting densely forested region. This exuberant foliage creates an enticing habitat for many species of bird and wildlife and there are numerous national parks to explore. You can view the canopy from above via a series of hanging bridges and towers, or hike through it on trails and paths that wind through the trees.

For the more adventurous the Rio Sarapiquí runs just east of the main street and is popular for rafting on its rapids. There are numerous other activities in the area including mountain-biking, boat trips and canyoning or you may prefer just to relax and prepare for the next leg of your trip.

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## DAYS 7-8

### Visit the Monteverde cloud forest.

Board a private bus for the 4 hour journey to Santa Elena on the edge of the Monteverde National Park. This is a magical sanctuary of verdant, dripping cloud forest high up in the Costa Rican mountains. Monteverde is home to the elusive Resplendent quetzal, an exotic bird with an emerald green body and rust-red breast which is an iconic symbol of Central America. You have a day here to explore this exquisite region. There is a guided tour of the Cloud Forest. There are optional excursions to a nearby butterfly farm or, for those in search of a bit of action, there is an optional canopy tour over the cloud forest.

## DAY 9

### Cross into Nicaragua

You continue towards Nicaragua, the journey starting with a steep but spectacular descent to the coastal plains, and, weather permitting, you may catch a glimpse of the imposing Arenal volcano. Be prepared for a dramatic rise in temperature. The bus passes through Liberia, a tranquil provincial capital in northern Costa Rica. After two hours you arrive at the border with Nicaragua.

Tourism is still in its infancy and the difference between the two countries is striking. The fact that it's not on many tourists radars means its welcoming people and unspoilt scenery come as a pleasant surprise to those who do visit.

The journey continues to San Jorge on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. From San Jorge you catch the next available boat across the lake to the twin volcanoes of Ometepe Island.

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## DAYS 10-11

### Explore Ometepe Island

Ometepe is a serene and undeveloped island. Even in comparison with the rest of Nicaragua, the infrastructure is basic with only rough roads and simple accommodation. Much of the island is still covered in primary rainforest and home to many different species of monkeys and parrots. It is also famous for its pre-Columbian stone statues and petroglyphs, carved by the Chorotega Indians centuries ago. This will all be seen on an organised tour of the island as well as the famous village of Altagracia, the Charco Verde nature reserve and Ojo de Agua, a forest-fringed natural swimming pool with a café for a refreshing swim in the crystal clear waters.

There are also opportunities for scenic and challenging walks on the slopes of the island's imposing volcanoes (Concepción and Maderas) which dwarf the surrounding landscapes. You can visit one of many coffee cooperatives on the island. Horse-riding and fishing are also options here. There are many spots to sit back and enjoy the views across the lake and take a dip in its warm waters.

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## DAY 12

### By boat and road to colonial Granada.

Head back to the mainland and on to the evocative Spanish colonial town of Granada. This charming city was once one of the wealthiest in Latin America, a staging post for the shipment of looted gold. The architecture reflects this one-time prosperity: huge wooden doors open on to shady patios in once-aristocratic houses. Efforts are now being made to restore the city's faded splendour. You will get a feel for this is fascinating city, on an informal walking tour with your tour leader.

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## DAY 13

### Visit Masaya National Park

Enjoy a trip to Masaya National Park, visiting volcanic crater lakes, the old hilltop fort of Coyotepe, the impressive and still active Masaya volcano and the town of Masaya itself. The handicraft market in Masaya is well known for its intricate handmade hammocks.

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## DAY 14

### Travel to the former political hothouse of León

You continue northwards across dusty volcanic plains, passing the Momotombo volcano, to León, another of Nicaragua's restored colonial cities. Here time is best spent wandering through the cobbled streets and around the shady plazas and ornate churches composing the town centre. Even during colonial times León had a strong liberal tradition (as opposed to the conservatism that characterised Granada), and it has remained the country's radical and intellectual centre, with a thriving university population. The Sandinista heritage is still visible today with a few large murals and revolutionary graffiti plastered over some of the town's white adobe walls.

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## DAY 15

### Drive through Honduras and into El Salvador

An early morning journey takes you to the border with Honduras, where cutting across the hot coastal plain of Choluteca, you soon cross another border and enter El Salvador. El Salvador is Central America's least visited country and another with a turbulent past, where throughout the 1980s a chaotic civil war was fought in the mountains and fields that dominate the landscape. El Salvador is once again finding its feet, and you're soon whizzing through the country and onto the port of La Unión which sits astride the Gulf of Fonseca.

In the evening you can take a short 15 minute drive to the more temperate surrounds of Conchagua. Here you can visit the 'pupusodromo' a perfect place to sample El Salvador's National Dish.

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## DAYS 16-17

### Travel to Suchitoto and explore the town

A drive of 4hrs brings you to the atmospheric town of Suchitoto which is located just 47km north of the dynamic capital San Salvador, but it is a complete contrast in all other senses. Virtually untouched by tourists it is easily navigated on foot on the included tour of the town, as you pass low level colonial buildings along cobblestoned streets, where craftsmen display their goods. From the centre, where a beautiful white washed church dominates the plaza, the town spreads down to the shores of Lake Suchitlán, where restaurants offer wonderful views of the lake and the nearby forest reserves. The surrounding area is a renowned bird migration zone, and you can spend a day walking along the trails of the forests that surround the town or take a leisurely boat trip out onto the lake. Alternatively just spend your time recharging your batteries.

## DAYS 18-19

### Visit the Mayan ruins of Copán.

Rural Honduras beckons. It's a 6-7 hour journey to Copán, which, along with Tikal, is the most impressive of the Mayan ruined complexes. This region of western Honduras is a remote province of velvety green hills and rushing rivers, dotted with whitewashed colonial villages where the horse is still the main form of transport. Its genial atmosphere comes in part from its relative prosperity gained through trade in coffee and tobacco, and through the tourism generated by the Mayan ruins.

Spend the night at Copán Ruinas, an attractive, cobbled village close to the site. There is time for a short hill walk, a visit to some nearby hot springs, but the main attractions, of course, are the archaeological site and the superb new museum, both of which you visit the following day.

Copán is unique, not so much for its impressive temples, but for the exquisite stelae and their artwork: huge, intricately carved statues depict the complicated history of the area and its great rulers. One of the highlights is the imperious hieroglyphic stairway; each of its 63 steps is sculpted with hundreds of different glyphs that describe important events in Copán's rise to prominence among the elite city states of the Mayan world. Copán flourished between 250 and 900 AD, at which point its prosperity mysteriously declined. Within about 100 years, this once-sophisticated city had been reclaimed by the jungle, only to be discovered by the Spanish conquistadors in the late 16th century, and subsequently excavated 300 years later.

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## DAYS 20-21

### Cross into Guatemala and continue to colonial Antigua.

The Guatemalan border is a 10 minute drive from Copán. From here you continue to Antigua. There is a marked change in temperature as you climb into the highlands. 'Land of eternal spring' is an accolade adopted by Guatemalans to describe the climate of this western highland region, where the heat is benign and nights are pleasantly cool.

Guatemala is unique in Central America; a mysterious, timeless country in which half of the population is Mayan. Many, especially women in the highlands, still dress in their traditional hand-woven clothing, similar to that which was worn over a thousand years ago. Antigua is a colonial city of cobbled streets, overhanging tiled roofs and a beautiful, leafy central plaza. There is an abundance of huge, ruined churches, convents and monasteries, testament to a time when Antigua was the country's capital and its main religious centre. It seems that every doorway opens onto a leafy tiled courtyard that you'll discover on your guided tour.

A dramatic backdrop of smouldering volcanoes reminds you how the city was destroyed by an eruption in 1773. Antigua is a welcoming place to relax and unwind, do some shopping and enjoy some excellent food, or just to wander around the ruined convents and enjoy the flowers in their beautifully tended gardens.

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## DAY 22

### Depart for international flight or extension.

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UK clients arrive home the following day.

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## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office  
Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides  
All land and air transport within Latin America  
Accommodation as specified  
Meals as specified  
Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

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## INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Panama City: tour of old town and the Panama Canal  
Monteverde: guided tour of one of the nature reserves  
Ometepe: tour of island  
Granada: Masaya Volcano National Park and market  
Granada: walking tour of Granada  
Suchitoto: town tour  
Copán: guided tour of the ruins  
Antigua: guided tour

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## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities  
Meals other than specified  
International flights to Latin America  
Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket  
Optional excursions

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## ESSENTIALS

### ABOUT OUR GROUP TOURS

To find out more about how our group tours including group sizes, solo travellers and why to choose us. Please click [here](#).

### TOUR LEADER

On this tour, you'll be accompanied from start to finish by one of our exceptional **Journey Latin America tour leaders**. From the moment you land in Latin America until the day the tour ends they will deal with all the practicalities, expertly adapting to the circumstances and individual needs of the group. Rather than different guides in different cities, your leader will get to know the group and keep you informed and entertained as you go.

### SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

22 days, 21 nights: Panama City 2; Boquete 1; Cahuita 1, Sarapiquí 2; Monteverde 2; Ometepe 3; Granada 2; León 1; La Union 1; Suchitoto 2; Copán 2; Antigua 2.

### ACCOMMODATION

For our Discovery Journeys we aim to use good quality, value-for-money accommodation, in a mix of larger more modern and smaller family run hotels. All the properties we use are well maintained and rooms will have a private bathroom with hot water.

The focus of these trips is on getting outside, seeing the sights, and experiencing local restaurants and cafes, therefore a few hotels may not have evening dining facilities. If you prefer more luxurious accommodation, please see our Classic Tour collection.

We use the following properties on this tour:

- Panama City: Best Western Zen Plus
- Boquete: Casa de la Abuela
- Cahuita: Hotel Atlantida
- Sarapiquí: Tirimbina
- Monteverde: Sibú Lodge
- Ometepe Island: Villa Paraiso
- Granada: Hotel Patio del Malinche
- León: Hotel La Recoleccion
- La Union: Comfort Inn Real
- Suchitoto: Posada Suchitlan
- Copán Ruinas: Casa de la Cafe
- Antigua: Villa Colonial

On rare occasions these hotels can change, however please speak to one of our consultants who can provide full details for each departure if you have any doubts. Address and contact details will be sent out with your final documents.

### TRANSPORT

1 flight. 10 road journeys (longest 6 hours) and 2 short journeys by boat. All road journeys are done by private vehicle.

### MEALS

Breakfast daily.

### OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

On this tour the price includes excursions in all the places you visit as per the itinerary. There will however likely be some free time when you may choose to take part in an optional excursion. These are booked locally through your tour leader once you are in Latin America, however we are more than happy to advise you of what is on offer in advance of your holiday so you can best plan the excursions that suit you.

### TRAVELLING ALONE

There is no extra cost for single travellers who are willing to share a room. You will be accommodated with a same-sex

member of the group who is usually also travelling solo. For single travellers who wish to be sure of having their own room there are a limited number of single rooms available, which carry a surcharge.

### TRIP SUITABILITY

There are some early mornings and long days of travel (all of which have comfort or place-of-interest stops). All walks are optional, and you can discuss with your tour leader which are suitable for you.

### CLIMATE

The trip covers six countries with climates ranging from tropical lowland to more temperate zones in the highlands. Temperatures are higher and it is the 'official' rainy season from May to September but this does not stop us running tours all year. A comprehensive overview of the weather in all the regions you are visiting can be found in our Destination pages. Our Travel Experts can answer your questions on climate and further details will be sent with your confirmation documents.

### CLOTHING, EQUIPMENT AND LUGGAGE

A daypack is essential for carrying rainwear, snacks, books/tablet and a water bottle. For day-to-day wear you should take loose-fitting, breathable clothes. Comfortable shoes are important and sandals are useful. A sun hat, sun block and sunglasses are necessary, and you should take warmer layers for the cooler evenings, as well as swimwear and insect repellent. Binoculars are useful for wildlife spotting. Some hotels will not provide hairdryers, kettles or sink plugs in the rooms so you may want to bring travel versions of these if it is a priority.

Owing to the number of road journeys on this trip, we recommend passengers pack as lightly as possible. There are plenty of opportunities to do laundry on the trip, and your tour leader will be able to advise about the best places to do this.

### MONEY

Please see the Country Info tab on this holiday for our latest currency information and advice about how to take your spending money. Tipping in Latin America is almost always done using cash. It is customary to tip tour leaders, local guides, drivers, boat crews and other service providers such as restaurant staff and porters. Full tipping guidelines are sent with your confirmation documents as is advice on local costs.

### HEALTH, ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND INSURANCE

For health information on travelling to all 6 countries visited including recommended vaccinations, please see <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/>

A Yellow Fever certificate is required for passengers under the age of 60 for entry into Nicaragua. An exemption certificate is available from travel clinics in the UK if you're unable to have the vaccine for medical reasons.

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa for any country apart from Honduras, although passports should be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins.

A visa can be obtained by contacting the Honduran embassy in London. You will enter Honduras twice on this trip so please ensure you get a multiple entry visa. Alternatively these can be paid for and then arranged by Journey Latin America with the assistance of the tour leader and our local suppliers once on tour. Please ask your travel consultant for information.

Other nationalities should enquire with us or check with the consulates.

Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on the Travel insurance website.

Our full briefing dossier contains more information on vaccinations, visas and insurance and will be provided with your final travel documents or can be requested from your travel consultant at any time.

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## GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

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Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

### GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

**0208 747 8315**

#### OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm

Saturday & Sunday: Closed

### SEND US AN EMAIL

[tours@journeylatinamerica.com](mailto:tours@journeylatinamerica.com)