



Experience Guatemala

Bike, hike, and sea kayak in the western highlands and the Petén jungle

Guatemala is a land of wonder and enchantment and boasts all of the ingredients for the perfect vacation – Aventouras combines them for the trip of a lifetime. We will bike and hike amid towering volcanoes near Antigua, sea kayak the tranquil waters of Lake Atitlán, explore the Petén and learn about the mystical Mayan culture while exploring the archaeological sites of Yaxha and Tikal.

Guatemala is one of the most authentic countries in the Americas. The traditional life of its indigenous people remains easily accessible. It features fascinating ancient Maya archaeological sites and some of the world's richest biodiversity including thick jungle, stunning volcanoes and azure lakes.

Day 1: Arrive in Guatemala City and transfer to Antigua

We meet at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City, and transfer to Antigua, one of Latin America's premier colonial cities, designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979. Here, we relax at Hotel Aurora, a lovely restored colonial mansion conveniently set near the center of town, allowing us to stroll through the city center. Tonight we enjoy a welcome dinner from tables overlooking a lovely courtyard and rose garden.

- Transfer from Guatemala City to Antigua (less than an hour)
- Welcome dinner at Restaurante Las Antorchas
- Lodging at Hotel Aurora (www.hotelauroraantigua.com) or something similar

Day 2: Mountain bike to Lake Atitlán, zip line

This morning after breakfast we drive through colorful local Mayan villages and traditional farms past terraced hillsides, and we witness daily ritual and cultural tradition, stopping along the way to begin our bike ride. After a short orientation on the operation of our bicycles, we begin our ride on spectacular back roads with incredible views of towering volcanoes that seem to reach into the horizon. In the middle of our ride we will break for lunch at a rest stop perched on the mountainside, with gorgeous views of Lake Atitlán. After lunch we finish our ride with a long and thrilling downhill that ends near Panajachel on the shores of Lake Atitlán.

Our mid-day activity gives the more adventurous in our group an opportunity to explore the forest canopy via zip line. Featuring a total of eight zip lines cruising over a gorge with stunning views of Lake Atitlán, this is a once in a lifetime experience.

After the zip line adventure, we return to Panajachel where we might have an opportunity to do a little shopping, before we take a short boat ride across the lake to Posada de Santiago, our first-class accommodation for the evening. Located between three dormant volcanoes in Guatemala's Western Highlands, Posada de Santiago features a spectacular view of Lake Atitlán, considered by many to be one of the world's most beautiful bodies of water.

- Biking to Lake Atitlán (2 ½ hours, 28 kilometers, cross country with approximately 30 minutes of mostly downhill at the end)
- Afternoon zip line tour (1.5 hours)
- Dinner and lodging at Posada de Santiago (www.posadadesantiago.com)

Day 3: Sea kayak and hike in and around Lake Atitlán, Santiago city tour

Today we relish a fun-filled day of activity. We begin with a short sea kayak trip around the expansive yet tranquil bay near our lodge before heading out on foot to explore our surroundings. After passing through fields of coffee beans, tomatoes, and avocados, we soon find ourselves atop Cerro de Oro looking out over Lake Atitlán. The views of the lake and surrounding volcanoes are simply breathtaking.

After returning to town for lunch, we'll venture into Santiago, an authentic highland town famous for its beautiful textiles but rarely visited by tourists. A local guide will accompany us for the afternoon and teach us about the history of the village and local rituals and traditions. We'll also partake in a ceremony by a shaman and learn about the Mayan god Maximón.

- Sea kayaking Lake Atitlán (1 ½ hours, single and double kayaks available)
- Hiking above Lake Atitlán (1 - 1 ½ hours, 500 feet of elevation gain, 500 feet of elevation loss)
- Tour of Santiago (2 hours)
- Lodging at Posada de Santiago (www.posadadesantiago.com) or something similar

Day 4: Explore Tecpán

In the morning, we depart for Panajachel by boat before beginning our transfer back to Antigua through the municipality of Tecpán. En route, we'll visit the colorful local market in Sololá. The market is the center of town life and is a great place to people watch and buy and local delicacies. Here, you're likely to hear Kaqchikel (a Mayan dialect) spoken instead of Spanish.

Early this afternoon we arrive back at the Hotel Aurora in Antigua for a relaxing night in this beautiful colonial city. The afternoon is yours to relax or take some time to get off the main streets and discover some of Antigua's monasteries, restored churches, and old haciendas. Dinner tonight is at La Fonda de Calle Real.

- Boat ride (½ hour)
- Explore Sololá market (2 hours)

- Dinner at La Fonda de Calle Real
- Lodging at Hotel Aurora (www.hotelauroraantigua.com) or something similar

Day 5: Bike tour near Antigua

After breakfast at the Hotel Aurora we embark on a bicycle tour of the areas surrounding Antigua. We'll visit some of the smaller towns and villages near Antigua and see the remnants of churches that were destroyed by earthquakes. We'll also get a glimpse of rural life—women coming to the local pilas to wash their families' clothing, coffee farms and cooperatives, and local markets.

We'll stop at a women's cooperative in Santiago Zamora and get a weaving demonstration and learn about the coffee process. The women of the cooperative will explain some of the techniques used to weave the beautiful and intricate tapestries, clothes and other textiles that Guatemala is so famous for as well as show how they make Petate mats. The highlands of Guatemala, including Antigua, produce some of the finest and most distinctive coffees. We'll learn about how the coffee is harvested and toasted before it gets to your cup. We'll enjoy a typical lunch of pepian and hibiscus with the women before returning to Antigua.

In the afternoon we'll do a cultural guided walking tour of Antigua. We'll eat dinner together at Las Palmas restaurant. Then we'll call it an early night because we have an early wakeup call the next morning to head to the Petén.

- Breakfast at Hotel Aurora
- Bike tour of the towns surrounding Antigua, the countryside, and visit to a women's cooperative in Santiago Zamora
- Traditional lunch at the women's cooperative in Santiago Zamora
- Return to Antigua mid-afternoon and cultural guided walking tour of Antigua
- Group dinner at Las Palmas restaurant
- Overnight in Hotel Aurora (www.hotelauroraantigua.com) or something similar

Day 6: Explore the Petén and Yaxha Mayan Ruins

We have an early wakeup call today to catch a short flight from Guatemala City to Flores. We'll arrive at the airport in Flores around 7:30 a.m. and have breakfast at Restaurante El Portal—great food in an open-air restaurant under a thatched roof.

After breakfast we will check in and drop off our luggage at El Sombrero Eco Lodge on the shore of Lake Yaxha. The lodge is very tranquil and right in the heart of the jungle of the Petén. It's a great place to relax and enjoy our surroundings, which you'll have a chance to do later in the afternoon.

From the El Sombrero Eco Lodge we'll depart by boat heading across Lake Yaxha en route to the ruins of Yaxha. Along the way, we'll stop at Topoxte, a pre-Columbian Maya archaeological site. Topoxte is a set of islands in Lake Yaxha and contains the remains of roughly 100 structures and was the principal ceremonial center.

After our guided tour of Topoxte we'll reboard our boat en route to the ruins of Yaxha. The Yaxha archaeological site is fascinating and has more than 500 structures from the

pre-Columbian Maya. In more recent times, Yaxha was the location used to film the reality show *Survivor Guatemala—The Mayan Empire* in 2005.

After the guided tour of Yaxha we'll return by vehicle to El Sombrero Eco Lodge for lunch and a relaxing afternoon (which will likely be much appreciated after the early wake up call to start the day). You'll have the chance to pick out a spot in a hammock, read a book, write some postcards and enjoy. While El Sombrero does not have hot water, after a day in the jungle we think you'll find the shower quite refreshing.

We'll have dinner at the restaurant at the lodge and spend the night.

- Early morning flight from Guatemala City to Flores
- Breakfast at El Portal Restaurant
- Check in and drop off luggage at El Sombrero Eco Lodge
- Boat and walking tour of the Mayan ruins of Topoxte and Yaxha
- Lunch at El Sombrero Eco Lodge
- Relaxing afternoon on the shores of Lake Yaxha
- Dinner and overnight at El Sombrero Eco Lodge (ecolodgeelsombrero.com)

Day 7: Biotopo Cerro Cahuí Nature Reserve and Sunset Tour of Tikal

Today we will head for the spectacular ruins of Tikal, which are the most impressive of all Mayan ruins, with a stop along the way to enjoy the Petén jungle.

After breakfast at the lodge we'll depart for the Biotopo Cerro Cahuí Nature Reserve. The reserve is home to howler and spider monkeys and a variety of exotic birds and butterflies. We'll embark on an approximately 2 hour hike to a mirador (viewpoint) which will give us a great view of Lake Petén Itzá and the surrounding jungle canopy. At the conclusion of the hike we can go for a swim in the lake to cool off and then we'll enjoy a late picnic lunch along the lake shore.

After lunch we'll continue the drive to Tikal, arriving there around 3pm. Upon arrival in Tikal, we'll check into our evening's accommodation before ending the day with an unforgettable sunset amidst the ruins in the Grand Plaza, catching the glow of sunset from atop the lost world and enjoying the sounds of toucans, parrots, and monkeys in the jungle below. Tikal is an unforgettable experience. No other Mayan ruin compares to Tikal with its majestic architecture and spectacular jungle setting, including six major temples, hundreds of other structures and an abundance of wildlife. We'll spend the night at the comfortable but basic Jaguar Inn where you'll have time to shower and relax. (Note that hot water and electricity are limited to certain hours as this is a very isolated area.)

We'll have dinner and overnight at the Jaguar Inn.

- Breakfast at El Sombrero Eco-Lodge
- Hike in Biotopo Cerro Cahuí Nature Reserve
- Option to swim in Lake Petén Itzá
- Picnic lunch on the shores of Lake Petén Itzá
- Visit to the ruins of Tikal for sunset (2-3 hours)
- Dinner and lodging at the Jaguar Inn (www.jaguartikal.com)

Day 8: Explore Tikal and transfer to Antigua

We have an option to wake up early to witness daybreak at Tikal, and then learn about Tikal and the Mayan civilization as a guide takes us through the ruins. Around mid-day we'll leave for the drive back to Flores, lunch, and perhaps a swim in Lake Petén Itzá. After our scenic flight to Guatemala City we will transfer to Antigua for one last evening and farewell dinner together.

- Tour of Tikal (2-3 hours)
- Scenic flight to Guatemala City (less than an hour)
- Transfer from airport to Antigua (less than an hour)
- Lodging at Hotel Aurora (www.hotelauroraantigua.com), or something similar

Day 9: Enjoy Antigua and transfer to Guatemala City for departure

Spend one last morning enjoying the quaint atmosphere of colonial Antigua. Airport transfers will be arranged based on your flight times.

About Experience Guatemala activities

Aventouras trips are active, designed for people who want a lively vacation with a variety of activities. We do not expect guests to have experience in the included activities, nor do these activities require a significant amount of learning or technical understanding. We recognize that not all guests may want to take part in all activities, or may have varying comfort levels with certain activities, and alternatives are available in most cases. Experience Guatemala is an action-oriented trip intended for the average active adult who feels comfortable being active 3-6 hours a day; activities include:

- Biking to Lake Atitlán: The bike ride is 28 kilometers, or about 2 ½ hours. The first two hours of the ride are rolling terrain; the last half hour of the ride is mostly downhill. There will be a support vehicle along, allowing us to ride a shorter distance if we prefer.
- Zip line canopy tour: There are a series of 8 zip lines ranging from 90 meters (295 ft.) to 320 meters (1050 ft.) along waterfalls, canyons, the valley and the coffee grove forest.
- Kayaking Lake Atitlán: We'll kayak for about 1 ½ hours along and across a small bay of the lake. There are single and double kayaks available, so anyone not comfortable being alone in a kayak can paddle with a partner.
- Hiking Cerro de Oro above Lake Atitlán: We'll hike for about an hour up and down to a viewpoint across the Lake. The trail, used by locals daily to transport their coffee harvest to the road, can be very steep and challenging at times. Elevation gain/loss is about 500 feet.

About Experience Guatemala lodging

Aventouras trips use a variety of lodging options, ranging from traditional hotels (most often in cities) to small, community run lodges and homestays. All accommodations are clean and comfortable, and all have been inspected by us or by our partner companies in each country. All have private hot water bath unless otherwise noted. Within these parameters, lodging options are selected more for location and access to activities and

local communities than for other amenities. The hotels and lodges listed below are a representative sample of the places we use. The actual hotels and lodges used on your tour may be different, but will be of equal quality and charm.

Typical Experience Guatemala lodging includes lodges like these:

- Hotel Aurora (www.hotelauroraantigua.com) is an elegantly restored colonial mansion with a classic courtyard and garden. It is conveniently located in the heart of Antigua, just a few blocks from the town square.
- Posada Santiago (www.posadadesantiago.com) is nestled along the shore of Lake Atitlán and set amid lovely landscaped gardens, these delightful stone cottages have fantastic views across the lake.
- El Sombrero Eco Lodge (ecolodgeelsombrero.com) is in a gorgeous location along the shores of Lake Yaxha in the jungle of the Petén. It provides a peaceful setting and easy access to the Mayan sites of Topoxte and Yaxha. El Sombrero Eco Lodge is dedicated to conserving the environment, supporting local communities and is part of the Rainforest Alliance's Best Practices Program. Hot water bath not available.
- Jaguar Inn (www.jaguartikal.com) is one of the few hotels located at Tikal – most visitors must stay in towns a half hour drive or more away from the site. The basic but comfortable rooms have private baths, with hot water and electricity that are available for a limited time each day. The Inn is only a few minutes walk from the entrance to Tikal, allowing easy access to anyone wishing to explore the ruins on their own.

What's included?

Almost everything, so it's easier to list what's not included:

- Personal expenses such as telephone bills, laundry, bottled water and alcoholic beverages
- Insurance against illness, accident, and/or theft
- Standard clothes for the activities listed (e.g., hiking boots; we provide the specialty items necessary for activities such as biking and kayaking)
- Any additional costs incurred due to circumstances beyond our control, such as delayed flights.
- Departure tax to be paid when flying out of Guatemala City or Flores (amount fluctuates, averages \$10)

And here is a list of what is included:

- Eight nights accommodations as listed above, double occupancy with a single supplement optional
- All meals starting with dinner on the first night and ending with breakfast on the last day
- Spanish-and English-speaking throughout the trip.
- All in-country transportation, including flights
- All entrance tickets wherever applicable
- All excursions and activities included above, including gear and local guides
- A detailed pre-trip departure packet with packing suggestions and other trip-specific information.

Tour Details

Trip length

9 days/8 nights

Cost

\$2,398

Single supplement: \$275

Group size

Limited to a maximum of 12 participants; register early in order to ensure space is available.

Activities

Hike (two 1/2 days), bike (1/2 day), canopy tour (2 hours), sea kayak / canoe (1/2 day), city explorations (Antigua and Santiago Atitlán), guided tours of Topoxte, Yaxha and Tikal

Gateway city meeting time and place

Guatemala City, La Aurora International Airport. You will be greeted as you leave customs and immigration. Check-in for international flights to and from Guatemala is usually three hours before departure. Valuable items such as camera equipment and essentials such as prescription medications should always be hand carried on all flights to avoid loss or damage. Checked luggage should be properly labeled.

Gateway city transfer

Airport transfers on the first and last days of the tour are included in trip costs.

Trip conclusion

Guatemala City, La Aurora International Airport. Because we will be spending the last night in Antigua, international flights can be scheduled at any time on the final day of the trip.

Updated 01.04.11

General Information, Questions & Answers

What weather conditions can I expect?

In Guatemala, altitude usually determines temperature. In the Petén, average yearly daytime highs range between 83-90° F. In the highlands, the daytime temperatures average between 68-72 degrees F° all year long. The "green" or rainy season normally runs from July through October, while the dry season extends from November into June. You can expect to have periods of rain during the dry season and, also, dry periods during the rainy season.

Tour operator

Aventouras operates this adventure through a Guatemalan tour operator, Martsam Travel, based in Antigua. All tours will include a driver and a bilingual guide specializing in regional biology, history and geology. A tour representative will be your escort both to and from the La Aurora International Airport on Days 1 and 9.

Regarding accommodations...

While we plan to use the accommodations specified in this itinerary, changes are occasionally required due to availability of facilities, group size, etc. We recognize that most guests need detailed accommodations information to leave behind with relatives, etc. We're more than happy to provide this when it is finalized - typically at least 30 days prior to departure.

Passport and visa information

A passport with an expiration date that is at least 90 days after your arrival date is required for travel to Guatemala. No other visas or shots are required. However, malaria is present in the Petén region and you should consider a malaria prophylaxis. We suggest you consult the Center for Disease Control website for guidelines (wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/guatemala.aspx) as well as speak to a health care provider about any recommended shots based on personal health history. You should schedule this discussion 4-6 weeks ahead of your departure to allow any needed shots to take effect before your trip.

We're always improving!

This itinerary details this trip's planned activities, routes, accommodations, departure and conclusion times. However, we're constantly seeking new opportunities to enhance this program and your experience. Our actual activities and sites may vary due to season, special events, or weather. Therefore, we reserve the right to alter the itinerary since unforeseen circumstances that mandate change may arise. Naturally, we will keep you up-to-date on any changes that may affect your arrival or departure times.

Cancellation policy

If you must cancel your trip, you're required to notify us in writing. We will calculate your refund on the day we receive your written cancellation. For all cancellations, we will refund you the cost of your trip less the following per person charges:

- 91 or more days before trip departure: The deposit less \$150 is refundable.
- 61-90 days before trip departure: Full trip payment less the \$500 deposit is refunded.
- 31-60 days before trip departure: 50% of the trip payment is refunded.
- 0-30 days before trip departure: No refund is given.

Exceptions to these policies cannot be made for any reason, including weather or personal emergencies. We recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance. We provide information about travel insurance upon registration.

To book this trip:

Call us at 800-930-2846, book online at www.aventouras.com, or email us at info@aventouras.com