From the highlands of Antigua to the white sand beaches of Playa del Carmen, explore the delights of Mexico, Belize and Guatemala on this thrilling 10 day adventure! Discover charming colonial towns and beautiful landscapes, explore Guatemala’s magnificent Mayan ruins in the heart of the jungle, kick back on the idyllic island of Caye Caulker before travelling up the east coast to Mexico’s Mayan Riviera.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights
- Antigua - a delightful colonial town
- Flores - a charming island town
- Tikal - a beautiful Mayan archaeological site in Tikal National Park
- Livingston - a lively town situated at the mouth of the Rio Dulce
- San Cristobal de las Casas - colonial city
- Caye Caulker - idyllic Caribbean island
- San Ignacio - Belize's adventure capital!
- Playa del Carmen - one of Mexico's finest beach resorts

What's Included
- 6 breakfasts
- 9 nights simple hotels and cabins
- Guatemala City airport arrival transfer on day 1
- Local transportation - public buses, private van and boats
- Excursions to Caye Caulker, Tikal ruins, Livingston
- Escorted by a tour leader
- Specialist local guides at certain sights of interest

What's Not Included
- International flights, departure and border taxes and visas.
- Tips on all excursions. Tip for your tour leader - an entirely personal gesture.
- Meals - allow US$25-30 spending money per day to cover meals, snacks, drinks, limited souvenirs and any extras.
- Airport departure transfer - can be booked at an additional cost upon request

Local Payment
$120 - $130 paid in USD

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Antigua - Guatemala
Welcome to Guatemala! Upon arrival at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City transfer to our hotel in Antigua. The first day of our tour is simply an arrival day with no pre-organised activities. In order to allow time to relax and see some of the sights you may wish to add pre tour accommodation. On arrival please ask at the reception for information on when the pre departure meeting will be held.

Antigua is one of the most delightful colonial towns in Central America. The local indigenous can be seen throughout the cobbled streets and plazas of the city in their colourful costumes, selling their crafts and textiles. As the cultural centre of Guatemala, Antigua is an ideal place to experience the traditional music, architecture and art of the country. Rich in ornate churches, convents, parks, plazas, cafés, restaurants, bars and colourful street markets and surrounded by awe-inspiring volcanoes, Antigua is one place you will never forget.

Optional Excursions:
- Pacaya volcano climb – US$20
- Walking tour – US$30
- Chocolate making class - US$30
- Coffee farm tour - US$25

Accommodation: Hotel Posada Los Bucaros or similar

Overnight - Antigua
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico

Day 2 : Rio Dulce & Livingston

Antigua - Rio Dulce. We depart Antigua by mini van to the river town of Rio Dulce where we overnight in cabins right on the water. In the afternoon the boat tour along the 23 kilometre stretch of waterway to Livingston allows you to experience one of the most scenic areas of Guatemala. Livingston is situated at the mouth of the Rio Dulce, where it joins the Bay of Amatique, and is inhabited by the Garifuna people. This lively little town has a Caribbean atmosphere different to the rest of Guatemala and is a great place to try the delicious local specialty tapado (seafood coconut soup) and listen to the local African-style punta music.

Accommodation: Hotel Catamaran or similar
Overnight - Rio Dulce (B)

Day 3 : Flores & Tikal Ruins

Rio Dulce - Flores. From Rio Dulce we continue to the charming island-town of Flores, the last town to be conquered by the Spanish and situated in the centre of Lake Peten Itzá. Flores is our base for exploring the breathtaking Maya sites discovered, and you will have most of the day to explore and learn about the flora, fauna, and amazing Mayan history with our knowledgeable local guide.

The area around Tikal has been declared as the Tikal National Park and the preserved area covers 570 square kilometres. The ancient city has been completely mapped and at its height covered an area greater than 16 square kilometres, with more than 3000 structures. Today the main centre covers an area of approximately two and a half square kilometres. As you wander the site, you will see several tall mounds which are temples that have not yet been excavated, and you will have the opportunity to climb some of the tallest Mayan temples.

The emphasis was on height when creating these imposing structures because the Maya believed the higher the building, the closer they were to the gods. Around Tikal there is a lot of animal life, and if you’re lucky, you will have the chance to spot the noisy howler monkeys, pizotes (a racoon-like animal), exotic birds such as toucans, and much more!

Included Excursions: Guide tour of Tikal ruins
Optional Excursions: Tubing – US$100
ATM Caves – US$95
Canoeing – US$85

Caracol Ruins, the largest and most important Mayan ruin site in Belize – US$95
Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve – US$85
Accommodation: The Aguada Hotel or similar
Overnight - San Ignacio (B:1)

Days 6-8 : Caye Caulker

San Ignacio - Caye Caulker. Leaving San Ignacio, we take a local bus through the centre of Belize to Belize City, where we catch a water taxi out to the Cayes (mangrove islands). Belizeans know how to relax, and hopefully the locals’ expertise on relaxation will be contagious during your stay on Caye Caulker. If not, there are signs to remind you to “Go Slow”, “Take it easy”, and even “No shirt, no shoes, no problem”. We spend three very laid back nights on Caye Caulker, where you can throw away your shoes to wander the sand filled streets, spend the evenings eating seafood, drinking cocktails, and listening to reggae music in one of the bars.

During the day we can organise a range of different optional snorkelling trips for you, such as to Shark and Ray Alley, where you can swim with a few feet of nurse sharks and majestic sting rays, or weather dependent, you may have the opportunity to swim with sea-cows! Another optional snorkelling tour takes you out to Hol-Chan Marine Reserve where you are guaranteed to see lots of colourful fish and interesting reef formations. Qualified divers can explore the so-called bottomless “Blue Hole”, made famous by the explorer Jacques Cousteau (please note: this optional excursion does not go every day, check locally for availability). Other options include sunning yourself, riding a bike around the island, or trying your luck at fishing. If you are lucky, you can take your catch to one of the local restaurants so they can BBQ it for you.

Included Excursions: Caye Caulker
Optional Excursions:
**Guatemala, Belize & Mexico**

Half/full day Caye Caulker snorkelling – US $45-80
Scuba diving in the Blue Hole – US$290
Night Snorkelling – US$70
Flight over the Blue Hole – US$200pp (min 3 people)

**Accommodation:** Hotel China Town or similar

**Overnight - Caye Caulker** (8:1)

### Day 9 : Playa del Carmen

Caye Caulker - Playa del Carmen. Crossing into Mexico we travel up the coast to the beautiful beach resort of Playa del Carmen. Relax on a white sand beach or take advantage of one of the several interesting optional activities available in the area such as visiting the island of Cozumel or the amazingly located Maya/Toltec ruins of Tulum. There are also many ‘cenotes’ in the area. Cenotes (se-note-tays) are fresh water swimming holes connected to underground limestone cave systems once sacred to the ancient Maya.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Playa del Carmen or similar

**Overnight - Playa del Carmen**

### Day 10 : Playa del Carmen

Your adventure of a lifetime comes to an end in Playa del Carmen today, if you have a late flight or have lengthened your stay by adding post tour accommodation you will have more time to explore the sights.

The itinerary listed above is to be used as a guide only. Occasionally, some tours may stay at an alternative hotel located nearby. If this is the case, you will meet as normal at Hotel Posada Los Bucaros and you will be escorted to the alternative hotel.

The hotel has safe deposit boxes for your use. Please leave all of your important documents, money and travellers cheques here when you go out but remember to carry some form of ID and a photocopy of your passport with you.

**Local Payments**

Please note that for all tours booked from 01 March 2018 onwards, a Local Payment applies. The amount of this Local Payment varies dependent upon the month of travel, please budget for the higher amount noted at the beginning of the Trip Notes.

If you booked your tour prior to 01 March 2018, this Local Payment is not applicable.

**Driving time from Guatemala City to Antigua**

can take anything from 40mins to 2hrs depending on traffic and other circumstances. Even if you have a safe and slow driver for your vehicle, other drivers on the road may put you a bit ‘on edge’. Guatemalans tend to overtake on hair-pin curbs, drive at ridiculous speeds, and honk their horns a lot. Remember, this is all part of the adventure. It is a good idea to learn how to ask the driver to slow down in Spanish: Por favor, vaya más despacio (pronounced: por fa-vor, va-ya mas des-pa-cio).

**Our Partners**

Please note that this tour is operated by Tucan Travel. Travellers on your trip will have made their reservation with On The Go Tours or Tucan Travel.

**Arriving in Guatemala City / Antigua**

There is no airport in Antigua, Guatemala so you must fly to Guatemala City and then get a transfer, bus or taxi from Guatemala City to Antigua (45km). Please make sure that your flight is into Guatemala City, Guatemala, NOT Antigua in the Caribbean.

An arrival transfer from La Aurora International Airport (GUA) to your hotel in Antigua is included on day 1. Please look out for someone with a sign displaying your name/Tucan Travel. If you are delayed by more than an hour or you miss your connecting flight, in order for us to rearrange your transfer, please call the emergency contact number on your tour voucher with your new scheduled arrival time and flight details. We will do our best to rearrange your arrival transfer.

If, for any reason, you need to make your own way to your hotel in Antigua, taxi services are readily available within the immediate vicinity of the airport. Guatemalan taxis do not have meters, so you should agree on a price before getting into the taxi. A taxi to Antigua should cost US$20-25, but of course they will try to charge you more. A shuttle bus should cost approx. US$10 per person, and they usually need at least three people to depart. Public buses are very cheap, but extremely difficult to take if you don’t speak Spanish so this option is not recommended.

The hotel has safe deposit boxes for your use. Please leave all of your important documents, money and travellers cheques here when you go out but remember to carry some form of ID and a photocopy of your passport with you.

**Arrival & Welcome Meeting**

When you arrive on day one of your trip, you should find a Tucan Travel welcome note in the lobby, giving the time and location of the

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**Guatemala, Belize & Mexico - 10 days**

www.onthegotours.com

uk 020 7371 1113  info@onthegotours.com

AUS 1300 855 684  aus-info@onthegotours.com

NZ 0800 44 77 69  CAN 1 866 890 7038

USA 1 866 377 6147  SA 0800 982 686
welcome meeting, which will be around 6pm. If you cannot locate this information, please ask at reception.

You will need to bring the following important items to the meeting with your tour leader:

- The original and a photocopy of your passport
- Vaccination certificates (if required)
- Travel voucher
- Details of your travel insurance policy number and their 24hr emergency contact number

Personal Safety
It is not advisable to wear chains or expensive looking watches or jewellery while in many Central American cities. You should also keep your camera concealed when not in use and carry daypacks on your front for extra safety. Crime in Latin America is not as bad as its reputation but you must be sensible and alert.

Missing The Start of Your Tour
If you miss the start of your tour, please ask at the reception of the hotel for a message from your tour leader which will give you instructions on how to catch up with the group. Any associated costs will be at your own expense (although, depending on the reason, you may be able to claim these from your travel insurance so ensure you keep all receipts).

If you know in advance that you are unlikely to arrive on time, please contact us immediately so we can inform the tour leader. We cannot be held responsible should your airline/boat/coach be delayed and we are unable to refund any unused portion of your tour.

Hotels & Transfers
Day 1 of all our tours is simply a joining day and the tour actually departs the joining city on day 2. The last day of your tour is the official departure day and is free for you to pack or sightsee before you depart. All tours are scheduled to arrive at your final destination the afternoon/evening before your departure day. Therefore very little time is spent in each of the starting and finishing cities and you will need to allow a few days at the beginning or end of your tour if you want to explore them further. We can book pre and post tour accommodation for you upon request.

Check in time is at 1300 hrs on day 1. If you wish to use the services of a room before or after checkout time, or you are arriving very early in the morning of day 1, you will need to book an extra night, which we can arrange for you. All rooms are on a bed only basis unless otherwise indicated.

We include an airport arrival transfer on day 1 for all tours.

Airport departure transfers are not included in the tour price but can be booked upon request at an additional cost. Please see the tour price page of our website for information on prices.

Important: If you are going to be delayed more than two hours, you must advise us of the delay at least six hours before arrival. If we are advised in time, we will make every effort to reschedule your transfer and your driver will be asked to wait for two hours after your new expected arrival time. However, if we are not made aware of any change, the driver will only wait for two hours after the original scheduled arrival time and after this point it will be up to you to arrange transport to your hotel at your own expense. Please contact us on the emergency number on your tour voucher.

Optional Excursions
During your tour there will be free time to enjoy a range of optional excursions which are listed under each day of the itinerary in these trip notes. Your tour leader will be able to make recommendations and bookings in advance for most of these activities so you have more flexibility and control over your itinerary. Please note that you may not have time to do all of the optional excursions listed. Should you wish to partake in optional activities in the city where you tour starts/ends we recommend that you book pre/post tour accommodation.

Spending Money
For personal spending money you should bring US dollars or Euros to use alongside the local currency (where applicable). While bank cards provide a very good way to access funds overall, it is not recommended to rely on them as your sole source of funds as cash machines do not always work and may not be available in remote locations. We recommend you bring along a minimum of US$200 cash in small denominations (no $100 notes). Make sure all notes are the new style, and are not damaged, defaced, rubber stamped or written on, as many places will refuse them if they are not in perfect condition. It is a good idea to try to maintain a supply of small notes and change in the local currency for tipping or small purchases.

Your spending money should cover some meals, optional excursions, souvenirs, drinks, laundry, border and airport taxes and any visas obtained locally. We provide guideline prices for optional excursions in the itinerary to help you budget, but ultimately the amount you will need to budget for your trip very much depends on your individual requirements. We recommend bringing extra money to cover emergencies or unexpected situations.

Style of Trip
Our Central America tours are designed to suit travellers who love being able to travel on many different forms of transport with local people. There is a certain amount of involvement needed, which will mean carrying your own bags to the bus or train station or even helping the driver throw everyone’s packs onto the roof. If you enjoy meeting and interacting with local people and don’t mind roughing it occasionally, then these tours will be just right for you.

It is important that you are open to travelling with a range of different age groups. You must also satisfy yourself that you are fit enough to complete the itinerary as there are no refunds if you choose to leave the tour. Based on the nature of this travel style, our adventurous Central America tours are generally suitable for people aged between 18 and 60 years old. If you have any questions about this please contact us or speak to your travel consultant.

Our Central America tours suit people who are fit and active. Although no experience is required there are many walks between bus/train terminals and hotels and travellers must be able to carry their own luggage over various terrains as well as lift up luggage onto the tops of bus and train carriages.
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico of buses so do not pack more than you can comfortably carry.

The average group size is 8 to 12 passengers with a maximum of 18, however on some included excursions group sizes may occasionally be larger.

Meals
Most meals are not included on our Central America Tours, so you can get out there and experience the best local cuisine on offer according to your own tastes and budget. This gives the flexibility to choose when and where to dine and enables you to maximise your free time and not worry about set meal times. Our hotels are generally located near restaurants with standards that vary from first class local eateries to street stalls to ensure we cater for all tastes and budgets.

The breakfasts offered on our Central America tours vary from a basic breakfast or breakfast box, to a full buffet breakfast, dependent upon the location and the accommodation.

Transport and Travel
On our Central America tours we use a variety of transport depending on the country in which we are travelling and the length of the tour. Vehicles can range from buses filled with local people and their many possessions to private minibuses and comfortable air-conditioned coaches. Sometimes you could be travelling on boats, taking a taxi or even walking.

Our aim is not simply to get you from A to B, but to help you to experience each destination as a genuine traveller, not as a first class tourist. A word of warning - please remember that travelling conditions can sometimes be cramped and seating is not always guaranteed in Central America. This may mean having to stand for some time in cramped conditions or share a seat with five others! This adds to the experience and is all a part of travelling with the locals.

Due to the vast distances covered on many of our Central America Tours, please be prepared for occasional long travelling days. This time spent travelling is unavoidable but you will not be disappointed once you arrive! On the positive side there are also many short travel days and days which involve no travelling leaving you free to explore at your leisure.

Accommodation
Our ‘simple’ accommodation is generally the equivalent in comfort and amenities of a 2-3 star hotel. We stay in small hotels, hostels and guest houses which are usually situated close to the main sights and town centres. They are chosen for their local ambience rather than star rating and we look for attributes like character, location, atmosphere, cleanliness and security. Although sometimes quite basic, you will find clean comfortable rooms with ensuite facilities (occasionally bathrooms may be shared but this is rare), friendly staff and often a bar and restaurant attached or nearby. Please be aware that accommodation in Central America sometimes has erratic services like lack of hot water or no central heating, staff members don’t always speak English and sometimes our reservations are ‘lost’! In general, facilities are very good but please be prepared for the occasional mishap, which is all part of the travelling experience.

All accommodation is included from the arrival day until check out time on the final day of the tour. Travellers will share rooms with other group members of the same gender. Mostly this will be in twin rooms although sometimes in triples depending on the group composition and hotel rooming structure.

Electrical Supply
The power supply in Latin America differs not only from country to country but sometimes from region to region within a country. If bringing electrical equipment, make sure that it can be switched over from 110 volts to 220 volts and vice versa. If your equipment is 220 volts it will work on a 110 volt system (albeit slower), but if you use 110 volt equipment in a 220 volt system, it will blow the equipment! Bring a voltage converter and travel plug adaptor (most countries either have 2 pin flat as in USA or 2 round pins).

What to Pack
You will have to carry your own bags on this tour so it is important to bring luggage you can carry and lift comfortably, potentially up several flights of stairs in hotels where elevators are not available and between bus/train stations and hotels. There may be times when you have to get your luggage through crowded streets which may be cobbled or store your luggage in lockers. Luggage too large for lockers will have to be left insecurely or carried for the duration of the day.

We recommend a frameless backpack or a sports type shoulder bag which fits comfortably on your shoulders, as they are less bulky and easier to handle than rigid suitcases or framed backpacks. Suitcases are not suitable for our tours and are not recommended. Tucan Travel takes no responsibility for damage to your luggage while on tour. If your tour includes regional flights, there may be a weight limit to the amount of luggage you can take. Please see your detailed itinerary for more information.

Clothing & Footwear
We recommend packing lightweight and durable clothing including at least one pair of warm trousers and thinner sweaters/fleeces which you can layer. Nights can be cold in some locations such as Guatemala and San José at certain times of year, so it is a good idea to bring at least one pair of warm trousers plus several thinner sweaters / fleeces which you can layer. Please avoid military or camouflage-patterned clothing as it can cause problems and in some countries may be illegal.

Good, comfortable walking shoes are essential. These do not need to be expensive boots, but they should have good ankle support and grip, be worn in and ideally waterproof.

Check the climate and altitude at www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour so that you can pack accordingly.

Essential Items
• A lightweight water/windproof jacket with hood
• Easy to pack wide-brimmed hat or cap
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico

- Towel - you will need a towel for most overnight excursions
- Swimwear
- Sandals/flip flops/thongs

Health

Please see your doctor or travel clinic for an up to date list of all recommended vaccinations for the regions you will be travelling to. We recommend that you do this at least eight weeks before you travel, as you may need a course of medications or more than one vaccination. In general we recommend that you are vaccinated against Tetanus-diphtheria, polio, hepatitis A and Typhoid and if travelling to a jungle area, yellow fever. Vaccinations are solely the responsibility of the traveller and not that of on the go.

The malarial risk varies in the regions of Central America and in some areas appropriate preventive medicines are needed. Measures should always be taken to avoid mosquito bites, such as nets and creams. Please check with your health care professional as to the best and most up to date remedy for this mosquito borne disease.

It is not recommended that you drink the tap water in any of the countries we visit and we recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that quite often we are in remote areas and away from medical facilities, and for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

Tipping

Tipping is a part of the life in Central America, but you should not feel obliged or pressured to tip if you have not received good service. A gratuity of 10% of the total bill is recommended in restaurants. Gratuities are usually expected for local guides on included and optional excursions. Tips are also appreciated by the tour leaders at the end of your tour and we recommend an average of $2-$4 per person per day for the duration of your tour. This is only if you feel that their service was up to standard and is completely at your own discretion.

Time Keeping

Punctuality is very important and throughout the tour your tour leader will give you the time to meet in reception. Tour leaders will often post notes at reception with meeting times, so remember to always look out for these.

Although rare, delays can occur and we therefore advise you not to arrange your onward travel too close to the end of the tour. We take no responsibility for any missed flights or additional expenses if the group arrives late into the departure city at the end of the tour.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Belize Country Guide

Belize - Fact File
- Official Name: Belize
- Capital: Belmopan
- Population: 366,954
- Total Area:22,956 square kilometres
- Official Language: English, others: Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Creole
- Religions: Roman Catholic 49.6%, Protestant 27%, none 9.4%, other 14%
- Voltage: 110 volts
- Dialling Code: +501
- Time Difference: GMT/UTC -6.
- Airport Departure Tax: US$36

Belize - Visas

Most nationals do not need a visa to enter Belize, however it is important to check with your nearest embassy or consulate. As a tourist you are usually entitled to 30 days, however depending on the immigration official you can be allocated less days.

On entering you may be asked to fill out an immigration card. A copy of this card should stay in your passport until you exit the country. There is no official fee to enter Belize, but to exit you must pay an official fee of US$35 plus security screening fee of US$0.75. Your tour leader will remind you of this on tour

Belize - Climate

Belize has quite a subtropical climate with temperatures ranging from 16 – 32 degrees Celsius. The wet season runs from June to October and the dry season from November to May. In Northern Belize they receive as little as 50 inches of rain a year whereas the far south can receive up to 180 inches of rain a year which helps feed the jungles an ensure all year round growth.

The hurricane season on the Caribbean side of Central America runs from September to November. This usually means high winds and the occasional storm, although sunny days tend to prevail throughout the year. It is highly unlikely that the full force of a hurricane would hit any of the areas we pass through on our tours, however our tour leaders are fully prepared to take any necessary action and would make itinerary changes if required to ensure the safety of clients.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Belize - Money

The local currency is the Belize Dollar - BZ$.

Belize has a fixed exchange rate of 2:1 with the US dollar, and you may use either currency throughout the country, however you will usually get change in Belize dollars.

Remember that once out of Belize you will generally not be able to use or exchange Belize dollars. Therefore, you must make sure you spend/exchange/ donate any left-over money before leaving the country.

For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.xe.com.

ATMs are available across the country, especially in tourist destinations including Belize City, Caye Caulker and San Ignacio. Visa, Plus, MasterCard and Cirrus/Maestro are accepted in some Belizean ATMs, as long as you have a four-digit pin. Visa cards are the most widely accepted and ATMs will only give you local currency (not US dollars). Please note that you will often be charged two fees – one from your bank for international use and one for the local Belize Bank.

You should also be able to get a cash advance at the bank (usually only possible for Visa and
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico

sometimes Mastercard) although some banks will require a copy of your passport. Cash is still the standard form of payment in Belize however hotels, and some bars and restaurants however there is usually a minimum charge for this. Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

Belize generally accepts torn or marked US dollars, so if your notes are damaged you may want to off-load them here! You will have serious difficulties changing/using damaged notes in Honduras, Guatemala or Mexico.

Most places should also accept travellers checks as long as you write your passport number on the back. Please ensure these are in US dollars as otherwise it can be more time consuming to exchange.

Belize - Shopping
Bargaining is not common in Belize, as shops usually have set prices on goods.

Belize is not well known for its handicrafts and textiles and selections may be limited and expensive however in Southern Belize you can hand-woven baskets made by the Mayan women, as well as other carvings. For something truly Belizean you can buy the Garifuna drums, however be careful to declare animal-skin drums at customs and check your country’s rules on importing exotic goods.

Belize - Tipping
A 10% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Belize. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There may also be ‘taxes’ added to your bill, on top of the service charge. Sometimes this is included in the menu price, other times it is added at the end. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80 cents. Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

Belize - Local Transport
Taxis are recommended for getting around the San Ignacio area (as local buses can be non-existent or unreliable). You should expect to pay roughly BZ$3 for each taxi you take locally, and up to BZ$10 for a longer journey. The taxis in Belize do not run on meters and you should always confirm the price before getting in the car.

Belize - Food & Drink
Belizean cuisine is simple yet hearty and you will eat well. There is some seafood available in Belize – especially lobster and shrimp. Most meals come with some kind of salad. Other common side dishes include coleslaw, potato salad, rice & beans and sweet fried bananas (platanos). You can get very good, cheap set meals for lunch, as this is the main meal of the day. Apart from the delicious local food, there are also many international restaurants to be found in Belize. Italian, Chinese, Indian and Sri Lankan restaurants are abundant. Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants.

Food
Breakfast usually consists of eggs with beans and johnny cakes (biscuit like rolls) or fry-jacks (deep fried dough puffs). To eat them Mayan style, order your eggs scrambled with diced tomatoes.

White rice and red beans power most of the country and over the years different variations to the dish have been created. Your rice and beans may be cooked with coconut and mild spices and served with grilled meat or fish, or your beans may be cooked in a stew and accompanied with boiled rice.

There is much more on offer than rice and beans in Belize. Chicken is the preferred meat and often found in tasty burritos and stews, but seafood is the country’s speciality. Lobster or Shrimp - grilled, fried, marinated, served with various sauces and spices – not to be missed. You will pay between US$10 and US$15 a plate, depending on how big the portions are. Note: Lobsters are only in season from mid-June to mid-February. The conch (shell fish) season begins when the lobster season ends. Shrimp are usually available year-round.

Local burritos – Belizean burritos are some of the best in the world. You can get vegetarian, chicken, shrimp or lobster fillings (US$1.50 to US$4 each). There is a fantastic chilli sauce to be found on every Belizean restaurant table called ‘Marie Sharp’ – it comes in mild, hot, extra hot and BEWARE HOT!

Drink
Central American fruit is fresh and cheap. There are some fantastic selections of fruit smoothie and juices on offer. Papaya, melon, watermelon, mango, and pineapple are all very popular. Smoothies can be made with either water or milk. Always specify if you don’t want sugar. Latin Americans have a very sweet tooth and will usually automatically add the sugar.

Central America is known for its good beer. Belize beer is a little stronger in flavour than the other countries. Belikan Beer is the National beer. Ever since the pirates settled in Belize, rum has been the spirit of choice. White rum and coconut rum are most common. Belize is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine (although this may be expensive).

The tap water is safe to drink in mainland Belize. Bottled water is available on Caye Caulker, and water re-fills available at most stores.

Guatemala Country Guide

Guatemala Fact File
• Official Name: Republic of Guatemala
• Capital: Guatemala City (often just called Guatemala, or even ‘Guate’)
• Population: 15.1 million
• Total Area: 108,890 square kilometres
• Official Language: Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized, including including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)
• Religions: Roman Catholic and indigenous Mayan beliefs
• Voltage: 110 volts
• Dialling Code: +502
• Time Difference: GMT/UTC -7
• Airport Departure Tax: US$540 plus US$3 security tax to be paid at airport

Guatemala Visas
It is important to check the rules of your nationality with your nearest embassy or consulate however most nationals do not need

GUATEMALA, BELIZE & MEXICO - 10 days
www.onthegotours.com
uk 020 7371 1113 info@onthegotours.com
AUS 1300 855 684 aus-info@onthegotours.com
NZ 0800 44 77 69 CAN 1 866 890 7038
USA 1 866 377 6147 SA 0800 982 686

This information has been compiled with care and good faith. They give an accurate illustration of the proposed arrangements for this holiday. Circumstances beyond our control such as changes in local conditions, inclement weather or other reasons could force us to make changes to this itinerary. Any costs shown are subject to change, though are an accurate reflection of costs at time of writing. Please also note that visa requirements are subject to change and are the responsibility of the traveller and not that of On The Go Tours. - 7 -
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico

a visa to enter Guatemala. On arrival you will be requested to show proof of your passport which must be valid for more than 6 months as well as proof of funds to support yourself. As a tourist you will be entitled to 90 days, however depending on the immigration official you may be allocated less. Anyone wishing to extend must submit an extension application to the Migration Directorate in Guatemala City.

You will be asked to fill out an immigration card which must be kept with your passport until you leave the country. Single entry tourist visas cost US$25.

Guatemala is part of the Central America-4 (CA-4) Border Control Agreement. As part of this agreement eligible foreign nationals can travel within the four countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras & Nicaragua) for a period of up to 90 days without completing entry and exit formalities at border immigration checkpoints. If travellers wish to remain in this area for more than 90 days they should research extensions. Overstayers can expect a fine. (CA-4) Border Control Agreement. As part of this agreement eligible foreign nationals can travel within the four countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras & Nicaragua) for a period of up to 90 days without completing entry and exit formalities at border immigration checkpoints. If travellers wish to remain in this area for more than 90 days they should research extensions. Overstayers can expect a fine.

Guatemala - Climate

Guatemala’s rainy season runs from around May/June until September/October however in the majority of places this generally only means sporadic showers throughout the day which don’t usually last very long. The only place where rain is guaranteed all year round is in the middle of the rainforest in Rio Dulce, where the rainy season can sometimes last until February. In the Guatemalan Highlands temperatures at night time are quite cool (Antigua, Lake Atitlan and especially Quetzaltenango). For example, December/January nights in the highlands can drop to zero centigrade. Generally, the hottest time in Guatemala will be the months of April to May (before the rain comes!).

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Guatemala - Currency

The monetary unit in Guatemala is the quetzal. For up-to-date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.xe.com.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

US dollars are widely accepted in Guatemala however it is recommended to carry quetzals with you, especially smaller bills as larger bills may be harder to break in smaller towns and local establishments. Even if you have the option to pay in dollar it is recommended you pay in local currency.

We recommend you exchange this before entering the country to obtain the best exchange rates. Remember once out of Guatemala you will not be able to use or exchange quetzals (except in border towns) so we recommend you spend/exchange/donate any left over money before leaving the country.

US dollars and travellers cheques can be changed at casas de cambio (exchange bureau), banks and border crossings. Your tour leader will give you details of where and when best to change money. Casas de cambio are privately owned, usually have longer opening hours and attend to you faster than banks.

Another way to obtain local currency is to use the ATM machines located throughout most of Guatemala. Please note there will be a fee to use foreign credit or debit cards when withdrawing cash from an ATM. Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will. Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

In Guatemala you will never be able to use US dollar notes which are torn or marked even slightly. If your notes are at all damaged you may use them in Belize, but not in Guatemala or Mexico.

Travellers checks are a safe way to carry money in Guatemala but they can be time consuming and you’ll only be able to cash them in cities and tourist destinations with full service banks. American Express is the most common and widely accepted check but proof of purchase may be requested.

If you do decide to queue in a bank, always check that what you want to do is going to be possible before lining up. Different banks have different rules. For example some banks do not exchange travellers cheques. They may also have a limit to the amount of US dollars you can exchange. Always try to exchange as much as you can at one time and try to ask cashiers for small notes “billetes pequeñas” as you will find it very difficult to break large notes throughout Latin America.

Always make sure you put your cash inside your money belt before you leave the premises. Pickpockets tend to loot near banks and change houses.

Guatemala - Tipping

A 10% sales tax is usually included in the price of hotels, shops and restaurants however may be added to your bill if not. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in higher end restaurants). You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80cents (Q5). Tour guides are usually tipped 10% and it is common practice to leave spare change to the small comedores.

Guatemala - Shopping

Guatemala’s markets have some of the best shopping in Central America and are best for local products. With so much to choose from its hard to choose what to buy but there are jade and wood carvings, ceramics, basketry as well as Mayan jewellery. The Central Market and Craft Market in Guatemala City, as well as Chichicastenango and the Highland area of Guatemala has by far the best bargains and most variety, due to the strong indigenous influence in this area (Antigua and Lake Atitlan). Bargaining is expected whilst shopping in the markets of Guatemala. In shops it is considered rude to bargain, but you can ask for a ‘discount’ (‘descuento’ in Spanish).

Guatemala - Local Transport

Taxi’s are cheap in Guatemala and we recommend using them at night. Most taxis do not have meters, so you will have to agree on a price before getting in the cab.

The ‘chicken buses’ (locally called camonetas) are in fact old second-hand American school buses which have been painted in all sorts of bright colours and covered with religious
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decorations! They are extremely cheap for getting around and they go everywhere! They’re safe to use as long as you use common sense - beware of thieves and pickpockets. These buses become very crowded, sometimes 6 people to one seat and it’s not uncommon to hear a few chicks clucking away on market day! Bear in mind that the drivers often drive like lunatics and sometimes don’t come to a complete stop when letting you on or off. These buses are privately run, so time is money. The more stops they make, the more money they make! A boy will come along to collect your money - usually a few quetzales - after you sit down (if you get a seat!). In most of the places we visit in Guatemala, walking is the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

Guatemala - Local Food & Drink

People are often surprised by the quality and variety on offer in Guatemala This is partly due to the number of ex-pats who have opened up a range of different international restaurants. There is also local cuisine to suit every budget. Chicken, pork and beef are available throughout. Most meals come with corn tortillas and sometimes salad, but often lack hot vegetables. Although you might expect the food to be spicy in this region (‘picante’ in Spanish), this is not usually the case. Your tour leader will be able to recommend restaurants.

Food

Corn (maize), is the staple diet of Guatemala’s indigenous people and you will certainly get a lot of it. Mostly in the form of tortillas which are flat pancake-like things made of corn dough and grilled. The following are a few Guatemalan specialties:

Tamales – Corn dough stuffed with meat, fruit and nuts, wrapped in banana leaves.

Kaq Ik – Turkey soup with herbs from the Alta Verapaz region.

Bistec or Pollo Asado - Beef steak or grilled chicken. These are common meals, usually served with tortillas, rice, spring onion, white cheese, and salad.

If you have any allergies to foods, please come prepared with a list to give to your tour leader who can then translate it into Spanish for you to show every waiter who takes your order. If you are vegetarian you must always specify ‘no carne, puerco, pollo, pescado’ etc etc.

In general we do not recommend you buy food off the street, however your tour leader will give advice, e.g. certain streets in Antigua where the local ladies prepare everything well. If you are unsure just try to use common sense and avoid any food that has been sitting around for a long time (and a word of advice – avoid the bright yellow hot chips sold on every road-side).

Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to provide interesting vegetarian alternatives when arranging group meals in the campsite, but your patience and understanding is requested.

Drink

Guatemalan fruit is fresh and cheap. Go to one of the many juice stands and ask for a fruit smoothie “l liquado de fruta” with one of the many ingredients to choose from including melon, watermelon, mango, pineapple as well as celery and beetroot. The smoothies are usually made with water or milk and you must always specify if you don’t want sugar as Latin American’s tend to have a very sweet tooth. You will also find all sorts of orange, grape, lemon, and lime soft drinks (“Gaseosas”). “Agua Mineral” is sparkling water.

Generally speaking it’s best not to expect good coffee/tea in this part of the world, even though some of the best coffee in the world is produced here, the majority is exported. Be warned that American’s is the most common, followed by “café con leche” (more like milk with a bit of coffee), and cappuccino.

If you only learn one word in Spanish it’s bound to be “Cerveza”. There are countless lagers, and a few dark beers. A beer will cost you anywhere between US$1.50 and $3. The most common are ‘Gallo’ and ‘Tona’, with the more premium ones being ‘Modelo’ and ‘Dorada’.

Guatemalan rum is considered some of the best in the world. Ron Centenario Zacapa is a locally made award-winning rum. Guatemala is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine.

Mexico Country Guide

Mexico - Fact File

- Official Name: United States of Mexico
- Capital: Mexico City (often just called Mexico (Me-hee-k0) or more commonly D.F (de. efe), for Distrito Federal
- Population: 120.9 million
- Total Area: 1.9 million square kilometres
- Official Language: Spanish. Indigenous languages sometimes spoken include Nahuatl and Mayan
- Religions: Roman Catholic 89%, protestant 6%
- Voltage: 110 volts, US-style two flat-pinned sockets
- Dialling Code: +52
- Time Difference: GMT/UTC -5
- Airport Departure Tax: There is a departure tax of approximately USD $65 which is payable on departure from Mexico. This tax depends on which airline you are travelling with and your onward destination. Make sure you have the money just in case if you are unsure whether you need to pay it.

Mexico - Visas

It is important to check the rules of your nationality with your nearest embassy or consulate however most nationals do not need a visa to enter Mexico. On arrival you will be requested to show proof of your passport which must be valid for more than 6 months as well as proof of funds to support yourself. As a tourist you will be entitled to 90 days, however depending on the immigration official you may be allocated less.

Important - you will have to fill out an immigration form on arrival to which will be checked, stamped and left in your passport for the duration of your stay. Do not lose this bit of paper; if you do not produce this paper on departing Mexico you must pay a fine of US$42.
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Mexico has no entry fee however departure tax will be requested (please check your ticket to see if this is included or not), this usually costs approx. USD$65. Anyone entering Mexico by land will have to pay a fee of USD$20 to exit the country. Your tour leader will advise on this.

Mexico - Climate

Mexico’s winter season runs from around November to February where days are usually warm and sunny compared to the summer season which runs from June to August where days are very hot and humid with heavy rain showers. Altitude also plays a part in Mexico’s climate with cooler temperatures in the highly elevated locations such as Mexico City, Puebla, San Cristobal de las Casas and warmer tropical climates as you descend to sea level locations such as Cancun and Cuemavaca.

The hurricane season on the Caribbean side of Central America and the Gulf of Mexico runs from September to November. Usually this only means high winds and occasional storms. It is highly unlikely that the full force of a hurricane would hit any of the areas we pass through on our tours, however our tour leaders are fully prepared to take any necessary action and would make itinerary changes if required to ensure the safety of clients.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Mexico - Money

Tipping

Service charges are rarely added to your bill however many of the staff depend on tips for their livelihood. Usually 15-20% is expected depending on how you found the service. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80cents (5-10pesos). Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

Entrance Fees

Generally speaking most museums in Mexico cost between US$2 and US$4. There are many interesting museums to visit, but please bear in mind that many museums close on Mondays or Tuesdays. The many beautiful churches and cathedrals of Mexico are always free to enter, but flash photography is strictly forbidden, and opening hours vary greatly.

There are sometimes cultural events going on and galleries/exhibitions which are free to enter. Your tour leader will give you more details on these. Mérida actually has a free historical walking tour of the city centre every morning, which is definitely worth doing.

You might also get the chance to take in an evening show. Perhaps the theatre or the ballet. Tickets for these are very reasonable and prices range from US$5 to US$20. Some evening shows (which include local traditional dances) are put on by the tourist office free of charge.

Mexico - Tipping & Entrance Fees

Tipping

A 10-15% service charge is added on to the restaurant bill throughout most of Mexico. If it is not added on, it is still expected (especially in the more expensive restaurants). There should be no other charge on top of this. You are not expected to tip taxi drivers unless they go out of their way for you although you should tip anyone who helps with your luggage, approx 50-80cents (5-10pesos). Tipping guides at the end of tours/excursions is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on this.

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Mexico - Shopping

Haggling is expected in Mexico’s street markets and can be a real highlight. La Merced in Mexico City and Mercado La Libertad in Guadalajara are some of the biggest in the country although each region will have their own regional handicrafts. If you see something that you like, buy it! As it may be more expensive in another region or you may never see it again. It is generally agreed that Oaxaca and San Cristóbal have the best bargains and most variety, partly due to the strong indigenous influence of surrounding villages.

Haggling in shops is not common practice and can be considered rude. Asking for a discount might be possible but this will depend on the shop.

Mexico - Local Transport

We recommend you use taxis for all journeys within a city. With the exception of larger cities taxis are not usually metered and you will have to agree the price before starting your journey. It is a good idea to ask one of the hotel staff of your tour leader for a rough guide, so you know how much to pay roughly. It will also help if you speak some Spanish but as a general rule you have to pay more than the locals do. Mexico city’s bus and underground metro system are also easy to use.

Mexico - Food & Drink

Food and drink in Mexico cost very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home. Breakfast can cost as little as US$3, lunch can cost as little as US$5.50 & dinner as little as $9.50. Obviously, this depends on if you order additional drinks which will increase the bill. In smaller restaurants that the locals and backpackers use you can get meals from as little as US$2. Mexican food is a mix of US, Spanish, Aztec and Mayan influences and is as vibrant and exciting as the country itself. Although the country has a reputation for spicy food, you can usually choose whether you would like to
Guatemala, Belize & Mexico

make the food spicy or not, and there are usually various chilli sauces and salsas on the tables in restaurants should you wish to increase the spice.

Huevos rancheros is the most common breakfast dish consisting of fried eggs on hot corn tortillas topped with salsa and can be served with refried beans, Mexican style rice and guacamole. Other dishes include Pozole which is a traditional soup dating back to the Aztecs made from meat, dried maize kernels, and toppings such as cabbage, onion, garlic and salsa. One that certainly deserves a mention is mole sauce, commonly served with chicken, turkey or enchiladas of chicken/turkey. Mole is a rich chilli sauce, thickened and enriched with nuts and seeds and augmented by various spices. The most famous is called “mole poblano” which is a dark brown colour as it has chocolate added to it.

Drink

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a rough guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below:

- 1 litre of water US$0.80
- Bottle of soft drink US$1.00
- Bottle of national beer US$1.40

Mexican fruit is fresh and cheap. Go to one of the many juice stands and ask for a “liquado de fruta” (fruit smoothie) or “jugo de naranja y zanahoria” (orange & carrot). Papaya, melon, watermelon, mango, and pineapple are very popular. Always specify if you don't want sugar (“sin azucar”). Latin Americans have a very sweet tooth and will usually automatically add the sugar.

Generally speaking it's best not to expect good coffee/tea in this part of the world. Be warned that Americano (weak black coffee) is the most common, followed by “café con leche” (more like milk with a bit of coffee), and cappuccino (sometimes good). If you ask for tea (“té negro”) you will get teabags. Always ask for “leche fria a parte” (cold milk on the side) as the alternative is likely to be a hot cup of milk with a tea bag inside.

If you only learn one word in Spanish it's bound to be Cerveza. There are countless lagers, and a few dark beers. The most common are Corona, Sol, XX, Pacifico, Montejo, with the more premium ones being Modelo and Bohemia. Also, two ways of drinking beer distinct to Mexico should be tried: A chelada is a beer already prepared with lime and salt. A michelada is the same only with a special chilli sauce added. White rum (ron) and unsurprisingly tequila are definitely the most commonly drunk spirits in Mexico. Kahlua is also Mexican. Mexico is not known for its wine and it is best to order Chilean wine.