JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

UNDISCOVERED EL SALVADOR AND NICARAGUA

19 days from **£4,700pp**

EL SALVADOR / SAN SALVADOR / RUTA DE LAS FLORES / SUCHITOTO / PERQUIN AND THE RUTA DE LA PAZ / NICARAGUA / LEON / OMETEPE ISLAND / GRANADA / RIO SAN JUAN



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

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

This three week journey through El Salvador and Nicaragua ventures off the beaten track to explore two of Central America's lesservisited yet most rewarding countries.

DAY 1	**Arrive in San Salvador and transfer to your hotel.**
DAY 2	**El Boqueron Volcano & San Salvador city tour**
DAY 3	**Transfer to Ataco on the Ruta de las Flores.**
DAY 4	**Exploring the Ruta de las Flores & Coffee Tasting**
DAY 5	**Transfer to Suchitoto via El Tazumal, Santa Ana & Joya de Ceren**
DAY 6	**Walking tour of Suchitoto.**
DAY 7	**Transfer to Perquin.**
DAY 8	**Visit Perquin's Museo de la Revolución and the nearby town of El Mozote.**
DAY 9	**Transfer to La Union on the Gulf of Fonseca.**
DAY 10	**Boat across the Gulf of Fonseca to Nicaragua; continue by road to Leon.**
DAY 11	**Walking tour of Leon.**
DAY 12	**Transfer to San Jorge port; ferry to Ometepe Island.**
DAY 13	**Ometepe Island tour**
DAY 14	**At leisure on Ometepe Island - optional hikes and cycle rides available.**
DAY 15	**Return to San Jorge port by ferry; continue by road to the colonial city of Granada.**
DAY 16	**Granada city tour, boat trip on Lake Nicaragua & Masaya volcano at night.**
DAY 17	**Transfer to San Carlos; travel by boat along Rio San Juan to El Castillo.**
DAY 18	**Hike in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve & tour of El Castillo fortress.**
DAY 19	**Return to Granada for your final night**
DAY 20	**Transfer to Managua airport for your international flight home.**

ITINERARY

Both nations offer spectacular landscapes shaped by volcanoes, lakes, rivers, jungle, palm fringed beaches, and fertile hillsides draped in coffee bushes, along with a remarkable diversity of flora and fauna. Along the way, you'll discover an unpretentious charm in their towns and cities and meet some of the most hospitable people in Latin America.

In recent decades, both countries have emerged from periods of political turbulence, and throughout your trip you'll visit significant sites that help to understand their complex histories.

While neither country rivals the big hitters of Mexico, Peru, or Brazil, El Salvador and Nicaragua captivate in quieter ways. From their colonial towns, archaeological sites, and poignant memorials to their volcanic landscapes and scenic journeys by road and boat, both nations reward travellers who are willing to leave the headlines behind and explore.

DAY 1

Arrive in San Salvador and transfer to your hotel.

You will be met at the airport by our local representative who will accompany you on the one-hour drive to your hotel in the capital's quiet, upmarket Zona Rosa district.



DAY 2

El Boqueron Volcano & San Salvador city tour

Drive up the steep mountain road which flanks San Salvador towards the peak of El Boquerón volcano for expansive views over the capital and surrounding countryside. Volcanic activity here in the past wreaked havoc on the city, but now you can take a short walk to the rim of the extinct volcanic crater, where a walkway offers impressive vistas into the crater, which is smothered in closely-packed foliage.



Established by the Spanish in 1525, San Salvador is a dynamic, cosmopolitan capital with a mélange of architectural styles reflecting its chequered history. The Plaza Gerardo Barrios forms the focal point of your walking tour, flanked by the National Palace, the striking National Library, and the Metropolitan Cathedral, which houses the tomb of Archbishop Óscar Romero who was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass.

DAY 3

Transfer to Ataco on the Ruta de las Flores.

Continue by private transfer (3 hours) to the colonial town of Ataco. Located in the heart of El Salvador's Ruta de las Flores (Route of the Flowers), Ataco is an attractive cobbled town adorned with brightly coloured murals. With its wide choice of cafés and restaurants, together with handicraft and artisanal markets, it's a lovely place to explore on foot.



DAY 4

Exploring the Ruta de las Flores & Coffee Tasting

Set off and explore the Ruta de las Flores, a 36kilometre winding mountain route linking Sonsonate to Ahuachapán and offering wonderful views at every turn. As the name suggests, you'll pass fields of tropical flowers and nurseries that thrive in the cool, pleasant climate.



Steeped in cultural tradition, the Ruta de las Flores is worth visiting any day of the week, though its towns truly come alive at weekends. Your tour is flexible so you can make the most of the day and tailor it to your interests, whether that's browsing craft markets, visiting historic churches (including one with a 16thcentury black statue of Christ), or joining the lively weekly food fair in Juayúa.

Rising from 250 to 2,365 metres above sea level, this fertile region produces some of the world's finest coffee. You'll have the chance to visit a coffee plantation, learning about cultivation, harvesting, and roasting before enjoying a fresh cup prepared using the traditional *chorreador* method, which strains the roasted coffee to bring out its most delicious aromas.

DAY 5

Transfer to Suchitoto via El Tazumal, Santa Ana & Joya de Ceren



Drive to the archaeological site of El Tazumal, El Salvador's most significant ceremonial Mayan centre. Set in the heart of the small town of Chalchuapa, it's a place where everyday life continues along the very streets once trodden by the Maya. Just outside the ruins stands a bust of Che Guevara, commemorating his visit in 1954.

Continue to Santa Ana, El Salvador's second city, taking time to admire the National Theatre and the impressive Gothic cathedral that dominate the vibrant main square. From here, travel to the fascinating archaeological site of Joya de Cerén.

Drawing comparisons with Pompeii, the pre-Hispanic farming community of Joya de Cerén was buried in up to 20 feet of ash when the Laguna Caldera Volcano erupted in AD 600, and the incredibly well preserved remains offer an insight into the day to day lives of rural communities of the time: how they cultivated their crops, built their homes and cooked and stored their food. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993 and houses an excellent museum with multilingual information boards.

DAY 6

Walking tour of Suchitoto.



Suchitoto is a charming colonial town whose name in the native Nahuatl language means *"place of birds and flowers"* – and for good reason – vibrant flowers adorn every building and nearby Lake Suchitlán provides an important sanctuary for birdlife.

During El Salvador's brutal civil war, Suchitoto was heavily affected. Fortunately, since the signing of the peace accords, extensive reconstruction has taken place, and today its cobblestone streets are a delight to wander.

On a leisurely 2–3-hour walking tour, you'll explore the town's principal attractions, including the striking white Santa Lucía Church, which dominates the main square. You'll also discover Suchitoto's rich cultural identity with visits to the Arte Para la Paz (Art for Peace) Museum and the Teatro Alejandro Cotto – named in honour of the filmmaker, writer, and poet who played a key role in shaping the town's cultural life.

DAY 7

Transfer to Perquin.



Continue by private transfer (5 hours) to the historic town of Perquín, tucked away in the far northeast of the country just a few kilometres from the Honduran border.

Perquín, a small town of only a few thousand residents, is best known for having served as the headquarters of the guerrilla movement during the civil war. Reminders of the conflict still remain, yet today it is a peaceful place with a pleasant climate, surrounded by low, forested mountains.

DAY 8

Visit Perquin's Museo de la Revolución and the nearby town of El Mozote.



Perquín forms part of the country's *Ruta de la Paz* (Peace Route), which also includes other settlements closely linked to the armed struggle.

You'll visit the town's Museo de la Revolución, proudly run by former guerrilla fighters and filled with memorabilia from the conflict. The museum also features moving displays describing how this region was particularly affected, as well as an account of the life and assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero, the revolutionary priest and martyr.

You'll then travel to the nearby town of El Mozote to see its poignant memorial dedicated to the victims of a horrific massacre that occurred at the height of the civil war.

DAY 9

Transfer to La Union on the Gulf of Fonseca.



Continue by private transfer (3 hours) to La Unión, El Salvador's principal port and an important regional trading hub. The city itself is somewhat ramshackle, but it enjoys a beautiful setting at the foot of the Conchagua Volcano and overlooking the Gulf of Fonseca.

Accommodation options in La Unión are limited, but your hotel – located a few kilometres outside the city with views across the Gulf of Fonseca – provides a more than adequate base for one night.

In the evening, head to Conchagua, a small town perched on the slopes of the volcano that shares its name. It's a pretty place with a flowerfilled plaza centred around one of the oldest churches in the country. Here, you'll learn how to make El Salvador's most popular traditional dish, the humble *pupusa*, a thick corn pancake typically filled with cheese, refried beans, or meat.

DAY 10

Boat across the Gulf of Fonseca to Nicaragua; continue by road to Leon.



Board a boat in the morning in La Unión for the 2½hour crossing of the Gulf of Fonseca to Potosí in Nicaragua. This is certainly the more adventurous way to travel between the two countries, as the ride can be a little rough and you may get splashed.

(It is possible to travel overland via Honduras, but UK passportholders require a visa to transit Honduras.)

The Salvadoran and Honduran coastlines are dotted with small islands and backed by steep, verdant mountains. Along the way, you'll see fishermen hauling in their catch, seabirds skimming the water's surface, and, if you're lucky, dolphins leaping and playing alongside the boat.

Once in Potosí, it's a threehour drive to León, Nicaragua's former capital, a city that still embodies much of the country's ecclesiastical and intellectual heritage.

DAY 11

Walking tour of Leon.



León is Nicaragua's most ebullient city – energised by its university and a thriving intellectual and cultural life. It boasts a fascinating history: the original settlement at the foot of the Momotombo Volcano was founded in 1524 and later destroyed by an earthquake in 1609.

A walking tour reveals the tempestuous history of the modern-day city, a colonial masterpiece rivalled only by Granada, with its trademark adobe façades, narrow streets, and elegant squares dominated by a number of grandiose churches. These include the imposing Cathedral – the largest in the Americas – which took over 100 years to complete.

León also has a long history of alliance with revolutionary causes, and you'll still see remnants of Sandinista murals painted during the revolt against the Somoza regime in the 1970s.

DAY 12

Transfer to San Jorge port; ferry to Ometepe Island.



Continue by private transfer (4 hours) across the country to the port of San Jorge on the western shore of Lake Nicaragua. Here, you'll board a ferry for the onehour crossing to Ometepe Island.

The relaxed, tranquil island rises majestically from Lake Nicaragua, dominated by its twin conical volcanoes, Concepción and Maderas. Thanks to its fertile volcanic soil, Ometepe is dotted with citrus, banana, watermelon, and avocado plantations, while its lush jungle vegetation provides a habitat for monkeys and a rich variety of bird species.

Life here has remained largely unchanged for decades, if not centuries, despite the upheavals caused by revolution and civil war elsewhere. And the fact that the island can only be reached by boat has helped maintain its enduring sense of remoteness.

DAY 13

Ometepe Island tour



Your tour begins in the Charco Verde nature reserve where palm trees and densely packed, fruit-bearing tropical vegetation line the lakeshore, which is indented with small volcanic beaches. The reserve is enlivened by the presence of over 200 howler monkeys, as well as the calls of migratory and indigenous birds. A calm lagoon, dotted with mangroves and fallen trees, creates a fairy-tale atmosphere; the area is famous for its mythology.

Continue to the El Ceibo Pre-Columbian Museum, where archaeological displays showcase ancient artefacts found on the island, including intricate carvings of animals and people, alongside a numismatic collection of more than 3,000 pieces. Your day concludes with a refreshing swim in the crystal-clear waters of Ojo de Agua, a forest-fringed natural swimming pool.

DAY 14

At leisure on Ometepe Island - optional hikes and cycle rides available.



The two volcanoes that dominate Ometepe Island – Concepción (1,610m) and Maderas (1,394m) – offer excellent, albeit challenging, hiking opportunities. Reaching the summit and returning typically takes a full day, and on clear days you'll be rewarded with breathtaking panoramic views of the Island, Lake Nicaragua, and beyond.

Peaceful and unhurried, Ometepe Island also lends itself beautifully to cycling. With little vehicular traffic, you can pedal through small villages, stopping at natural swimming holes as you explore the island on two wheels.

Or simply relax at your hotel – whether swaying in a hammock or unwinding on the lakeside beach – the choice is yours.

DAY 15

Return to San Jorge port by ferry; continue by road to the colonial city of Granada.



Return to the port of San Jorge by ferry and continue by private transfer (2 hours) to Granada. Founded in 1524, Granada lies at the foot of the Mombacho Volcano and is one of the oldest cities in the New World.

At its height, the city grew wealthy through the gold trade and was repeatedly plundered by pirates, and even razed by the American mercenary William Walker in the mid19th century. Despite this turbulent past, the city has been beautifully restored and its colourful colonial houses and cobbled streets, many of which lead down to the shores of Lake Nicaragua, are a delight to explore.

DAY 16

Granada city tour, boat trip on Lake Nicaragua & Masaya volcano at night.



Take a guided tour of Granada, visiting its colonial churches, strolling down narrow streets, and passing graceful historic houses. Many of the city's highlights are located around the main square, including the beautiful baroque La Merced Church, the Casa de los Tres Mundos – now a cultural centre for local musicians and dancers – and the 16thcentury San Francisco Convent.

Granada sits on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, the secondlargest body of freshwater in the Americas. The lake stretches before you like an inland sea, its silky silver surface breaking into whitetipped waves when the wind picks up. Embark on a small launch for a relaxing boat ride through the sheltered waters around the peaceful *Isletas* – hundreds of tiny, brightgreen, forested islands created by eruptions from the Mombacho Volcano that towers above the lake. Depending on the weather and time of day, you may spot abundant birdlife. Small fishing communities live among the islands, and a few host impressive weekend retreats owned by wealthy Nicaraguans.

At sunset you'll head to Masaya Volcano, a short distance from Granada, where visitors can peer into the volcano's fiery crater to witness its red and glowing lava.

DAY 17

Transfer to San Carlos; travel by boat along Rio San Juan to El Castillo.



Continue by private transfer (5 hours) to San Carlos on the south-eastern shores of Lake Nicaragua. The liveliest part of this quiet and somewhat ramshackle town is down by the pier: ferries and private launches jostle for space with fishing boats.

The boat journey to El Castillo takes about 1½ hours. Leaving San Carlos, the riverbanks are initially lined with maize fields and grazing cattle, punctuated by small jetties and rural homes. As you travel further downstream, the vegetation gradually gives way to dense tropical forest. There's plenty of wildlife too: snowy ibis perch on overhanging branches and you may spot monkeys swinging through the taller trees and caiman basking on bare logs.

Rounding a bend, you're greeted by a spectacular sight – on a rare hilltop, a vast stone-built Spanish fortress looms above white-water rapids and the squat, stilted houses of the quirky little port of El Castillo.

In the evening, set out by boat in search of caimans accompanied by a specialist guide. As you glide through the darkness, your journey orchestrated by the nocturnal sounds of the rainforest, the guide will use a spotlight to reflect the beady red eyes of caimans as they rest along the water's edge.

DAY 18

Hike in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve & tour of El Castillo fortress.



El Castillo fortress, dates back to 1673 and was constructed by the Spanish to protect the affluent trading city of Granada from what they considered to be European pirates. Spend the afternoon exploring this formidable fortress with your guide who will narrate its extraordinary history, which included an assault by a youthful naval officer named Horatio Nelson. The expanisve views from the top, over uninterrupted rainforest are as impressive as the monumental stone walls and cannons themselves.

DAY 19

Return to Granada for your final night

The return journey upriver to San Carlos takes 1½ hours, and from there it's a further 5 hours by road back to Granada for your final night in Nicaragua.



DAY 20

Transfer to Managua airport for your international flight home.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- San Salvador: El Boqueron Volcano & San Salvador City Tour
- Ataco: Ruta de las Flores & Coffee Tour
- Ataco: Tazumal, Santa Ana & Joya de Ceren
- Suchitito: Walking tour
- Perquín: Museo de la Revolución & El Mozote
- La Union: Pupusa dinner
- Leon: Walking tour
- Ometepe Island tour
- Granada: city tour, boat trip on Lake Nicargua and Masaya volcano by night.
- El Castillo: Caiman-spotting by night
- El Castillo: Hike in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve
- El Castillo: Guided tour of the fortress

ESSENTIALS

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS
20 days, 19 nights: San Salvador 2; Ataco 2; Suchitoto 2; Perquín 2; La Union 1; Leon 2; Ometepe Island 3; Granada 2; El Castillo 2; Granada 1.

ACCOMMODATION
This trip features a variety of accommodation, ranging from mid range colonial style hotels to simple yet comfortable lodgings in more remote areas.

TRANSPORT
– 9 long distance road journeys (ranging from 2-5 hours)

– boat from El Salvador to Nicaragua across the Gulf of Fonseca (2½ hours)

– public ferries to/from Ometepe Island (1 hour each way)

– boats to/from San Carlos/El Castillo (1½ hours each way)

MEALS
Breakfast: daily

Lunch: day 18

Dinner: days 9, 17 & 18.

GUIDES
Our local, trusted and carefully selected partners understand the expectations of our customers very well, and their staff and guides are consistently singled out for praise by clients on their return.

On this holiday, you will be joined by different guides for each activity and or region, ensuring you benefit from specialised expertise and knowledge, often from someone local to the area.

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS
As well as any included activities, most Private Journeys include some free time for optional excursions. As optional excursions are often subject to availability, we recommend you discuss and arrange them with your Travel Expert as early as possible before you depart.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

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.

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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