JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



DISCOVERY GROUP TOURS

QUETZAL: THE BEST OF MEXICO AND GUATEMALA

from **£3,999pp**

MEXICO / GUATEMALA / MÉRIDA, CHICHÉN ITZÁ AND THE YUCATAN / LAKE ATITLAN AND VILLAGES / ANTIGUA AND THE HIGHLANDS



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

Discover the Mayan ruins and natural splendour of Mexico's Yucatán peninsula and Guatemala on this fascinating tour of two of Latin America's most beautiful regions.

DAY 1	Arrive in Mexico and transfer to Valladolid.
DAY 2	Guided tour of Ek' Balam.
DAY 3	Guided tour of Chichén Itzá and then travel to Mérida.
DAY 4	Walking tour of Mérida.
DAY 5	Fly to Flores in Guatemala.
DAY 6	Full day tour of Tikal.
DAY 7	Visit the ruins of Ceibal.
DAY 8	Visit Lanquín Caves and Semuc Champey.
DAY 9	Drive to the shores of Lake Atitlan
DAY 10	Boat trip on Lake Atitlan to Santiago and San Juan la Laguna.
DAY 11	Drive to Antigua via the market at Chichicastenango.
DAY 12	Discover Antigua with a walking tour.
DAY 13	Transfer to Guatemala City for flight home or onward journey.
	UK clients arrive home the following day.

ITINERARY

On this escorted group holiday, you will trace the Maya civilisation from the iconic Chichén Itzá to the breath taking sights of Tikal and down to Lake Atitlán, where centuries-old traditions are still deeply honoured to this day.

You'll start your journey in Mexico's traditional city of Valladolid, exploring the lesser-known ruins of nearby 'Ek Balam and the world famous Chichén Itzá, before continuing to the bustling Yucatán capital of Mérida. You'll then fly into Guatemala to wander the rainforest surrounding the temples of Tikal before visiting the caves, and pools of emerald green en route to historic Cobán. Next, you'll get to explore the communities that line the shores of the volcanic Lake Atitlán, and stop at the famed mountain market of Chichicastenango, before ending your stay in one of the best preserved colonial cities in Central America, Antigua.

From here, you can choose to fly home or continue your journey with a short flight to Mexico City to explore one of Latin America's most famous cities.

DAY 1

Arrive in Mexico and transfer to Valladolid.

You'll be arriving in your base for the first two days: the colourful, colonial town of Valladolid. Filled with history, great restaurants and a laid-back atmosphere, Valladolid is an excellent location for reaching the Yucatán Peninsula's famed archaeological sites.



DAY 2

Guided tour of Ek' Balam.

Explore the lesser-known ruins of Ek' Balam. Considered one of the best kept secrets and Mayan sites of the Yucatán, you'll be on an in-depth guided tour and have the opportunity to even climb the pyramids at the archaeological site.



DAY 3

Guided tour of Chichén Itzá and then travel to Mérida.



This morning visit one of the modern seven wonders of the world, Chichén Itzá. You will be accompanied by a guide who will bring the history of this incredible location, filled with pyramids, macabre sculpture and temples, alive.

The origins of the site are mysterious. It has the largest and best-preserved ball court in the Americas: the venue for an ancient ritual game that was played throughout the continent, but which is still not fully understood. Archaeologists have not been able to determine whether the losers or winners were decapitated, but judging from the gory carvings along the base of the court's walls, someone certainly came to an unpleasant end.

After the tour, you will travel onto the city of Mérida for the next 2 nights.

DAY 4

Walking tour of Mérida.



Today you'll explore the historical centre of Mérida, the bustling, colonial capital city of the Yucatán State built more than 450 years ago on the site of Tho, an ancient Mayan city. Start with a visit to the magnificent Cathedral of San Ildefonso, built with the stones of ancient Maya temples. Construction of this cathedral began in 1561, making the oldest in Latin America. Inside there are murals depicting the meeting between Francisco de Montejo, the founder of Mérida, and the Mayan King, Tutl Xiu.

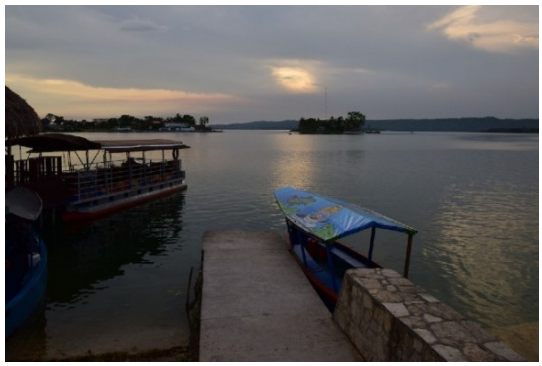
You'll then continue to the Casa Montejo, the grandiose home of Francisco de Montejo, and the Governor's Palace, housing 27 huge murals by Don Fernando Castro Pacheco illustrating the at times violent history of Yucatán, and then the tree-shaded Plaza Principal which is an ideal vantage point for photos of the city's major buildings and sites.

The 3 hour tour ends with a drive along the historical boulevard Paseo Montejo – fashioned after the Champs Elysees – with its elegant homes, shops and typical restaurants, and you can spend the rest of the day exploring this beautiful city at your leisure.

DAY 5

Fly to Flores in Guatemala.

Today, take to Flores (a change in Guatemala City is likely), a small, charming island on Lake Petén in northern Guatemala. An ideal base for exploring the nearby Mayan ruins of Tikal, Flores is well worth a stroll upon arrival for its colourful cobblestone streets, waterside views and laid-back atmosphere.

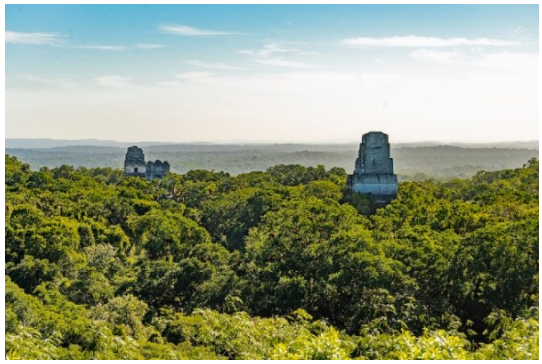


DAY 6

Full day tour of Tikal.

An hour from Flores lies Tikal where tall, elegant temples penetrate the lush forest canopy, and where you'll be spending the day discovering the palace complexes with an informed local guide.

Tikal was one of the largest and most important Mayan city states, reaching its peak around AD 800, before its mysterious demise. The pyramids and temples seem frozen in time, but you're brought back to the present by the curious roar of howler monkeys as they swing through the low branches of the trees, and flashes of colour as toucans and parrots take flight. Make sure to catch the spectacular views from one of the temple-tops for an unforgettable sight.



DAY 7

Visit the ruins of Ceibal.

Today you'll drive about 1.5 hours to the village of Sayaxché through the dense Petén jungle. From here you continue by boat for another 45 minutes up river before reaching the ruins of Ceibal hidden deep within the jungle forest. Ceibal was a very important city for the Mayas of the Petén and the river served as a trading point for luxury goods such as jade and quetzal feathers. Populated from about 800 BC until it was abandoned sometime between AD 500 and AD 690, the city was eventually repopulated somewhere between AD 771 and AD 889. Thanks to the hardness of the local stone, Ceibal has some of the best-preserved stelae in Guatemala, and amidst the ruins the ball court is still clearly visible together with an unusual round, flat-topped pyramid believed to have been an observation platform.

Afterwards you'll continue to the town of San Cristóbal Verapaz where you'll be spending the night.



DAY 8

Visit Lanquín Caves and Semuc Champey.

This morning you'll be making multiple sightseeing stops in the region around Coban. First stop is Semuc Champey, a series of natural pools of emerald green formed by the underground Cahabón River. Its setting is spectacular: surrounded by a canyon and a lush tropical forest. There is an opportunity for a dip in the waters before continuing to the caves at Lanquín, which has an underground river and unique rock formations. The caves are considered sacred by local indigenous people. Take care and use the hand rails where here as the cave floor is particularly slippery.



DAY 9

Drive to the shores of Lake Atitlan

A 6 hour drive will take you into the Guatemala highlands and to the lively tourist town of Panajachel located on the shores of Lake Atitlán.

Lake Atitlán is one of the most captivating in the world, with conical, volcanic cones reflected in its impossibly blue waters, and traditional towns and villages skirting its periphery.



DAY 10

Boat trip on Lake Atitlan to Santiago and San Juan la Laguna.

Take a motor launch across the lake to Santiago de Atitlán. Cruising over the still morning waters there are wonderful views of the various shoreline settlements and cultivated fields, some grand houses, and beyond to the gently sloping volcanoes that encircle the water. You'll be greeted as you alight at Santiago by enthusiastic children, and the town is an excellent place to buy brilliantly coloured textiles.

You'll then continue on to San Juan La Laguna, a town with striking landscapes and great artisan wealth. Take in the panoramic views, visit weaving cooperatives and art studios and discover this former colonial gem.



DAY 11

Drive to Antigua via the market at Chichicastenango.



Today you'll start your journey with a 1.5 hour drive north to the highland town of Chichicastenango, a place where the overt symbols and practices of Catholicism mingle with esoteric Mayan religious ceremonies. Here there is a vast market, and labyrinthine streets that are lined with textiles, clothes and tapestries of striking colour and extraordinary intricacy, as well as extravagant hand-carved masks and good-quality leather goods. Local farmers also bring an array of fruit and vegetables from the surrounding villages, which they exchange and sell. Take your time and weave through this incredible location – there's much to see and to find.

Afterwards, you'll continue your journey through the highlands west of Antigua that are dominated by watchful volcanoes and compact, busy farming villages as you make your way in to the city proper, ultimately arriving in one of the best preserved Spanish colonial cities in Central America.

DAY 12

Discover Antigua with a walking tour.



Antigua is a colonial work of art with cobbled streets, overhanging tiled roofs and a beautiful, leafy central plaza. There is an abundance of huge, ruined churches, convents and monasteries, testament to a time when Antigua was the country's capital and its main religious centre, and a dramatic backdrop of smouldering volcanoes to remind you how the city was destroyed by an eruption in 1773. You'll get to learn all about this city's fascinating past on a guided walking tour.

Antigua is a welcoming place to relax and unwind, so afterwards, do some shopping and enjoy some excellent food, or just to wander around the ruined convents and enjoy the flora in their beautifully tended gardens.

DAY 13

Transfer to Guatemala City for flight home or onward journey.

Travel by road for 1.5 hours from Antigua to Guatemala City Airport for your international flight or onward extension.

UK clients arrive home the following day.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- Ek Balam: guided tour of Mayan ruins
- Chichén Itzá: guided tour of Mayan ruins
- Mérida: walking city tour
- Tikal: guided tour of Mayan ruins
- Cobán: boat ride on the La Pasion river and Ceibal Archaeological site
- Coban: Lanquin caves and Semun Champey
- Lake Atitlan: boat trip around the lake to visit Santiago Atitlan and San Juan La Laguna
- Chichicastenango: visit to the famous market
- Antigua: walking city tour

ESSENTIALS

ABOUT OUR GROUP TOURS

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

TOUR LEADER

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

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

13 days, 12 nights: Valladolid 2; Mérida 2; Flores 2; San Cristobal Verapaz 2; Lake Atitlan 2; Antigua 2.

ACCOMMODATION

We use the following mid-range hotels on this tour.

- Valladolid: Real Hispano
- Mérida: Villa Mercedes Curio Collection
- Flores: La Casona del Lago
- San Cristobal Verapaz: Paniste
- Lake Atitlan: Posada de Don Rodrigo
- Antigua: Villa Colonial

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

TRANSPORT

1 flight (with connection in Guatemala City), 5 road journeys (longest 7 hours with stops). All land transport is operated privately for the group.

MEALS

Breakfast daily. Lunch day 6.

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

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

TRAVELLING ALONE

There is no extra cost for single travellers who are willing to share a room. You will be accommodated with another same-sex member of the group who is also travelling solo. For single travellers who wish to have their own room there are a limited number of single rooms available which carry a surcharge.

TRIP SUITABILITY

This journey covers some large distances and although we try and make it as relaxed as possible there are some long days of travel. However all transportation is private and comfortable. Walks and excursions are optional; ascents to some of the pyramids at the Maya and Aztec sites can be steep and vertiginous. Consult your tour leader if you have any doubts.

CLIMATE

November to April are the best months to visit the Yucatán Peninsula and Guatemala, as there is plenty of warm sunshine and minimal rainfall. Tikal is hot and humid all year round and the Guatemalan Highlands can be chilly at night. A comprehensive overview of the weather in all the regions you are visiting can be found in our Destination pages. Our

Travel Experts can answer your questions on climate and further details will be sent with your confirmation documents.

CLOTHING, EQUIPMENT AND LUGGAGE

A daypack is essential for carrying rainwear, snacks, books/tablet and a water bottle as are comfortable walking shoes. Bring a hat with a visor, sunglasses and sun block. Binoculars are useful for bird and wildlife spotting. Because the weather can be changeable, we recommend wearing layered clothing for excursions. Some warm items. waterproof jackets mosquito repellent and swimwear are also necessary for all departures.

MONEY

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

HEALTH, ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND INSURANCE

For health information on travelling to Mexico and Guatemala including recommended vaccinations, please see https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports should be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Other nationalities should enquire with us or check with the consulates.

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

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

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

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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