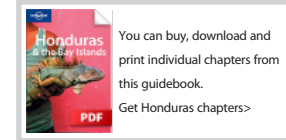


Getting Started



WHEN TO GO

Like most tropical countries, Honduras experiences a rainy season and a dry season, known locally as *invierno* (winter) and *verano* (summer), respectively. In the interior, especially the west and south, the rainy season runs roughly from May to November. Rains usually come in the afternoon and last an hour or so. On the north coast and Bay Islands, the rainy season is later, around September to December, with *nortes* ('northerners', cool storms from the north) possible into February. Hurricanes are most likely from September to October, though they rarely hit Honduras directly. However, even a far-off hurricane can send heavy rain Honduras' way and can cause flooding or minor mudslides. See climate charts (p304) for more information.

Travel is easier during the dry season, especially for scuba diving and trips to La Moskitia. Then again, the forests and countryside are more lush during the rainy season. February and March are good months to visit because the weather is fairly stable across the country; the trails and roads are drying out but the trees and underbrush are still full and green.

COSTS & MONEY

Honduras is an inexpensive country overall, but a trip here can be pricey simply because of the activities you're likely to do, namely diving.

Besides diving, lodging will likely be your biggest expense. Hotel prices run the gamut in Honduras, the majority being high-budget or low-midrange, around US\$15 to US\$25 per night. Budget travelers can manage lodging for under US\$12 per day in popular destinations and under US\$8 in remote areas, though the cheapest hotels can be pretty grim.

For most travelers, eating out will cost around US\$6 to US\$8 per person per meal, once drinks, taxes, and tip are added in. But you can save money by eating at street food vendors and no-name eateries, and

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Passport and US cash – universal travel essentials
- Sunscreen – very expensive in Honduras
- Bug repellent – expensive and can be hard to find
- Toiletries – you'll appreciate having your preferred brands of tampons, pads, condoms, deodorant, etc
- Travel alarm clock – it's rare to find alarm clocks in hotels, even high-end ones
- Copies of important documents – having a copy of your passport and plane tickets will make replacing them, if necessary, much easier
- Toilet paper – an extra roll has saved many a traveler in a pinch
- Diver certification card and logbook – bring them if you've got them. You don't want to repeat the Open Water course, do you?
- Extra eyeglasses or contacts – expensive and difficult to replace
- Large heavy-duty plastic bags – handy for travel in the rainy season, or anytime in La Moskitia

by getting lunch or breakfast items at a grocery store instead of a restaurant. Being careful, budget travelers can bring food costs down to US\$5 per meal or less.

The big-ticket item for most travelers here is diving, plus the higher cost of hotels and restaurants on the Bay Islands. Figure an Open Water course will cost US\$200 to US\$240, with a half-dozen fun dives at around US\$20 to US\$35 per tank. Lodging and food tend to be more expensive on Roatán than Utila. Most shops on Utila have basic dorms, and offer their students either two to four free nights or two free fun dives (most people choose the latter). A trip to La Moskitia can also be pricey, whether by tour or on your own.

Buses are a bargain, especially considering how big the country is. There are three classes of service: *ordinario* or *parando* (literally, stopping) is the classic ‘chicken bus’ that stops frequently to pick up and drop off passengers. *Directos* make fewer stops and cost only slightly more – for most travelers this is the way to go. Some popular routes are covered by the luxury or deluxe lines Hedman Alas, King Quality or Saenz Clase Primera. Prices are double or triple, but it can be a worthwhile splurge.

Taxis are safe and affordable, with fares typically charged per person. Expect US\$0.60 to US\$1 per person within town, US\$1.50 and up for destinations out of town or at night.

Other costs to consider are rental cars (midsize US\$30 to US\$60 per day including taxes and insurance), Internet (US\$0.75 to US\$1 per hour) and laundry (US\$1 per pound).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Topics like Copán archaeological site, the banana industry and the Contra war have been well studied, while others, like non-Maya indigenous communities and environmental issues, have not. Gangs are a hot topic and have received extensive newspaper and magazine coverage; full-length books are still rare, though several are in the works.

Honduras: A Country Guide by Tom Barry and Kent Norsworthy (1991) and *Honduras: A Country Study* (1990) by the US Federal Research Division are oldish but have concise historical information.

The United States, Honduras, and the Crisis in Central America by Donald E Schultz and Deborah Sundloff Schulz (1994) discusses the role of the US in Central America during the region’s tumultuous civil wars.

Don’t be Afraid, Gringo (1987) is the intriguing first-hand story of peasant Elvia Alvarado’s reluctant rise as a labor leader, and of the Honduran labor movement, flaws and all.

Bitter Fruit by Stephen C Schlesinger is mostly about the United Fruit Company in Guatemala, but provides insight on the banana giant’s impact on Honduras as well. *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880–1930* (1995) and *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898–1934* (2002), both by Lester D Langley, are incisive accounts of the banana companies’ political and economic influence in Central America and the Caribbean.

Alison Acker’s *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic* (1989), lacks the detail and analysis of more recent studies, but is a very worthy read.

Copán is one of the most extensively studied archaeological sites in the Maya world; many studies are highly technical but several have been written with a more general readership in mind. *Copán: The History of*

HOW MUCH?

Moto-taxi ride US\$1

Average hotel room
US\$15 to US\$25

Open water dive
certification US\$200 to
US\$240

Plato típico US\$2

Five-minute call to US
US\$0.50, to Australia
US\$2 to US\$10

TOP TENS

Small Towns

Small towns are one of the joys of Honduras, where a bit of Spanish and a friendly manner can earn you plenty of lunchtime conversations and interesting insights.

- Las Marías (p289) A Miskito-Pech village in the heart of the Reserva de la Biósfera del Río Plátano, and a perfect base for excursions in the area.
- Gracias (p159) A colonial town set at the foot of the lush Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque.
- Jewel and Pigeon Cay (p272) Off the western tip of Utila, these sun-bleached islets are even smaller and mellower than Utila itself, and no less picturesque.
- Santa Lucía (p89) A quaint colonial village in the mountains, minutes from Tegucigalpa.
- Chachauate (p228) A traditional Garífuna village on a picture-perfect Caribbean cay.
- Rais Ta (p284) A quiet Miskito village on a thin strip of sand and trees between the Caribbean and a huge island lagoon.
- Yuscarán (p96) On the way to Honduras’ cigar country, this colonial town has winding cobblestone streets and several *aguardiente* breweries.
- Miami (p206) A cluster of thatched-roof homes on a rustic beach at the end of a long sandy road near Jeannette Kawas National Park.
- San Marcos de Colón (p103) A cool colonial refuge in the otherwise sweltering southern region, with a seldom-visited wildlife refuge nearby.
- Travesía (p195) A Garífuna village with an excellent beach and good lodging options.

Festivals & Parties

Whether a local celebration or a national holiday, festivals are a unique window on Honduran culture, a chance to see how locals mark important events and also to have a little fun.

- Garífuna Festival in Baja Mar (p195) – July 9–24.
- Gran Carnival/Feria de San Isidro, La Ceiba (p216) – third weekend in May.
- Semana Santa, Comayagua (p187) – week before Easter.
- Sun Jam, Utila (p272)
- San Pedro Sula (p134) – any Saturday night.
- Guancasco, La Ruta Lenca (p161) – mostly December and January. Dates vary by town.
- Feria de la Virgen de Suyapa (p78) – February 2–8.
- Festival Nacional de Maíz, Danlí (p98) – last week of August.
- Noche de Fumadores, Santa Rosa de Copán (p156) – third Friday of August.
- Semana Santa, Tela (p200) – week before Easter.

Things to Buy

Remember that Hondurans don’t engage in the same hardcore bargaining common elsewhere; a little back and forth is okay, but lay off the big guns.

- Lenca ‘negativo’ pottery
- T-shirt from Copán Ruínas
- Clay or stone Maya replica
- Cuadro de tunu – Moskitia tree bark art
- Garífuna rayador – Garífuna rasp used to grind yucca, comes in souvenir size
- Rosary at the Basilica de Suyapa
- Garífuna coconut bread
- *Baleadas* (Honduran national snack food)
- Fried chicken – hardening your arteries has never tasted better
- Aralen – cheap and easy to get antimalarial

PUTTING DOWN THE GUIDE *Matthew Firestone*

No, we're not talking about insulting the local guy who is leading you through the rainforest. We're talking about closing this book that you have in your hands and leaving it behind. We're talking about following your own trail and paddling up your own stream. It is bound to be an adventure more memorable than the one you'll find along the Gringo Trail.

We at Lonely Planet are dedicated to providing comprehensive coverage of every country and region that we cover, but we recognize the sometimes detrimental effect of places being 'discovered'. Even more than that, we are dedicated to creating a sustainable global traveler culture, and we recognize the universal benefit of 'discovery'.

So put your guidebook down for a day or – even better – a week. Explore the parts of Honduras that are not covered in the pages of this guidebook. And discover your own lonely planet.

an Ancient Kingdom, by William L Fash and E Wyllys Andrews (2005) is an excellent overview, while *Written in Stone: Guide to the Copán Ruínas Archaeological Park* (1998), also by Fash, is a fine on-site companion and is often sold at the Copán ruins' bookstore.

Los Barcos (The Ships; 1992), and *El Humano y La Diosa* (The Human and the Goddess; 1996) and *The Big Banana* (1999) are all by Roberto Quesada, one of Honduras' best-known living novelists. *Gringos in Honduras: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1995) and *Velasquez: The Man and His Art*, are two of many books by Guillermo Yuscarán, aka William Lewis, an American writer and painter living in Honduras. *Around the Edge* by English journalist Peter Ford (1991) relates Ford's journey along the Caribbean coast from Belize to Panama, especially in La Moskitia.

INTERNET RESOURCES

A growing number of sites provide reliable up-to-date information on Honduras. Many are maintained by expatriates, and are in English.

www.aboututila.com General info and news about Utila.

www.hondurastips.honduras.com The website of the free tourist magazine *Honduras Tips*.

http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/honduras/ Extensive list of links to article and websites on everything from politics to sports to tourism.

www.letsgohonduras.com Honduras' ministry of tourism website.

www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/ The source of updated LP coverage.

www.marrder.com/htw The official site of *Honduras This Week*, Honduras' only English-language newspaper.

www.roatanonline.com A charmless but comprehensive guide to all things Roatán.

www.sidewalkmystic.com Private website with practical info on travel in Honduras.

www.travel-to-honduras.com Links to various services, including volunteer organizations.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE WHOLE COUNTRY (ALMOST)

Three Weeks

From **Tegucigalpa** (p70), head to **Parque Nacional La Tigra** (p91) for hiking, or make a day trip to **Valle de Ángeles** (p90). Head north to **Lago de Yojoa** (p175) for bird-watching in the AM and **Pulhapanzak Falls** (p177) in the PM. Zip up to **San Pedro Sula** (p125) before flying to **Roatán** (p243) or **Utila** (p263). Spend at least three full days diving, snorkeling and wearing flip-flops. Don't dive? Take an Open Water course – one starts every day. Take the ferry back to **La Ceiba** (p210), where there's something for everyone: hiking, biking, rafting, horseback riding, canoeing, even canopy-rides. Next, hop over to **Tela** (p198) for a day at the beach, the **Jardín Botánico Lancetilla** (p204), or beautiful **Punta Sal** (p204). Afterwards, head to **Copán Ruínas** (p138). Visit the ruins, but hike or horseback ride as well. If you like colonial towns, make your next stop **Santa Rosa de Copán** (p154); otherwise head straight to **Gracias** (p159), gateway to **Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque**. Continue down through the southern half of the **Ruta Lenca** (p154) to **Comayagua** (p185) and back to Tegucigalpa. So what's missing? **La Moskitia** (p277) for starters: budget a week. You could also add hiking in **Parque Nacional Sierra de Agalta** (p117). In the south, beat the heat in colonial towns like **San Marcos de Colón** (p103) and **El Corpus** (p102).



Here's Honduras from top to bottom: from the highest peak to a hundred feet underwater. It includes national parks, Maya ruins, and colonial plazas, which you can complete in three busy weeks. Add another week to visit La Moskitia and write the guidebook yourself.

INTO THE WILD

Two Weeks

Fly into **Tegucigalpa** (p70) where appropriately enough, your tour begins with Honduras' first national park, **Parque Nacional La Tigra** (p91). Plan to stay the night at one of the two entrances and make an all-day loop hike. From La Tigra, head north to **Parque Nacional Cerro Azul Meámbar** (p179) with its well-marked trails, easy-to-follow signs, and excellent campgrounds. Continue north to **Tela** (p198) and the beautiful **Parque Nacional Jeannette Kawas** (p204). Take it easy on a guided daytrip, or rough it by hiking in from the tiny village of **Miami** and camping on the beach. Next head east of **La Ceiba** to the tiny Garífuna village of **Sambo Creek** (p226), a jumping off point for **Parque Nacional Marino Cayos Cochinos** (p227). Crystalline water and pristine coral reefs make this a divers' and snorkelers' paradise, not to mention one of the most photographed spots in Honduras. Back on the mainland, take a bus from San Pedro Sula to Gracias, where **Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque**, (p163) with Honduras' highest peak, awaits. If your time and energy permit, head straight to **Parque Nacional Sierra de Agalta** (p117) to climb La Picucha mountain, one of Honduras' most challenging ascents, doable from either **Gualaco** (p119) or **Catacamas** (p114). Otherwise, return to Tegucigalpa for your flight home.

This itinerary takes you to Honduras' best national parks, from the rugged Sierra de Agalta to coral-fringed Cayos Cochinos. Some parks have well-marked hiking trails, others require a guide who's handy with a machete. You can complete it in two to three weeks.



ROAD LESS TRAVELED

A WORLD APART: THE MOSQUITO COAST

Depending on your time, budget and tolerance for long land journeys, fly into La Moskitia or go overland – either way, make your way to **Belén** (p285) or **Rais Ta** (p284), neighboring towns on Laguna de Ibans. Take a day to get your bearings straight and check out the peaceful towns of **Plaplaya** (p287) and **Cocobila** (p286). Early the next morning, settle in for the five to six hour canoe ride to **Las Marías** (p289). There, arrange a mellow daytrip to the petroglyphs or a more challenging three-day rainforest hike to **Pico Dama** (p291). Back in Belén and Rais Ta, arrange a morning boat ride or flight to **Brus Laguna** (p292) for a night or two in the savannah cabañas there. Afterwards, head back to Brus Laguna town, stock up on supplies and fly to **Wampusirpi** (p295) where – knock on wood – you'll be able to hitch or hire a boat ride into the **Reserva de la Biosfera Tawahka Asangni** (p296). Boat back to Wampusirpi and fly to **Puerto Lempira** (p297). Time permitting, bike to **Mistruk** (p299) or **Kaukira** (p300) for the day; otherwise fly from Puerto Lempira back to **La Ceiba** (p210).

An organized tour can be a very good option, visiting many of the same places but saving you the time and hassle of arranging transport and other details. In fact, one of the best ways to see La Moskitia is on a seven- to ten-day rafting trip (see p280 for more info), starting in Olancho. The trip takes you down the lush Río Patuka and through the Tawahka region – an incredible journey.

This tour includes the Río Plátano and Tawahka Biosphere Reserves and small Miskito and Garífuna villages along the coast. A full tour takes two weeks, but you can hit the highlights in seven to ten days. A five day visit will feel pretty rushed.



COBBLESTONES & CATHEDRALS

From **Tegucigalpa** (p70), head straight to **Santa Lucía** (p89), a pretty little village that is often overlooked for better-known Valle de Ángeles. Loop around to **Yuscarán** (p96), a charming colonial town on the way to nowhere. Back in Tegucigalpa, head north to **Comayagua** (p185) with its soaring cathedral, broad Parque Central, and traditional religious festivals. Next, go up and around to **Copán Ruínas** (p138), which in addition to its archaeological riches, is a picturesque and lively town, popular with backpackers. From there it's a short drive or bus ride to **Santa Rosa de Copán** (p154) and its recently restored city center and a boho bar scene. Continue south to **Gracias** (p159) a cool mountain redoubt with clay tile-roofed houses, cobblestone streets, and great hiking nearby. This is part of the **Ruta Lenca** (Lenca Route), a string of small indigenous villages that eventually leads back to the main highway, and to Tegucigalpa. Time permitting, zip out to **San Marcos de Colón** (p103), an underappreciated colonial gem near the Nicaraguan border and gateway to a nature reserve brimming with monkeys.

A tour of the places many travelers skip en route to bigger, better-known destinations. You'll appreciate having a car for part of this itinerary – buses to some of these towns are few and far between. Budget two to three weeks.



TAILORED TRIPS

BENEATH THE SURFACE

From the US, Delta and Continental have non-stop flights to **Roatán** (p243), thus avoiding San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba. In Roatán, look for a hotel and independent dive shop in West End, or stay at a resort with its own dive shop in **Sandy Bay** (p256) or **West Bay** (p254). For more isolation, look for resorts further afield, at **Palmetto Bay** (p260) or **Paya Bay** (p262). Some of Roatán's most memorable dive spots include Hole in the Wall, West End Wall, Spooky Channel and Mary's Place. For snorkeling, West Bay is good (though showing increasing damage).

From Roatán, take the morning ferry to **La Ceiba** (p210) and get on the one going to **Utila** (p263). Utila caters mostly to backpackers and independent travelers, with just a few upscale resorts on the western end. Utila's best diving is on the north shore – don't miss Pinnacle, Black Hill, and Blackish Point – though the sea mounds on the south side are gorgeous. For snorkeling, try Airport Reef and Blue Bayou beach.

Take the ferry back to La Ceiba and get directly onto a plane for **Guanaja** (p273). Instead of staying in Bonacca, the main town, head to one of the resorts around the island, all of which offer diving and snorkeling. The Pinnacle, Lee's Pleasure, Jim's Silver Lode and the Jado Trader are all Guanaja favorite spots.

Fly back to La Ceiba for one last stop – **Cayos Cochinos** (p227). You can arrange a one-day snorkel or dive trip through Palma Real hotel or arrange an independent trip – snorkeling only – from one of the boatmen in Sambo Creek (p226). Plantation Beach Resort is the only hotel in Cayos Cochinos offering daily and weekly dive-and-lodging packages.



HONDURAS FOR KIDS

Honduras can be a fun and rewarding place to travel with children. Fly into **San Pedro Sula** (p125) and start your trip at **Copán Ruínas** (p138). Visit the ruins and the museums – the children's museum in the center of town is terrific. Don't miss the butterfly farm and tropical bird park, and consider taking a hike or horseback ride in the surrounding hills and coffee fields. Make your way to **Tela** (p198), which has a nice beach and interesting daytrips, including Jardín Botánico Lancetilla and Punta Sal. Continue east to **La Ceiba** (p210) for river rafting or canopy tours. Take the ferry to **Roatán** (p243) where resorts like Anthony's Key cater to families, or you can explore on your own – there are several canopy tours, an iguana farm, and terrific diving and snorkeling, including certification classes for all levels. Middle-schoolers and older should have no trouble in **La Moskitia** (p277); you're probably best off arranging a five- to seven-day tour, flying from La Ceiba to **Brus Laguna** (p292).



Snapshot

Like its neighbors, Honduras is experiencing tremendous changes: an expanding tourist economy (cruise ships in Roatán?!), a maturing political scene, and the whole globalization thing, including maquilas, free trade agreements – heck, even implementing Daylight Savings Time for the *second* time. Honduras remains deeply entrenched in a two-front war against gangs and HIV/AIDS. Illegal logging is emerging as another major concern (do you know where that new mahogany chest came from?) and a key issue among Honduras' growing environmental community.

In fact, logging was a factor in the 2005 presidential elections, in which both candidates were from Olancho, ground-zero for illegal logging. Both candidates had less-than-savory connections to timber interests – it's hard to climb the political ranks in Olancho without them – but Liberal Party candidate Manuel 'Mel' Zelaya was less besmirched than his National Party rival, and eked out a narrow victory. Though hard-fought, it was a mostly clean and fair election, no small feat for a country with a history of electoral fraud and military coups. One of President Zelaya's first major deeds was the implementation of the Central America and Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), which was met with predictable applause from the business community and condemnation from anti-globalization activists. Everyday Hondurans were characteristically unfazed by the event, reserving judgment until the real effects begin to appear in the form of job growth or job loss.

Interestingly, most Hondurans you'll meet are very laid back and, while not disinterested, certainly disinclined to make much to-do over politics and world affairs. They do get animated when conversation turns, as it inevitably does, to crime and violence, especially related to gangs. And not without reason: in 2004, there were 45.9 murders per 100,000 residents, one of the highest murder rates in the world. (By comparison, the United States' rate is 5.7 per 100,000.) Still, it remains quite unlikely that any given person, local or traveler, will experience crime, violent or otherwise. But fear runs high thanks to the sobering numbers and the not-so-sober media coverage of the most sensational incidents.

The ongoing immigration debate in the United States is also of keen interest to many Hondurans. Around 400,000 Hondurans live in the United States, a third of whom do not have legal status. Hopes are high that an amnesty is in the offing, though that doesn't seem likely given the political climate in the United States. The debate is met with a mixture of hope and confusion by ordinary Hondurans, who rely mightily on money sent home from abroad, but are resigned to the Byzantine machinations of US immigration policy.

Honduras today is a place of change, too fast for those who'd like the country to remain 'undiscovered', too slow for those frustrated by persistent remnants of the 'Banana Republic' days, whether in undue foreign influence or lax enforcement of environmental laws. Hondurans themselves take it all in their stride, and travelers with an open mind and a bit of Spanish will find many fascinating conversations in store.

FAST FACTS

Population: 7.3 million

Life expectancy: women 71 years, men 68 years

People living with HIV/AIDS: 63,000 (1.8%)

Unemployment: 28%

Minimum wage: US\$3.15 per day

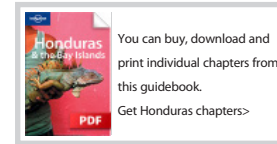
Remittances in 2004: US\$1 billion

Metric tons of bananas and plantains produced annually: 1.7 million

Size of Honduras: 112,090 sq km

Length of coastline: 820km

Number of tourists visiting Honduras each year: 1 million



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