

COFFEE, KITES & COOKSTOVES

Farm-to-Table Through the Maya Highlands



Departs October 25, 2014

9-day cultural, culinary and community-based adventure through Guatemala's W. Highlands, including: Antigua, Lake Atitlán, Chichicastenango, Almolonga, San Lorenzo & Sumpango.

Introduction

Guatemala truly has it all: a vibrant indigenous culture, spectacular natural beauty, the UNESCO world heritage city of Antigua, dramatic Mayan ruins, and the warmth and charm of its proud people. This is not to ignore Guatemala's turbulent past or the social inequalities that still exist. However, since the signing of the 1996 peace accords, Guatemala has again taken its rightful place on the world's stage as one of our planet's most compelling destinations to experience living culture in a lush, natural setting.

Our farm-to-table adventure is focused on meeting the people and experiencing the living traditions of the Guatemala highlands. Amongst these special traditions are the vibrant Day of the Dead festivities in Sacatepéquez, where giant, colorful kites are sent skyward, carrying with them families' messages for their dearly departed.

Another highlight of this journey is the experience of visiting San Lorenzo, one of 20 villages in the San Marcos department that has volunteered to take part in a study of clean burning *plancha* stoves. We'll meet local residents and learn how cleaner cookstoves can improve children's health as we as mitigate the effects of climate change.

Whether gathered around the table with local hosts, hiking through an organic coffee farm overlooking Lake Atitlán or participating in the spectacular Day of the Dead kite festival in Sumpango, this is the heart of the Guatemalan spirit that we look forward to sharing with you!

Signature Experiences

- **Home-hosted Highland Cooking.** Help our indigenous hosts prepare Pepián, one of Guatemala's signature dishes, recently incorporated into Guatemala's national patrimony.
- **Concepción Maximón.** Visit members of a *cofradía* in Concepción charged with caring for Maximón, the cigar-smoking folk saint venerated in several towns in the Western Highlands.
- **Microloans at Atitlán.** Meet families breaking the cycle of poverty with the help of a micro-loan and education program administered through a local NGO.
- **Peace Weaver.** Meet Doña Socorro, a master textile artist who has led the rescue efforts for Guatemala's ancient textile traditions in the community of San Juan Laguna.
- **Coffee: Crop to Cup.** Meet the indigenous owners of the San Miguel co-op, which boasts stunning views of Lake Atitlán in addition to growing some of the finest coffee in the world.
- **Prolific Produce.** Delve into the aromatic atmosphere & colorful chaos that is the Almolonga Saturday market, amongst Central America's largest fresh produce market.
- **Clean Cookstoves.** Visit the community of San Lorenzo, which served as a research base on the importance of indoor air quality & clean cookstoves on family health & development.
- **Chocolate: Bean to Bar.** Delve into the delicious history of chocolate and finish with a blind tasting pitting Guatemala's finest against a few of the world's best.
- **Highlands, Heaven & Earth:** Participate in the Day of the Dead festivities in Sumpango, as local families send giant kites skyward with messages for their dearly departed.

Thumbnail Itinerary



Saturday, October 25: Arrive Guatemala & Transfer to Antigua

Culture Xplorers' trip leader will be at the airport to greet you upon arrival. Revive after the long flight with a chocolate tasting session at the workshop of one of Guatemala's best *chocolatiers* then continue to colonial Antigua, about 1 hour away. Gather for a welcome dinner to meet your fellow travelers and receive an informal briefing on the adventure-packed days ahead. (Meals: D)

Lodging for two nights in Antigua will be at *Hotel Cirilo (or similar)*, an intimate, atmospheric lodge built around the ruins of an 18th century church. For a preview visit: www.hotelcirilo.com

Sunday, October 26: Markets, Monuments & Home-Hosted Highland Cooking

A morning walking orientation of Antigua brings this colonial city's historic monuments, evocative ruins, beautiful churches and shady plazas alive. Delve into the bustling market for an aromatic introduction to Guatemala's local produce & seasonal fruits, including: *zapote*, *huisquil*, *chipilin* and *loroco*.

Continue herbs in hand to Santiago Zamora, a small indigenous village (pop. 1,500) where 95% of the population belongs to the K'akchiquel ethnic group, with a local economy focused on vegetable and coffee production. Our local hosts prepare Pepián, one of Guatemala's signature dishes, recently incorporated into Guatemala's national patrimony. Help with the finishing touches of the Pepián (which requires hours of prep time before your arrival) and try your hand making fresh corn tortillas. Note: while the home-based setting is quite modest, the food is simply delicious and the welcome genuinely warm. (Meals: B, L)

Monday, October 27: Concepción Maximón & Micro-loans at Lake Atitlán

Travel to the stunning Lake Atitlán, famously described by Aldous Huxley as the most beautiful lake in the world. *Caution:* the ride, around 2 ½ hours from Antigua, is on paved, but curvy mountain roads. If you're sensitive to car motion, take Dramamine or another motion sickness medication.

En route, visit the traditional indigenous community of Concepción to meet with the caretakers of Maximón. The cigar-smoking, rum-drinking folk saint Maximón (aka San Simon) who is venerated in dozens of towns in rural, highland Guatemala.

This afternoon visit with the staff of the local NGO Friendship Bridge, whose comprehensive micro-loan & education programs are helping break the cycle of poverty for thousands of families across Guatemala's western highlands. *Note: Culture Xplorers contributes to this sustainable, long-running program on each of our visits to Guatemala.* (Meals: B, L)

Lodging for three nights at Lake Atitlán will be at the upscale and spectacularly situated *Hotel Atitlan* (or similarly charming boutique hotel) For a preview visit: www.hotelatitlan.com



Tuesday, October 28: **Indigenous Roots Rescued & Coffee: Crop to Cup**

Start with a private, morning boat ride across breathtaking Lake Atitlán to San Juan Laguna where the president of the local weavers cooperative, Doña Socorro awaits our visit.

Doña Socorro is responsible for rescuing the ancient weaving art of San Juan Laguna by re-introducing the use of natural dyes. Due to her weaving virtuosity, she was chosen to create the table mantel upon which Guatemala's peace accord, ending decades of civil war, was signed in 1996. She has been awarded the *Order of the Quetzal*, Guatemala highest civilian honor.

Continue by boat to San Lucas Tolimán for lunch then (by road) to the *Mam Maya* community of Tzampetety. There we meet the indigenous owners of the San Miguel coffee co-op, which boasts stunning views out across Lake Atitlán in addition to growing some of the finest high altitude coffee in the world. Learn about coffee production from crop to cup and speak with the owners about their growing success exporting to N. America and Europe. (Meals: B, L)

Wednesday, October 29: **Prolific Produce & Clean Cookstoves**

This morning we drive further into the western highlands, stopping first to experience Almolonga, the fertile valley that boasts Guatemala's largest weekly produce market. The finely embroidered garb of its indigenous vendors adds yet more texture & spectacular color to the visual riot of open-air commerce. Continue to San Lorenzo. (Meals: B, L)

En route we'll discuss the heroic work of Professor Kirk Smith at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health who has conducted pioneering research spanning more than two decades on indoor air pollution and its crippling effects on household health, especially on women and children. Enjoy a community-hosted lunch in San Lorenzo while meeting local field workers and children. Visit a local community clinic for health assessments and learn more about the positive health impacts clean cookstoves can have on families in rural areas of Guatemala and the world.

Thursday, October 30: **Chichicastenango**

Drive an hour through the majestic Guatemala highlands to Chichicastenango at the peak of its bustling market day activity. Start with a visit to the church of Santo Tomás to witness the fascinating syncretism between Catholicism and Mayan beliefs, both of which are practiced inside and outside its walls. After ample time to bargain, explore and re-charge over lunch, continue back to Antigua. (Meals: B, L)

[Remainder of the afternoon / evening at leisure in colonial Antigua](#)

Lodging for three nights in Antigua will be at *Casa Encantada* (or similar) an intimate, nine-room boutique hotel known for its understated charm & excellent service. For a preview visit: www.casaencantada-antigua.com



Friday, October 31: Independent Exploration + Chocolate: Bean to Bar

The morning is yours for independent exploration in and around colonial Antigua (Meals: B)

This afternoon engage in an in-depth discussion of chocolate from its pre-Maya roots to modern-day attributes. Roll-up your sleeves side by side with an artisan chocolate maker and finish with a blind tasting pitting Guatemala's finest against a few of the world's best.

Saturday, November 1: Highlands, Heaven & Earth – Day of the Dead Celebration

Drive to Sumpango about 40 minutes from Antigua, to celebrate with local families who gather in the town's cemetery to commune with their dearly departed. Giant kites, some as wide as 30 feet across, are sent heavenward controlled by thick ropes with messages for the dearly departed. Prizes are awarded annually for the best kites. (Meals: B, L, D)

Remainder of the afternoon / evening at leisure in colonial Antigua

Gather once more this evening to toast your farm-to-table Guatemala experience in a surprise locale, full of magical local character and reserved just for us!

Sunday, November 2: Homeward Bound

Adolfo will pick you up at your hotel and transfer you to Guatemala City at any time today coordinated with your international flights home. (Meals: B)

Copán Xplorers

Optional Post-Trip Extension
(Minimum four travelers)



Sunday, November 2: **Arrive Copán**

Drive East from Antigua, Guatemala to Copan, just across the border in Western Honduras. Relax after a long day of overland travel with an afternoon cocktail on the spacious grounds of Hacienda San Lucas followed by a welcome dinner and an informal trip briefing on the days ahead. (Meals: D)

Lodging for three nights near Copán Ruinas is at the lovingly restored Hacienda San Lucas, a 100-year old family retreat overlooking Copán. For a preview visit: www.haciendasanlucas.com

Monday, November 3: **Sacred Sites, Cacao Workshop & Home-hosted Mayan Meal**

This morning, take a hike along the hacienda's nature trails to the diminutive, yet fascinating site of *Los Sapitos* (*the toads/frogs*). Frogs were symbols of regeneration and birth in Mayan times and some think this was a sacred site dedicated to women and fertility.

Return to the hacienda's rustic, open kitchen for a cacao workshop. Learn why cacao was considered sacred to the Maya. Savoring lunch, you'll understand why *Theobroma Cacao* (cacao's scientific name) translates to "food of the gods". This afternoon, there's free time to explore the small town of Copán Ruinas, with private transportation provided to/from the hacienda.

This evening, share dinner and conversation at the home of a former Penn archaeologist and his Honduran wife, renowned for her cooking, in particular, traditional Mayan dishes such as *Kakik*, a spicy turkey stew which originated in the cloud forest region of Guatemala. (Meals: B, L, D)

Tuesday, November 4: **Explore Copán**

Embark on a comprehensive exploration of the ancient city of Copán: its Acropolis, Great Plaza, ball court, Hieroglyphic Stairway, the residential area of Las Sepulturas and the impressive Copán Sculpture Museum. Copan is often called the "Athens" of the Mundo Maya, a tribute to its stunning artwork and intricate hieroglyphics. (Meals: B, L, D)

Wednesday, November 5: **Transfer to San Pedro Sula, Honduras**

This morning, transfer for international flights departing from San Pedro Sula. (Meals: B)

Making a Positive Impact



At Culture Xplorers, we insist on being not only responsible travelers, but on making a positive impact on the communities with which we come into contact. We work hand-in-hand with local leaders in every destination we visit to spend time as well as money in their communities, to ask questions and to support the living traditions that make these destinations unique.

With each trip to Guatemala, Culture Xplorers sponsors micro-loans administered via the respected NGO *Friendship Bridge*. Their program is comprehensive, long term and sustainable, combining micro-credit for mothers with formal education for their children and informal health education for the women themselves.

We aim to travel responsibly in other ways as well, working only with local, bi-lingual trip leaders as well as specialist guides and day leaders. Not only is this sustainable economic policy, it is by far the best way to learn about the local people and culture.

For details on each of our long-term positive impact partnerships, please visit www.cultureexplorers.com/positive-impact/cx-foundation

Costs & Details



5 to 10 Travelers: 9 Day Guatemala Expedition = \$2,992 pp (sgl rm add \$595)
2 to 4 Travelers: 9 Day Guatemala Expedition = \$3,392 pp (sgl rm add \$595)
Optional Extension to Copán, Honduras = \$1,390 pp (single room add \$195)

Included:

- Our experienced local, bi-lingual Culture Xplorers trip leader will be with the group for all organized activities during the core 9-day journey
- Specialist guides, invited hosts and other cultural ambassadors accompany us at times throughout the journey, including: indigenous textile experts, organic coffee farmers, artisan chocolate makers, NGO program directors and more
- Signature experiences and insider's visits listed in the start of the itinerary
- Lodging in small, distinctive, best of class hotels brimming with local character
- Meals: Breakfast & lunch daily, plus (2) dinners on our core journey, including: a culinary class and a home-hosted lunch with the owners of a family coffee farm.
- Private ground transportation in modern, air conditioned vehicles
- Entry fees to museums, national parks, monuments, etc.
- Bottled water provided aboard our vehicle throughout the journey
- Airport pick-up and drop-off coordinated with the group's arrival and departure
- Tips for all included meals, baggage handling, hotel staff and for Culture Xplorers' driver

Items not included and estimates:

- International airfare to Guatemala City. Budget \$700
- Approximately one meal per day during the core journey. Budget \$15/day
- Airport departure taxes. Budget \$6 for domestic and \$33 for international flights
- If you are traveling alone and opt for a single room, add \$592 for 8 nights, add \$180 more for each optional trip extension. To avoid this upgrade fee, ask us to match you with a roommate. *If no roommate is available, the single room upgrade must be charged.*
- Travelers' insurance covering medical treatment and evacuation
- Tip for Culture Xplorers' trip leader & specialist guides (discretionary) \$4 - \$6/day/pp

Details:

- Max. travelers: 10 (minimum 2)
- Length of trip: 9 or 12 days, plus international travel
- Activity level: Active. Participants must be able to walk comfortably and unassisted for 1-2 hours at a time at an altitude of approximately 5,000 feet. There is hilly terrain, steep stairs and unpaved surfaces at times throughout the trip as well as uneven, cobblestone streets in Antigua and dirt surfaced paths at archaeological sites.