

# Guatemala Up Close

## Semana Santa Celebration



Plus extensions to Tikal & Copan, Honduras

AS FEATURED IN



## Honoring Traditions Celebrating Culture

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# GUATEMALA UP CLOSE

9<sup>th</sup> Annual Semana Santa Celebration



**2014 Departure: April 12<sup>th</sup>**

09 day trip: Guatemala City, Antigua, Sumpango, Lake Atitlán & Chichicastenango  
Optional post-trip extension to Copán, Honduras or Petén, including Yaxhá & Tikal

## 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 immersive journey is focused on meeting the people and experiencing the living traditions of the Guatemala highlands. During this, our 6<sup>th</sup> annual *Semana Santa (Easter Week)* festival departure, actively participate in one of the most colorful expressions of this religious celebration in the Western Hemisphere.

An optional extension to Copán, Honduras is highly recommended. Copán is considered the "Florence" or "Athens" of the Maya world, with its stunning hieroglyphics and intricately carved stele. Delve deep into the living culture of Copán as well at a home-hosted dinner with an archaeologist, turned agronomist and during a hands-on cacao workshop. Our lodging throughout this extension is in a lovingly restored, 100-year old converted hacienda.

## 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.
- **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.
- **Coffee: Crop to Cup.** Experience it all, from picking coffee cherries at a coffee farm (when in season) to visiting drying patios, to sampling fine artisan roasted coffees.
- **Peace Weaver of Atitlán.** Meet Doña Socorro, awarded the *Order of the Quetzal*, Guatemala highest civilian honor. Due to her weaving finesse, she was chosen to create the table mantel upon which Guatemala's peace accord, ending decades of civil war, was signed in 1996.
- **Positive Impact Visit.** Meet with families breaking the cycle of poverty with the help of a micro-loan and education program administered through a local NGO. Note: CX contributes to this sustainable program on each of its visits to Guatemala
- **Concepción Maximón.** Visit members of a *cofradia* in Concepción charged with caring for Maximón, the cigar-smoking folk saint venerated in several towns in the Western Highlands.
- **Carpet Tradition.** Go behind the scenes with the family behind the spectacular, 25-meter *alfombras* of dyed sawdust that have graced Holy Week in Antigua for more than 50 years.
- **Semana Santa's Splendor.** From purple-robed, incense-laden processions, to elaborate, flower-strewn *alfombras* & giant altars borne through town upon hundreds of shoulders, the scale & color of the holy week celebrations and in Antigua are unrivaled in the Americas.

# Thumbnail Itinerary



## Saturday, April 12: Guatemala City Museums & Arrive Antigua

Culture Xplorers' trip leader will be at the airport to greet you upon arrival. Stop for a visit to one or two of this bustling capital city's excellent museums before driving 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 three nights in Antigua will be at *Hotel Cirilo*, an intimate, atmospheric lodge built around the ruins of an 18<sup>th</sup> century church. For a preview visit: [www.hotelcirilo.com](http://www.hotelcirilo.com)

## Sunday, April 13: Chocolate: Bean to Bar & Coffee: Crop to Cup

Engage in an in-depth discussion of chocolate from its pre-Maya roots to modern-day attributes. Finish with a blind tasting pitting Guatemala's finest against a few of the world's best.

One of the products most intimately tied to Guatemala's history, politics & economy is its fine, high altitude coffee. Visit a family owned, micro-production organic coffee farm for a behind-the-scenes look at how to create the perfect cup, from planting to roasting. Finish with a home-hosted lunch on the terrace overlooking the garden and framed by Volcano Agua in the distance. (Meals: B, L)

## Monday, April 14: Markets, Monuments & 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. While the home-based setting is quite modest, the food is simply delicious and the welcome genuinely warm. (Meals: B, L)

## Tuesday, April 15: Micro-loans at Lake Atitlán & Concepción Maximón

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.



Upon arrival at the lake, 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. Culture Xplorers contributes to this sustainable, long-running program on each of our visits to Guatemala. (Meals: B, L)

Lodging for two 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](http://www.hotelatitlan.com)

### Wednesday, April 16: Indigenous Roots Rescued

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.

San Juan Laguna is gaining favorable attention for its innovative recycling program, which makes use of plastic bottles stuffed with bags as basic building materials for local homes, shops & schools. Continue to Santiago Atitlán where local faithful pay public homage to Maximón.

Enjoy a late afternoon at leisure to stroll through the bustling market stalls of Panajachel or simply relax and soak in the stunning views from our hotel, while marveling at the natural theatre of constantly changing light & cloud patterns over the lake. (Meals: B, L)

### Thursday, April 17: Chichicastenango & Return to Antigua + Carpet Traditions

Drive 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, where the Semana Santa activities have shifted into high gear.

This afternoon we are honored by an invitation to enter the home and workshop of one of Antigua's foremost *alfombra* families. These Holy Week carpets of dyed sawdust are a highlight of the Semana Santa celebrations in Antigua and our host has been making one of the city's most spectacular alfombras for the last 51 years. (Meals: B, L)

*Note:* Rest early tonight, as tomorrow brings a pre-dawn optional stroll not soon to be forgotten.

Lodging for three nights in Antigua will be at *Hotel Cirilo*, an intimate, atmospheric lodge built around the ruins of an 18<sup>th</sup> century church. For a preview visit: [www.hotelcirilo.com](http://www.hotelcirilo.com)



### **Friday, April 18: Semana Santa Celebrations: Processions & Carpets**

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Wake very early for an *optional* guided stroll together at 4:30am. Believe it or not, Antigua is full of pre-dawn activity as the most stunning *alfombras* (carpets) are prepared for this morning's procession leaving from La Merced church. For those who manage to wake up early, this is a very special atmosphere, not to be missed! (Meals: B)

While the rest of the day (after 10 am) is technically free time, don't think that there'll be nothing to do! Today the Holy Week activities reach their frenetic peak, with incense-strewn processions wending through Antigua's streets all-day and long into the night.

*Note:* Adolfo has reserved a table for our group at a café with a terrific bird's eye view of one of the late morning Good Friday processions.

### **Saturday, April 19: Custom Activities Around Antigua & Celebration Dinner**

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Customize your experience this morning to suit your individual preferences. Travelers can choose from a two-hour morning zip-line adventure, a vigorous hike with a pre-dawn departure up the very active Pacaya volcano (min. two travelers), a therapeutic massage at an Antigua spa or a visit to the nearby artist communities around Antigua.

Of course, you are welcome to continue to soak in the atmosphere of the magical Semana Santa processions today, which continue in full swing. Gather for an intimate celebration dinner at one of Antigua's most atmospheric restaurants. (Meals: B, D)

### **Sunday, April 20: Homeward Bound or Copán or Petén Extensions**

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Transfer to Guatemala City this morning to connect with international flights back home. Those opting for our Tikal extension will board a morning flight to Flores. Those opting for our Copán extension will travel overland from Antigua this morning. Please see the following page for complete Copán details. (Meals: B)

# Copán Xplorers

Optional Post-Trip Extension  
(Minimum four travelers)



## Sunday, April 20: 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: L, 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](http://www.haciendasanlucas.com)

## Monday, April 21: 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, April 22: 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, April 23: Transfer to San Pedro Sula, Honduras

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

# Tikal Xplorers

Optional Post-Trip Extension  
(Minimum four travelers)



## Sunday, April 20: **Secrets of Yaxhá**

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Early morning transfer to Guatemala City for our one-hour flight to Petén. Our Petén leader, one of the first guides ever to be licensed in the region and an avid naturalist, takes you directly to the magical site of Yaxhá. See the latest archaeological restorations taking place, tour the site and enjoy a delicious picnic with wine and cheese on-site. (Meals: B, L)

Lodging for two nights is at Francis Ford Coppola's intimate and upscale eco-lodge, *La Lancha*. For a preview, please visit: [www.blancaneaux.com](http://www.blancaneaux.com)

## Monday, April 21: **Exploring Tikal**

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Explore Tikal, one of the most impressive of all the ruins in Mesoamerica with a well-earned break in our explorations for a picnic lunch near the site. (Meals: B, L)

## Tuesday, April 22: **Homeward Bound**

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Transfer to the Flores airport for the short flight back to Guatemala City in time for your connections back to the US or Europe. (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](http://www.cultureexplorers.com/positive-impact/cx-foundation)

**YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A CULTURE XPLORERS PROGRAM HELPS FOSTER THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL CULTURE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE**

# Costs & Details



**5 to 10 Travelers: Cost for 9 Day Journey = \$2,992 pp (single room add \$595)**  
**2 to 4 Travelers: Cost for 9 Day Journey = \$3,392 pp (single room add \$595)**  
Optional Extension to Copán, Honduras = \$1,390 pp (single room add \$195)  
Optional Extension to Petén, Guatemala = \$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, artisan coffee roasters, Guatemalan painters, 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.
- Two flights within Guatemala: Guatemala City/Flores RT (Petén extension only)
- 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 - 14 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.