

recommend

Discover Honduras

- Sergio Ortiz



There's something about Honduras that captivates tourists seeking a certain different place. Perhaps it's the sweeping terrain of savannas stretching from rainforests to sparkling beaches, perhaps it's the warmth of its people or maybe it's the unparalleled magnificence of its desolate beaches.

Sadly, this wedge of land smack in the center of Central America seldom gets its time in the leisure travel spotlight.

Unlike its more popular sister republics—Costa Rica and Guatemala—Honduras receives fewer visitors than any of the other micro nations in the region, with the possible exception of El Salvador.

Why Honduras, a mere 2-hour flight from Miami, hasn't registered much of a blip on the tourist radar isn't much of a mystery. Its tourist infrastructure is so unexploited that it could rightly be considered almost embryonic, poverty seems rampant and a recent political upheaval hasn't helped.

But visiting Honduras will reward those willing to face a certain amount of inconveniences such as primitive access to its most appealing spots and a lack of those ultramodern amenities that today's tourists take for granted.

After receiving a large amount of press exposure due to its recent political crisis when most of its large cities were placed under a state of siege setting the stage for anachronistic turmoil that harked to the days of Banana Republic shenanigans, Honduras tourism now seems to be regaining a small but important footing as officials have rebooted the Herculean chore of shining a spotlight on the country's fabulous attractions.

Their task is somewhat made easier by portraying Honduras as a land rich in pulchritude: lush rainforests thriving under tropical skies, miles of coastline where it seems plausible to think that no one has trod these sands before, sparkling colonial cities and a rich history evidenced by a cluster of Mayan ruins hidden deep in pristine jungles.

Officials for the **Foundation for Investments and Exports (FIDE)** like to point out that despite its recent rough ride, according to the **World Tourism Organization**, Honduras shows more potential for growth over the next 15 years than any other nation in the region.

Indeed, Honduras is the only Central American country that holds within its borders the five attractions that traditionally have lured visitors to Central America: archaeology, beaches, colonial architecture, culture, diving and nature.

Today, thanks to a concerted effort by government and private industry, it seems poised to regain its spot on the tourist map.

First-timers will be captivated by the beauty of the Bay Islands (Roatan, Guanaja and Utila) in the Caribbean—the world's second largest coral reef, and a place of sheer beauty. They will thrill on jungle canopy tours, explore hidden pirate caves and visit indigenous communities.

In addition, Honduras contains an extremely diverse ecosystem, with 107 nature reserves that are ideal for ecotourism development and give visitors a wide number of attractions such as white-water rafting, kayaking, trekking through rainforests, birding and boat trips through swamps, rivers and wetlands.

The northeast region gives newcomers a sense of having entered a wonderland. The port of entry for this area is San Pedro Sula, a two-fisted, dusty, noisy and weathered city easily reached from Miami by **American Airlines** and **TACA**.

The city of Copan Ruinas (pictured), about a 2-hour drive from the airport, has the look of a relic. It's full of uneven narrow streets, rain-blotched roofs, backyards with mango trees and coconut palms growing everywhere, and a vibrant Latin exuberance.

Accommodations are plenty and varied. **Hotel Marina Copan**, a family-run colonial jewel that began offering lodgings to archaeologists in the early-1900s, rates among the best. This hotel rigidly guards its heritage, yet it boasts spacious rooms and suites overlooking fountains and gardens. All rooms have air-conditioning, ceiling fans and cable TV. This is a place of unparalleled atmosphere. It's currently offering a 3-day, 2-night package including breakfast and dinner plus guided tours of nearby coffee plantations for \$249 dbl.

The hotel is ideal for those who want to visit the nearby Mayan ruins of Copan, Honduras' answer to Mexico's Palenque or Guatemala's Tikal. For more information, call **(800) 893-913** or visit hotelmarinacopan.com.

Hacienda San Lucas, a highly rated eco-lodge built atop a bluff overlooking the Copan River Valley, will enchant visitors seeking more remote accommodations in the area.

Although it falls shy of a luxury destination, as befits a place built more than a century ago, Hacienda San Lucas exudes a New Age mystique. The yoga center has sprawling views of the ruins, valley and town below.

The hacienda has eight rooms featuring solar lighting and water heating, and the beds are handcrafted from local cedar. Dinners are candlelit affairs prepared by a Maya Chorti chef. It consistently rates as one of the most charming country inns in Meso-America. Rooms run from about \$125 dbl and include full breakfast. It was designed for those who want to get away from it all. For more information, call **(504) 651-4495** or visit haciendasanlucas.com.

Further afield, Honduras has some of the most majestic scenery in the Caribbean. Roatan Island, easily accessible on TACA from Miami or Houston, is a vibrant and colorful port full of music and sunshine. The condominium-resort at **Infinity Bay and Beach Resort** is an attractive, upscale modern property built on a white sand beach that stretches to the horizon. Waters teem with tropical fish and other marine creatures wafting around a coral reef that's only about 100 ft. from the beach. A dazzling 1,200-ft. infinity pool adorned with three waterfalls and a bridge appeals to those preferring a more sedate swim. Careful planning has gone into Infinity Bay's operations, including an onsite concierge service that organizes activities like fishing, diving, horseback riding, river rafting and even tours of nearby Mayan ruins. Rates during the low season (from August to December) range from about \$200 dbl for a 1-bedroom deluxe room to about \$465 for a beachfront, 3-bedroom penthouse. For more information, call **(866) 369-1977** or visit infinitybay.com/en.

Some say that Honduras is an acquired taste and those who are game to explore a unique destination will find that it's a place of beauty and great experiences. For more information on travel to Honduras, visit letsgohonduras.com.

Worth International Communications

<http://www.recommend.com/>