



Hello, Honduras

Where Tropical Bliss Meets Mayan Intrigue

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Clockwise from top: Relaxing on Roatan; crossing the Rio Cangrejal; the shy smile of a Chortí girl



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When talk turns toward your next getaway ... when debate heats up on whether to laze on a beach, do something sporty and invigorating, or go the cultural route, why not do it all?

It's high time to head for Honduras,

Central America's easily accessible, untrammled destination that offers a welcome smile while going an extra mile to provide comforts, courtesies and culinary experiences that soft adventure-seekers adore.

From zip-lining above rain forest canopies, white-water rafting, and

extraordinary diving to communing with the ancients at Copan, easy escapes to Honduras can seem like around-the-world whirls.

Want rough-hewn luxury with a personal hammock on your private cabin porch? Look to the **Lodge at Pico Bonito** near La Ceiba, where excitement



The streets of Copan Ruinas

between naps can range from morning horseback riding on the beach to night hikes in the rainforest. Add to that a good afternoon soak in hot springs just off a mountain trail.

Prefer beachy-keen island environs where it's only a hop-skip to snorkel, dive, or kayak? **Henry Morgan Resort** on Roatan's West End attracts families from the mainland as well as Yankees from up north, providing a friendly, all-inclusive atmosphere with open-air lobby facilities and air-conditioned buffet dining.

Little wonder that real estate has gotten hot in Honduras, especially on Roatan. Native Honduran Ana Svoboda has lived in New York, Missouri, and on Florida's Marco Island, but can't resist being back on Roatan to show off

Parrot Tree Plantation, a 168-acre gated waterfront community with one-bedroom condos and a 200-slip marina blending gracefully with the island's still common thatched huts and dugout canoes.

Mainland Magnetism

A century of banana trade and increasing tourism has brought Honduras in touch with North American culture, from golf courses to fast food. But beyond ubiquitous signs for pizza and Bojangles fried chicken lies the allure of spectacular Mayan Indian ruins ... of coffee plantations ... of untold flora, fauna and geologic wonders, all tied to a way of life far less frenzied.

The Mayan metropolis of Copan collapsed around 900 A.D., yet its culture

and traditions live on. Descendants of the Maya are plentiful around the colonial town of Copán Ruinas, and Copan Valley is filled with ancient footprints. Copan's main archaeological park is within hiking distance from town (or a short ride in a three-wheeled tuk-tuk). The site, with hieroglyphic staircase and ball court, is the second largest in the Mayan world. Exposed by river erosion is a cross-section of ancient construction, since the Mayans frequently built on top of their old monuments, going higher, wider, and more elaborate. Nearby, the **Museum of Mayan Sculpture** shelters many salvaged carvings in an open-air hall.

Nestled in hills above the ruins, **Hacienda San Lucas** is a 100-year-old family-owned retreat. Eight distinctive rooms feature private baths with hot water, plus beds handcrafted from local cedar. Authentic country cuisine prep, from rolling tortillas to wrapping tamales, is showcased in an open kitchen, and five-course candlelit dinners are served nightly. The San Lucas property also is home to the ruin of **Los Sapos** ("The Toads"), a key ceremonial site. According to folklore, Los Sapos holds special power related to birthing and fertility (the toad is a fertility symbol, and this region is home to 12 species).

Among newer attractions near Copan, **Macaw Mountain** stars as a bird park and nature sanctuary amid old-growth forests of mahogany, gumbo limbo, figs, and Spanish cedar. Many birds here were rescued by American conservationist Mandy Wagner who years ago began taking in cast-off parrots and toucans. Biologist Lloyd Davidson inherited the birds in 1994. By 2000, the collection had grown to more than 100 winged wonders representing more than 20 species. Davidson moved the birds from Roatan to the present-day tract by charter plane in July 2003. It's only fitting that rare birds donated or rescued include the scarlet macaw – the official bird of Honduras.

