

Central America Independence Day Special

United in joint cultural, natural roots

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Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua share a rich history shaped by ancient civilizations, Spanish colonialism and independence that they all gained on Sept. 15, 1821. Though each nation boasts its own unique identity, they stand united through a collective cultural and natural heritage.

Today, travelers to Central America can discover their archaeological treasures, indigenous cultures, volcanic vistas and tropical coasts where sustainable tourism blooms.

Lake Atitlan and the Archaeological Park and Ruins of Quirigua offer an immersive entryway to the charms of Guatemala. Atitlan combines volcanic scenery with access to indigenous communities and over 40 archaeological locations to create Central America's premier ecotourist destination.

Quirigua, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is notable for its Mayan monuments, such as the stelae monoliths inscribed with hieroglyphics. The two locations form an itinerary that connects lush landscapes, diverse communities, archaeological heri-

tage and historic works of art that capture the spirit of Guatemala — all while encouraging sustainable travel across the region.

Honduras, on the other hand, brings together a storied heritage and a spectacular Caribbean coastline. Its diversity is reflected in the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, which protects forests, wetlands and rivers, and in the San Fernando de Omoa Fortress, a former Spanish stronghold. Together, these destinations create a route that takes travelers from the ancient lands of the Maya to a historic site highlighting Honduras' strategic importance during Central America's colonial era. This remarkable variety of destinations makes Honduras a compelling addition to any regional itinerary.

El Salvador's archaeological heritage comes to life at Joya de Ceren, a remarkably well-preserved pre-Hispanic farming settlement often compared to Pompeii because of the way volcanic ash froze it in time.

Buried by the Loma Caldera eruption around 600 C.E., the site offers a rare glimpse into the lives of everyday agricultural communities rather than great seats of power and commerce, revealing how the

indigenous population of El Salvador lived long before the Spanish period. Discovered during construction work in 1976, Joya de Ceren was designated a World Heritage Site.

Nicaragua's centuries-old history of Spanish colonialism offers many enticing destinations around the country.

The Ruins of Leon Viejo preserve early traces of the Spanish Empire going back to 1524. Leon had seen its population drop after the Momotombo volcano erupted in 1578. When a quake caused further damage in 1610, the city was abandoned. Leon, among the oldest Spanish settlements in the Americas, was gradually buried in ash and stone.

This preserved complex, where 17 structures have since been discovered, takes visitors back in time through Nicaragua's colonial history, architecture and majestic volcanic landscapes, while illustrating how natural phenomena have repeatedly shaped so much of Central America.

Costa Rica's story can be glimpsed through centuries-old archaeological mysteries and ongoing conservation landscapes. The Precolumbian Chiefdom Settlements



The Recolection church in Leon, Nicaragua, is an example of baroque architecture often seen in Central America. GETTY IMAGES

with Stone Spheres of the Diquis reveal the complexity of the societies that flourished here before European contact, while the large spheres themselves, whose use is still uncertain, add a touch of mystery.

In the northwest, the Area de Conservacion Guanacaste brings together coastal environments, tropical dry forests, wetlands and mountain ecosystems, the preservation of which began with Santa Rosa National Park in 1971 and grew into a protected landscape. Today, these destinations emphasize Costa Rica's strong links between history and conservation.

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This content was compiled in collaboration with the chiefs of mission of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua with information taken from their official tourism websites.

Congratulations
to the People of
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,
Honduras and Nicaragua
on the Anniversary
of Their Independence

Takeshige Ogawa
Honorary Consul of
the Republic of Guatemala in Yokohama
and
Group Representative

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