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ANCIENT & NATURAL WONDERS OF CENTRAL AMERICA - CRUISE FROM COSTA RICA TO GUATEMALA

This unique voyage from Puerto Caldera in Costa Rica to Guatemala's captivating, UNESCO World Heritage city of Antigua by way of Nicaragua and El Salvador is a fascinating journey through some of Central America's most picturesque and fascinating destinations. The region is imbued with colour and culture with a tremendous mix of natural beauty and historical sites which we will discover accompanied by our knowledgeable expedition team and excellent local guides. An unusual and appealing aspect of our unique voyage will be our four days of exploration in El Salvador, a small and often overlooked country in the region but one which offers an extraordinary array of wildlife, magnificent birdlife, Mayan ruins and stunning scenery. We will also spend time in Nicaragua, Central America's largest country and one that remains delightfully undiscovered where we will witness extraordinary volcanic landscapes and take in the splendours of the colonial cities, from the pastel hues of the great buildings that line the streets of Granada to the shady gardens, plazas and colonial architecture of delightful Leon. Natural wonders abound during our itinerary and some of the highlights will be our visit to Costa Rica's Curu National Wildlife Refuge and the Palo Verde National Park where we hope to see capuchin monkeys, turtles, armadillos, jaguarondis and coatis. We will also experience two of Central America's most picturesque lakes. Whilst in Nicaragua we will enjoy a relaxing boat ride on Lake Nicaragua, the largest lake in Central America where the serene waters surround a series of volcanic islands, and during our time in Guatemala we will visit Lake Atitlan, described by Aldous Huxley as the most beautiful lake in the world. Our days will be spent searching for endemic flora and



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fauna in some splendid national parks with our onboard naturalists, learning about the colonial and often turbulent history of the region, discovering Mayan ruins and visiting some charming towns. If you have been contemplating a visit to Central America, then this fascinating voyage could offer you the perfect opportunity with its mix of natural and



ancient wonders.

ITINERARY

Day 1 London to San Jose, Costa Rica.

Fly by scheduled flight. Arrive and transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 2 San Jose to Puerto Caldera.

After breakfast in the hotel and some free time, we will transfer to Puerto Caldera, enjoying a local lunch on the way. On arrival, embark the MS Hebridean Sky.

Day 3 Curu National Park & Tortuga Island.

We spend the morning exploring the Curu National Wildlife Refuge which boasts a rich and diverse wildlife in five different habitats ranging from marine zones, including a wide beach area, mangrove swamps and tropical forests. Here on a range of walks we will find a number of species of birds, howler and capuchin monkeys and turtles. Over lunch we sail the short distance to Tortuga Island where we will spend the afternoon relaxing on the white sand beaches or swimming in the clear waters.

Day 4 Palo Verde National Park.

Our final stop in Costa Rica is Playa Flamingo in the Papagayo Gulf. Once a small fishing village it has grown into a popular destination for local Costa Rican tourism. We will use our Zodiacs to land before heading inland to the Palo Verde National Park where we will board local boats to travel along the



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Tempisque River seeing the mangroves and dry forest vegetation which is home to countless birds and multiple mammals. As we will be visiting in the dry season we hope to see peccaries, armadillos, jaguarondis, coatis, agoutis, deer and monkeys which are attracted to the river. We will enjoy lunch at the 19th century Hacienda House with views of the savannahs and sugar cane fields.

Day 5 San Juan del Sur for Granada, Nicaragua.

After an early breakfast we will leave from the friendly fishing village of San Juan del Sur for a full day tour to Granada and Lake Nicaragua. Founded in 1523, Granada is Nicaragua's oldest Spanish city and has retained much of its Spanish character with colonial churches, narrow streets and colourful Spanish style homes. We will enjoy a walking tour including the cathedral and convent of San Francisco where we find around 30 pre-Colombian stone statues dating back to 800 AD sculpted by the inhabitants of Zapatera Island on Lake Nicaragua. After a local lunch we will continue to Lake Nicaragua and enjoy a relaxing boat ride amongst the 365 small islands created by the volcanic activity of the Mombacho Volcano around 20,000 years ago. Whilst some islands are inhabited, most remain unspoiled and are home to exotic plants, howler monkeys and orchids.

Day 6 Corinto for Leon.

The port of Corinto is our base for our visit to Leon, the former capital of Nicaragua. Here we will explore the colonial architecture and the 18th century cathedral which is one of the most prominent buildings in the city with fantastic views from the rooftop. Inside we will see the fresco paintings, statues and the lion that guards the tomb of Ruben Dario, the famous Nicaraguan poet. There will be some free time for those who wish to visit the bustling market.

Days 7 & 8 La Union, El Salvador.

We have two days to explore the southern region of El Salvador and will offer a number of excursion options. You may wish to follow the 'peace route' set up to remember the events of the 1980s when El Salvador experienced a bitter civil war. It is estimated that over 100,000 were killed in the fighting whilst half a million people fled into exile. We will visit Perquin, once a stronghold of the guerrillas and home to the Museum of the Revolution where former members of the rebel army are willing to share their experiences. We continue to the village of El Mozote where in December 1981 one of the worst atrocities occurred and more than 1000 people were killed in a single day. Our local guides will explain about living in the country during this time and we will see the monument erected for the victims and the memorial garden decorated with brightly coloured murals. There will also be a tour to Alegria, the birthplace of the writer Alberto Masferrer and where we visit the



lagoon known as the 'Emerald of America' located in the Tecapa Volcano. A full day tour will also visit the Jiquilisco Bay Biosphere Reserve which is El Salvador's most important marine ecosystem with the coastal area being made up of remote islands, mangrove canals and desolate beaches whilst inland we find beautiful forests and cacao plantations. It is an important base for migratory birds as well as a nesting site for four sea turtle species including one of only two sites in the Pacific for the endangered Hawksbill Turtle. We explore the different areas of the reserve spending time with the environmentalists and scientists who will teach us about the conservation of the turtles, and we will walk through the forest on the lookout for spider monkeys. We will also visit a cacao plantation where we learn about the cultivation of cacao which creates some of the finest chocolate.

Days 9 & 10 Acajutla.

From the port of Acajutla our full day excursion will discover the Mayan route starting at the archaeological site of Joya de Ceren, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the Pompeii of America. The site was covered by the Loma Caldera volcano explosion which kept the remains of pre-Hispanic civilisation covered for hundreds of years and the site provides a unique insight into everyday life in a Mesoamerican farming community of the 6th century AD. We continue to the ruins of San Andres, once an important political and religious centre and testimony of the Indigo industry during the colonial period, better known as the 'Blue Gold'. After lunch in a local restaurant we will continue

to Santa Ana and see the beautiful Gothic Cathedral and National Palace before our tour ends at the ruins of Tazumal, the largest pyramid in El Salvador which dates from 1500 BC and is an important Mayan settlement. The following day our morning tour will explore some of the colonial towns and communities on the 'Flower Route' named after the abundance of flowers found along the roadsides and in the villages. We will drive through the beautiful mountains to the town of Nahuizalco, home to one of the most longstanding native communities and arts and crafts production sites in the country. We continue to Ataco, the final stop on the Ruta de las Flores. Ataco is a quaint, colonial village that is known for its natural beauty, as well as its brightly painted homes, cobblestone streets, colourful murals and unique arts and crafts. We will return to the MS Hebridean Sky for lunch and a relaxing afternoon at sea.

Day 11 Puerto Quetzal to Antigua, Guatemala.

We will disembark after breakfast in Puerto Quetzal and drive to Antigua, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built between three magnificent volcanoes in 1542, it is one of the oldest and most beautiful cities in the Americas. Antigua remained an economic and political heart of Central America until a devastating earthquake in 1773 destroyed much of the city. We will explore the city which is a wonder of colonial buildings, beautiful squares, cobblestone streets and Baroque churches. This afternoon we will transfer to our hotel for a two night stay and the remainder of the day will be at leisure for independent exploration before we meet for dinner tonight.



Day 12 Lake Atitlan.

Itineraries are subject to change.

After breakfast, we embark on full day tour to Lake Atitlan, described by Aldous Huxley as the most beautiful lake in the world. Surrounded by 12 post-Mayan villages, all bearing the names of Catholic saints, and surrounded by three majestic volcanoes, the experience is unique. We visit the main town of Panajachel where there will be some time at leisure to take some photographs and explore the local shops. After lunch in a local restaurant we will head back to our hotel in Antigua and there will be some free time before we meet for dinner this evening.

Day 13 Antigua to London.

Check out from the hotel after breakfast and transfer to Guatemala City airport for our scheduled indirect flight to London.

Day 14 London.

Arrive this morning.

Please Note:



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YOUR SHIP: HEBRIDEAN SKY

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Hebridean Sky

VESSEL TYPE:

LENGTH:

PASSENGER CAPACITY:

BUILT/REFURBISHED:

Medical facilities with available doctor Elevator serving all passenger decks Swimming/zodiac platform All Voyages Include: Up to Two Pre-Voyage Hotel Nights Complimentary Wine or Beer with Dinner Certified Emergency MD and Clinic World Class Cuisine Live Entertainment Complimentary Coffee/Tea station Voyage Photographer Dedicated Passenger Service Manager Complimentary Expedition Jacket Please note deck

Hebridean Sky has always been known for its effortless elegance, impeccable service and atmosphere of charm and camaraderie. Now we add increased adventure options and an on-site Passenger Service Representative. Hebridean Sky is the perfect blend of luxury and adventurous exploration. Is it a luxury ship? An adventure ship? It's both! The vessel underwent a multi-million pound refurbishment in Sweden in Spring 2016. **ONBOARD DINING** Great expeditions require great food! We are pleased to offer daily changing breakfast, lunch and dinner menus with an emphasis on providing well balanced and nutritional cuisine. Our team of international chefs has boat loads of creativity and you are sure to experience a variety of interesting dishes throughout your voyage. The restaurant is located on Deck 2 and our service team looks forward to providing a memorable dining experience. **IMPECCABLE SMALL-SHIP AMENITIES** Returning from excursions, passengers enjoy complimentary refreshments, afternoon tea and all-day coffee in The Club, a gracious space for relaxation, surrounded by panoramic windows. Other Sea Explorer features include: Library with Internet access Lounge with audiovisual facilities Dining room Wraparound sun deck with Jacuzzi Exercise room



plan may vary.

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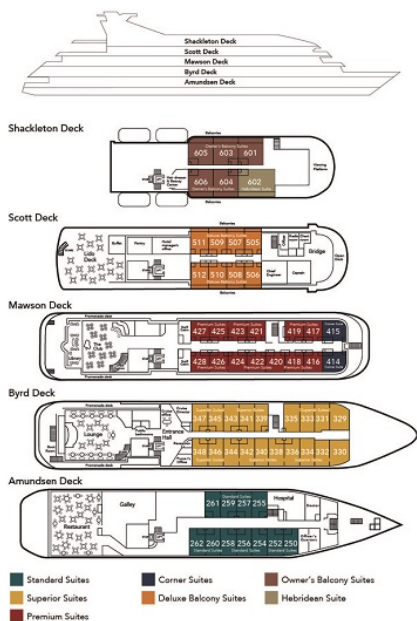
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