CENTRAL AMERICAN ODYSSEY (SERENISSIMA)

Join us aboard the Serenissima as we explore Central America’s Pacific Coastline visiting Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. Such a varied and comprehensive itinerary would be difficult to comprehend or undertake by any other means than a cruise aboard a vessel like the MS Serenissima with her expert expedition team, fleet of Zodiaks and less than 100 passengers. We will be able to visit some small islands and ports which the larger cruise vessels simply cannot access and skip the arduous, lengthy land travel which such a trip would usually entail and instead relax on board as we deliver you to a new and exciting destination each day. If you have been contemplating a visit to Central America, then this fascinating voyage could offer you the perfect opportunity with its mix of cultural and natural wonders. The history of the ancient Mayan civilisation, the colonial years and the more recent events of the region will be brought to life by our onboard team and local guides. There is also much of the natural world to occupy us on our journey including our visits to Costa Rica’s Curu National Wildlife Refuge, the spectacular Manuel Antonio National Park and the Palo Verde National Park and El Salvador’s most important marine ecosystem, the Jiquilisco Bay Biosphere Reserve. The birdlife of the region is magnificent and its home to countless species of endangered birds from tiny hummingbirds to flashy macaws and parrots, toucans and woodpeckers. Add an amazingly rich biodiversity of flora and fauna seen against some of the lushest of landscapes to be found anywhere in the world and you have the recipe for a perfect escape.

ITINERARY

Day 1 London to San Jose, Costa Rica.
Fly by scheduled indirect flight. On arrival transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 2 San Jose to Puerto Caldera.
After breakfast in the hotel we will have some free time in San Jose before transferring to the MS Serenissima in Puerto Caldera. Enjoy welcome drinks and dinner as we sail tonight to our overnight anchorage at Puerto Quepos.

Day 3 Manuel Antonio National Park.
Early this morning we will travel to the Manuel Antonio National Park which is one of the most stunning and bio-diverse areas of the world. Spread out over 683 hectares it is filled with diverse...
wildlife, has both primary and secondary forests, boasts a stunning shoreline ideal for bird watching or swimming and is home to a number of endemic species of plants and animals. We will make an early start this morning allowing for the best viewing of monkeys, vividly coloured birds and the lethargic three-toed sloth. This afternoon we will have time at leisure in Quepos before we sail later tonight.

Day 4 Curu National Park & Isla Tortuga.
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 have the chance to snorkel over the volcanic reef which is home to angelfish, morays and needlefish. Alternatively spend the afternoon relaxing on the white sand beaches.

Day 5 Playas del Coco.
Our last stop in Costa Rica is the beach town of Playas del Coco 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 Tempisque River seeing the mangroves and dry forest vegetation which is home to countless birds and multiple mammals. As we visit 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 6 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 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 7 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 8 & 9 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 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 where we visit the museum before continuing to 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, walking through the forest on the lookout for spider monkeys before learning about the cultivation of cacao, which creates some of the finest chocolate, on one of the local plantations.

Days 10 & 11 Acajutla.
We have a day and a half in the northern port of Acajutla. From here we 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. Alternatively 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 for hundreds of years and 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 dating from 1500 BC and an important Mayan settlement.

Day 12 Antigua, Guatemala.
Disembark after breakfast and from our berth at Puerto Quetzal 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 transfer to our hotel for our two night stay and
the remainder of the day and evening is free for independent exploration.

**Day 13 Antigua.**
Guatemala is recognised for producing some of the world’s finest coffees and a morning excursion takes us to a nearby plantation. Walk through coffee fields and processing plants and learn the secrets of how high quality Guatemalan coffee is cultivated, harvested and processed and understand how the region’s ideal climate, high altitude, fertile volcanic soils and traditional farming practices all contribute to create the finest coffee beans - which are harvested by hand. After lunch at the Finca we return to the hotel this afternoon. Meet later this evening for dinner.

**Day 14 Guatemala City to London.**
After breakfast in the hotel we will transfer to Guatemala City for our scheduled indirect flight to London.

**Day 15 London.**
Arrive today.

**Please Note:**
Itineraries are subject to change.
Prior to her life as the MS Andrea she spent many years cruising the Norwegian coast as the Harald Jarl. The decision by the Norwegian owners, Hurtigruten to invest in much larger new vessels, presented an opportunity to the American company, Elegant Cruises to purchase the vessel in 2002. After a substantial refit of over $20 million in Sweden she began her new life of worldwide cruising. She underwent another significant refurbishment in December 2018 and her capacity was reduced to 95.

Perhaps, one of the best known and loved features of this vessel is its unique style. During the major refit in Sweden the then owners commissioned Swedish interior designers to create a Gustavian style interior. This bright Swedish 18th century influenced, country house style works particularly well on a vessel of this vintage, providing intimacy and classic nautical sensibility often lacking in larger vessels.

Accommodating just 95 passengers, the 53 cabins are attractively designed for comfort and convenience and are fully air conditioned with a modern shower and toilet, telephone, flat screen televisions and other thoughtful appointments. There are eight different grades of cabin arranged over five decks and with the exception of the five inside cabins, all staterooms feature either windows or portholes.

The free seating Venice Restaurant accommodates all guests in one sitting. In addition there is an outside dining area for when the weather and itinerary permit. A new addition to the vessel is a Lido area on Deck 5 with a bar and Jacuzzi.

Other facilities on board include two lounges, a small library with two computers for internet access, a spacious observation deck, fitness area, massage and an elevator. In areas such the United Kingdom and Norway the vessel is equipped with Zodiac craft allowing us to visit remote places where normal tender arrangements are not possible.

The European captain, officers, expedition staff, and crew offer a first class service and have been selected for their professionalism and caring attitudes. The atmosphere on board is warm and welcoming and dedicated to discovery and relaxation.
INSIDE YOUR SHIP