FROM THE WEST INDIES TO GUATEMALA

Here is a true escape, an odyssey to some of Central America’s most picturesque and fascinating destinations through the Caribbean Sea and Central America exploring some of the most beautiful, tropical places on earth.

This is a combination of two voyages and your days will be spent swimming from pristine beaches, searching for endemic flowers, mammals and birds with our onboard naturalists, meeting with members of indigenous tribes, learning about the colonial and often turbulent history of the region and of course not forgetting what will be one of the highlights for many, our transit through the Panama Canal.

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.

ITINERARY

Day 1 - London to Antigua.
Fly by scheduled flight. On arrival transfer to the MS Serenissima. Enjoy welcome drinks and dinner onboard as we moor overnight.

Day 2 - Antigua.
A onetime British colony, Antigua is justly famous for its beaches, said to total more than 300. We have a day here and on a morning tour we will enjoy the views from Shirley Heights before heading to Nelson’s Dockyard, beautifully located in English Harbour. This afternoon either join us on one of the local
beaches or explore the town of St Johns with its vibrant market and cathedral.

Day 3 - St Eustatius.
In the 18th century, the port of Oranjestad was a major player in the trade between Europe and the new world. Today the island maintains a low key existence and has avoided the modernisation and development of her neighbours. We will explore the small town including the 17th century fort and the museum with information on slavery, colonial relics and historical artefacts. Meanwhile the more active may wish to take the strenuous hike to “The Quill”, the 600 metre hill which dominates the landscape. This afternoon is free to explore at leisure.

Day 4 - St Kitts & Nevis.
We will make a landing this morning on the delightful island of St Kitts. This lovely island has it all, restful green fields of sugar cane plantations, rainforests and long stretches of uncrowded beaches. The atmosphere here is wonderfully relaxed and full of old-world charm. Choose to either wander the streets of Basseterre, admiring the colonial buildings or see the impressive UNESCO fortress at Brimstone Hill. This 18th century British garrison played a key role in the battles with the French and is situated on a hill offering fine views over to Nevis. During lunch onboard we will sail over to Nevis, where true, most of the old plantations here are now deluxe resorts, but then you can see why they have chosen this little bit of paradise. The island of Nevis featured significantly in Nelson’s time in the West Indies. It was here that he met Fanny Nisbet and later married her in the old Montpelier House, on the site where a hotel now stands. On an island drive we will stop at the Nelson Museum and also visit the Botanical Gardens.

Day 5 - Montserrat.
Ask any Caribbean connoisseur about their favourite places and Montserrat will always be high on the list. Following the damaging volcanic eruptions of 1995 and 2010, much of the island is now returning to normal. We will visit the volcano observatory and learn how the islanders coped with the devastation it caused. We also see some of the untouched areas which are as beautiful as ever and if weather permits we will cruise by the destroyed town of Plymouth.

Day 6 - Les Saintes.
At first light we sail to this eight-island archipelago which dots the waters of the southwest coast of Guadeloupe. Still untouched by the hand of tourism, these attractive islands offer lovely coves and beaches and colourful fishing villages. On an island drive this morning in Terre de Haut we will visit Fort Napoleon with its museum and gardens, the Catholic Church and Town Hall. After lunch there will be time to explore the town independently or maybe relax on one of the inviting Antigua local beaches.

Day 7 - Dominica.
Stepping back in time, the island of Dominica is still the primitive garden that Columbus first sighted in 1493. An area of tropical rainforests, flowers of incredible beauty and animals that exist nowhere else in the world. No doubt in time this lovely place will succumb to the developers but for now it is a place of beauty and solitude. We arrive on Christmas morning in the small port of Cabrits, just below the national park and the former British garrison of Fort Shirley. We have a few options today, the active can climb to the Fort to explore the ruins, visit the small museum and maybe wander the surrounding trails on the lookout for birds, hermit crabs and lizards. Alternatively
spend the day on the local beach enjoying a swim in the clear waters. Enjoy Christmas Dinner and celebrations onboard this evening.

Day 8 - Martinique.
Martinique is a truly cosmopolitan island and a Department of France. The strong French influence is seen everywhere and without doubt Martinique is one of the most sophisticated islands in the West Indies enjoying a remarkably high standard of living. We will base ourselves at the small port of Le Marin and enjoy a morning scenic drive which will include the Musee de la Pagerie, the birthplace and childhood home of Empress Josephine, the impressive plantations and offer a chance to sample some of the local rum. This afternoon enjoy some time to relax in the small town or on a local beach.

Day 9 - St Lucia.
A splendidly rugged island of towering mountains, lush green valleys and acres of banana plantations. We will moor in sight of the island’s best known feature, the twin peaks of the Pitons. In the nearby town of Soufriere we can visit the bubbling sulphur springs, part of a low lying volcano which erupted thousands of years ago. Our island tour will also include the splendid botanical gardens and one of the local plantations where we learn about cacao production.

Day 10 - St Vincent & Bequia.
Arrive this morning in bustling Kingstown, capital of St Vincent and gateway to the Grenadines. This morning we drive to the outskirts of the city to the 19th century Fort Charlotte and the oldest botanical gardens in the western hemisphere. Dating from 1765, this 20 acre site was developed to provide medicinal plants and was the location where Captain Bligh introduced breadfruit to the island in 1798. Over lunch we sail to Bequia. This delightful Grenadine island is totally unspoilt, a place of pure escapism with a charming old world atmosphere. Choose to spend time in the main town of Port Elizabeth, visit the market, find a spot on a local beach or join a drive to Spring Bay where we can visit the Hawksbill Turtle sanctuary.

Day 11 - Tobago Cays and Carriacou.
Spend the morning on one of the remote islands of the Tobago Cays. We will use the Zodiacs to find a suitable stop where we can swim and snorkel in the waters or enjoy time to beachcomb. Over lunch we will sail to Carriacou, one of the three islands of Grenada. From the small port of Hillsborough we simply enjoy the chance to visit an island off the major cruise and tourists routes. Carriacou translates as “Isle of reefs” so we will take the opportunity to swim, snorkel or relax on the beach.

Day 12 - Grenada.
Explore this wonderful Windward Island which many regard as the most beautiful in the Caribbean. It is a lush and verdant island with spice plantations, tropical forests, secluded coves, nature trails and select hotels which cling to the hillsides overlooking the ocean. We will moor in the picturesque capital of St George’s and have time to walk amongst the picturesque buildings, see the 18th century French Fort Frederick with great views before visiting one of the spice plantations.

Day 13 - Barbados.
Barbados is the most easterly of the Caribbean Islands, with Atlantic surf on the east coast and sparkling Caribbean waters on the west coast. Captain Powell landed here in 1625 and claimed the island for England, now independent it continues to
embrace its British Empire roots, afternoon tea remains a tradition and cricket is the national sport. This morning an island drive will include visits to the historic 17th century Sunbury Plantation House and the impressive St John’s Church. Return to the vessel for lunch and enjoy an afternoon at leisure to explore Bridgetown independently. This evening we will enjoy the New Year Festivities on the island before sailing.

Day 14 - Tobago.
We start the New Year at sea arriving in the small fishing village of Charlotteville, situated in Man of War Bay, over lunch. This afternoon there will be a choice of activities including an island drive which will take us to the Argyle Waterfall for a refreshing swim and a chance to explore the lush surrounding forest.

Day 15 - Trinidad.
Due to its location close to the South American mainland, Trinidad has a unique diversity of plant and animal species which we will discover today. From our berth at Port of Spain we will drive inland to the Asa Wright Nature Centre. Founded on a former cocoa and coffee plantation in 1967 it comprises 1500 acres of forest providing habitat for a range of wildlife. On a series of guided walks we will explore searching for the 166 species of birds. Return to the MS Serenissima for lunch and this afternoon either take time to explore Port of Spain and maybe visit the Botanical gardens or National Museum. Alternatively in the late afternoon join a tour to the Caroni Nature Sanctuary, a mangrove swamp covering an area of 40 square miles. On arrival at the sanctuary we board a flat-bottomed boat and slowly travel along the beautiful peaceful waterways and lagoons.

Days 16-17 - Trinidad.
At leisure.

Day 18 - Isla Margarita, Venezuela.
Over breakfast we arrive at Isla Margarita located off the Venezuelan coast. Visited by Columbus in 1498, it was also the centre of the Spanish colonial Margarita Province in the 16th century. This morning we will visit the La Restinga National Park which was created in 1974 and boasts three main ecosystems that support a variety of creatures. We will visit the area on local boats before making our way to the Museo Marino which reveals the amazing biodiversity of Venezuela’s marine life and gives an overview of the importance of the sea in the island’s development. Return to the ship for lunch and a relaxing afternoon at sea.

Day 19 - Bonaire, Dutch Antilles.
After a morning at sea we arrive in Bonaire, world famous for the variety of its corals, fish and exceptionally clear waters. We will offer a choice of trips today including the Washington Slagbaai National Park, which was created to protect some of the Caribbean’s last remaining desert habitat. The island’s birdlife is remarkable including flocks of native parrots and in one of the lagoons, a resident flock of flamingos. Alternatively join a scenic tour of Bonaire seeing the salt water lagoon at Lake Goto with some time at Mangazina di Rei cultural park which showcases indigenous culture.

Day 20 - Curacao.
Arrive this morning into the lively port and UNESCO World Heritage site of Willemstad. This capital has a rich history dating back to the 16th century and the island’s colonial Dutch heritage sets a genteel tone amid markets, museums and cafes. On a morning excursion we will explore the historic downtown
Day 21 - At sea.
Enjoy a full day to relax onboard and perhaps join one of our lectures in the lounge.

Day 22 - Santa Marta, Colombia.
The Santa Marta area is renowned for the eco-diversity and dramatic beauty of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the highest coastal mountain range in the world, that sweep down to the sea. This morning, from our berth we will travel slightly inland to the Tayrona National Park. Covered in large part by virgin tropical forest, the park is home to over 100 species of mammals, 200 species of birds and 50 species of reptiles. On a walk through this semi-tropical jungle we will be joined by a local guide who will offer insights into the park’s vegetation, animals and eco-system.

Day 23 - Cartagena.
Today we arrive in the colonial walled-city of Cartagena, virtually surrounded by water and steeped in history, with a wealth of 16th and 17th century buildings and churches. Today there will be a choice of tours, you can either join a morning walking tour including the 16th century Fort of San Felipe and monastery of San Pedro Claver, or a full day boat trip to the nearby Rosario Islands at Isla Baru, encircled by coral reefs and declared a National Natural Park.

Day 24 - San Blas Islands, Panama.
After a morning at sea we arrive at the stunning San Blas Archipelago made up of over 400 islands which line the north coast of Panama with dazzling white sandy beaches, set in a turquoise sea. The islands are home to the indigenous Kuna Indians who gained self-rule from the government of Panama in the 1920s and maintain their traditional way of life including the production of colourful fabric art known as ‘molas’.

Day 25 - Panama Canal Transit.
An undisputed destination on the travel bucket list has to be the Panama Canal. The first attempt to build the canal was made by a French company, but ended in failure in 1889. The American government eventually bought out the French for 40 million dollars, and their attempt to build the Canal started in 1904. Through the efforts of over 80,000 workers and the loss of more than 30,000 lives, the greatest single construction project ever undertaken was completed. The project ended in triumph, with the Canal opening in 1914, and it is now a vital artery of international trade, with nearly 14,000 ships travelling through it every year. The canal is around 50 miles long and takes between eight to ten hours to cross. Unlike many cruise ships we are planning a daytime transit allowing us the best conditions to experience this engineering marvel.

Day 26 - Panama City.
Panama City is a combination of the historic old town, declared a UNESCO Historical monument, and the ultra-modern new town. We will stroll along the cobblestone streets of the Casco Viejo visiting the colonial mansions and 17th century churches and convents before continuing to Panama Viejo and the original ruins of the city founded in 1517 and burnt to the ground by British pirate Henry Morgan. This afternoon is free to explore further and maybe look for the famous Panama hats. Alternatively join an excursion to the Panama Canal observation Centre. Here we will learn about the expansion of the canal.
before visiting the Miraflores Locks Visitor Centre where we see the history of the canal and watch the ships as they pass through.

Day 27 - Darien.
This morning arrive at the wild, rugged and remote Darien Province. The Darien Jungle is recognised as one of the world’s top ten birding sites, and we hope to see many bird species such as the colourful crimson-collared tanager, green and chestnut-fronted macaws, rufous-tailed and snow-bellied hummingbirds. We will explore this pristine, seldom visited area by local canoe, navigating up the tidal Mogue River to an Embera Indian settlement. Untouched by the modern world these little known tribes offer a fascinating glimpse of an ancient world that has changed little since Sir Francis Drake was ransacking the shore of the Spanish Main.

Day 28 - Isla Coiba.
Enjoy a relaxing morning at sea before arriving at Isla Coiba during lunch. This once infamous prison island, now a National Park, has reverted to an island paradise. We will anchor off the ranger station and use our Zodiacs to land on the island. Here our onboard naturalists will lead some guided walks as we explore the main island, which boasts some 147 species of birds and walk up to the observation tower. Alternatively there is the option to relax on the beach or enjoy a swim.

Day 29 - Golfo Dulce, Costa Rica.
Our first call in Costa Rica will be at the famous gardens at Casa Orquideas (Orchid House), where we find a profusion of over 100 varieties of orchids and look out for tanagers, parrots and colourful toucans.

Day 30 - Manuel Antonio National Park.
Awake this morning in the port of Quepos from where we 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 to get the best viewing of monkeys, vividly coloured birds and the lethargic three-toed sloth. This afternoon you may wish to relax onboard or enjoy a swim from the beach.

Day 31 - Puerto Caldera.
Our berth at Puerto Caldera is our starting point for a choice of full day excursions today. Either choose to visit Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, a nature reserve set boasting over 3000 species of animals and plants. On guided walks we will learn how the forests location ensures it receives a steady supply of clouds and the moisture they contain sustains and supports this eco system. Alternatively join an excursion to the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. Our route will take us through the Braulio Carillo National Park before arriving into San Jose where we will visit the Gold Museum and the National Museum with a wealth of archaeological and historical artefacts.

Day 32 - Playa del Coco.
Our final stop in Costa Rica is the beach town of Playa 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 enjoy lunch at the 19th century Hacienda House with views of the savannahs and sugar cane fields.

Day 33 - San Juan Del Sur, 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 800AD 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 34 - 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. We will enjoy a little free time for those who wish to visit the bustling market. Return to the MS Serenissima for lunch and an afternoon at sea.

Day 35 - Acajutla, El Salvador.
We arrive today in El Salvador and the main port of Acajutla. There will be a choice of excursions today to either explore the colonial towns and communities or the Mayan sites. On a morning excursion we will drive through the beautiful mountains to the towns of Juayua and Nahuizalco for a guided tour of the communities before continuing to the coffee making towns of Apaneca and Ataco. Alternatively join a full day excursion visiting the archaeological sites of Joya de Ceren, known as the Pompeii of America and the ruins of San Andres, once an important political and religious centre. After a local lunch we will continue to Santa Ana seeing the beautiful Gothic cathedral and national palace before ending at the Ruins of Tazumal, an important Mayan settlement.

Day 36 - Antigua, Guatemala.
Disembark this morning in Puerto Quetzal and drive to the UNESCO World Heritage city of Antigua. 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. Today we explore the city’s colonial buildings, beautiful squares, cobblestone streets and Baroque churches. After our tour we transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay before meeting for dinner this evening.

Day 37 - Guatemala City to London.
This morning we transfer to Guatemala City airport for our scheduled indirect flight to London.

Day 38 - London.
Arrive this afternoon.
YOUR SHIP: SERENISSIMA

YOUR SHIP: Serenissima

VESSEL TYPE:

LENGTH:

PASSENGER CAPACITY:

BUILT/REFURBISHED:

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.