



# EXPLORING CENTRAL AMERICA

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THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

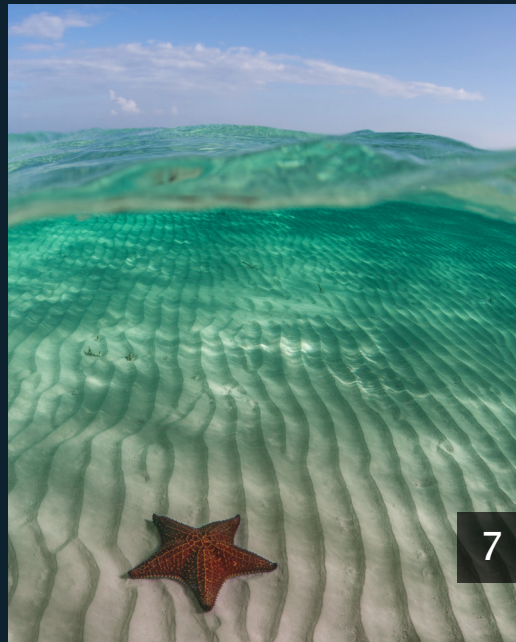


Central America is a land bridge that connects North and South America. It has seven countries inside its borders: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Large bodies of water surround Central America, except where it shares borders with Mexico and South America. The Caribbean Sea is to the east, and the Pacific Ocean is to the west.



- 1 A hanging bridge** suspends over a river in the jungle of Rio Blanco National Park in Belize. It is common to find bridges like it to help connect land that would otherwise be difficult to get to. Because there are so many waterways flowing through the region, hanging bridges are a great solution for getting around. Would you be willing to cross a bridge like this?
- 2 Big Rock Falls** is part of the Privassion River. It is tucked away in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve in Belize. This beautiful forest is now protected by the government of Belize in order to help preserve the life and beauty there. Magnificent and large, Big Rock Falls stands over 46 meters (150 feet) tall. The water rushes over massive granite boulders on its way to a small pool below.
- 3 Panama Bay**, located on the southern coast of Panama, is widely known for its incredible fishing. Fishing is a very important part of life for the people of Central America. Fishing trips can last from 1 to 9 days; the fishermen live at sea.
- 4 Tobacco Caye** is a small Caribbean island with palm trees and bungalows in the Belize Barrier Reef. Many people consider this to be a tropical paradise.
- 5 Lake Nicaragua** has a unique history regarding its creation. Scientists believe that it used to be in the Pacific Ocean, and after a violent volcano rose up around it, it became a lake.
- 6 Semuc Champey** hides the Cahabón River, which flows beneath it. This magnificent water feature is made from a natural limestone bridge that is about 300 meters (984 feet) long. Above the limestone is a series of stepped, turquoise pools. People enjoy swimming in them.
- 7 Turquoise water** is sometimes found in parts of the Caribbean Sea. The phenomenon happens where there is light-colored sand and shallow water. Starfish sightings are common in the clear water.
- 8 Rio on Pools**, found in Belize, has a series of small waterfalls cascading down granite rocks. Another stunning feature, the Rio Frio Cave, is found nearby. Belize has one of the largest cave systems in Central America.
- 9 The Five Sisters Waterfalls** is made up of five rippling waterfalls in Belize. Numerous crystal clear pools of water form part of this natural wonder.





*This local woman is shopping in a fruit stand in Guatemala.  
This market is where people who live in the area buy their food.*



# CORN

Corn is one of the region's most important foods. Locals grind dried corn kernels into a flour that is then used to thicken stews or create dough for tamales. Sometimes the corn is picked early (in the milk stage) to make a creamy, sweet corn drink called *atol de elote*. A popular way to use corn in Central America is to make a pupusa. Pupusas are stuffed corn cakes that resemble thick tortillas. In El Salvador, pupusas are eaten nearly every day.



**1 Lake Atitlán in Guatemala** is famous for its magnificent sunsets, places to kayak, hot springs, and volcanoes to hike around and observe. There are three volcanoes nearby: Atitlán, San Pedro, and Tolimán.

**2 Poás Volcano in Costa Rica** is a very active volcano. It has erupted 40 times since 1828. This volcano has three craters. The main crater is almost a mile across and over 274 meters (900 feet) deep and has continuous explosive eruptions of putrid sulphuric gas and steam.

**3 Tabacón Hot Springs in Costa Rica** is very unique. Spring water flows out from the base of the Arenal Volcano. It then travels through a thermal river and over waterfalls, finally landing into more than 20 different thermal pools. Visitors enjoy sitting in the mineral water and springs to relax.

**4 Irazú Volcano in Costa Rica** is said to have gotten its name from the nearby village of Iztarú. It is Costa Rica's tallest volcano. The beautiful turquoise lake found there is said to have gotten its color from tiny bits of debris that fall into the water from the walls of the volcano.

**5 Arenal Volcano in Costa Rica**—The magma of the Arenal Volcano contains high levels of chemicals that make it very explosive. This powerful volcano often erupts as many as five times in one day.

# HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLES

Hawksbill sea turtles are named as such due to their curved beaks. These magnificent reptiles migrate, which means they have many different places they call home. They feel most at home gliding through the open ocean, swimming near coral reefs, resting in a colorful lagoon, or even munching on plants in a mangrove swamp. Hawksbill sea turtles eat both meat and plants, but their all-time favorite food is sea sponges.





# TOUCANS

Toucans are known for their large, colorful bills. They have the longest bills of any bird in the world in relation to their body size, but their bills are surprisingly lightweight, which allows them to still be able to fly. Their bills are made of keratin, similar to what human hair is made of. Their strong beaks are useful for finding food, protecting themselves, and attracting mates. The color of the bill can be any combination of black, blue, brown, green, red, white, and yellow.







**1 Tikal in Guatemala** is an ancient Maya citadel, or fortress. Fortresses like this were typically on high ground and were used to help protect the city from invaders. Tikal is in the rainforests of northern Guatemala and was home to royal palaces, ceremonial buildings, carved altars, and several giant pyramids.

**2 The Pyramid of Tazumal** is considered the most important and well-preserved ruin in El Salvador. The artifacts found here prove that the people traded goods as far away as Panama and Mexico. That is a long distance!

**3 The Copán Pyramid in Honduras** is well known for its portrait sculptures. The Hieroglyphic Stairway, which leads to one of the temples, is beautifully carved with about 1,260 hieroglyphic symbols. It is approximated that at one point in time nearly 20,000 people lived here.

**4 The Pyramid of Altun Ha in Belize** was once a major trading center. Discoveries of jade, jewelry, pottery, and elaborate sculptures were found here. It is believed that up to 10,000 Maya lived in the area around this site.

**5 Xunantunich** (pronounced shoo-nan-too-nitch) is a Maya ruin in Belize. It means “stone woman” in the Mayan language. The ruins are massive and impressive. It is the second-tallest human-made structure in Belize.

# CULTURE

Culture is a word that means the way of life. Culture is seen in how people write, where they go to church, what music they listen to, what they eat, the clothes they wear, and what they do every day. The people of Central America have a beautiful, lively culture. Spanish is the most common language. Many people are of the Roman Catholic religion. It is very common for them to make things with their hands, such as yarn, rugs, baskets, dolls, masks, clothing, and pottery.



**1 Alfombra** or “carpets” are created using brightly colored sawdust. The dust is poured into elaborate designs reflecting the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. These beautiful, though temporary, works of art are created throughout Central America as a part of many festivals and celebrations.

**2 Basket Weaving in Guatemala** is typically done by women. They weave coiled baskets from the fibers of palm fronds. These charming baskets often have beautiful patterns and designs. They are found in homes across Central America, as well as in local markets.

**3 Nicaraguan Pottery** begins from deep deposits of clay that are laid down by volcanoes. The clay is a gift to the people in Nicaragua. With it, they create pottery and other beautiful works of art. Nicaragua has been a center for pottery since pre-Columbian times.

**4 Día de los Muertos**—People across Central America and other nearby regions celebrate this holiday on November 1 each year. People wear detailed makeup and costumes, hold parades and parties, and sing and dance. This holiday is a spiritual time for families to get together and remember their honored ancestors.

**5 Traditional Shopping Bags** are commonly used by the people in Central America to carry the things they buy at the market.

**6 La Feria de Barriletes Gigantes** draws crowds from around the world to see these amazing works of art. Guatemala’s “Festival of the Giant Kites” is celebrated on All Saint’s Day. Months of preparation go into the creation of the kites, which are made with bamboo, tissue paper, string, and glue. Many of the kites are so large they require a team of people to fly.

**7 Festival de la Pollera Conga in Panama** celebrates the country’s proud African heritage. Traditionally people celebrate with a parade, colorful dances, and festive foods. They crown a festival king and queen. The king and queen wear elaborate costumes and are distinguished from others by their crowns.

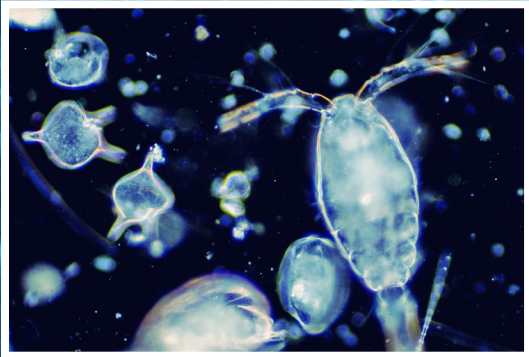
**8 The Guatemalan Marimba**—The marimba is a percussion instrument. It looks like a mix between a xylophone and a drum. It is made from a set of wooden bars and struck with rubber mallets to create musical tones. The marimba is the national instrument of Guatemala and likely came to the country from Africa.

**9 Costa Rican Pottery** is created from local clay. The clay is dried, pounded into a powder, and mixed with iguana sand (a fine freshwater sand like the kind where iguanas lay their eggs). After drying, it is painted with memorable designs then cooked with extreme heat to harden.

# BIOLUMINESCENT BEACHES

## COSTA RICA

Bioluminescence is the ability that some living things have to transform chemical energy into light. Plankton are some of the living organisms that can create this glowing light. They cannot propel themselves against the waves of the ocean, but when they sense movement in the water, they light up and turn blue. Nearly all of the beaches in Costa Rica have reported having bioluminescence at one time or another.



# THE GREAT BLUE HOLE

## BELIZE

The Great Blue Hole, located in the center of the Lighthouse Reef off the coast of Belize, is the world's largest underwater sinkhole. Nearly perfectly circular, measuring 300 meters (984 feet) across, and dropping to a depth of over 125 meters (410 feet), the hole is an opening to a system of caves and passageways, where limestone stalactites can be found.





# EXPLORING CENTRAL AMERICA

A vast array of colors, geological features, sounds, traditions, and creatures make up the incredible area of the world known as Central America. Such variety makes this region a truly unique and fascinating place to explore. From the resplendent quetzal and Tamanique Waterfalls to cacao trees, ruins, and resourceful people, there's something beautiful to see at every turn. Featuring dazzling full-color photos, *Exploring Central America* will take you on a journey from the moment you open the book.

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