



GUATEMALA

Aspen Middle School Cultural Exchange Program

June 5th – 20th 2010

Spend two weeks immersed in the rich & colorful culture of this amazing country. Visit ancient Mayan ruins, interact with Guatemalan middle school students, trek through remote highland villages, and experience the spectacular natural beauty of Lake Atitlan & the colonial splendor of Antigua.



Saturday June 5th: EL PETÉN REGION, NORTHERN GUATEMALA.

Leave Denver at scheduled flight time Saturday morning arriving in Guatemala City mid-day and transfer to Flores, arriving early evening. Flores is the natural starting point for a visit to the untamed jungles of northern Guatemala's Petén region, home to many of the lost Mayan cities, including one of the largest and grandest, Tikal. We will stay in El Remate, a small village on the banks of Lake Petén Itza and use it as our home base. (D)

Sunday June 6th – Monday June 7th: EL PETÉN REGION, NORTHERN GUATEMALA – On our first morning, we enjoy a leisurely morning and then explore Lake Petén Itza by kayak in the afternoon. On Monday, we rise very early for a sunrise tour of Tikal where students will gaze at the massive temples towering above the wide plazas and avenues of this jewel of the Petén. We'll spend an afternoon zipping through the jungle canopy on a zip line tour. (B,L&D)



Tuesday June 8th – Friday June 11th: QUETZALTENANGO – We leave the tropical jungles of the Petén and after returning to Guatemala City by air, we are met by our private transport at the airport. We hop on the Pan-American Highway westbound, our destination: Xela. Quetzaltenango, or Xela as its commonly know to locals and tourists alike, is Guatemala's 2nd largest city but its compact central core, where we will stay, makes it feel much smaller. The center of the country's K'iche Mayans, Xela (from the ancient K'iche name "Xelaju" meaning "under ten mountains") has the feel of a slightly shabby European highland city. It sits at 7,500 ft and is looked over by the perfect conical volcano Santa Maria, which is visible from almost anywhere in town. Our four days in Xela represent the heart of the two-week trip. One full day will be spent at Escuela de la Calle (EDELAC), located in the Xela neighborhood "Las Rosas." EDELAC, founded in 1997 by two progressive Guatemalan teachers, provides quality education and rehabilitative programs for disadvantaged, abused and orphaned children. At the school, we will participate in a largely non-verbal cultural exchange program focused on arts, sports and health. The unique artistic and cultural heritage of the K'iche people will be woven into the activities. That afternoon, the students and their new Guatemala friends visit the local market and then together prepare a communal meal at the Hogar Abierto, a dormitory/orphanage that serves as the home of about 20-25 EDELAC students. EDELAC is largely funded by the non-profit trekking organization, Quezaltrekkers. The following day, their experienced,



English-speaking guides will lead our group and the kids from EDELAC on an adventurous day-hike through the mountains around Xela. The hike takes our group to a spectacular viewpoint overlooking the most active volcano in Guatemala – Santiguito. We will witness at least one eruption (they happen about every half hour). On our final day in the Xela area we travel to the nearby town of Zunil for a visit to the therapeutic and luxurious mountain hot springs, Fuentes Georginas. In the afternoon, we return to Xela and celebrate our time there with dinner at a local restaurant. (B,L&D)

Saturday June 12th – Monday June 14th: TREK TO LAKE ATITLAN

We rise early and join Quezaltrekkers for a spectacular three day highland trek from Xela to “the most beautiful lake in the world,” Lake Atitlan. The trip takes us through very remote Mayan villages, well off the beaten tourist trail, into lush cloud forest, along rugged ridgelines and beside and across a meandering river. While challenging, the trek is achievable and incredibly rewarding. Our second night, we stay with a local Mayan K’iché family in their home. After a communal dinner, the family often joins us around the fire for songs, stories and games. The final day of the trek begins very early as we rise for a short hike to a viewpoint where we watch the amazing sunrise over the still-slumbering Lake Atitlan. After a warming cup of tea or coffee and a leisurely breakfast, we climb up to the sacred peak of La Nariz (The Nose) and then hike down to Mayan Tzutuhil community of San Juan La Laguna for a swim in the lake and lunch at a women's weaving cooperative. Sitting side by side with these artists, we learn the traditional weaving and dying methods used by the Maya for generations. (B,L&D)



Tuesday June 15th & Wednesday June 16th: LAKE ATITLAN

Ringed by rugged green ridgelines and towering volcanoes, the sparkling deep blue Lake Atitlan is truly one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. At our lakeside accommodations in San Juan, we will enjoy a day of relaxation after our long trek. Volleyball, kayaking, shopping in the village or simply lounging in a hammock are all options for the free day. Day two begins with a boat cruise, stopping at several other lakeside villages. Returning to San Juan in the afternoon, we tour the town's fair-trade, shade-grown coffee fields: La Voz Cooperative. Started in the 1985 with the help of Heifer International, 120 indigenous families grow their coffee using traditional organic methods in small plots on the slopes of the volcanic ridgelines ringing the Lake. (B,L&D)

Thursday June 17th: CHICHICASTENANGO

Leaving San Juan early on Thursday, we head for the famous Mayan market town of Chichicastenango. “Chichi,” perched among the mountains, is where local K’iche residents gather to buy, sell and socialize with their neighbors and the rash of gawking tourists who descend on the town each market day. This is one of the best places in

Guatemala to purchase authentic (and not-so-authentic) Mayan handicrafts while witnessing the fascinating melding of ancient native spirituality with traditional Catholic rites. (B,L&D)



Friday June 18th and Saturday June 19th: LA ANTIGUA

The final two days of our Guatemalan journey will be spent in the former colonial capital of the Spanish conquistadors, La Antigua. After a series of significant earthquakes in the late 1700's destroyed much of the city, the aristocracy moved the capital to present day Guatemala City. Ringed by majestic volcanoes, Antigua is a popular tourist destination, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to a large portion of Guatemala's ex-patriot population. We arrive in the midmorning and spend the afternoon hiking one of

Guatemala's most active volcanoes – Pacaya. From its flanks, we watch the sun set behind several distant volcanic peaks under the reddish-orange glow of the lava flowing from Pacaya's fiery summit. The following day, our final in Guatemala, we escape the bustle of the city and tour the countryside by mountain bike. We ride to the original colonial Guatemala capital, La Ciudad Vieja and tour the ruins. The old city met fateful doom in 1541 as a result of a terrible mudslide released from the crater of the Agua Volcano. In addition, we visit an experimental macadamia nut farm and sample a variety of macadamia nut products (chocolates, pancakes and more) while learning about the farm's sustainable agriculture practices. After returning to Antigua, we complete our Guatemalan adventure with a special dinner at a local restaurant. (B,L&D)

Sunday June 20th: RETURN TO DENVER

An early morning flight departs from nearby Guatemala City, arriving mid-afternoon in Denver. (B)

Program Cost: \$2500; includes all lodging, transportation, most meals, tours and guide fees. Does not include international airfare to Guatemala. Crooked Trails can help book your flight or you may book on your own.

A note: All of our itineraries are flexible. Our philosophy at Crooked Trails is to let the country guide our experiences and not to live by a strict itinerary. If unexpected events arise, we may change plans to take advantage of the situation or deal with an issue. However, we will do all we can to offer you everything that is on the schedule. Please be flexible and allow the program to unfold.

For more information, visit www.crookedtrails.com or email Tad Bradley (tadbrad@gmail.com)