

## HONDURAS

### Read This and We Promise You'll Want to Travel to One of the Least-Visited Countries in Central America



Rosie Bell

September 28, 2021

PHOTO: Courtesy of Cayos Cochinos Foundation

Despite its bounty of natural beauty, Honduras remains one of Central America's least-visited countries, making this the perfect destination an adventure.

**S**candalously under-appreciated, Honduras (<https://www.fodors.com/world/mexico-and-central-america/honduras>) is no stranger to salacious headlines. Its unspeakable good looks, wild adventures, and rich culture are often omitted from the country's narrative. Honduras was the first country referred to as a "Banana Republic" as it is teeming with verdant mountains, unspoiled jungles, and—in the community of La Unión—it purportedly even rains fish (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/16/world/americas/honduras-rain-fish-yoro.html>). In 2012, a team of archaeologists discovered an entire lost city hidden deep in the La Mosquitia rainforest known as the legendary "Lost City of the Monkey God" where various animals presumed to be extinct were found alive.

Honduras' reputation as a hotbed for adrenaline-pumping adventure is solidified by its appearance on shows like *Naked and Afraid* and the Spanish version of *Survivor*, which regularly films there. An ideal playground for water exploits, this small country, which is about the size of England or the state of Virginia, has 644 kilometers of Caribbean coastline.

Despite its bounty of natural beauty, Honduras remains one of Central America's least-visited countries, making this destination one of the more inexpensive places to book a trip. It's time to throw out the book on what you think you know about Honduras and instead discover its wealth of attractions yourself. Here's a guide to rousing experiences in three of the country's main regions: Copán Ruinas, the Bay Islands, and La Ceiba.

---

## Adventures in the Copán Ruinas

In Copán Ruinas, boiling natural jungle spas, decadent chocolate, and Mayan ruins await. Spend some time uncovering the Matryoshka Doll that is Copán Ruinas Archeological Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Scientists have called it "The Athens of the New World," and it is one of the most studied Mayan cities, home to thousands of sculptures as well as the Hieroglyphic Stairway, which is the longest text stone carving in the Americas (also featured on the Lempira banknote).

Copán is older than Mexico's Chichén Itzá (<https://www.fodors.com/world/mexico-and-central-america/mexico/cancun/experiences/news/10-day-trips-you-can-take-around-cancun-and-riviera-maya>), and it has an Acropolis pyramid built on a man-made mountain in which Rosalila—a three-story and 12.9-meter red temple—was discovered in 1989. While in Copán Ruinas, one may also take in an experience that's wholly unique to Honduras: a riveting annual scarlet macaw release festival. (<https://hondurastravel.com/birding-in-honduras/honduras-celebrates-scarlet-macaw-day/>) Representing sunrise, macaws were sacred to the Mayan culture and, as the national bird, they are still treasured by Hondurans today (June 28 is national Scarlet Macaw Day).





The annual Guacamaya Fest is a big deal in June, with concerts, craft fairs, and cultural events in this charming cobblestone town. The event's highlight is the release of bred and rehabilitated macaws from [Macaw Mountain \(http://www.macawmountain.org/en/home/\)](http://www.macawmountain.org/en/home/), a bird park and nature reserve. Witnessing these floating rainbows take their maiden aerial voyage is arresting, atmospheric, and not to be missed. At the Macaw Mountain Park, which is open year-round, you can watch baby macaws being fed or meet toucans, parrots, and owls as you stroll through the majestic ceiba trees and grandiose aviaries.

The tiny colorful town of Copán Ruinas is peppered with stores stocking a litany of macaw memorabilia. It's also known for its quaint cafes, such as [La Casa de Todo \(https://www.casadetodo.com/\)](https://www.casadetodo.com/) and [El Lugar Del Té & Chocolate, \(https://m.facebook.com/ElLugardelTeyChocolate/\)](https://m.facebook.com/ElLugardelTeyChocolate/) where you can savor sumptuous locally-grown hot chocolate out of a traditional *guacal* cup on a balcony overlooking hills and expansive lush greenery. Later, raise your temperature (and heart rate) with a dip at the [Luna Jaguar Spa, \(http://lunajaguarspa.com/\)](http://lunajaguarspa.com/) with Mayan-inspired architecture and an eco-spa with cold and hot springs. Some pools are out of bounds due to temperatures reaching a scorching 194 degrees Fahrenheit.



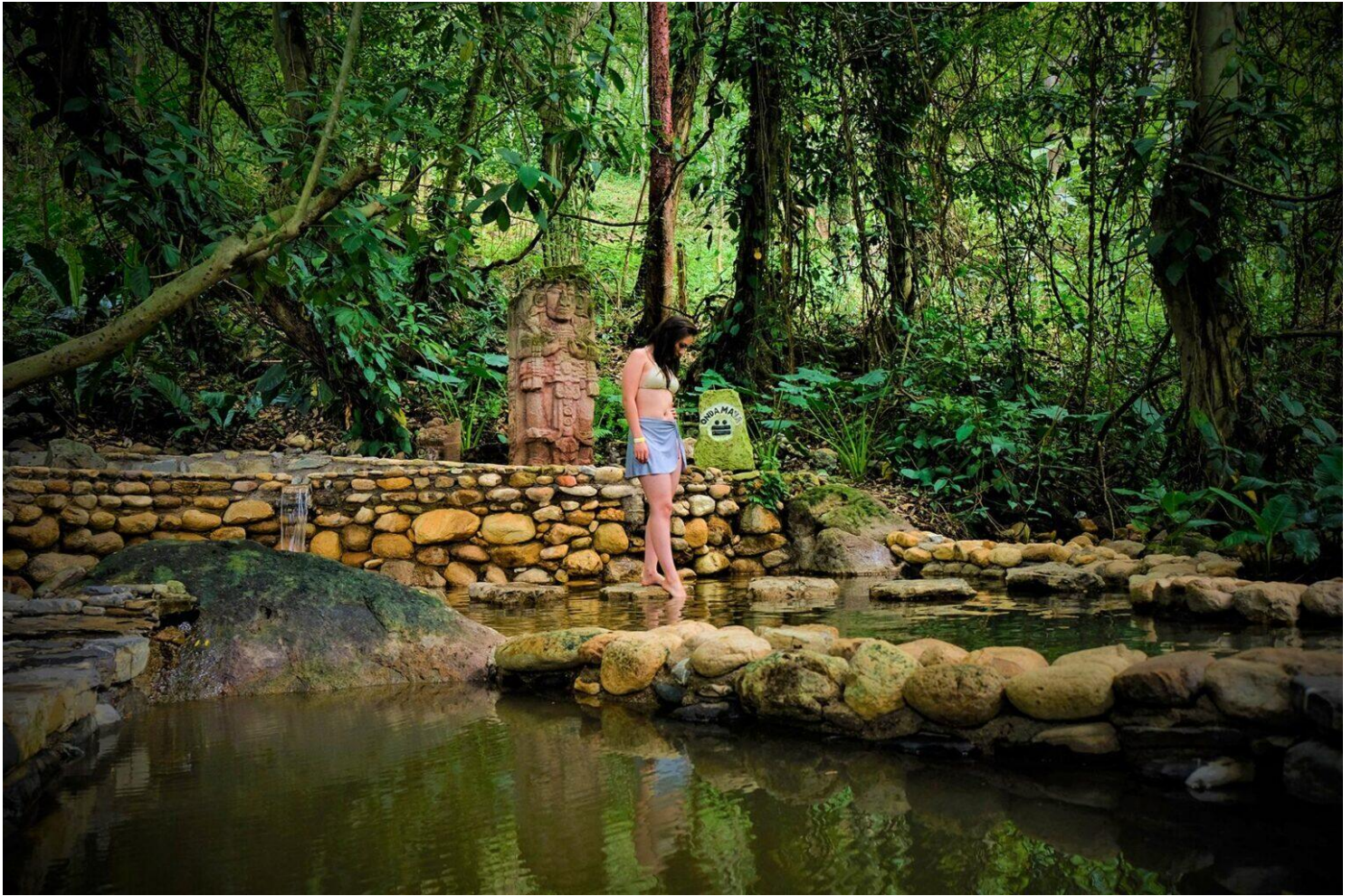


PHOTO: Courtesy of Luna Jaguar Spa

---

### **INSIDER TIP**

*Many travelers start their Honduran adventures in Copán by flying into San Pedro Sula and driving three hours out.*

---



## Soak up the Bay Islands

You'll find sky swings, affordable diving, and paradise beaches over on the Bay Islands (made up of Roatán, Utila, and Guanaja). Roatán is the largest of the three islands, and you can fill your agenda with [sloth and monkey sanctuary \(https://monkeyandslothhangout.com/home/\)](https://monkeyandslothhangout.com/home/) visits, mangrove tours, or diving or snorkeling the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, which is the second-largest coral reef in the world after Australia's Great Barrier Reef. You can also stay dry and view the wondrous underwater world from the comfort of a one-of-a-kind [glass-bottom boat \(http://hydetoursroatanhonduras.com/portfolio-items/hiking-tour/\)](http://hydetoursroatanhonduras.com/portfolio-items/hiking-tour/). Head to West Bay to grab this spectacular yellow semi-submarine experience with Hyde Tours, which grants vivid views typically reserved for divers.

With an international airport, Roatán is abuzz with a conglomerate of travelers lured there for PADI qualifications, aquatic eye candy, fiestas, and freediving, for which it has become well-known. Since 2013, the [Caribbean Cup Roatán Freediving Competition \(https://caribbeancupfreediving.com/\)](https://caribbeancupfreediving.com/) has taken place there. Learn how to control your body and mind with freediving lessons from the event's organizer and master freediver, Esteban Darhanpe, at the [Roatán Freediving School and Training Center \(https://www.roatanfreediving.com/\)](https://www.roatanfreediving.com/).

Back on dry land, experience authentic Afro-Caribbean culture with a trip to Punta Gorda, the first Central American settlement of the Garifuna. This community of Black African and [Indian \(https://searchlight.vc/special-features/2006/03/17/east-indians-in-svg/\)](https://searchlight.vc/special-features/2006/03/17/east-indians-in-svg/) descendants came to Honduras after being expelled from St. Vincent by the British in the 18th-century. Have a meal at the oceanfront restaurant [Yurumei \(https://www.facebook.com/Yurumei-Sport-Bar-Restaurants-1505023396423007/\)](https://www.facebook.com/Yurumei-Sport-Bar-Restaurants-1505023396423007/) in Punta Gorda and sip on local liqueur gifti, a potent mix of rum, roots, and herbs. If lady luck is on your side, you may also see an energetic performance of the Garifuna Punta dance.

Roatán has a lively mix of living cultures. Though Honduras was part of the Spanish empire, the British ruled the region for two centuries, so English is more common than Spanish, and Bay Islanders speak with a mild British twang. The island is relaxed and raucous in equal measure. For the latter, West End is the locale of choice as it is the epicenter of hostels, nightlife, dive shops, and all-around good vibes.

For lodging, cliffside [Paya Bay \(https://www.payabay.com/\)](https://www.payabay.com/) has storybook views and zen paths leading to private beaches. The artfully designed boutique property, [Ibagari \(https://www.ibagarihotel.com/\)](https://www.ibagarihotel.com/), is another sought-after reservation. You'll go to bed with a full belly and heart after dinner at the hotel's unfathomably chic beachfront restaurant, Luna Muna. Stay or play at [Barefoot Cay \(https://www.barefootcay.com/\)](https://www.barefootcay.com/) boutique resort, home to the only marina that accommodates mega yachts and what's deemed the best restaurant on the island, [Siversides \(https://www.barefootcay.com/restaurant\)](https://www.barefootcay.com/restaurant) (don't miss the island cocktail, Monkey Lala).

TOP



PHOTO: Courtesy of Paya Bay

Just 20 miles south of Roatán, the [Cayos Cochinos \(https://cayoscochinos.org/\)](https://cayoscochinos.org/) Archipelago offers sweet seclusion and rentable private islands for no more than \$200 a night. This protected marine park is beyond picturesque and consists of two small islands (Cayo Grande and Cayo Mayor) and over a dozen largely uninhabited small coral cays. On Cayo Grande, day trips and overnight stays are possible in private cabins with scientists on hand to educate about this pristine dreamboat region.

---

#### **INSIDER TIP**

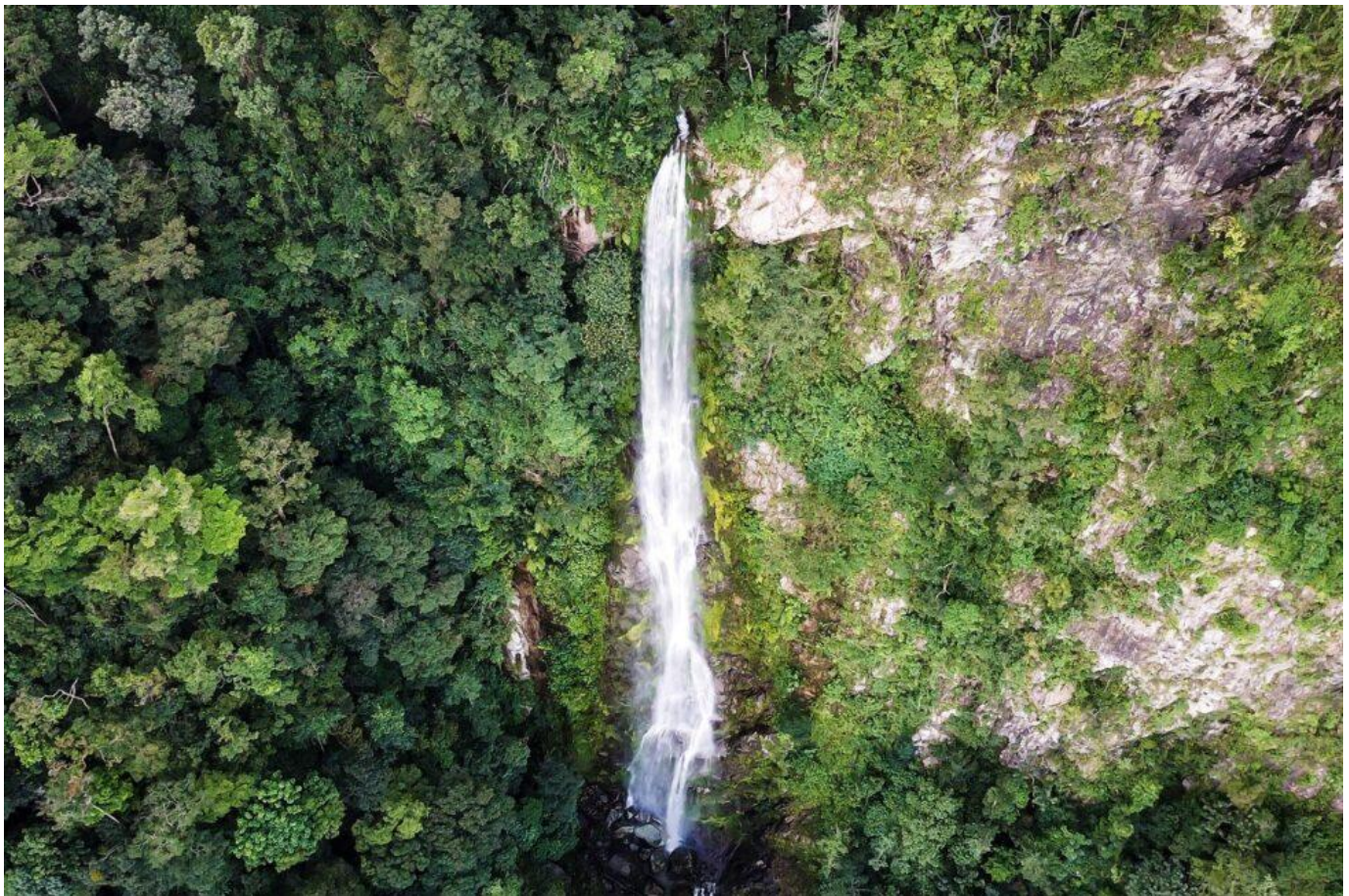
*Roatán is a scenic 30-40 minute flight from the San Pedro Sula airport.*

---



## Soar Over La Ceiba

La Ceiba is a handsome port city from which many travelers get to the Bay Islands by [ferry](https://www.roatanferry.com/) (<https://www.roatanferry.com/>). It's the country's adventure capital where one can earn bragging rights by rafting (<https://www.facebook.com/LaMoskitiaEcoaventuras/>) the raging Cangrejal River, spotting endemic birds, and even walking in the footsteps of some Hollywood A-listers who adore it.



Waterfall rappelling at [Las Cascadas Lodge](https://www.lascascadaslodge.com/) (<https://www.lascascadaslodge.com/>) is impossible to omit from your La Ceiba agenda. You'll feel momentarily gifted with superpowers as you rappel down an 80-foot waterfall with the water wildly pattering down your face. The experience culminates with a jungle swing where you can let out a deep-throated roar over the woods. Sufficiently showered in bliss and feeling proud of yourself, head out for a mountain-facing meal beside the infinity pool at the [Villas Pico Bonito](https://www.villaspicobonito.com/) (<https://www.villaspicobonito.com/>) jungle retreat.

After all, is said and done, you'll appreciate a tranquil stay hidden in the hills at Villa de Soledad (<https://www.lavilladesoledad.com/>), German-run Omega Eco Jungle Lodge (<https://www.omegatours.info/eco-jungle-lodge>) (which has on-site horse stables), or right in the heart of La Ceiba's main attraction, Pico Bonito National Park. The Lodge & Spa at Pico Bonito (<https://www.picobonito.com/>) is heaven for nature lovers with an in-house butterfly garden, hiking trails, a serpentarium, and over 400 types of birds that reside in the park. Contrary to what those pesky headlines suggest, Honduras packs in countless unforgettable experiences that are well worth the trip to this island nation.