

MYTHS AND MYSTERIES — of the — MAYA

A Cultural and Natural Discovery
Journey through Guatemala Copan, and Belize

Guatemala Discovery March 17- April 1, 2018
\$2940 pp/do

Belize Extension April 1- 6, 2018
\$1165 pp/do

GUATEMALA

rewards adventurous explorers with exquisite hospitality, Spanish colonial charm, and vibrant indigenous Mayan communities with their colorful traditions. The greatest cultural treasures of Mesoamerica and a richly diverse natural environment are waiting to be discovered.

To experience the many layers of this land, we will: Walk with the Semana Santa procession as is colonial tradition. Breathe in the cool highlands air. Climb the highest Mayan temples and pyramids. Listen to night sounds in the jungle. Barter for souvenirs in colourful local markets. Sway to the music of the marimbas.

The Belize extension will feature two days exploring Caracol and tropical nature in mountain preserves then take us to the azure Caribbean to snorkel on the barrier reef and relax on Caye Caulker.



DAY
1

Saturday March 17th

Arrival at Guatemala City – Antigua D

Arriving Guatemala City, we will transfer directly to Antigua. The 45 minute drive introduces us to the local terrain where steep volcanoes preside over verdant valleys. Antigua's well preserved Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a charming historic relic of Spanish Colonial times and was the original capital of Spanish Central America. Our boutique accommodation, Palacio de Doña Leonor, evokes the past as it pampers with modern comforts.

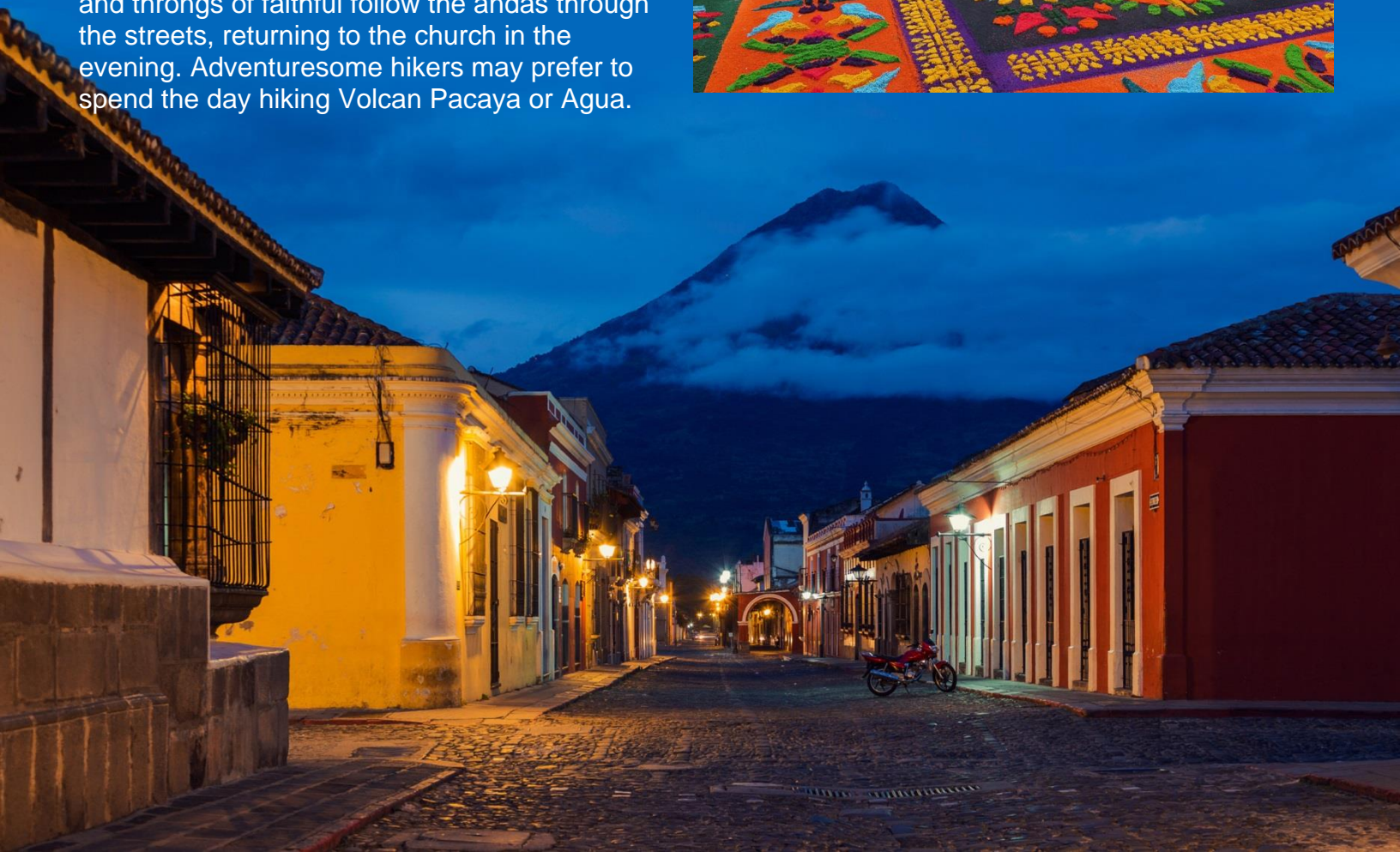
As evening settles, we absorb the unique ambiance of Antigua. Marimbas serenade our alfresco welcome dinner of authentic Guatemalan delicacies featuring tortillas, handmade and cooked to order on charcoal braziers.

DAY
2

Sunday March 18th

Antigua B

Today is the The Procession of San Bartolo. Elaborate carpets intricately crafted of colored sawdust adorn the cobblestone streets as "andas", statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other saints weighing several tons are carried by dozens of devout local men, cucuruchos, dressed in purple gowns and hoods. Roman soldiers in full dress, loud brass bands, and throngs of faithful follow the andas through the streets, returning to the church in the evening. Adventuresome hikers may prefer to spend the day hiking Volcan Pacaya or Agua.



DAY
3

Monday March 19th

Antigua Half Day Walking Tour with Guide B, L

The history of Antigua comes alive this morning during our walking exploration of the old city. We will visit La Merced, the Convent Las Capuchinas, the Cathedral, a local craft market and the Plaza Mayor (central park). After lunch, enjoy the afternoon in the park, continue to explore on your own or join us for an ad hoc visit to some of the surrounding villages.

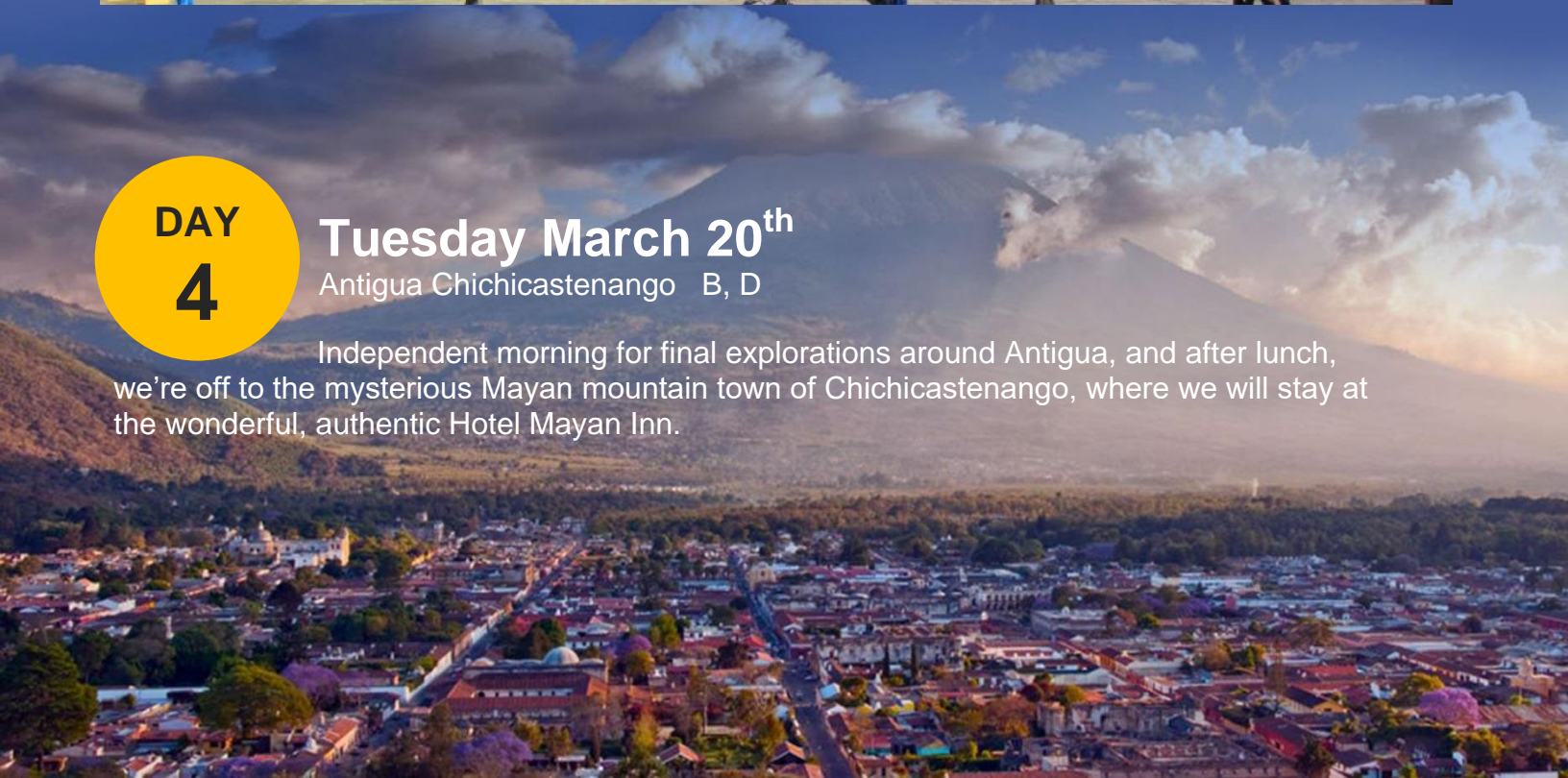


DAY
4

Tuesday March 20th

Antigua Chichicastenango B, D

Independent morning for final explorations around Antigua, and after lunch, we're off to the mysterious Mayan mountain town of Chichicastenango, where we will stay at the wonderful, authentic Hotel Mayan Inn.



DAY
5

Wednesday March 21st

Q'umarkaj Archaeological Site & Centro de Paz

Chichicastenango boasts a rich and vibrant Mayan culture and offers a stark contrast to the colonial spirit of Antigua. Today we visit Q'umarkaj, a K'iche Mayan post-classic site, one of the largest remaining when the Spanish arrived.

Then we're off to Chajbal near Santa Cruz del Quiche where Centro de Paz Barbara Ford is a local NGO dedicated to helping communities from Quiche Etnia. Here we'll enjoy a delicious lunch and then a short guided hike with stunning views of the surrounding countryside. We will identify and learn about medicinal plants and see a traditional Mayan ceremonial center.



DAY
6

Thursday March 22nd

Chichicastenango/ Quetzaltenango

Chichicastenango is best known for its bright, colorful market filled with a vast range of locally-made handcrafts. This is one of the biggest markets in Central America and is one of the best places to test your bargaining skills and pick up special souvenirs. Nearby, La Merced de Santo Thomas is a mixed Mayan and Catholic church where you can clearly see how the traditions and beliefs of the past and present have intertwined in syncretism to become the tapestry of Guatemalan life. The Mayan diety, Maximon, seems omnipresent here in Chichi, and we may see him worshiped at local altars.

Reluctantly we pull ourselves away from bargaining for stunning weavings and handmade articles to enjoy a sumptuous traditional buffet lunch. Later this afternoon we will travel to the mountainous city of Quetzaltenango where we spend one night at Pension Bonifaz.



**DAY
7**

Friday March 23rd

Qutezaltenango/ Santiago de Atitlan B, D

This morning we make our way to San Francisco El Alto to see the largest indigenous market in Central America. This authentic local market is off the main tourist path and affords a unique opportunity to people coming from miles around to buy fruit, vegetables, tools, weavings, and livestock. Watch as they bargain and pick up the essentials for their everyday life. Following this, we'll visit the village of Almolonga with its picturesque Market, one of the best vegetable markets in Central America. The bright colors of the produce make for fantastic photo opportunities, especially against the beautifully woven traditional clothing.

In the village of Zunil, we will visit the vibrant church of San Andres Xecul. Here, too, the Mayan diety Maximon is worshiped, moving from house to house each year. We will seek him out and leave an offering of appreciation.

Afternoon transfer to Panajachel on the shore of Lake Atitlan where we continue by boat to Santiago de Atitlan, the most authentic and traditional Mayan village on the lake and our home for the next 2 nights at Posada de Santiago.

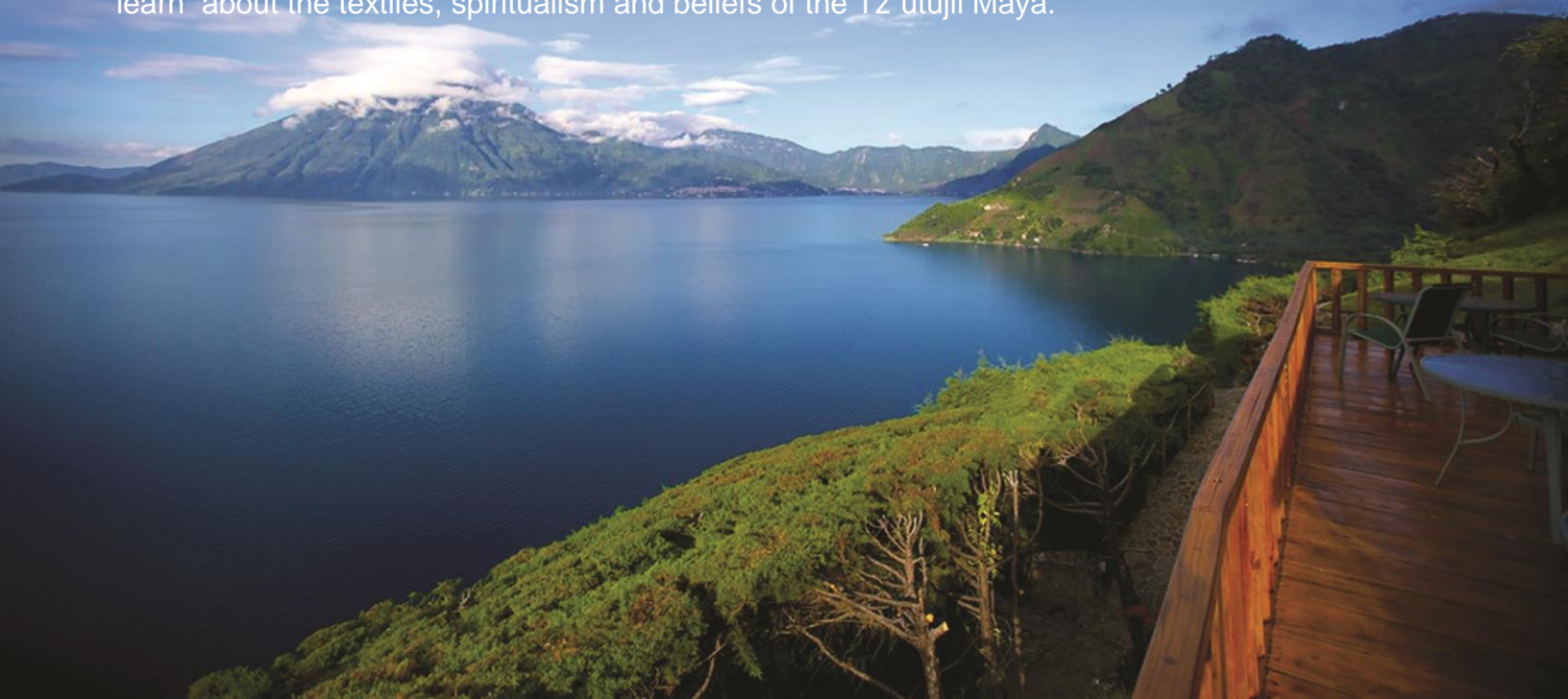
**DAY
8**

Saturday March 24th

Lake Atitlan B, L

This morning, we experience the beauty of Lake Atitlan and its volcanic background as we ferry to the small village of San Juan La Laguna. At the local women's textile co-operative we witness hand weaving and natural dye process. Then we visit the homes/studios of local naif (naïve) painters in the village before making our way to San Pedro La Laguna to visit the peaceful plaza and whitewashed church of San Pedro and the homes of more local artists.

Returning to Santiago, we stroll the village to visit the church and the effigy of Maximon as we learn about the textiles, spiritualism and beliefs of the Tz'utujil Maya.



DAY
9

Sunday March 25th

Palm Sunday/ Santiago de Atitlan/ Guatemala City B, L

The unique blend of Mayan and Catholic religious traditions known as syncretism, a mixture of different religions and cultures, is evident throughout highland Guatemala, but perhaps the most unusual of Guatemalan religious celebrations is found in Santiago Atitlán, on Palm Sunday. Today we witness the procession depicting Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, blessing all around. Amid clouds of piney copal incense and with great pageantry, simultaneously Jesus and Maximon are honored, with prayers and offerings to both.

After the procession, we'll enjoy a hearty lunch before driving to Guatemala City where we overnight at the Radisson Blue Hotel.

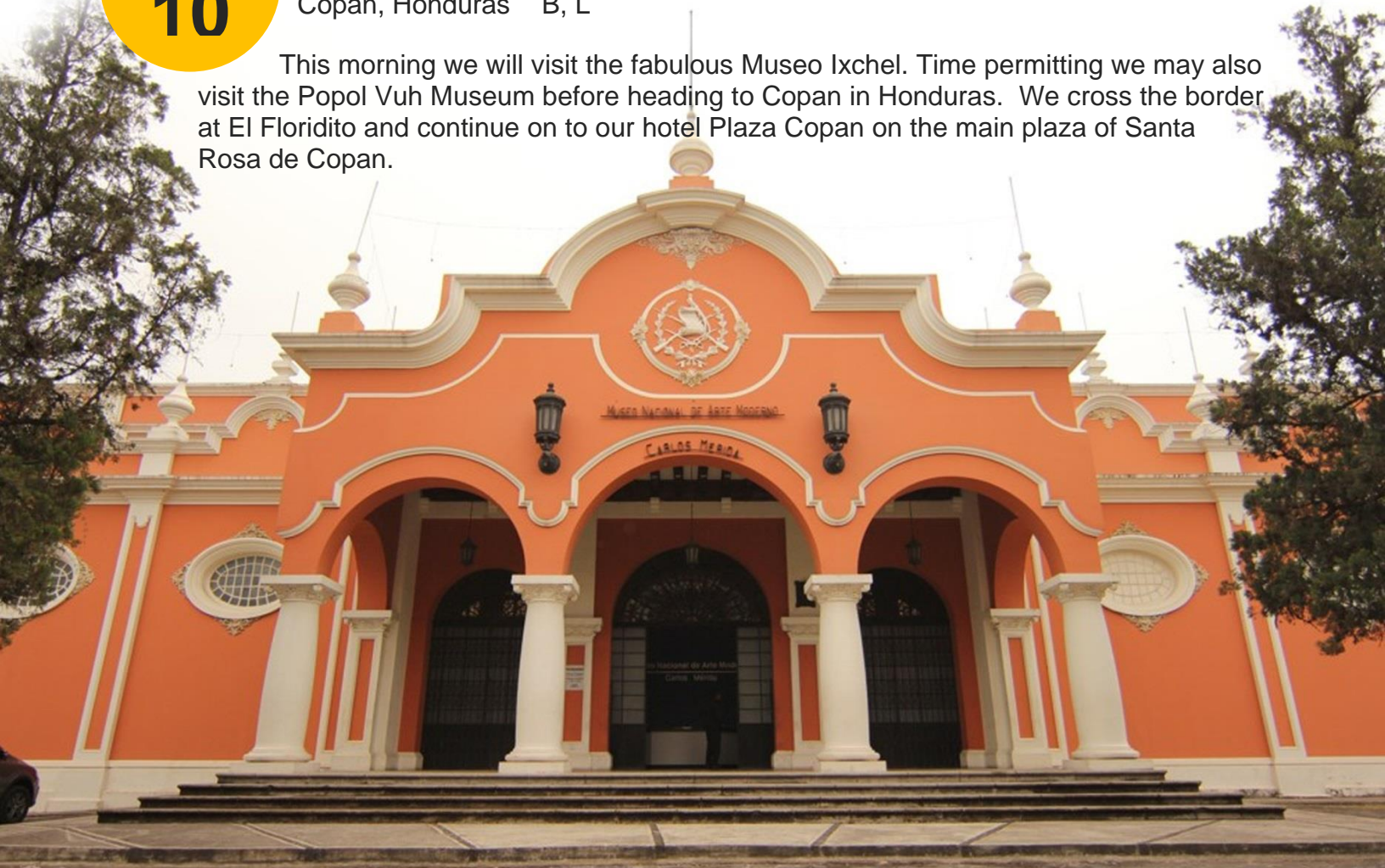


DAY
10

Monday March 26th

Copan, Honduras B, L

This morning we will visit the fabulous Museo Ixchel. Time permitting we may also visit the Popol Vuh Museum before heading to Copan in Honduras. We cross the border at El Floridito and continue on to our hotel Plaza Copan on the main plaza of Santa Rosa de Copan.



DAY
11

Tuesday March 27th

Copan Ruins B, L

Copan dates from the early pre-classic period and flourished in the Mayan classic period from the 5th to the 9th centuries AD, a span of over 2,000 years. At its zenith, it was home to as many as 2,000 people. Known for its ornate carvings and advanced art work, Copan is one of the crown jewels of Mayan sites. Our expert local guide leads us through the ceremonial center, the ball court, the hieroglyphic stairway and the acropolis, explaining the structures, glyphs and stela and chronicling the complex political intrigues that played such an important part in the rise and fall of this spectacular kingdom.

We have all day to spend in the site and when finished, we return to Santa Rosa de Copan for the night.



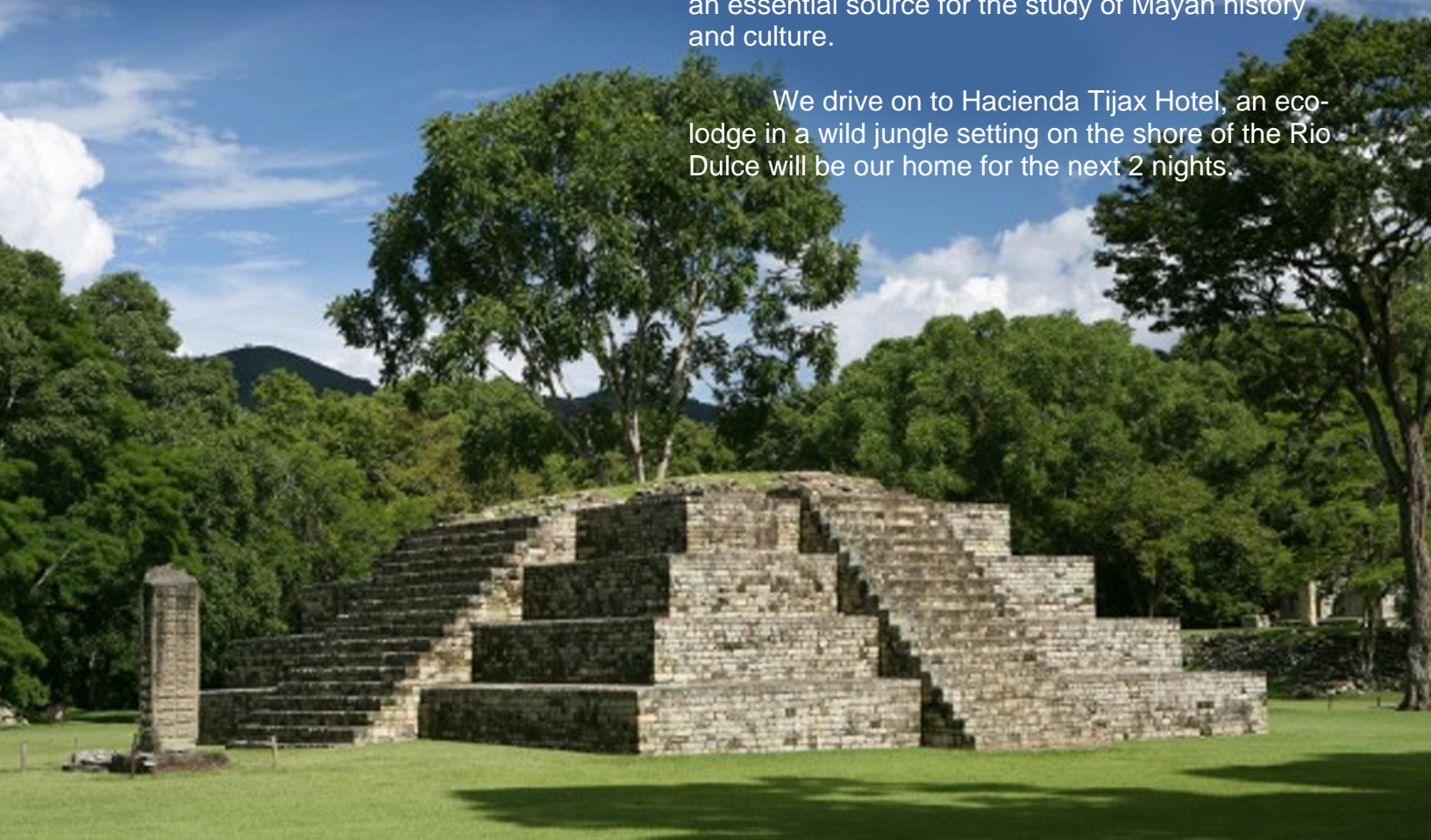
DAY
12

Wednesday March 28th

Quirigua / Rio Dulce B, L

We leave Honduras this morning traveling through picturesque, colorful villages until we reach the ancient Mayan city of Quirigua where we find an impressive series of stelae and sculpted calendars, true masterpieces of Mayan art that tell the history of the social, political and economic events of the Mayan civilization and are regarded as an essential source for the study of Mayan history and culture.

We drive on to Hacienda Tijax Hotel, an eco-lodge in a wild jungle setting on the shore of the Rio Dulce will be our home for the next 2 nights.



DAY
13

Thursday March 29th

Rio Dulce/ Livingston B, L

Today we journey by boat down the Rio Dulce to Livingston on the Caribbean coast, stopping at Bird Island and the Great Canyon, hot springs and visiting a small community. Livingston is home to a Garifuna population, afro-caribbe descendants of shipwrecked slaves. We will have a walking tour of the village of Livingston before our typical lunch featuring Tapado, a seafood soup with coconut milk. This afternoon we boat back up river to lake Isabel and visit the Castillo de San Felipe de Lara, a fortress to protect the new world treasures bound for Spain from pirates.



DAY
14

Friday March 30th

Rio Dulce/ Tikal National Park B, L

Morning free for kayaking, swimming, hiking or relaxing by the pool. We depart after lunch for Tikal National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the most important sites of the Mayan world.

We'll spend our final two nights in Guatemala at the wonderful Hotel Tikal Inn which sits at the edge of the jungle, just 10 minute walk away from the ruins. Tomorrow we rise early, so we turn in early while howler monkeys roar in the jungle outside determined to keep us awake.

**DAY
15**

Saturday March 31st

Tikal National Park B, D

With special permit, we may enter Tikal at first light and climb the highest Mayan temple to witness a spectacular sunrise over the majestic ruins and surrounding jungle. Our expert guide will lead a birdwatching tour to see a rich variety of resplendent species, then we begin our archaeological tour of the site. If you choose to sleep in, we will rendezvous at a designated spot before the architectural tour.

Tikal dates to the 4th century BC and was an important Mayan ceremonial, trade, and urban center from the 6th to the 10th century AD. We will see the Great Plaza Acropolis, the Plaza of Seven Temples, and the Mundo Perdido Complex. Weary but temple sated, we rest and refresh by the hotel pool this afternoon.

Let us share our favourite experiences of the trip at our farewell dinner tonight.

**DAY
16**

Sunday April 1st

Depart for the Airport B

For those not going on to Belize, you will transfer early this morning to the airport in Flores. The flight to Guatemala City arrives at 9 am so you can connect with your international flight home



BELIZE

**DAY
1**

Sunday April 1st

Tikal – Flores - Yaxha – San Ignacio Belize B, L

Transfer this morning to the beautiful, colourful island town in Lake Peten Itza where we will watch the Easter procession at Santa Elena. Then we're off to the remote site of Yaxha (Green Waters in Mayan) on Laguna Yaxja. This large site from the classic period has 9 plazas, over 40 stelae as well as temples and ball courts. After lunch, we drive to the border, cross into Belize and continue to Windy Hill resort, a luxurious lodging set in the lush, green rainforest of San Ignacio in Belize's Cayo District, and our home for the next 2 nights.



**DAY
2**

Monday April 2nd

Caracol Archaeological Site B, L

Rising early we travel to the Mountain Pine Ridge area with its unique landscape of rolling granite hills covered with battalions of uniform pine sporadically dissected by fire breaks and broadleaf gallery forest.

We stop at the Rio On where we swim in cool pools and waterfalls or slide down the natural waterslide before continuing on to the Caracol, the largest Mayan site in Belize covering 30 square miles of high canopy jungle including five plazas, an astronomic observatory and over 35,000 buildings. The tallest, a massive pyramid (Caana) is capped by three temples and rises over 140 feet above the jungle floor.

**DAY
3**

Tuesday April 3rd

Actun Tunichil Muknal (ATM) /
Caye Caulker B, L

Actu Tunichil Muknal (The Cave of the Sepulcher) is one of the most impressive caves in the Maya Lowland. Located in the heart of the Belizean Rainforest, this cave was a sacred place to the prehistoric Maya of Belize and is the site of our subterranean adventure into the underworld of Mayan mythology. Is this cave the portal to the

legendary Mayan underworld of the gods? Archaeologists believe the caverns and chambers were used for religious ceremonies. Skeletons in the massive "Cathedral" attest to sacrificial rituals. Properly outfitted, we safely explore this underground site. This amazing cave is comprised of a series of chambers, ending in a 300 by 50-meter Cathedral where sacrificial ceremonies once took place. Here we travel deep into the Mayan past and witness a living museum where the human sacrifices and artifacts can be viewed in their original context. Later we enjoy a 45 minute trek through the dense jungle in the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve and wade across three streams, learning about the plants and animals of the Jungle. Afternoon transfer to Belize City and continue by water taxi to Caye Caulker (45 minutes) and our island lodging for 3 nights, Caye Caulker Condos.



**DAY
4**

Wednesday April 4th

Hol Chan Marine Reserve L

The crystal clear waters of Caribbean (or is it the irresistible call of the Sirens?) beckon as we sail to the 7.8 sq km Hol Chan Marine Reserve, one of the most popular diving/snorkeling sites in Belize, where our guided snorkelling adventure explores the beauty and variety of marine life. Then we will sail on Shark Ray Alley to encounter sharks and rays in their natural habitat. The Shark Ray Alley is a shallow water snorkel where you will enjoy swimming with the harmless nurse sharks and famous southern stingrays.

**DAY
5**

Thursday April 5th

Caye Caulker

Today is a free day in laid back Caye Caulker. Optional activities will be available. Scuba divers will want to join Steve for a morning reef dive. Let us gather for a social hour tonight to celebrate our Mayan experience!

**DAY
6**

Friday April 6th

Depart from Belize City

We take a water taxi to Belize City then transfer to the airport for our flights home.

