

tour dossier for:

Quetzal Highway

9 nights / 10 days • Guatemala, Belize, Mexico



The Facts

Dossier Last Updated: 27-03-2008

Tour Code: QYC

Duration 9 nights / 10 days

Joining City: Antigua

Departure City: Cancun

Nearest International Airport (joining / departing): Guatemala City is 45kms from Antigua (please make sure that your flight is into Guatemala City, Guatemala, NOT Antigua in the Caribbean) / Cancún

This dossier is designed for this particular tour and should be read in conjunction with the country dossier(s), regional pre-departure booklet and optional excursions guides relevant to your itinerary. You will also receive a joining letter in advance of your journey with further information, while last minute updates may be posted in the Latest News section of our website. Please see tucantravel.com for details.



What's Included

- Accommodation: 9 nights in hotels/cabins
- Meals: No meals included
- Excursions: Caye Caulker; Tikal ruins
- Transport: Local public bus, minibus, speed boat, on foot, taxi
- Group: Average 8 - 12; max 18
- Age: Recommended 18 - 60
- Staff: Tucan Travel tour leader, local guides

What's Excluded

- Local Payment
- International flights & departure tax
- Border taxes - Guatemala approx US\$2, Belize approx US\$19. Note this is subject to change, and your tour leader will provide current information.
- Tips on included excursions, visas, travel insurance, personal items, other tips.
- Pre & post tour accommodation

- Airport transfers
- Spending money allow US\$25-30 per day to cover meals, snacks, drinks, limited souvenirs, laundry and any extras
- Optional Excursions - Please see our Optional Excursions Guide (available from www.tucantravel.com) for a comprehensive list of optional activities and excursions available on this tour.

Brief Overview

A brief tour for those wanting a quick look at Guatemala, Belize and Mexico. If you want to discover ancient ruins, beautiful Caribbean beaches and see some incredible scenery and wildlife, then this is the trip for you.

Itinerary

Day 1 to 5

Antigua (Guatemala) - Rio Dulce Flores Tikal San Ignacio

Antigua is one of the most attractive towns in Central America. Here you will see the local indigenous population in their colourful costumes, selling their textiles in the cobbled streets and plazas. It is also the cultural centre of Guatemala, an ideal place to experience the traditional music, architecture and art of the country. Rich in ornate churches, convents, parks, plazas, cafés, restaurants, bars and colourful street markets and surrounded by awe-inspiring volcanoes, Antigua is one place you will never forget!

On day 2 we depart Antigua by minivans to the river town of Rio Dulce. We stay in cabins right on the water, and have the option to take a boat tour to Livingston experiencing some of the most beautiful scenery imaginable along this 23-kilometre stretch of waterway. Livingston is situated at the mouth of the Rio Dulce where it joins the Bay of Amatique and is inhabited by the Garifuna people. This lively town has a Caribbean atmosphere different to the rest of Guatemala and is a great place to eat lobster or coconut prawns and listen to the local African-style 'punta' music.

From Rio Dulce we continue to the pretty island-town of Flores, situated in the centre of Lake Peten Itzá, which was the last town to be conquered by the Spanish. Flores is our base for exploring the incredible Maya jungle site of Tikal, which was regarded as the greatest city of the Maya world. This complex is one of the biggest Maya sites discovered and will take much of the day to explore.

Today the main centre covers an area of approx. 2½ square kilometres but at its pinnacle the city stretched for nearly 100 kilometres. As you approach the site, you may see several tall mounds which are temples that have not yet been excavated. The highest Maya temple is found at Tikal (70 metres). The emphasis was on height when creating these imposing structures because the Maya believed the higher the building the closer they were to the gods. Tikal is also rich in animal life, such as the howler monkey that was sacred to the Maya, the pizote (a racoon-like animal), bird life such as toucans and, if you're very lucky you may even see a jaguar...

A short drive takes us to the Belize border and one of the least populated and smallest countries in Central America. Formally known as British Honduras, the official language is still English but almost everyone also speaks Spanish. First stop is San Ignacio. This attractive town is also known as "Cayo" and is an agricultural centre serving the areas many citrus and peanut farms. It is also known to be the 'adventure' and 'nature' capital of Belize, being surrounded by jungle, wildlife, waterfalls, rivers and caves. There are many optional excursions on offer, from canoeing down the river or tubing through caves, to visiting the nearby Maya site of Caracol - the biggest in Belize!

Day 6 to 7

Caye Caulker

Catching a bus through the centre of Belize, we reach Belize City and take a boat out to the Cayes (islands). Belize is a great place to relax, with favourite sayings there "No problem" and, as one sign says, "Go slow". We spend a couple of very laid back nights on Caye Caulker, where you may find that you throw away your shoes to wander the sand filled streets. Another famous sign reads "No shirt, no

shoes, no problem. No money, problem!" You can spend the evenings eating seafood, drinking cocktails, and listening to reggae music in one of the bars.

During the day we can organise a range of different optional snorkelling trips for you, such as to Shark and Ray Alley. Some of you might decide to go on the 'manatee excursion' where if you're lucky you'll see these enormous sea-cows surface to take a breath. Another optional snorkelling tour takes you out to Hol-Chan Marine Reserve where you are guaranteed to see lots of big, colourful fish. Qualified divers can explore the so-called bottomless "Blue Hole" made famous by the explorer Jacques Cousteau (please note: this optional excursion does not go every day, check locally for availability). Other options include sunning yourself on a beach, riding a bike around the island or trying your luck at fishing. If you are lucky, make sure you then take your catch to one of the local restaurants so they can BBQ it for you.

Day 8 to 10

Bacalar (Mexico) Cancún

We travel up the coast to Bacalar, set on the beautiful Laguna Bacalar (Lake Bacalar). The lake is one of the most picturesque in Mexico and is known as the "Lake of Seven Colours" for its seven hues reflected in its depths. Here you can go swimming in the cenote where the water is lovely and warm and there is a tyre swing! Bacalar is a quiet, tranquil town, far from the crowds and noise of the larger tourist spots and our hotel is right on the lake.

From Bacalar it's only a two hour bus journey to Cancun. Until 1970 Cancún was just a small fishing village with one lone coconut plantation, but now, due to its beautiful beaches, it attracts over 2 million visitors a year. Relax on one of the beautiful beaches, swim in the turquoise waters or take a ferry out to the attractive island of Isla Mujeres, where you can organise snorkelling or drive around the island in a golf-cart.

Our tour finishes on day 10 in Cancún

Important note: The itinerary listed above is to be used as a guide only and our tour leaders may need to make adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances. The tour leader will also try to be in the best place for local holidays and festivals etc. We endeavour to incorporate any permanent changes into our Tour Dossiers and, as such, the itinerary may vary slightly from the one printed in the brochure. To make sure you have the most up to date copy please download the very latest version from our website just before travelling.

About Adventure Tours

Adventure Tours travel by public transport wherever possible and so have a high degree of interaction with the local people. This hands-on style means that you will need to travel light (see below for details). Tucan Travel's Adventure Tours will bring you into contact with cultures and experiences that contrast dramatically with those at home and therefore a sense of humour and patience is essential!

Don't forget that Tucan Travel also offer two other tour styles: Discovery Tours where we travel by private and comfortable custom built vehicle and Overland Expeditions (in South America only), which usually have a high percentage of camping, travel by overland truck and suit travellers who love the great outdoors.

Local Payment

The cost of all Tucan Travel tours includes a compulsory 'Local Payment', which is in addition to the price you pay to your travel agent. The Local Payment MUST be paid to your Tour leader in full in US\$ cash at the pre-departure meeting on the first day of your tour. The local payment is administered by our tour leaders and no refunds can be made for any unused services or if you decide to leave the tour early.

The Local Payment is in no way a 'kitty'. To avoid confusion, we no longer have a kitty system for tips and taxes as we have found that most people prefer to pay their own tips and taxes individually as they go along.

Pre-Departure Meeting

The address of your joining hotel can be found on your joining letter and tour voucher. On arrival you should look for a Tucan Travel

information sheet on the hotel notice board where you will find details of the pre-departure meeting. The tour leader will normally hold the pre-departure meeting on the afternoon of Day 1 (assuming that all clients have arrived by then). Your tour leader will give a briefing about the tour, outline the plan for the next few days, answer any questions and collect your Local Payment in full in US\$ cash. Then there will usually be the option for everyone to go out for dinner and drinks to start to get to know one another.

Please note that you will need to bring the following important items to the pre departure meeting:

1. Passport (including any necessary visas) original document and a photocopy.
2. Vaccination certificates (e.g. Yellow Fever, if required)
3. Travel voucher
4. Travel insurance policy
5. Local Payment

Tour Personnel

Adventure Tours use a variety of different styles of leadership in order to maximize your enjoyment and experiences. On this tour you will have a combination of Tucan Travel tour leader, and local guides. The Tucan Travel Tour leader accompanies your tour and local guides will lead your included and optional excursions,

Degree of Difficulty/Fitness

Adventure Tours suit people who are fit and active. Although no experience is required there are many walks between bus/train/boat terminals and hotels and travellers must be able to carry their own luggage over various terrains.

This tour offers optional excursions such as caving, snorkelling and scuba diving, which if wanting to do these, can be reasonably demanding. There will also be pyramids to climb at Tikal ruins (if you wish) which can be fairly arduous. The maximum altitude this tour reaches is about 1,600 metres (unless you decide to go on an optional volcano climb) which is not considered high in terms of altitude sickness.

As this tour uses public transport in Guatemala you must be willing to put up with a fair amount of discomfort. The local chicken buses' in Guatemala are great fun, but extremely chaotic and uncomfortable at times. You may be sharing a seat with 5 other local people or you may have to stand for some periods (up to two hours). Be prepared to be pushed, pulled, squeezed and squashed but remember this is how the locals travel in Guatemala and is all part of the fun!

Pre-Departure Information

Once you have booked the tour (paid your deposit), your travel agent will provide you with a detailed pre-departure booklet, with in-depth information to help you prepare. If you do not receive your pre-departure information shortly after booking your tour please consult your travel agent. After you have paid for your tour in full you will also receive from your travel agent: a local map & joining letter for your arrival city, your tour voucher and transfer voucher (if applicable see below).

Country Dossiers

This Tour Dossier is designed to be read in conjunction with our Mexico, Belize & Guatemala Country Dossiers which you can download from our website or obtain from your booking agent. The Country Dossiers contain essential information about visas, arrival transfers, spending money & costs, taxes & tips, climate, local food etc.

What you need to bring

A full list of suggested equipment can be found in the pre-departure booklet.

A towel is optional as you can quite often use hotel towels, however if you prefer your own bring it along. Alternatively, a sarong is highly recommended as it can also be used in place of a towel. Snorkelling equipment may be useful, but not necessary, as you can easily hire it locally. If you want to save space you could just bring some swimming goggles - still great for spotting fish! You may wish to bring some kind of waterproof protection cover for your pack, as luggage tends to get thrown around a lot on public transport and it may get dirty and sometimes wet.

On Adventure Tours it is very important that you do not bring too much luggage as you will find it extremely difficult to get on/off buses and trains etc and there is a fair amount of walking to/from hotels. You are also likely to encounter many cobbled streets and dirt roads so luggage on wheels is totally unsuitable.

You must be prepared to carry your own bags at all times and we therefore strongly urge you to limit your luggage to a maximum of 10-14kgs.

Transfers

We do not offer transfers in Guatemala City or Cancún due to the ease, availability and cheapness of local transport. Please refer to your

tour Joining Letter for detailed guidelines on how to get a taxi.

Whichever way you decide to make the journey between Guatemala City and Antigua, you should be prepared for crazy Guatemalan drivers!! Even if you have a safe and slow driver for your vehicle, other drivers on the road may put you a bit 'on edge'. Guatemalans tend to overtake on hair-pin bends, drive at ridiculous speeds, and honk their horns a lot! Just try to remember, this is all part of the adventure

Accommodation

This tour includes 9 nights accommodation in hotels and cabins (in Rio Dulce). All hotels are chosen for their central locality, security, friendliness, cleanliness and ambiance. Although sometimes simple, you will find clean comfortable rooms with mostly en-suite facilities (occasionally bathrooms may be shared but this is rare), and often a bar and restaurant are attached or close by. All rooms will be allocated on a share basis, usually in twins or triples (depending on the male/female ratio) and on rare occasions, multi-share rooms

Transport

On Adventure Tours our goal is to offer you as much variety as possible while meeting the local people. On this trip we will be using local public buses, mini buses, taxis and boats (life jackets provided). Please see public transport note under 'Degree of Difficulty' above and keep your sense of humour! There will also be some walking with your luggage between bus terminals and hotels. Optional excursions may use other forms of transport, for example horses or mountain bikes.

Meals

Meals, snacks and drinks are not included on this tour and are at your own expense. Your tour leader will be able to advise the best places to eat. Please see the relevant Country Dossier for more information about the local food.

Tour Highlights

- **Antigua** - One of the most beautiful colonial towns in the Americas overshadowed by gigantic volcanoes.
- **Rio Dulce** - stay in jungle cabins located right on the water!
- **Flores** - A charming little town situated on an island, right in the middle of Lake Peten Itzá.
- **Tikal** - Beautiful Maya ruins set in the heart of the jungle, with howler monkeys screeching above.
- **San Ignacio** - Cradled in a picturesque valley between two rivers, there are countless adventurous options including; caving, tubing, canoeing, trekking, nature-spotting, biking, horse-riding etc.
- **Caye Caulker** - Small sandy island with no traffic and options for diving or snorkelling the world's second largest reef.
- **Tulum** (Option) - Coastal Maya /Toltec ruins with an incredible cliff-top setting above the beach (bring your swimwear).

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Antigua (Guatemala)
Day 2 Rio Dulce
Day 3 Flores
Day 4 Tikal ruins/San Ignacio
Day 5 San Ignacio
Day 6 Caye Caulker
Day 7 Caye Caulker
Day 8 Bacalar
Day 9 Bacalar/Cancun
Day 10 Depart Cancún

Please note the day to day itinerary above is given as a GUIDELINE ONLY.

Responsible Travel Tips

At Tucan Travel we are serious about our responsibility to care for the environment and people that we visit. Here are a few tips to help you to enjoy your tour while minimising your impact and enhancing your travelling experience. Learn more about our responsible travel policy at www.tucantravel.com.

1. Carbon offset your Tucan Travel tour and flights. Check out our website for details about how you can go about this www.tucantravel.com.
2. Bring your own metal water bottle. Fill up at restaurants or treat your own water on tour instead of buying lots of plastic bottles. Bear in mind that there may not be recycling facilities available at some destinations.
3. Cut out plastic - remove and recycle the packaging of new travel gear before you pack, and bring a light cotton or string bag for your shopping, so you can politely refuse plastic bags at shops and markets.
4. Bring a stack of pens and pencils and hand these out to children rather than offering sweets. Your alternative gifts will still be popular and the parents will thank you for saving their children's teeth - access to dental services may not be readily available

there.

5. Learn a bit of the local language before you travel. Being able to say even a few words like hello, please and thank you will help you to connect with people in a positive way and really enhance your personal experience. Bring a phrase book on tour and keep practising to improve your confidence. You will also find some good language tips in the country dossier(s).

Feedback

At the end of your tour we would greatly appreciate it if you could take the time to complete a questionnaire about your experiences. The tour leader will give you a paper copy and an electronic version can be found on our website. We take feedback very seriously as it allows us to maintain and improve the very high standards we expect from our road crew, local operators, hoteliers, transportation and office staff, among others. We also use this information to improve our itineraries and optional excursions on offer. Thank you in advance for your help with this.

Subscribe to our e-newsletter

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Join our online communities

Make friends with fellow passengers in the Tucan Travel forums, and ask questions about any tour you like - we've got the answers! See Share your tour photos and videos on Youtube and Flickr, and keep in touch with group members on Facebook, Bebo and Myspace. There are many Tucan Travel communities out there waiting to welcome you, just a few clicks away.

Write a travel diary and get published on our website

Share your experiences of life on tour and you may be rewarded! Get in touch with us for details through www.tucantravel.com.

We want your photos!

We've taken you to some of the most amazing places on earth - why not share that with the world? Send us high resolution colour photos of your adventures, and you could be published on our website or our brochure. Contact us through www.tucantravel.com.