

# The New York Times



373

## 52 Places to Go in 2023

Travel's rebound has revealed the depth of our drive to explore the world. Why do we travel? For food, culture, adventure, natural beauty? This year's list has all those elements, and more.

# 33 Cayos Cochinos

Honduras



Planting coral and counting sea turtles  
where there are no cars or roads

[READ MORE](#)

# 33 Cayos Cochinos

Honduras



Off the northern coast of Honduras, the Cayos Cochinos archipelago, part of a marine preserve where commercial fishing is banned, encompasses about 300,000 acres, two main islands and 13 small cays, with a collective population of about 200 Indigenous Garifuna residents.

Before the pandemic, the nonprofit Cayos Cochinos Foundation, which manages the reserve, derived much of its funding to study and protect its biodiversity from the fees paid by day-trippers to snorkel there. Now, the nongovernmental organization is gently opening itself to tourism, allowing visitors to stay in basic cabins (from \$45 a night) that previously hosted exclusively scientists.

Between scuba dives and hikes to see pink boa constrictors and black-chested spiny-tailed iguanas, travelers can volunteer to propagate new coral or count sea turtles. Travel to the islands, which are roadless and free of cars, also supports the Garifuna community, which offers guide services, restaurants and tastings of the local root-infused spirit, guifiti.

— *Elaine Glusac*

Planting coral and counting sea turtles  
where there are no cars or roads

[READ MORE](#)

The New York Times

SUNDAY,  
JANUARY 15, 2023

A SPECIAL  
SECTION

# 52 PLACES TO GO



PORAS CHAUDHARY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Off the northern coast of Honduras, the Cayos Cochinos archipelago, part of a marine preserve where commercial fishing is banned, encompasses about 300,000 acres, two main islands and 13 small cays, with a collective population of about 200 Indigenous Garifuna residents.

Before the pandemic, the nonprofit Cayos Cochinos Foundation, which manages the reserve, derived much of its funding to study and protect its biodiversity from the fees paid by day-trippers to snorkel there. Now, the nongovernmental organization is gently opening itself

to tourism, allowing visitors to stay in basic cabins (from \$45 a night) that previously hosted exclusively scientists.

Between scuba dives and hikes to see pink boa constrictors and black-chested spiny-tailed iguanas, travelers can volunteer to propagate new coral or count sea turtles. Travel to the islands, which are roadless and free of cars, also supports the Garifuna community, which offers guide services, restaurants and tastings of the local root-infused spirit, guifiti. ELAINE GLUSAC



# TIME

## THE WORLD'S GREATEST PLACES OF 2023

50 extraordinary destinations to explore

### Roatán, Honduras

A quieter barrier reef



A view of Cayos Cochinos Archipelago, Roatan, Honduras. Antonio Busiello—Getty Images

**S**urrounded by the aquamarine waves of the world's second largest barrier reef, Roatán, located off the coast of Honduras, has attracted backpackers and nature lovers for decades, but new luxury properties are transforming the island's rustic

appeal. This summer, **Kimpton Roatan** will unveil a five-star resort—complete with a rooftop bar and pool, and a spa featuring treatments rooted in Indigenous traditions—overlooking West Bay Beach.

Elsewhere on the island, Azul, a new gourmet restaurant at the Blue Roatan Resort helmed by local chef Ramon Orozco, is responsible for some of the best meals here. Conch carpaccio and lobster with coconut and manchego cheese are served in a lush outdoor garden area where you're likely to glimpse macaws flying through the trees.

On the northeast tip of Roatán, the sleepy town of Punta Gorda boasts the title of the oldest permanent settlement on the island. Settled by the Afro-Indigenous Garifuna in the 18th century, the town showcases Garifuna dance, music, and food at weekly street parties.

About 20 miles off the coast of Roatán, the Cayos Cochinos archipelago, a marine preserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also set to launch new upscale eco cabins this spring. Hop a 45-minute ferry from Roatán and you'll land on the isolated paradise of Cayos Cochinos. Brimming with surreal beauty, the island boasts 800 acres of protected land and 110 species of coral in its crystalline waters. The pearly sand beaches are home to hawksbill sea turtles as well as the pink Cochino Cays boa.

IRELAND • TAMRON HALL • THE CARIBBEAN

# Hemispheres

FEBRUARY 2023



THIS MAGAZINE  
HAS BEEN  
TREATED WITH AN  
ANTIMICROBIAL  
PROCESS

Three  
Perfect  
Days  
**Rome**

Where you can wander  
the labyrinthine  
cobblestone lanes of  
bohemian Trastevere

STAR ALLIANCE

UNITED



# Navigator



THE INITIATIVE  
By Jonny Bierman

## Notes From the Underwater

How you can help  
restore coral reefs



Coral Restoration Foundation

A Coral  
Restoration  
Foundation diver  
on a project in  
the Florida Keys



Barrier Reef (the second-largest in the world, after Australia’s Great Barrier Reef). The properties also observe an annual Reef Week every summer. “We believe that children are the future, which is why we began by focusing on them with Reef Week programming,” says Ambar Plasencia, the director of the conservation- and education-focused Sancus Foundation. “We explain what a coral is, how a reef ecosystem works, its importance, and what we can do to help protect it. By involving the kids’ clubs from all of the hotels, we hope to create young ambassadors for our oceans.” For inspired adults, meanwhile, the foundation matches guest donations.

Further south along the Mesoamerican Reef, Belize’s **Fragments of Hope** and Honduras’s **Cayos Cochinos Foundation** are also working to restore coral. Cayos Cochinos recently opened cabins on a private island that serve as a base-camp for guests to explore the archipelago and participate in restoration and conservation programs. Fragments of Hope, for its part, offers kayak tours and volunteer opportunities.

If you really want to get a feel for what it’s like to be a marine biologist, perhaps the ideal activity is the Coral Hero Program at Costa Rica’s **Peninsula Papagayo** resort. Here, you can clean, plant, and adopt coral—and even give your coral structure a name. Everyone, meet Cory.

recognized around the world as the best way to grow certain types of coral really quickly,” says Coral Restoration Foundation communications director Alice Grainger. “It’s cheap, easy to produce, and the design is openly available to anyone who wants it. Because of these coral trees, we’re now able to produce around 50,000 reef-ready corals every year.”

In Mexico’s Riviera Maya, the four hotels at the **Mayakoba** resort offer workshops on coral restoration, as well as snorkeling and diving tours on which guests can get an up-close look at the ongoing work on the Mesoamerican

**Clockwise from top:** divers in the Florida Keys; coral restoration on the ocean floor; baby corals ready to be taken to their underwater home



Diving in a coral reef is one of the most spellbinding experiences a traveler can have, but these underwater wonderlands are at risk of extinction. Due to climate change, overfishing, coastal development, pollutants, and disease, an estimated 30 to 50 percent of the world’s coral reefs have disappeared, and more than 90 percent could be gone by 2050. Amid such drastic circumstances, many scientists have switched their focus from conservation to active restoration—and on your next beach vacation, you can help.

**Coral Restoration Foundation** in the Florida Keys is a team of passionate conservationists on a mission to regrow Floridian reefs, which have declined by 98 percent. Tourists and locals alike can participate in educational programs above and below the surface, including dives to plant forests of “coral trees”—lattices of PVC pipe and fiberglass rods from which coral can be hung like ornaments on a Christmas tree. “It’s



Coral Restoration Foundation (boat, divers); Jose Carlos (baby corals)

## 9 of the best hiking trails in Honduras



Find the perfect trekking route for you with this guide to Honduras' best hikes © Unaihuiziphotography / Getty Images

**H** [onduras](#) may be known by some tourists for its collection of [fine beaches](#), but this Central American nation has its share of great hiking trails ideal for the more active traveler.

There's a diversity of landscapes in all of Honduras' [best places to visit](#) – from the Bay islands in the Caribbean Sea to the rainforests and cloud forests of its national parks – so there are plenty of different trail terrain all across the country. Some trails are even accessible from urban centers, allowing walkers to escape city life and enjoy a bit of fresh air.

As far as safety is concerned, you'll be fine as long as you keep your wits about you, just like anywhere in the world. However, it's recommended to hike only during daylight hours – so be mindful of when sunset is – or to go with a guide in most cases to avoid getting lost. Fortunately, there are plenty of services out there, and guides are typically available at many of the national park entrances.

So wherever you are in the country, you'll be near a trail, be it for a quick, casual hike, or a multi-day excursion.



See the waterfalls of Pico Bonito National Park on one of the many hiking trails  
© Manuel Chinchilla / Getty Images

## 1. El Mapache Trail, Pico Bonito National Park

### Best hike near the Rio Cangrejal

*7.2km (4.5 miles) round trip, 4 hours, moderately challenging*

[Pico Bonito National Park](#), encompassing 565 sq km (350 sq miles) of tropical rainforest near the city of [La Ceiba](#), is the country's showcase biosphere with the largest collection of flora and fauna. At the center is the namesake "Beautiful Peak" surrounded by mountainside terrain adorned with many waterfalls. Not surprisingly, there are hiking trails that lead you to some of them.

If you're based in El Naranjo, the adventure hub of activities in and around the Rio Cangrejal, the best hike is along the 7.2km (4.5miles) El Mapache Trail. Considered moderately challenging, the trail starts at the hanging bridge over the Cangrejal and ascends to the showcase cascade in the El Bejuco section of the park.

While you could navigate the trail yourself, it's definitely recommended to go up and down with a guide. In fact, with local guiding companies like [Omega Tours](#) or [La Moskitia Ecoaventuras](#), you can turn the typical 4-hour round-trip excursion into an overnigher with some added trail time and camping gear provided. You can organize this with the outfitters directly, or if you're staying at [La Villa Soledad](#) across the street from the trailhead, just ask at reception.



Get panoramic views of Guanaja on a hike to the top of Michael's Rock © EmLion / Shutterstock

## **2. Unbelievable Falls Trail, Pico Bonito National Park**

**Best hike in Pico Bonito National Park**

*5.5km (3.4 miles) round trip, 2 hours, moderately challenging*

In another area of the sizable Pico Bonito National Park, jetsetters may be drawn to the luxury amenities of [The Lodge at Pico Bonito National Park](#). However, at its heart is the natural beauty of the park itself, and you don't necessarily need to stay at the lodge to access the trails that begin there.

Going deeper into the rainforest, the most worthy, and thus most popular trail is the one that leads to the aptly-named Unbelievable Falls. This moderately-challenging 5.5km (3.4miles) trail takes about two hours to complete – going to the falls and back to the lodge – unless you find yourself preoccupied with all the birdwatching opportunities, or swimming at the natural pools at the base of the falls (don't forget your swimming gear).

### **3. Michael's Rock Peak Trail, Guanaja**

#### **Best hike in the Bay Islands**

*4km (2.5 miles) round trip, 2 hours, moderately challenging*

Anyone who's visited all three [Bay Islands](#) will likely tell you that the most pleasing of them is Guanaja. Unlike Roatán or Utila, Guanaja hasn't been overtaken by mass tourism (yet), and represents the island scene before the dawn of resort construction: lush, pristine green hills – some primed with trails for you to grace your hiking boots on.

At the center of Guanaja is the island's highest point, the peak of Michael's Rock (412m/1351ft), and a few trails make the ascension that gives you a panoramic view of the island and beyond. The most popular trek starts at Hammond Beach on the north coast, which goes up to the summit and back down the way you came. It takes about two hours for this 4km (2.5 miles) option, which you can rightfully conclude with a well-earned cocktail at a beach bar.

However, if you're feeling ambitious, you can continue to hike southbound from the peak to Sandy Bay, traversing the entire span of the island – 11.8km (7.3 miles) in total. Another way to descend from the peak is to have a guide

lead you down the northbound trail towards the waterfall – it’s the only one across the Bay Islands, after all. Beware though, the trail ends in an area so secluded that you’ll have to arrange with a local boat captain to pick you up.

## **4. The Coca-Cola Trail, Cerro Merendón, San Pedro Sula**

### **Best hike from San Pedro Sula**

*6.9km (4.3 miles) round trip, 3 hours, moderately challenging*

If you find yourself in [San Pedro Sula](#) – which is often inevitable since it’s the country’s main commercial and transportation hub – there are plenty of city experiences to enjoy from restaurants to nightlife. However, one getaway from the urban sprawl is a hike up to the peak of the adjacent metropolitan mountain, Cerro Merendón, along the “Coca-Cola Trail.” It’s named after the popular soft drink because the trail leads to the big “Coca-Cola” sign that overlooks the city.

As one of the most popular and straightforward hikes in the area, you won’t be alone, so there’s no need for a guide here. You and your fellow hikers will be rewarded with views of San Pedro Sula as you ascend up the mountain along the 6.9km (4.3 miles) in-and-out trail to Merendón’s peak. The Coke sign is about two-thirds of the way up this moderately-challenging trek, and you won’t be alone if you decide to stop the upward climb there and make your way back down for a shorter hike.

## **5. Angeli Gardens, San Pedro Sula**

### **Most relaxed hike**

*2km (1.25 miles) round trip, 1 hour, easy*

For a much more casual hike in San Pedro Sula – complete with food and a craft beer at the end – head to [Angeli Gardens](#) in the El Merendón area of the city. Once a plant nursery, Angeli Gardens evolved into the city dwellers’ favorite oasis with a restaurant, craft brewery, music venue, and event

space, plus its own botanical garden with private hiking trails through the area where the city meets the Merendón mountain range.

The easy trails are only about 2km (1.25 miles), so it's not much of a time commitment, although you can extend your time there with a zip-line canopy option. While not in a national park, the grounds are manicured for an optimal escape from the city, with a hammock bridge and sweeping views of the city at some vantage points. Also, you might still spot wildlife, including armadillos, toucans and other birds.

After hiking, there's an inevitable, yet welcoming stop at Angeli Gardens' restaurant and craft brewery, Cerveceria Del Bosque, where you can finish off your excursion with a flight of brews, or even a Saturday evening music set if you sync your visit with the event schedule in mind. Either way, admission to the private trails costs just L125.



Hire a guide to help you get the best out of a trek through the old mining region of La Tigra © Carlos Torres / Shutterstock

## **6. The Mine Trail, Parque Nacional La Tigra**

**Best hike near the capital city of Tegucigalpa**

*7.5km (4.7 miles) round trip, 4 hours, moderately challenging*



Honduras' capital city [Tegucigalpa](#) is another urban center worth exploring, but a popular day trip away from city life is at the country's first national park, [La Tigra](#), about an hour's drive north (admission: L250). There are several hiking trails in this cloud forest nature preserve, but the most notable is the Sendero La Mina, a 7.5km (4.7 miles) in-and-out trail up a mountain to a waterfall. Note that there's a lot more water flowing than just at the cascade, so make sure you pack rain gear, good boots and warm layers.

Transformed from a former mining route, you'll see remnants of Honduras' mining past along the way: entrances of abandoned mines, old mining company buildings, and the iron door built into the side of the mountain where dynamite was once stored. While you could explore them on your own, going with a company like [La Tigra Tours](#) is recommended. The guide can best show you how to navigate the ins and outs of the trail with all its caverns, dripping with water.

## **7. The Sinaí Trail, Cerro Azul Meambar National Park**

### **Best hike for birdwatching**

*6.8km (4.2 miles) loop, 3–4 hours, moderately challenging*

Birdwatchers know to flock to the Lake Yojoa region in the western interior of the country because Honduras' largest lake is a haven for many local and migratory birds. Flanking the lake to the east and west are two lush national parks, but it's [Parque Nacional Cerro Azul Meambar](#) in the east, known by the acronym PaNaCAM, that has hiking trails accessible from the [Panacam Lodge](#) – hiking and birdwatching guides are readily available at the visitors center.

There are three main trails here, but arguably the country's best hiking trail for birdwatching – particularly in the early morning – is the challenging Sendero Sinaí, a 6.8km (4.2 miles) loop that undulates up and down the cloud forest terrain. Along the way, there are a couple of waterfalls, plus a few platform miradors with unobstructed views above the canopy to better spot birds flying to and from the lake, or perched on a distant branch. Be sure to also keep an eye out for other animals, like frogs or pisotes (raccoon-like coatimundis), that you may encounter along the way.



Look out for colorful birdlife on your treks through Honduras © Ondrej Prosicky / Shutterstock

## **8. Quetzal Waterfall Trail, Parque Nacional Cusuco**

**Best easy hike in the remote wilderness**

*4km (2.5 miles) round trip, 1 hour, easy*

In the less frequented northwest corner of the country, near the border with Guatemala, is [Parque Nacional Cusuco](#), home of some of Central America's most pristine, yet accessible land. In fact, a few research expedition camps are stationed there at certain times of the year for those studying ecology and biology. The remote location in the Merendón mountain range affords an abundance of wildlife: toucans, frogs, and howler monkeys to name a few. Its lush, pristine cloud forest terrain is also home to a few waterfalls, each with a trail connecting it from the village of Buenos Aires within the park.

Hiking trails that lead to the Toucan Waterfall or Orion Waterfall take about 90 minutes on a round trip, but if you want an easy one, hike for about an hour along the Quetzal Waterfall Trail (4km/2.5miles), named after the teal-feathered bird that was considered sacred by the Mayans. You may actually see one on your way, with better chances in the spring and early summer.

If you can get to Cusuco National Park on your own, hire a guide at the visitors center. However, there's no easy public way to get there, so it's recommended to go with a local tour operator, like [Cusuco Tours](#) in San Pedro Sula, 2.5 hours away (L2500 including transportation). It can also organize other experiences in the park, including a hike to the Dwarf Forest, or a visit to the nearby coffee plantation.

## **9. Cerro Las Minas, Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque**

### **Highest hike in Honduras**

*20km (12.5miles) round trip, 2 days, challenging*

If you're looking for a challenging two-day adventure, head to [Parque Nacional Montaña de Celaque](#) near the town of Gracias, for a trek up to the highest peak in the country, Cerro Las Minas (2870m/9416ft). It's rugged and wet terrain out there, so definitely go with a tour operator like [Senderismo Tours](#), [Señor de las Montañas Tours](#), or [Celaque Tours](#), each charging about L2500 for a gear-supported two-day excursion including food.

The first day involves an increasingly steep trek through the vegetation of the cloudforest as you begin the 1890m (6200ft) elevation gain up the mountain. Mist and fog will get thicker as you ascend into the clouds. By afternoon, you'll arrive at an established encampment, where you'll crash for the night in tents or cabins, depending on availability.

The following day begins in the wee hours of the morning so that you can arrive at the top for sunrise. On a clear day, the spectacular view you'll have from the roof of Honduras will reveal the other peaks of this mountainous region and even a glimpse of the ocean. Afterward, it's all downhill from there, going back the way you came. When it's all over, you can relish the fact that you've just hiked a rugged 20km (12.5 miles).

# AFAR

## 11 Beautiful Islands to Visit for an Off-the-Grid Escape

*Pack your swimsuit and head to one of these island paradises around the world.*



Tourism on the Honduran islands of Cayos Cochinos focuses on conservation. Photo by Elena Berd/Shutterstock

### **Cayos Cochinos, Honduras**

Spanning 300,000 acres with fewer than 200 Indigenous Garifuna residents, this group of islands 20 miles off the northern Honduran coast remains mostly off the tourist radar. The archipelago is home to fragile yet well-protected ecosystems (there's no commercial fishing, no cars, and no bikes), including two forested islands, 12 sand cays, and miles of seagrass beds. It's also the only place in the world with tree-dwelling pink boa constrictors. Modest tourism efforts are focused on engaging the small number of travelers and backpackers (fewer than 30,000 annually pre-COVID) with scientists around reef restoration and sea turtle conservation programs, many in partnership with the [Cayos Cochinos Foundation](#).

## Where to stay

- **Book Now:** [Round Cay](#)

The islands of Cayo Mayor and Cayo Menor, which sit along the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, are managed by the [Cayos Cochinos Foundation](#), and every stay supports conservation initiatives. The NGO runs a \$3,000-per-night six-bedroom private island retreat on Round Cay on [Airbnb](#). It also offers simpler cabins on Cayo Menor with large decks and hammocks, plus a food hall serving typical Honduran meals. Stays can involve lunches in local Garifuna fishing villages, tastings of the root-based spirit *guifiti*, and interactive Garifuna dance and hand-drumming performances.



## Roatán guide: Why this Honduran island needs to be on your go-list



Aerial view of West Bay Beach, Roatan, Honduras • Image: dstephens/Getty Images

### **And where to eat, stay, and play on this underrated island.**

With its golden beaches, turquoise water teeming with marine life, and varied landscapes—from rain forests to mangroves to mountains—it’s a wonder Roatán isn’t more widely known. And yet, the tiny island off the north coast of Honduras remains blissfully off the radar of most travelers (save for backpackers who have long loved it for its budget prices).

Later in 2023, Kimpton will open its first Honduran property on Roatán, likely bringing with it a rush of new interest in the island. For now, however, it remains one of the best destinations for a Caribbean vacation without the high costs or crowds. Read on for where to eat, stay, and play and get started planning the perfect tropical trip.

# What to do in Roatán



A coral reef in Roatán, Honduras • Image: Antonio Busiello/Getty Images

Framed by the second-largest coral reef in the world, Roatán is all about getting in the water. Snorkeling, scuba diving, and glass-bottomed boat tours with outfitters like [Hyde Tours](#) and [Las Moskitia Eco Adventures](#) are popular ways to see the reef, but for a more special experience, go with [Las Cascadas Lodge](#) to [Cayos Cochinos](#), an isolated archipelago and marine preserve where you can spot jewel-toned fish and sea turtles in the healthiest water in the country. It takes about an hour to sail to this archipelago, inhabited only by the Afro-Indigenous Garifuna people. Once there, you'll take a dip in the pristine water, then go hiking to try and spot native pink boa constrictors.

To learn more about Roatán's Garifuna population, pay a visit to Punta Gorda on the northeast end of the island. The town is Roatán's oldest permanent settlement, founded in 1797 by Garifuna deportees from Saint Vincent, who were stranded here by the British. On Sundays, the village comes alive with a festive street party featuring live music, dancing, and food like *sopa de pescado* (a fish-and-coconut-milk soup that's scooped up with *machuca*, bites of mashed yellow and green plantains).

Another must-do is Las Cascada Lodge's [waterfall rappelling tour](#), which tests you physically and mentally with a trek through the rainforest before descending a waterfall on a rope. If you're after something slightly less extreme, go floating through serene mangrove tunnels with a [local guide](#) to learn about Roatán's fascinating ecosystem and natural history, or tour [Gumbalimba Park](#) to see local Capuchin monkeys, macaws, sloths, and iguanas.

# What to eat



Grilled octopus, spicy shrimp, and fried ceviche at Azul • Image: Management/Tripadvisor

Honduran food is a delicious blend of local seafood and Indigenous, Spanish, and Caribbean flavors. The most beloved dish, baleada, involves a wheat-flour tortilla stuffed with refried beans, cheese, and cream, all sprinkled with your choice of toppings like scrambled eggs, chorizo, and avocado. A popular breakfast food, baleadas can be found at [Calelu's](#), a West End cafe and grocery, where you can also enjoy hearty dishes like seafood soup and chicken with rice and beans.

For elegant dining, try [Romeo's Restaurant](#), a waterfront bistro on French Harbour that serves Italian and Caribbean cuisine. Here, you can pair dishes like chorizo-and-gorgonzola pizza and whole red snapper in Creole sauce with live music and ocean views. Also check out [Yurumei Sports Bar and Restaurant](#) in Punta Gorda for Garifuna specialties like sopa de caracol (a rich conch soup that's a favorite all over Honduras) and gifty (a spirit made with herbs and rum). The spot sits right on the beach, so you can watch the fishermen catching the ingredients for your meal.

Roatán's top gourmet experience can be found at [Azul](#), the main restaurant at the upscale [Blue Roatán Resort](#) in West Bay. The chef's menu offers an array of elevated Caribbean dishes, from conch carpaccio to coconut-cream lobster.



# Where to stay



Aerial view of the Grand Roatan Caribbean Resort • Image: Management/Tripadvisor

Though small in size, Roatán boasts everything from budget rooms for backpackers to five-star resorts. The best places to stay, however, highlight the island's natural resources. The Lodge & Spa at Pico Bonito plunges guests into tropical splendor with spacious cabins surrounded by lush gardens and cacao groves, plus a striking mountain backdrop. Each cabin has a private porch and hammock for taking in the scenery, and the resort features its own hiking trails as well as a spa that uses organic ingredients grown in on-site gardens.

Ibagari Boutique Hotel's open-air lobby displays local art and wooden furniture, while the infinity pool offers sweeping ocean views. In the plush rooms, balconies and deep-soaking tubs make for a luxurious stay. There's also a fantastic restaurant, Luna Muna, serving king crab tortellini and beef tenderloin with mushroom risotto.

In summer 2023, the already stunning Grand Roatan Resort will become a Kimpton hotel after a major expansion that includes 126 renovated guest rooms and seven new suites with plunge pools overlooking the Caribbean Sea. For the time being, guests can still look forward to suites with outdoor showers and private terraces surrounded by bougainvillea, as well as the show-stopping Kao Kamasa Spa, which draws inspiration from indigenous Pech culture for treatments like an obsidian palm stone massage in a temazcal (sauna).

# Fodor's Travel

## 15 Best Caribbean Islands for Families



### Roatan, Honduras

English-speaking Roatan is one of Honduras' three Bay Islands. Though land lubbers can find bliss touring the sloth sanctuary, feasting on Garifuna cuisine at local restaurants, strolling along the 40-acre Carambola Botanical Gardens, or getting an adrenaline rush at the Guambalimba eco-adventure park, some of the best things to do in Roatan are on the water. The whole gang can scuba dive or snorkel at the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the world's second-largest coral reef after the Great Barrier Reef in Australia or take in the colors and creatures of the water from a semi-subglass [bottom boat](#).

In laidback Roatan, adults won't believe their luck with some of the hotel deals to be found compared to other Caribbean destinations. For holidaymakers that want to gift their families a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience, there are entire private islands off the coast of Roatan that can be rented for as little as \$200 a night.

# BESTLIFE

## 10 Best Tropical Islands You Can Get to From the U.S. in Under Three Hours

### 7. Roatán, Honduras



Unai Huizi Photography/Shutterstock

Originally occupied by the Pech people, an indigenous group from northeastern Honduras, Roatán switched hands between the Spanish, British, and groups of pirates for a while, before eventually being annexed to Honduras in 1861. Now, the island serves as one of Honduras' most beautiful tropical destinations. In addition to a fascinating history, the Honduran island is also home to incredible natural sights and wildlife.

"One of the things that makes Roatán so special is it's situated on the

# Islands

## How to Make the Most of a Vacation in Roatán

Great experiences sometimes happen in small places, and this little “big” Honduran island proves it.



The secret is out on Roatán, and this Honduran paradise is packed with great times and adventures. *Shutterstock*

---

For many years, the small Caribbean island of Roatán flew under the radar of most travelers. Located off the northern coast of Honduras, this destination in the Bay Islands is the kind of beautiful gem that seasoned island-hoppers and especially ex-pats loved to keep hidden, because of its natural allure and the fact that, well, it was mostly free of tourists. Roatán is also a diver’s haven due to its proximity to the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second largest in the world, but even its status as one of the best dive destinations in the world couldn’t spoil the secret.

Only when the major cruise lines caught on did the rest of the world start to turn its attention to the Bay Islands’ “Big Island.” While that was bad news for those who protected their secret, the tourism boost put a new focus on Roatán’s other activities and offerings. There is certainly no shortage of excitement on this beloved island.

## The Diving is a Must

Let’s be real—if you’re visiting Roatán for the first or fiftieth time, scuba diving is still at the top of your to-do list. This island has more than 100 dive and snorkel locations for people of all experience levels, so your waterproof action camera will require the bigger memory card.

Whether just getting your mask wet for the first time or returning to the reef to say hello to old underwater friends, there are dive shops on Roatán—like [Coconut Tree Divers](#) and [Sun Divers](#)—that will show you an amazing time and make sure you spot so many different types of fish and sea turtles. [Roatan Divers](#) is a boutique operator (that means a focus small groups and enhancing the individual experience) that comes highly recommended and runs trips to West End and Sandy Bay.

## Take the Time to Learn about Roatán



Even if you’re looking for non-stop adventure, you’ll want to spend a little time appreciating the amazing natural beauty of Camp Bay. *Shutterstock*

Any destination is made better by a tour. The more you learn about an island's history and culture, as well as the people who make it an amazing place to be, the more you'll appreciate and share it as if you discovered it. Everyone loves to plant their flags, after all. An island tour on Roatán will vary in cost, depending on the operator, and it can focus on any number of the island's best activities.

Bodden Tours offers a very popular Best of Roatán private tour that includes a ride on the Mayan Jungle Canopy Zipline, a visit to Victor's Monkey Business to meet the monkeys, sloths, macaws and more, and an ATV jungle adventure, among many others (including snorkeling, naturally). Animal lovers will also enjoy Arch's Iguana Farm, where private tours put them up close with the colorful reptiles, even offering the opportunity to feed them and see baby iguanas.

Other tours include trips to the mangroves and beautiful beach at Camp Bay, where kite-surfing lessons are available. For those seeking a richer cultural experience, the Flamingo Cultural Center offers an all-inclusive interactive tour showcasing the lifestyle and traditions of the Garifuna people, and it includes music and samples of the cuisine.

One great way to get an all-encompassing experience is the Ruthless Roatán Charters day trip to Cayos Cochinos, an archipelago of 15 islands where guests can spend hours fishing and snorkeling—the marine life is supremely abundant here—or even interacting with the local Garifuna tribe. As an added bonus, the tour operators even serve fresh sashimi on the boat.

## Meet the Dolphins at Anthony's Key

With 56 bungalows spread out across 11 acres of lush tropical beauty, Anthony's Key Resort is certainly one of the more unique places to stay in Roatán. What puts it over the top is the variety of dolphin experiences that guests and visitors can enjoy, from the simple Dolphin Encounter to the Dolphin Dive, which drops certified divers 60-feet below the surface, where they'll interact with these brilliant creatures in the open water.

There's even a dolphin summer camp for kids ages 5-14 who want to spend their family vacations learning about marine life.

## Enjoy Some Local Culinary Treats

Pick your treat: rum, chocolate or beer? Just kidding, you can tour them all. Begin a culinary adventure at the Roatán Chocolate Factory, where you can run right to the gift shop and pick up any number of locally made sweets and treats, including chocolate bars made with Honduran coffee, island coconut and passion fruit, among other ingredients.



There's plenty of local food and drink to explore on Roatán, especially if you're a beer lover. *Shutterstock*

You'll also find the El Cabrito Diablito Hot Sauce that we're dying to add to our Caribbean list. But the real fun takes place on the factory's tour, where you'll learn how chocolate is made (it's fascinating if you've never experienced it).

Next, you'll want to swing by the [Roatán Rum Company](#), where you'll be able to sample delicious rum cakes and a variety of artisan rums, like the Wandering Spirit and Tropical Mango. If rum's not your thing, contact Tours by Locals for a trip to the Roatán Island Brewing Company, where "the cool kids hang out." Your dedicated tour guide will pick you up and drop you off again (a must for an immersive beer tour), and he will probably even have some good recommendations for lunch.

## Head Out to Sea

Divers aren't the only people drawn to the waters surrounding Roatán. There's great fishing to be experienced as well, so on top of an experience like a day trip to Cayos Cochinos, charter operators like Go Fish Charters and Wahoo Slayer offer half- and full-day trips for people looking to catch anything from sailfish to mahi mahi.

You can even catch some Z's, but we recommend you wait until you return to the resort for that. You'll definitely be tired after the adventures on day in Roatán can provide.

second largest reef in the world, the [Mesoamerican Barrier Reef](#)," says **Jenn Lloyd**, a travel writer and the founder of the blog [Sick Girl Travels](#). "This makes for spectacular snorkeling and scuba diving. The island also offers encounters with local wildlife like sloths, dolphins, and various tropical birds. There are plenty of stunning white sand beaches and crystal clear waters."

Roatán is serviced by Juan Manuel Gálvez International Airport, and has direct flights from a few airports in the continental United States, including Dallas and Miami, the latter of which has a flight time of two hours and 27 minutes.



# Miami Herald

## Traveling Honduras: The vitality of Cayos Cochinos



In movement across place, paradise often describes a place that is covered by perfectly rooted, tower-sized palm trees surrounded by translucent green-emerald waters with the sweet and saltiness of the land and sea wrapping the air. It is a place where golden beams blaze down and energize all that has the chance to feel its presence, acting as a balm for whatever and whoever needs healing.

As my journey in Honduras continued with a day trip to Cayos Cochinos, this sprawling archipelago revealed itself to be just that, paradise.

But, in keeping with the thread of surprise that the country decidedly delivers, there was a twist. Consisting of two islands, Cayo Grande and Cayo Menor, and 13 smaller

cays, Cayos Cochinos is a vital marine protected area of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, also known as the Great Mayan Reef. Stretching more than 600 miles along the Caribbean coast along México, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, it is the second largest barrier reef in the world home to hundreds of fish and coral species.



With no cars or bikes allowed on Cayo Menor or Cayo Grande and strict enforcement of how close boats are allowed within the reef area, its beauty—both on land and below the sea—is undoubtedly due to being the least disturbed ecosystem in this part of the Caribbean with its translucent blue-green mosaic waters as evidence.

The care of this archipelago, of this land, is a community effort. Between The Honduras Coral Reef Fund, which manages these islands, the [Cayos Cochinos Foundation](#), the local Garifuna people who live in the fishing village of Cayo Chachahuate, as well as volunteers from around the world, all are responsible for the work of preserving its rich biodiversity.

Once you meet the people behind the scenes, like Andrea a local marine biologist and scuba instructor whose passion for the water and the children of the cays

shined through during our day together as well as Ana Morales whose knowledge, warmth, passion, and joy radiated as we danced, broke bread, and experienced paradise together.

I've been to enough places now to know that paradise is not only what idyllic postcards show or what appears on social media.

Cayos Cochinos demonstrated that to be a true paradise, there is community and there is care. There are questions like "how can we take care of each other?" And the other is not reserved for humanness but includes the trees, the dogs, the water, the fish, and the reefs. Because what Cayos Cochinos seemingly practices is the need for the other and that care, is in fact, a verb.



# The Washington Post

## Central America is a diver's paradise. Here are 5 spots to get deep.

From Belize to Panama, these destinations are best experienced below the surface

### Roatan, Honduras

About 40 miles from the mainland, Roatan is world-renowned for its diving options — and perhaps the best stop for someone looking to see what Central America has to offer beneath the surface. The island is one of Honduras's three main Bay Islands, along with Utila and Guanaja.

Divers to the area, which is the second-largest reef in the world, are spoiled by a wide variety of scuba experiences, from coral gardens and caverns to walls and wrecks like the El Aguila and Odyssey. And it's all super accessible, located just a few minutes from the shore. "Here on Roatan it's pretty much like honeymoon diving, really simple and really easy," said Nicholas Bach, patrols and infrastructure coordinator for [Roatan Marine Park](#). "Usually the visibility is remarkably good, there aren't really any strong currents to name of, and the dive sites are all really close by."

For those travelers that prefer not to dive, hotel-lined West Bay Beach is often ranked among the finest beaches in the world and also offers snorkeling. Meanwhile, other parts of the island offer a quiet refuge from the crowds: "The nice thing about Roatan is you've got beaches on a portion of the island and hotels and bars, and other places that are more secluded. So the benefit of being here is you can really choose how isolated you want to be," adds Bach.

# thrillist

## 10 Under-the-Radar Islands in Central America That You Should Add to Your Bucket List



Utila attracts scuba divers from all over the world. | Anna\_plucinska/Shutterstock

### Utila, Honduras

Utila is a laid-back bohemian island that attracts scuba divers from all over the world. Here, it's less about the beaches (although the tiny island is home to a few good ones) and more about what's under the waves: Colorful corals and sponges, rainbow-hued schools of fish, sea turtles, nurse sharks. For experienced divers willing to descend 100 feet, it's also about the ghostly shell of a wrecked cargo ship, with a ruined hull that's been reclaimed by nature. Back on land, Utila is known for its casual beach bars, ATV rides through the jungle, and a tiny town with a charming and welcoming vibe. But traveler beware—If you spend any time here, you're sure to meet somebody who came for a five-day vacation and decided never to leave, so you may find yourself falling in love with a new home.

To get to Utila from the mainland, you can fly from San Pedro Sula or take a ferry from La Ceiba. Many travelers will combine a trip to Utila with a visit to the nearby island of Roatán (a popular cruise ship destination), which is a short flight or ferry ride away.

## 16 Cheapest Islands in the World to Visit

### 11 Utila, Honduras

of 16



Cavan Images / Getty Images

Arguably, the best diving in Honduras is in the Bay Islands, which is where you'll find Utila—not to mention whale sharks, seen year-round in these waters. Less developed and even less expensive than Roatan, Utila is also known for its vibrant and cheap nightlife (think: drinks and food for a couple of bucks a pop). Visitors can also snorkel the coral reef and chill at Bandu Beach. Hotels can be found for less than \$100 a night (and some at half that price if you book on the right days).

# ShermanTravel

## ShermanTravel's Best Budget Destinations of 2023



### **Honduras**

From historic ruins to beautiful beaches, Honduras offers plenty to see and do – that is, without breaking the bank. Consider visiting this budget-friendly Central American nation during the rainy season (May through October). During this time, you'll find fewer crowds and cheaper prices on airfare, accommodations, tours, and flights, the latter of which are available for less than \$400 round-trip from Miami.

On the idyllic island of Roatán, travelers can take advantage of ample diving and snorkeling opportunities thanks to vibrant coral reefs and shipwrecks. Alternatively, soak up the sun from one of the white-sand beaches. Meanwhile, history buffs can admire centuries-old Mayan ruins at the Copán Ruins Archeological Site, and wildlife enthusiasts can check out the Macaw Mountain Bird Park or Lake Yojoa.



## Top 6 things to do in Honduras from scuba diving to exploring Mayan ruins



**B**eyond the beach resorts, glass-bottom-boat tours and canopy adventure parks lies the true [Honduras](#).

The country's mighty rivers, lush mountains, Mayan archaeological sites and Mesoamerican Barrier Reef beckon adventurous travelers worldwide. Honduras is a popular port of call for large cruise ships, and passengers often squeeze a handful of activities into an eight-hour window. Yet if you can, we recommend visiting Honduras on your own and take the time to experience all this wonderful [Central American](#) country has to offer.

Here's our guide to the top things to do in Honduras.

## Head under the sea with (or without) an air tank

Many consider Honduras one of the [world's best snorkeling and scuba diving destinations](#). One of the country's three principal [Bay Islands](#), [Roatán](#) has many spectacular dive sites within [Roatán Marine Park](#), designated waters in which coral and sea life are protected.

On an excursion with a dive shop like [West Bay Divers](#), it's not uncommon to spot sea turtles, eagle rays or plenty of tropical fish. If you're lucky, you may even encounter the elusive whale shark.

However, Roatán isn't the only premier spot for diving in Honduras. The other two Bay Islands, Guanaja and [Utila](#), along with the smaller Cayos Cochinos archipelago, also boast some of the best scuba dive sites in the world.

Utila is internationally known as a dive destination, both for its marine life and youth culture. At this enclave, backpackers seek to become certified PADI divemasters at dive hostels like [Alton's Dive Center](#).

## Get wet on the Rio Cangrejal

The zip-line canopy tours at [Gumbalimba Park](#) in Roatán can give you thrills. But if you want to go on a truly immersive adventure, head to the El Naranjo region of the Cangrejal River valley on the mainland, about 10km (6 miles) from the city center of [La Ceiba](#).

Here, you can take a wild whitewater rafting ride on the Rio Cangrejal through Class III–V rapids that churn from the boulders rising up from the river bed.

Long-running operation [La Moskitia Ecoaventuras](#) offers rafting excursions with experienced guides to navigate the course. Trips can also be organized through the [Jungle River Lodge](#).

Another freshwater adventure is canyoning with the guides at [Las Cascadas Lodge](#), who'll lead you on a jungle hike up the river gorge to rappel down a series of waterfalls. While not for the faint of heart, the slow and meticulous 15m (50ft) descent on a rope as the force of falling water pounds your body offers a rush you won't soon forget.



The majestic scarlet macaw is the national bird of Honduras © loeskieboom / iStockphoto / Getty Images

## **Go for a hike and do a little bird-watching**

Bird nerds to flock to Honduras: it's the convergence point of over 760 species of North American and South American bird species.

Bird-watching is especially promising in Honduras' national parks, where hiking trails let you explore a bit when you're not standing still with your eyes glued to binoculars.

But you don't need to be an expert to get excited the wild toucans, hummingbirds and parrots you'll spot on a rainforest hike through Pico Bonito National Park.

[Cerro Azul Meámbar](#) and [Montaña de Santa Bárbara](#) National Parks, on opposite sides of [Lake Yojoa](#) in the western interior, are also worthy bird-watching destinations with great hiking trails.

Seven species of motmots, along with chachalacas, flycatchers and woodcreepers, create a polyphonic soundtrack as you trek through the cloud forest to caves and waterfalls. [Panacam Lodge](#) is a good place to base yourself in the area. From here, bird experts lead hikes and inspire an appreciation of ornithology in even the most seemingly uninterested.

Whether you're a die-hard spotter or not, Honduras' national bird – the majestic scarlet macaw – is certain catch anyone's eye. The chances of seeing one in the wild are high in and around the [Macaw Mountain Bird Park and Nature Reserve](#).

Rather than a national park, it's a rehabilitation sanctuary for macaws, parrots, toucans, cassowaries and other feathered creatures.

Each June, those graduates of the scarlet macaw rehab program deemed independent enough to survive without human intervention are released into the wild during a grand, media-blitzed ceremony.



Copán is one of the best-preserved Mayan sites in Central America © Kevin Schafer / Getty Images

## Channel your inner archaeologist in Copán

You may spot some scarlet macaws in the wild around the ruins of the [Archaeological Park of Copán Ruinas](#), the site of a once-great Mayan city dating back to 300 CE.

Since this former settlement didn't have much gold, the Spaniards' pillaging in the 16th century wasn't as horrendous as at other Mayan sites across the region. Accordingly, though the site is known for its "ruins," it stands for its high state of preservation.

Up Copán's famous hieroglyphic stairway, the longest-known Mayan text inscription depicts the stories of five Mayan kings. The staircase gained Unesco World Heritage status in 1980, joining the roster alongside [Guatemala's Tikal](#).

While the remains of Copán are in good condition, the red colors that once adorned its temples have faded.

To see Copán in all its former crimson-hued glory, head to the Sculpture Museum of Copán, just across the parking lot from the main entrance. The highlight is the imposing Rosalila Temple, reconstructed to look as it did centuries ago.

Admission to the park is L360, which doesn't include a guide; written explanations are dotted throughout the site. Museum admission is separate from the park, at L170.

## Visit the cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula

Honduras' two biggest cities, [Tegucigalpa](#) and [San Pedro Sula](#) have less-than-stellar reputations when it comes to crime. Yet since they host the two principal airports in the country, a stopover may be inevitable. Consider spending more than just a night: if you keep your wits about you, you'll actually find the pair of cities as safe as any major metropolis – and even filled with charm.

---



Shop for crafts made by local artisans in Tegucigalpa, Honduras' capital © Quiony Navarro / EyeEm / Getty Images

The capital city Tegucigalpa is the country's political hub, with government buildings and remnants of its Spanish colonial past. Most of the historical places of interest are in El Centro, the district surrounding the [Plaza Morazán](#), named after the former Central American president (1830–39) immortalized in a statue at its center.

As you stroll among local families and a handful of tourists around this square, you'll find shops, restaurants, and the city's Catholic Cathedral of St Michael the Archangel.

Nearby, there's also the [Centro de la Cultura Garinagu](#), where you can learn about Honduras' Afro-Indigenous Garifuna community. Several interesting museums lie in the vicinity; if you only have time for one, make it [Museo para la Identidad Nacional](#).

Wandering around, you'll surely find vendors selling baleadas, the Honduran delicacy of a flour tortilla filled with variations of the traditional mix of refried beans, cream and cheese. Try one.

San Pedro Sula is the country's industrial and commercial center. Like the Hollywood sign in Los Angeles, tall letters spelling out the instantly recognizable brand Coca-Cola loom atop a towering green hill just east of the city.

From up there, you might be able to spot the other places worth checking out: [Angeli Gardens](#), a cross between a botanical garden and an elegant restaurant; the main [Cathedral of St Peter the Apostle](#) at the Parque Central; and the [Museo de Antropología e Historia](#), which offers exhibits on Honduras' past.

## Enjoy Honduras' sparkling nightlife

Across the country, Hondurans bring on the own alcohol- and music-fueled party when the sun goes down. If you're into craft beer, San Pedro Sula's offerings include [Cerveceria La20](#), featuring a chill taproom and outdoor beer garden; [Alquimia Cervecera](#) commands a crowd for its live music. For a night of dancing, head to [Morena](#), an indoor/outdoor venue to eat, drink and meet young locals.

The capital city Tegucigalpa (known locally as "Tegus") also has its share of nighttime hot spots. Head to [Santé](#) for live music that ranges from Coldplay covers to metal tribute bands. If the club vibe is more your scene, stop by the Vegas-inspired poolside DJ dance parties at [Blu Bar](#), the rooftop venue of the Real Intercontinental Hotel.

While popular nighttime spots are spread out in the bigger cities, they're more condensed – and therefore easy to hop between on foot – in smaller towns. La Ceiba's nightlife is primarily in and around the waterfront area known as El Malecón, where bars are lined up next to each other.

At its eastern end is the popular beach bar [La Casa del Jugar](#). If you're daring enough, order their signature yet diabolical cocktail shot, Semen del Diablo. (Yes, the translation is exactly what you think it is).

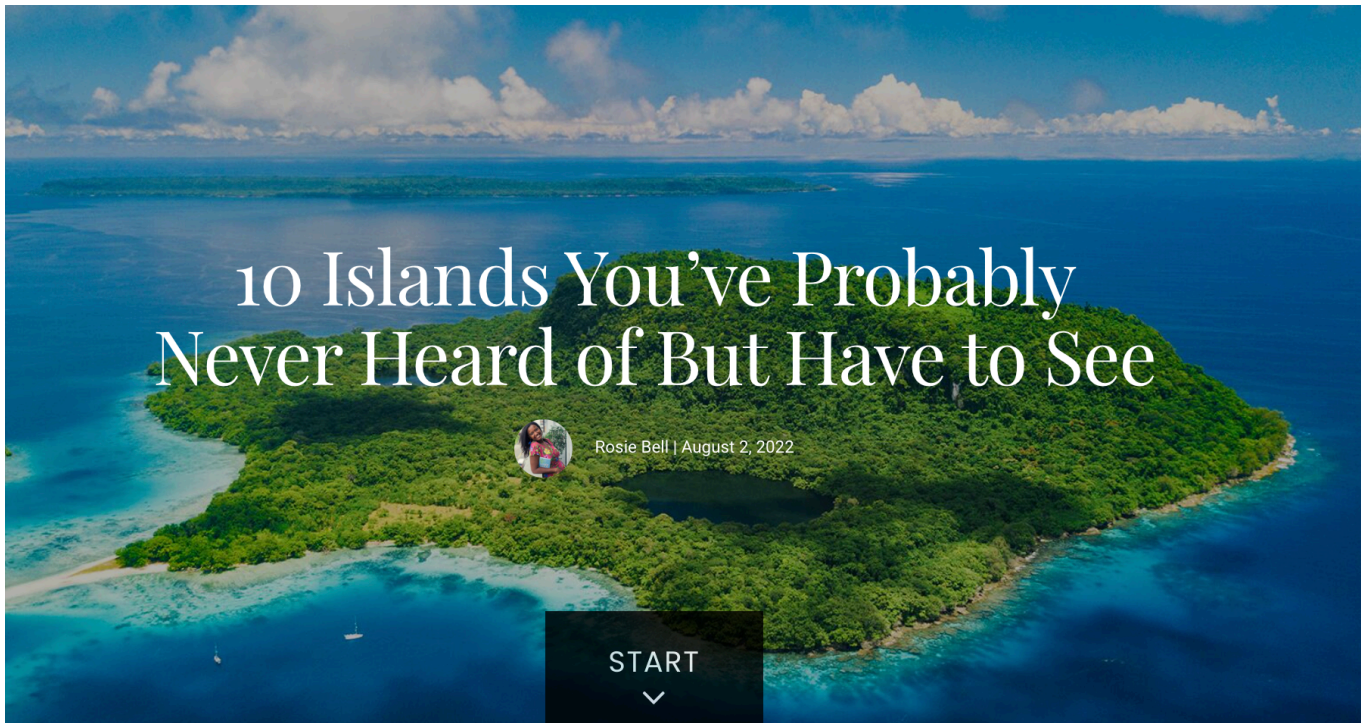
In the Bay Islands, nightlife is concentrated on the main drags of town. In Roatán, head to West End Road, lined with one bar after the next.

[Sundowners](#) and [Blue Marlin](#) are the go-to venues for live music, while pirate-themed [Booty Bar](#) has dance floors for DJ nights.

Utila's main (and only) drag has a similar if younger vibe. If you're looking to party like a college student, head to party bar [Tranquila](#) (sounds like "tequila") or to [La Cueva](#), which has a killer karaoke night that lasts until the wee hours of the morning.



# Fodor's Travel



These islands might not ring a bell, but they pack a punch.

You've certainly heard of Cyprus, Cuba, and Curaçao, but what about the island nation of Kiribati, the only country in the world that's on all four hemispheres? Or visited Bonaire, the only country that's a protected marine park in its entirety? After you've checked the usual suspects off your bucket list, countless lesser-known islands await for fresh experiences. From underwater post offices to 26-hour music festivals for people with specific names, the following islands have everything going for them—except big crowds. Here are 10 of the world's tropical best-kept secrets.

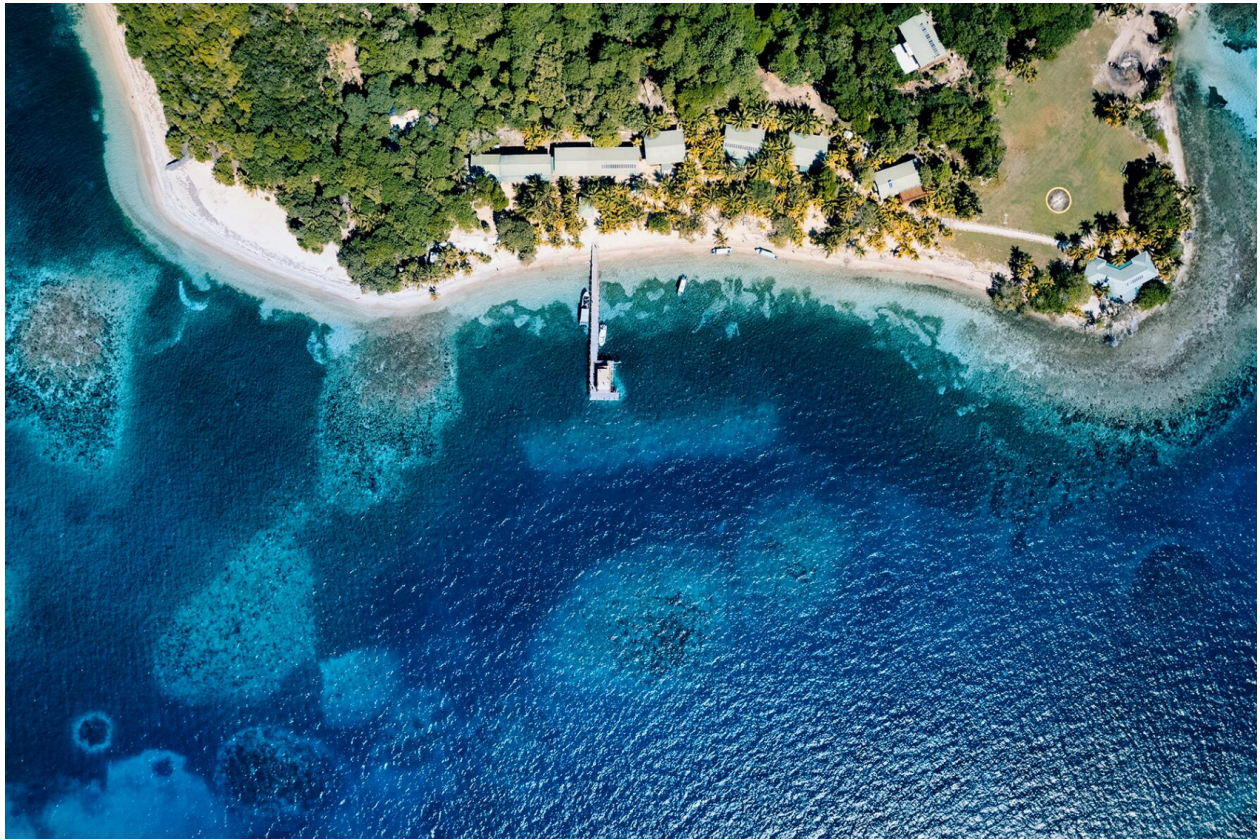


PHOTO: YAIR VALLADARES/SHUTTERSTOCK

2 OF 10

## Cayos Cochinos

---

**WHERE:** Honduras

---

Cayos Cochinos (Hog Cays) is an untouched real-life paradise in Honduras consisting of two small islands—Cayo Grande and Cayo Mayor—as well as over a dozen cays that should certainly make their way onto your lust list. You can rent your own private uninhabited palm tree island for less than \$200 a night, learn from resident scientists, and emulate the cast of the Spanish version of *Survivor* who regularly films there. This deliciously remote and protected marine park is accessible by boat from La Ceiba, Honduras' adventure playground.

---

# THE TAKEOUT

## The Best Street Food in Honduras Began With Dock Workers

The beloved baleada embodies the culture and cuisine of the Bay Islands.



The first thing that stands out about Roatán, and all the other surrounding islands off the coast of Honduras, is the glistening barrier reef. It's the second largest in the world, and when I dipped into the crystalline water during a trip to the marine preserve of Cayos Cochinos, there were so many rainbow-colored fish floating near the surface that I didn't need a snorkel to see them—the archetypal image of paradise.

But the Bay Islands (Islas De Bahía) aren't just about the beaches. I navigated through dense rainforest in the bustling port city of La Ceiba and rappelled

down three roaring waterfalls, an experience as thrilling and astounding as it sounds. After climbing down waterfalls with the streams pounding my face, I hiked through the jungle and saw parrots, iguanas, and a sleeping sloth curled up on the branch of a mahogany tree, all just a few miles from a lively city of 200,000 people.

I trekked to Punta Gorda, the oldest permanent settlement on Roatán, for a taste of Garifuna cuisine. The Garifuna are Afro-Indigenous people who migrated from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent during the 18th century. Garifuna food plays a significant role in Honduran culture (just as it does in Belizean culture), so I was eager to sample it.

Walking into Yuramei restaurant, the flags of St Vincent and Honduras, as well as the black-and-gold Garifuna flag, adorned the entrance. The building overlooks a beach where Garifuna fishermen catch fish with hand-woven nets in keeping with centuries-old traditions. Fresh caught bonito and snapper appeared in the flavorful sopa de pescado, a fish soup with coconut milk, pepper, onions, and yucca that's scooped up with mashed plantains.

Fish is also served whole on the Bay Islands, with plates of rice and peas. Our meal was topped off with a shot glass of gifiti, a bracing rum concoction that contains dozens of different herbs, roots, and seeds. It's a medicinal and recreational bitters drink, one that people believe can increase libido and even prevent disease. It burned a trail down my throat to my lungs and certainly felt like it was killing any foreign substance it encountered along the way, so maybe there's something to it.

Back in La Ceiba, my favorite meal was a serving of thick pupusas, grilled corn cakes filled with cheese, pork, or beans and topped with curtido de repollo, a tangy pickled cabbage mixed with vinegar, carrots, and red chiles. And only my shellfish allergy could prevent me from tasting the popular sopa de caracol, a

conch soup that appeared on most menus in the city. Not to worry, my friendly guide Alex assured me. The most beloved Honduran dish has nothing to do with shellfish.

I had heard about baleadas each and every time I asked about classic Honduran food, but I hadn't yet ascertained what they were. I quickly learned that baleadas are a beloved street food consisting of a warm wheat tortilla folded and stuffed with refried beans, cheese, and crema. From there, you can choose to add chorizo, avocado, eggs, or chicken. It's a street food breakfast staple, but cafes and restaurants also serve them at any time of the day; the dish was created in La Ceiba as a quick meal for dock workers. Legend has it that the lady selling them was struck by stray bullets from bank robbers. She survived to sell the food the next day, and people started calling the dish la baleada, which translates to "the lady who was shot."

I ordered my baleada with scrambled eggs and avocado and sprinkled it with the local hot sauce. Although it sounds like a taco or a wrap, it didn't taste like either one; the thin grilled flour tortilla brought the cheese and crema together into a sauce that bound everything else together. The hot sauce added a kick to the rich ingredients, and bowls of curtido, or cabbage slaw, sat on the table for another optional layer of flavor and texture.

I slathered the pickled concoction into the tortilla, and that was it. The taste was comforting and thrilling at the same time: a zesty, savory sensation. As I started in on my second one, I realized that the baleada's simplicity masks the complexity of its flavors. Much like the beauty of the Islas De Bahía, which might look from a distance like a calm beach but teems with life as soon as you step in from the shore.



## **This is where to travel in 2023, according to the New York Times**

Looking to book a big trip this year but can't decide where to go? Well, this is worth a gander: the experts over at the New York Times have released their annual [52 Places to Go](#) list for 2023.

This year's edition focuses on the question of why we travel, highlighting food, culture, adventure and natural beauty as four of the main elements that drive us to see the world. As such, the places they've chosen aim to offer some or all of those elements – plus a whole lot more.

Ready for some inspo? Here's the full New York Times list of places to go in 2023.

33. Cayos Cochinos, Honduras

# JOHNS CREEK

CITY LIFESTYLE™

*In Love.*

FEBRUARY 2023  
CITYLIFESTYLE.COM

# EXPLORING HONDURAS

Dangling over a plunging 90 foot waterfall, my life was now in the hands of the young guides who led our small group deep into the jungle of the coastal mountains of Honduras on the Rio Cangrejal. After a crash course, thorough and hands-on, I was expected to rappel backwards, leaning into my harness, steering my descent with a wide stance and footfalls against the slippery rocks. So, double-harnessed and helmeted I locked eyes with the guide who smiled and gave me the thumbs-up.

With my gaze hazy from the spray and splashing water, I listened for his directions, using my right hand to grip the rope just under my seat, releasing it to drop a little farther down the vertical canyon. The crash of the waterfall was deafening, so I just kept moving aggressively until I could jump into the river and scramble onto a sunny rock to do my victory dance which included a wide smile and expletives.

Our “canyoning” continued as we gingerly hiked the banks and swam down the narrow river through the thick brush, climbing moss-covered ledges, jumping into pools, abseiling a few more challenging waterfalls and finally swimming up to the small dock at Las Cascadas Lodge, the eco resort where

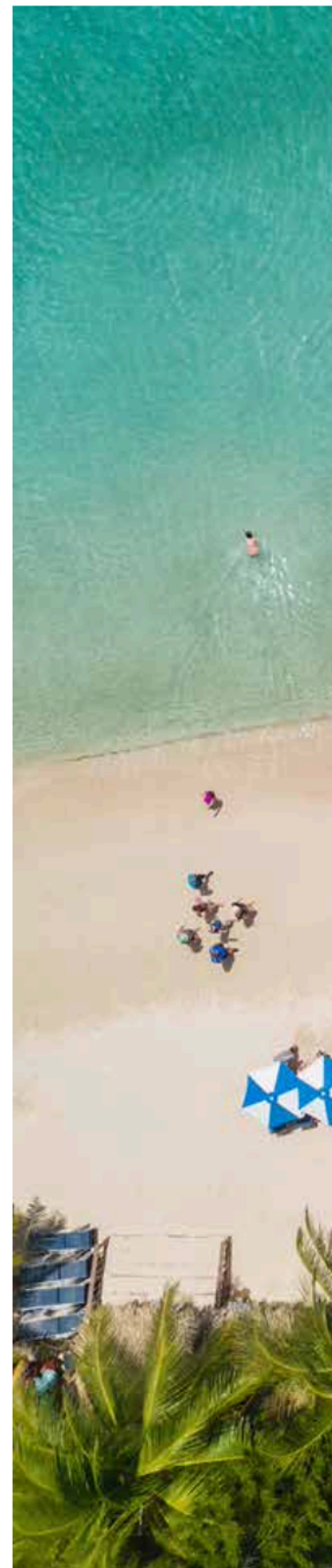
our adventure had begun three hours earlier.

With non-stop flights servicing the bay island of Roatán and the coastal port city of La Ceiba, Honduras offers an adventure destination beyond the diving that the Caribbean barrier reef waters are known for. The people are warm and welcoming, honoring the growing tourism industry for this Central American country stretching along the Caribbean and Pacific between Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Boutique hotels like the Ibagari Hotel and diving-centric hotels like Barefoot Cay on Roatán are gorgeous and comfortable outposts for exploring local culture, shopping, dining out and adrenaline-packed days. West Bay, Roatan, is a paradisaical gem. A walk along West Bay is an experience filled with glistening white sands, children playing along the shoreline, vendors selling handcrafted trinkets, and an assortment of upscale hotels like the nearly complete Grand Roatan Resort, home to Kao Kamasa Spa. Opened last year, Kao Kamasa Spa’s decadent treatments are inspired by the ancient traditions of the Pesh people and offer exquisite spa suites for extended stays. The Pesh are believed to be the original inhabitants of the Bay Islands and still exist

CONTINUED >

ARTICLE BY SUE G. COLLINS WITH ROSALIND  
CUMMINGS-YEATES AND RENÉE CHEREZ







# le mekong

VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Experience Authentic  
Vietnamese & Asian Cuisine in our  
Elegant & Relaxing Atmosphere



770-622-5000  
[lemekongcuisine.com](http://lemekongcuisine.com)

10900 Medlock Bridge Road, Johns Creek, GA 30097

in small numbers on the mainland. The spa features an outdoor infinity pool with a see-through floor and outdoor treatment rooms in this unique location atop a raised-bed coral reef overlooking the Caribbean.

Divers flock to the island to explore the Mesoamerican Reef, the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, stretching nearly 700 miles from the northern tip of the Yucatan Peninsula down through the Honduran Bay Islands. Among them are Cayos Cochinos, an archipelago of 15 islands, home to Cayos Cochinos Foundation, supporting conservation initiatives, including sustainable tourism and preservation of biodiversity together with the local Garífuna community. Hosting scientists, volunteers and divers, the Foundation works to welcome visitors with care and warmth, sharing the delicate beauty of the area.

Located on the northeast end of Roatan, the quaint, seaside town of Punta Gorda brims with traditional Garifuna culture. Founded around 1797, Punta Gorda is the oldest permanent settlement on the island. The afro-indigenous Garifuna settled in the area after migrating from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent.

Strolling the narrow roads, visitors can glimpse aspects of Garifuna culture that haven't changed in centuries. Handcrafted fishing nets line the beaches as well as boats filled with catches that form the basis of Garifuna cuisine. At Yuramei restaurant, the black and gold Garifuna flag stands proudly next to the Honduras and St. Vincent flags near the entrance. The menu serves up beloved dishes like fried snapper and *sopa de pescado*, a fish soup made with coconut milk, peppers and onions and served with *macchuca*, a sticky ball of mashed yellow and green plantains used to scoop up the soup.

On Sundays, Punta Gorda comes alive with a street party that attracts revelers from all over. Musicians play traditional rhythms on drums while dancers whirl and move their hips to the beats. Vendors sell locally-made jewelry, hand-painted art and t-shirts from sidewalk tables and bars supply drinks while the party continues into late in the evening.

Back on the mainland, explore Pico Bonito National Park's 217 square miles, with an altitude of over 8,000 feet in the Cordillera Nombre de Dios mountain range.

Guided hikes, valley tours, fishing, rafting, jungle saunas, zip lines, hot springs, waterfall descents and mud baths are on the menu. Have a blast!

**[BarefootCay.com](http://BarefootCay.com)**

**[IbagariHotel.com](http://IbagariHotel.com)**

**[PicoBonito.com](http://PicoBonito.com)**

**[HondurasWaterfallDescents.com/home](http://HondurasWaterfallDescents.com/home)**

**[LaVillaDeSoledad.com](http://LaVillaDeSoledad.com)**

**[GrandRoatanResort.com](http://GrandRoatanResort.com)**

**[CayosCochinos.org](http://CayosCochinos.org)**





**CHECK OUT OUR  
TREMENDOUS SELECTIONS  
AT PRICES THAT WON'T BE BEAT!**



**SELECT PRODUCT DISCOUNTS | SELECT CASE DISCOUNTS**  
ASK ABOUT SPECIALS must mention Johns Creek Lifestyle to receive.



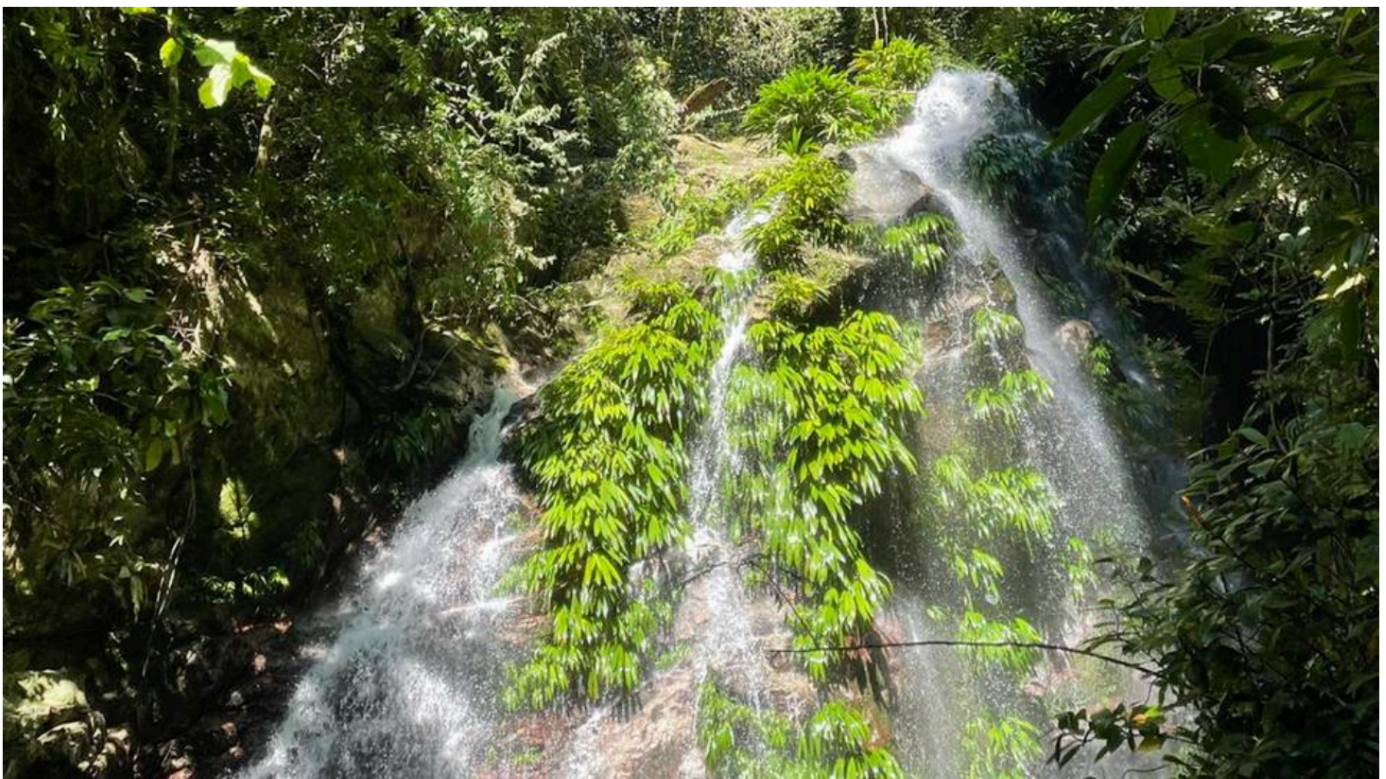
**NOW DELIVERING**

**WWW.JOHNSCREEKWOB.COM**

10305 MEDLOCK BRIDGE RD, STE C6; JOHNS CREEK, GA 30097

# Miami Herald

## Traveling Honduras: Joy, Beauty, and Terror Among Waterfalls



Breathtaking waterfalls against the Honduran rainforest, October 2022. *Courtesy of Renée Chéréz*

At every turn, Honduras reminds you of its aliveness. Not only did I find this to be true by the greens of the jungle, the quick and delightful sightings of multicolored parrots and the meditative sounds of cascading waterfalls, but also as I hung off the side of a cliff masking as a waterfall and frozen in icy terror.

Admittedly, when I learned waterfall rappelling was part of the media trip itinerary, I was giddy. So giddy that for one reason or another, it was the one experience I didn't perform any extensive research on, which in hindsight, could be seen as an act of self-preservation — or ignorance, for that matter!

La Ceiba, a port city in the northern part of the country, is the gateway to thrilling adventure activities centered around the protected eco-gems Pico Bonito National Park and Rio Cangrejal. It's also home to Las Cascadas Lodge, a boutique eco resort oasis teeming with a variety of wildlife, flowers and plants, including one of my favorites — the sweet-and-spicy smelling red ginger plant, which goes by different names depending on where they're found in the world.

After an extensive tutorial on physical form and rope usage, it was time to ascend into a Honduran jungle with our first stop, which was just behind the lodge, being a 35-foot waterfall that served as a practice run. Child-like feelings of anxious-excitement emerged as I made my way down, careful to plant my feet on visible rocks while navigating the very loud and refreshing waters rushing over my body, all the while keeping an ear out for my guide's instructions.



Renée Cherez rappelling down the practice run, a 35-foot waterfall, October 2022.  
*Photo courtesy of Las Cascadas Lodge*

Our hike continued into the vibrant rainforest, taking us up 600 jagged steps that led us to suspension bridges, through low-hanging vines and branches and around slippery moss. I loved trying the sweetness delivered from cacao trees on the trail, especially because I'm one of those few humans who doesn't enjoy chocolate. My descent of the 85-foot waterfall was less graceful than my practice run. I hung on for dear life as the water pounded my helmet and filled my shoes, seemingly colder than that of the last waterfall. Once down, my ropes were detached, and I slid down

a natural slide into the rocky pool of water and swam on my back toward the sun, taking a mental note of the gargantuan task I just accomplished. I did it!

Unfortunately, this sense of accomplishment was quickly obliterated when I learned there was one more waterfall to descend. The problem was that the waterfall in question was not a waterfall, but, in fact, a cliff. A cliff! “How will I get down when I’ve used all my superhero juice for the day?” I remember thinking to myself. The steepness was disorienting. There was no body coherence just proper terror as my feet and knees froze on the mossy edge of the cliff. Whatever juice I did have left, I used to help the guides pull me up.

Thankfully, I was graciously guided back the way we came; scrambling through pools of water, climbing up wet rocks and back down those plentiful moss-filled, jagged jungle steps. By the next day, I was done with feeling guilty about not finishing with the group because, for me, something truly valuable took place on that cliff: My “no” was respected and heard. And for me, that was more significant than completing the final rappel.

# NAPLES

CITY LIFESTYLE™

*Building a  
Brighter Naples*





*Adventuring and exploring this welcoming Caribbean country's coastline.*

---



# HAPPY IN HONDURAS

ARTICLE BY SUE G. COLLINS WITH ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES AND RENÉE CHEREZ

Dangling over a plunging 90 foot waterfall, my life was now in the hands of the young guides who led our small group deep into the jungle of the coastal mountains of Honduras near the Rio Cangrejal. After a crash course, thorough and hands-on, I was expected to rappel backwards, leaning into my harness, steering my descent with a wide stance and footfalls against the slippery rocks. So, double-harnessed and helmeted I locked eyes with the guide who smiled and gave me the thumbs-up.

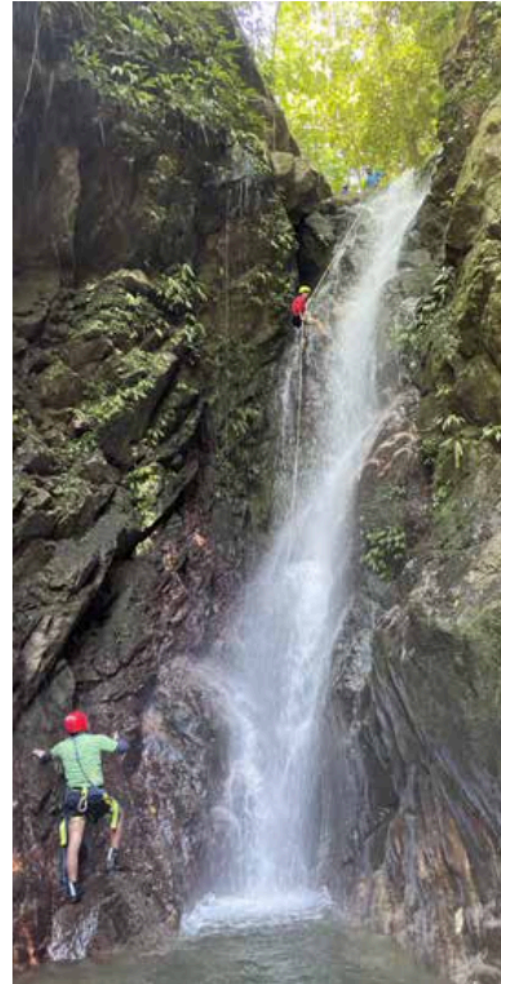
With my gaze hazy from the spray and splashing water, I focused on listening for his directions, using my right hand to grip the rope just under my seat, releasing it to drop a little farther down the vertical canyon. The crash of the waterfall was deafening, so I just kept moving aggressively until I could jump into the river and scramble onto a sunny rock to do my victory dance which included a wide smile and expletives.

Our “canyoning” continued as we gingerly hiked the banks and swam down the narrow river through the thick brush, climbing moss-covered ledges, jumping into pools, abseiling a few more challenging waterfalls and finally swimming up to the small dock

at Las Cascadas Lodge, the eco resort where our adventure had begun three hours earlier.

With non-stop flights servicing the bay island of Roatán and coastal port city of La Ceiba, Honduras offers an adventure destination beyond the diving that the Caribbean barrier reef waters are known for. The people are warm and welcoming, honoring the growing tourism industry for this Central American country stretching along the Caribbean and Pacific between Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Boutique hotels like the Ibagari Hotel and diving-centric hotels like Barefoot Cay on Roatán are gorgeous and comfortable outposts for exploring local culture, shopping, dining out and adrenaline-packed days. Opening this summer, the Kimpton Grand Roatán Resort & Spa will offer 126 guest rooms, inclusive of seven suites with balcony plunge pools overlooking the Caribbean Sea. The beachfront resort will feature four unique culinary concepts, on-site water desalination and other adaptive reuse and eco-friendly touches. The newly opened Kao Kamasa Spa (Pesh for “White City”) offers the ultimate in destination wellness with private treatment rooms and



CONTINUED >



*The Ibagari Hotel, a boutique feel with ocean views, pools and smiles for miles.*



*29TH AIDA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP  
was held in Roatán*

bungalows for innovative and recharging services. The Pesh are believed to be the original inhabitants of the Bay Islands and still exist in small numbers on the mainland. The spa features an outdoor infinity pool with a see-through floor and outdoor treatment rooms so that clients may appreciate the serenity and beauty of this unique location atop a raised-bed coral reef overlooking the beautiful Caribbean Sea.

Divers flock to the island to explore the Mesoamerican Reef, the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere, stretching nearly 700 miles from the northern tip of the Yucatan Peninsula down through the Honduran Bay Islands.

Cayos Cochinos is an archipelago of 15 islands and is home to Cayos Cochinos Foundation, supporting conservation initiatives, including sustainable tourism and preservation of biodiversity together with the local Garífuna community. Hosting scientists, volunteers and divers, the Foundation works to welcome visitors with care and warmth, sharing the delicate beauty of the area.

Back on the mainland, explore Pico Bonito National Park's over 217 square miles, with an altitude of over 8,000 feet in the Cordillera Nombre de Dios mountain range.

Guided hikes, valley tours, fishing, rafting, jungle saunas, ziplines, hot springs, waterfall descents and mud baths are on the menu, all at lower prices than other popular adventure destinations nearby.

**[BarefootCay.com](http://BarefootCay.com)**

**[IbagariHotel.com](http://IbagariHotel.com)**

**[PicoBonito.com](http://PicoBonito.com)**

**[HondurasWaterfallDescents.com](http://HondurasWaterfallDescents.com)**

**[LaVillaDeSoledad.com](http://LaVillaDeSoledad.com)**

**[GrandRoatanResort.com](http://GrandRoatanResort.com)**

**[CayosCochinos.org](http://CayosCochinos.org)**