

Honduras

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Honduras is a country trying hard to promote tourism to rival Belize and Costa Rica. At this time there are two areas in Honduras that are ready to accept most American tourists. The Bay Islands, long a favorite for scuba diving and deep-sea fishing, and Copan. The rest of the country is for the adventurous traveler, those who like to discover areas before "mass" tourism arrives. In May, I visited these off-beat destinations.

La Ceiba is a fairly large town. It is a jumping off point for some interesting tours. We did a full-day tour by boat to the Cayos Cochinos, some gorgeous little islands about five miles offshore. Some of the islands are inhabited, and some are set aside as part of a national marine park. We did some snorkeling, then went to one of the inhabited islands for a lunch prepared by the Garifuna villagers there. The Garifuna are very interesting - they are descendents of black slaves on St. Lucia. They have a lot of African traditions, and their music has African roots.

Another tour we took from La Ceiba was to the Refugio de Vida Silverstre Cuero y Salado. This is a wetlands sanctuary that has lots of different species of birds and monkeys. The things that you see are similar to the ecosystem of the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica, but with many fewer people.

Tela was a smaller town than La Ceiba, and the beach in Tela is much nicer and cleaner. We did a tour to the reserve at Punta Sal. where we saw lots of birds; and on the return we saw a Garifuna village called Miami. The locals live in one-room thatched roof houses and make their living fishing.

The people on the coast very rarely speak English, even in the hotels, so anybody traveling there should have at least a couple of words of Spanish to get by.

In Copan we were fortunate to stay at the home of David Sedat, head archaeologist for the University of Pennsylvania team there. We had our own little two-bedroom house. We drove into the hills high above Copan through some Mayan villages and to some land that he owns and is farming. He is also involved in marketing Guatemalan Mayan paintings which benefits the painters.

Prices for food throughout Honduras were very good. We ate in local restaurants (being careful about the water and that everything was cooked). Our most expensive meal was a shrimp dinner for \$7.00.

I enjoyed my trip, but it will be a few years before the infrastructure is such that the main stream tourist will feel comfortable in other than the Bay Islands or Copan, which I do recommend for any tourist. For those not looking for a beach vacation, you can combine Copan and Antigua Guatemala. I will be happy to share my experience with you first hand.