



Explore

AMAZING PLACES



DEAR TRAVELER

Our specific goals when we started Explore Amazing Places in 2001 were:

- to share our love of exploring new places
- to make every aspect of our workshops/tours a “wow”
- to send travelers home itching to travel with us again

It has been very rewarding to see our travel experience goals validated by our customers through their repeat business and workshop/tour evaluations!

We personally love our chosen destinations. Currently with Guatemala, Panama, Cuba, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, most of our venues are listed in the book, *1000 Places to See Before You Die*, by Patricia Schultz. We have known these places well for many years and are eager to share them with you. We have selected routes, hotels, dining, and venues reflecting the uniqueness of each area we visit. Our hope is that you will return home with a lasting impression and rewarding memories of the colorful cultures.

ABOUT US

All members of the Explore team understand local customs and business practices. We stay in the hotels, eat in the restaurants, and ride the transportation, personally experiencing every aspect of our travel workshops and tours. We know the “hidden treasures” as well as the little bits of information only the locals know. Our experience, relationships, and knowledge of the country allow us to provide a worry-free, life enriching travel adventure, providing a deeper understanding of the way of life, the cultures, nature and societies; in short, we will show you the real Latin America in a way very few travelers experience.

COMPANY FOUNDERS

Anita Rogers (Korte) who speaks fluent Spanish, lived in Guatemala for 25 years, started her own business there, and was a collector of Maya weavings as well as Spanish Colonial art and antiques. She has been around the travel industry most of her life, as her family owns the beautiful Hotel Atitlán on Lake Atitlán in the Guatemala Highlands.

John Korte, retiring from a 30-year career as a financial advisor for wealthy families across the United States, a U.S. Marine, diver, traveler, adventurer, explorer, John has been traveling to Central and South America for the past 25 years.

John and Anita lived in Antigua Guatemala for eight years, and in Bariloche, Patagonia, Argentina where they own property, and currently reside on the Azuero Peninsula in Panama.

Jeremy & Melissa Dyck, both fluent Spanish speakers, have lived and worked extensively throughout Latin America for more than 20 years. Jeremy helped to establish a non-profit that provided homes, clinics, school and more in Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, and most recently, Cuba. He has hosted hundreds of groups in each of these countries for more than 2 decades.

Melissa is a trained RN who has practiced in Honduras, Mexico and the United States. She too has hosted groups extensively throughout Latin America

Jeremy & Melissa enjoy exploring amazing places together and look forward to sharing these inspirational locales with friends and family.



OUR ASSISTANTS & LOCAL PARTNERS

Our Traveler's Assistants and Guides in Guatemala and Ecuador are the most knowledgeable, personable, and helpful in the business.

In Guatemala: Roberto Uhlenbrock was born in Lima, Perú, of German parents and fluent in Spanish, English and German; Roberto has lived in Antigua, Guatemala for 12 years, and is an officially licensed guide through the Guatemala Institute of Tourism. His study and experience in arts gave him the background to understand and communicate the beauty of Indigenous art and life. Roberto gained a deeper understanding of the Maya culture by learning one of the 21 Maya languages spoken. Traveling in Guatemala, and witnessing its natural beauty and cultural diversity firsthand, his tours allow you to gain a deeper understanding of the Guatemalan way of life, its culture, nature and society; Roberto will show you the real Guatemala.

In Ecuador: Tomás (Tommy) Palma was born in Quito, Ecuador. He studied Tourist Administration and National Guiding at Universidad Católica de Quito and at UTC in Quito. He speaks fluent English, Spanish and Italian, and has been a professional guide for over 16 years throughout Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands and Perú. An avid outdoorsman, Tommy has made a hobby of seeking out and studying the many and various species of Ecuador's birds and plants. He is an enthusiastic participant in adventure sports such as trekking and kayaking, and is passionate about motorcycles and mountain biking. Tommy and his wife Carolina have three young sons who all share his passion for adventure sports and nature.

Archaeology throughout the Americas: Shelby Saberon, a BYU-trained archaeologist and anthropologist, has worked on numerous archaeological projects in Utah, Mexico and Guatemala. Due to his contact with many of the leading archaeologists, he is often privy to discoveries years before they are published for the public. Shelby is the creator, founder, and President of his own tour company in addition to providing archaeological tours for Explore. A seasoned lecturer on the archaeology of South America, Saberon brings the ancient civilizations of Guatemala and Ecuador to life as he conducts lectures on location and provides cutting-edge knowledge of these "vanished peoples". He and his wife Catherine have three active sons.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

Our website, www.exploreamazingplaces.com, will be useful to you, however, we also welcome your phone calls and e-mails; we are always eager to talk about travel in Guatemala, Panama, Cuba, Ecuador and the Galapagos, and beyond.

You will find that most, if not all, of the information you will need for our trips are in this travel guide. However, please call or email us with any further questions you may have. You may contact John and Anita by telephone (SKYPE) at 210-807-4222, Jeremy at (623) 888-1314 or e-mail us at mail@exploreamazingplaces.com. We look forward to traveling with you soon.

Kindest regards,

John, Anita and Jeremy

**“TWO ROADS DIVERGED IN A WOOD AND I – I TOOK THE ONE LESS
TRAVELED BY, AND THAT HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE”**

– ROBERT FROST



TRAVEL TIPS

Traveling in Central America is an adventure and our goal is to make your time spent there a memorable and positive experience. The most important tip to remember is to bring a positive attitude and do not expect perfection – many of our destination are developing nations. If you experience any problems we are there to help. Please let us know if something is not right.

We recommend that you:

- Always check with your airline for luggage regulations
- Hand carry any items you cannot do without; i.e. medications. Do not put expensive items, i.e. jewelry, cameras, etc, in your checked luggage.
- Place your name and address on the outside of your luggage and also inside your luggage along with a copy of your itinerary.
- Make sure you have enough luggage room for your purchases in country.
- Bring luggage locks to lock up your valuables while luggage is left in your room.

Clothing:

Informal clothing is suitable. Slacks, jeans (no shorts please as local people dress more modestly) and comfortable apparel are the order of the day. Dressing up for dinner is not required however you may want to have something a little less casual than your day clothes to change into. Temperatures vary from cool in the morning to hot at midday with very chilly evenings; it is wise to dress in layers, perhaps a sweater over a shirt and a tee shirt. Bring sturdy, comfortable walking shoes or tennis shoes for walking on uneven and cobblestone streets, and socks so the coffee flies will not bite your ankles. The sun is very strong so bring a hat and sunglasses. If you are traveling during the rainy season (mid-May through mid-October and occasionally in January), compact fold-up ponchos are advised. Light-colored, lightweight, cotton clothing is most comfortable there. You may also want to bring a bandanna to wet and drape over your neck. This will help you keep cool. All hotels have a pool so if you like to swim or enjoy sitting in the Jacuzzi, bring a swimsuit.

PACKING

It is highly advisable to bring only one suitcase per person, plus an extra fold-up bag for additional purchases, and a day bag (backpack or shoulder bag) for sweaters, cameras, sunscreen, etc. A small calculator is very useful and you may also want to bring binoculars. Not all hotels have hair driers in the rooms but you can always borrow one. Not all hotels offer washcloths so if you must have one, you should bring it. The electrical current is the same as the U.S however, many plugs do not offer a ground. It is advisable to have a 2 prong adapter on hand.

“TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL BE MORE DISAPPOINTED BY THE THINGS THAT YOU DIDN'T DO THAN BY THE ONES YOU DID DO. SO THROW OFF THE BOWLINES. SAIL AWAY FROM THE SAFE HARBOR. CATCH THE TRADE WINDS IN YOUR SAILS. EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER.” — MARK TWAIN



CLIMATE & HEALTH

Climates can vary from country to country and season to season. We'll send a "last minute travel details" email prior to your departure to give clarity on what to pack and what to expect. However, we also recommend checking out these links to get a better idea of the climate in each location.

- [Ecuador](#)
- [The Galapagos Islands](#)
- [Guatemala](#)
- [Cuba](#)
- [Panama](#)

The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) has recommendations for vaccinations and medicines for each of the countries we travel. Please visit the following links to learn more:

- [Ecuador & The Galapagos Islands](#)
- [Guatemala](#)
- [Cuba](#)
- [Panama](#)

"The trip was so unbelievable. Each place we visited was more exotic than the one we left. I could hardly absorb it all. The details that you went to for our convenience were just extraordinary."

— ANN, LEXINGTON, KY



HEALTH

Please note! ***There will be a fair amount of walking on this trip.*** Many of the streets are cobblestone, some of the streets in villages we visit are steep, and there are several places where walking up and down steps is required. We sometimes walk 7 – 10 blocks at a time. If at any time during the trip you feel like you are unable to keep pace with the group or that you need assistance to do so, we can always obtain transportation for you. Any additional transportation is an individual expense.

Drink only bottled water (of which we furnish a good supply), available everywhere. If you have a finicky stomach, bring Pepto-Bismol tablets and chew one or two tablets one hour before each meal. You may also want to bring Imodium in case the change in bacteria – not necessarily bad bacteria – causes you to have a “loose stomach.”

Bring insect repellent because the coffee flies are abundant and their bite is worse than a mosquito bite. It will itch for at least a week and likely turn into a sore if you are unable to resist scratching.

Bring sunscreen and use it because the ultraviolet rays are extremely powerful.

If you are prone to upper respiratory problems or allergies please note that crop burning is practiced in Guatemala and at certain times of the year the air is smoky. Also, occasionally the wind can be very strong and kick up dust and during the rainy season there could be humidity with molds (these are all just precautions for those who are particularly sensitive).

Carry waterless hand sanitizer with you and use it frequently, especially after being in the markets or handling money and ALWAYS before eating.

When you fly into Quito from sea level, you will experience a rather extreme change in altitude, which can lead to some mild symptoms of altitude sickness in some. (*Altitude can reach 9,350ft.*) The symptoms of altitude sickness typically include headaches and insomnia, as well as nausea or an upset stomach. Feeling lightheaded or dizzy is another symptom, as is feeling a bit short of breath climbing the stairs. A loss of appetite is common too. These effects are usually mild and are likely to last for a day or two.

Do not worry too much about altitude sickness, as for most people the symptoms are very mild, and will not spoil your enjoyment of your trip. In the vast majority of cases, with mild symptoms of altitude sickness, the best way to adapt quickly is to stay hydrated by drinking lots of water. Alcohol will make you feel worse, so this is best avoided for a day or two. Eat light meals, as heavy meals can make the nausea worse for some.

In some cases, you might want to take pain relievers for headaches. Aspirin can be good for this to help alleviate the symptoms. Try not to do too much as you settle in at the new altitude. Rushing out immediately for a vigorous walk is best avoided. Give yourself a rest and adjust slowly to the change and the effects it is having on your body.

Some people may want to consider getting medication to minimize the impacts of altitude sickness. Do not do this without consulting with your doctor first! Diamox is a medication that you might try, and this helps to reduce the impact of symptoms on your body. However, if you take the steps recommended above, taking this medicine is not necessary for most people.

MONEY, HOW MUCH DO I BRING?

There are banks and ATMs everywhere; however, there sometimes can be problems for anyone wanting a cash advance on their credit card. If you find yourself low on cash the banks are typically open on Sundays.

It is advisable that you contact your credit card company before you leave on your trip to help any possible transaction go more smoothly. There are various currencies in each of our destinations. In Guatemala, the Quetzal (ket-ZAL) or Qs for short is the local currency. In Cuba you have the Peso Convertible or CUC, (kook). The official currency of Panama is the Balboa and in Ecuador, they use the American dollar.

The airport does not have a good exchange rate but you can change a little money there just to get by. Many ATM machines are difficult to use; they often run out of cash. It is best to bring the cash you think you will need from home and keep whatever you do not need that day locked in your suitcase or hotel safe.

In Cuba, US based credit cards are not accepted and all transactions must be done in cash. Some retailers may accept US currency, but most will want you to use the local CUC. When getting cash for your trip, be sure to bring crisp, newer bills, as many small retailers will not accept defaced or torn US dollars.

“JOBS FILL YOUR POCKET, BUT ADVENTURES FILL YOUR SOUL.”

– JAMIE LYN BEATTY

LOST PASSPORT

In the event you lose your passport you will need to contact the American Citizen Services (ACS) unit at the U. S. Embassy. You will be required to submit proof of identity and citizenship: copy of your passport, two passport size (2"x 2") photos, and a completed passport application. This process could be very time consuming. Therefore, we recommend you **make two photocopies of your passport**. Leave one copy at home and carry one copy with you at all times (in case you need it when making financial transactions), and put your original in the safe or locked up in your suitcase as soon as you arrive at your hotel. **Do not take the chance** of losing your passport by carrying it around with you and never keep it in the same place as your money. Your money would be the target for pickpockets, not your passport, but if they are together you may lose both. Be sure to bring pertinent contact numbers for appropriate banks or agencies in the event you lose any items such as credit cards, traveler's checks, etc. (keep these numbers in a separate place).

MAY I TAKE YOUR PICTURE?

A reminder: If you try to photograph indigenous people, many will turn or cover their faces. If it does not "feel" like the right thing to do, **don't do it**. The local people are not "actors" performing for the tourists; they are behaving in their traditional ways so please show respect. Photography is relatively new to rural Maya culture and some people feel it steals their spirit. Always ask permission to take a person's photo in the indigenous areas unless you are able to do so inconspicuously. Photography is relatively new to the rural Maya and Inca cultures.

Many of those who agree to be photographed expect something in return. Most will be happy with a small payment or a small gift and a cheerful "*muchas gracias*".



BEGGING

Begging is a practice that we see in many of our destinations, however, it varies from country to country. Guatemalans believe it is their duty to help out those who are less fortunate than themselves, which is why you see so many beggars in the streets of Guatemala City. Guatemalan children, on the other hand, are becoming persistent in asking for money in some tourist areas, a practice usually brought on by visitors offering money in the first place. If you give in to one, another dozen will immediately appear. It's like feeding the seagulls at the beach. If someone is pestering you, tell him or her **no gracias** one time and then do not give them any more attention. They will continue to try to engage you, and by responding you are encouraging them.

When they ask for your name, do not give it to them because within a few minutes you will find they have made a pen or something with your name on it and if you do not buy it they will get upset.

In Cuba, you will not encounter many people asking for money. In certain plazas, it is common practice for roaming sketch artists to draw your picture as you sit and enjoy a meal. They will then hand this picture to you and walk away, giving you an opportunity to decide if you'd like to purchase it. When they return to your table, you can kindly refuse the drawing, or offer any amount of pesos, (typically 1 - 5 cuc) as payment.



SAFETY

Statistically speaking, our destinations are as safe as any large city in the United States. Simply avoid being a target by dressing conservatively (avoid the appearance of affluence) and acting respectfully. Do not walk alone in isolated areas and never walk in the streets after dark. Only take a taxi recommended by the hotel or establishment you are in. Most locations in Central America are developing nations and you should be very cautious of your valuables. Do not bring any valuable jewelry. Carry with you only what you can afford to lose. Carry your extra money inside your shirt, trousers, or shoes, not in pockets, fanny packs, purses, or backpacks (which are easy targets for pickpockets).

Just as you would not walk across Central Park in New York at night, there are some common sense things you should not do in Latin America. Keep your purse close to you in restaurants, do not hang it on the back of your chair anywhere. If you are out at night take a cab to and from your hotel. You can always get a cab or have someone in the hotel make arrangements for you for the evening. The driver can let you off and you tell him what time you wish to be picked up again.

Do not allow yourself to be distracted by any surprising event, which would allow someone to grab your valuables. Beware that the most crucial time for theft is when one is caught up in the crushing crowds of the markets. If you are confronted, do not fight back! Give up your valuables – they can be replaced. Remember that it is up to you to be a responsible tourist regardless of where you are traveling.

Leave your passport, airline ticket, and any money not needed for that day in the hotel safe or locked in your suitcase.



“I cannot thank you enough for the great time I had. What a magical experience you created for our group. The amenities were of the finest caliber and the service and attention were first class.”

— BOB BURRIDGE ART WORKSHOP

PACKING ART SUPPLIES

Airport Security Issues:

Anyone using acrylics or watercolors should have nothing to worry about.

When security is inspecting your luggage and asks, "What are these?" never say paints. The word "PAINT" could be a hot button issue with them. Tell them they are **artist's colors made from mineral pigments** (watercolors or acrylics) or **artist's colors made from vegetable oil, no solvents** (oil paints).

Rehearse saying artist's colors in front of the mirror.

Keep your cool—don't hassle security. Show them the Material Safety Data Sheets (**MSDS**) and explain that you are going on a painting holiday (you can usually download and print MSDS for all artists' materials from the product manufacturer's web site).

Just to make sure that the person inspecting your bag understands that the items are permitted, enclose a copy of the paragraph below from their own website pointing out that "artist's colors" are permitted as follows:

The US Department of Transportation defines "flammable liquids" as those with a flash point 140 degrees F or below. (Artist grade oil colors are based on vegetable oil with a flash point at or above 450 degrees F. THEY ARE NOT HAZARDOUS.) If you need to confirm this, please contact TSA at 866-289-9673



Packing Your Artist Materials:

“Artist colors” should be packed in a sturdy, leak-proof container, with some absorbent material in case there are any leaks with the changes in pressure. The container with your “artist colors” (especially oils) should include the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) information from the “artist colors” manufacturer that indicates the exact flash point.

Do not travel with solvents and mediums. If you need these materials **let us know before** you arrive so that we may make arrangements for you to purchase them upon arrival.

Do not carry your palette knives or brushes on board, they could be seen as possible weapons. Put them in the luggage you’ll be checking in.

Place your watercolor sheets in a hard protective portfolio, later using one of the sides as a level surface supportive back for painting on (we provide containers for water).

If you choose to bring an easel or a folding chair (we provide stools), make sure it is well packed and protected from being bent in your suitcase. Airline luggage handlers are



“AND THEN THERE IS THE MOST DANGEROUS RISK OF ALL — THE RISK OF SPENDING YOUR LIFE NOT DOING WHAT YOU WANT ON THE BET YOU CAN BUY YOURSELF THE FREEDOM TO DO IT LATER.”

– RANDY KOMISAR

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

COURTESIES

Good morning.....	Buenos días	Excuse me.....	Permiso
Good afternoon.....	Buenas tardes	How are you?	Cómo está?
Good evening/night.....	Buenas noches	I'm fine.....	Estoy muy bien
Goodbye.....	Adiós	I do not understand.....	No entiendo
Hello.....	Hola	Pleased to meet you.....	Mucho gusto
Please.....	Por favor	See you later.....	Hasta luego
Thank You.....	Gracias	What is your name?.....	Cómo se llama?
You're welcome.....	De nada	Do you speak English?...	Habla inglés?
Yes.....	Sí	Speak slowly.....	Mas despacio

BASICS

Bathroom.....	el baño	How do I get to.....	Cómo llegar a?
Bill.....	la cuenta	Arrive.....	llega
Cash.....	el efectivo	When?.....	cuando?
Expensive.....	caro	Where is.....	Dónde está...?
Family.....	la familia	On the left/right.....	a la izquierdo/derecha
Wife.....	la esposa	Straight ahead.....	todo recto or derecho
Husband.....	el esposo	Corner.....	esquina
Luggage.....	el equipaje	Road.....	Camino
Market.....	el mercado	North.....	Norte
Room.....	el cuarto	South.....	Sur
Good, okay.....	Bueno	East.....	Este
Bad.....	Malo	West.....	Oeste
I want.....	Quiero	How much?.....	Cuánto cuesta?
Why?.....	Por qué?	Exchange rate.....	la tasa de cambio
Help me!.....	Ayudarme!	What time is it?.....	Qué hora es?

Where is the main shopping street?.....Donde esta la calle principal de
comercio? or Donde están los
comercios principales?
Is it far from here?.....Esta lejos de aquí?
Can we walk?.....Se puede ir caminando?
What size is this?.....Que talla es esto?
Where can I try this on?.....Donde me puedo probar esto?
You haven't given me enough change!.....No me ha devuelto bien el cambio!
When does it start?.....A que hora empieza?

FOOD & BEVERAGES

to eat	comer	bread	el pan
meal	la comida	butter	la mantequilla
breakfast	el desayuno	salt	la sal
lunch	el almuerzo	pepper	la pimienta negra
dinner	la cena	hot/spicy sauce	la salsa picante
appetizers	los antojitos	fried	frito/a
soup	la sopa	boiled	hervido/a
main dishes	platos fuertes	grilled	asada/o
desserts	los postres	eggs	los huevos
plate	el plato	toast	pan tostado
fork	el tenedor	bacon	el tocino
knife	el cuchillo	ham	el jamón
spoon	la cuchara	chicken	el pollo
glass	el vaso	beef	la carne de res
napkin	la serviette	pork	el cerdo
to drink	tomar	shrimp.....	los camarones
bottle	la bottella	fish fillet.....	el filete de pescado
water	aqua pura	Snook.....	el róbalo
carbonated water ...	aqua mineral	rice	el arroz
tea	el té	potatoes.....	la papa
coffee	el café	vegetables.....	las verduras
coffee with milk.....	el café con leche	avocado.....	el aguacate
milk	la leche	salad.....	la ensalada
juice.....	el jugo	raw seafood salad.....	el ceviche
beer	la cerveza	fried plantains.....	plátanos fritos

NUMBERS

one.....uno/una
two.....dos
three.....tres
four.....cuatro
five.....cinco
six.....seis
seven.....siete
eightocho
ninenueve
tendiez

elevenonce
twelvedoce
thirteen.....trece
fourteen.....catorce
fifteen.....quince
sixteendieciséis
seventeen...diecisiete
eighteen ... dieciocho
nineteen.....diecinueve
twenty.....veinte

twenty one...veintiuno
twenty two...veintidós
thirty.....treinta
forty.....cuarenta
fifty.....cincuenta
sixty.....sesenta
seventy.....setenta
eighty.....ochenta
ninety.....noventa
hundred.....cien

DAYS & MONTHS

Week.....Semana
Sunday.....Domingo
Monday.....Lunes
Tuesday..... Martes
Wednesday.... Miércoles
Thursday..... Jueves
Friday.....Viernes
Saturday.....Sábado

Month.....Mes
January.....enero
February.....febrero
March.....marzo
April.....abril
May.....mayo
June.....junio

Year.....Año
July.....julio
August.....agosto
September....septiembre
October.....octubre
November.....noviembre
December.....diciembre

