

Beyond Sightseeing

Small Group Adventures
2016

Costa Rica



Big Yellow Suitcase

Inside the most beautiful and interesting places in the world

Puglia



Mexico



Sicily



Savannah



Big Yellow Suitcase takes you Beyond Sightseeing

Small group adventure for 6 to 15 guests inside some of the most beautiful and interesting places in the world

Why travel with us?

Are you an astute and experienced traveller looking for more than just a ticking of boxes of 'must see' sights?

Do you want to stay longer in each place, pack and move less often and enjoy a greater depth of experience?

If so, then our destinations and itineraries are designed specifically with you in mind.

Like you, we know that seeing is not the same as understanding.

Being able to connect to the history, culture and community of diverse locations around the world is what can make travel such an amazing and worthwhile experience.

Travel Globally and Explore Locally

Travel with us and you will experience a place more intensely

We'll ...

- visit local markets
- eat street food
- take a cookery class
- visit private homes and palaces
- understand the culture, its past and its present
- wander aimlessly
- gaze in wonder at archaeological & architectural marvels
- spend a morning people watching
- pick a favourite coffee shop
- have a picnic in a park
- dine in fine restaurants
- visit vineyards and discover new wines
- take a course in painting, pottery or photography
- go bird watching
- ask a local for a favourite restaurant

... and so very much more.



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Founder, Wendy Hand, owned and operated a highly successful event production company designing and delivering exclusive incentive events for blue chip clients around the world. She is now keen to share her contacts and access to these one-off unique experiences which would not normally be available to independent travellers or small group tours.

Our aim is not to see as much as possible but to experience as much as possible

Our Local Guides

The local guides that accompany us are personally selected for their deep knowledge, passion and ability to bring to life the places we visit through the stories they tell and the historical facts they recount.

They will share with us the reality of daily life as well as the historical significance of the location, its architecture and the peoples who have inhabited the region.

We open doors to private homes and palaces that are otherwise inaccessible to tour groups and independent travellers. As a small group we'll have the advantage of being able to jump queues and gain priority access to museums and archaeological sites.

We know the best places to eat and will make recommendations and bookings for you on those evenings when you're free to explore at leisure.

The Advantages of Small Group Travel with BYS

Our days are relaxed, we'll see amazing sights and learn fascinating facts; you'll have a choice to stay with the group or explore on your own; travel will be stress-free; excellent food and wine are a given and good company will be there when you desire it.

What will remain at the end of the tour will be a new appreciation of the places we've visited, new friends and many wonderful memories.

Local Travel

- Meet and greet on arrival at the designated airport and private transfers to the hotel.
- Travel in comfort in air-conditioned mid-size vehicles.
- Access areas not accessible by big tour coaches.

Accommodation

- Stay longer in each place, less packing and moving.
- Single travellers will enjoy the comfort of a double room provided for single occupancy.
- 4 Star hotels of charm and character including small private and family owned hotels.
- Stay in "Magical" towns in Mexico and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Italy and Mexico.

Food & Wine

- Enjoy excellent food including authentic regional cuisine and dine at Michelin Star restaurants in Sicily and Puglia.
- Wine/beer and soft drinks included in all group meals.
- Cookery classes for fun and to learn new skills creating local regional dishes in a little kitchen in Mexico, a fabulous neo-classical palace in Lecce or on a nobleman's ancient estate and vineyard in central Sicily.
- Visit vineyards in Sicily & Puglia and discover new varietals.

Unique Experiences

- Access to private homes and haciendas in Mexico, their splendid internal gardens and private art collections
- Out of hours tours of archaeological sites such as the Mayan site of Chichen Itza in Mexico
- Spend Halloween in Savannah – the most haunted town in the USA



- Visit private Villas and Palazzos in Sicily and be greeted by the resident owners, members of an ancient nobility
- Visit volcanoes and waterfalls in Costa Rica
- Stay in a Biosphere in Mexico – home to hundreds of bird species
- See a Sloth in Costa Rica
- Take an art or photography class in Mexico

- Learn how to throw a pot in a Potter's atelier in Sicily
- Visit the cave houses and trulli unique to Puglia
- Visit the 'White Town' of Ostuni, one of the most beautiful in Southern Italy
- Spend a day at the largest artisan fair in Mexico
- Climb the pyramids built by the Mayans and marvel at the still vibrant living culture of the Maya people.



- Go birding in Mexico, Costa Rica or South Carolina
- Take a bike ride through the low country of Georgia and South Carolina



Finca Rosa Blanca, Costa Rica.
Ranked as one of the 10 best hotels in the world



Cooking class in Mexico

SICILY

THE PEARL OF SOUTHERN ITALY



Greek Theatre at Taormina

Sicily is the largest of the Mediterranean islands and nature seems to have endowed all its wonders to this land: mountains, hills and above all the sea, with its incredible colours, its crystal-clear water and the beauty of its sea beds and last but not least, its great volcanoes. The contemporary pot-pourri that is Sicily is a sum total of its illustriously varied past. Cementing its status as the crossroads of the Mediterranean Sea is Sicilian exuberance and warmth, obvious in its complex food culture, which speaks intimately of Sicilians' passion and care for good food and genuine flavours.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 15 guests
- Private visits to Palazzos, villas and vineyards
- Cocktails with the Contessa at Palazzo Conte Frederico
- Cooking class & overnight stay at Anna Tasca Lanza Cookery School
- Lunch in Michelin-starred restaurant
- Tour of UNESCO World Heritage towns of Modica, Noto and Ragusa Ibla
- Day in Taormina
- Private tour, hosted by the Baron, to his villa where the "Godfather" movie was shot
- Visit ancient Greek and Roman Theatres



Days 1-4 Palermo

Private transfers are provided from Palermo airport to our hotel. Early evening we'll visit one of Palermo's grandest private palaces, the Palazzo Conte Federico, hosted for pre-dinner drinks by the Contessa followed by a casual dinner.

Day 2: Enjoy a morning walking tour of Palermo including the Arab-Norman architecture of the city dating from the early 10th Century when Palermo was at the peak of its importance. Late morning transfer to the town of Monreale for lunch at one of its top rated restaurants followed by a tour of the magnificent Norman cathedral that towers over the valley and surrounding countryside. This evening is at leisure

Day 3: Today we travel by air conditioned coach to Erice, a timeless town of Greek origin, perched upon a mountainside enclosed by strange triangular walls, perhaps the most evocatively picturesque town in Sicily. On the way we will stop for lunch and wine tasting at Feudo Disisa an estate lying on the gentle sloping hills with extensive views across the valley and vineyard.

We'll save dessert for afternoon tea in Erice where we'll enjoy the fabulous almond cakes made entirely by hand in strict accordance with ancient recipes passed on by the nuns of a cloistered Franciscan order.

After our wonderful lunch and afternoon tea, perhaps something light and easy in a local's favourite café?

Day 4: Explore Palermo at your leisure. There's so much more to see.

Visit one of the many markets, re-visit the cathedral or the theatre or sit in one of the many plazas and watch the city dwellers go about their daily lives.

This afternoon you will have an option to visit a local potter, Raffaele Piccoli, see him at work and test your own skills with clay and terracotta at his most unusual atelier housed in the grounds of an ancient Abbey known also for its home-made beer.

 *Massimo Plaza Hotel, Palermo*



Castellamare del Golfo



Noto

Day 5 Anna Tasca Lanza Cooking Experience

Today we travel to the centre of the island to a beautiful 19th century winery, still owned by a noble family, which will be our home for the night. We'll enjoy a 'hands-on' cookery class conducted by internationally renowned chef Fabrizia Lanza. We'll dine on dishes prepared, accompanied by wines from the estate. A perfect peaceful oasis.

◇ *Tasca d'Almerita Estate*

Days 6-10 Syracuse

After a leisurely breakfast we'll head towards Syracuse. En-route we'll stop to explore the amazing mosaics in the Villa del Casala at Piazza Armerina. The Villa which was built early in the 4th Century is home to some of the best preserved and extensive examples of Roman mosaics.

After lunch we'll have time to check in at our hotel and freshen up before our walking tour of Ortigia, the historic heart of Syracuse, followed by dinner in the roof top restaurant of our hotel overlooking the sparkling bay and harbour of Syracuse.

Day 7: After breakfast we'll explore the renowned Greek Theatre where Plato orated to his disciples and the tomb of the great mathematician and scientist Archimedes lies. The rest of the day is at leisure to fully discover Ortigia, its many museums, cafés and restaurants.

Day 8: Today it's the turn of one of the real scenic jewels of Sicily, Taormina. With its famous Greek Theatre, spectacular views over Homer's 'wine dark sea', magnificent garden, great shopping and restaurants it will be very easy to while away a few hours. Dinner will be at one of its finest restaurants. On the way we will stop for coffee at the walled villa where many scenes from Francis Ford Coppola's 'The Godfather' films were shot.

Day 9: Today we're heading inland to the spectacular Baroque and UNESCO World Heritage Listed hill town of Noto. After a walking tour and lunch you'll have some time to explore the town and visit the home of the best granita in all of Sicily. This evening is at leisure and there is no shortage of excellent restaurants to choose from or just sit over aperitifs and hors d'oeuvres and watch the passing parade.

Day 10: This morning we're off to explore Modica, another UNESCO World Heritage Listed site with a visit to a small and unique chocolate factory which has been in the same family for many generations creating chocolate according to ancient Aztec recipes. From Modica we'll head to the magnificent baroque town of Ragusa Ibla for lunch in a Michelin starred restaurant. There will be time to enjoy the town and its gardens before returning to our hotel. *Guests continuing to Malta will travel to Valletta this evening. See below.*

◇ *The Grand Hotel Ortigia, Syracuse*

Day 11 Depart Syracuse

This morning you will be transferred to Catania Airport for your onward flight.

Inclusions

- Individual transfers from Palermo airport
- The same English speaking guide for the entire tour
- Tips for drivers and guides
- 4 nights in Palermo
- 1 night at Anna Tasca Lanza Cookery School
- 5 nights in Ortigia, Syracuse
- 10 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 4 dinners
- Excursions to Palermo, Monreale, Erice, Villa del Casala, Noto, Syracuse, Modica, Taormina, Ragusa Ibla
- Entry fees for all scheduled visits
- Group transfer to Catania Airport

Dates & Prices

11 days/10 nights
 Thursday 2nd to Sunday 12th June 2016
 Tour Price: €6,750 per person
 Reductions available for twinshare
 Not included: Air fares to and from Sicily
This tour can be customised and operate on any date for a group of minimum 4.

“ The itinerary was varied & very interesting covering archaeological sites, fine dining, cooking class and much more. Our local guides were very knowledgeable and really made a difference. I would definitely recommend this tour.
 - Annette Baggie ”

Malta Extension

Prehistoric temples, fossil-studded cliffs, glittering hidden coves, Caravaggio masterpieces and a history of remarkable intensity.

Malta is a Mediterranean jewel that is not to be missed. We'll take you off the tourist trail and initiate you into the richness, variety and wonder that is the Maltese Islands. Prepare to be amazed.

◇ *Hotel Juliani at St Julians, Malta*



5 days/4nights
 Sat 11th to Wed 15th June 2016
 Tour Price: €2,500 per person.
 For full details, visit our website

PUGLIA

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES



Trulli houses in Alberobello

Justing out between the sparkling emerald green and soft blues of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, Puglia's coastline still bears the marks of its many invaders. You'll find Baroque towns, white-walled trulli, olive groves, picturesque seascapes, memorable hill-top and coastal towns and plenty of sunshine. Puglia's peasant cuisine (cucina povera) is legendary and features locally sourced olives, tomatoes, eggplants, artichokes and plentiful seafood. Its wines are among the best that Italy has to offer. This is slow travel at its best.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 15 guests
- Cooking class in a neoclassical palace
- Walking tour of Lecce
- Visit to a papier-maché workshop
- Wine tasting and dinner in the wine growing commune of Salice Salentino
- Day tour to Otranto, a historic seaside town on the Adriatic coast and the Cappella Mortiri in its cathedral
- Visit Santa Maria di Leuca where the Ionian sea meets the Adriatic sea
- Visit the 'White Town' of Ostuni – one of the most beautiful towns in southern Italy
- Morning bike riding tour
- 2 Michelin star restaurant dinners
- Visit a local dairy to see how mozzarella cheese is produced
- Explore the cave houses and churches in Matera Matera
- Visit a bakery using the traditional ancient methods to bake the bread of the region "Pane di Altamura"
- Visit the mysterious Castel del Monte
- Spend some time wandering the byways of the historic fishing port of Trani
- Take a tour by bike or pedal cab of Bari

Days 1-3 Lecce

Arrive at Bari or Brindisi for a private transfer to your hotel in Lecce.

In the early evening we'll take a leisurely stroll to a stunning neoclassical palace built in the 1500's. The palace has the most beautiful secret gardens in the historic centre of Lecce. With the help of the chef and a glass of wine or two we will create our own dinner featuring local delicacies. A perfect way to break the ice with your fellow travellers.

Day 2: After a leisurely breakfast we'll take a walking tour of Lecce, once a Greek settlement and later an important centre of the Roman Empire. We'll visit a workshop making papier-maché where we'll see craftsmen at work at creating a unique art form developed at Lecce throughout the centuries.

From late morning you'll have free time to further explore Lecce.

This evening we'll head to one of the famous wineries in Salice Salentino, arguably the most important wine district in all of Italy, to sample the fine wines and enjoy a delicious dinner.

Day 3: Our first stop today will be the UNESCO site of Otranto, a lovely historic seaside town and port on the Adriatic coast. It is famous for its Cathedral built by the Normans in the 11th century and featuring a vast 12th century mosaic of a stupendous tree of life balanced on the back of two elephants.

A seafood lunch awaits us in the walled city of Castro before continuing our journey to the southern cape of Puglia, Santa Maria di Leuca, where the Ionian Sea meets the Adriatic Sea.

This evening you will be free to explore more of the wonderful restaurants on offer within walking distance of our hotel.

 **Risorgimento Resort, Lecce**



Ostuni



Otranto



Matera Matera

Days 4-8 Martina Franca

After breakfast we'll check out of our hotel for the drive to Ostuni. This walled city with its incredible view overlooking the coast known as the "White Town" is one of the most beautiful towns in southern Italy. After a guided walk through the town and lunch in a typical, de charme, restaurant you'll have time for further exploration before the short drive to check into our hotel outside the baroque city of Martina Franca.

The rest of the day is at leisure to wander the park surrounding the villa or relax by the pool. Why not join the locals for the obligatory passagiata and aperitifs in the historic centre of Martina Franca before finding the perfect spot for dinner.

Day 5: We'll swap walking for an optional bike riding tour this morning to explore the nearby coastal path.

Early afternoon we'll head to the heart of the Murgia upland and one of the most beautiful landscapes of the region. A splendidly cultivated valley bearing olives, fruit and vines and characterised by scattered towers, domens, chianche and dry stone walls and with fine views over the valley and its trulli.

Our final stop will be at Alberobello, UNESCO's Heritage site where after an opportunity to wander at our leisure we'll meet to dine in a fantastic 1 star Michelin restaurant before returning to our hotel with all of our senses duly sated.

Day 6: In an area famous for its mozzarella cheese we can't resist a visit to a local dairy to see how it's made and of course to taste this marvel of a cheese.

Our next stop is at the extraordinary UNESCO World Heritage site of Matera, one of the ancient world's city centres. It's impossible not to marvel at what living was like in these cave dwellings known as "Sassi" in which frescoed

churches and houses were established and where families were still living until 1952. You might also recognize it as the location chosen for the Mel Gibson movie "Passion".

We'll visit one of the restored caves for lunch to sample local specialties and varieties of cheeses accompanied by Aglianico del Vulture wine. Drunk by Horatio this is a wine of ancient origins.



Day 7: Join us on another bike tour this morning or just enjoy the facilities of the villa. After lunch we're in for a treat as we visit the famous and mysterious Citadel and Castel del Monte, a marvel of medieval military architecture and a successful blend of elements from classical antiquity, Islamic Orient and north European Cistercian Gothic.

On to Trani and a step back in time but this time just to the 1950's. Trani is an historic fishing port on the Adriatic coast. It's a lovely place to explore, wander or relax. The town is reminiscent of a 1950's film set in old-fashioned seaside Italy: historic buildings fading with casual charm, boats in the harbour and sleeping dogs lazing in the midday sun by the deserted waterfront.

Our restaurant for dinner tonight is in Noci, a quiet town rarely frequented by tourists.

Day 8: This morning enjoy a city tour of Bari by bike or pedal cab. Look out in the old part of the city for the women making

the famous "orecchiette" – the typical ear shaped pasta. Time to explore on your own and for last minute shopping before we head back to the hotel to relax by the pool or enjoy a spa treatment for tonight is our farewell dinner. We'll be heading this evening for a feast at Ceglie Messapico, one of Puglia's gourmet capitals at a 1 star Michelin restaurant.

◇ *Villa San Martino, Martina Franca*

Day 9 Depart

All good things must come to an end ... until next time. Transfers will be provided to Bari or Brindisi airports.

Inclusions

- Individual transfers from Bari or Brindisi airport to the hotel
- The same English speaking guide for the entire tour
- Tips for drivers and guides
- 3 nights in Lecce
- 5 nights in Martina Franca
- 8 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 5 dinners
- Entry fees for all scheduled visits
- Air conditioned motor coach used for all excursions
- Group transfer to Bari or Brindisi airport

Dates & Prices

9 days/8 nights

Tue 24th May to Wed 1st June 2016

Tour Price: €4,500 per person

Reductions available for twinshare

Not included: Air fares to and from Italy

This tour can be customised and operate on any date for a group of minimum 4.

AJIJIC

A CULTURAL IMMERSION INTO OLD MEXICO



Colourful buildings in Ajijic

Unpack once – so much variety from one base – do as much or as little as you want – soak up the ambience of this delightful village which includes an active and engaged ex-pat community who chose it for its perfect climate, artistic community and friendly and welcoming locals. Ajijic nestles in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains on the northern shore of Lake Chapala. Only 30 minutes from Guadalajara international airport, Ajijic remains a quaint cobble-stoned village, a rustic reminder of an earlier time but with all the normal services of the 21st Century. This is 'slow travel' at its very best as we are drawn into the rhythms of daily life.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 15 guests
- Unpack once
- Escorted walking tour of Ajijic
- Full day tour of Tequila and the historic Mundo Cuervo distillery
- Transfer for day trip to Tlaquepaque
- Cooking class
- Optional special interest activities including photography, painting class, birding
- Behind the walls tour to private homes and haciendas
- Unique opportunities to meet ex-pat locals to discover more about life in a Mexican village



Our hotel in Ajijic, La Nueva Posada

Days 1-8 Ajijic

Arrive at Guadalajara international airport. Private transfer provided to our hotel, La Nueva Posada, in Ajijic. Meet your fellow travellers for a welcome cocktail followed by a casual dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Guided walking tour of Ajijic. Wandering along the cobble-stoned village streets is the best way to experience Ajijic. You will find that the houses are typical of old Mexico with simple village homes with colourful walls fronting the cobblestone streets as well as the elegant haciendas hidden behind the high walls. Dotted throughout the town are magnificent murals depicting social and historical scenes created by famous Mexican artists – many of whom are based in Ajijic. Following lunch the remaining afternoon is at leisure to further explore. For dinner choose from our selection of local restaurants offering traditional Mexican food or opt for a light supper in the hotel.

Day 3: After breakfast we'll head to the Maestros del Arte Fair in Chapala which is a unique event and the largest artisan fair in Mexico. Organized by an array

of volunteers, artists do not pay fees or percentage of sales to attend. They are hosted by local ex-pat families and their participation forms part of a unique community event. For many artists it is their first contact with the outside art world. All are masters of their mediums; clay, paper, fabric, print, wood, stone, silver, alpaca wool and other traditional materials. Feria Maestros del Arte brings you an opportunity to meet the artists and witness demonstrations of these ancient crafts. Why not explore the lakeside town of Chapala before heading back to Ajijic. Dinner tonight is in one of Ajijic's finest restaurants.

Day 4: Today is your special personal day where you have an opportunity to explore the local villages and surrounds or join one of a selection of guided activities. We offer a specialised photography day trip to surrounding villages to meet local artists guided by an internationally renowned photographer living in Ajijic. Or you may want to partake in a hands-on cooking class. Lunch is naturally included. Or try your hand at a local art class or go birding. Please inform us at the time of booking if you are interested in any of these personalised activities.



Sunrise over tranquil Lake Chapala



Local artisan at the Maestros del Arte Fair

Dinner tonight is in the neighbouring village of San Juan Cosala at 'Viva Mexico', owned and run by Agustin, one of the area's local heroes due to his charitable work in the community and a master Mexican Chef.

Day 5: After breakfast we'll depart for a full day tour to Tequila home to a 300 year old distillery still producing high quality tequila. We will travel through Maguey plantations along our route to the only area where tequila is manufactured. A private escorted tour through Mundo Cuervo family distillery will be followed by a tour of the gardens attached to the family's hacienda which features a selection of surrealist sculptures by the artist Leonora Carrington alongside works by Juan Soriana and Sergio Bustamante. After lunch there will be time to explore the village of Tequila before our return to Ajijic. Dinner at leisure in one of our recommended restaurants.

Day 6: Today is market day in Ajijic. It's located approximately 10 minutes' walk from our hotel and is an excellent place to interact with locals. Following the market go "Behind the Walls" with a visit to some of the privately owned magnificent colonial haciendas. The Spanish style architecture features central courtyards, colourful tile work, lush gardens and modern and antique furnishings, many designed and made locally. This is a unique opportunity to meet home-owners and gain insight into some of the town's private art collections. The afternoon is at leisure to further explore Ajijic or take in a spa or massage. This evening we will have dinner in one of our favourite restaurants.

Day 7: Today we head into one of Guadalajara's oldest village, Tlaquepaque. With over 40 specialty shops and exclusive art galleries, shopping becomes a joyful

revelation of fabulous art treasures and distinctive gifts around every corner. Tlaquepaque is filled with spectacular one-of-a-kind experiences in every medium from Western and eclectic bronze sculptures, functional and traditional ceramics, breathtaking glass blown creations, fine contemporary jewellery and designer casual wear in silk and leather. Just walking around Tlaquepaque is an adventure in discovery. Tonight is free – dine around options are provided.

Day 8: Your last full day to wander the village, sit in the plaza and watch the world go by, do some last minute shopping or take a local bus to explore one of the other local towns or villages. Tonight we'll dine together in one of Ajijic's finest restaurants to celebrate the end of a memorable tour and our immersion into the life and spirit of this wonderful community.

◇ *La Nueva Posada, Ajijic*

Day 9 Depart Ajijic or extend

Guests leaving us today will be provided a group transfer to Guadalajara airport.

Those guests joining us for our extension tour will depart the hotel after breakfast for their transfer to San Miguel de Allende which takes approximately 5 hours.

San Miguel de Allende & Mexico City Extension

Managing to be both quaint and cosmopolitan at the same time, with its cobblestone streets, leafy courtyards and fine architectural details, San Miguel de Allende is arguably the prettiest town in Mexico.

◇ *Casa Rosada Hotel*

Mexico City is a fascinating capital and many of its attractions are concentrated in the historic centre, Zocalo, near our hotel. The National Palace, Metropolitan Cathedral, Templo Mayor and Palace of Fine Arts are all within a few minutes walk.

◇ *Gran Hotel de la Ciudad*

Inclusions

- Individual transfers from Guadalajara airport to the hotel
- 8 nights' accommodation in Ajijic
- English speaking guide for walking tours and excursions
- 8 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 4 dinners
- Full sized air conditioned motor coach for longer excursions
- Air conditioned van for local transfers
- Group transfer to Guadalajara airport
- Tips for drivers and guides
- Entry fees for scheduled visits
- Charitable donation

Dates & Prices

9 days/8 nights

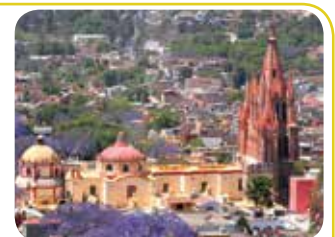
Fri 11th to Sat 19th November 2016

Tour Price: AU\$4,000 per person

Reductions available for twinshare

Not included: Air fares to and from Mexico

“ What an amazing experience! You could actually put your arms around this village, Ajijic. Thanks to Big Yellow Suitcase every day had a WOW factor. The exceptional local knowledge of the tour leaders was willingly shared amongst the group. A great experience, great company & amazing tour leaders – I can't wait for the next tour. ”



6 days/5 nights

Sat 19th to Thu 24th Nov 2016

Tour Price: AU\$2,600 pp

For details, visit our website

YUCATAN PENINSULA AND THE MAYAN RIVIERA

NATURAL WONDERS AND ANCIENT CULTURES OF MAYAN MEXICO



Mayan Temples at Pelanque

Yucatan Peninsula separates the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea. It is one of the richest archaeological zones in the ancient Mesoamerica world and presents astonishing surprises at every turn. The wonders and beauty of this region can't be over-stated. We'll explore magical towns, see an amazing range of wildlife and our expert guide will illuminate the Mayan mysteries of the area as we learn about its engineering, architecture and society. Avoiding the crowds, we'll have exclusive off-hour access to Chichen Itza the most important capital city of the Maya area and still a sacred centre for the Maya.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 15 guests
- Full day access to the Celestun Biosphere and wildlife refuge
- Private boat ride to see the flamingos
- Cooking class and lunch at Hacienda Sotuta de Peon
- Tour of Merida known as "The White City"
- Visit to the legendary Mayan temples of Uxmal
- Tour the caves of Loltun with its stalagmites and stalactites
- Explore the city of Izamal and its Franciscan Monastery
- Watch artisans work at a local hammock workshop
- Spend time exploring Valladolid, established by the Spanish in 1543
- Off-hours exclusive tour of Chichen Itza
- Visit the beautiful site of Ek Balam
- Swim in the underground lakes known as Cenotes
- Explore the towering temples of Coba on foot or by bike.
- Discover the walled town of Tulum and its unique Maya site situated on the shore of the Caribbean Sea.

Days 1-4 Celestun

Arrive at Merida Airport for a private transfer to the hotel. Meet your fellow travellers for a welcome cocktail followed by a casual dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: We'll spend the day at the Celestun Biosphere to explore the area's treasures. Celestun's ecosystem is unique because of a combination of fresh water from the estuary and salt water from the Gulf of Mexico. A once in a lifetime opportunity to see the richness and variety of birds and reptiles, many on the endangered list, provided with a safe haven in this unique region. It's also home to the Pink Flamingo which we'll have an opportunity to see up close and personal during our private boat ride.

Celestun is renowned for its seafood restaurants which we'll be able to sample when we stop for lunch. Back at the hotel enjoy dinner at your leisure in the hotel restaurant.

Day 3: Today we explore the ancient Mayan World at the temples of Uxmal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered one of the most complex and beautiful of Puuc architecture.

Our guide will help us unravel the mystery of how the people lived and how their ingenuity created such unique and beautiful structures.

We'll join a local Mayan family at their restaurant for a traditional meal before heading to the caves of Loltun with its 500 metres of illuminated paths featuring stalactites, stalagmites and ancient rock carvings.

Day 4: Today is all about you - a free day to indulge in the extensive facilities of the hotel and its surrounds.

 *Hotel Xixim, Celestun (pictured)*





Flamingos at Celestun Biosphere



Handcrafting in Valladolid

Days 5-6 Merida

We'll visit the grand Hacienda Sotuta de Peon, built in the time of the 'Green Gold', now restored to its former glory. Explore the estate and meet the chef in the kitchen of the main house for a cooking class and a delicious lunch.

This afternoon we'll head to Merida, "The White City", one of the most tranquil cities in Mexico. After checking in to our hotel we'll visit the Paseo de Montejo modelled after the Champs Elysees then complete the day with an aperitif followed by dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 6: Today you're free to explore Merida at your leisure. There's so much to see and do in this lively town.

◇ Casa del Balam, Merida

Days 7-9 Valladolid

Mexico has 35 towns that are considered magical and today we will visit two of them, Izamal and Valladolid.

Izamal is a jewel of a colonial town, with almost all buildings painted an egg-yolk yellow. We'll check out a local hammock workshop to watch artisans at work and learn about this ancient Mayan product.

Valladolid is one of the oldest cities of the peninsula. Formerly a ritual and ceremonial centre of the Mayan civilization it is now a centre of gastronomy.

Day 8: Today we are extremely lucky to have a private off-hours tour of the truly remarkable Chichen Itza (pictured opposite). This was the most important capital city of the Maya area. Chichen Itza and the Cenote of Sacrifices were, and still are, sacred centres for the Maya and is a UNESCO World Heritage listed site. After our guided tour of this stunning site we'll head inland to the archaeological site of Ek Balam.

The startling and amazingly well-preserved sculptures uncovered at Ek Balam are exciting to both newcomers and repeat visitors of Mayan sites. Dating from 100 BC to its height at 700-1,200 BC, it is unlike any other Mayan site.

The main temple here is impressive, both in size and architecture. Its massive size of over 500 feet long and 200 feet wide easily makes it one of the largest structures ever excavated in the Yucatan. It is so big that one wonders how this could have been built without the aid of iron or the wheel. The intricate detail of the artistry and symbolism incorporated into the frescoes and sculptures decorating this temple are an artistic marvel.

After a morning exploring we'll head to the beautiful Cenotes of Dzitnup for a refreshing swim and a picnic lunch.



Day 9: Today we're heading into the jungle to Coba and its towering temples, some of the tallest in Mexico. The surrounding jungle can be explored by bike or foot. Cool off in a gorgeous cenote and enjoy a traditional meal by the lake.

On to Tulum with its combination of centuries old ruins and stunningly beautiful coastal setting overlooking the azure water of the Caribbean Sea.

All good things must come to an end and tonight we'll celebrate the end of our tour with dinner in one of Valladolid's finest restaurants.

◇ Meson del Marques, Valladolid

Day 10 Depart

After breakfast a group transfer will be provided to Cancun airport.

Inclusions

- Private transfers from Cancun airport
- English speaking guide for all activities
- 4 nights in Celestun
- 2 nights in Merida
- 3 nights in Valladolid
- 9 breakfasts, 6 lunches on excursions and 6 dinners including wine/beer and soft drinks
- Air conditioned van or coach for transfers
- Optional yoga classes
- Access to the Spa and Wellness centres
- Tips for drivers and guides
- Entry fees for all scheduled visits.
- Return group transfer to Cancun airport

Dates & Prices

10 days/9 nights

Sat 24th Sept to Mon 3rd Oct 2016

Tour Price: US\$4,750 per person

Reductions available for twinshare

Not included: Air fares to and from Yucatan

This tour can be customised and operate on any date for a group of minimum 5.



Turn to the back page to read about our special Photography Tour to Yucatan in 2017, hosted by renowned Australian photographer Peter Eastway.

COSTA RICA

AN ECO PARADISE



Arenal Volcano

Costa Rica, in Central America, extends majestically from the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean Sea. This spectacular country offers almost limitless possibilities including extensive rainforests, volcanoes, rivers travelling through mountains, beaches and natural resources all safeguarded by national parks and reserves. Working with our local guide we have selected locations and experiences for you to enjoy and an opportunity to marvel at the beautiful scenery, lush jungles and unique wildlife. Find out for yourself why Costa Rica is considered the happiest country in the world.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 12 guests
- Visit to Cartago and Lankaster Gardens
- Visit to Poas Volcano National Park and La Paz Waterfall Gardens
- Coffee Tour of La Finca Rosa Blanca coffee plantation
- Walking tour of San Jose and the Central Market
- Tour of Arenal Hanging Bridges and Ecotermals thermal hot springs
- Safari float tour of Penas Blanca River
- Visit to Tarcoles
- Santa Juana tour
- Nature walk at Manuel Antonio Park



Days 1-4 Central Highlands near San Jose

You will be met individually at San Jose airport and escorted through immigration in the VIP lines and transferred to the hotel. Meet your fellow travellers over pre-dinner drinks and dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Today we'll visit Cartago, home to the country's largest cathedral. When Spanish Governor, Juan Vasquez de Coronado founded the city in 1563, he claimed that he'd never seen a more beautiful valley. Lush green fields encircle the city while 'Arabica' coffee trees seem to grow everywhere on the steep mountain slopes. Cartago is the gateway to Lankaster Botanical Garden and the Orosi Valley which we'll have an opportunity to explore.

Dinner tonight will be at our hotel restaurant which is well recognised for its fresh local ingredients and mix of exotic indigenous dishes prepared with flair.

Day 3: This morning we'll visit Poas Volcano National Park and La Paz Waterfall Gardens where we'll stop for lunch. Poas is one of the largest caldron volcanoes in the world. La Paz Waterfall Gardens is a private rescued wildlife

preserve home to over 100 species of animals, a hummingbird garden and the most famous waterfalls in Costa Rica.

After lunch you'll have an opportunity for a little down time back at our hotel before heading to Tiquicia for a fun evening of typical Costa Rican food and folkloric dances. Kick back, have a drink or three and practice your dance moves!

 *Finca Rosa Blanca*

Days 4-6 Arenal

Day 4: After breakfast and check-out we'll take a tour of the coffee plantation before a relaxed walking tour exploring the capital city of San Jose, Costa Rica's thriving municipal centre. We'll visit the splendid and historic Teatro Nacional (the country's top-notch arts focus) and the city's gustatory crossroads, its Central Market. You're free to explore on your own.

After lunch we'll head to the beautiful mountainous area of Arenal, where a perfect volcanic cone looms over lush cloud forest and gushing natural hot springs. Keep an eye out for toucans overhead and sloths in the trees. Dinner this evening is at our hotel.



Magnificent hummingbird



Take a dip in a cool waterfall

Day 5: This morning we're off to a traditional Tico (Costa Rican) house where our host and hostess will take us farm to table with a unique cooking class experience followed by lunch.

Then we'll follow the 3km trail and 16 famous state-of-the-art hanging bridges that introduce the forest's rich biodiversity and loop through the mountainous area.

After our hike in the rainforest it's time to relax as we head to the Ecotermals thermal hot springs, famous for their therapeutic benefits since ancient times. Spend a couple of hours bathing in the mineral enriched hot springs before enjoying an authentic, traditional Costa Rican meal at the Ecotermals restaurant.

Day 6: Today we'll taste the best chocolate in Costa Rica! In this 2-hour "hands-on" program, we'll have an opportunity to participate in all the production processes of the traditional drink of Central American ancestors.

After lunch it's off for a relaxing inflatable raft trip along the river where we'll spot an array of tropical birds such as Oropenolas, Tucans, Kingfishers as well as animals such as monkeys, sloths caimans and iguanas. Dinner tonight at your leisure.

 *Lost Iguana Resort, Arenal*



Days 7-9 Manuel Antonio

Checking out of the hotel after breakfast we'll head to the lovely beach town of Manuel Antonio on the Central Pacific Coast. On the way we'll stop on the Rio Tarcoles bridge for an up close look at the world's second largest crocodiles. Later, relax and enjoy the facilities of our hotel before dinner which is included here.

Day 8: After an early breakfast today it's off to enjoy one of the best adventures in Costa Rica, the Santa Juana tour. Our journey will take us through the lush jungle to Fila Chonta Mountains. At the top of the mountain, you'll have the option of taking a guided horseback or 4WD tour down to the authentic sugar mill still run by massive white oxen. From there its a scenic ride to the sublime El Salto waterfalls. Keep your eyes open for local wildlife including over 200 species of birds.

There is a small changing area next to the waterfalls for those seeking a relaxing dip. This is one of the most beautiful places in Costa Rica for swimming in fresh clean water tumbling from pristine mountains.

Enjoy a Campesino style lunch overlooking the panoramic vista of Manuel Antonio Park before returning to the hotel where we enjoy dinner tonight.

Day 9: It's your first full day of leisure. Enjoy a pool-side breakfast at Si Como No and use this day to go shopping or relax on the stunningly beautiful beach laid out at your feet near the hotel or why not claim a chaise-longue by the private pool for a spot of well earned R & R? Lunch is on your own today, while dinner is included at Si Como No.

 *Si Como No, Manuel Antonio*

Day 10 San Jose

After a Nature Walk to spot the wildlife in Manuel Antonio National Park, one of the most successfully managed parks in Costa Rica, we'll begin our return journey to San Jose. Our farewell dinner this evening is at the hotel restaurant, one of the best in Costa Rica.

 *Gran de Oro Hotel, San Jose*

Day 11 Depart San Jose

After breakfast a group transfer will be provided to International Airport for your onward flights. As they say in Costa Rica, "Pura Vida!"

Inclusions

- Meet and greet at San Jose Airport for individual transfers
- English speaking guide for the entire tour
- 3 nights at Finca Rosa Blanca - ranked as one of the 10 best hotels in the world
- 3 nights at Lost Iguana Resort, Arenal
- 3 nights at Si Como No, Manuel Antonio
- 1 night Gran de Oro Hotel, San Jose
- 10 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 9 dinners
- Comfortable air conditioned transport for transfers and excursions
- Group transfer to San Jose International Airport
- Entry fees for scheduled visits
- Tips for drivers and guides

Dates & Prices

11 days/10 nights
 Mon 12th Sep to Thu 22nd Sept 2016
 Tour Price: US\$6,650 per person
 Reductions available for twinshare
 Not included: Air fares to/ from Costa Rica
This tour can be customised and operate on any date for a group of minimum 6.

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA & SOUTH CAROLINA

GHOSTS, CYCLING AND SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY



Cycle past ante-bellum homes

Savannah is one of the most beautiful and haunted cities in North America. We'll spend Halloween there, dine on wonderful food and enjoy traditional southern hospitality. Savannah, with its old plantations; huge ancient oaks hung with Spanish moss; and tales of pirates; wars; fevers; African voodoo; and other supernatural doings, has always been a legendary and tragically romantic place. Our 6 days biking adventure in the low country of Georgia and South Carolina will see us cruise through wildlife preserves and forests, pedal through tiny rural towns, and ports lined with shrimp boats. Its relatively easy riding over flat terrain with flexibility to choose the distance you wish to ride each day.

Highlights

- Small group – maximum 15 guests
- 6 Days guided cycle tour of the Low Country of Georgia and South Carolina
- Bike through pine forests, salt marshes and nature preserves full of birds and other wildlife
- Guided tour of the Andrew Low House Museum
- Visit and bike on Sapelo island the only undeveloped island off Georgia
- Cycle on the exquisite Jekyll Island, the millionaire's island.
- Walking tour of the historic district of Savannah
- Tour of Bonaventure Cemetery featured in the book & movie, "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil"
- Walking tour of historic Beaufort one of the most beautiful towns in America
- Bike to the five mile beach and historic lighthouse at Hunting Island State Park
- Kayak tour in Altamaha River Biosphere
- Halloween celebration

Days 1-4 Savannah

On arrival you will be met at the airport for transfer to our hotel. Meet your fellow travellers over drinks and dinner in a local restaurant full of good southern tradition and hospitality.

Day 2: This morning, our local guide will take us on a walking tour of the Historic District and we'll discover why Savannah is considered one of the most beautiful cities in North America. This fully narrated tour will take us through the old City Market to the cobblestone streets along the riverfront to beautiful Forsyth Park. We'll be entertained with fascinating stories and traditions that will reveal Savannah's colorful and rich history.

Late afternoon we'll transfer to Chef Darin's Kitchen Table where we'll help prepare our southern style dinner with a glass or two of wine to help the cooking process. As Chef Darin says 'the kitchen table is the source of many great memories' and tonight we'll be creating more great memories as well as great food to share.

Day 3: After a leisurely breakfast we'll meet our tour guide for our next 6 days exploring the low country of Georgia and South Carolina and embark on a ten-mile warm-up ride through the city. There'll be free time this afternoon before meeting for dinner in one of Savannah's finest restaurants to top off this wonderful day.

Day 4: Today we head out to Beaufort, an area rich in natural beauty and a showcase of the very best the South Carolina Low Country has to offer. Cycle along pristine roads cradled by saltwater marshes, massive oak groves, estuaries and rivers. Enjoy a picnic lunch on the beach by the lighthouse and explore historic Beaufort. Back in Savannah your evening is free to further test the city's well-earned reputation for being the Foodie capital of North America.

 *Savannah Bed and Breakfast*





Sapelo Island



Tybee Island Lighthouse

Days 5-6 Sapelo Island

Checking out of our hotel after breakfast we'll bike in rural countryside through salt marshes and pine forests and the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge, the home of egrets, herons and other water birds. Then, we cruise through the tiny villages of Shellman Bluff, Pine Harbor and Eulonia and on to Valona to see shrimp boats and Ridgeville to look at the Victorian style homes of former timber barons who summered here. We'll catch the ferry to Sapelo and check into the Historical Reynolds Mansion. Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

Day 6: The day starts with a guided tour of this fascinating island and the chef at the Reynolds Mansion will prepare a picnic lunch to eat at the mansion or on the beach. After lunch you'll have the option to bike along the beach, hike or just explore the magnificent empty beach. Tonight we'll dine at the hotel.

 *Reynolds Mansion (pictured below)*



Days 7-8 Jekyll Island

After checking out of the hotel and catching the ferry back to the mainland, we'll bike to Darien for a short tour including Fort George, the first English settlement in Georgia and St Cyprian's Episcopal Church, built by former slaves in 1876. Then we pedal on to the historic Butler Plantation where we will hop into kayaks to explore the wonder of the surrounding coastal wetlands.

Tonight we'll stay at the world-famous Jekyll Island Club Hotel. Founded in 1886, the Club thrived as a grand retreat for some of America's wealthiest families. Dinner tonight will be in the clubhouse.

Day 8: We will spend today with a relaxed bike ride around this magnificent island along the coast through salt marshes and past the magnificent cottages of some of America's most famous families. It is one of the most memorable bike rides you will ever take, and we'll enjoy a picnic lunch by the sea. This afternoon you might like to take a dip in the riverfront pool, play tennis or a round of golf and this evening we'll cap this fun filled leg of our trip with a delicious, farewell dinner at "Our Club".

 *Jekyll Island Club Hotel (pictured below)*



Day 9 Savannah

After a leisurely breakfast we'll transfer to Savannah. En-route we'll stop for a guided tour of the Bonaventure Cemetery. It's said to be one of the most beautiful cemeteries in North America consisting of over 300 acres of garden featuring camellias, azaleas, wisteria, dogwood trees, 300 year old live oak trees and magnolia trees.

We'll continue on to Tybee Island for lunch at a Seafood restaurant overlooking the Atlantic Ocean before checking into our hotel. There will be time to settle in and freshen up before, with the aid of a mint julep to steel our nerves, we'll head out by carriage for a ghost tour of Savannah.

As is only fitting for Halloween we'll dine tonight in one of the most haunted buildings in Savannah and celebrate the amazing journey we've shared and our visit to this beautiful, romantic and ghostly city.

 *Savannah Bed and Breakfast*

Day 10 Depart Savannah

Transfers to the airport will be provided for your onward journey.

Inclusions

- 5 Nights at Savannah Bed and Breakfast.
- 2 nights at The Reynolds Mansion
- 2 nights at Jekyll Island Club Hotel
- 9 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 8 dinners including wine/beer and soft drinks
- 6 Days guided cycle tour of the Low Country of Georgia and South Carolina
- SAG (Support and Gear) Van to provide luggage relocation, mechanical support, snacks, fresh water, and "rest rides"
- Return airport transfers
- Air-conditioned vehicle for excursions
- Bike rental
- Gratuities

Dates & Prices

10 days/9 nights

Sun 23rd Oct to Tue 1st November 2016

Tour Price: US\$5,400 per person

Reductions available for twinshare

Not included: Air fares to and from USA

This tour can be customised and operate on any date for a group of minimum 6.

Coming in
2017

THE MAGNIFICENCE OF THE MAYANS

YUCATAN PENINSULA PHOTOGRAPHIC INTENSIVE - OCTOBER 2017



The Place

A photographer's paradise, the Yucatan Peninsula abounds in wildlife parks and nature reserves with over 300 species of birds, mangroves, lagoons, savannahs, coral reefs, rainforest and Mayan temples. The culture is as rich as its landscape and flora and fauna.

You'll discover walled cities, underworld marvels, pyramids, ruin cities and jungle camps where you'll meet the workers and learn how they live and work in the jungle camps.



Places are strictly limited on this fully escorted 8 day tour. Register your interest now by email - see below.

Your Host

Peter Eastway is a contemporary Australian photographer known internationally for his landscape and travel work.

Peter has been involved in photographic magazine publishing for over 30 years, establishing his own title, Australia's Better Photography Magazine, in 1995. It is now one of Australia's leading photography magazines.

Peter Eastway is an AIPP Grand Master of Photography. He won the 2009 Kodak Award of Distinction, the AIPP Professional of Photographer of the Year in 2010 and in 2013 the AIPP NSW Landscape Photographer of the Year.

Peter speaks nationally and internationally on topics including landscape photography, Photoshop techniques, publishing and the business of professional photography.



FERRARA & LAKE COMO

LA VITA ITALIANA - SEPTEMBER 2017



You've visited the must see sights of Venice – Florence and Rome and now you're ready to soak up some authentic northern Italian culture.

The UNESCO World Heritage city of Ferrara, free from the typical foreign tourist's itinerary, is our destination of choice. Its twisting medieval cobblestone streets, elaborate residences of the House of Este and a castle straight out of the storybooks complete with towers, moat and drawbridge provide a perfect backdrop for exploration. We'll visit the incredible Soragna Palazzo, one of the world's most precious and sumptuous private properties; Giuseppe Verdi's home in Busseto; dine in an ancient Jewish Ghetto and Michelin Star restaurants; learn how to cook perfect home-made pasta in Bologna the heartland of pasta; taste balsamic vinegars, mortadellos; parmesan cheese in Parma; visit the cellars where home-made hams are aged for Prince Charles and Armani; test drive a Ferrari and visit a winery to taste the local wines.

From Ferrara we'll head further north to spend a couple of days in the most beautiful town on the edge of Lake Como, Bellagio. Here we'll take a private boat tour of the lake and visit some of the most beautiful villas that abut the lake and visit Monza with its fabulous and recently restored Queen Teodolinda's Chapel.



Big Yellow Suitcase

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Visit our website for extended destination and itinerary details, to download a Booking Form and read our Terms & Conditions.

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Your Travel Professional