

PERU

*Amazon
Expedition Voyages
From Lima Tours*



NICARAGUA

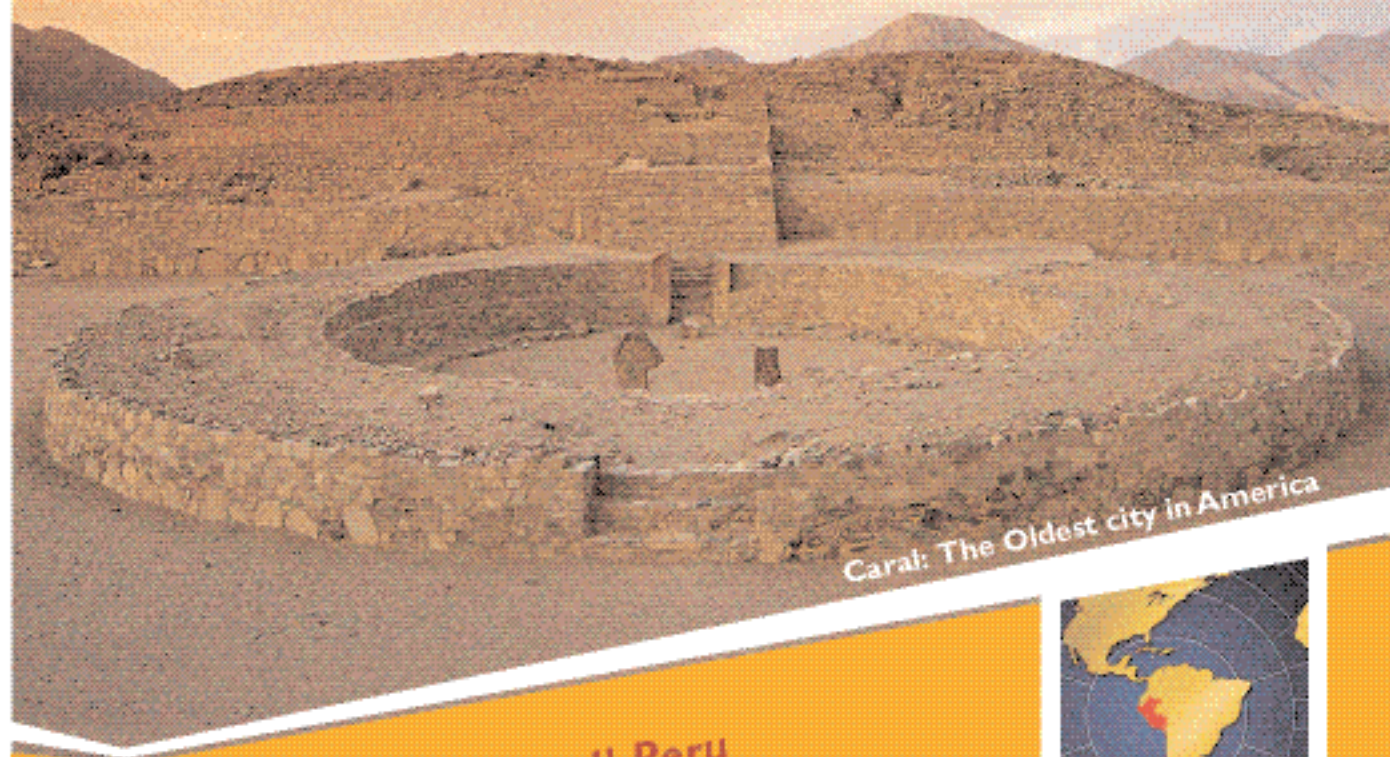
*Central America's
Largest Country Is
On A Roll*





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10 Reasons to sell Peru

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- Living Cultures
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- Colorful Festivals
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- Magical Destination



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Amazon Expedition Voyages From Lima Tours

Journey to Earth's Greatest Wilderness aboard a Classic Amazon Riverboat.

BY JENNIFER M. LANE

Peru is a very wealthy country, not only rich in history, biodiversity, and tremendous natural resources, but most importantly rich in its peoples, cultures, ancient traditions, complex languages and singular lifestyles.

Significant ancient cultures have left their mark in Peru, including the Inca, Moche, Chimu, Nasca and Paracas, making its archaeological legacy one of the most important. Pre-Inca temples are interspersed with colonial cities, sensual deserts and exuberant tropical forests, not to mention the imposing Andes Mountains. Contemporary cities mix with ancient cultures and ancestral traditions. With Lima Tours, travelers will discover adventure, mysticism, culture, gastronomy, nature and much more in a single country.

Since 1956, Lima Tours has developed responsible tourism policies which help to value and care for Peru's natural, historic and cultural resources. They continue to lead the market due to the excellent quality and creativity involved in each of their products. Their highly trained team of professionals travels constantly around Peru to seek out the best suppliers and, above all, to remain informed of the infinite number of attractions the country offers. Their passion is for complete client satisfaction.

The Adventure

Their latest offering is a journey to discover Earth's Greatest Wilderness – the Amazon - aboard the Delfin classic Amazon riverboat on three-, five-, and seven-day expedition voyages.

Since the mid 1500's when Spanish conquistador Francisco de Orellana explored the entire length of it in search of "El Dorado," the fabled source of Inca



Local dockside farewell to the Delfin sailing.

gold, to the late 1900's when French marine biologist Jacques Cousteau, aboard the Calypso, revealed its rich natural history to the world, navigating on the mighty and mysterious Amazon River has been an alluring dream for explorers and travelers alike.

Guests on this voyage will enjoy a unique, exotic, adventurous and luxurious cruise on the main Amazon River and the two rivers that form it, the Ucayali and the Marañon, as well as several tributaries for up-close nature observation and exploration. The cruise also sails to the Headwaters of the Amazon River and into the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, the largest and most pristine flooded forest in the world. Guests will have the opportunity to visit native villages and learn about life in the rainforest.

The Vessel

Built in 1986 and refurbished/upgraded in 2006, the Delfin classic

Amazon riverboat accommodates 14 guests in seven double cabins, all appointed with wood paneling, air conditioning, comfortable beds, soft pillows, 100 % cotton sheets and bath robes, bathroom, and organic/environmentally safe toiletries.

Guests will enjoy the cozy, wood paneled dining room, the covered observation deck, and the lounge area, complete with fully stocked bar, video/DVD player, and an extensive Amazon library. The crew of 15, all of them Peruvian nationals and most of them from the Amazon region is fluent in English, rainforest-savvy, nature loving, friendly, talented in music, and full of spirituality.

All meals are included, and menus have been designed by Peru's foremost young chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino to please the most sophisticated international palates while featuring the generous bounty of the Amazon rainforest.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

LIMA TOURS FROM PAGE 3

There are weekly departures from Iquitos/Peru every Friday for the three-day and seven-day cruises and every Sunday for five-day cruises. Cruises are available for individual bookings and/or full charters. Special themed departures during the year may include photography, health and wellness, Peruvian cuisine, and Amazonian spirituality.

More to do in Peru

In addition to their Amazon Cruise, Lima Tours offers many other exciting programs. Itineraries can be created by destinations, interests, budget, or theme. Visit Arequipa, the land of volcanoes and canyons; Cusco, the sacred valley of the Incas; Lima, the City of Kings; spectacular Machu Pichu and more. Tours for every interest are offered including Journeys of Discovery, Ecoadventures, Nature Observation, Living Tourism, Family Holidays, Spiritual Encounters, Arts and Crafts, Honeymoons, and Gay and Lesbian Tourism.

Peru, with its rugged and varied geography has always been host to innumerable cultures which have coexisted or fought, creating a cultural space that today contains evidence of centuries of human presence. All of it among nature at its most diverse, dominated by the Andes Mountain Range. What is surprising - and this perhaps identifies Peru - is that this history and nature continue creating life, life in which aspects of past cultures survive but are updated by the demands of the



The Delfin Bar and Sundeck.

present, making up a universe of living cultures which probably no other part of the world can offer. The New Destinations Program offered by Lima Tours is a trip through part of this unending Peru.

Their Hidden Treasures Program explores the three elements that make Peru a unique destination: its history, nature, and living culture. This combination is continually producing new routes and destinations for tourists, which can be discovered with the aid of a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The Peru All Inclusive and a la Carte Program is an unforgettable week visiting Lima, Cusco, Machu Picchu and The Sacred Valley of the Incas, combining the convenience of an all-inclusive vacation with the flexibility of a-la-carte touring and dining.

Peru Gourmet is a six-day program which visits the main cultural highlights of Lima and Cusco, while enjoying special tastings of Peru's world-renowned cuisine.

Peru is also the ideal destination for incentive trips: entertaining, enriching, exciting and very hospitable.

Visit Peru Now

Traveling to Peru now by air, sea or land, is easier – and a better value – than ever before. More importantly, visitors can now indulge in first class travel services, accommodations and touring.

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AMAZING TRIPS TO THE AMAZON WITH OPEN DOOR

The Amazon is probably the most well known landmark of Brazil. 1,800 species of birds and 250 varieties of mammals are sheltered by an infinite assortment of trees and plants. The Amazon Rain Forest is directly responsible for the production of 50 percent of the world's replenishable supply of oxygen. It is a paradise for scientists, photographers and fishermen. The world's largest river basin contains 1,500 varieties of fish in a seemingly endless succession of rivers and tributaries.

The Amazon River and its tributaries make up 20 percent of the world's supply of fresh water. Of the 20 largest rivers in the world, 10 are in the Amazon Basin. The Amazon River itself is 4,087 miles long. Not surprisingly, waterways are the main access routes within the Amazon and boats are the principal means of transportation.

The phenomenon of the Meeting of the

Waters of the Negro and Solimões rivers is the excursion most sought after by travelers. Located approximately 32,000 feet from Manaus, the two largest rivers of the region meet but do not mix for approximately 19,000 feet creating a spectacle of the dark waters of the Negro and the muddy waters of the Solimões, which then end up forming the Amazon on out the Atlantic Ocean. Differences in density, temperature, and velocity of the two rivers contribute to the occurrence of this phenomenon.

The Anavilhanas archipelago is the world's largest freshwater jungle island grouping. This remote area is comprised of 370 islands, myriads of small creeks, pools and sand beaches, all formed by the ever-changing waters. As a naturalist's paradise, it fascinated the famous Jacques Cousteau and allows visitors to marvel at the unique ecology of the Amazon. In addition to an astounding number of differ-

ent species of vegetation, there are also monkeys, sloths and exotic birds that make their habitat in the tropical forest.

The gateway Manaus is a pleasant and friendly city and is still a major port. Manaus is about three hours by air from São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian airline TAM also flies once daily direct Miami - Manaus. Copa Airlines now flies direct from Panama to Manaus five times a week. This trip takes three hours saves travel and transfer time through Sao Paulo. Copa Airlines has direct flights to and from Panama from Los Angeles, Miami, Orlando, New York, Newark, and Houston.

Open Door, with a professional and experienced international staff, is a major incoming tour operator for customized tours to this amazing region, offering a wide range of tour to the Rainforest and the city of Manaus.

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ANNIE BERK AWARDED OSCAR LOBO AWARD



ANNIE BERK

Ms. Annie Berk from Ladatco Tours was awarded the 2006 Oscar Lobo Award at SATA's Holiday Celebration event held in Miami, FL this past December. The prestigious award is a

heartfelt recognition to an individual who is dedicated and committed to the promotion of travel and tourism to South & Central America and has made strides in the industry.

Annie's forte is Central America, having traveled extensively in the region over the years. She has also traveled through most of South America and is able to speak about Guatemala or Chile with equal passion. Her duties include day to day sales for independent individual or group travel, as well as development of the Central America product line.

Annie received the "Amigo de Costa Rica" award by the Ministry of Tourism in Costa Rica in 1991. She has been a member of SATA (South and Central America Travel Association), having served as treasurer, vice-president and president. She has also been a speaker for SATA at their educational trade shows and has also developed an educational seminar for TRES, Travel Exchange for Central America.

SATA (South & Central American Travel Association), satausa@gmail.com, www.sata-usa.com

SATA ON THE ROAD IN 2007: TRADE SHOW, SEMINAR PRESENTATION AND DINNER

Diversified South & Central American suppliers and quality travel agents can interact through SATA's well established educational dinner programs. Features include guest speakers, new sales tools, destination and product presentations, door prizes, and networking potential that

will open the door to more profits within the travel trade.

The schedule is as follows: February 6: Oklahoma City, OK; February 7: Houston, TX; March 6: West Palm Beach, FL; March 7: Tampa, FL; May 8: Sacramento, CA; May 9: San Jose, CA (Downtown area); June 5: Milwaukee, WI; June 6: Chicago, IL (Northbrook area); September 4: Denver, CO; September 5: Albuquerque, NM; October 9: Philadelphia, PA; October 10: Long Island, NY; November 6: Raleigh, NC (Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill area); and November 7: Greensboro, NC (Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem area).

Invitations to travel agencies in the vicinity of the above cities, will be sent approximately three to four weeks prior to the event.

For suppliers who wish to participate in these upcoming SATA events or wish to sponsor, please send an email to satausa@gmail.com.

SATA (South & Central American Travel Association), satausa@gmail.com, www.sata-usa.com

EXPERIENCE THE REAL LATIN AMERICA WITH INTREPID

As the largest tropical rainforest in the world, the Amazon shelters unique plant and wildlife and is home to thousands of indigenous communities. It is also creates 20 percent of the world's oxygen.

Devastatingly, the Amazon is under threat. As the Amazon disappears, approximately half of the world's animal and plant species are under threat, indigenous communities are losing their traditional homelands and the earth faces extreme climate change.

In line with Intrepid's responsible travel philosophy, they will be donating 10 percent of the land costs from trips to Latin America booked between February 1 and March 31, 2007 to the Intrepid Foundation's Amazon Fund. Each Intrepid Latin American journey will help fund projects that are working towards a sustainable future for the Amazon. These projects

are educating and empowering locals to choose the future of their land, encourage sustainable land use and help to stop illegal deforestation.

Peru in Depth is 15 days, ex Lima. It is an Intrepid Original trip. Retrace the steps of the Incas along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, cruise across Lake Titicaca, step back in time in the Sacred Valley and explore the Amazon Jungle. Price is \$1,645 per person, plus a Local Payment of \$250.

Ecuador Adventure is 14 days, ex Quito. It is an Intrepid Comfort trip. Stay deep in the Amazon Jungle, travel on the Devil's Nose Train, explore Quito, encounter the wildlife of the Galapagos and soak in the thermal baths of Banos. Price is \$1,505 per person, plus a Local Payment of \$400.

Way to San Jose is 17 days, Antigua to San Jose. It is an Intrepid Basix trip. Traveling through Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, discover the underwater world of the Roatan Bay Islands, explore the ancient ruins of Copan, experience life by the Arenal Volcano and roam rainforests in Monteverde. Price is \$730 per person, plus a Local Payment of \$300.

The Inca Trail is eight days, ex Lima. It is an Intrepid Active trip. Explore the historic center of Lima, see how the Incas lived in the Sacred Valley, trek the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu and wander the streets of Cuzco. Price is \$730 per person, plus a Local Payment of \$300.

Peru Amazon Extension is six days, ex Cuzco. It is an Intrepid Independent trip. Get a real taste of the Peruvian Amazon rainforest, cruise along murky waterways, spot exotic wildlife and learn about the healing properties of the plantlife. Price is from \$910 per person.

After being named Best Tour Operator at the 2006 Responsible Tourism Awards in the UK, Intrepid feels that they have an amazing opportunity to broaden their responsible travel commitments in Latin America and help protect a region that gives life to so many.

Intrepid,
www.intrepidtravel.com/amazon

SPECIAL OFFERS FOR AGENTS FROM QUASAR NAUTICA

Quasar Nautica has been a Tour Operator in the Galapagos Islands for over 18 years. They offer one a stop-shop for mainland Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. Agents are welcome to take part in a FAM trip offered by the company. Instead of a specific date, new agencies or agencies that have not been in the market long can partake in a fully paid cruise, totally refundable with the first four passengers that they send. FAM costs for known agencies are \$350 for Galapagos, plus air and entrance fee.

Quasar Nautica, 800-247-2925,
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GOL BEGINS TICKET SALES TO LIMA, PERU

GOL Linhas Aéreas Inteligentes, Brazil's low-cost, low-fare airline, has begun ticket sales to Lima, Peru. The Peruvian capital is

GOL's eighth international destination – the Company currently flies to Buenos Aires, Rosário and Córdoba (Argentina), Montevideo (Uruguay), Assuncion (Paraguay), Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia) and Santiago (Chile). Two daily flights will depart to Lima, one from São Paulo and one from Santiago, Chile.

The Brazilian National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC) has authorized GOL to operate 14 regular flights per week to Lima on its Boeing 737-800 NG aircraft. "By expanding operations to Lima, our eighth international destination, GOL demonstrates its commitment to popularizing air transportation in South America," says GOL's Vice-President of Marketing and Services, Tarcísio Gargioni.

Peru, whose economy grew 6.7 percent in 2005, is home to 27.9 million residents and is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America. According to information from the Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, business between Brazil and Peru

has increased from \$1.4 billion in 2005 to \$2 billion in 2006 (January to November 2006).

Exports from Brazil to Peru have increased from \$933 million to \$1.3 billion in the same period and imports from \$459 million to \$706 million. Last November, Brazil and Peru signed 12 bilateral agreements to further strengthen relationships between the two countries.

The World Tourism Organization estimates that approximately 80,000 Brazilians visited Peru in 2005, while more than 60,000 Peruvians traveled to Brazil over the same period. Flight departure schedules are as follows: depart São Paulo (Guarulhos) 10:00 p.m. arrive Lima 10:10 a.m.; depart Lima 1:50 a.m. arrive São Paulo (Guarulhos) 8:20 a.m.; depart Santiago do Chile 10:15 p.m. arrive Lima 2:00 a.m.; and depart Lima at 2:40 a.m. and arrive Santiago do Chile 7:00 a.m.

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MEDELLIN AND CARTAGENA PROVE THERE'S MORE TO DISCOVER IN COLOMBIA

BY JIMMY IM



Colombia has come a long way by rebounding from its darker days and exposing itself in a newer light. While drug trafficking and violence conjure up downbeat images of South America's northernmost country, the government has taken important (and successful) measures to promote Colombia's best attributes—from culture to ecotourism—and letting the seedy reputation slip in between. "Five years ago, there were neighborhoods that you just couldn't go to because it was quite dangerous," says Vanessa Escobar, Communications Coordinator of Medellín Convention Bureau. "Now, that's no longer the case." Colombia is one of the most beautiful countries in South America, and part of the beauty is the relentless dedication of overcoming silence and struggle endured for decades.

While Bogotá thrives as the economic, cultural and political heart of Colombia, smaller cities like Medellín and Cartagena reflect the progression and excitement travelers admire and flock to. Throw in some panoramic landscapes, buzzing nightlife, haute cuisine and passionate people and visitors will soon understand why New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index ranked Colombia as the second happiest place on Earth.

MEDELLIN

Cradled between the tropical Andes Mountains, Medellín is chockfull of commanding views with nature abound. Locals and visitors alike refer to it as the "City of Eternal Spring:" the weather hovers at 72 degrees year-round.

Known mostly to foreigners as the best and most inexpensive city in Colombia for plastic surgery, Medellín embraces several other highlights (including Shakira claim) that has helped improve their tourism infrastructure. The city has invested heavily in education, reintegration programs and created cultural places and parks, three of which will be anticipated in 2007.

"We've had some difficult times, but we have so many things we are proud of," says City Mayor Sergio Fajardo. "The crime rate has reduced 91% in the past five years. The city's changing positively." It's a social transformation that's bettering the city and establishing a stronger sense of community. One inspiring example is the work put into the poverty-stricken neighborhood of Explora Park. Last year, the city completed a cable car harboring breathtaking views that begins at the subway and travels 2,700 meters to the top of the hill (Previously, it was a painfully steep commute for

residents to get home.). A much-anticipated public library is currently under construction, as well as a new park.

The sense of community reaches further to Medellín's neighbors: the new "Tunnel de Occidente" completed last year connects the city with Santa Fe de Antioquia, a quaint, historical town favored by Colombians with quick retreat in mind. What was once a three-hour drive has been reduced to 45 minutes with the new tunnel.

Medellin is more cosmopolitan than one would think. Lleras Park is a burgeoning neighborhood lined with trendy boutiques, restaurants and bars that fire up the nightlife with the stylish set. What's unique about this neighborhood is that the store owners created an association—Via Primavera—to be more of a community than rivals. The association's main objective is to promote the country by mostly limiting product to Colombian designers and staff and showcasing the talents of its denizens. You can find everything from furniture to jewelry.

CARTAGENA

The coastal Caribbean city of Cartagena feels far removed from the rest of Colombia. An unspoiled destination for the rare American traveler and a year-round weekend getaway for Colombians, it boasts miles of beaches, intriguing history, old-world charm and a vibrant nightlife. Cartagena has been topping "it" destination lists for its tranquil allure and retreat, and locals are anticipating the release of "Love In The Time of Cholera," based in Cartagena and adapted from Colombian's best known author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Cartagena's historic sites—from churches to fortresses—provide the perfect balance for the "resort" feel of the coastal beaches in Bocagrande, where most of the high-rise hotels and condos line the coast.

The Old Town is unarguably Cartagena's best attribute, contained within massive stone walls and a protected UNESCO World Heritage site. 400 years of history fill these walls with colonial homes, churches, parks, hotels, restaurants and bars, most of which retain the colonial architecture. While the northern part Centro dates back to the 16th century, Getsemi (17th century) is less tourist-driven, but plans are made to match it with Centro. At any time, you can find locals and vendors flooding the cobblestone streets day and night, keeping the streets lively. Here, most of the accommodations (ranging from high end to cheap) are bed & breakfasts in traditional colonial homes, where rooms tend to max out around 10 and sell out quickly. Most are embellished with Colombian decor, and features courtyards. For a really authentic stay, Casa El Carretero (www.casaelcarretero.com) is tucked on a side street in Getsemi. Open for a year, it offers only three rooms (one master suite), a non-English speaking staff of three, and typical Colombian breakfast. The rooftop has a commanding view of the fortress and a dip pool for instant heat relief.

Colombia Tourism, www.proexport.com.co

Nicaragua: Central America's Largest Country Is On A Roll

Tourism isn't the only thing on the upswing in Nicaragua; new beachfront golf resorts are cropping up and plans are underway to bring sacred, ancient statues that somehow found their way to museums in other countries, back home to Zapatera Island in Lake Nicaragua.

BY JOAN GONZALEZ

Nicaragua has certainly had a turbulent past, both politically and geographically, but the naturally optimistic nature and dogged determination of Nicaraguans has brought them through many crises, including a devastating earthquake in 1972. The quake leveled the commercial center of Managua, the country's capital. Its beautiful cathedral on Plaza de la Republica was left standing, but in ruins and seemingly beyond repair. Today the hands of the cathedral's clock still point to 12:32 pm, marking the exact time of the quake. Grass now grows on what were once busy downtown streets while shops, hotels and restaurants have sprouted in surrounding areas.

Creating a lot of new interest in Nicaragua is a project to protect and bring home pirated petroglyphs to the island of Zapatera, one of the 300 islands in Lake Nicaragua (Lake



The Grand Pacifica Beach and Golf Resort, Nicaragua

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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NICARAGUA FROM PAGE 9

Cocibolca), the second largest lake in Latin America after Lake Titicaca between Bolivia and Peru. The island was inhabited by a culturally developed indigenous tribe before the arrival of Spanish conquistadors. Since that time, petroglyphs carved by the tribe have been slowly disappearing from the island and miraculously reappearing in other places. Coming home soon from the U.S. will be the statue of a Nicaraguan Indian Princess that has been residing in the Smithsonian, and there to welcome the Princess will be Jim Woodman: writer, lecturer, publisher, Latin American expert and director of the International Explorers Society, who has also been instrumental in developing tourism to every country in Central and South America. He has now zeroed in on Isla Zapatera, a protected national park. The park is easily reached by boat from Granada for a petroglyph-tour and wood steps have made it an easy climb to the top where visitors are met by a small group of families making a living from agriculture.

Jim Woodman was in Managua recently on another mission: to help select a name for the country's first signature cocktail, like Mexico's Margarita or Peru's Pisco Sour. This necessitated a lot of "tastings," for an entire week. The sponsors of the "name the drink" contest included one of Nicaragua's premier tour operators, Solentiname Tours, the Association of Restaurants, Intur,

Canatur (Nicaragua's chamber of tourism), Flor de Cana (all drinks had to be made with Flor's rum), InterContinental Hotels and Morgan's Rock Hotel. The gala dinner, when the winning name was announced took place at the InterContinental Hotel with much fanfare and further "tastings" by the guests. The winning name, "El Guarapo," drew rounds of applause and lots of toasts only to be withdrawn a week later when it was discovered "El Guarapo" was already being used in some other Latin American countries. So, the new name is, drum roll, please, "El Macua.", known in English as the Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift.

The Flor de Cana Rum Distillery, providers of all the rum, also makes an interesting excursion for tourists and includes, of course, rum tasting. Rum can be taken on board for flights home as long as it's put in checked bags. It comes well protected in boxes.

Other News

Nicaraguans also have their ears flapping to catch what's going on with Panama, one of their southern neighbors. It seems the famous Panama Canal is not wide enough to permit passage of new mega ships now being built and Panama needs to take some measures, like widen passage-ways. Nicaraguans are saying, "Since the canal linking the Pacific and Atlantic oceans was originally supposed to be in Nicaragua (via the San Juan River and

Lake Nicaragua) and another canal is actually needed to handle increased sea traffic and larger ships, help us get international support to build an \$18 billion canal linking the two oceans in our part of the world and thereby have a second canal to handle the new mega ships."

It seems that thirty years before France started digging the Panama Canal and before the U.S. took over the project in 1904, the Gold Route, across Nicaragua's Rio San Juan area was opened. This was expected to be the ultimate link for shipping between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and a gateway to California's gold fields. In other words, had this waterway crossing been built instead of the Panama Canal, we might have been talking about the, "Nicaragua Canal" all these years, shortened to the, "Nica Canal."

Time Marches On

In the meantime, while the above debate rages, Nicaragua's excellent tour operators are busy showing off the many interesting attractions in Nicaragua, which includes, among other things, spectacular beaches, volcanoes, surfing, diving, fishing, handicraft markets, birding, thermal springs, rivers, lakes, flora and fauna.

Golfing

Nicaragua is also going all out to develop golf communities. One is called, Seaside Mariana, Spa & Golf Resort in a spectacular setting along the Pacific Ocean and not far from Barcelo's beautiful Montelimar resort, with a Jack Nicklaus design course, and the other, is the Pacifica Beach & Golf Resort along the Pacific Coast near Managua with a Tom Haugen golf course design.

Scuba, Surfing, Sport Fishing

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Pacific coast near San Juan del Sur and in the freshwater crater lake of the Apoyo volcano. Diving off the Pacific coast is for more experienced divers. The coast is also the location of Nicaragua's first locally owned PADI dive shop.

The most popular site for surfing is a 37-mile stretch of beaches called San Juan del Sur on the southwest coast. One of the best areas is called, "Maderas," that gained fame in 2003 in a worldwide quest by "Quicksilver's, The Crossing to find the perfect wave.

Excellent sport fishing is available in the oceans on both sides of Nicaragua and in the lakes, rivers and lagoons. The International Sports Fishing tournament is held in September on the San Juan River and on Ometepe Island, the world's 10th largest island located in a freshwater lake.

Nicaragua has excellent hotels, lodges

and resorts and polite and friendly people. English is widely spoken and the country is known for having the best food in Central America. One of the most delightful restaurants that comes with not only excellent food but is in a spectacular, romantic setting and perfect for a romantic dinner or special events, when folkloric dance troupes perform, is in an old coffee plantation called, "Restaurante InterMezzo del Bosque".

It is just a short drive up the mountain from Managua. Other interesting restaurants include "Cocina de Dona Haydee" and "La Marseillaise." However, the country has many good restaurants where your clients can get plenty to eat for very little money and that goes for hotel restaurants, also.

Reasons to Visit

Solentiname Tours, in their excellent

brochure, Discover Nicaragua, list ten reasons to discover Nicaragua. Included are security, friendly, undiscovered, indigenous cultures, exceptional beauty, variety, history and traditions, good value, accessible and beautiful Granada, the oldest colonial city in the Americas. And all are valid. General manager of Solentiname is Immanuel Zerger.

New Call Center

The Nicaragua Tourism Board has announced a new information toll free call center with a live voice 24-hours a day, seven days a week and in English and Spanish. You can also request brochures.

**Nicaragua Tourism Board,
888-SEE-NICA (888-733-6422)
www.visitnicaragua.com
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UNUSUALLY WARM WEATHER INSPIRES OFFBEAT PROMOTION

Don Buynack, President of OptionsTravel.com in Des Plaines, IL, has announced a new offbeat advertisement billed as "The El Niño Winter Sale" in response to the unusually warm winter that's hurting business.

"Sick and tired of 59° winter days?" the ad asks. "Escape the winter heat wave with travel deals to famous cold spots such as International Falls, MN and Fairbanks, AK." Readers are then encouraged to visit the website GlobalWarmingGetaways.com.

The promotion is the brainchild of Don Buynack, President of OptionsTravel.com, who decided to have some fun and maybe drum up a little business at the same time.

"Usually at this time of year we're running ads encouraging people to travel south to escape the bitter Chicago winter," says Buynack. "Well this year, there is no bitter

Chicago winter. Instead of shivering and bundling up, people are out playing golf and having picnics. It's crazy! I don't know what's going on...all I can tell you is, it's not good for business."

During a brainstorming session, the idea came up that maybe there are a men and women who actually miss winter. That became the central theme of the promotion, as well as the inspiration for the destination choices (where average January temperatures range from 6° F to -8° F). The copy calls out to people who long for "the joys of a bracing wind, frostbite toes, and snow down your back."

Not to leave anyone out, the ad also offers choices for those "who insist on even warmer weather than Chicago." Visitors to the web site will also find fun travel information about the cold weather destinations featured in the ad.

Founded in 1993, OptionsTravel.com provides both online and offline travel services to leisure travelers, and travel management and support to corporate clients. OptionsTravel.com, 847-803-4444, www.GlobalWarmingGetaways.com

A WELLNESS PROGRAM FOR THE ADVENTUROUS AT PLAYA NICUESA RAINFOREST LODGE IN COSTA RICA

Wellness lodges and adventure eco lodges in Costa Rica are commonly considered worlds apart. However, now Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge, situated in one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world – the Golfo Dulce/Osa Peninsula region of Costa Rica- will be integrating both seemingly opposite approaches into one unique vacation experience. Guests accustomed to the eco lodge's assorted offering of both sea and rainforest multisport activities will now be able to also enjoy yoga classes and massage therapies imparted by an ongoing schedule of visiting world-class instructors.

Co-owner Donna Butler explains: "It's a wellness program for the adventurous. We want our guests to holistically energize themselves through yoga when they wake

up to be ready for an active day of hiking and kayaking. Then, be able to wind down with soothing massage therapies when the sun sets, and enjoy wonderful healthy tropical cuisine made with organically grown local goods. The multisport adventure vacation experiences our guests will discover throughout their stay at Nicuesa will take care of awakening their spirit."

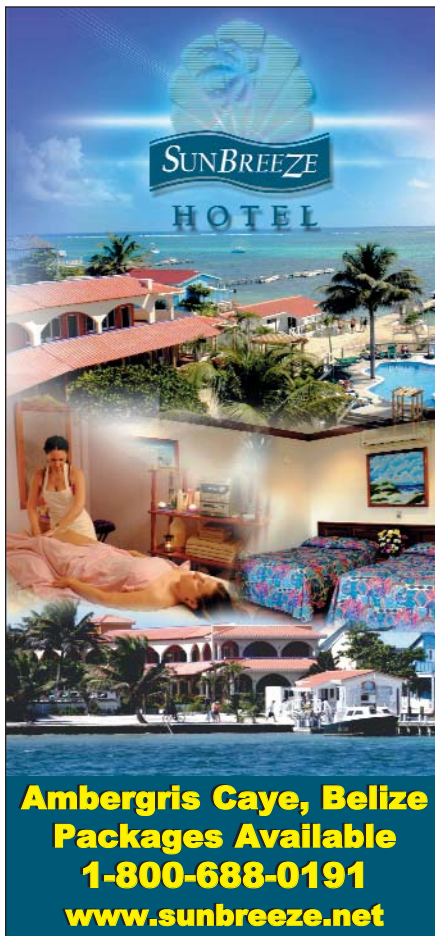
The 165-acre private natural preserve which nestles the eco lodge and its exotic wildlife, along with the remote beaches of Golfo Dulce and the rainforest of the Piedras Blancas National Park, offer up the perfect balance for the internal calm that the Wellness Resident Instructor program seeks to provide.

The new Wellness Resident Instructor program is comprised of certified and highly experienced massage and yoga instructors from North America. It began January 16 with the participation of Yoga Alliance member Eva Lev; followed by U.S./Ireland based Catherine Paulson who teaches the many facets of asana and pranayama (postures and breathwork). A constantly updated schedule, as well as information on rates and special packages currently offered, can be found on the Nicuesa eco lodge website.

A five night Multisport Adventure Vacation package starts at \$1,025 in the Mango Guesthouse, and \$1,125 in a Private Cabin. It includes daily nature and adventure tours, meals and use of sports equipment. For a limited time Nicuesa is including two free yoga classes with this five, six or seven night package.

Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge is an environmentally sensitive eco lodge set on a 165-acre private preserve in the undeveloped Pacific Coast of Southern Costa Rica. The lodge embraces conservation and harmony with the natural environment and caters to travelers interested in ecotourism, nature, adventure and sports. It is located within the Piedras Blancas National Park, and fronts the coastline of the Golfo Dulce.

Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge, 866-504-8116, www.nicuesalodge.com



VILLAS AT VICTORIA HOUSE NOW OPEN



At Victoria House in Ambergris Caye, Belize, the new phase, "Villas at Victoria House" is completed and ready to go. This luxury addition comprises of seven one and two bedroom units; four Infinity suites in Victoria House plantation style; and three, single story two bedroom villas with traditional thatch roofs. Each Villa has mahogany poster beds, travertine bathrooms, romantic indoor/outdoor shower gardens and extensive verandahs, perfect for relaxing while taking in the views. All accommodations front a new 70 foot long infinity edge waterfall pool with views to the beach and Caribbean Sea.

Victoria House has also added a plunge pool to Casa Playa Blanca, on the beach front and only steps from the waters edge. Victoria House now has four pools. Victoria House, 800-247-5159, www.victoria-house.com

VILLA PREMIERE HOTEL & SPA AWARDED AAA FOUR-DIAMOND AWARD

The Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa has once again garnered the celebrated AAA Four-Diamond Award.

"We are honored to be receiving this award for the second year in a row," said Sasa Milojevic, Managing Director for Villa Premiere. "We strive every day to live up to this esteemed recognition, which not only acknowledges our superb facilities but also our commitment to excellence in service. To this end, we have recently upgraded several of our suites to Spa Suites, added a new Oxygen Bar to the Spa Services and

now work with three Butlers, three Concierges and one Chief Concierge, all of whom have received intensive training to better serve our guests."

"AAA Four Diamond Award winners such as Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa know the language of quality as they consistently deliver premier experiences, complete with superior personal service, first-class amenities, and impressive surroundings," said Tony Perrone AAA Director for Mexico. Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa joins a select group of AAA Four Diamond winners; in fact only 3.25 percent of the estimated 32,000 AAA Rated lodgings and 3.21 percent of the estimated 28,000 restaurants are awarded this designation each year. Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa is among 74 other 2007 AAA FourDiamond winners for Mexico, and is the only such rated hotel closest to the center of Puerto Vallarta.

The prestigious Four-Diamond recognition is defined by AAA as a hotel that meets or exceeds the following description: "ex-

ceptional, significantly exceeding requirements in the physical and operational categories of judgment; offers luxurious accommodations, as well as extra amenities; the management and staff, housekeeping and maintenance rank well above the average."

Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa is set beachfront, nearby to downtown Puerto Vallarta and located within walking distance of the colonial district and its famous boardwalk, the Malecon. The 83-suite resort boasts ocean views, full service spa, eclectic atmosphere, and first class personalized service. To jumpstart the high season, Villa Premiere has announced the opening of eight grand new Oceanfront Spa Suites. Guests of these new suites (which include a living room and a dining room) will enjoy full ocean views, a Jacuzzi and a SPA atmosphere, which includes a private balcony perfect for meditation.

Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa, 877-886-9176, www.premiereonline.com.mx

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TIANGUIS TURISTICO 2007 TO BE HELD MARCH 25 - 28

Mexico's Tourism Tianguis 2007 (Tianguis Turistico 2007) - the country's largest tourism trade fair - will be taking place on March 25 to 28 in Acapulco, Mexico. The Pacific resort city will, once again, be converted into a meeting place for hundreds of international tour operators, travel agents and other travel industry representatives seeking to purchase Mexico travel products and services.

A one-stop shop for tourism industry representatives looking to assemble travel packages to Mexico, the Tourism Tianguis will give travel professionals the opportunity to learn about and purchase the country's vast array of tourism products and services, attend seminars and networking events and engage in one-on-one appointments with tourism service providers.

"Mexico continues to stand out as one of the most visited countries in the world on account of its cultural diversity, variety of landscapes and friendly people," says Francisco Xavier Lopez Mena, newly appointed CEO of the Mexico Tourism Board. "Tianguis is our country's most important trade fair, showcasing to key industry leaders the virtually limitless number of tourist activities and destinations that Mexico has to offer."

One of Tianguis' main attractions are the one-on-one appointments registered attendees can schedule with exhibitors via a high-tech, online system. The program allows for the scheduling of thousands of pre-established business meetings at the more than 400 business suites provided at the fair.

The term tianguis comes from the Nahuatl (Aztec-language) word tianquiztli, meaning marketplace. The great Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where Mexico City stands today, was home to one of the region's most active prehispanic marketplaces. The tianguis were and remain one of the most strongly-rooted customs of the Mexican people.

Tianguis 2007,

www.tianguisturistico.com.mx

RIU HOTELS & RESORTS LAUNCHES RIU SANTA FE



Riu Hotels & Resorts has officially broken ground on its newest resort, Riu Santa Fe in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. The Resort is scheduled to open in November 2007. Construction is expected to take 12 months and cost over \$135 million. This marks the largest single capital investment ever made by the company.

Riu Santa Fe will be RIU's second resort in Los Cabos and its 13th in Mexico, situated in close proximity to RIU's other five-star property, the Riu Palace Cabo San Lucas. Located just outside downtown Cabo San Lucas, the Riu Santa Fe will be the company's largest resort, featuring 902 guestrooms and suites spread across a beachfront property. Designed in a distinctive architectural style intended to reflect its Mexican location, the hotel will offer RIU's legendary all-inclusive amenities and renowned personalized service. Riu Santa Fe will provide its guests impressive facilities, limitless activities and numerous all-inclusive gourmet restaurants and bars.

Equally suited to meet the needs of business guests, Riu Santa Fe will also include three conference rooms.

Riu Hotels & Resorts, 888-666-8816,
www.Riu.com

TESORO RESORTS CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY; ANNOUNCES MANAGEMENT CHANGES

Tesoro Resorts is celebrating the accomplishments of its first year in operation, and has announced two pivotal management changes at their Los Cabos and Ixtapa hotel properties.

After two years in his position as General

Manager of Tesoro Ixtapa and almost 30 years of experience in the hotel industry, Manuel del Callejo brings his hospitality expertise to the position of General Manager of Tesoro Los Cabos. The appointment, which officially took place on December 15, 2006, comes in response to Mr. Callejo's superb track record at Tesoro Ixtapa and on-going commitment to the Tesoro brand.

The position he leaves behind has been entrusted to Hildorfo Medina, a 38-year veteran of the hotel industry with training in both Mexican and U.S. markets. Mr. Medina, who got his start as the front office manager at Acapulco's storied El Presidente Hotel, has managed nearly 20 resorts, to include work with Hyatt Hotels and Posadas de México Group, among others. He continues to demonstrate his vast knowledge of chain hotel operations in his role as General Manager of Tesoro Ixtapa, which began on December 1, 2006.

Many of Tesoro's new guest-oriented concepts are already in motion. As the New Year begins, the hotel chain celebrates a number of achievements at all three Pacific Coast properties.

At Tesoro Los Cabos nearly all 286 rooms have been updated and refurbished, and plans to add a rooftop restaurant and lounge are underway. Additionally, Pirate's Bay, the kids' pirate-themed waterpark at the 331-room Tesoro Manzanillo is open. The park features a giant waterslide, a number of activities pools and a recreational area. The hotel's Adobe and Agave Tequila Cantina restaurants have also undergone substantial renovations.

And for Tesoro Ixtapa, yearend marked an increase in rooms from 170 to 205, thanks to the reacquisition of time shares, full-time ownership villas and rental units.

California-based company, Steadfast Hotel Management, which launched Tesoro Resorts earlier this year, has committed to grow the chain's inventory to eight properties in Mexico - five Tesoro hotels and three boutique properties - and possibly more in Central America over the next five years.

Tesoro Resorts, 866-99TESORO,
info@tesororesorts.com,
www.TesoroResorts.com

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