



SAN SALVADOR

El Salvador's capital, San Salvador, is a modern city of wide boulevards and narrow streets, outdoor markets, government buildings, high-rises, monuments, an exuberant nightlife, museums and other cultural institutions. And all set against the backdrop of San Salvador volcano. The city is surrounded by shantytowns as well as affluent suburbs with restaurants and large shopping malls. Peaceful settings such as the botanic garden of Parque Cuscutlan provide a break from the city's hectic pace.

San Salvador is the first landfall site of Christopher Columbus on his initial voyage of discovery in 1492. Four separate monuments mark the exact spot Columbus came ashore, however, it is generally regarded that he landed at Long Bay where a big stone cross stands. Called Guanahani by the native Lucayan Indians, Columbus renamed the island San

Salvador or "Holy Saviour," noting in his journal, ***"The beauty of these islands surpasses that of any other and as much as the day surpasses the night in splendour."***

However, the island subsequently became the headquarters of the buccaneer George Watling and carried his name (Watling Island) until 1925, reflecting his great influence.

The pace of life here has changed little over the centuries. Today, San Salvador is the ultimate escape. The island has miles of pristine and secluded beaches, and an emerald-blue sea of such sparkling clarity that divers have visibility of up to 150 feet. Challenging reef and wreck diving can be undertaken at High Cay, Low Cay, and Middle Cay.

ANTIGUO CUSCATLAN: THE GATE TO SAN SALVADOR

This city Antiquo Cuscatlan, which is adjacent to San Salvador, belongs to the department of La Libertad.

Cuzcatán in Nahuatl means "Place of jewelry and precious stones". The name was changed to Cuzcatlán by Mexican Indians who guided conquerors throughout the region and decades later changed it to Cuscatlan, after dropping the letter "z" for an "s". Archaeological investigations have proven the place was once an indigenous community, due to the artifacts found when building residential areas such as Madreselva and Santa Elena (Close to where the US Embassy is).

Antiquo Cuscatlan once belonged to San Salvador, but was transferred to the department of La Libertad in 1865. Two major private universities are located in Antiquo Cuscatlan: "Dr. Jose Matias Delgado" and "Jose Simeon Cañas, UCA". I was in the UCA where the Jesuit priests were assassinated in 1989, during the civil war.

Also in Antiquo Cuscatlan: "El Espino" a coffee plantation area, formerly known as "the lungs of San Salvador" and the Botanical garden "Plan de la Laguna" an ecological park located inside an extinct volcano crater.

One of Antiquo Cuscatlan major festivities takes place on December 12th, when Catholics commemorate the virgin of Guadalupe appearing to the Indian boy Juan Diego (now Saint Juan Diego) in Mexico. The image of the virgin was originally located in Santa Tecla; since 1961 this image was taken to the basilica of Guadalupe. Antiquo Cuscatlan serves as the main gate into San Salvador when coming from the west.



SAN MIGUEL

The city of San Miguel is the third most important city of El Salvador, located to the east at 138 km from San Salvador on the Pan-American road CA 1, which runs from east to west throughout the country. Another way to get there is through the coastal road (CA 2) which runs parallel to the Pacific Ocean.



The mountain range Tecapa- Chinameca, formed the volcano Chaparrastique.

The city was well known for the amount of garrobos (a kind of iguana) that lived in the city.

San Miguel is where the highest temperatures in El Salvador have been recorded; sometimes reaching the 43 degrees Celsius during summer time.

NATIONAL PARK MONTECRISTO

National Park Montecristo is located at 125 km North West of San Salvador.

Montecristo is a very popular destination for the adventurous travelers. Declared a national park in order to protect its flora and fauna, it was the first protected area in El Salvador.

National Park Montecristo is a cloud forest located in the northwest region of the country, close to the border of Guatemala and Honduras; its 2,000 hectares include three important mountains: Montecristo, Miramundo and El Brujo, at 2,418 m ASL.

Montecristo offers camping areas, a botanical garden, and rustic pathways which will take you far into the humid forest.



One of its main attractions is the trees which can reach up to 30 meters of height, like cypresses, oaks and pines. The Garden of the Hundred Years (Jardín de los Cien Años) holds an incredible exhibit of orchids.

Some of the fauna found in the area includes black shrew-mouse, squirrels, porcupines, white tailed deer and pumas (but you must have a bit of luck to be able to see the puma).

There is a time of the year during which more than 275 endemic species of birds can be seen, among those migratory birds that are flying away from the cold up north.

To access the park you should drive a four wheel drive vehicle, and during the winter it can take up to three hours from San Salvador.

NATIONAL PARK CERRO VERDE

Since the National Park Cerro Verde reopened its doors to the public in December 2002 it offers visitors many new changes. The Ministry of Tourism has made a big effort together with the guides in order to provide of better quality services. They offer an interpretation of the environment in an educational and unique way. The guides are local people from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Nahuatl name for Cerro Verde is Cuntetepeque.

Main attractions: pathways, sight spots, flora and fauna, orchid nursery.

Services: Basic, toilets, parking lot.

Food: Cafeteria.

Others: Local Guides.

Entrance fees: \$1.00 per person and \$1.00 per car.

Altitude: The Park is located at 2030 meters above sea level, in the western part of the country, between the departments of Santa Ana and Sonsonate.

How to get there: Those traveling in their own vehicle take the road that from San Salvador takes you to Santa Ana, when you get to "El Congo" make a left or if coming from Sonsonate take the detour "Puerta Roja". By bus: Take the bus Ni 201 at the west terminal going to Santa Ana, then route 248 going to Cerro Verde.



EL PITAL

El Pital is located at 93 km to the north of San Salvador, at 7 km from San Ignacio, in the department of Chalatenango.

El Pital is one of the national parks where we can enjoy the climate, vegetation and amazing views with no need to request permission in advance; one fee entrance is required though. El Pital rises at 2730 m above sea level - the highest point in El Salvador.

Many outdoor activities can be carried out like: bird watching, trekking, mountain biking, camping, etc. or simply enjoying the view. You can see most of the volcanoes in the Eastern and Central zone of the country, in addition to the city of New Ocotepeque in the sister republic of Honduras.



This is an area with a cloudy microclimate. The variety of orchids growing here is impressive due to the perfect climate: high concentration of humidity and abundance of vegetation.

Local people have the particularity of being white skinned, green eyed and most have blond hair; whereas in the rest of the country the color of skin, eyes and hair is different; all these due to the settlements and mix of races during the conquest.

El Pital is one of the best places for camping, which is if you enjoy cold nights inside a tent. Some new hotels have recently been built if you need more comfort, among them "El Pital Highland", on the road to the top of the mountain.