Honduras

Country Facts
Population: 7,792,854
Languages: Spanish, English
Predominant Religions: Predominantly Christian (Roman Catholic)
Time Zone: Six hours behind Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 110 volts
Telephone Codes: 504, country code

Introduction:
Honduras offers travel diversity while sharing some of the region’s less admirable travel qualities. Roads can be rough, travel slow and amenities basic. Even though Honduras has not had destabilizing insurrections of the sort that El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua have suffered, conditions are far from ideal. Crime and a lack of attractions make the big cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula places you’ll want to avoid or to pass through quickly.

That said, Honduras is doing much to make its best features more accessible. Travelers who don’t mind a bit of adventure will likely relish the country’s unpolished charm.

Compassion in Honduras:
Compassion International’s work in Honduras began in 1974. As of 2010 more than 40,470 children participate in more than 170 child development centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 38 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Honduran children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Handshakes are the common greeting among both men and women. Handshakes are gentle, almost limp, and somewhat prolonged, except among Hondurans already involved in and familiar with international business standards.
- Titles are important and foreign visitors should call their business counterparts by their title and last name unless requested to do otherwise.
- The main meal in Honduras is eaten at lunchtime. Meals are eaten in a relaxed, informal manner and Honduran guests may arrive anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour "late."
- Hands are always kept above the table and Hondurans eat with the fork in the right hand and the knife in the left.
- Fresh bananas, pineapples, citrus fruits, coconuts, mangoes, melons and avocados are often served sliced and ready to eat.
- Favorite dishes include Tapado (stew made from beef, vegetables and coconut milk), nacatamales (pork tamales) and mondongo (beef knuckles and tripe). During the Christmas season, torrejas, a French toast-style treat coated with cinnamon and sugar is popular. Sodas often accompany the meal and coffee follows. If you cannot eat everything, your host may offer to wrap up the leftovers to take with you.
• North American fast foods, such as pizza and hamburgers, are becoming popular in larger cities. Fine dining restaurants are difficult to find since many are semi-private "clubs" open only to wealthy members and their guests.
• Expect to pay a 10- to 15-percent tip for restaurant service.
• Government statistics show that one third of the workforce in Honduras is female and that many women operate businesses, but that doesn’t paint a clear picture. Most of the women included in these numbers work in free trade zone factories producing garments for export.
• Foreign women are expected to refrain from aggressive or confrontational behavior. Making comments or talking about the working conditions of Honduran women is one of the subjects considered "confrontational" by Honduran males. Such assertive behavior often proves counterproductive because it not only brands the female as "aggressive," but also causes men in her group to be considered "weak" or "unmanly." Honduran males react to the so-called "aggressive" female by being more polite and courteous in her presence.
• In rural areas, Christians are still very conservative. Women don’t wear pants, shorts or make up. Most local churches don’t endorse dancing, smoking or drinking alcohol, especially in rural areas.

Dos and Don’ts:
• Don’t be alarmed by unexpected loud noises — Hondurans often celebrate events with firecrackers, sometimes in the early morning hours.
• Do bring plenty of insect repellent for the pesky mosquitoes and no-see-ums if you are stopping at the Bay Islands or along the north coast.
• Don’t buy coral products or seashells — it contributes to the destruction of the coral reef.

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
Crime — including purse snatching, pickpocketing and armed robbery — is a continuing concern in both urban and rural areas in Honduras, so be cautious. The greatest danger is in the large cities of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Robberies and assaults have also occurred in Tela and Trujillo, but state security forces active in those areas have had some success in deterring crime. The Bay Islands and Copan pose fewer dangers — petty theft being the most common — but as more money comes to the islands, crimes of opportunity are increasing.

Be aware of your surroundings and avoid deserted areas, especially after dark. Urban areas (especially neighborhoods outside of commercial districts) can be particularly dangerous because of gang activity, and isolated beaches can be unsafe in the evening. Central America has seen a sharp rise in sex offenses and violent crime. Single female travelers should be extremely cautious when venturing into unknown areas. Avoid deserted stretches of beach and always stick to marked trails. Avoid flashy jewelry or watches, and follow local norms. Highway robberies remain another danger. Honduran police officers have been known to stop random motorists and charge them with speeding to get bribes.
During Nicaragua’s civil war, land mines were planted on both sides of the Honduras-Nicaragua border. Many have been cleared, but use caution. The Honduran government has created a special police force to help protect visitors. There are tourism police offices in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Tela, La Ceiba and on Roatan.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them [purse, wallet, backpack, etc.] on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

Health:
Do not drink the tap water: Stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks. Bottled water (agua purificada) is available everywhere. Most first-class hotels and restaurants either treat their water supply or provide bottled water as a matter of course, but be sure to ask. Street vendors, stores, fast-food chains and many others also sell small 12-ounce bags of purified water for just a few centavos. Be aware of local vendors trying to sell unfiltered tap water in unlabeled plastic bags.

Sanitary conditions can cause problems, so be careful what you eat: Avoid salads unless the ingredients have been disinfected or at least washed in purified water. Peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, and avoid unpasteurized dairy products. Lots of food available at roadside stands may look good, and some of it may be, but it’s best to steer clear if you are not confident it is fresh and fully cooked. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, especially if it’s included on a package tour or recommended by a guide or someone else you trust.

Because of the presence of malaria and dengue fever, avoid mosquito bites by using a repellent with Deet. You should also see a doctor about anti-malaria medication before your visit. Leptospirosis, a bacterial disease found in water contaminated with animal urine, is present in Honduras; take care to minimize contact with standing water in rural areas. Avoid contact with animals because of the danger of rabies: If you are even nipped by an animal, consult a doctor. Prevent skin infections by disinfecting and covering even the smallest wound. Sand fleas are a constant on the Bay Islands; they are more of an annoyance than a health threat, but use some kind of repellent to avoid getting welts. AIDS is prevalent, especially in San Pedro Sula, which has a very high incidence of the disease.
Bring all needed prescription medicine and over-the-counter drugs. Have a doctor’s note with you for any medication you take. Hospital supplies are not always available. Surgery should be completed in other countries, if possible. Each town of any size has at least one drugstore open 24 hours a day. The duty is rotated. Make sure that you have adequate out-of-country health insurance before leaving home.

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Anti-malaria medication, tetanus/diphtheria, typhoid, adult polio, and Hepatitis A vaccinations may be recommended.

Money:
Honduras’ official currency is the lempira. U.S. dollars are also widely accepted in major hotels and restaurants. Small denomination bills are the easiest to cash. Major banks will exchange traveler’s checks issued in U.S. funds and give cash advances on credit cards. ATMs also give advances on some foreign credit cards.

Weather:
During February through April, days are warm [80s F / 28-32 C] and dry, and nights are cool [60s F / 16-22 C]. Mid-December to February is dry and pleasant in the interior, but can be a bit chilly. Mid-September to mid-December, it’s cool with occasional rain, and the rainy season is mid-May to mid-September [heavy showers fall once or twice a day, but the rest of the day can be sunny].

Dress:
Pack casual summer clothing for sightseeing in the cities and light outdoor-wear for exploring parks and archaeological sites. You might also want to bring one dressy outfit for dining out in the cities. Bring a suitable pair of walking shoes or hiking boots and a waterproof shell if you’re planning to hike in the coastal or mountain forests. Sturdy shoes are also essential for the hills and cobblestones of the colonial towns. Hats and sunscreen are recommended.

As in most of Latin America, men do not wear shorts outside the coastal regions, and women (especially married ones) generally wear less-revealing clothing than is typical in the United States. On the Bay Islands, however, beachwear is fine for most any situation.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.