

El Salvador Road Trip Report

By Linda and Chuck on s/v JACARANDA (www.jacarandajourney.com)

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El Salvador is the size of Maryland - nothing is very far away
Most Americans only know of the brutal 12 year civil war (in which the U.S. - through Ronald Reagan and the CIA - played a big problematic part)
Still relatively undiscovered as a tourist destination so the whole country is off the beaten path

The best thing about the country: the gentle and warm Salvadoreños
The most densely populated and most deforested country in Central America
Unfortunately, trash and litter mars many a beautiful landscape, streetscape, and nature spot.

TRANSPORTATION (from Bahia del Sol (Estero de Jaltepeque) where we left the boat on one of Santos' moorings)

Car Rental -

We used Hertz and they were great (several travel forums advised against Alamo).
Booking online was cheaper than using the hotel reception (\$411 quoted)
We use our special American Express program for collision/damage insurance and declined the rental car company's (but we paid for their liability insurance)
\$194 for one week, \$15 delivery from the airport, plus liability insurance = \$318 total (\$28/day rental; \$12/day insurance plus \$40 delivery fee)
Driving and parking was no problem but there are no good road maps

ITINERARY

- Drive through Costa Del Sol to get to Highway CA 2W
- Travel west along the coast on Highway 2 past Costa del Balsamo and the surfing beaches; stop at the lookouts or at one of the restaurants lining the road with ocean views. Playa El Tunco was beautiful.
- Turn north on CA 12S through Sonsonate to the Ruta de Las Flores Tourist Route (a tourism device, not an actual driving route). The string of small towns making up the Ruta de Las Flores are Juayua, Concepcion de Ataco, Apaneca, Nahuizalco, and Salcoatitlan. Use Juayua as a base.
- Drive north west through Ahuachapan to Santa Ana, Maya Ruins of Tuzmal
- Lago de Coatepeque
- Suchitoto
- Alegría (eastern El Salvador)

Ruta de as Flores

Juayúa (we used this as a base of exploration in the Ruta de Las Flores)
Stayed at Casa Mazeta Hostal - funky place but great people

Darren, Seka, Lippy and Chiquita (their 2 dogs)

1 Calle Poniente #22

(503) 7252-8498

<http://casamazeta.com>

http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g660505-d1997516-Reviews-Casa_Mazeta-Juayua_Sonsonate_Department.html

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJc4_wxGYTU

\$20 for private room w/shared bath; \$25 for garden room with private bath

We liked the more private garden room.

\$9/dorm bed

Los Chorros de la Calera - beautiful waterfall with pool to bathe in; about a 30 minute walk from the hostel - we hired Darren's guide to take us and get a commentary on tree identification, etc. Lovely except for the trash.

Feria Gastronomica (food festival) that is celebrated each and every weekend, the whole year round. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v2baFFt6M4&feature=fvwp>

Pupuseria Esmeralda - best pupusas

El Cadeño Coffe shop and restaurant

Ataco - lovely town to visit for a few hours. Beautiful wall murals. Nice central square and church; has a mirador lookout.

El Botón - French Restaurant - 2 Ave. Sur #19 in the center (Barrio El Calvario);

503-2450-5066; el.boton.ataco@gmail.com

Nahuizalco - Sunday is market day and is busy. Wicker crafts

Lago de Coatepeque

The Lake is beautiful but large estates owned by San Salvadorians behind high walls precludes access and views to the lake in most places. Very rustic road to the guest house.

Amacuilco Guest House

\$26/night for the double with shared bath - elevated room with patio and great view of the lake. The bath was down the stairs and underneath the room.

There is also access to the lake from the guest house property and a restaurant on a dock nextdoor. We ate at the "New York Pizza" restaurant on the guest house property since there was nothing around this place but a few street food stalls. It's pretty isolated.

Suchitoto

This colonial town seems to be the jewel of El Salvador's tourism (if you're not a surfer). February is a Cultural Festival with music in the Teatro Alejandro Cotto (resident music patron and film director)

Los Almendros de San Lorenzo

<http://www.hotelsalvador.com>

4a, calle poniente next to PNC - Tel. (503) 2335 1200

Owner: Pascal Lebailly, with his partner:

Joaquin Rodezno-Munguia, Ambassador of El Salvador in Europe (Brussels, Rome, Paris)

Double - \$89/night with gourmet breakfast (\$210 for 2 nights w/tax). We stayed in room #5

Double Suite - \$115/night

Townhouse - \$140/night

Lonely Planet "...Without a doubt one of the best places to stay in El Salvador." (p.381)

Great restaurant too - averaged \$36 for dinner for 2

(Total Feb. 14, 15 - \$285.00)

Galeria de Pascal across the street from the hotel - art and craft display

Teatro Las Ruinas - Alejandro Cotto has a wonderful small art gallery of El Salvadorian artists (Museo de Obras Maestras de la Pintura Nacional)

Villa Balanza - cheaper accommodation alternative; nice restaurant; place is like a funky museum (near Parque San Martin)

Las Puertas - hotel/restaurant on the Plaza Central

Lago Suchitlan is a short walk away

Alegría

Lush garden mountaintop village with incredible views; not much tourist traffic.

Cartegena Cabins \$60/night

Fantastic vista over half of El Salvador in a flower-filled setting (get cabin #3, 4, or 5)

Sunday is market day in the quaint Parque Central

Do not eat at the Cartegena restaurant - the food is terrible.

Eat at La Fonda de Alegria instead.

Hostal y Cafe Entre Piedras (on the Plaza) is a good cheaper alternative place to stay

TO READ/OTHER RESOURCES:

Movie - "Innocent Voices" - moving drama based on true story of 12 year old boy in the El Salvadorian conflict

FOR THE NEXT TIME

Because of higher priority personal interests or time constraints we didn't even get to:
Perquin - headquarters of guerrillas and the FMLN; war memorial; Mozote
San Sebastian - textiles and weaving
Ilopango - pottery miniatures

OTHER PLACES:

San Salvador

The capital city of El Salvador, San Salvador is a big, polluted urban area and a warren of streets with aggressive drivers: we were traumatized when driving with a local cab driver at rush hour.

A city of armed guards and razor wire, and large shopping centers side by side
Two great museums - Art Museum and David Guzman Museum (Archeology)

Hotels:

We like to stay in the San Benito area

BandB: Villa Serena - Escalon - \$37 (with rally discount)

Meson de Maria Hostal and Hotel at the Tica Bus station in San Benito

Restaurants

Hola

Shaws

Sal & Pimienta – Blvd. del Hipódromo #572; Col. San Benito; 2263-8006;

salypimientagourmet.com; wonderful little bistro tastefully done interiors and garden.

Restaurant in Guzman Museum in SS - Pascal's restaurant

El Paseo Shopping Center for Super Selectos Supermarket

La Union (near Golfo de Fonseca)

Restaurant at Hotel Comfort Inn Real - Carretera La Union