



Excursion Guide

Guatemala & Central America

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Read Aloud Folktale, Legend or Myth:

“The Creation of Plants, Animals and Fish” or “The Story of the Weasel Who Helped People Find Corn” from *The Honey Jar* by Rigoberta Menchú with Dante Liano (Groundwood Books, 2006): Menchú is a Nobel Peace Prize winner, recognized for her human rights and advocacy work. This book is a collection of stories she learned from her grandparents. “The Creation of Plants, Animals and Fish” tells how Grandmother Moon, Grandfather Sun, Mother Earth, and Father Sky worked together to create the world. It is a joyful story that celebrates the beauty of life on earth. “The Story of the Weasel Who Helped People Find Corn” is about a kind-hearted weasel who shows the hungry Maya people where to find corn. She also teaches them a lesson about gratitude and generosity. Both stories are told through narration and dialogue, and have elements of humor.

Remember to:

- Greet each person individually
- Use a globe or large map to show each person the starting point and destination
- Engage people in informal conversation
- Include supplemental materials such as music, souvenirs, coloring pages, or food to enhance the program



Five Facts About Central America

1. Central America is a thin strip of land that connects Mexico and South America. On one side is the Pacific Ocean, and on the other side is the Caribbean Sea.
2. The tallest Mayan pyramid, Temple IV, is located in Tikal, Guatemala. It was built about 1300 years ago and is 230 feet high.
3. Mayans used a red dye made from the Cochineal bug to color their cloth. Today this dye, called carmine, is used to color food and lipstick.
4. The Panama Canal joins the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. To pass through the canal, ships must pay a toll. The highest toll ever charged for a single ship was \$375,600.
5. In Nicaragua, the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve protects 2 million acres of rainforest and is home to harpy eagles, jaguars, pumas, tapirs, macaws, 150,000 species of insects, and over 20,000 indigenous people.



Annotated Bibliography

Unless otherwise specified, the non-fiction books listed here have many color photographs and images (but not cartoon-style illustrations) and they do not have an intimidating or distracting amount of text on the page. Although many of the selections are children's books, they are not obviously juvenile in their layout and illustrations.

Top Selections

Aztec, Inca & Maya (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2011): This book introduces readers to these three cultures through many photographs of art, religious objects, and household objects. There are also images of marketplace stalls, a typical Mesoamerican city, and a cross-section of a Mayan temple. Each two-page unit includes photographs and an introductory paragraph of text. Topics include religious life, arts and crafts, leisure activities, hunting and farming, and home life. *Pages 36-37 discuss the Inca and Aztec practices of human sacrifice. A human skull and a small illustration from Codex Magliabecchiano depicting a sacrifice are pictured. Facilitators should use their judgment about whether this book is appropriate for their program.*

Costa Rica: An Ecotraveler's Guide by Hannah Robinson (Interlink Books, 2006): This book is full of beautiful, colorful photographs of the plants, flowers, insects, birds, animals, and sea life of Costa Rica. The photographs are small but fascinating, and there is at least one on every page. The book is organized geographically, with sections on the northwest, Monteverde, San José, the mountains, the Caribbean coast, and the Osa Peninsula. Each section starts with a map, and is further subdivided geographically. Many pages include a sidebar with a photograph and unique facts.

Countries of the World: Guatemala by Anita Croy (National Geographic, 2009): This book includes five full-page maps and many photographs. Since it is a National Geographic publication, all of the photos are beautiful! The familiar "yellow rectangle" of National Geographic shows up frequently, which might be a



positive association for some readers. Topics include geography, nature, history, people, culture, economy, and government. Each chapter includes insets on specific topics, such as the unique wildlife of Guatemala, the weather, and indigenous Mayan people.

Eyewitness Travel: Costa Rica by Christopher Baker (Dorling Kindersley, 2010): This review is based on the 2010 printing, but any of the other editions and/or printings (2005, 2008, 2012, 2014) would be suitable for the program. Like other books in the Eyewitness Travel series, the photographs and text are small, but the engaging layout more than makes up for this. Every page includes multiple photographs, and many include maps and diagrams as well. The chapter “Introducing Costa Rica” includes sections on the history, festivals, and climate of Costa Rica, as well as features on the birds of Costa Rica and Costa Rican coffee.

Guatemala, Belize & The Yucatán (Apa, 2006): This review is based on the 2006 edition, but either the 2009 or 2012 edition would also be suitable for the program. This book has more full page and double page photographs than any other travel guides listed here. There are also many smaller photographs on other pages, and they are all in color. In addition to guides to the different countries and regions, there are features on the history of the area, contemporary Mayans, local cuisine, local wildlife, and the barrier reef on the shores of Belize. The book also contains twenty-three maps.

Mayan Weaving: A Living Tradition by Ann Stalcup (The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1999): This book outlines the dyeing, designs, methods, and uses of traditional Mayan weaving. Each two-page section includes a full-page color photograph; subjects include a Mayan family wearing traditional clothing, a selection of cloths, and a mother and daughter weaving together. The large font may encourage patrons to try reading, but readers and non-readers alike will enjoy the photographs of brightly colored designs and costumes.

Meet Our New Student from Nicaragua by John A. Torres (Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2010): Although the premise of meeting a new student might feel too juvenile for some readers, the many unique photographs make this book a worthwhile addition to the program. In addition to a large map in the first chapter, there are photographs of Nicaraguan architecture, landscape, wildlife, history, and people. Chapters of special interest include “A Brief History of Nicaragua,” “The Land and Its Creatures,” and “Religion, Customs, and Culture.”



National Geographic Traveler: Panama by Christopher Baker (National Geographic, 2007): This review is based on the first edition (2007), but the second edition (2011) would also be suitable for the program. As with any National Geographic publication, the highlight of this book is the captivating and unique photographs. Most pages have at least one, and each section also includes a map. In addition to the eight chapters on the regions of Panama, there is a “History and Culture” chapter as well as features on parrots and macaws, poison dart frogs, and wild cats.

Alternate Selections

Belize in Pictures by Tom Streissguth (Twenty-First Century Books, 2010): This book is an alternate selection because it has fewer photographs and more text than other selections. It may appeal to more advanced readers. Chapters include “The Land,” “History and Government,” “The People,” “Cultural Life,” and “The Economy.” Each chapter includes one large photograph and a selection of smaller ones.



Supplemental Materials



Souvenirs: small potted cacti, brightly colored feathers (as used by Mayans for ceremonies)

Food: gallopinto (Nicaraguan rice and beans, recipe on page 41 of *Meet Our New Student from Nicaragua* by John A. Torres), tortillas (or tortilla chips), pupusas (stuffed corn tortillas), avocado or guacamole, coffee

Music Suggestions (to search on <http://www.youtube.com> or in your own library's collection): Brukdown and Punta (Belize folk music styles), marimba (Guatemalan xylophone-like instrument) music, Pipil (indigenous people of El Salvador) folk music

Free coloring pages are available on the Internet from helpful resources such as <http://www.coloring.ws> and <http://www.supercoloring.com>. All coloring pages are subject to their own terms of use, separate from the Tales & Travel Creative Commons License. The following links are suggested for this Excursion: "Great Jaguar"

<http://www.supercoloring.com/pages/great-jaguar/>



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