

# CULTURE AND VOLCANOES

## A TRIP THROUGH EL SALVADOR

### THE APPLICANTS

Julio Gomez is a first-year student who loves the outdoors and is an experienced hiker. Julio's family is Salvadoran, and many members of his family have volunteered to provide help and shelter during our trip. Having grown up in L.A., for Julio the trip will be a back-to-the-roots experience. Though it is not his first trip to *El Salvador*, he hopes to gain more first-hand experience of *El Salvador's* natural and cultural marvels. He wants to show Johannes Lohmann his cultural roots.

Johannes Lohmann is a first-year student from Germany, who has been scrambling up the Alps since childhood. In 2004, his love for Latin American culture drove him to travel to southern Mexico to explore the jungle and the volcanoes.

Julio and Johannes met on their first-year DOC trip, Strenuous Hiking.

### SUMMARY OF THE TRIP

The goal of the trip is to combine the exploration of El Salvador's culture with the exploration of its landscape. Most of the trip will be spent traveling through the country, but we will also spend a few days with various members of Julio's family, who have been living in *El Salvador* for generations. We will do most of the traveling by car, with the option of accessing a few areas by bus. The highlights of the trip will be *San Salvador*, *El Salvador's* bustling capital, *El Pital*, *El Salvador's* highest peak, and the national parks of *Cerro Verde*, *El Imposible* and *Montecristo*. This entails long hikes, generally with significant elevation difference, with overnight camping at designated camping sites.

We will visit the archeological sites of *Tazumal* and *Cihuatán* on the trip. They are the country's biggest and most interesting Mayan ruins.

By visiting Julio's family and historical highlights in the rural area of *Sensuntepeque* and the urban area of *San Salvador*, which holds a third of the nation's population, we will get a feeling for Salvadoran life and culture.

By traveling as far away from the major cities as possible, we will experience the Salvadoran wilderness at its best. At least five of the nights will be spent in tent, and between five and eight volcanoes will be scaled on the trip. The two natural highlights will be *El Imposible*, *El Salvador's* largest and most impressive national park, home to a biodiversity that's the last of its kind and *El Pital*, *El Salvador's* highest peak at 2730 m, offering jaw-dropping views of *Honduras* and the volcanoes of *El Salvador*.

We hope to return to Dartmouth with profound knowledge about the heritage and natural beauty of a country that is a hidden gem for cultural travelers and has not yet been overrun by the masses of tourists.

## ITINERARY

The trip will start on the 15<sup>th</sup> and end on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March.

- Day 1     Arrival at *San Salvador Comalapa International Airport*. Pick-up by the Gomez family. Spend the night in *Sensuntepeque*.
- Day 2     Visit Julio's Grandmother Clara, Transfer to *San Salvador*, Spend the night with Julio's uncle Orlando.
- Day 3     ***San Salvador***: See *El Monumento a la Revolucion*, the *Palacio Nacional*, get a permit to camp at the *Parque Nacional Montecristo* from the *Ministerio de Agricultura, Servicio de Parques Nacionales*, spend the night with uncle Orlando.
- Day 4     ***San Salvador***: See the *Lago de Ilopango* or hike up the *Volcan San Salvador* (6 hour hike, with guide for safety reasons). Spend the night with relatives.

- Day 5 Transfer to the **Parque Nacional Cerro Verde**, hike up *Volcan Izalco*, *Volcan Santa Ana*, and the volcano *Cerro Verde* (long day trip), overnight in the town of *Tacuba* or the town of *San Miguelito* (hammocks for \$3 a night).
- Day 6 Transfer to the **Parque Nacional el Imposible** (\$8 for pass), Stop for information in *Tacuba*, hike along the *Sendero de Mulo*, swim in the waterfall at *Los Enganchos*, hike back (about 3-4 hours total), overnight at the campsite, alternatively overnight in *Tacuba* or *San Miguelito*.
- Day 7 **Parque Nacional el Imposible:** Short visit to the rustic town of *San Miguelito*, Hike to the *Sendero de Mulo*, from there up the volcano *Cerro Leon* and down to the *Rio Ixcanal*, then back to the *Visitors Center* (up to 8 hours), overnight at campsite.
- Day 8 Transfer to the city of *Santa Ana* (~2 hours drive) by way of the ruins of *Tazumal*, see the ancient church *Iglesia de Carmen*, transfer to the city of *Metapan* (~1.5 hours drive) and the **Parque Nacional Montecristo** (\$6 entrance fee, get there before 3 p.m. to be able to camp), hike into the park and Hike along the *Sendero Maravillas y Procesos de la Madre Naturaleza* to the *Mirador*, which offers a striking view of the famous Cloud Forest (1 hour), then hike along the *Sendero el Rio Hondurano* (~ 2 hours), swim in the *Rio Hondurano*, camp at the campground of the *Los Planes* visitors area.
- Day 9 **Parque Nacional Montecristo:** Hike through *Bosque Nebuloso* (Cloud Forest) to the peak of *Montecristo* (2418 m) at *Trifinio*, where *El Salvador* borders *Guatemala* and *Honduras* (this will take the whole day, hiking is not permitted without a guide), visit the *Jardin de Cien Anos*, camp at the campground of the *Los Planes* visitors area.
- Day 10 Transfer to the town of *Rio Chiquito* via *El Poy* on the border to *Honduras* (~4 hours drive), hike up the mountain **El Pital** (2730 m; 4 hours hike, \$1 entrance fee, \$2 toilet fee), camp at the campground at *El Pital*.

Day 11 Drive to the archeological site of *Cihuatlan* along the *Centro Americana 4* (~3 hours), then continue to ***Sensuntepeque*** via the colonial town of *Suchitoto* (~4-5 hours), drop off the car, overnight with relatives.

Day 12 See the area surrounding Sensuntepeque, or alternatively trip to *San Vicente*, possibly climb the *Volcan San Vicente/Chichontepic* (~7 hours), continue to ***San Salvador***, spend the night with uncle Orlando. Alternative: Overnight in Sensuntepeque, travel back to *San Salvador* the next day.

Day 13 Fly from *San Salvador Comalapa International Airport*.

## THE BUDGET

The largest part of the cost of the trip is made up by the flights, which will cost anything from 580 to 650 dollars per person. We are guessing that travel costs within the country will be somewhere between 200 and 600 dollars, so we are reckoning with about 400 dollars and a grand total of about 1600 dollars for the whole trip.

With this in mind, and considering that we aren't being subsidized by any other source and will have to earn the money for the trip, we would like to make a request for 900 dollars for the whole trip, so that we will each pay about 350 dollars, more or less, an amount that can be earned within a term. Please remember that we are content with each dollar we get, and will certainly not refuse a lower amount.

## OTHER ISSUES

### **Risk management and safety**

Both of us have had experience with this type of travel. Julio is a Sierra Club member and has been to *El Salvador* on several occasions. Johannes was a boy scout for eight years, is a member with the *Deutscher Alpenverein*, the German equivalent to the Sierra Club and has been on a similar two-week trip in Mexico. Both are fluent in Spanish and are experienced hikers and campers. Johannes is also First Aid certified.

### **Giving back to the DOC**

We will write a complete narrative of the trip for Woodsmoke upon returning from *El Salvador*. Also, we would like to give a presentation of our tour with a slideshow and a detailed description of events. If our trip is successful, we will know a lot about what *El Salvador* has to offer to travelers willing to make an effort to explore the less accessible and are willing to share this information with anyone interested in it. We will be able to provide a lot of information for other travelers and hikers that want to explore *El Salvador*.