



# TRANS-MAYA RIDE

## 15 DAYS OF THE WILDEST RIDES IN THE MAYAN HEARTLAND

Guatemala is a mountain biker's paradise. Our adventure begins in Antigua, the beautiful former capital and once the Spanish center of administration for the whole of Central America and Mexico. Here, we start out with a single-track ride high on the slopes of Volcán de Agua, which overlooks the city. Over the next 3 days, a mix of dirt road biking and single-track then takes us to Lake Atitlan, surely a contender for the most beautiful lake in the world, with its towering volcanoes and azure water.

This is a trip aimed at mountain bikers with a taste for the undiscovered. The first half of our trip will cover a lot of single-track that has thus far been biked only by the locals and Old Town. The second half of the trip will be more of a cycling journey, following dirt tracks into the remote region of the Cuchumatanes Mountains. Here, we embark on some real 'backcountry' biking beneath frosty 3600 meter peaks and have a rare glimpse into the local Indian life, as we visit some of the country's finest fiestas and markets.

We continually modify this trip and seek out new and challenging trails. We may even need to make minor changes during the course of a trip to keep it real. This is a spectacular and unique cycling trip. Guatemala is probably the wildest country in Central America - but also the friendliest.



### AT A GLANCE

- ⇒ Explore the beautiful cobblestone city of Antigua, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ⇒ Ride off the beaten path tracks only explored by Old Town Outfitters
- ⇒ Spend time on Lake Atitlan, Central America's largest (and arguably most beautiful) lake
- ⇒ Experience Mayan culture as we ride through traditional villages

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1: WELCOME TO GUATEMALA!

Arrive to Guatemala City International Airport and transfer via private shuttle to Antigua. Spend your afternoon or evening exploring this old cobblestone city.

LODGING: Hotel in Antigua

MEALS: N/A

### DAY 2: TRAIL RIDE VOLCÁN DE AGUA

Antigua has to be one of the most attractive cities in Guatemala and has a rich and colorful history. Founded in 1543, the city became the Spanish colonial capital from which most of Central and South America was once ruled. A wealth of impressive 17th and 18th century buildings, picturesque streets and a friendly population makes Antigua the logical choice as a starting point for travel in Guatemala. The city's setting is also magnificent, surrounded as it is by 3 imposing volcanoes; Agua (3766m), Fuego (3763m) and Acatenango (3976m). In the morning, after a relaxed breakfast, we will unpack and reassemble our bikes. We will then set off for a trail climb on Volcan de Agua, Antigua's most dominant feature on the horizon. The ride includes a tough trail climb up to the Indigenous town of Santa Maria de Jesus, where we will soon be able to appreciate that what goes up must come back down. From the town, we will traverse on Mayan paths and then start a fun technical descent back down to the valley. The lower trails on the volcano are fun and fast, with lots of great flow. It is important to note that the trails in the Antigua Valley are not purpose built for mountain bikes. They are often dusty, loose, off – camber and rutted. They can also be steep-- when it goes up, it goes UP! We'll roll back around the valley to Antigua taking in the sights along the way. The ride will take around 3 hours and we will get back to Antigua in time for a late lunch at one of the many cafes. The picturesque patio at Café Condesa, or the famous Rainbow Reading Room are just 2 of the excellent lunch options. The rest of the afternoon is free time to stroll around the many cobbled back streets of this superb old colonial town. In the evening, we can explore the old part of town and take our evening meal at another great restaurant. Ride distance 17 km (11 miles) with approximately 650 meters of ascent and descent.

LODGING: Hotel in Antigua

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 3: CIERRO GRANDE RIDGE AND LAS TIERRAS ALTAS

The next stage of the holiday involves a 3-day ride cross-country to Lake Atitlan. After breakfast at our hotel, we will ride out from Antigua towards the north-east, climbing via a mix of old coffee farm tracks, single-track and jeep tracks up onto the ridges of the Cielo Grande, high above the city. En route, we pass through the Mayan village of El Hato and continue up steep single-track to the ridge that loops around towards the west and the El Rejon Pass. Beyond this pass, we will be traversing high above the settlements and towns that follow the Pan-American Highway, mostly on scenic single-track. After circumnavigating the highest point in the area, we start our drop back down to the valley floor on super fun twisty trails. We'll stop just before the end of the downhill for a picnic lunch, before tackling our last climb of the day, up to our accommodation for the night in Parramos. Here, we stay at a working horse ranch (also a mountain biking centre) that is definitely rustic, but which does have a pool and

cold beer. Ride distance 28 km (17.5 miles) with approximately 1250 meters of ascent and 1000 meters of descent.

LODGING: Horse Ranch in Parramos

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 4: CROSS-COUNTRY TO TECPAN

After a monster breakfast at the farm, we head further into the hills on our way towards the next objective of Tecpan, which is about two thirds of the way to Lake Atitlan. En route we'll stop off in the town of San Andreas Itzapa, where we will pay our respects at the shrine to a Mayan god, before moving on. There's a large climb just on the other side of San Andreas on a rougher track. At the top of the climb, we'll meet the van one last time before lunch. The ride from here is a mix of varied trails, footpaths and dirt roads that lead across the highlands, crossing the Pan-American Highway and negotiating the town of Zaragoza. After a picnic lunch, we'll continue on to Tecpan, passing through small agrarian villages along the way. Finally, a beautiful stretch of single-track takes us down through pristine forest to our riverside accommodation for the night, at a converted 1900's flour mill, now an excellent B&B. Ride distance 43.5 km (27 miles) with approximately 1000 meters of ascent and 650 meters of descent.

LODGING: B&B

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 5: PANAJACHEL AND LAKE ATITLAN

Today we have an epic cross-country ride following an old Spanish Conquistador corridor that connected the Antigua Valley and the simply stunning Lake Atitlan. As we need to cover some distance today, we will be riding a bit more dirt track and single-track mix. There are a few steep climbs, as we cross between river valleys and ascend to the edge of the caldera, within which the lake is contained. Lake Atitlan is astonishingly beautiful and lies in one of the most dramatic settings imaginable. Like Antigua, it is encircled by the near perfect cones of 3 volcanoes (Toliman, Atitlan and San Pedro) and sits in a huge crater, which links these volcanoes. We finish off the day on some of Guatemala's best single-track, dropping 600 meters from the rim of the vast caldera to the lakeshore on the famous 'Santa Cat' trail. This is a steep and technical trail and at one point includes the descent of 200 plus steps through village streets – amazing. The toughest bits are easily avoidable, however and it is quite short. We overnight at a central hotel in the lively town of Panajachel. Ride distance 41 km (25.5 miles) with approximately 1135 meters of ascent and 1650 meters of descent.

LODGING: Hotel in Panajachel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 6: THE SLICKROCK RIDE

We transfer from Panajachel about 45 minutes up to the top of the ridges high above Atitlan. The ride starts on a technical single-track climb, winding even further above the lake to around 2800 meters. Following a limestone rock trail, we reach the start of a long and technical descent that winds its way through forests and over rock gardens as it drops around 1000 meters into the valley of the Madre Vieja River. From here, we have a steep but short (2 km) jeep track climb up to the lunch spot. After lunch, the single-track madness continues with more technical drops down to the lakeshore. Time permitting, there is another short (3 km) climb to an amazing piece of single-track called 'La Culebra' or the snake that once again drops down to the lake. We will stay tonight at the amazing Casa del Mundo, a cliff-side hotel overlooking the lake and only accessible by boat! Ride distance 23 km (14 miles) with approximately 650 meters of ascent and 1650 meters of descent.

LODGING: Hotel Casa del Mundo, Lake Atitlan

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 7: RELAX ON LAKE ATITLAN AND TRANSFER TO HUEHUETENANGO

We have a free morning to enjoy the special ambiance of the Casa del Mundo. There is good swimming from the hotel boat landings in the warm waters and there are kayaks for hire. Alternatively, you may wish to simply swing in a hammock or enjoy a hot tub above the sparkling blue Lake Atitlan. After lunch, we take the launch back to Panajachel and begin a drive to the Cuchumatanes, a rugged mountain group that boasts the highest non-volcanic peaks in Central America. It is also probably the wildest area of Guatemala. Our destination today is Huehuetenango, the departmental capital of the Cordillera de los Cuchumatanes. Sitting at an altitude of 1900 metres, it has no particular attractions apart from its local market, but the relief map in the main square is a good indicator of what lies ahead. The Cuchumatanes, although vast and beautiful, are extremely precipitous throughout and the area has the most difficult access problems imaginable. Of course, this is exactly why we are going mountain biking there. This region has always been remote from the influence of central government and has traditionally been home to hotbeds of guerrilla activity. However, after an intervention by the Guatemalan Army in the 1970's, a truce was declared and the area is now relatively peaceful, but very few Westerners and even fewer mountain bikers have explored this area. It will take us around 4 hours to reach Huehuetenango, where we check in at a basic hotel close to the town's main square. In the late afternoon, there is time to look around and to buy any items you might need.

LODGING: Hotel in Huehuetenango

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 8: HUEHUETENANGO TO TODOS SANTOS

We ride out of Huehuetenango in the early morning and very quickly find ourselves at the bottom of a major ascent, where the tarmac road switch-backs upwards for 10 km (6 miles), involving a height gain of 1000 meters. This ride provides us with breathtaking views of the backbone of the Cuchumatanes Mountains and we pass through many small Indian villages along the way. These small villages will give us an excellent insight into the way of life of the rural Guatemalan people. Near the top of the climb is a belvedere where, on a clear day, views stretch as far as the volcanoes around Quetzaltenango and back to Antigua. A bit further above the viewpoint we start a rolling section of trail on a mixture of old jeep tracks and single-track as we make our way across the plateau. From here, we have an excellent single-track descent that drops us right down into Todos Santos (2450m). By the afternoon, in this part of the world, it often clouds up and our descent is likely to be shrouded in mist. Indigenous people inhabit the pueblo of Todos Santos and its ancient traditional customs are still intact. Here, the men still wear the traditional dress or 'traje' and perform many of the ancient rituals of the highland Maya. It is a spectacular town and our overnight stay is in a central, family-run guesthouse. Ride distance 44 km (27 miles) with approximately 1800 meters of ascent and 1275 meters of descent.

LODGING: Guesthouse in Todos Santos

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 9: TODOS SANTOS TO CHANCOL

The local men stand out, for they all wear the traditional dress of baggy red and white striped trousers, with richly embroidered shirts, topped with wide collars. This is Guatemala at its most colorful. The landscape on this part of the ride is an awesome mix of rocky peaks, coniferous forests, stretches of arid soil and also isolated fertile valleys where the pastures are home to flocks of sheep. Initially, we make a tough rocky ascent on dirt tracks back to the plateau and start of yesterday's single-track. We then cross the plateau on sheep tracks and dirt roads passing through pueblos to the edge of the main ridge of the Cuchumatanes. There is a great technical descent to a meet-up with the support vehicle for lunch. Our overnight stop tonight is at a horse ranch in a remote location high on the plateau. This will be a unique and quite rustic experience and will show us how the locals in the area live. Ride distance 42 km (26 miles) with approximately 1500 meters of ascent and 975 meters of descent.

LODGING: Horse Ranch in the Chuchumantanes

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 10: ON TO ACUL

A long ride today as we head across country to reach the Ixil triangle. We are effectively tracing a big loop around to the north of a deep ravine that separates the departments of Huehuetenango and Quiché. Riding across the mixed terrain of the high plateau of the Cuchumatanes, we enjoy fantastic undulating single-track and dirt road trail riding. This is a real cross-country ride and arguably one of the best of the trip, with simply breathtaking scenery. Surrounded by pinewoods and mountains, it is easy to understand why the Spaniards found this area so hard to conquer. In more recent years guerrillas made this a major base for their operations, thankfully all resolved now. We could be forgiven for thinking that we've been transported to the New Zealand of old, as the surroundings are very reminiscent of that part of the world. At the northern extent of our ride, there is a technical and often muddy descent to the remote village of Palop and from there to Salquil Grande we follow dirt roads to a river valley. A long climb to Tzabal, then down to another river and up again to Acul, where we spend the night in a small, rustic family run hotel, which comes complete with its own 'Olde Worlde' style cheese factory. Ride distance 57 km (36 miles) with approximately 1200 meters of ascent and 2500 meters of descent.

LODGING: Hotel in Acul

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 11: ACUL TO USPANTAN

Another long and challenging day lies in store for us today. From Acul, we drop down to the road and follow an undulating track to Nebaj, the main town of the Ixil Triangle. We then pick up an old Spanish highway, known as the 'boqueron' that provides a picturesque route up into the mountains, with great views out across the Western Highlands. We then contour around the highest peak, before dropping down to a village where we meet up again with our support vehicle. We regroup, then drop down on super fun single-track to our lunch stop in Cunén. Here, the second major set of climbs starts, taking us back up onto high ridges and traversing through pine forest and small Quiché Mayan villages to Uspantán, the home of Nobel Peace Prize Winner and recent political figure Rigoberta Menchú. Ride distance 58 km (37 miles) with approximately 1800 meters of ascent and 1950 meters of descent.

LODGING: Lodge in Uspantán

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 12: USPANTAN TO SAN PEDRO CARCHA

The terrain gradually becomes less and less dramatic, as we begin to leave the high mountains of the Cuchumatanes. Today begins with a rolling ride on a paved surface, passing the town of Chicaman. A long (10km) gradual uphill on a dirt road then leads us to the top of the hills above the Chixoy River. Now, we have a fast descent on a trail with some technical sections, and at the village of Ojo de Agua, we begin a rougher piece of dirt track that takes us down to the river. Crossing the bridge, we start a long climb. It's roughly 27 km from the bridge to the end of the day, broken up into a couple of major climbs, the first of which is the most difficult. The support vehicle is with us the entire way today. Finally reaching the highway, we load up the support vehicle and transfer by road to Cobán. The Cobán region lies in the middle of some of Guatemala's densest cloud forest. It is an area famous for its coffee production and one of the only remaining places where it is possible to see the quetzal, Guatemala's national bird, monetary unit, icon and source of civic pride. We overnight in a big 70's-style hotel in San Pedro Carcha. Ride distance 61 km (38 miles) with approximately 1600 meters of ascent and 2000 meters of descent.

LODGING: Hotel in San Pedro Carcha

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 13: SEMUC CHAMPEY

Our last ride is to the pristine clear blue waters of Semuc Champey. This is an area of outstanding natural beauty, with numerous pools of cool river water, just perfect for swimming. Many people regard this spot as the most beautiful in the country and we will spend the rest of the afternoon here. It is the perfect spot in which to finish our exploration of Guatemala. The first section of today's ride follows a straightforward and undulating road, before we descend to the town of Lanquin. We then ride on a bumpy jeep track for an hour, before tackling a challenging climb and then descent to Semuc Champey. We transfer back to Lanquin and our 'posada' accommodation. Ride distance 69 km (43 miles) with approximately 800 meters of ascent and 1600 meters of descent.

LODGING: Hotel in Lanquin

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### DAY 14: TRANSFER TO ANTIGUA

An early morning transfer takes us back to Antigua by late afternoon. It is a picturesque drive across central Guatemala and we will discover en route that there are not many flat areas in this wild country. Back in Antigua we have time for last minute shopping and to celebrate the successful completion of a unique trip in one of the many restaurants. There is a choice of venue for our farewell dinner, but whatever the group's taste we are sure to have a memorable party.

LODGING: Hotel in Antigua

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 15: Transfer to airport and say goodbye to incredible Guatemala!

MEALS: Breakfast

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

14 nights in hotels, guesthouses and lodges

#### **TRIP COST**

\$2,740

#### **TRIP DATES**

Best time to go is November to May, please inquire at [info@adventureguatemala.com](mailto:info@adventureguatemala.com)