

NORTH AMERICA · BEACHES · HIKING · FOOD · ADVENTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



El Salvador

In Central America's smallest country, volcanoes, surf breaks and coffee towns are all within a few hours' drive. Climb Santa Ana Volcano to its turquoise crater lake, ride the right-hand point breaks around El Tunco, eat pupusas in the villages of the Ruta de las Flores and wander colonial Suchitoto. It remains one of the region's more affordable stops.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for El Salvador and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 17 June 2026.

 CAPITAL San Salvador	 CURRENCY US dollar (USD) £1 ≈ US\$1.34	 LANGUAGE Spanish	 BEST TIME Nov–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 15h via Madrid or Houston ~£650–£1,150 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-6 standard time

El Salvador is small enough to cross in a morning, which makes it easy to combine very different landscapes from two or three bases. The classic loop starts on the Pacific coast around El Tunco and El Zonte for surfing and sunsets, then heads inland to Santa Ana for the volcano hike and Lake Coatepeque, west along the Ruta de las Flores through Juayúa, Apaneca and Ataco, and east to the cobbled streets and lake views of Suchitoto. San Salvador adds museums, the buried Maya village of Joya de Cerén and the country's best restaurants.

Prices are low and the currency is the US dollar, so budgeting is simple. Distances are short, main roads are good, and travel days rarely exceed three hours. The coast is surfer-heavy and laid-back; the highlands are cooler and greener, with weekend food fairs that draw families from the capital. Visitors are often struck by how few other foreigners they meet away from the beach, and by the warmth of the welcome. Dry-season weekends and Semana Santa get busy at the coast. It suits surfers, hikers, coffee lovers and travellers adding a week to a Guatemala or Honduras trip.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Santa Ana Volcano and Lake Coatepeque

El Salvador's highest volcano rises to 2,381 m. A guided hike from Cerro Verde National Park reaches the rim of a steaming, turquoise crater lake, with views down to the deep blue caldera of Lake Coatepeque.
- 2

CULTURE

Ruta de las Flores

A winding road through coffee country linking Nahuizalco, Juayúa, Apaneca and Concepción de Ataco, known for murals, waterfalls, weekend food fairs and the wildflowers that bloom along the verges in the dry season.

3

BEACH

El Tunco and the surf coast

Dark-sand beaches and consistent right-hand point breaks such as Punta Roca and El Sunzal make the La Libertad coast a surf magnet. El Tunco has the nightlife; El Zonte is quieter, with surf schools for beginners.

4

ARCHITECTURE

Suchitoto

A cobbled colonial town of whitewashed houses and the gleaming white Santa Lucía church, set above Lake Suchitlán. Come for indigo-dyeing workshops, boat trips to bird-filled islands and a slower pace.

5

HISTORY

Joya de Cerén

Buried by volcanic ash around AD 600, this UNESCO-listed Maya farming village preserves houses, storerooms and a sweat bath in remarkable detail, a rare glimpse of everyday rather than royal Maya life.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

San Salvador

≈ 1.8 million people

The capital sprawls beneath San Salvador Volcano. The restored historic centre, the MUNA anthropology museum and the El Boquerón crater are worth a day or two before heading to the coast or highlands.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Santa Ana

≈ 250,000 people

The second city has a striking neo-Gothic cathedral and a grand old theatre, and is the natural base for Santa Ana Volcano, Lake Coatepeque and the Maya ruins of Tazumal.

3RD LARGEST CITY

San Miguel

≈ 240,000 people

The hot commercial hub of the east, overlooked by the active Chaparrastique volcano. Few tourists linger, but it is the jumping-off point for the eastern beaches and the Gulf of Fonseca.

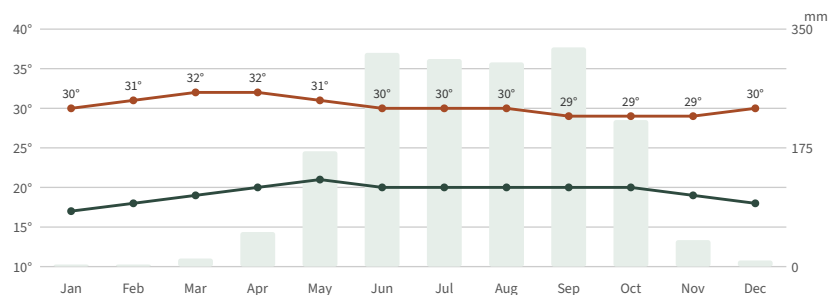
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to El Salvador

Best time: **Nov–Apr.**

**Average climate in San Salvador**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar–Apr	Semana Santa Holy Week brings solemn processions across the country; in towns such as Sonsonate and Izalco, streets are laid with intricate carpets of dyed sawdust before the processions pass.
Aug	Fiestas Agostinas San Salvador's patron-saint festivities in the first week of August honour the Divino Salvador del Mundo with fairs, parades and the 'Bajada' procession on 5 August.
Aug	Bolas de Fuego, Nejapa On 31 August, young men with painted faces hurl fuel-soaked rag balls at each other through Nejapa's streets, recalling a 17th-century eruption of the nearby El Playón volcano.

How much does El Salvador cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ US\$46.77 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ US\$107 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ US\$227 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Pupusas Thick corn tortillas stuffed with beans, cheese, chicharrón or the edible flower loroco, griddled and eaten with curtido (pickled cabbage) and a thin tomato salsa.	Panes con pollo Chicken stewed in a spiced tomato sauce, stuffed into a soft roll with watercress, radish and cucumber; a messy weekend and festive favourite.	Yuca frita con chicharrón Fried cassava with crisp pieces of pork, curtido and salsa, sold from street stalls and market counters across the country.
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Getting around

Old US school buses, known as chicken buses, cover almost every route for a dollar or two, with frequent departures from San Salvador's terminals. Tourist shuttles link El Tunco, the Ruta de las Flores, Santa Ana and Suchitoto and are worth the extra on travel days. Uber works in greater San Salvador, car hire is straightforward, and there are no passenger trains.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE   A B 120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 911 (ambulance, fire, police) Tourist police: Telephone: +503 2224 2705 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +503	TIME ZONE UTC-6 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Restaurants often add a 10% 'propina' to the bill; if not, leave about 10%. Tip guides and shuttle drivers a few dollars.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'buenos días' before asking anything, use the formal 'usted' with older people, dress modestly in churches, and ask before photographing anyone, especially in indigenous communities such as Nahuizalco.

MAIN AIRPORTS

El Salvador International Airport Saint Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (SAL), San Salvador

Visas & entry for El Salvador

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel to El Salvador for tourism or business for up to 180 days without a visa.

You can extend your stay by contacting the General Directorate of Migration and Immigration.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in El Salvador

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 2 Nov 2026

All Souls' Day

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Christmas Day

Fri 1 Jan 2027

New Year's Day

Thu 25 Mar 2027	Maundy Thursday
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 27 Mar 2027	Holy Saturday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 10 May 2027	Mother's Day
Thu 17 Jun 2027	Father's Day
Fri 6 Aug 2027	Celebrations of San Salvador
Wed 15 Sep 2027	Independence Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAN-toh KWES-tah

Know before you go

- Prices are in US dollars. Bitcoin is accepted in a few places, notably El Zonte ('Bitcoin Beach'), but cash and cards are what nearly everyone uses.
- Carry small notes: bus drivers, market stalls and pupuserías often cannot change a \$20 bill, and many rural shops take cash only.
- Santa Ana Volcano is climbed with a park guide on group departures from Cerro Verde National Park; confirm the start time beforehand and arrive early, as departures are few.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.