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## TRAVELOGUE

**Traveling the World  
in a Vision Jet ...  
Guatemala, Costa Rica,  
El Salvador, Honduras**

AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER

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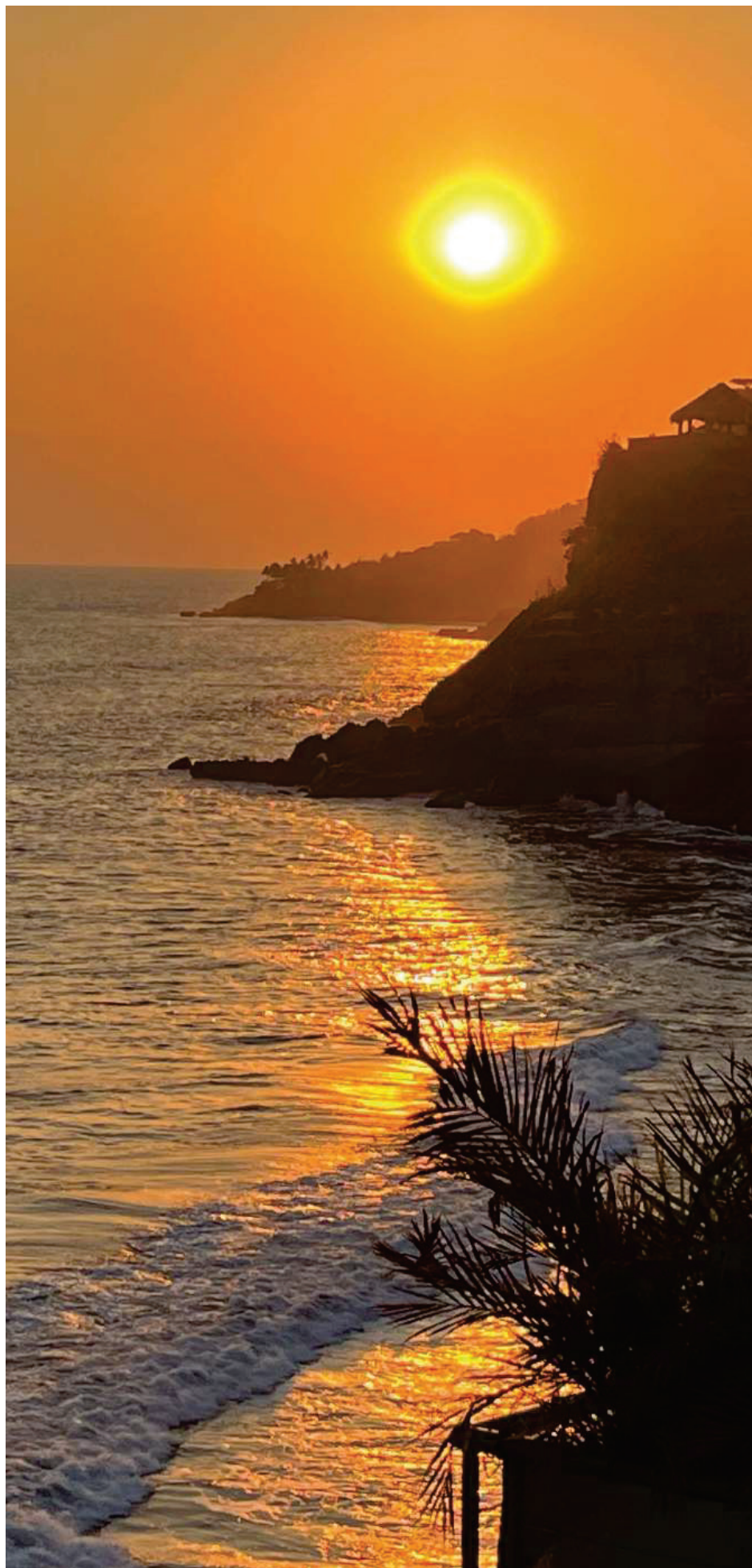
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# TRAVELOGUE

» *Places to Fly and Explore*



**AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER** are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fifth Cirrus aircraft (they recently upgraded to their second Vision Jet), a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures. Visit their website for more stories and information: [www.VisionJetTravel.com](http://www.VisionJetTravel.com)



# Traveling the World in a Vision Jet ...

## Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras

by Amir and Tamra Hyster

Our original flight planning for this epic adventure started with a route from Panama City, Florida, to Roatan, Honduras, with additional stops in Guatemala, Costa Rica and El Salvador. Maybe we'd add Colombia as a side trip. As always, the desired route and the final route are two separate entities. We never use an organized flight support company. Amir loves the challenge and has extensive experience sourcing and negotiating with handlers and FBOs or dealing directly with countries for approvals and permits. Many handlers have become good friends, and Amir, in turn, has provided them with client perspectives and market conditions, resulting in great improvements in their services. We now have a golden book of contacts from all over the world including this small section in Central America.

*A golden glow sunset on the  
Pacific coast of El Salvador.*



➤ Our flight path from Panama City, Florida, to Tikal, Guatemala.



**Tikal National Park** is a Mayan complex featuring the Tikal City Ruins in a wildlife-rich tropical forest. It was rediscovered in the mid-19th century and major excavations began in 1956.

After unexplained delays in receiving a clearance to Honduras we did what we normally do – stay flexible and change the plans. We flew straight to Guatemala, Mundo Maya International Airport (MGMM); the first stop was the ancient Mayan site of Tikal.

During our 900 NM flight straight over the Gulf from the Florida Panhandle we had a mild 10-knot tailwind but a brutal 130-knot crosswind that had us crab crawling just under the jet stream! At least on this occasion, the Vision Jet's altitude restriction of FL310 was in our favor. The calls from the surrounding airliners reporting turbulence all the way up from FL330, asking to descend to our flight level, kept the radio and ATC extremely busy.

It was interesting to watch the jet stream swirl over the top as we flew in the smooth belly, with Cuba to our left and Mexico to our right as we descended toward Belize and crossed to Guatemala.

The landing clearance by ATC for Tikal was to overfly the Tikal airport VOR outbound, then 180 degrees turn to intercept the localizer (LOC) for ILS approach RWY29. At the minima, break left for a circle to land for RWY11 is turning another 180 degrees for a full 360 degrees of flying at a relatively slow speed and low altitude spanning a beautiful view over Lake Lago Peten Itza and La Flores Island.

Upon landing, we were met by Aviation Ground Solutions, where the team assisted with a rental car so we could start exploring.

Tikal National Park spans 220 square miles and is the most important complex of the Mayan societies. The Tikal City Ruins are 6.2 square miles and situated in a tropical forest inhabited by many unusual species of animals and birds.

The site dates back to 300 B.C.E., reaching its architectural peak between 600 and 800 C.E. After 900 C.E. Tikal was abandoned, and the whole site became covered in soil and rainforest. The ruins were rediscovered in the mid-19th century, but it took 100 years before major archeological excavations started in 1956. Many more ruins are still covered by soil and waiting to be discovered. We climbed the 212-foot eighth-century Temple IV, the highest in Tikal, for a full view of the Tikal complex. Temple V is another 187-foot climb that provides a different perspective on the site and better views of the magnificent Grand Plaza, Lost World Complex and lush forests. Spider, squirrel and howler monkeys are throughout the treetops. Jaguars and cougars are also known to roam in the park but are rarely seen.

Our tour guide recommended visiting the other large Mayan site of Yaxha National Park, just an hour's drive from Flores. The road in the last 7 miles was rough but worth it. Yaxha is a hidden gem located on the banks of Lake Yaxha. The city was at its peak in the third to 10th centuries and was entirely abandoned by the 16th century, with the archeological excavations starting only in the late 1980s. The site has 500 structures including nine temple pyramids. The tallest pyramid structure

has a long staircase to climb to see views for miles of the stepped pyramids, twin pyramids and the surrounding lakes, mountains and rainforests.

## Guatemala City, Guatemala (MGGT)

On departure, we headed north over Lake Peten Itza, climbing only 2,500 feet to overfly the Tikal National Park. Overhead the site, we slowed to 120 knots, deploying one stage of flaps for stability, then started to rotate around just with the heading bug. From the air, we could see the impressive size of the ruins and the surrounding jungle. We advised ATC that we were ready to go back on course for the short flight south to Guatemala City, the largest city in Central America. The path took us over the Cuchumatanes mountain range and into Hermitage Valley, where the Sierra Mountain line of fire volcanoes is visible.

The ILS RWY02 approach took us over the La Aurora International Airport VOR outbound, then turned us 180 degrees to intercept the localizer, providing us a full view of the city surroundings and the city itself flying around and in between 8,500-foot-high mountains to turn for the runway final. The runway sits on a

*An eruption sends steam and smoke billowing from the summit of Volcano Fuego.*

» **Tamra and Amir** with their handlers in Guatemala City, Aviation Ground Solution.

plateau with the final elevation of 4,900 feet. NOTAMs reported both volcanoes Fuego and Santa Maria as active and we could see a huge cloud of steam and smoke erupting from the top of Fuego.

We were met by the team from Aviation Ground Solution, who took us on a side trip to Guatemala City and the offices of the largest coffee merchants to taste the coffee.

We hired a car and drove straight to the UNESCO-listed ancient city of Antigua, once the country's capital. An earthquake destroyed it in 1773. We stayed at the Las Cruces Boutique Hotel, which is beautifully restored in the center of the city. Most of the city has been restored, including the ruins of Santo Domingo Church and Monastery, dating back to the 1500s. Now, there is a hotel and museum called Casa Santo Domingo.

Antigua is a safe, walkable city but only with good shoes as the cobblestone streets are hard on cars and pedestrians. The ancient sites were amazing to see, but for us, it was the mystery and intrigue of discovering what is behind the Spanish colonial-style front facades of each building or entrance. The complexes open to a central open-air courtyard. Each building is unique and each courtyard is decorated in a traditional style with fountains and beautiful gardens. It is like a treasure hunt that doesn't end. For this fun alone, you could spend weeks here, but a day is more than enough time for the sites.

We were advised to drive through the coffee farms and to Lake Atitlan, a 5.5-hour round trip. We kept reminding ourselves that we were on an adventure



» **One of the many** family-owned local restaurants in Antigua, each unique to its culinary heritage.

when the main road turned to dirt, and we needed to drive through a river to proceed to "The best lake in the world!" We stopped at the Atitlan Hotel and visited its botanical gardens. The gardens consist of beautiful individual areas stretching from the hotel entrance to the edge of the lake. Additionally, the hotel features a helicopter landing pad that accommodates tourists traveling to and from Guatemala City.

We headed back to the city and met up with AeroLogistica's owner, Sergio De Gravilola. He has contacts in every country in Central and Latin America and can provide a one-stop shop for flight handling for many countries including Belize, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

He took us to a unique restaurant called Sublime, which specializes in farm-to-table cuisine. They have designed each dish around the provinces of the country and their historical significance. That was an experience we had not encountered anywhere else in the world.



*The Iglesia de La Merced is a stunning example of colonial Baroque architecture. The church has withstood numerous earthquakes and remains a significant landmark in Antigua.*



*A beautiful Guatemalan sunset reflecting on the calm and peaceful water.*

## TRAVELOGUE

» **Costa Rica** is home to several species of toucans, each with its own unique charm. Toucans are social birds that often nest in tree cavities and feed on fruits, insects and small creatures.

### San Jose, Costa Rica (MROC)

After a two-hour flight directly over El Salvador, bypassing Nicaraguan airspace, we landed in San Jose, Costa Rica. Nicaragua demands an overflight permit, which will cost around \$250. We prefer to avoid this headache.

Our handlers here were Aviation Ground Solution, an agent for AeroLogistica. They explained that their new General Aviation Terminal (GAT) at the airport is a separate FBO business with full customs and immigration on-site for an express service. The facilities are modern and comfortable and saved us over an hour of bureaucracy at the main terminal. Like every VIP facility they are not cheap but highly recommended.

We headed straight out of San Jose to the Arenal Volcano area and stayed in La Fortuna. The active volcano still erupts at least once a year, and steam vapor from the active shaft forms a cloud around the top. However, Costa Rica's weather is hot, and it constantly clears and evaporates in the dry season.

The area is full of lush forests, hot springs, zip lines and fun activities for all ages.

Next, we visited Antonio Manuel National Park in the town of Quepos on the central Pacific Ocean side. This is a good park where we saw sloths and views of the beaches. We saw more monkeys in the forest just behind



» **Our handlers**, Aviation Ground Solution, with Amir in San Jose, Costa Rica.

our hotel, La Forest. We learned about the original tribal people called BriBri, who maintain their traditional culture and religion and conduct tours that explain the medicinal uses of the local plants.

We had dinner at an extraordinary restaurant called El Avion. It was built around an old C123 cargo plane shipped from Puerto Arenas, Costa Rica, in pieces and reassembled there, complete with a functional cockpit. They turned the inside into a bar. It was a fun place to view the sunset on the Pacific Ocean and see playful monkeys, a resident sloth and toucans.

» **Tamra and Amir** kayaking on the remote and biodiverse Osa Peninsula.

We took another three-hour drive and headed to Corcovado National Park in Puerto Jimenez, where we gave ourselves a luxury treat at the Curio Collection Hilton on the Osa Peninsula and protected bay. We took a nighttime kayak tour to see the phenomenon of bioluminescence in the water which lights up when agitated. We learned about the mangrove systems, birds and wildlife. The water is warm and a pleasure to swim at night, although it barely cools you down during the day.

We didn't go into the Corcovado National Park reserve as the trip to get there required a 5 a.m. start, a two-hour, four-wheel drive journey on a rough road along with an hour-long walk on



a hot beach just to get to the entrance of the park – sounded like a torture to us. Instead, we took a day tour around the peninsula with a guide. After all, who told all the animals that they needed to live only in the park? We spotted everything from the comfort of a van: four types of monkeys, sloths, birds and other mammals. The tour also included a home-cooked meal at a private palm oil farm.

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*The sun beginning its descent over the horizon, casting an orange glow across the water near Costa del Sol.*

## San Salvador, El Salvador (MSSS)

The handling was smooth when leaving Costa Rica, but we had to wait for almost an hour for the fuel truck. There is only one fuel provider in MROC, which showed their lack of urgency. What was lacking by the refueler was rectified by ATC, assigning a SID for our departure from RWY07 that took us east instead of northwest. Once cleared of the high terrain, they gave direct to TEXUP offshore and west of Nicaragua thus saving us 30 minutes of flight and the Nicaraguan air navigation fees.

Customs and immigration clearance through San Salvador's Ilopango International Airport was quick and friendly. It is quiet and resembles a small general aviation airport more than an

international one. We needed our aircrew cards, but only to void the small passenger departure tax; showing a pilot's license will also avoid the tax.

Miguel Aguilar handled the arrangements and showed us the new luxury FBO on-site. He also drove us to the Hilton, which sits on the fringe of the city in a very nice district with luxury houses and apartment buildings. He told us stories of how El Salvador was before the current president.

He explained how the country transformed from a major crime hotspot to being recognized as one of the safest countries in the world by managing gang activity—a remarkable achievement accomplished in under five years.



*Costa del Sol features expansive waters with shallow areas, home to stilted restaurants and bars nestled into the water.*

Miguel took us on his boat to Costa del Sol. The area is full of restaurants and bars built on stilts in the water. The vendors take their own power source and all the supplies needed for the day's trade.

We wanted to explore on our own and found it difficult to rent a car here as the infrastructure is still not set up for a high volume of tourists. Miguel lent us his car, and we explored the coffee-growing region with many farms open for the public to enjoy a meal and entertainment. We went to Suchitoto, a historical town with Spanish Colonial architecture on a massive lake. We also traveled to Libertad, the Surf City side of the country, which sits along the Pacific coast and consists of high cliffs and several bays of white and black sand beaches. Like a primitive Riviera, the cliffs are lined with great restaurants and bars. We took the safe option and ate at an upscale seafood place full of locals and a beautiful sunset. The beaches are an emerging international surfing spot with year-round warm water.

## Roatan, Honduras (MHRO)

This was a short 200 NM flight. We departed MSSS to the northeast and stayed at a low altitude of 16,000 feet. On descent, we were assigned the RNP RWY07 to Roatan; all the way to the IAF, we flew low above the second-largest coral reef in the world, which is a spectacular view.

Roatan is a beach tourist destination and offers various attractions, including island tours, a rum cake factory, a local chocolate factory, a monkey and sloth park and boat rides to nearby islands.

The whole trip was a bucket list for us and we found learning about each country fascinating. ⊕