

(More of) What you need to know about trekking to El Mirador

29 February 2012



More insider tips on jungle trekking to northern Guatemala's El Mirador, in one of the most spectacular—and most remote—Mayan archaeological sites in the Mundo Maya.



STORY BY:

KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY

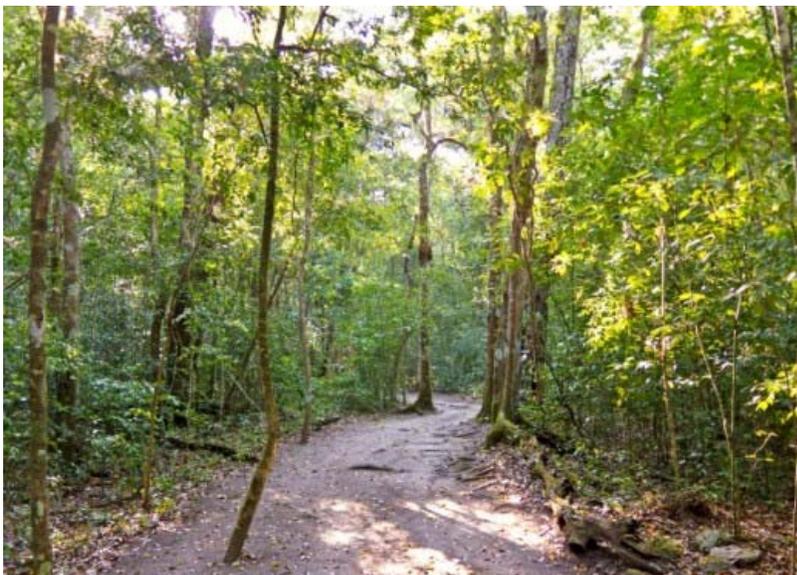
FOLLOW: [@TransAmericas](#)

We loved our jungle trek to El Mirador with [Tikal Connections](#), but there were a few things we wish we'd known (or were glad we improvised) before we entered the Guatemalan jungle. Here are the rest of our tips, below. For the first 5 tips, and to find out more about the spectacular ruins of one of the greatest and most remote Mayan sites, read [Part 1: What you need to know about trekking to El Mirado](#).

6. The last thing you want during your El Mirador hike is rain, which turns the trail into knee-deep goop. The rainy season in the region is roughly June through November. We had perfectly dry weather when we were there in March, but it was exhausting just to *think* about doing the hike through deep mud. **Plan with the weather in mind.**

7. The walk into and out of El Mirador is **almost entirely flat and much of the trail is shaded** under deep jungle cover. We are sun protection fanatics, but we rarely wore the caps and sun block we brought. We're not saying don't bring those things. We're just saying the sun exposure is less harsh than you might fear.

8. The jungle cover does little to cool things off, however, so leave camp with **more water than you think you need** before hitting the trail. There are no refills along the way.



9. The camping areas are rudimentary, but comfortable enough except for the fact that there are precious few

places to sit down. Believe us when we tell you that after hours of walking through the jungle you will want to sit down. Solution: **bring a hammock**. In an instant you have a place to sit or even lie down and sleep. Our guide had his own hammock with him, of course, and our mule wrangler taught Eric a clever, quick and easy way to string up a hammock.

10. You may not believe this but the **bugs really weren't that bad** when we were in the El Mirador area in March. Still, we were glad we had insect repellent with Deet in it during the sundown hours; and we also wore ExOfficio BugsAway shirts and pants after sundown just to be safe. Result? Just a handful of bug bites during our six days in the jungle — and Karen is normally a mosquito buffet.

11. If you have **your own sleeping pad**, bring it. The camping gear supplied by tour companies that offer El Mirador hikes is generally fine but certain items, like sleeping pads, are in short supply. You might end up sleeping on a pile of old blankets like we did.

12. Do not assume that **hand sanitizer** will be supplied. Bring your own.

13. It's really worth adding on two days so you can **do the hike as a loop**, returning to Carmelita via the Nakbe and La Florida archaeological sites, rather than merely backtracking the same way you came in. We don't know why tour operators don't push this six day option but we were really glad we added on the extra days. The hike from El Mirador to Nakbe archaeological site took us through one of the most gorgeous jungle stretches of the whole experience, and we even saw a rare juvenile ornate hawk eagle along the trail. The camping area at La Florida is the nicest of them all and the caretaker there is a real character (we won't spoil it). Be warned that the hike from Nakbe to La Florida archaeological site is a doozy—at least eight hard, hot hours.

12. When we visited El Mirador in March it was possible to travel by bus from Flores to Carmelita, and then ask Paty (she speaks a bit of English) for help organizing your own bare bones, cheaper trip to El Mirador. Lately, however, tensions between Carmelita guides and mule men, outside tour agencies and the government have flared and this DIY approach to El Mirador may not be possible at the moment. A good overview of the situation as of January 2012 can be found [here](#). Ask your tour operator and returning trekkers to get the latest news.

For the first 5 tips, read [Part 1: What you need to know about trekking to El Mirado](#).

KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY



In April of 2006, journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl left their jobs and apartment in New York City and embarked on the [Trans-Americas Journey](#), a 200,000-mile working road trip through all 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After many years on the road they are still nowhere near their goal of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America where the road literally ends. Until then, their slow and steady overland exploration of The Americas continues.

FOLLOW: [@TransAmericas](#)