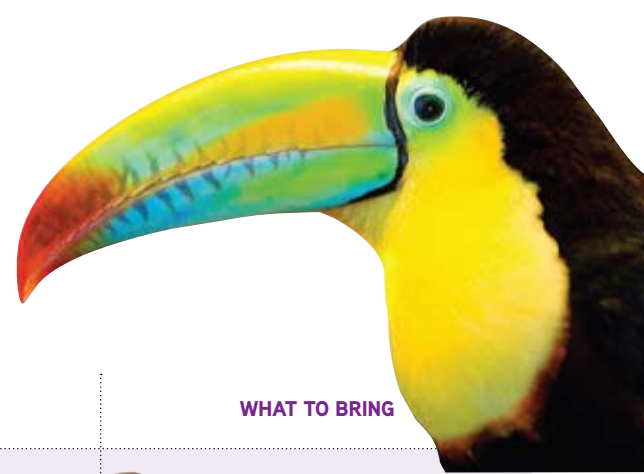








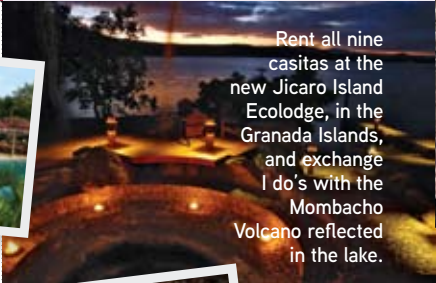






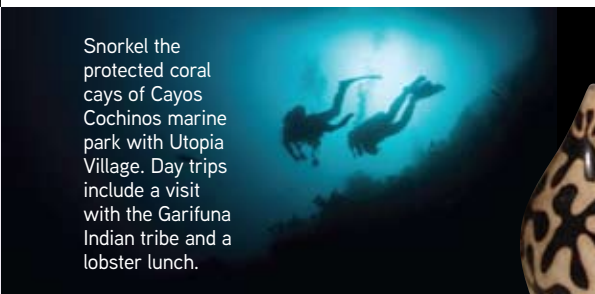















at a glance

spirited central america

A pullout guide to adventure-filled shindigs **BY MELANIE HAIKEN**



REGION	WHO SHOULD GO	SAFE-BET RESORT	UNEXPECTED DIGS	ADVENTUROUS OUTING	TAKE-HOME TREAT	WHAT TO BRING
costa rica	<p>A pioneer of sustainable tourism, Costa Rica is for eco-minded travelers who want access to ample wedding resources.</p> 	<p>What's a more dramatic ceremony backdrop than an active volcano? At the 180-room Springs Resort & Spa, choose from several formal garden settings, all with Arenal views.</p> 	<p>Wed on one of CR's best beaches at the 24-room Harmony Hotel, in Nosara. For fun, take lessons at the nearby Safari Surf School.</p> 	<p>Canyoneering in Arenal National Park with Pure Trek will test your mettle as you rappel 200 feet down a series of spectacular waterfalls into a vine-draped canyon.</p> 	<p>Stuff your welcome bags with fair-trade organic coffee grown and roasted on local estates. Café Britt coffee is available online and in the airport; groups can even tour the plantation, in Heredia.</p> 	<p>Don't forget your hiking boots and quick-dry socks for exploring Costa Rica's 20 national parks, eight bioreserves and copious protected areas. Hint: Wear the boots on the plane to save suitcase space.</p> 
nicaragua	<p>Surf and yoga trendsetters nostalgic for Costa Rica in the 1970s will welcome Nicaragua's uncrowded waves and wellness meccas like San Juan del Sur, on the Pacific coast.</p> 	<p>Lush vistas from the 65 villa rooms at Pelican Eyes Hotel & Resort make this hilltop sanctuary in San Juan del Sur a landmark. Enjoy a prewedding sunset cruise on the property's yacht.</p> 	<p>Rent all nine casitas at the new Jicaró Island Ecolodge, in the Granada Islands, and exchange I do's with the Mombacho Volcano reflected in the lake.</p> 	<p>Keep your eyes peeled for armadillos, wild orchids and colorful quetzal birds in the Miraflores cloud forest. At the Nature Reserve Miraflores, experienced bilingual guides lead affordable horseback tours that allow you to see more of the park in one day.</p> 	<p>At your cocktail hour, serve gourmet sun-dried pineapple, mango and banana in Maya-inspired baskets. Get the goods in Managua at the Masaya craft market — the best in the country.</p> 	<p>Take Teva sandals or other sturdy water shoes for creek walking and hopping in and out of boats.</p> 
honduras	<p>Budget-minded globe-trotters will appreciate Honduras' exotic beaches, world-class diving and rainforest attractions — at half the cost of better-known destinations in the surrounding region.</p> 	<p>At Roatan's Palmetto Bay Plantation, an island resort with 23 overwater bungalows, celebrate your happiness in an open-air poolside lodge.</p> 	<p>Say your vows in Hacienda San Lucas' yoga pavilion, with views of the Copan Valley. Then hold your reception on the lawn of this eight-room inn.</p> 	<p>Snorkel the protected coral cays of Cayos Cochinos marine park with Utopia Village. Day trips include a visit with the Garifuna Indian tribe and a lobster lunch.</p> 	<p>Gift guests with traditional Lenca vases, plates or bottles, which are handmade and decorated by indigenous artisans at pottery collectives in various small towns like La Campa.</p> 	<p>Bring a small day pack for hiking through the jungle and climbing Maya temples. Water and sunscreen are essential when visiting ancient sites like the ruins of Copan.</p> 
panama	<p>Panama attracts wildlife die-hards who want to do what none of their friends have done. Who knows — you might come home with a close-up shot of a margay or a capuchin monkey.</p> 	<p>At the elegant 122-room Bristol Buenaventura, even big weddings (the ballroom seats 300) feel intimate, thanks to romantic details like a grand arrival via horse and carriage.</p> 	<p>Commune with nature in the 11 treehouse-like cabanas at the Cotton Tree Lodge, on the Moho River. The owner offers chocolate-making workshops, using local cacao.</p> 	<p>Habla Ya leads hikes on the Quetzales Trail, in Volcan Baru National Park; on the way, the continental divide renders insane views of both oceans.</p> 	<p>In lieu of a guest book, have guests sign colorful molas: embroidered and appliquéd fabric pictures made by the Kuna tribe.</p> 	<p>Be sure to pack high-quality binoculars in a protective case; birders flock to Panama, where more than 800 species, including six different types of booby, can be found.</p> 
belize	<p>Boasting adventure both by land (Maya temples, cave tubing) and by sea, Belize is for snorkeling and diving fanatics who want a side of rainforest excitement.</p> 	<p>Choose from a beach or garden setting at Hamanasi Adventure & Dive Resort, which offers 21 rooms, suites and treehouses.</p> 	<p>Exchange vows amid lush foliage at the 15-room Ka'ana Boutique Resort & Spa. Your reception dinner features produce from the onsite organic garden.</p> 	<p>Dive the Blue Hole, a 400-foot sinkhole in the Lighthouse Reef made famous by Jacques Cousteau. Hugh Parkey's Belize Adventures offers a one-day boat trip.</p> 	<p>Decorative bottles of Marie Sharp's tamarind, green-mango and habanero hot sauce make great tabletop favors. Order online, or contact the local office, near Stann Creek.</p> 	<p>Pack a snorkel, mask and fins for exploring the second-longest barrier reef in the world — home to nurse sharks, stingrays, sea turtles and other exotic marine life.</p> 