

# DESTINATIONS Group Leader e-Newsletter

from Group Travel Directors - Your International Group Tour Specialists

Providing the latest travel news to group leaders

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## In This Issue

[Central America...Worth a visit](#)

[Oberammergau Passion Play](#)

[Strengthening US Dollar](#)

## Teleseminars for Group Leaders

Because there's so much to learn and know about international group travel, GTD has begun offering FREE teleseminars for group leaders.

If you're interested in registering or receiving future teleseminar invitations, please email [jweiss@gtd.org](mailto:jweiss@gtd.org).

Send us your ideas for future teleseminars.

[Click HERE to Join Our Opt-in Group Leader e-Newsletter](#)

Join our opt-in e-newsletter and receive valuable information, exclusive group leader Discovery Tour invites, and the latest news every group leader needs to know.

 Forward to a Friend

**Planning a performing or arts-related tour?**

## Central America... Worth a Visit

*GTD's air purchasing specialist, Beth Heisler, recently returned from a travel expo held in Nicaragua and El Salvador. She shares with you her visit to Central America.*



The Central American Travel Market (CATM) recently held its travel expo in Managua, Nicaragua and I had the good fortune to attend. Now in its fifth year, CATM showcased the region's best travel offerings during a weeklong expo that more than 300 travel buyers and suppliers attending from Europe, Asia, North America and Latin America.

Nicaragua has come a long way in the past five years, with much improved infrastructure and tourism offerings. Pre- and post-tours within Nicaragua as well as in Panama, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica or Belize were offered.

I chose Northern Nicaragua and El Salvador for my pre & post touring and both were a very pleasant surprise! Nicaragua and El Salvador both accept the US Dollar (it is the national currency in El Salvador). The climates in both countries are constant almost all year long and vary by terrain - from scenic mountains, to rich rainforests, down to beautiful beaches. The rainy season runs May-October, and dry season, November-April, with average temperatures around 84 degrees. I felt welcomed and safe everywhere we went. Civil war is a thing of the past.

In Nicaragua, I visited the old colonial city of Leon with its narrow streets, low adobe houses, red-tile roofs and many churches. Our overnight was at a wonderful hotel that was once a convent - the Hotel El Convento. The open walkways are filled with antiques, and there is a beautiful central courtyard and garden to enjoy. We visited the Cathedral and climbed the bell tower and then up to the roof-top for a panoramic city view. The tomb of the famous Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario lies in the cathedral. The original location of the city of Leon was on Lake Managua and was buried by ashes from Momotombo Volcano in the 16th century. The location has slowly been excavated and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We then made our way north to the highland town of Matagalpa, the capital of coffee country. Our lodgings were at Selva Negra, a



[Click here](#) to learn more about how to organize a flawless international performance tour.

### Types of groups interested in traveling to Central America:

- Ecology
- Archaeology
- Horticulture
- Art
- Sustainable tourism
- Bird watching
- Outdoor/Adventure

### GTD Travel Trivia

A KLM 747-400 flight from Amsterdam to Australia carries an average of just over 1,000 kilograms of food, and some 1,324 litres of drink - from mineral water to wine and whiskey.

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AMERICAN AIRLINES saved \$40,000 in 1987 by eliminating one olive from each salad served in first class.

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The abbreviation ORD for Chicago's O'Hare airport comes from the old name "Orchard Field."

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KLM is the world's oldest

sustainable coffee plantation that welcomes tourists. In this area one can hike miles of beautiful trails, ride horseback or bird watch. Guided tours of the mountain resort, coffee plantation, flower greenhouses and agriculture are lively and informative.

We later took a one-hour flight from Managua, Nicaragua, to San Salvador, El Salvador. The ancient Mayans called El Salvador "Cuscatlan" - meaning "land of precious things". This country has volcanoes, lakes, highland villages and beaches that run along a 175-mile-long coast. Surfers from around the world come to surf on waves that are ranked fifth best in the world! We stayed 3 nights in San Salvador and enjoyed daytrips to many of the area's major attractions.

Our first excursion headed north along the Artisans Route, to the colorful town of La Palma. Here we visited an artisan village where women are trained in the art of painting wooden crafts. Arrangements can be made for groups to participate or attend classes. Our next stop was in Suchitoto, which was a cultural capital during the heyday of the indigo trade. This was one of my favorite towns! The village is undergoing an arts revival and the beautiful town square hosts an arts and food festival every weekend, with live music and stands full of art and handicrafts.

Our second daytrip was east along the Floral Route, which includes cultural traditions, history, archaeological sites and beautiful flowers everywhere you turn. Our first stop was Joya de Cerén archaeological site, a UNESCO humanity heritage site and is the only place in the Mayan world that shows the daily life of Mayan natives. Then on to Juayua, which in Nahuatl means "River of Purple Orchids" with its natural beauty. Here we found another impressive church that venerates the Black Christ. Every weekend the locals host a famous Gastronomical Festival.

Our last area to visit was in Apaneca, which is in the heart of coffee land. Here all of the telephone poles for miles and miles are colorfully painted by the locals with floral paintings. We visited the town of Concepcion de Ataco, whose main attraction is the textile industry with rustic methods and religious images.

Even though I wasn't sure what to expect prior to traveling to Nicaragua and El Salvador, I must say I was thoroughly impressed. My visit far exceeded my expectations in beauty, fascinating sites, and the friendliness of the people. I am eager to return to Central America and would highly suggest that group leaders consider traveling to this part of the world if they want to visit an emerging destination.

I would have to agree with the Mayans - this is truly the "Land of Precious Things."

## Oberammergau 2010 Ten Years is a Long Time to Wait

airline established in  
1919.

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Group Travel Directors'  
first tour group was  
in 1982, a performing  
tour...Wayne State  
University Symphonic  
Band to China.

### Start Your Planning NOW!

It's not too late to plan your Oberammergau Passion Play tour for 2010.

Since its beginnings in the 15th century, the citizens of the picturesque village of Oberammergau have performed the Passion Play.

This world-famous performance takes place every ten years and is a do-not-miss event. Christians from around the world come to witness this spiritual re-enactment of the Passion of Christ.



Traveling with your congregation and friends on a spiritual-based tour builds community, faith, and relationships. If you'd like to learn more about the Oberammergau Passion Play, contact GTD. Tickets usually sell-out quickly, so acting now will reserve performance tickets.

Request an [Oberammergau Information Packet](#) by emailing [kpeer@gtd.org](mailto:kpeer@gtd.org). In the packet you'll find sample itineraries, history on the Oberammergau Passion Play, and answers to frequently asked questions of group leader.

## Strengthening US Dollar

The US Dollar is once again enjoying a gain in dominance against most currencies. In fact, the Euro has fallen to a 13-month low against the Dollar since soaring to a record high of \$1.60 this past summer. This boost in the Dollar against the Euro equates to approximately a 20% increase in your Dollar's buying power.

For international travelers the Dollar's resurgence is putting a happier spin on future travel costs. Since there is no way to know how long the Dollar will remain in this positive upswing, GTD suggests there is no better time to travel.

Cynthia Jorgenson, co-owner and travel purchasing manager says, "We deal with the effects of the dollar's buying capacity on a daily basis. At GTD we understand the impact it has on our travelers, so we take extra care in putting our packages together that provide the best value. While we can't completely insulate travelers from the change in currency rates, we do work diligently to minimize any negative impact."

Cynthia offers the following advice to take advantage of the Dollar's current value:

*Plan your tour now, and get travelers enrolled as soon as possible. GTD will help you lock in currency rates so there are no currency price changes for you and your travelers.*

Talk to your GTD Group Tour Specialist about how you can take advantage of the Dollar's current strength.



**Group Travel Directors - International Group Tour Specialists**

Group Travel Directors (GTD) is internationally renowned for custom designing purposeful tours for churches, schools, families, organizations and other special interest groups to destinations worldwide. Each tour is filled with unique experiences because enriching lives through travel are the words we live by.

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