

Mexico's Copper Canyon Adventure

Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine traditional motorcoach touring with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most active people find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect — in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the brochure?

- A: About three weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:
- *Hotel Listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
 - *Traveler List
 - *Daily Schedule
 - *Tour t-shirt
 - *Nametag
 - *Adventure map
 - *Re-usable luggage tags for first-time travelers

Q: What kind of identification do I need to get across the border into Mexico?

- A: Since we will be crossing the Mexican border by bus, you will need to present either a valid passport, a U.S. Passport Card, or a U.S. citizenship document (birth certificate) together with a state-issued photo-id (drivers license). In addition, you will be required to purchase a Mexico Tourist Card in order to be in the country legally. This fee is approximately \$25 (USD) and is not covered in the cost of the Adventure. You will need to have enough cash on hand to purchase this Mexico Tourist Card when we cross the border. **Be advised that Mexico, like many countries, now requires that passports be valid for at least six months after the date of entry.** It is also recommended that you have at least 2 empty pages in your passport. Additional pages can be inserted by the State Department into passports for no charge. Just be sure to allow enough processing time. Passports can usually be obtained by applying at your town's main post office. They normally take six weeks to process, but due to new passport regulations over travel between Canada and Mexico, we highly recommend that you allow additional time and obtain or renew your passport as soon as possible.

IMPORTANT: Please make a copy of your passport and birth certificate and keep them in your luggage separate from where you keep your passport. In case your passport gets lost, having these copies really speeds up the replacement process.

Q: Do you have any suggestions to help with connecting flights?

- A: WAI is not a travel agent, and we don't have the authority to make individual bookings or print airline tickets.

By now your flights to El Paso should be booked. If you have not yet booked your flights, we strongly suggest that you do so as soon as possible. We recommend that you contact the travel agent with whom we work, Debbi Custer, at 888.276.0925 or debbi@wtpdx.com

Debbi knows our program and would be glad to assist you in finding a competitive fare. There are many other sources, including AAA, if you are a member, and a host of Internet web sites. To start your planning, www.orbitz.com is a good site to find which flights are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the web site of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. Other sites to check out include:

Airline sites:

www.continental.com
www.southwest.com
www.united.com
www.aa.com (American)
www.alaskaair.com
www.usairways.com
www.delta.com

Planning sites:

www.travelocity.com
www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.onetravel.com
www.bestfares.com
www.priceline.com
www.qixo.com

NOTE: As flight delays and missed connections become a more common occurrence, the advantages of departing for the starting point one day early increases. We propose that you consider planning your flights to arrive one day early, thereby minimizing the stress of any possible delays and allowing an additional day to recover from the trip before the Adventure begins in earnest. For help in booking a hotel room in El Paso on the extra night, just give us a call.

Q: What are the plans for rendezvousing in El Paso?

- A: The starting point of the Adventure is the Hawthorn Inn & Suites in El Paso, Texas, located just a few blocks from the El Paso Airport. Upon arrival into El Paso you can catch a free Hawthorn Inn shuttle by picking up a courtesy phone in the airport near the baggage area.

Our first group activity will be a Welcome Reception at our hotel in the evening.

Q: What type of hotels will we be in?

A: We use superior, tourist class (3-star) accommodations. When making reservations, we request non-smoking rooms and as many rooms on the ground floor as possible.

Q: How is land transportation handled?

A: Throughout portions of the trip, we will use a full-sized motorcoach. The El Chepe train will form a significant portion of our land travel throughout the canyon. While in Cerocahui and El Fuerte, we will also be using vans to get to and from excursions.

Q: What will the train be like?

A: The famous El Chepe train will provide us with a scenic and memorable journey through Copper Canyon. We will be riding aboard the first-class version of the train. The seats are comfortable with plenty of leg room, and the views are tremendous, especially in the upper sections of the canyon. In between each rail car, there are open-air vestibules where you can get some fresh air and enjoy spectacular picture-taking opportunities. The train is equipped with a dining car as well as a bar, which are both great places to enjoy the endless vistas of the canyon.

Q: What kind of walks will we be doing?

A: The Copper Canyon is a new destination for WAI, with new walk routes. Although Mexico is not currently an IVV nation (i.e. not affiliated with volkssport), we will receive Mexico volkssport stamps (through the AVA) for 3 of the walks on our Copper Canyon Adventure.

Our walks will include two city walks (Chihuahua and El Paso) and four scenic, rural walks (Cerro Gallego, Cerocahui Falls, Rio El Fuerte/Petroglyphs, and Copper Canyon Rim). On all walks, you will have the services of your WAI guide team as well as our national guides. Walks will range in distance from 4 to 10 kilometers. Difficulty levels are gauged using the rating system of the American Volkssport Association ranging from 1 to 5. Following is a description of the rating system:

1. An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained trail with no significant hills. Probably suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
2. A moderately easy walk, may be on pavement or on trails. No significant difficulty with hills. May not be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
3. A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills and/or steps. Strollers and wheelchairs questionable.
4. A more difficult walk. Most likely in a natural setting with poorly maintained paths and steeper or hilly inclines. Not likely to be wheelchair or stroller accessible. Participants with certain health problems should take caution.
5. A very difficult walk. All in rough fields or woods. Many steep hills or high altitude trails, or very rough uneven terrain, steep or unstable inclines. Not suitable for any person who is not in good health.

On this particular Adventure, walks will be rated between 1 and 3. Three of the walks will be at relatively high elevation (5,000-7,000 feet) but will be primarily on level or downhill terrain.

We normally allow between 3 and 3¼ hours for each walk, depending upon our itinerary for the day and the sightseeing opportunities along the route. Of course, none of the walks are mandatory and we encourage travelers to pace themselves. Take a day off or do a partial walk as necessary. Just let the guide know your needs, and we'll help you make adjustments.

Carrying a water bottle on the walks is recommended on the walks, and especially on the three walks in the high canyon portion of the trip (Cerro Gallego, Cerocahui Falls, and Copper Canyon Rim). Because of the rocky terrain on three of the walks, walking boots and a walking stick are highly recommended.

Our itinerary is aggressive and designed to offer the traveler as much exposure to the areas we visit as possible. In order to maximize enjoyment of these rigorous and rewarding Adventures, we recommend that travelers be in good physical condition. If you have doubts about your ability to participate, please contact us for a more detailed description of what to expect from this experience.

Q: What is a volkswalk?

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is a steady walk through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). It is non-competitive and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

Q: What type of foot wear should I bring?

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them the preferred footwear for travelers. We believe a quality pair of lightweight hiking boots is a good investment for a traveling walker and can even eliminate the need for a second pair of walking shoes if waterproof.

Q: Is the water drinkable in Mexico? Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: **Water:** We **DO NOT** recommend drinking water from the tap. Bottled purified water will be available from stores throughout the program. Please be prepared to purchase your drinking water, even for group meals.

Q: Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: One of the realities of group travel is that we share a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy Adventure, including the following:

- * Use Vitamin C and Echinacea beginning a week before the trip and during the trip to boost your immune system (check with your doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea).
- * Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the trip.
- * Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- * If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- * Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.
- * Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in group activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

Shots: No vaccinations are required or recommended for this trip other than the standard inoculations that should be kept up to date for all international travel. We have found travel health clinics to be the most reliable sources of information in this matter. You can find them in the yellow pages or online. Two examples are www.ushealthworks.com and www.passporthealthusa.com.

Prescriptions:

Though we have not had problems with prescription drugs at airport security before, we recommend that you bring a note from your doctor verifying your need for any prescription drugs you will bring on the trip.

Q: How many people do you accept on an Adventure?

A: Generally, we close the trip at no more than 30 people. Often, our groups are quite a bit smaller than that; this will likely be a full trip.

Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, anywhere from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men. Another is that they tend to outlive their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

Q: How much money should I take along?

A: This depends entirely upon your own preferences. However, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Several meals are not included.
- Gratuities for group meals, as well as for the coach driver and local guides, if any, are included in the program price.
- ATM's are available in Chihuahua and El Fuerte but not throughout the rest of the Copper Canyon.
- Many vendors accept U.S. dollars in lieu of the Mexican peso, though the exchange rate given may be marginally poorer than if you pay directly with peso.
- The current exchange rate is approximately 12 pesos to 1 dollar.
- Credit cards are accepted by some vendors and restaurants, but cash is always preferred; surcharges may be applied to credit card purchases due to merchant credit card fees.
- It is always a good idea to make photocopies of the credit cards you're using while you're traveling. These photocopies should be kept separate from the cards themselves.
- Our recommendation: Take \$200 USD of cash, \$100 equivalent in pesos, a debit card, and at least one credit card. You can purchase pesos from your bank before arriving for the Adventure. Use credit or debit cards whenever possible in the early part of the trip, restock your pesos from ATM's as necessary (in Chihuahua or El Fuerte), and save your U.S. dollars as a backup.
- **WARNING:** The dollar sign symbol for the peso is the same as for the U.S. dollar. Be clear on the currency used on the price tag before making your purchase.

Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: As always, it is best to arrange your wardrobe so that you can layer clothing as needed. Winter time in the canyon can be a bit cold, especially while in the higher elevations in the canyons. It would be wise to bring some warmer clothing for these days so that you can dress in layers. Gloves and fleece jackets are recommended. Compact rain gear is always recommended though rain is less likely this time of the year in Copper Canyon. We also strongly recommend you bring along a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen to protect against the direct rays of the sun. Walking attire is the standard for the entire trip. We suggest you bring along a set of casual pants and blouse or shirt for an occasional activity or more formal dinner (e.g. farewell dinner).

Weather:

Average temperatures will be in the 60's and 70's in the lower elevations this time of year, while the higher elevations in the canyons will average in the 50's. Mornings and evenings can be quite chilly in Cerocahui and Divisadero, so the layered look will be the way to go!

Q: Do you have a suggested reading list for the trip?

A: Yes. Having historical background information on the areas you will visit will greatly enhance your experience. Because this is a new trip and there are not as many books written about the Copper Canyon as with other areas, we don't have a large list yet. We are hoping to

expand these selections as we become aware of new material. Below we have compiled a few suggested reading selections:

- * Yesterday's Train - A Rail Odyssey Through Mexican History by Terry Pindell
- * In the Sierra Madre by Jeff Biggers
- * Tarahumara: Where Night Is the Day of the Moon by Bernard L. Fontana
- * Mexico's Sierra Tarahumara: A Photohistory of the People of the Edge by Dirk Raat
- * The November 2008 edition of National Geographic has an interesting article about the Tarahumara people of the Copper Canyon entitled "A People Apart".

Other Important Information

MEALS:

A few of the lunches are included at our Copper Canyon hotels or as components of our walks. For other lunches and dinners that are not included, we will either provide transportation to restaurants or provide good maps and dining guides when restaurants are within walking distance of our hotel. We will attempt to make no-host reservations for the dining car on El Chepe for lunches and dinners that are not included while you are enjoying the magnificent train journey through the canyon. You may choose to dine with the group or eat at your convenience.

CALLING/MAILING HOME:

Calling home while out of the country can be expensive. It is usually less expensive to give a copy of our itinerary to your friends and relatives and have them call you. Travelers have also had good luck with pre-paid phone cards purchased here in the States or overseas; if you use these, remember to bring along the list of in-country toll-free access phone numbers issued with the card.

LAUNDRY:

Other than our hotel in El Paso, our hotels throughout our Copper Canyon Adventure will not have laundry facilities. On such a short Adventure, laundry may not be an issue. There are two primary approaches we recommend to the laundry problem: 1) pack a few feet of clothes line and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home.

ELECTRICITY:

Electric current throughout Mexico is 110 volts, 60 cycles, the same type used in the United States and Canada. Some electrical outlets at hotels are still of the two prong type. To get around this and enable you to use personal appliances with a three prong electrical cord plug, we suggest taking a converter with you.

GRATUITIES:

Gratuities for group meals and lodging are included in the cost of the Adventure. The Adventure price also includes the tip for the driver and any local guides that serve us.

LUGGAGE:

One large suitcase or two smaller suitcases are allowed per person, as well as carry-on type luggage. Remember that portage is not provided on this Adventure, though you will have help when access to your room or on the train is challenging with luggage. Packing light has proven to be the best way to travel.

NOTE: Bringing a small day pack is a handy item to have along for our walks and excursions.

TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. If you've not participated in group travel before, there are a few things you should be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your experience.
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our "Adventures," we still believe in providing a full day's opportunities for our travelers. On some days, we spend a significant amount of time on the bus.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves giving up a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we strive for added flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be "headed in the same direction."

We hope we've covered most of your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to walking Mexico's Copper Canyon with you!

Adventure Checklist

Though by no means intended to be comprehensive, following is a list of things you should probably consider bringing with you on this walking adventure. We've left a few blank lines for you to add your own "necessities" as you think of them.

- airline tickets
- passport and copy of passport**
- rain gear/wind breaker
- walking stick
- sun screen & lip balm
- sense of adventure
- earplugs
- highlighter pen to mark maps
- insect repellent
- walking credit books
- sunglasses
- sense of humor
- mini flashlight
- two pairs of walking shoes (or boots)
- camera (with extra batteries)
- extra film / memory cards
- travel binoculars
- road maps (to follow our progress)
- handi-wipes (for quick cleanup on the go)
- hat or visor—**broad brimmed sun hat**
- sheet protector for map/directions in rain
- swimsuit
- travel towel
- gloves and/or warm fleece
- clothing that can be layered
- photocopies of debit/credit cards
- WAI Walking Journal from prior trips
- vitamins
- prescriptions
- small day pack
- Mexican currency
- adaptor for wall outlet
-
-