

Hi-jinx in Honduras

Honduras isn't exactly toward the top of most Aussie motorcyclists' travel wish list - but maybe it should be, because there are great trails, big parties, spectacular scenery and cheap booze...

Story and photography by JOHN BENNETT

HONDURAS is a land of contrasts, with a cool mountainous interior and a warm Caribbean coastline - ideal for bike riding. It is in Central America and has common borders with Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and between the Atlantic (Caribbean) and the Pacific Oceans.

We started our trip by heading up the Pico Bonito Mountains before tipping over into green, tropical jungle and huge waterfalls. We were in the Parque Nacional Pico Bonito (National Park), home of jaguars, armadillos, monkeys, toucans and many other animals. The dirt road doesn't make it all the way to the top of the 2400-metre peak, but it comes close. And the

swim in the Rio Cangrejal during the return journey was perfect to wash away the day's dust.

Hondurans know how to party. It was Saturday night, we were the only foreigners in town and the food and drink was plentiful. The local ladies had us up dancing far beyond our tired bodies' normal endurance...

Way back in 1502 Christopher Columbus first set foot on the American mainland at Trujillo the next town we visited. There is a sense of history to the place but we needed a few cleansing afternoon ales, so we headed straight to a bar-restaurant right on the beach run by an expatriate Irishman from Donegal. Four or five cold beers later we sat down to a late lunch, or should I say feast, of lobster, bugs, camarones (prawns), deep fried snapper and paella - all for ten bucks. It was so good we returned for dinner that night.

After a leisurely start the next day we rode through the Garifuna huts and



villages of San Antonio and Guadalupe, crossing the Rio Grande in the process. The road then turned into a donkey track through lush jungle scenery, emerging onto a beautiful beach, enclosed by a reef. There we found the remains of an enormous three-storey hacienda, long abandoned. Its lush lawns running down to the beach were now grazed by stray cattle belonging to the local villagers.

At Santa Fe we ate lunch at Comedor Caballero, which was a basic hut on the beach. The food was fantastic and Señor Caballero (Peter) is thought by many to be the best cook in Honduras. Again we came nowhere near finishing the lavish feast provided.

We then left the coast to climb the towering Sierra de Agalta mountains (2,400m) up a dirt road twisting through pine forests to reach the valley of 'Olancho' - Honduras' largest cattle farming area. That night we stayed in Catacamas, where Pedro and Daniel were held up by a gun-totting vasquero



(cowboy) who had drunk even more cervezas than them... luckily they persuaded him to move on.

The next day we climbed the La Tigra mountain range (2,200m), through a lush cloud forest to the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa or 'Tegus' to the locals. On the way we descended in Valle de Angeles (The 'Valley of the Angels') - a colonial town with much of its 18th century appearance. Tegus was founded by the Spanish in 1578 as a silver and gold mining town and is surrounded by a ring of mountains.

It was then on to the western mountain ranges through La Paz, a region famous for its coffee plantations, landslides and washaways.

La Esperanza, a quiet colonial town with a Lenca Indian market was our next stop and the temperature was now decidedly cool. We spent some time in the local market, grateful for the chance to buy some souvenirs.

Back on the dirt we passed through the highest mountain of Honduras, Montañas de Celac (2800m) experiencing some of the most fantastic views over the ranges. After visiting one of the many coffee and tobacco plantations we visited the local hot springs near Macala. The springs were a perfect 38°C and did a good job of washing off the dust and easing the aching limbs. We headed on to Santa Rosa de Copan, a beautiful little town with cobblestoned streets. The highlight was a visit to the

cigar factory, each one hand-rolled. We were enthralled by the fine workmanship, speed and dexterity of the workers.

Copan Ruinas is a beautiful little village, with cobblestoned streets passing among typical white adobe buildings with red-tiled roofs and a lovely colonial church. More importantly, it is the home of the best preserved Mayan ruins in the Americas with its ball court, hieroglyphics stairways and acropolis. All afternoon was spent visiting the ruins and we were most impressed by the ballgame, where the leader of the winning team was decapitated and thus allowed to go to a greater life!

Our next highlight was Lago de Yojoa, a large freshwater lake, where we stayed at



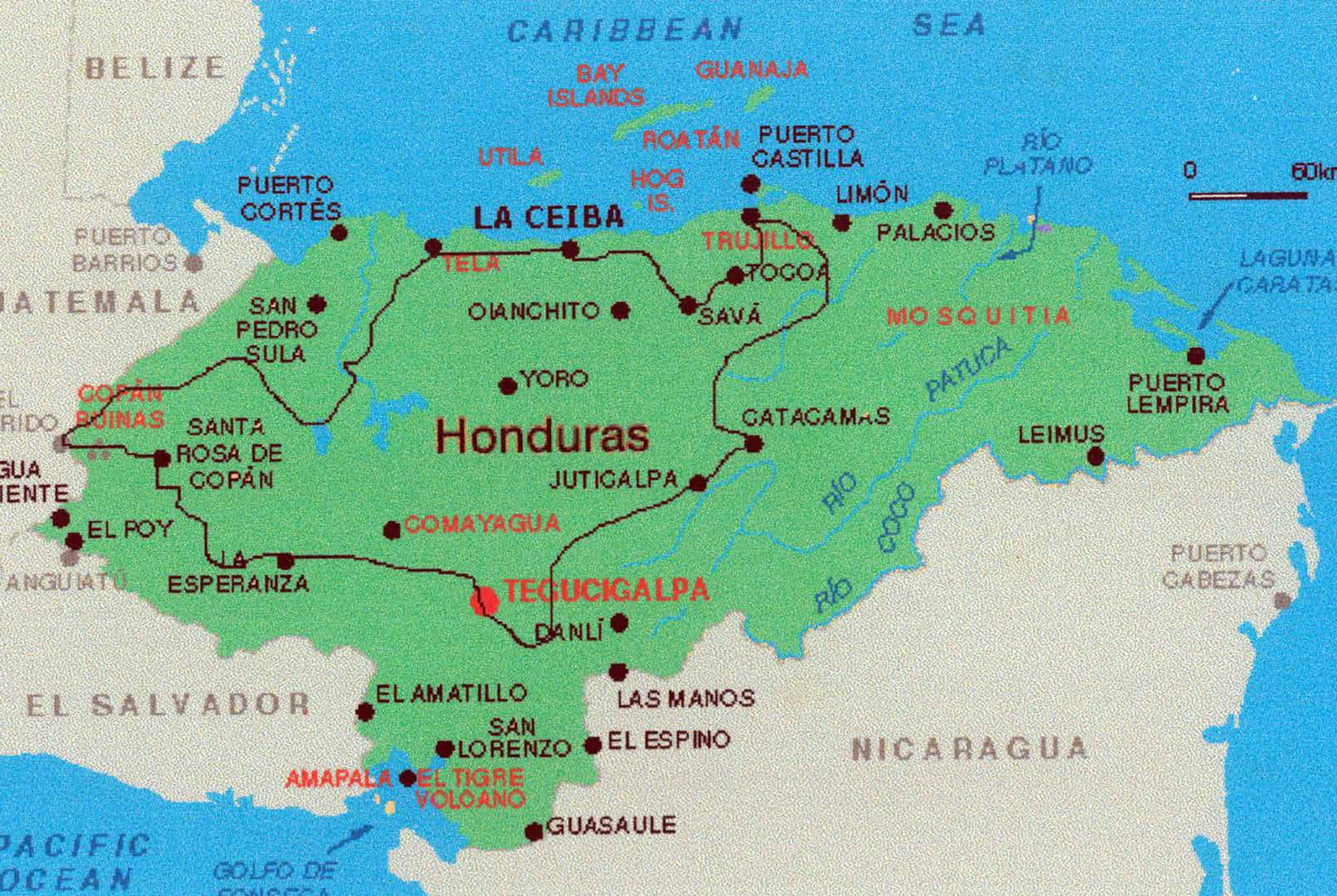
some of the most beautiful beaches. Our destination however, was along a sand track to the Caribbean coastal village of Tournabe, an isolated Garifuna village surrounded by a lagoon and framed with coconut trees.

We stayed at the Last Resort, a quaint timber building right on the beach. The riding highlight of the whole trip was the scenic ride along a sand track with the beautiful Caribbean beaches on one side, where palm trees frame the coastline and a beautiful lagoon on the other side, the Laguna de los Micas. This was the entrance to the Punta Sal National Park, created to protect endangered animals like the white-faced monkey, ocelot and manatee.

After numerous crashes in the soft sand we got back hot and exhausted, so immediately downed three or four beers before we were served freshly cut whole coconuts with the top lopped off and then filled with rum. I drank so many of these I don't even remember giving the thank you and goodbye speech at the celebratory dinner that followed!

John Bennet is now the Australian representative for Pancho-Villa Moto Tours, the company which ran this tour. For more information about how to take part in a Pancho Villa tour of the Americas or Africa, ring him on (066) 871 512.





CARIBBEAN SEA

BELIZE

BAY ISLANDS
GUANAJA

GUATEMALA

0 60km

PUERTO CORTÉS

UTILA

ROATÁN

PUERTO CASTILLA

RÍO PLATANO

LIMÓN

PALACIOS

LA CEIBA

HOGUÍS

TRUJILLO

TOCOA

SAVÁ

OLANCHITO

YORO

Honduras

GATAGAMAS

MO SQUITIA

PATUCA

PUERTO LEMPIRA

LEIMUS

COPÁN RUINAS

SANTA ROSA DE COPÁN

EL POY

JUTICALPA

COMAYAGUA

TEGUCIGALPA

DANLÍ

ESPERANZA

EL SALVADOR

EL AMATILLO

LAS MANOS

SAN LORENZO

EL ESPINO

NICARAGUA

AMAPALA EL TIGRE VOLCANO

GUASAULE

PACIFIC OCEAN

GOLFO DE CONCEPCIÓN

PUERTO CABEZAS

LAGUNA CARATÁ