

HEAD TO HEAD

Acatenango v Cerro Negro

Hiking up or sandboarding down? Size up Central America's soaring volcanoes with adventures to remember in Guatemala and Nicaragua, writes [Laura French](#)

Acatenango, Guatemala



IN A NUTSHELL

About 18 miles from Guatemala's Unesco-listed city of Antigua sits Acatenango. This active volcano juts 3,976m into the sky, offering a challenging climb for the adventurous, with superlative views of the surrounding smoking peaks.

TELL ME MORE

Hikers ascend through lush farmland and mystical cloud forest to reach the summit of this perfectly conical peak. The landscapes are spectacular, but it's the views of nearby Volcán de Fuego (pictured) that really make it. Central America's most active volcano erupts every 15-20 minutes, with jets of smoke billowing out during the day and bright-red sparks of lava exploding like fireworks at night. It's a strenuous eight-mile, round-trip trek with lots of steep stretches, but this extraordinary sight is worth the challenge.

BEST TIME TO GO

It's best to go in the dry season, between November and April, when clear skies are more likely.

DID YOU KNOW?

Acatenango is one of 37 volcanoes dotted across Guatemala and the third highest in Central America.

BOOK IT: Audley Travel offers a full-day Acatenango hike on a 10-day tailor-made tour of Guatemala, which features three nights each in Antigua and Lake Atitlán, and two in El Petén (near Tikal). Prices start at £5,800, including flights, transfers, accommodation and excursions.
audleytravel.com

Cerro Negro, Nicaragua



IN A NUTSHELL

Cerro Negro, one of Nicaragua's handful of active volcanoes, sits just outside the Spanish-built city of Leon. It offers an exhilarating experience for thrill-seekers, with popular trips to sandboard at speed down its ashy slopes.

TELL ME MORE

Tours start with a one-hour 4x4 ride from Leon, passing yucca fields and dusty, off-road tracks. From here, it's an hour-long hike to reach the 728m summit, clambering between stark basalt boulders and soft grey sand. At the top, travellers are given a long wooden sled, a boiler suit and a helmet – then it's time to pelt down the side of the volcano. The descent can be controlled by digging your heels into the gravelled sand. Daredevils can hit speeds in excess of 60mph.

BEST TIME TO GO

As with Guatemala, November to April is dry season and therefore the optimal time to sandboard. It gets very hot in the middle of the day, so an early-morning or sunset trip is recommended.

DID YOU KNOW?

This is the youngest active volcano in Central America, formed in 1850. It last erupted in 1999.

BOOK IT: Intrepid Travel offers a 16-day Central American Journey tour through Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica from £1,496 (excluding flights). The half-day sandboarding trip starts at \$55.
intrepidtravel.com