



The 10 Prettiest Towns in El Salvador



From elegant colonial architecture to brilliant murals showcasing indigenous art, [El Salvador](#)'s towns and villages are a mix-and-match of cultures, heritages, and histories, [all on display in a country](#) rebounding from recent struggles and eager to welcome tourists.

01 Suchitoto

of 10



Hugo Henriquez / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Suchitoto,
El Salvador*

Perched on a hilltop overlooking the blue waters of Lake Suchitlan, the Spanish colonial village of Suchitoto was saved from destruction during El Salvador's hard-fought civil war by a dedicated group of locals. Today Suchitoto earns a spot on almost every travel itinerary, the center of a proud renaissance in local craftsmanship, its cathedral-dominated central plaza filled with craft booths and lined with shops selling clothing hand-dyed in indigo, which is grown in the surrounding countryside. The tile-roofed adobe houses lining the cobblestone streets are painted in gentle shades of mauve, lilac, blue, and green and draped in colorful bougainvillea. Several of Suchitoto's dark-beamed historic villas have been restored as ambiance-rich boutique hotels and restaurants, with rooms surrounding shaded courtyards. The theme continues at Museo de Los Recuerdos Alejandro Cotto, the former home of El Salvador's most famous and beloved movie director, which he left filled with his Spanish colonial antiques and memorabilia.

02 La Palma

of 10



Marc Guitard / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
La Palma,
El Salvador

This sleepy highland village is all about Fernando Llorca, perhaps El Salvador's most renowned painter and craftsman, whose mosaics adorn the Central Cathedral in San Salvador. Moving to the village at age 23, Llorca dedicated himself to teaching villagers his own "naïf" style of carved and painted folk art, and it continues as one of the area's most significant sources of employment. Indeed La Palma seems to live and breathe art; murals featuring indigenous designs cover the walls of houses and businesses, and everywhere you'll see the round brown seeds called copinol made into brightly painted carvings. Don't miss the mosaics in the central park, either.

03
of 10

Santa Ana



Henryk Sadura / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Santa Ana,
El Salvador*

Made wealthy by the surrounding coffee plantations, Santa Ana, El Salvador's less-visited second city, flaunts a string of showy architectural gems including the National Theater, a Baroque wedding cake of a building in jade green, and a gothic cathedral that rivals any in Central America. Halfway between Santa Ana and San Salvador, visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site Joya de Ceren, sometimes called the “Pompeii of the New World” for its excavation of an ancient Mayan farming village entombed in ash during a volcanic eruption. And Santa Ana also makes a convenient place to stay while visiting El Salvador’s even more impressive ruins, the stair-stepped pyramids of Tazumal.

04 Juayúa

of 10



Aaron Morgan / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Juayua,
El Salvador*

Renowned for its Feria de la Gastronomía, or food festival, which takes over the central plaza on weekends, Juayúa also serves as the most popular base camp for travelers on the Ruta de las Flores, a 20-mile road trip through a series of picturesque villages. Surrounded by lush forests and fast-flowing rivers, Juayúa is the gateway to the set of waterfalls called Chorros de la Calera and the even longer Seven Waterfalls hike. When in Juayúa, do like the locals do and eat, starting with the traditional buttery breakfast bread at Pastelería y Cafetería Festival.

05
of 10

Nahuizalco



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ADDRESS:
Nahuizalco,
El Salvador

Weaving, wicker, and other crafts are the focus in Nahuizalco, a small village on the Ruta de las Flores with a strong indigenous influence. Hammocks, purses, and handcrafted furniture are just some of the wares brought in from surrounding towns. At night the market comes alive with a festive atmosphere as the craft shops stay open lit only by candlelight. This region also produces chocolate; a few of the local cacao plantations are open for tours.

06 Salcoatitán

of 10

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ADDRESS:
*Salcoatitan,
El Salvador*

In Nahuatl, the language of its original settlers, Salcoatitán means "the city of Quetzalcoatl," and indeed, a strong sense of history, identity, and pride pervade this quiet village. Fronting a festive plaza where there always seems to be a gathering, Salcoatitan's colonial church is one of the oldest in El Salvador. But it's the gracious 300-year-old Ceiba tree nearby that tells the most interesting story. Supposedly, anyone who hugs the tree and says a prayer will receive a gift from its spirit. It is now surrounded by a wall and plaza with signs explaining its importance.

07 Apaneca

of 10



benkrut / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Apaneca,
El Salvador*

At 4,845 feet, the mountain village of Apaneca has become a destination for adventurers who come for its zipline canopy tour and to hike to the volcanic crater lakes Laguna Verde and Laguna de las Ninfas. With cobblestone streets and rainbow-hued stucco houses almost as colorful as Suchitoto's, Apaneca is long on ambiance, which is boosted by quirky offerings such as the labyrinth of the Café Albania, a hedge maze so complex it really is possible to get lost. Between Apaneca and Concepcion de Ataco, make a lunch stop at El Jardin de Celeste, El Salvador's version of a roadside attraction with tropical gardens, a children's playground, and cabins.

08 Concepcion de Ataco

of 10



Henryk Sadura / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Concepción de Ataco,
El Salvador*

Tucked in the highlands surrounded by coffee plantations, the village that locals call Ataco is a kaleidoscope of murals, the result of a street art project spurred by a government beautification competition. Since then, art has taken over the town, with the streets around the serene central plaza lined with weaving shops, craft stores, and galleries. This is coffee country with outfitters standing by to set up tours of the nearby coffee plantations. Climb

up to the cross on the top of the hill for a view of the coffee groves, then relax over a cup of some of the best coffee in the world at Kafekali or Café del Sitio.

09 La Libertad
of 10



Ryan Forsythe / 500px / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
La Libertad,
El Salvador

The beauty of this fishing village on El Salvador's central coast lies in its energy and liveliness, which is most on display during the afternoon as fishermen return from the day's outing. Stroll the malécon seaside promenade lined with market stalls, then head out to the end of the long municipal pier to watch the fishing boats hauled out of the water, touting their day's catch as they unload. The name La Libertad also designates the greater stretch of coast, which includes some of the best surf beaches and breaks in the world, from Punta Roca at the north end of town to El Sunzal, El Tunco, and El Zonte further north.

10 Ahuachapan

of 10



benkrut / Getty Images

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ADDRESS:
*Ahuachapan,
El Salvador*

This bustling town close to the Guatemala border is known for its geothermal activity, showcased at Los Ausoles, a group of hot springs, mud pools, and steam jets. Close to the bus station, crowds throng the market area along Parque General Francisco Menendez, which also offers a lush oasis surrounding a gazebo. But the real heart of town is Parque Concordia and the white and gold colonial church Iglesia Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion. A set of arched gates and fountains known as Pasaje La Concordia lit up at night in bright colors, is the place to meet and be seen.