



Guatemala Tourist Information



Guatemala

Guatemala is a country that is unique not only for the extraordinary beauty of the countryside, but also for the vibrant soul in the character of our people -a blend of beauty and soul-. Guatemala is located in a privileged spot, right in the center of the American continents and this makes it an important commercial as well as tourist center. A little over 108,000 Km. Sq. (about the size of Tennessee and a little larger than Portugal), Guatemala is divided into 22 departments which are home to a population of 12 million. There is an exquisite cultural mix of 22 Maya ethnic groups, Ladinos and Garifunas. Although the official language is Spanish, there are 23 other languages in use, 21 Maya, Garifuna and Xinca. A hot coastal climate is perfectly balanced with a temperate climate in the highlands. It is so often said that Guatemala's highland climate is one of the world's finest and healthiest, which is why Guatemala is frequently called the Land of Eternal Spring. Guatemala is a country of contrasts, emotion and adventure. The country's natural and cultural treasures are even further enhanced by the fabled warmth of Guatemalans not to mention the tourist attractions that seem to lurk around every corner.

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- Runway
- Cities
- Archaeological Sites
- Natural Reserves
- Touristic Attractions
- Port

Pacific Ocean



Guatemala

soul of the earth

Nature

Parks and reserves

Guatemala is host to one of the richest biological treasures in the world- the habitat for 10% of all species registered on the planet. This encompasses 19 eco-systems, 300 microclimates and 33 volcanoes, five of which are active. Travelers can go from cloud forest to a black sand beach on the Pacific Coast in just a few minutes. There are 93 protected areas and 25 classified as special protected areas, which range from mangroves on both coasts to mountain cloud forests. They all add up to 1.4 million hectares in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, one of the ecologically most important in this hemisphere.



Spelunking (caving)

Exploring and studying caves can be as exciting and adventurous as any experience can get in nature. A weekend or even a single day in a cave can transport you to another world as remote as the ocean bottom or even the surface of another planet. For the Maya, caves were the sacred entrance to the underworld. As a result of many porous limestone deposits, Guatemala is honeycombed with caves of every conceivable size, shape, length or depth. These caves can be visited by walking, swimming, boating or rappelling. The Verapaces boast the Candelaria, the Rey Marcos and Lankin caves, and the Peten is home to Actun Kan (Cave of the Serpent's Mouth), just minutes outside Flores, and many others throughout the country.





Canopy (Zipline)

What used to be a scientific tool to study forest canopies has turned into one of Guatemala's most popular tourist attractions. You can check out the jungle canopy from 30+ meters in the air, zipping from tree to tree, landing briefly with your friends on special platforms that surround huge trees, and you can be sure of a dose of adrenalin along the way. Don't be surprised if you run into monkeys or orchids as you zip through the air. There are also suspension bridges, hung high above the canopy in Ixpapanjul, Peten. There are also ziplines in the Verapaces, in nature reserves in Jalapa, Caldera Lake, on the slopes of active volcano Pacaya, near Lake Atitlan, and in Rio Dulce. There is a collection of canopy adventures and you may enjoy them.



Ornithology (Bird Watching)

Guatemala is an unequalled destination for birdwatchers. The climate and the widespread green areas practically guarantee a wide variety of birds of 738 different species. Guatemala is especially exciting to birdwatchers because it is on the North- South migratory path of birds from South and North America, the two coasts of the United States and Canada. Birds of different feathers do flock together in Guatemala. Lachua Lake, the northern transversal road in Verapaz, Yaxha, Monterrico, Cerro San Gil, Quetzal Biotope, Cerro Alux and Cayala Park already show signs of fame among birdwatchers from all over the World.



Lakes and beaches

On Guatemala's Pacific Coast the beaches are black sand of volcanic origin-certainly exotic. Guatemala is peppered with lakes and lagoons, often also of volcanic origin. The most spectacular is Lake Atitlan, which was born when a volcano blew its top 85,000 years ago and is now over 340 meters (1000+ feet) deep. Dormant Toliman, San Pedro and Atitlan volcanoes stand sentinel over Lake Atitlan's 25+ kilometers of winding shoreline. Shallow Lake Amatitlan, fed by sulfur springs near Guatemala City is another example, along with Calderas Lake on the slopes of the active Pacaya volcano and Ipala, yet another emerald-colored lake of volcanic origin. Lake Izabal in the northern part of the country, is the largest fresh water lake surrounded by a combination of water falls, canyons and rivers, the main one Rio Dulce which flows into Amatique Bay in the Atlantic Ocean and where the town of Livingston is located, home of the Garifuna ethnic group and a must to see.



Coffee Tour

The Guatemala Coffee Tour program brings to tourism an innovative concept-a personal encounter with the world's best coffee. Each one of the host coffee farms explains the tips on coffee cultivation and processing, interacting with the people from the community in a natural setting. Most are located near urban centers to be able to work cooperatively with hotels that lodge foreign tourists. Coffee Tours are currently available in Alta Verapaz, Solola and Sacatepequez, all of them offering a walk or horseback ride through coffee plantations that produce fair trade and organic coffee. These farms are located in the shadow of surrounding volcanoes, on mountains partially in cloud forest, crossed by ravines and magnificent waterfalls these Coffee Tours will provide a different and exotic experience in Guatemala.

Culture

Archaeology

One of Guatemala's most mystical features is its archaeological heritage, the heart of the Maya World. There are countless sites throughout the country that represent the prehispanic Maya civilization. The signature site is majestic Tikal but recent decades have showcased spectacular San Bartolo, with its "Sistine Chapel" murals; and Yaxha with its main walk ways and beautiful lagoon; El Mirador, the largest pyramid by volume in the world; Takalik Abaj with ten terraces rising 1500 meters from the Pacific and spanning the Olmec to the Maya civilizations. As archaeologists learn more about the way the Maya lived in harmony with nature and on a sustainable basis, sites like El Pilar, by the Belize border, recreate a Maya forest garden. It is no coincidence that the newly renamed Peten airport is now the Mundo Maya Airport, and that Guatemala is more and more validating her claim as the heartland of the Maya World. The names roll of the tongue: Topoxte, Nakum, Cancuen, Kaminal Juyu, Quirigua, Uaxactun and Iximche, the ancient Kaqchiquel capital. Archaeology is now further expanding to examine Spanish colonial sites.



Living Cultures

If there is a single feature that makes Guatemala unique, it is the living indigenous culture which envelops daily life, especially in the highlands. Color, traditions, language, ritual and customs dominate in almost half the country as Guatemala's 23 ethnic groups proudly cling to their ancestral ways, differentiating their hometown by wearing their distinctive hand woven attire.



“Vibrant,” “kaleidoscopic,” and above all “authentic” are adjectives that stand out when describing highland life. Saints’ names superimposed on traditional indigenous names dominate the country’s geographical atlas: San Francisco Panajachel, Santiago Atitlan, San Pedro Carcha and San Jose Poaquil join tongue-twisting Chichicastenango in illustrating the blending of venerable indigenous with more modern Christian traditions.



Religious Tourism

There’s religion in the air in all of Guatemala’s streets and byways. Church bells peal from the smallest towns, loudspeakers call the faithful in the countryside while nearby shamans (traditional Maya religious authority), perhaps even in the depths of a cave, are practicing traditional Maya worship. The 2002 canonization of Hermano Pedro de Betancourt of colonial-day Antigua has created a Catholic pilgrim’s route. Holy Week in Guatemala is a mixture of surprising sights, sounds and smells. Fresh pine needles, richly colored sawdust and flower petals carpet procession routes while incense wafts over the heads of processioners and onlookers alike. Holy Week has evolved into one of Guatemala’s most avidly sought and vividly remembered tourist and religious attractions, with processions winding through even the smallest towns and villages, often to the accompaniment of firecrackers or overhead rockets. Guatemala’s unique miracle-working “Black Christ” draws people to Esquipulas in the hot and dry eastern part of the country.



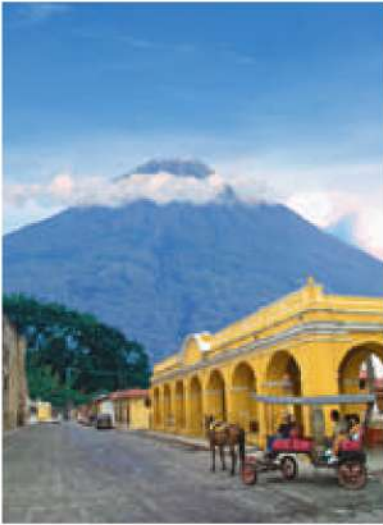


Art History

Guatemala's capital city, Central America's largest by far, is filled with cultural and historic treasures. The seat of government moved to Guatemala City in the late 1700s when earthquakes repeatedly rattled the then-capital Antigua. Although little colonial architecture remains in Guatemala City the Metropolitan Cathedral, the 1930s ornate Presidential Palace (now called the Palace of Culture), the old post office and the classic railroad station and museum are worth the visit. But unique Antigua wears the art history crown in Guatemala. Museums, restored famous paintings, colonial and baroque architecture, and picturesque ruins blend so perfectly that UNESCO has designated the cobble-stoned town as a world heritage site. Antigua is Guatemala's most visited destination and art and history have everything to do with that accolade.

Because of this cultural heritage Guatemala has three recognized World Heritage distinctions declared by UNESCO; Tikal, Quirigua and the prehispanic cultural dance, Rabinal Achi, named an intangible heritage.

This historical richness has been the cradle of many literary, arts and humanitarian world-renown personalities. Some examples are Miguel Angel Asturias - Nobel Literature Prize 1967, Rigoberta Menchu - Nobel Peace Prize 1992.



Cuisine

Guatemalan cuisine features a variety of spices and why not, since many of the world's spices are grown here. Virtually every traditional dish has its own story that the chefs will proudly share with visitors. Visitors who venture into Guatemala's markets will come out with a wealth of ingredients and a new food vocabulary, from kakik to ajonjolito to



cardamom. Regional specialties abound and who could pass up an incredibly inexpensive Caribbean lobster, plateful of Pacific shrimp or a steaming bowl of tapado, Guatemala's own equivalent of bouillabaisse, with local touches such as plantains? Fruits and vegetables are daily staples with exotic such as pitaya, pacayas, and jocotes jostling for position alongside traditional melons and avocados, which are believed by botanists to have originated in Guatemala. The native and traditional dishes are complemented by numerous examples of leading edge cuisine, often restaurant creations by chefs from abroad who revel in the variety (and price) of the fresh Guatemalan ingredients. Major tourist centers such as Guatemala City, Antigua, Flores, Livingston and Panajachel are invariably home to restaurants listed in international guidebooks under "the Best of". For those looking for fast food, a wide variety of choices is available, from local to the worldwide known chains, you name it, they are in Guatemala.



Handicrafts

Guatemala's handicrafts are famous, exotic and diverse. You've probably already seen modest amounts of them in Athens' Plaka, on the streets of Amsterdam or London's Covent Garden, but now you are at the source and can find these handicrafts in local markets throughout the country. Distinctive patterns in colorful cotton textiles flourish, especially in the highlands, while an item in everyday use in Guatemala such as a ceramic colander may look like a work of art "back home." Wooden masks reflect the mixture of indigenous and Christian history, while high-end apparel incorporating native fabrics can be found in Antigua or Panajachel.

Spanish Schools

Guatemala has quickly become a preferred location to learn Spanish. Foreign governments, high school and university students and the just plain curious are drawn by Guatemala's neutral Spanish and the environments in which it can be absorbed.

Guatemalan Spanish is universally understood throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Locations for learning Spanish range from the beach to the remote highlands, with the favorite recipe being a home-stay with a Guatemalan family and the contextual learning of the language.



Community Tourism

Guatemala is certainly the most diverse country in Latin America and arguably one of the most diverse in the world. Guatemala is multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual. When you add to that human mixture an amazing bio-diverse array of flora and fauna it's scarcely surprising that community tourism should be on the rise. Each community is engaged in differentiating cultural traditions, culinary uniqueness, archaeological treasures and the colonial past. The result is a booming movement towards community tourism. There aren't enough days in the year to see all that Guatemala's communities have to offer, and remember that this is all available in a country the size of Portugal.



Museums

The museums in Guatemala range from A to Z, art to zoology, with stops along the way for R for railroads and T for textiles, but above all archaeology is the watchword.



- Palacio Nacional de la Cultura
- Museo Heráldico y de Armas del Ejército
- Museo Miraflores de Kaminal Juyú
- Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología
- Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno “Carlos Mérida”
- Museo de Historia de Guatemala
- Museo de Historia Natural “Jorge A. Ibarra”
- Museo Fray Francisco Vásquez
- Museo Ixchel del Traje Indígena
- Museo de Semana Santa
- Museo de Fe (Museo de la Catedral Metropolitana)
- Museo Popol Vuh
- Museo Casa M.I.M.A.
- Museo Bodegas del Siglo XIX, Cervecería Centroamericana
- Museo de la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (MUSAC)
- Museo de la Cultura Flavio Herrera
- Museo de los Niños de Guatemala
- Museo Carlos F. Novella
- Museo del Ferrocarril
- Museo Casa M.I.M.A.
- Museo de Paleontología y Arqueología “Ing. Roberto Woolflok Saravia” en Estanzuela.



Folk Festivals

With 23 different ethnic, cultural and language groups and a Spanish colonial epoch it should come as no surprise that folk festivals abound. They may deal with religion, local tradition, the harvest or any other theme. One of Guatemala's most famous festivals, the National Folk Festival Rabin Ajaw, in Coban, Alta Verapaz in July. Close-runners up in popularity would be the horse races on November 1, All Souls Day in Todos Santos de los Cuchumatanes and the giant kites that are flown that day in Santiago Sacatepequez.



Sports



Saltwater fishing

If there is an entry in the record books for salt water fishing, Guatemala's Pacific Coast has it. Anglers enjoyed a recent 240 billfish catch, and that was in a single day. Guatemala also holds the record for the most billfish caught and released in one championship day, by one boat in one day, by one person in one day and by one boat in a year. The near-inshore waters of Guatemala's Pacific coast teem with maritime food as several currents meet just offshore. Paddling turtles, breaching humpback whales and spinning dolphins join the lunch line and are an attraction even for the non-angler.



Golf

When was the last time you were distracted while lining up that putt by a puff of smoke from an active volcano? The world's amateur golfers are discovering that Guatemala's world class courses offer spectacular settings at a cost per round that is a fraction of what they are used to. Because of Guatemala's wonderful climate professional and amateur golfers are able to play 365 days a year. Professionals are increasingly drawn to Guatemala by tournaments such as the Tour of the





Americas and the Hooters International NGA Open. Most first class hotels have arrangements with golf clubs and your best bet is to consult with a hotel concierge to arrange a tee time.



Surfing

Surfing has taken off in recent years on Guatemala's Pacific coast. High season for the perfect right and left breaks runs from March through October as the waves swing around from the south. Surf camps are in vogue and individual camping is permitted in many beach side locations. Tourists don't need to bring their own boards since rental equipment is readily available. And who knows whom you'll meet if you take surfing lessons on the Pacific?



Rafting

Guatemala is a mountainous nation with an abundance of river and stream resources. So it should come as no surprise that rafting has taken off in recent years. Guatemala's clear blue rapids range from Class II to Class V and in spite of Guatemala's dry season running from December to May, there's almost always a river open for rafting or kayaking. Not only are the drops spectacular but especially on the Caribbean side rafters are likely to encounter monkeys, toucans and parrots as they twist and turn their way down to sea level. It's becoming popular to combine biking with rafting tours and a recent British group celebrated a Pacific to the Atlantic crossing in ten days.

Hiking and climbing

Take your pick. With a sturdy pair of shoes your feet will carry you almost anywhere in Guatemala. You can hike Tikal, or to and from Tikal from Nakum. You can “circumstroll” most of Lake Atitlan or head out to even more remote areas for bird watching, orchid spotting or crocodile pointing . If you choose a more adventurous activity, try climbing our active volcanoes, a unique experience to see lava flows and active smoking craters. Rock climbing is also available throughout the country. Specialized companies can accommodate your choice.



Mountain biking

Bicycles are faster than feet and tourists can cover a lot of ground on a mountain bike. You can leave your favorite bike at home, since companies provide equipment and guides and escort groups throughout the country. Pacific to the Atlantic on a bike? Antigua to Lake Atitlan? Anything’s possible although even the best cyclists would find themselves walking up some of Guatemala’s steepest slopes.



Sailing

Guatemala’s Caribbean coast is a paradise for boaters. Rio Dulce has become one of the western Caribbean’s premier destinations for cruisers seeking a safe and reasonably priced freshwater anchorage. As a jumping off point for excursions around the country, Rio Dulce is ideally located, with Tikal close by to the north, Quirigua to the east and the highlands to the west. There is also sailing on Lake Atitlan and Lake Amatitlan, with the former occasionally hosting sailing tournaments.



Horseback riding

If you are looking for a four-footed experience you can rent horses or mules and aim for practically anywhere in the country. The two days up and two days back by horse or mule excursion to El Mirador in the far north of the country is becoming more and more popular and the town of Carmelita has organized itself as a staging point for the trip. Also, for those who are seeking to climb an active volcano, a horseback ride up is an option. In Huehuetenango's Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, you can enjoy the beautiful landscape by horseback a service provided by a hotel nestled in the mountain range.



SCUBA Diving

Guatemala also offers a variety of diving facilities. From diving in the Caribbean to the intriguing wrecks in the Pacific to high altitude diving in Lake Atitlan, you are sure to find what you are looking for. Many professional diving centers will provide gear and logistical coordination for your favorite type of dive.



Entertainment

Theme, water and amusement parks

If you've ever been to Disney World and have a hankering for theme or amusement parks, the department of Retalhuleu is waiting to welcome you. IRTRA's lineup of parks includes a water park and a theme park recreating villages, restaurants and attractions derived from sites in Europe, Asia and elsewhere. First class accommodations can be part of the package which has drawn over 36 million visitors, three times Guatemala's total population. Themed restaurants are incorporated into the parks along with gift shops and rides. IRTRA has hit the mark for theme park development, setting standards for service and cleanliness that are known throughout the region. The over 1,000 rooms in the complex are also available at very reasonable prices.



Other water parks like Guastatoya, Valle Dorado and Longarone located on the route to the Atlantic, also offer modern accommodations and other tourist attractions. Chatun Park, located in Esquipulas, is another option conveniently located close to the Esquipulas basilica.





Shopping

With over 2.5 million inhabitants Guatemala City is Central America's largest and most cosmopolitan capital city. Many visitors are pleasantly surprised at Guatemala's sleek and chic shopping districts featuring every format from European hipermercés to small brand name boutiques. Since Guatemala has long had the lowest customs duties in the region prices are surprisingly affordable with European products often costing less in Guatemala City than in the US. New shopping malls are also wonderful entertainment areas and most have large food courts, cinemas and other amenities. Local markets are always a great choice for tourists looking for handicrafts and souvenirs.



Weddings and Honeymoons

Where you say "I do" can add an important dimension to a wedding ceremony. Central Americans and others are flocking to such romantic spots as Antigua or even the Tikal National Park to tie the knot. Imagine being wed in the tumbledown ruins of a colonial era church (getting there by horse-drawn coach of course), or in a millennia-old Maya courtyard (getting there by 4X4). Even if you should choose another country for the wedding ceremony, Guatemala is an ever popular choice for honeymooners. The beach in the daytime, a crackling fireplace in a colonial home, the volcanoes at night-all are available for honeymooners in Guatemala.

MICE- Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events

The corporate tourism sector is one of the most important and fastest growing in international travel. Guatemala has made a sustained and successful effort to attract corporate sponsors of meetings, incentive programs, conventions and events such as training seminars. Modern convention facilities, ample room offer in first class hotels and nearby attractions of interest to corporate travelers such as golf courses and colonial Antigua are all part of Guatemala's natural advantages in this arena. There is a 23,000 m² expo center in Guatemala City that is frequently booked for trade shows by regional entities that recognize the importance of Guatemala's GDP within the region- Guatemala accounts for 40% of Central America's GDP.



Cruise Ships

The cruise ship industry is one of the fastest growing segments in tourism. Guatemala has modern facilities both on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of the country. Arriving passengers will find a different destination, with colonial and Maya sites close by, mountain lakes set in breathtaking scenery. Tourists can have a taste of the variety and richness of our country in a short stay. Guatemalan handicrafts, textiles, gourmet coffee, world-renown rum, jade jewelry, local cuisine, marimba rhythms, other attractions, accompanied by the warmth of the Guatemalan people are a guaranteed invitation to return. The cruise ship trade, chiefly oriented towards tourists from North America and Europe, blooms in the months of September to May as snowbirds abandon chillier northern climes for Guatemala, the Land of Eternal Spring.





Guatemala *soul of the earth*

General Information

- Name:** *Republic of Guatemala*
Native name: *Coactemalan (Land of Forests)*
Location: *Guatemala is located south of Mexico, west of Honduras and El Salvador, right in the center of the American Continent (Central America).*
- Population:** *11,237,196 inhabitants. In Guatemala there are 22 Mayan ethnic groups jointly with ladinos (a mixture that originated from the Maya and Spanish), a community of Garifunas and Xinca.*
- Political Division:** *The country is divided in 22 departments.*
- Language:** *The official language is Spanish; however, 23 additional languages are spoken, 21 of Mayan origin, 1 Garifuna and 1 Xinca.*
- Weather:** *Warm in the coastal areas and valleys and temperate in the elevated plains.*
- Currency:** *Quetzal. US Dollar and major credit cards are accepted in the majority of establishments. You can change Euro at banks.*
- Information:** *www.visitguatemala.com*

Information of Tourism Bureau

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International Airport La Aurora
International Area, First Floor
Telefax: (502) 2331-4256

Antigua Guatemala
5th St. and 4th Ave. South
General Captain's Palace
Telefax: (502) 7832-0763

Panajachel, Lake Atitlán
Santander St. 1-87, Zone 2
Shopping Center San Rafael
No. 11. Panajachel, Sololá
Phone: (502) 7762-1392
Fax: (502) 7762-1106

Quetzaltenango
7th St. 11-35, Zone 1
House of Culture
Telefax: (502) 7761-4931

International Airport Mundo Maya
Santa Elena, Petén
Arrivals Building
Telefax: (502) 7926-0533

Regional Delegation of Flores
Road to Tikal Km. 5,
Shopping Center Cristal
Phones: (502) 7952 8602
y (502)7952 8604

Important Services International Airport La Aurora
2331-8192, 2331-5281

Municipal Fire Department
123

Volunteer Fire Department
122

Red Cross
125

International Automatic Dialing Service
00 + Country code
+ Area Code + Phone #

International Calls by Operators
147-110

Immigration
2360-8540/48

National Civil Police Force
110, 120

POLITUR
5561-2073



1500 or 2421-2810
TOURIST ASSISTANCE



Guatemala

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Centroamérica
tau pequeña... tau grande...