



Guatemala

502 / POP 16.2 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restaurante Buga Mama (p189)
- ➔ Xkape Koba'n (p174)
- ➔ Tienda La Canche (p116)
- ➔ Taberna El Pelicano (p169)
- ➔ La Fonda de la Calle Real (p117)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Quetzalroo (p99)
- ➔ Earth Lodge (p121)
- ➔ Hotel Kangaroo (p183)
- ➔ Posada del Cerro (p200)
- ➔ Finca Santa Elena (p163)

Why Go?

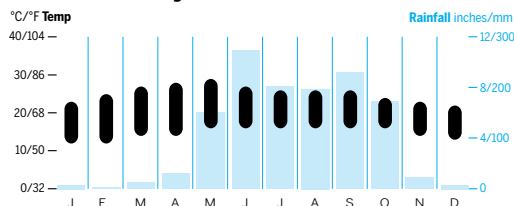
Guatemala is a magical place. If you're into the Maya, the mountains, the markets, kicking back lakeside or exploring atmospheric pre-Columbian ruins and gorgeous colonial villages, you're bound to be captivated.

Want to surf in the morning and learn Spanish in the afternoon? No problem. Descend a volcano, grab a shower and hit the sushi bar for dinner? You can do that. Check out a Maya temple and be swinging in a beachside hammock by sunset? Easy.

Guatemala's got its problems, but they mainly keep to themselves (although if you go looking for trouble, who knows what you'll find). Travel here – once fraught with danger and discomfort – is now characterized by ease; you can do pretty much whatever you want, and your experience will only be limited by your imagination and time.

When to Go

Guatemala City



Dec–May
Festivities such as Christmas and Easter are celebrated with gusto.

Apr–Sep Prices drop and crowds thin out as the rainy season starts in earnest.

Oct–Nov Rains begin to ease up, making for good hiking weather.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Quetzal (Q)

Language Spanish (official), 21 Maya languages, Garifuna

Visas Generally not required for stays up to three months.

Money ATMs widely available. Credit cards accepted in higher-end places.

Time North American Central Standard Time (GMT/UTC minus six hours)

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 108,890 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Guatemala City
- ➔ **Emergency** English ☑1500, Spanish ☑110

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Hostel bed** Q60-100
- ➔ **Set meal** Q25-40
- ➔ **Three-hour 'chicken bus' ride** Q20

Resources

- ➔ **Lanic Guatemala** (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/guatemala>) Excellent collection of Guatemala links.
- ➔ **EntreMundos** (www.entremundos.org) Guatemalan social and political issues and NGO database.
- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/guatemala) Information, hotel bookings, traveler forum and more.

Connections

From Mexico enter Guatemala at Ciudad Hidalgo or Ciudad Cuauhtémoc. From El Salvador enter via Anguaitú; from Honduras via Agua Caliente; and from Belize via Benque Viejo del Carmen. For more detailed information, see Survival Guide on p224.

FIRST TIME IN GUATEMALA

One Week

With a week up your sleeve you won't see it all, but you can at least catch the Big Three. Make a beeline for **Antigua** and spend a couple of days wallowing in colonial glory and climbing volcanoes before heading off to **Lago de Atitlán**. Choose which village suits you, from bustling Panajachel to out-of-the-way San Juan, and explore the lake and its surrounds by boat, kayak, horseback, bike or whatever else takes your fancy. From there, head back to **Guatemala City** and catch a bus or plane to **Flores**, your stepping off point for the mother of all Maya ruins, **Tikal**.

Two Weeks

Add another week and you'll have time for a quick dip in the lovely limestone pools at **Semuc Champey** and a boat ride down the lush **Río Dulce**. Try to set a day aside for Guatemala City's fantastic collection of museums and galleries.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Where to Eat** The cheapest eats are to be found at food stalls around the central plaza or bus terminal – exercise common sense when buying food at these places. Family-run *comedores* (eating halls) are the next up the budget scale, often serving good-value set meals for a pittance. Towns with large tourist populations, such as Antigua and Panajachel, offer the greatest variety of eats, all the way up to world-class fusion restaurants.
- ➔ **What to Eat** You won't be able to avoid corn tortillas, and you shouldn't try, either – done right they're delicious. The most common varieties are made with yellow or white corn, but the blue corn and flour ones are worth looking out for, too. Keep an eye out for regional specialties like *tapado* (a seafood stew, found mostly on the Caribbean coast), *pepián* (spicy sesame-seed sauce served with chicken or turkey) and *jocón* (a stew of chicken or pork with green vegetables and herbs), found in the highlands; and boxbol (maize dough and chopped meat or chicken), a staple in the Ixil Triangle area.
- ➔ **What to Drink** The best drinks for miles around are *licuados*, fresh fruit juice blends made with milk or water.