

# 4 easy-to-use sections

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

Your planning tool kit

Photos & suggestions to help you create the perfect trip.

1

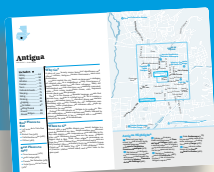


## ON THE ROAD

Your complete guide

Expert reviews, easy-to-use maps and insider tips.

2



## UNDERSTAND

Get more from your trip

Learn about the big picture, to make sense of what you see.

3

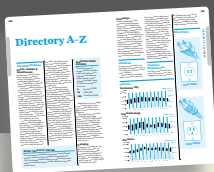


## SURVIVAL GUIDE

Your at-a-glance reference

Vital practical information for a smooth trip.

4



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## How to Use This Book

Look for these symbols to quickly identify listings:

Sights

Activities

Courses

Tours

Festivals & Events

Sleeping

Eating

Drinking

Entertainment

Shopping

Information & Transport

**All reviews** are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

**Sights** are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

**Eating and Sleeping reviews** are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

These symbols give vital information for each listing:

Must-visit recommendation

Sustainable or green recommendation

**FREE** No payment required

Telephone number

Opening hours

Parking

Nonsmoking

Air-conditioning

Internet access

Wi-fi access

Swimming pool

Vegetarian selection

English-language menu

Family-friendly

Pet-friendly

Bus

Ferry

Tram

Train

For symbols used on maps, see the Map Legend.

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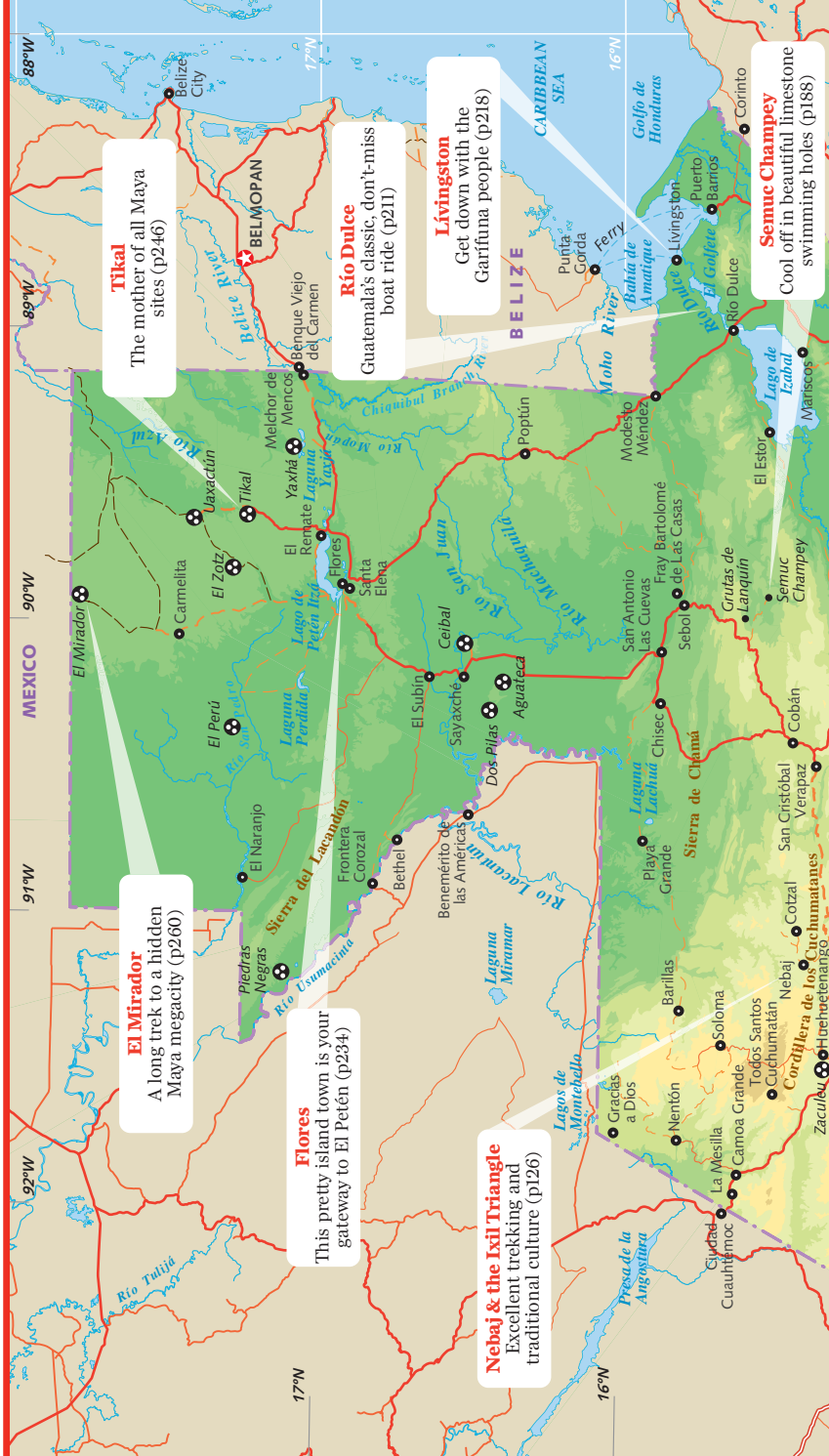
# Guatemala



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Lucas Vidgen, Daniel C Schechter

# Guatemala



**Tikal**  
The mother of all Maya sites (p246)

**Río Dulce**  
Guatemala's classic, don't-miss boat ride (p211)

**Livingston**  
Get down with the Garifuna people (p218)

**Semuc Champey**  
Cool off in beautiful limestone swimming holes (p188)

**El Mirador**  
A long trek to a hidden Maya megacity (p260)

**Flores**  
This pretty island town is your gateway to El Petén (p234)

**Nebaj & the Ixil Triangle**  
Excellent trekking and traditional culture (p126)



## ELEVATION



PACIFIC OCEAN

92°W

91°W

90°W

89°W

88°W

13°N

14°N

15°N

14°N

15°N

# On the Road





## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Lucas Vidgen

**Coordinating Author, Guatemala City, The Pacific Slope, Central & Eastern Guatemala**

Born and raised in Melbourne, Australia, Lucas has been living in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, for nearly 10 years. He first arrived with the idea of studying Spanish for a couple of weeks and the rest is too much history to fit into this space. Lucas has contributed to a variety of Lonely Planet titles over the last decade, mostly in Central and South America. When not writing for Lonely

Planet, he divides his time between other writing projects and working with two Quetzaltenango-based NGOs, as Vice President of EntreMundos and Managing Director of Solidaridad y Desarrollo. Lucas also wrote the Plan Your Trip, Understand Guatemala and Survival Guide sections.



### Daniel C Schechter

**Antigua, The Highlands, El Petén** A native New Yorker, Daniel called Mexico home for more than a decade. During that time he spanned the Mundo Maya on various forays from the capital, discovering and writing about such places as Campeche, Calakmul and Tikal and cultivating an enduring interest in Classic Maya history. It seemed fitting to revisit the territory for this edition at the dawn of the new *baktún*. Daniel currently resides in the Netherlands.

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## Plan Your Trip

# Itineraries



1  
WEEK

### Hit the Highlights

On a short break and you want to see it all? Well, that's not going to happen, but with a week up your sleeve you can at least see Guatemala's Big Three.

Flying into Guatemala City, get a shuttle bus directly to **Antigua**. If you don't arrive too late, grab a bite to eat at any one of the city's many fabulous restaurants and finish the night off with a nightcap in one of the cozy bars around town.

The next morning, stock up on a big breakfast – you're going to need some energy. Take a walk around town following

our walking tour (p71) – cut corners if you like, but don't miss the Iglesia de la Merced or the Las Capuchinas convent. For a real taste of Antigua, plan a dinner at La Cueva de los Urquizú.

You'll probably want an early night because the next day you'll be climbing a volcano – check with the locals to see which one is safe/recommended to climb at the moment. Back in town, if you've still got energy, catch dinner and a show at the wonderfully atmospheric La Peña de Sol Latino.

The next day catch another shuttle to **Panajachel** on Lago de Atitlán – Pana's a





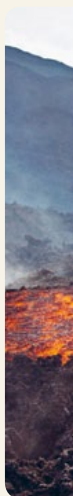


Lago de Atitlán (p91)

great place to shop and eat out, but read up on other villages around the lake to decide where you want to stay; they're all different and each has its own appeal. Regardless of where you end up staying, spend a half a day or so exploring your village and the next day exploring the rest of the lake. You can do this on a day tour from Panajachel or you can just as easily use the public boats and make your own way around, from Pana or any of the other villages.

Next day you're off to **Tikal**, so shuttle back to **Guatemala City** and from there (depending on your budget) either fly to **Flores** or catch an overnight luxury bus. Either way, you can arrive in the morning, make your way straight out to the site, spend the day exploring and be back on the bus or plane that night for the return to Guatemala City and your flight home.





10  
DAYS

## Highland Fling

Guatemala's most spectacular scenery and strongest Maya traditions await you along this well-traveled route. It could take a few months if you stop off to learn some Spanish or to take advantage of the great sightseeing and hiking possibilities along the way.

From the capital head first to picturesque **Antigua**, enjoying the country's finest colonial architecture, the great restaurants and the traveler and language-student scene. Several volcanoes wait to be climbed here including the fiery Volcán Fuego – but ask around for current conditions before planning anything. From Antigua move on to **Panajachel** on volcano-ringed **Lago de Atitlán**. Hop in a boat to check out some of the quieter, more traditional Maya villages around the lake such as **Santiago Atitlán**, where the curious deity Maximón awaits, or **San Pedro La Laguna**, a party town with a certain fame countrywide. **San Marcos La Laguna** is much more laidback and a magnet for yoga and natural healing types. And **Santa Cruz La Laguna** is just plain tiny and gorgeous. From the lake, hop a shuttle or chicken bus north to **Chichicastenango** for its huge Thursday or Sunday market and, if you're lucky, a religious ceremony where it's hard to tell where the Maya-ism ends and the Catholicism starts.

From Chichicastenango you can follow the Interamericana Hwy west along the mountain ridges to **Quetzaltenango**, Guatemala's clean, orderly second city, with a host of intriguing villages, markets and natural wonders waiting within short bus rides away. From Quetzaltenango it's possible to go further into the hills to **Todos Santos Cuchumatán**, a fascinating Maya mountain town with great walking possibilities.

If you have extra time, consider pushing east to explore **Nebaj** and the Ixil Triangle, where you'll find great walking and a strong Maya way of life amid stunning scenery. A rough but passable road leads further eastward from here, passing **Uspantán** and providing a back-door route to Alta Verapaz, where you can check out **Cobán**, **Semuc Champey** or head further north towards **Tikal**.



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MARK NEWMAN/GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Iglesia de Santo Tomás (p120), Chichicastenango  
Bottom: Hiker ascending a volcano south of Antigua

3  
WEEKS

## The Big Loop

PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

This 1900km round trip takes you to the best of Guatemala's Maya ruins, into its dense jungles and to some of its spectacular natural marvels, covering the center, east and north of the country. Really pushing, you might do it in two weeks, but if you have four, you'll enjoy it more.

Start out northeastward from **Guatemala City** and detour south into Honduras to see the great Maya site of **Copán**. Don't just make it a flying visit, though – Copán is a great town and there's plenty to do in the surrounding countryside. Return to Guatemala and continue northeastward to another fine Maya site, **Quiriguá**, where you can marvel at the 10m-plus carved stelae and you may just have the place to yourself. From there move on to the curious Garífuna enclave of **Livingston** on the sweaty Caribbean coast. Soak in the atmosphere in this entirely different corner of Guatemala and get in some beach time on the country's finest beaches. Take a boat up the jungle-lined **Río Dulce**, stopping for a dip in the hot springs along the way before reaching **Río Dulce town**. Head north up Hwy 13 to chill out at **Finca Ixobel** before continuing to **Flores**, a quaint small town on an island in the Lago de Petén Itzá. From Flores, head for **Tikal**, the most majestic of all Maya sites. Spend a night at Tikal itself or nearby **El Remate**. While in the Flores/Tikal area, you should have time to take in further impressive Maya sites such as **Yaxhá** and **Uaxactún**.

From Flores head southwest to the relaxed riverside town of **Sayaxché**, which is at the center of another group of intriguing Maya sites – **Ceibal**, **Aguateca** and **Dos Pilas**. The road south from Sayaxché is now paved all the way to **Chiseec** and **Cobán**, jumping-off points for a whole series of pristine natural wonders such as jungle-ringed **Laguna Lachuá**, the **Grutas de Lanquín** and the turquoise lagoons and waterfalls of **Semuc Champey**. Finally, make your way back to Guatemala City for your flight home.

DANIEL SCHNEIDER/GETTY IMAGES ©



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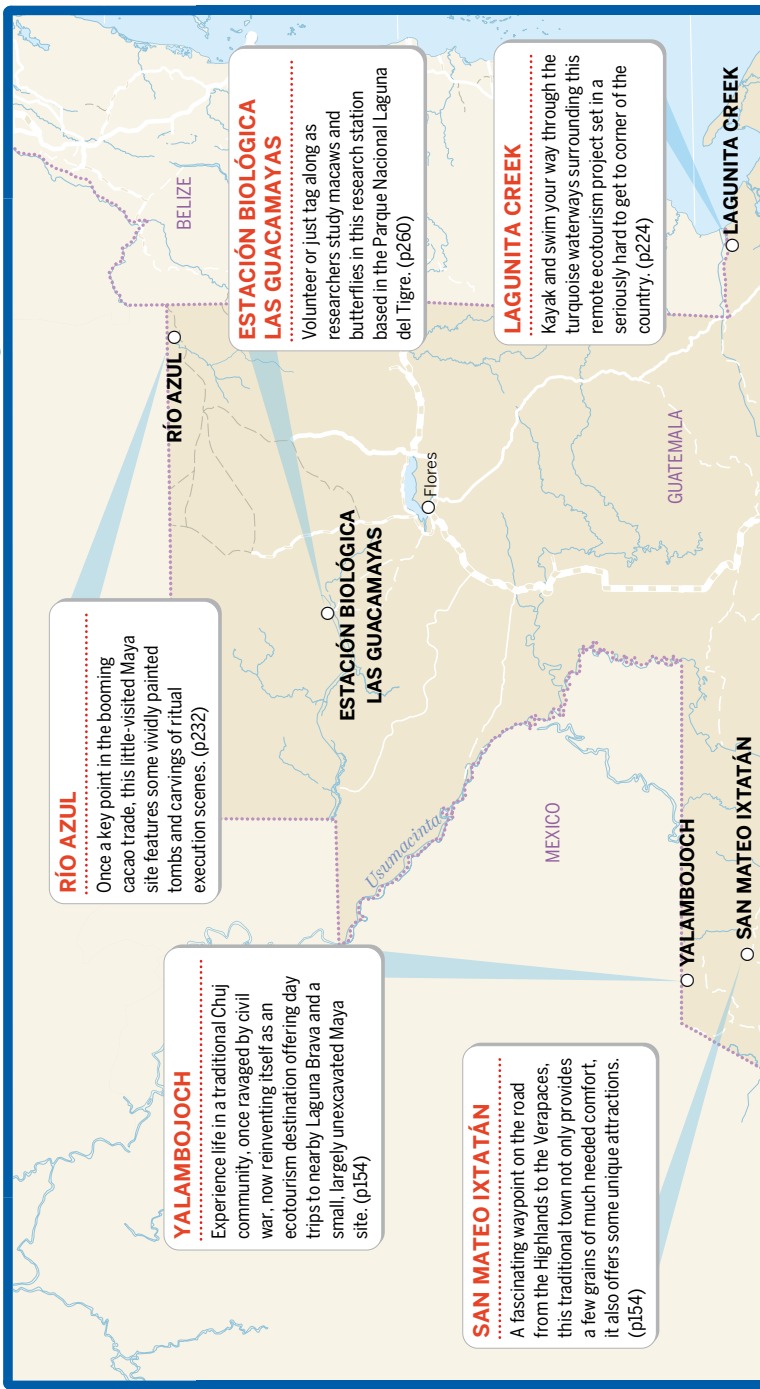


Top: Río Dulce (p211)  
Bottom: Templo I, Gran Plaza (p248), Tikal





## Guatemala: Off the Beaten Track



### RÍO AZUL

Once a key point in the booming cacao trade, this little-visited Maya site features some vividly painted tombs and carvings of ritual execution scenes. (p232)

### YALAMBOJOCH

Experience life in a traditional Chuj community, once ravaged by civil war, now reinventing itself as an ecotourism destination offering day trips to nearby Laguna Brava and a small, largely unexcavated Maya site. (p154)

### SAN MATEO IXTATÁN

A fascinating waypoint on the road from the Highlands to the Verapaces, this traditional town not only provides a few grains of much needed comfort, it also offers some unique attractions. (p154)

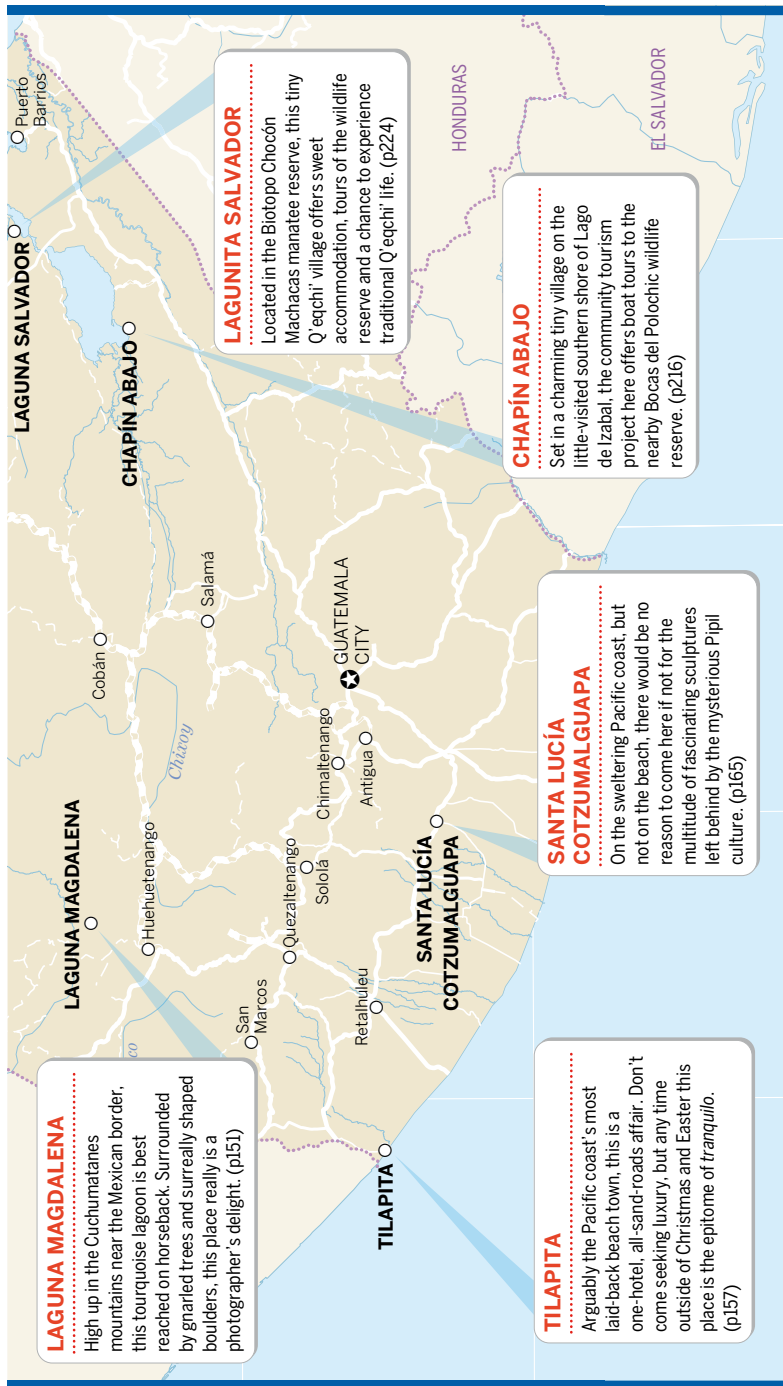
### ESTACIÓN BIOLÓGICA LAS GUACAMAYAS

Volunteer or just tag along as researchers study macaws and butterflies in this research station based in the Parque Nacional Laguna del Tigre. (p260)

### LAGUNITA CREEK

Kayak and swim your way through the turquoise waterways surrounding this remote ecotourism project set in a seriously hard to get to corner of the country. (p224)

### LAGUNITA CREEK



### LAGUNA MAGDALENA

High up in the Cuchumatanes mountains near the Mexican border, this tourquoise lagoon is best reached on horseback. Surrounded by gnarled trees and surreally shaped boulders, this place really is a photographer's delight. (p151)

### LAGUNITA SALVADOR

Located in the Biotopo Chocón Machacas manatee reserve, this tiny Q'eqchi' village offers sweet accommodation, tours of the wildlife reserve and a chance to experience traditional Q'eqchi' life. (p224)

### CHAPÍN ABAJO

Set in a charming tiny village on the little-visited southern shore of Lago de Izabal, the community tourism project here offers boat tours to the nearby Bocas del Polochic wildlife reserve. (p216)

### SANTA LUCÍA COTZUMALGUAPA

On the sweltering Pacific coast, but not on the beach, there would be no reason to come here if not for the multitude of fascinating sculptures left behind by the mysterious Pipil culture. (p165)

### TILAPITA

Arguably the Pacific coast's most laid-back beach town, this is a one-hotel, all-sand-roads affair. Don't come seeking luxury, but any time outside of Christmas and Easter this place is the epitome of *tranquilo*. (p157)

### SANTA LUCÍA COTZUMALGUAPA

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