



The Highlands

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Best Places to Hike

- ➔ Nebaj & the Ixil Triangle (p127)
- ➔ Todos Santos Cuchumatán (p152)
- ➔ Banks of Lago de Atitlán (p97)
- ➔ Laj Chimel (p125)
- ➔ Volcán Santa María (p131)

Best Markets

- ➔ Chichicastenango (p118)
- ➔ Almolonga (p143)
- ➔ San Francisco El Alto (p146)
- ➔ Santa Cruz del Quiché (p123)
- ➔ Panajachel (p102)

Why Go?

Guatemala's most dramatic region – Los Altos – stretches from Antigua to the Mexican border. Traditional values and customs are strongest here. Maya dialects are spoken far more widely than Spanish, and over a dozen distinct groups dwell within the region, each with its own language and clothing, perhaps most vividly displayed in the weekly markets of Chichicastenango and San Francisco El Alto. This is where indigenous tradition blends most tantalizingly with Spanish, and it is common to see Maya rituals taking place in front of and inside colonial churches.

Most travelers spend a spell at volcano-ringed Lago de Atitlán. West of the lake stands Guatemala's second city, Quetzaltenango. Northward spread the Cuchumatanes mountains, where indigenous life follows its own rhythms amidst fantastic mountain landscapes. For hikers, this is the promised land.

When to Go

Though pleasant weather can be enjoyed year-round up in the highlands, between May and October abundant rains fall so be prepared for some chilly, damp conditions then. If you're up for trekking the Ixil Triangle or scaling Volcán Santa María, trails tend to be less muddy and volcano visibility best from November to April. Key events to plan a trip around include Quetzaltenango's annual blast (late September or early October); devil-burning ceremonies in Chichicastenango (early December); and folk saint Maximón's spring move in Santiago Atitlán (Holy Week). Try to be in Todos Santos Cuchumatán on November 1, when the normally sedate town hosts a no-holds-barred celebration with rowdy horse races and all-male marimba dancing.



The Highlands Highlights

1 Soar over, dive under or relax by sublime **Lago de Atitlán** (p91)

2 Hunt for *huipiles* (embroidered tunics) and other Maya weavings at vibrant indigenous markets in **Chichicastenango** (p118) and **San Francisco El Alto** (p146)

3 Polish your Spanish and hike volcanoes in and around **Quetzaltenango** (p130)

4 Take in the stunning Cuchumatanes scenery and village life of the Ixil Triangle around **Nebaj** (p126)

5 Mingle with the Maya in **Todos Santos Cuchumatán** (p151), **San Mateo Ixtatán** (p154) and other remote villages