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The most beautiful train wreck you're ever likely to see.

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Tortillas, beans and *fútbol* are about all that this diverse nation has in common.

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From towering temples to Nobel Prize-winning authors, this little country packs a punch arts-wise.

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With volcanoes, jungles, lakes and desert, Guatemala plays host to over a thousand species of birds, mammals and reptiles.

Guatemala Today

Guatemalans are struggling. Over half the population lives below the poverty line and gang membership is rising as an overwhelmed and under-resourced police force struggles to maintain order. Against this increasingly bleak backdrop, scores of grass-roots organizations have sprung up, tirelessly combatting Guatemala's many problems. While successive governments continue to make promises, it is Guatemalans themselves who are delivering solutions.

Best on Film

Aquí me Quedo (2010; Rodolfo Espinoza) Subtle political commentary, black comedy and satire abound in this story of a kidnapping, shot in and around Quetzaltenango.

When the Mountains Tremble (1983; Pamela Yates & Newton Thomas Sigel) Documentary featuring Susan Sarandon and Rigoberta Menchú, telling the story of the civil war.

Capsulas (2011; Verónica Riedel) A look at greed, corruption and the drug trade from one of Guatemala's few female directors.

El Norte (1983; Gregory Nava) Young indigenous siblings flee their village and begin the tortuous journey to enter the US as illegal immigrants.

Best in Print

The President (Miguel Ángel Asturias; 1946) Nobel Prize-winning Guatemalan author takes some not-too-subtle jabs at the country's long line of dictators.

A Mayan Life (Gaspar Pedro González; 1995) The first published novel by a Maya author is an excellent study of rural Guatemalan life.

The Art of Political Murder (Francisco Goldman; 2008) Meticulously-researched account of the assassination of Bishop Gerardi.

The More Things Change...

In mid-January 2012, Otto Fernando Perez Molina was sworn in as Guatemala's president. Molina is a former army general who served during Efraín Ríos Montt's dictatorship and was stationed in the Ixil region, where many of the worst human rights abuses and massacres of the civil war took place.

During his successful campaign, Molina offered Guatemalans the two things that polls consistently say they want – security and jobs. In one of his first moves as president, Molina announced a plan that would put 7000 soldiers on the streets in the country's most dangerous and criminally active areas. While arrest rates skyrocketed, crime rates remained steady.

Recent years have shown that often the worst criminal excesses are committed by security forces. In just one month in early 2012, four police officers were charged with assault, conspiracy and unlawful association while various members of the Secret Service were accused of being members of a countrywide kidnapping gang.

Molina's own anti-corruption credentials were called into question as he came under fire for defending three members of his government who had each racked up over Q800,000 (over US\$100,000) in travel expenses in a three month period. The trips were defended by Molina as being necessary to avoid becoming 'isolated'. Meanwhile Congress opened up the way to grant themselves whatever pay rises they feel like, whenever.

A Question of Security

One very touchy subject in rural Guatemala has to do with large (often foreign-administered) projects such as hydroelectric dams and mineral mines. Opponents to Molina's mobilization of troops claim that the security argument is a smokescreen and that the soldiers are really there to protect the interests of these projects. As