## Welcome to Guatemala

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Hit the Highlights

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

Flying into Guatemala City, shuttle or taxi directly to Antigua. If you don’t arrive too late, grab dinner at one of the city’s fabulous restaurants and maybe a nightcap in a cozy bar. Next morning, take a walk around town – don’t miss the Iglesia de la Merced or Las Capuchinas convent. 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, catch dinner at the wonderfully atmospheric Mesón Panza Verde. The next day it’s on to Lago de Atitlán. Panajachel is great for shopping and eating, but read up on the other villages around the lake – each is different and has its own appeal. Regardless of where you end up, spend a half a day exploring ‘your’ village and the next day exploring the rest of the lake. Next it’s off to Tikal, so shuttle back to Guatemala City and then on to Flores. Head straight for the site, spend the day exploring and then return to Guatemala City for your flight home.
Above: Arco de Santa Catalina (p84), Antigua
Right: Handicrafts, Panajachel (p93)
Antigua
Panajachel
Tikal
Chichicastenango
Quetzaltenango
Todos Santos
Cuchumatán
Uspantan
Cobán
Semuc Champey
Nebaj
Chichicastenango
Panajachel
Lago de Atitlán
Guatemala City

MEXICO
EL SALVADOR
BELIZE
HONDURAS
PACIFIC OCEAN
CARIBBEAN SEA
Guatemala’s most spectacular scenery and strongest Maya traditions await along this well-traveled route. It could easily 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 laid-back and a magnet for yoga and natural-healing types. Santa Cruz La Laguna, meanwhile, 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 hiking opportunities and a strong Maya way of life amid stunning scenery. A rough but passable road leads further eastward from here, passing Uspantan and providing a back-door route to Alta Verapaz, where you can check out Cobán, Semuc Champey or head further north toward Tikal.
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 Garifuna enclave of Livingston on the sweaty Caribbean coast. Soak up 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 Mayan sites – Ceibal, Aguateca and Dos Pilas. The road south from Sayaxché is now paved all the way to Chisec 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.
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. (p155)

Rio 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. (p233)

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)

Finca Chaculá
Tucked away in the extreme northwest near the Mexico border in a zone that straddles subtropical forest and chaparral, the Huistas region boasts rushing rivers and turquoise cenotes, with community-run lodging in an old hacienda. (p156)

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)
High up in the Cuchumatanes mountains near the Mexican border, this turquoise lagoon is best reached on horseback. Surrounded by gnarled trees and surreally shaped boulders, this place really is a photographer’s delight. (p152)

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. (p160)

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)

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. (p166)
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkeling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway/Subte station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book
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 Dublin, Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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

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Born and raised in Melbourne, Australia, Lucas has been traveling and working in Latin America for nearly 20 years. He ended up living in Quetzaltenango for over a decade, going there for a few weeks to study Spanish. He currently divides his time between Melbourne and Quetzaltenango where he publishes – and very occasionally contributes to – the city’s leading nightlife and culture magazine, XelaWho. Lucas has contributed to a range of Lonely Planet titles over the years, mostly on Central and South America. His Spanish is OK but he still can’t decide if a pupusa is better than a potato cake. Lucas also wrote the Plan Your Trip, Understand Guatemala and Survival Guide sections.

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A native New Yorker, Daniel has been poking around Latin America for so long it sometimes makes more sense to him than his place of birth. After living in Colombia and Puerto Rico, he called Mexico home for over a decade. During that time he spanned the Mundo Maya on various forays, discovering and writing about such places as Campeche, Calakmul and Tikal, and cultivating an enduring interest in Classic Maya history. Daniel currently lives in the Netherlands, where he blogs on cycling (http://netherlandsbikeways.blogspot.nl).