



The Highlands

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Why Go?

Guatemala's most dramatic region – El Altiplano – 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. Such extraordinary diversity is perhaps most evident 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.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restaurante Hana (p101)
- ➔ Café El Artesano (p113)
- ➔ Café Sabor Cruceño (p117)
- ➔ Allala (p115)
- ➔ Mayan Inn (p120)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ La Fortuna (p117)
- ➔ Mayan Inn (p120)
- ➔ Hacienda Mil Amores (p130)
- ➔ La Casa del Mundo (p116)
- ➔ Posada Rural Finca Chaculá (p156)

When to Go

If you're up for trekking the Ixil Triangle or scaling Volcán Santa María, trails tend to be less muddy and volcano visibility is best from November to April.

Key events to plan a trip around include Quetzaltenango's annual party (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 Soaring over, diving under or relaxing by sublime **Lago de Atitlán** (p92).

2 Hunting for *huipiles* (embroidered tunics) and other Maya weavings at vibrant indigenous markets in **Chichicastenango** (p118) and **San Francisco El Alto** (p145).

3 Upgrading your Spanish and ascending volcanoes in and around **Quetzaltenango** (p130).

4 Taking in the stunning scenery and village life of the Ixil Triangle around **Nebaj** (p125).

5 Mingling with the Maya in **Todos Santos Cuchumatán** (p152), **San Mateo Ixtatán** (p154) and other remote villages.