

Understand Guatemala

GUATEMALA TODAY264

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

HISTORY266

The timeless Maya watch as empires rise and crumble.

GUATEMALAN WAY OF LIFE 275

Tortillas, beans and *fútbol* are about all that the parts of this diverse nation have in common.

MAYA HERITAGE280

The Maya haven't gone anywhere and their culture is hanging in there, too...more or less.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE284

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

LANDSCAPES & WILDLIFE288

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

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

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

Ixcánul (Jayro Bustamante; 2015) Multi-award-winning film about a young Kaqchikel girl's coming of age.

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.

Neither Corrupt nor a Thief

The elections that followed ex-president Otto Pérez Molina's impeachment were won by Jimmy Morales, a popular television comic whose popularity partly stemmed from the fact that he came from outside the country's political elite. Morales ran with the slogan '*Ni corrupto, ni ladrón*' (neither corrupt nor a thief), which obviously touched some chords in a country that now had its previous president and vice-president in jail. Morales took office in January 2016. Hopes were high that change was finally in the air, but the new president's ties to the military establishment (themselves seen as the core of the country's real political elite) gave way to concerns that the country was in for more of the same, again.

A Question of Security

Guatemala still struggles with violence. The National Gun Registry campaign started off well, but continues to falter. There are 11 guns for every 100 people in Guatemala, of which only three are registered.

The police force, understaffed and under-resourced, has struggled to keep up with the rise in drug-related crime, particularly in urban areas and most notably in Guatemala City. A measure of their failure to do so is the fact that there are an estimated 150,000 private security guards employed nationwide, as compared to just 30,000 police officers. It won't take you too long on your travels before you start spotting heavily armed young (sometimes scarily young) men in official-looking uniforms, guarding everything from private residences to pharmacies and fast-food restaurants.

Global Policy

Global policy continues to affect Guatemala. A possibly unforeseen consequence of the move toward renewable