



Central & Eastern Guatemala

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Why Go?

Stretching from the steamy lowland forests of El Petén to the dry tropics of the Río Motagua valley, and from the edge of the Western Highlands to the Caribbean Sea, this is Guatemala's most diverse region.

The Carretera al Atlántico (Hwy 9) shoots eastward to the sea from Guatemala City, passing the turnoffs for the wonderfully preserved ruins of Copán (Honduras), Quiriguá with its impressive stelae and Río Dulce, a favored resting spot for Caribbean sailors and gateway to the Refugio de Vida Silvestre Bocas del Pochic (Bocas del Pochic Wildlife Reserve). While you're here don't miss the gorgeous boat ride down the Río Dulce to Livingston, the enclave of the Garifuna people.

The north of the region is lush and mountainous coffee-growing country. The limestone crags around Cobán attract cavers the world over, and the beautiful pools and cascades of Semuc Champey rate high on Guatemala's list of natural wonders.

When to Go

This region encompasses a huge area, measuring about one quarter of Guatemala's land mass, and the climate is predictably diverse. Cobán and the Alta Verapaz are best avoided in the cooler months from November to February, as many of the attractions involve swimming. Garifuna National Day in Livingston at the end of November is worth putting on your calendar, as is Cobán's Rabin Ajau festival in July.

Birdwatchers hoping to see Guatemala's national bird, the quetzal, will have better luck during their laying period from March to June. Accommodations prices remain relatively stable throughout the year, with the usual exceptions of steep hikes during Christmas and Easter.



Central & Eastern Guatemala Highlights

1 Splashing around the turquoise waters of **Semuc Champey** (p189).

2 Getting deep in the caves at **Grutas de Lanquín** (p187).

3 Admiring the impressive carvings at **Copán** and **Quiriguá** (p201).

4 Relaxing in the Antigua-rivalling beauty of **Copán Ruinas** (p206).

5 Going bush in the jungle hideaway of **Las Conchas** (p193), where waterfalls, jungle treks and village tours await.