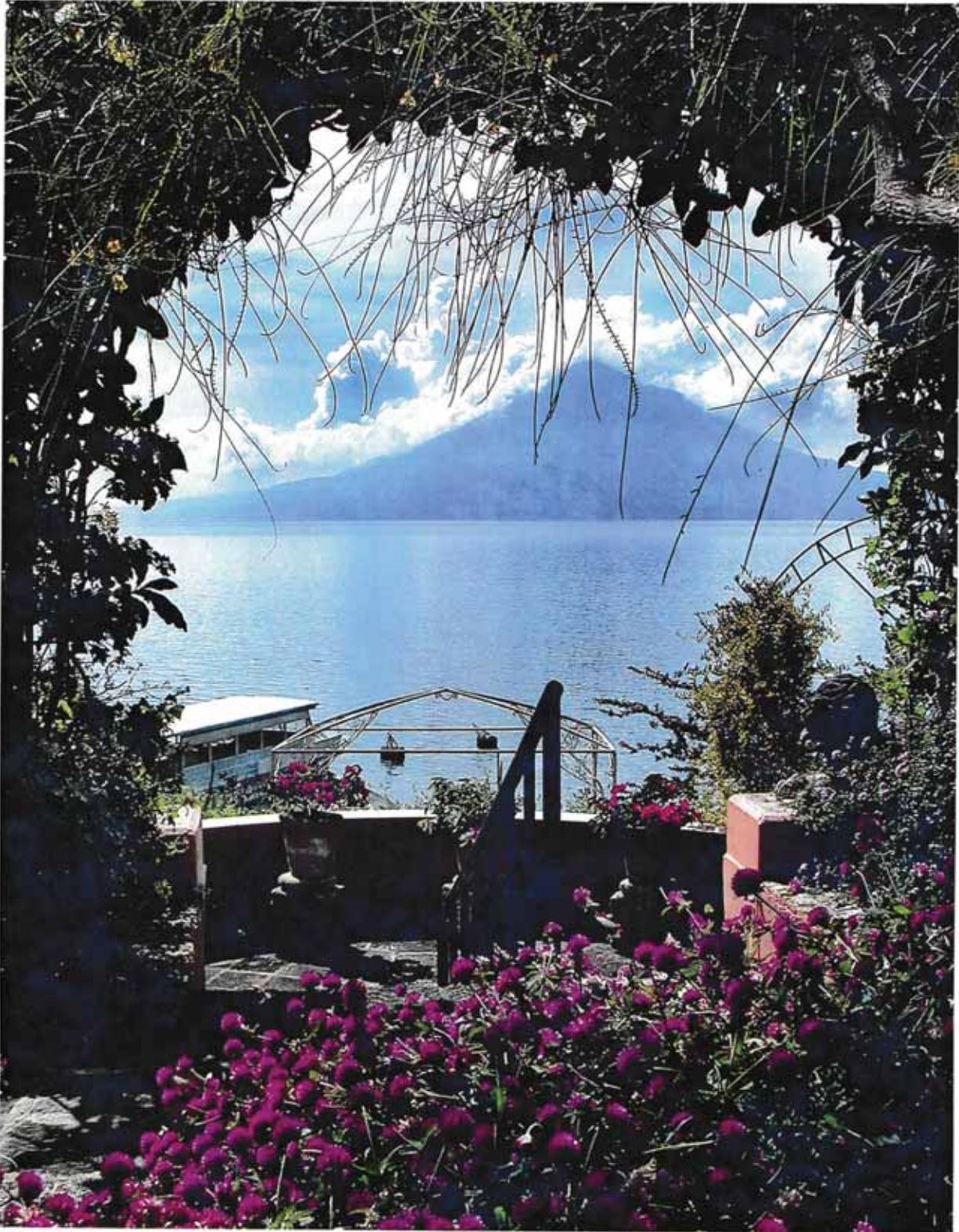


EXPLORE

GUATEMALA



Dear Traveler,

Our specific goals when we started Explore Guatemala in 2001 were:

- **to share our love of exploring new places**
- **to make every aspect of our workshops/tours a “wow”**
- **to send travelers home itching to travel with us again**

It has been very rewarding to see our travel experience goals validated by our customers through their repeat business and workshop/tour evaluations!

We personally love our chosen destinations. Currently with Ecuador and Guatemala, most of our venues are listed in the book, *1000 Places to See Before You Die*, by Patricia Schultz. We have known these places well for many years and are eager to share them with you. We have selected routes, hotels, dining, and venues reflecting the uniqueness of each area we visit. Our hope is that you will return home with a lasting impression and rewarding memories of the colorful Maya and Inca cultures.

ABOUT US

All members of the Explore team understand local customs and business practices. We stay in the hotels, eat in the restaurants, and ride the transportation, personally experiencing every aspect of our travel workshops and tours. We know the “hidden treasures” as well as the little bits of information only the locals know. Our experience, relationships, and knowledge of the country allow us to provide a worry-free, life enriching travel adventure, providing a deeper understanding of the way of life, the cultures, nature and societies; in short, we will show you the real Guatemala and Ecuador in a way very few travelers experience.

Explore's Original Company Founders

Anita Rogers (Korte) who speaks fluent Spanish, lived in Guatemala for 25 years, started her own business there, and was a collector of Maya weavings as well as Spanish Colonial art and antiques. She has been around the travel industry most of her life, as her family owns the beautiful Hotel Atitlán on Lake Atitlán in the Guatemala Highlands.

John Korte, retiring from a 30-year career as a financial advisor for wealthy families across the United States, a U.S. Marine, diver, traveler, adventurer, explorer, John has been traveling to Central and South America for the past 25 years.



John and Anita lived in Antigua Guatemala for eight years, and in Bariloche, Patagonia, Argentina where they own property, and currently reside on the Azuero Peninsula in Panama. They have traveled together for the past 13 years on many adventures; extensively throughout South America, into the jungles, the mountains and out of the way places; sailing a 50 foot sailboat from Australia across the Indian Ocean to Bali, then through the Indonesian Islands to “The Lost Continent” of Borneo, up the Kumai River to visit the Leake Orangutan Camp; then on to Singapore; all throughout Mexico and every country in Central America. They have also sailed and explored most of the Caribbean.



Explore's Traveler's Assistants and Local Partners

Our Traveler's Assistants and Guides in Guatemala and Ecuador are the most knowledgeable, personable, and helpful in the business.

In Guatemala: Roberto Uhlenbrock was born in Lima, Perú, of German parents and fluent in Spanish, English and German; Roberto has lived in Antigua, Guatemala for 12 years, and is an officially licensed guide through the Guatemala Institute of Tourism. His study and experience in arts gave him the background to understand and communicate the beauty of Indigenous art and life. Roberto gained a deeper understanding of the Maya culture by learning one of the 21 Maya languages spoken. Traveling in Guatemala, and witnessing its natural beauty and cultural diversity firsthand, his tours allow you to gain a deeper understanding of the Guatemalan way of life, its culture, nature and society; Roberto will show you the real Guatemala.

In Ecuador: Tomás (Tommy) Palma was born in Quito, Ecuador. He studied Tourist Administration and National Guiding at Universidad Católica de Quito and at UTC in Quito. He speaks fluent English, Spanish and Italian, and has been a professional guide for over 16 years throughout Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands and Perú. An avid outdoorsman, Tommy has made a hobby of seeking out and studying the many and various species of Ecuador's birds and plants. He is an enthusiastic participant in adventure sports such as trekking and kayaking, and is passionate about motorcycles and mountain biking. Tommy and his wife Carolina have three young sons who all share his passion for adventure sports and nature.

Archaeology throughout the Americas: Shelby Saberon, a BYU-trained archaeologist and anthropologist, has worked on numerous archaeological projects in Utah, Mexico and Guatemala. Due to his contact with many of the leading archaeologists, he is often privy to discoveries years before they are published for the public. Shelby is the creator, founder, and President of his own tour company in addition to providing archaeological tours for Explore. A seasoned lecturer on the archaeology of South America, Saberon brings the ancient civilizations of Guatemala and Ecuador to life as he conducts lectures on location and provides cutting-edge knowledge of these "vanished peoples". He and his wife Catherine have three active sons.

Our website, www.exploreguatemala.com, will be useful to you, however, we also welcome your phone calls and e-mails; we are always eager to talk about travel in Guatemala and Ecuador, and beyond.

You will find that most, if not all, of the information you will need for our trips are in this travel guide. However, please call or email us with any further questions you may have. You may contact us by telephone (SKYPE) at 210-807-4222, or e-mail us at mail@exploreguatemala.com. We look forward to traveling with you soon.

Kindest regards,

John and Anita

Travel Tips

Traveling in Guatemala is an adventure and our goal is to make your time spent there a memorable and positive experience. The most important tip to remember is to bring a **positive attitude** and do not expect perfection – Guatemala is a third world country. If you experience any problems we are there to help. Please let us know if something is not right.

We recommend that you:

- Always check with your airline for luggage regulations
- Hand carry any items you cannot do without; i.e. medications. Do not put expensive items, i.e. jewelry, cameras, etc, in your checked luggage.
- Place your name and address on the outside of your luggage and also inside your luggage along with a copy of your itinerary.
- Make sure you have enough luggage room for your purchases in Guatemala.
- Bring luggage locks to lock up your valuables while luggage is left in your room.

Clothing:

Informal clothing is suitable. Slacks, jeans (no shorts please as local people dress more modestly) and comfortable apparel are the order of the day. Dressing up for dinner is not required however especially while in Antigua you may want to have something a little less casual than your day clothes to change into. Temperatures vary from cool in the morning to hot at midday with very chilly evenings; it is wise to dress in layers, perhaps a sweater over a shirt and a tee shirt. Bring sturdy, comfortable **walking shoes or tennis shoes** for walking on uneven and cobblestone streets, and socks so the coffee flies will not bite your ankles. The sun is very strong so bring a hat and sunglasses. If you are traveling during the rainy season (mid-May through mid-October and occasionally in January), compact fold-up ponchos are advised. If traveling to Tikal, the rainy season is from June to February. Light-colored, lightweight, cotton clothing is most comfortable there. You may also want to bring a bandanna to wet and drape over your neck. This will help you keep cool. All hotels have a pool so if you like to swim or enjoy sitting in the Jacuzzi, bring a swimsuit.

Packing:

It is highly advisable to bring **only one suitcase per person**, plus an extra fold-up bag for additional purchases, and a day bag (backpack or shoulder bag) for sweaters, cameras, film, sunscreen, etc. Be sure to bring the **film and batteries** you will need, since they **are twice as expensive in Guatemala**. We also recommend that you bring a spare camera because on every trip someone always seems to have a camera problem. A small **calculator** is very useful and you may also want to bring binoculars. Not all hotels have hair driers in the rooms but you can always borrow one. Not all hotels offer washcloths so if you must have one, you should bring it. The electrical current in Guatemala is the same as the U.S.



Health:

Please note! **There will be a fair amount of walking on this trip.** The streets of Antigua are cobblestone, some of the streets in villages we visit are steep, and there are several places where walking up and down steps is required. We sometimes walk 7 – 10 blocks in Antigua. If at any time during the trip you feel like you are unable to keep pace with the group or that you need assistance to do so, we can always obtain transportation for you. Any additional transportation is an individual expense.

Drink only **bottled water** (of which we furnish a good supply), available everywhere. If you have a finicky stomach, bring **Pepto-Bismol** tablets and chew one or two tablets one hour before each meal. You may also want to bring **Imodium** in case the change in bacteria – not necessarily bad bacteria – causes you to have a “loose stomach.”

Bring **insect repellent** because the coffee flies are abundant and their bite is worse than a mosquito bite. It will itch for at least a week and likely turn into a sore if you are unable to resist scratching.

Bring **sunscreen** and use it because the ultraviolet rays are extremely powerful.

If you are prone to upper respiratory problems or allergies please note that crop burning is practiced in Guatemala and at certain times of the year the air is smoky. Also, occasionally the wind can be very strong and kick up dust and during the rainy season there could be humidity with molds (these are all just precautions for those who are particularly sensitive).

For those who have a concern about **altitude** – Guatemala City, Antigua, and Lake Atitlán are about 5000 feet. Chichicastenango is about 7200 feet and we usually spend 4-6 hours there (unless it is in your itinerary to spend the night). Most medical authorities indicate that altitude is usually not an issue until you are over 8000 feet but if you have a concern please consult your physician.

You should bring **all your medications** for the entire trip including **supplies for contact lenses**. No special immunizations are required; however it is advisable to keep up your tetanus shot (booster every ten years).



Carry **waterless hand sanitizer** with you and use it frequently, especially after being in the markets or handling money and **ALWAYS** before eating.

Money, How much do I bring?

Bring as much money as you can afford to spend. If you like hand-made textiles, you will spend it. **Do not bring \$100 bills, torn, or old bills of any denomination as they will not be accepted anywhere.** Cash is easiest to deal with but Credit Cards are accepted in most establishments with an added fee; however, **American Express is not widely accepted** and transactions often take more time than we are used to. It will not be possible to use your credit card with the street vendors and in the village markets.

There are banks and ATMs everywhere; however, there sometimes can be problems for anyone wanting a cash advance on their credit card. If you find yourself low on cash the banks are open in Antigua and Chichicastenango on Sundays.

It is advisable that you **contact your credit card company before you leave on your trip** to help any possible transaction go more smoothly. The Quetzal (ket-ZAL) or **Qs for short** is the local currency and a bank in Guatemala is the best place to exchange your U.S. Dollars.

The airport does not have a good exchange rate but you can change a little money there just to get by. The banks and ATM machines in Panajachel and Chichicastenango are more difficult to use; they often run out of cash. It is best to bring the cash you think you will need from home and keep whatever you do not need that day locked in your suitcase or hotel safe.

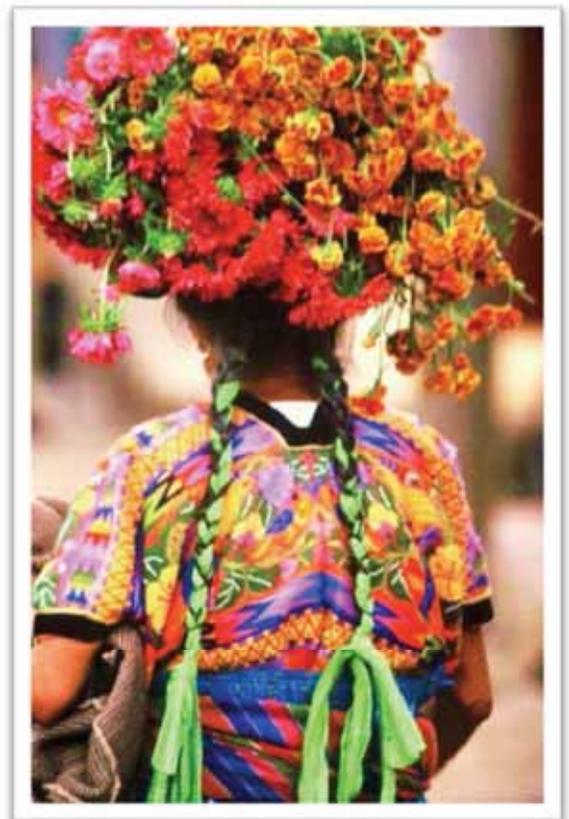
Lost Passport:

In the event you lose your passport you will need to contact the American Citizen Services (ACS) unit at the U. S. Embassy in Guatemala City. You will be required to submit proof of identity and citizenship: copy of your passport, two passport size (2”x 2”) photos, and a completed passport application. This process could be very time consuming. Therefore, we recommend you **make two photocopies of your passport**. Leave one copy at home and carry one copy with you at all times (in case you need it when making financial transactions), and put your original in the safe or locked up in your suitcase as soon as you arrive at your hotel. **Do not take the chance** of losing your passport by carrying it around with you and never keep it in the same place as your money. This is a poor country and your money would be the target for pickpockets, not your passport, but if they are together you may lose both. Be sure to bring pertinent contact numbers for appropriate banks or agencies in the event you lose any items such as credit cards, traveler’s checks, etc. (keep these numbers in a separate place).

May I Take Your Picture?

A reminder: If you try to photograph indigenous people in Guatemala, many will turn or cover their faces. If it does not “feel” like the right thing to do, **don’t do it**. The local people are not “actors” performing for the tourists; they are behaving in their traditional ways so please show respect. Photography is relatively new to rural Maya culture and some people feel it steals their spirit. Always ask permission to take a person’s photo in the indigenous areas unless you are able to do so inconspicuously.

Many of those who agree to be photographed expect something in return. Most will be happy with a few *Quetzales* or a small gift and a cheerful *muchas gracias*.



Begging:

Guatemalans believe it is their duty to help out those who are less fortunate than themselves, which is why you see so many beggars in the streets of Guatemala City. Guatemalan children, on the other hand, are becoming persistent in asking for money in some tourist areas, a practice usually brought on by visitors offering money in the first place. If you give in to one, another dozen will immediately appear. It's like feeding the seagulls at the beach. If someone is pestering you, tell him or her *no gracias* one time and then do not give them any more attention. They will continue to try to engage you, and by responding you are encouraging them.

When they ask for your name, do not give it to them because within a few minutes you will find they have made a pen or something with your name on it and if you do not buy it they will get upset. This behavior should not be encouraged because it is having a negative impact on the interaction between the local people and the tourists.

Tipping:

It is customary to tip 10% of the total bill when dining out. Always check your bill to see if the tip has already been added (it usually is). **Alcoholic beverages are not included in the price of the trip so please do not forget to leave a tip when you consume these beverages.**

Safety:

Statistically speaking, Guatemala is as safe as any large city in the United States. Simply avoid being a target by dressing conservatively (avoid the appearance of affluence) and acting respectfully. Do not walk alone in isolated areas and **never walk in the streets after dark**. Only take a taxi recommended by the hotel or establishment you are in. Guatemala is a third world country and you should be very cautious of your valuables. Do not bring any valuable jewelry to Guatemala. Carry with you only what you can afford to lose. Carry your extra money inside your shirt, trousers, or shoes, **not** in pockets, fanny packs, purses, or backpacks (which are easy targets for pickpockets).

Just as you would not walk across Central Park in New York at night, there are some common sense things you should not do in Antigua. Keep your purse close to you in restaurants, do not hang it on the back of your chair anywhere. If you are out at night take a cab to and from your hotel. You can always get a cab at the Main Square or have someone in the hotel make arrangements for you for the evening. The driver can let you off and you tell him what time you wish to be picked up again.

Do not allow yourself to be distracted by any surprising event, which would allow someone to grab your valuables. **Beware** that the most crucial time for theft is when one is caught up in the crushing crowds of the markets. If you are confronted, do not fight back! Give up your valuables – they can be replaced. Remember that it is up to you to be a responsible tourist regardless of where you are traveling.

Leave your passport, airline ticket, and any money not needed for that day in the hotel safe or locked in your suitcase.

Packing Art Supplies For Your Painting Holiday

Airport Security Issues:

Anyone using acrylics or watercolors should have nothing to worry about.

When security is inspecting your luggage and asks, "What are these?" **never say paints**. The word "PAINT" could be a hot button issue with them. Tell them they are artist's colors made from mineral pigments (watercolors or acrylics) or artist's colors made from vegetable oil, no solvents (oil paints).



Rehearse saying artist's colors in front of the mirror.

Keep your cool—don't hassle security. Show them the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and explain that you are going on a painting holiday (you can usually download and print MSDS for all artists' materials from the product manufacturer's web site).

Just to make sure that the person inspecting your bag understands that the items are permitted, enclose a copy of the paragraph below from their own website pointing out that "artist's colors" are permitted as follows:

*The US Department of Transportation defines "flammable liquids" as those with a flash point 140 degrees F or below. (Artist grade oil colors are based on vegetable oil with a flash point at or above 450 degrees F. **THEY ARE NOT HAZARDOUS.**) If you need to confirm this, please contact TSA at 866-289-9673 or their Hazardous Materials Research Center at 800-467-4922. Packed with the artist's colors is the MSDS data sheet from the manufacturer of the Artist Colors.*

Packing Your Artist Materials:

"Artist colors" should be packed in a sturdy, leak-proof container, with some absorbent material in case there are any leaks with the changes in pressure. The container with your "artist colors" (especially oils) should include the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) information from the "artist colors" manufacturer that indicates the exact flash point.

Do not travel with solvents and mediums. If you need these materials **let us know before** you arrive in Guatemala so that we may make arrangements for you to purchase them upon arrival.

Do not carry your palette knives or brushes on board, they could be seen as possible weapons. Put them in the luggage you'll be checking in.

Place your watercolor sheets in a hard protective portfolio, later using one of the sides as a level surface supportive back for painting on (we provide containers for water).

If you choose to bring an easel or a folding chair (we provide stools), make sure it is well packed and protected from being bent in your suitcase. Airline luggage handlers are extremely rough on luggage.

Note: It is important not to forget your hat and sunscreen! The sun is very strong in Guatemala.

These are only suggestions. Airline safety precautions are ever changing in this day and age. When in doubt, in advance of your departure, check with your airline and or TSA for their specific requirements.

Copán

The Copán Ruins, remnants of a great Maya city, are amongst the most famous and best-preserved ruins in Central America. The beautiful ruins are dominated by impressive pre-Columbian art and are prized for the carved stelae of ancient rulers. Remarkable in detail and in size, these unique sculptural monuments and the well-preserved hieroglyphics make Copán shine among the ruin sites of the Maya and are invaluable to the understanding of this lost civilization.

Copán, a world heritage site, was the special place of the Maya world where art and astronomy flourished. Located in the Rio Copan Valley of western Honduras, the ancient city of Copán was part of the once great civilization of the Maya. The city, known for its advancements in arts and astronomy, flourished during the 7th century and is representative today of what Athens was to the old world, the cradle of its civilization. This once beautiful and artistically detailed city was home to over 20,000 inhabitants. Currently archeologists are working to learn more about the Maya culture through the unique set of



hieroglyphs found here, a difficult task due to the destruction of structures over time. When first discovered most of the ruins had been grown over by the diverse vegetation of the area. Currently archeologists are working to learn more about the Maya culture through the unique set of hieroglyphs found here, a difficult task due to the destruction of the structures over time. Now, archeologists have been able to determine much of the Maya history, unearth most of the center of the city, determine many of their religious beliefs, and develop ideas of why the Maya here disappeared.

Three main periods divide Maya history by stages of development, Pre-Classic, Classic, and Post-Classic. During the Pre-Classic period, 1500 BC to 250 AD, the Maya primarily lived in caves. At this point, they were semi-nomadic, hunting and gathering for food, but they did domesticate some plants. Little is known about the rulers of this time. The Classic period, 250 AD to 738 AD, brought about stone houses for the elite and wood and grass homes for the average citizen. This period is often referred to as the Golden Age of the Maya. During this time, the Maya were at the height of their rule; they excelled in the arts and began building many of the structures that remain today.

Three kings ruled in the Classic era, Moon Jaguar, Jaguar Smoke, and 18 Rabbit. Moon Jaguar built the Rosalila Temple, in honor of the sun. Temples were built on top of each other as new rulers took over. The Rosalila Temple was the third structure (constructed over two other temples) out of five eventually built on this site. The temple was so sacred to the Maya that it was given the highest honors for “burial.” It seems strange to talk about a building in this way but as the next structure was erected, Rosalila was carefully preserved within.

The Rosalila Temple has given great insight into the general appearance and techniques the Maya used in their construction of buildings and how the city must have looked during this period. The crests on other buildings have not survived due to the passage of time, climatic factors, erosion, looting, and the Maya themselves. When buildings fell into disuse, they were defaced and mostly used as construction material for new structures.

Jaguar Smoke was a great scribe erecting altars and many stelae in Copán. However, the most influential king was 18 Rabbit. Most of the remaining buildings in Copán were completed during his rule. He developed the Great Plaza that stands today as well as the final level of the Acropolis. While in battle, 18 Rabbit was captured and beheaded. His death ended the Classic period and began the Post-classic period, 738 AD to around 1200 AD.



During the Post-Classic period, the civilization of the Maya began to decline. With the death of one of the most glorious rulers, 18 Rabbit, the new king, Smoke Monkey, had many problems to deal with. The people began to lose faith in their king and Smoke Monkey was forced to carry on his rule with the aid of a council. The most impressive structure built during this time was the hieroglyphic stairway, which is currently being restored and deciphered by archaeologists. It was at this point in time that the Maya of Copán began to fade into history.

The great city of Copán was built around two major areas of development, the Great Plaza and the Acropolis. Within the Great plaza, the Maya erected many stelae (statues to represent their former kings), covered in hieroglyphics and telling the story of the represented ruler.

Adjacent to the Great Plaza is a ball court in which they played a ceremonial game. Players would wear yokes of stone, leather or basketry around their hips and throw an eight-pound

rubber ball across the court without the use of their hands or feet. The captain of the winning or losing team, depending on the era of the game, was then sacrificed on an altar in the Great plaza. They first cut off the player's head with an axe made of obsidian and then removed his heart. The heart was placed on top of the altar where the blood flowed down grooves in the stone, to both the east and west. This was in accordance with the rising and setting of the sun. They then burned the heart so the smoke would reach the Gods in the heavens. The Maya did this to insure good crops for the upcoming year. They believed, by killing their best player, he would be able to fight the ruling Gods of the underworld in honor of two ball playing heroes, the sun and the moon. This was true until the rule of 18 Rabbit. It is believed that during his rule he decided that it was not right to sacrifice the best player so he decided to sacrifice the loser of the game.

The other area of great importance located in the heart of the ruins is the Acropolis. Within the Acropolis; a great hieroglyphic stairway stands 72 steps high. This stairway contains over 2,500 glyphs and is the longest inscription found in North, Central and South America. It was built to give the history of past Maya rulers. This has been a great aid in translating several of the hieroglyphs. Most of the hieroglyphics are not in their original order because; in 1925, archeologists reconstructed the stairway and placed many of the stones in the wrong order. Another focal point of the Acropolis is the temple just north of the East Court. Atop this temple, a great stone mouth doorway stands in which many religious ceremonies were performed. When the Mayas would ask for help from the Gods, the ruling King would perform a bloodletting ceremony as an offering to the Gods. This bloodletting ritual consisted of the King piercing his skin on his tongue, genitals, ears, and fingers with a stingray. He then would mix his blood with what is believed to be hallucinogenic plants and burn the two. Inhaling the intoxicating fumes, he saw images that were thought to be messages from the Gods. The court that this temple faces is believed to be to original plaza.

Overall, the Maya were a very religious people. Almost everything they did was determined by what they thought would please their Gods. Most of their temples and stelae were painted in red and white paint. They believed these colors to be sacred. They assumed that the Gods controlled all occurrences in nature. The Sun God was represented by a jaguar that would “vomit” the sun every morning. A human with a monkey head represented the Wind God. He held a musical instrument with a T shape on the top from whence the wind came. Another religious symbol of the Maya is the sacred cieba tree. They believed the roots of the tree represented a connection to the underworld. The trunk of the tree symbolized the earthly world and the canopy reached up to the heavens and the Gods. When they buried their dead, they would prepare the grave by placing all of the person's belongings with them and an ample amount of food for use in the travel to the underworld. Some graves of the more wealthy have been found to have many valuable stones and statues. One woman, believed to be the wife of a King was buried with an eight meter long Jade necklace. They would also place painted pumpkins next to the body and burn corn in the burial ceremony.

Many theories exist about the end of the Maya civilization. One theory proposes they were eliminated by war. The Maya were a very war oriented society, but in Copan their warriors were not as great as other Maya cities because they were mainly artisans, not warriors. Disease is another possible reason for their disappearance. When the Spaniards came to the new world they

often brought many diseases for which native people of Latin America had no immunity. One of the most common theories is the overwhelming population. As the Maya population increased, demands on the land increased drastically. They were forced to cut down all of the surrounding trees for fuel and building material. With the lack of trees on the land, soil erosion began to occur which led to a decrease in the water supply. They also expanded their city to cover most of the rich bottomland, forcing farmers to move their croplands to the steep hillsides. The soil in this area was much less productive than the bottomlands. This theory basically states that the Maya slowly starved themselves to death by exploiting all of their natural resources. Overall, what we now know about the Maya is just a portion of their culture and there is still much more to learn.

There were larger Maya cities to the north, and the structures at Copán are relatively modest compared to those at Tikal, Palenque and Chichén-Itzá. Nonetheless, the stonework and sculpture is without equal in the Maya world and there are more carved monuments at Copán than elsewhere, the intricate, swirling, decorative art surpasses not only that of other Maya cities, but of any other civilization in the Western Hemisphere before the arrival of Europeans.

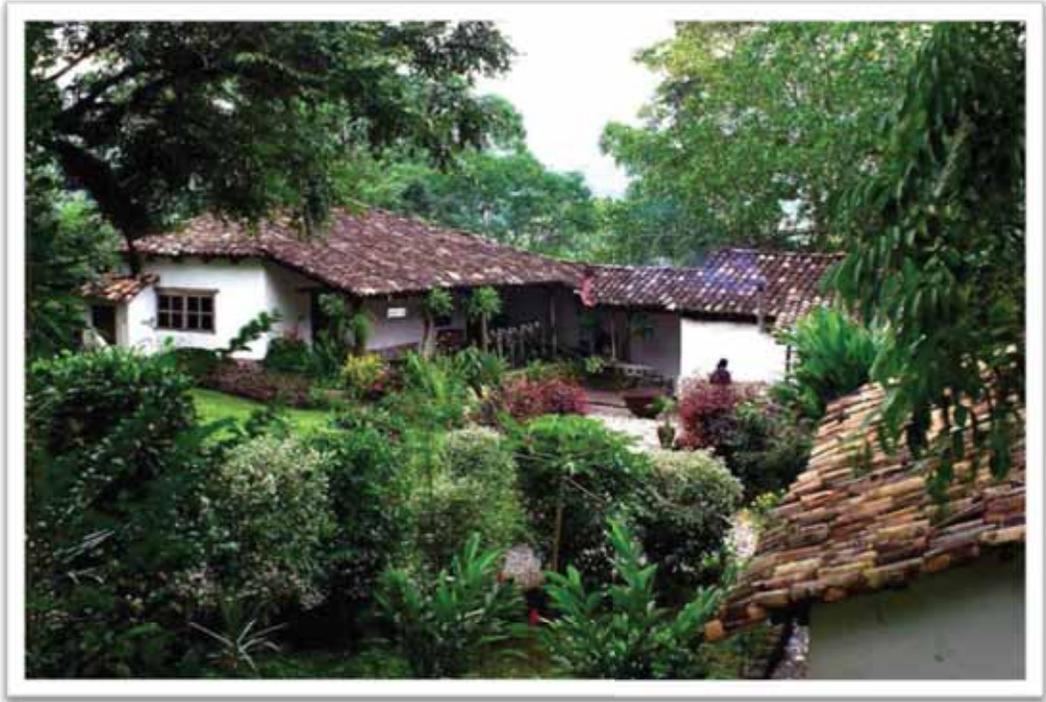
The grounds surrounding Copán are also part of the allure. The mid-elevation forests surrounding Copán is lush, tall and filled with sights and sounds of a variety of animals; monkeys, tree sloths, agoutis, peccaries. You can also see a rainbow of birds; colorful *guacamayas* (Macaws), Garnet-throated Hummingbirds, Blue-crowned Motmot, Flame-colored Tanagers, and Orioles, just to name a few. The setting is pristine in its beauty and serene in its peacefulness, making this not only a historic marvel but also a beautiful, natural place.

Another venue while in Copán is **Macaw Mountain** Bird Park and Nature Reserve. This park's mission is to rehabilitate, and return to the wild, all the birds (rescued or donated) they possibly can, including any babies that are born on the premises. All those that cannot be released into the wild are housed and fed with diligent care. The birds provide visitors a nearly complete reference of the parrots and toucans found in Honduras, as well as the chance to interact directly with the birds.



Explore Guatemala and **Hacienda San Lucas** share a common goal – to provide a wow experience to our travelers. We will relax in an enchanting family-owned *finca* nestled in the foothills of western Honduras above the ruins of Copán. This 100-year-old hacienda, with a wonderful setting nestled in the foothills above the Maya ruins of Copán, has been featured in many travel publications.

The rustic guest rooms come with handcrafted cedar beds, vaulted ceilings and a porch with hammocks, fantastic views and beautiful sunsets.



The authentic country cuisine here is prepared before your eyes in a rustic, open kitchen by the Maya Chortí staff who will show you how to roll tortillas or wrap tamales. The evening brings a five-course candlelight dinner accompanied by unique South American wines. Moreover, the hearty country breakfasts are the stuff of legend in the Copan valley.



Tikal

Tikal, rediscovered in 1848, is the greatest of all Classic Maya cities. Located in the thick tropical forests of *El Peten*, just 39 miles northeast of Flores you will simultaneously encounter the past and the present. As you stand at the top of a colossal pyramid, a sea of green can be seen extending to the furthest horizons where temples and pyramids float above the tall tropical trees – while howler monkeys and numerous birds fill the air with their call, announcing a significant victory over civilization. The temples and pyramids of Tikal, legacy of the Maya civilization, were once part of a mighty city three and a half times the size of ancient Rome.

Of the cultures that arose in what is now Guatemala, it was the Maya that lasted the longest and left the most traces. The Maya developed at more or less the same time as the Toltec, Olmec and Mixtec in other parts of Mesoamerica. The Maya shared many beliefs and practices with these other peoples and borrowed some of their achievements. Archeologists, judging by finds of pottery and other remnants of settled life, place the barely discernable formative period of Maya civilization between 1000 and 300 BC, when towns inhabited by people with a common way of life began to appear across an area stretching from southern Mexico to Honduras.

The Maya settled in the area supposedly for the abundance of flint, which they used to make spear points, arrowheads and knives. By 300 BC there was already a complex of buildings on the site of the North Acropolis. In 250 AD Tikal had become an important religious and commercial city. By the early part of the Christian era, many of the Maya settlements were growing into ceremonial centers. The Early Classic period of the Maya civilization, extending from 300 to 600 AD saw the development of Tikal as one of the major cities in the Americas.

In the 300's King Yax Moch Xoc (First Scaffold Shark), founded a dynasty which grew to a believed population of about 100,000 by the mid 500's. He is today considered the founder of Tikal. A second powerful king named Ah Cacao (the Lord Cocoa) from 682 to 734 restored Tikal's power which had been lost to neighbors and added new temples including Temples 1 and 2. He was buried under Temple 1, which his son completed after the ruler's death according to his plans. Today the Great Plaza comprised of Temple 1 and 2, the North Acropolis and the Palace Reservoir represent the main tourist attractions.

Tikal's Golden Age flourished from about 300 to 900 AD. Sprawling over 30 sq. km., it was once home to over 60,000 people where the hustle and bustle of a bygone era is now replaced by tourists who are able to witness the awe-inspiring architectural triumphs of the Maya. The tallest pyramids built in the Maya world are found here, predating the modern skyscrapers by over a millennium, and were unrivalled in height until the Capitol was built in Washington D.C.! In addition to raising their temples to ever-greater heights, the Maya of Tikal worked changes on the landscape. Ravines were dammed to form reservoirs for seasonal rains. Causeways were built to connect different parts of the city, and to provide trade routes to other Maya centers. Trade developed with far-away peoples who could provide jadeite, obsidian and other useful raw materials.

Some sort of residential city grew around Tikal, though its nature is a matter of debate. The great buildings range from temples on pyramid bases to palaces (assumed to have been for religious purposes, though they might also have been residences for the noble classes) to ball

courts to tombs and burial chambers to stalae. Scattered for more than four kilometers in every direction from the center of Tikal are thousands of platforms that might have been the foundations for houses of stone and wood.

The most visible evidence of a large population, a bountiful agriculture, and a highly developed social organization, is, of course, the very magnitude of Tikal. Many laborers had to work over long years to carry the rock and rubble needed to fill the bases of the temples, build retaining walls, and manufacture lime mortar to face the structures with carefully cut blocks of limestone. All this had to be done with brute human labor, for the Maya did not know the use of the wheel nor of iron, nor did they have beasts of burden.

While all this hard labor was going on, artisans were at work scraping away at limestone to form the low-relief sculptures of stelae, and incising designs into beams of *chicozapote* which often displayed pictures and glyphs that told anecdotes of the time. This wood, carved while still fresh and soft, takes on iron hardness when exposed to air. The original temple *lintels* of Tikal are the finest examples of Maya woodcarving and have endured the jungle climate for centuries.

Additional workers had to patch up fallen bits of plaster, replace missing blocks of limestone, keep the temples painted, plaster over plaza floors worn with use, and maintain the reservoirs. Artisans created jewelry and beautiful pottery vessels with painted scenes of daily life, and jadeite jewelry and mosaics of shells and stones for personal decoration and as funerary offerings. Priests had to preside over human sacrifices, the victims of which might have been secured in raids on neighboring peoples. Other priests and officials had to supervise matters ranging from ball games to the administration of justice to the calculation of the calendar.

All the people who were tending to the organized activities of civilization in Tikal could hardly have devoted much time to growing food. So, in addition to the workers and nobility of the city, there must have existed a large class of farmers. Maya agronomy was in many respects more advanced than that of modern tropical farmers. The Maya of Tikal took seemingly dreadful jungle swamps, with their store of water, and reworked them into resources that supported large population centers. Drainage canals were dug, and dirt piled up to create raised planting beds. Cassava, yams, corn, and ramon nuts could have provided a complete and varied diet, along with wild game.

The ball-courts, wooden lintels, unique calendar, and glyph writings all reveal clues about life in a society that thrived for over 1,000 years. Exploring these aspects of Maya life gives the visitor an even greater appreciation of the accomplishments of this once great civilization. Tikal was highly structured and immersed itself in spiritual practice. The monuments paid tribute to the rulers of the past, and were meant to please the deities. In addition to their obvious achievements in the arts and construction, the Maya also excelled in astronomy and glyph writing. Some of what has been learned from this ancient people has been found in their expressions of pictoglyphs, and their complex writings. They were prolific in their description of life, religious beliefs and customs. Though little is understood, what is known is fascinating.

One example that reveals much about the Maya is the ball-court. This game, similar to soccer, pitted two teams against each other in a stone court. The game was highly competitive, and there was much betting among the spectators and royal guests. Some of these games had serious implications for the losers. Often they were sacrificed. A disturbing facet of Maya culture was the prominence of human sacrifice. In addition to its role in ball courts, human sacrifice was

used in burial rituals. Often a number of attendants were sacrificed and placed alongside their ruler in the burial vault.

Mayas used different forms of expression in recording life. They had a complex form of writing that was found inscribed on the stelae and altars that dot the site. Pictures depicted events and beliefs of the time. Carved in the lintels, etched in the stone steps, and covering various walls throughout the temples, the life, religion and the times of the Maya were documented.

The Maya were obsessed with the idea of time. The fact that they employed the concept of zero in their number system helped them make great strides in this realm. They knew that the earth year was a little more than 365 days, and a complicated incredibly accurate calendar predicted the solstices of the year. The Maya applied the same zeal to studying other worlds and were quite accurate in determining the average year on Venus, a planet that was millions of miles from earth! They named periods of time (a twenty year span was known as the *katun*), and placed great significance on these cycles by building temples and stelae marking the conclusions of these Maya “katuns”.

In the later part of the eighth century the fortunes of Tikal began to decline. The last date recorded on a stela is AD 899. The site was finally abandoned in the tenth century. Most archaeologists now agree that the collapse was due to warfare with neighboring states, over population which resulted in environmental degradation and destruction, and drought.

Walking around the park of Tikal is more than just a trek through history. The temples are magnificent, but what makes this park so unique is its setting. All groups of monuments are separated by thick rainforest with century old trees. The forest only is worthy of a visit even if the Maya temples weren't there. If you are physically fit, do not miss climbing up Temple IV. From here the view of Tikal's temples rising out of a sea of green jungle is dramatic.



Tikal restoration efforts started in the 1960s. Though there is an abundance of information relating to Maya life, there is much that has yet to be discovered. The jungles of Tikal, full of unexcavated mounds, underground passages, whispers of the past and the boundless beauty of nature, still hold many secrets for both the casual visitor and the dedicated scientist – it is a place for wondering, not only at the engineering accomplishments of the Maya, but at the jungle splendors of the Petén.

Republic of Guatemala

Guatemala is a nation rich in almost four thousand years of history. There is a range of experiences for the traveler that few other countries can match; from the ancient Maya temples hidden in lush jungles full of giant Ceiba trees, howler monkeys and colorful birds to the cobblestone streets of colonial Antigua rich in history and impressive architecture, to the cosmopolitan Guatemala City with its museums and fine dining.

Guatemala is derived from the Aztec word *Quauhtlemallan* meaning *land of many trees*. The Central American country is a natural paradise where you can find 33 volcanoes and 19 different ecosystems in an area of 41,700 square miles; descending from a cloud-covered forest into a near desert in just a few minutes; leaving an urban center and arriving at a tropical jungle in less than an hour. In Guatemala, the landscape changes from one instant to the next, challenging the imagination all the way.

Lake Atitlán - one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, nature reserves, volcanoes, rivers and the ever-present green of its mountains spotted here and there with clusters of white washed adobe houses with red tiled roofs and little villages of people dressed all alike in traditional clothing will turn your visit into an extraordinary experience filled with adventure.

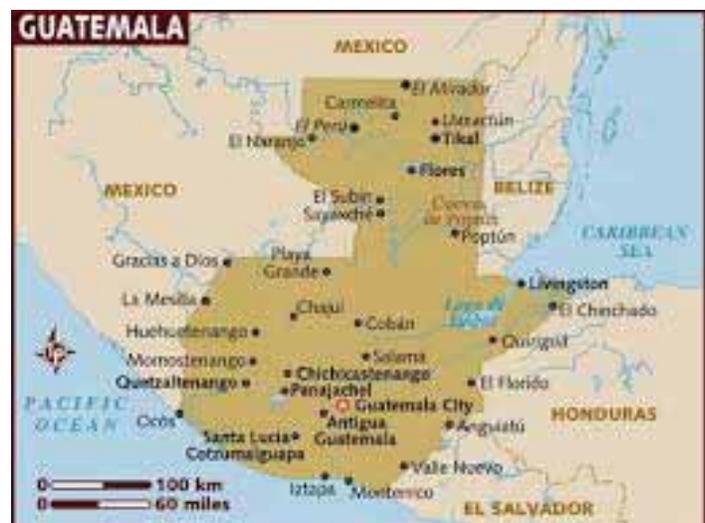
A personal encounter with the lost world of one of America's foremost archaeological sites, Tikal, is an experience you will never forget. A monumental city of the classic period, rising out of the Petén, Tikal is a legacy to the Maya civilization that is safeguarded by thick tropical jungle full of a variety of flora and fauna.

Antigua is the colonial *crème de la crème* of the New World. Saved from ugly expansion like other Latin American capitals because of an 18th century earthquake, it now sits gracefully ruined with toppled church arches, columned courtyards, and flowers and fountains galore. And, as if that weren't enough glory for one place, it lies in the shadow of three volcanoes and enjoys million dollar views.

Despite the overwhelming processes of modernization Guatemala is a country where the modern coexists with its Spanish colonial heritage and the ancient Maya people still preserve their ancestral customs and traditions in defiance of the past Spanish conquest and present day dominance of the Guatemalan "rulers."

Geography / Topography

Guatemala, approximately the size of Tennessee, is the third largest nation in Central America and is bordered on the north and west by Mexico, on the southwest by El Salvador and Honduras, on the northeast by Belize and the Caribbean Sea, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The country is traversed by numerous rivers and volcanoes, dotted with lakes and covered by jungles and forested plains.



Volcanic sand beaches rim the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, some of which are still “undiscovered.” The low-lying jungles in the northern area of the Péten harbor an abundance of wildlife, valuable hardwoods, rubber trees and petroleum. The country is comprised of temperate plateaus, tropical plains, near-desert river valleys, lowland jungles and swamps; however, much of Guatemala’s breathtaking beauty comes from the mountains and volcanoes standing like sentinels over fertile farms, colonial towns and azure lakes. Peaks that rise as much as 13,000 feet provide spectacular views on a clear day.

Climate

Guatemala is known as the Land of Eternal Spring. The average temperature is 72°F, with the coastal area much warmer. Nights are usually fairly cool all year round. The high central plateau enjoys clear skies after heavy rains that fall in the afternoons or evenings during the rainy season (from mid May to mid October).

Demography

Guatemala has approximately 13 million inhabitants, with Spanish the official language. Guatemala’s culture is a unique product of Maya ways and a strong Spanish colonial heritage. More than half of Guatemalans are descendants of indigenous Maya peoples. Westernized Mayas and *mestizos* (mixed European and indigenous ancestry) are known as *Ladinos*. *Ladino* culture is dominant in urban areas but unlike many Latin American countries, Guatemala, still has a large indigenous population - the Maya - that has retained a distinct identity. Though the official language is Spanish, it is not universally understood among the indigenous population. Deeply rooted in the rural highlands of Guatemala, many indigenous people speak a Maya language, follow traditional religious and village customs, and continue a rich tradition in textiles and other crafts. The two cultures have made Guatemala a complex society that is deeply divided between rich and poor. This division has produced much of the tension and violence that have marked Guatemala’s history. A high percentage of the population belongs to the 21 Maya groups that still preserve the cultural heritage of their ancestors, including 23 indigenous languages, while the inhabitants of the Caribbean coast revive their Afro-Caribbean roots.

Economy

Coffee is the mainstay of the economy, but tourism has become the second most important source of foreign revenue in recent years. Agriculture is still the major factor of the economy. The country produces and exports sugar, fruits, vegetables, flowers, cardamom and macadamia nuts.

Because of the many climates of the country, almost anything will grow in Guatemala. Plants and trees are nearly endless in their variety. More than a hundred species of orchids are found in the forests. All the tropical fruits, mangoes, papayas, pineapple and many others, grow in the warm areas. Apples and peaches appear at the higher altitudes.

Mostly, what is grown in Guatemala is corn – on mountain slopes, in plots hacked out of the jungle and in the hot coastal lowlands. Corn is seen everywhere, often with vines of black beans climbing the stalks. In terms of its monetary value, the returns on a corn harvest are low. But corn is what most Guatemalans eat – mainly in the form of tortillas – and what their ancestors ate centuries ago.

Additionally, Guatemala has developed excellent industries devoted to the assembly of clothes, electronic products, as well as the manufacture of furniture and canned goods, and its petroleum industry is rapidly growing.

Spanish Influence

The Spanish who conquered Guatemala were not content to subject the inhabitants to a new master sitting on a throne far across the ocean. As soldiers of the king and cross, they sought to impose a new order on the Indians, to bring them into the fold of the Catholic Church, to change every aspect of their way of life.

The ruling houses of the Indian nations were destroyed and their written records burned. The populations were forced from the countryside into villages built along the Spanish pattern, with an administrative headquarters, a church and a trading area grouped around a plaza. From these new fortified hamlets, the Indians went out to work their lands, and the lands taken from them by their new masters. They were instructed in the Catholic religion by the friars of the Church orders, who had to battle not only the old pagan ways, but also the more avaricious Spaniards, who saw the Indians only as cheap labor to be used for their own enrichment.

The Spaniards forced a cultural revolution upon their new subjects, creating a society that was not a miniature Spain, but which was not the old Indian culture either. In their new villages, Indians adapted to Spanish morality, and covered their bodies with clothing modeled after the trousers, jackets, blouses and skirts of Spanish officers and ladies. These new articles of clothing became standardized within each village, evolving into the native hand-woven garments that one still sees today.

As new customs mixed with old, each town became more set in its ways. The native languages broke down into dialects and accents peculiar to each village, and tribal identification weakened. Indians went out to other towns when they took their goods to market, but they married only within their own villages. Horizons shrank in the towns imposed by the Spaniards, a situation much to the advantage of the conquerors. Revolt was all the less likely when nationalism ended at the village boundary.

Wake Up Calls

A special feature in Guatemala is the *cohete* – firecrackers set off at any time after 4:30AM, celebrating holidays, birthdays, and family occasions. In more urban areas, these “events” seem to echo to and fro across the air as each participating group tries to outdo the last. Around 6:00AM they may be joined by the much louder *bombas*, which are actually churches honoring their patron saints. There is a telltale thump followed a few seconds later by an explosion high in the sky not unlike anti-aircraft fire. They are theoretically harmless: at least there is no recorded case of a plane having been brought down.

Shopping & Bargaining

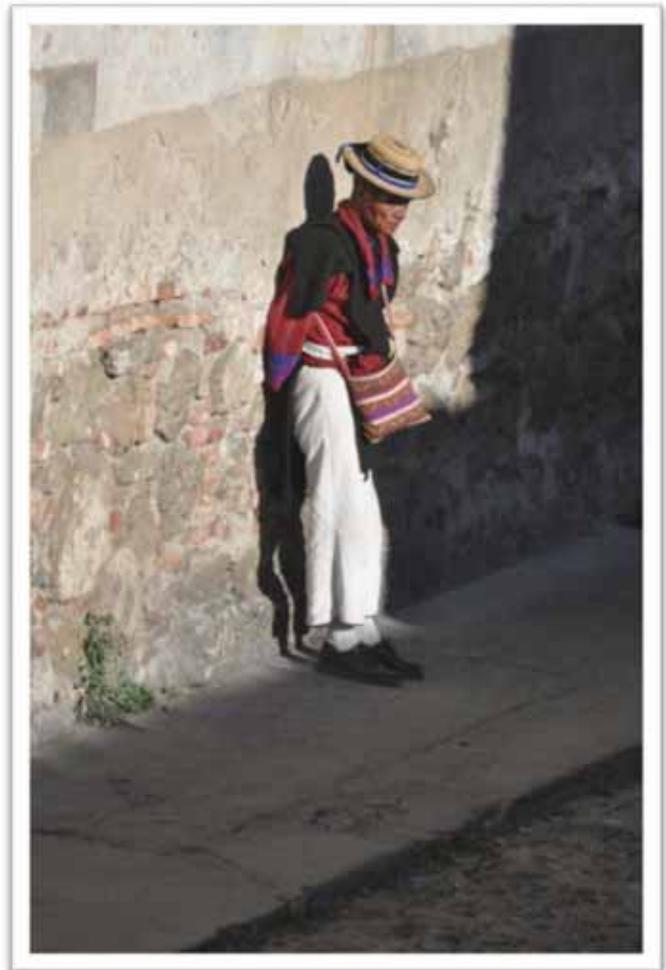
More than in most countries, one of the main attractions for visitors in Guatemala is shopping. Guatemala is a great place to buy textiles, heavy woolen blankets, carved wood, silver and jade jewelry and many other handicrafts. The explosion of color and array of handicrafts is astonishing! Markets brim with beautiful hand-woven fabrics and splendid works of art using techniques passed on from generation to generation. Many towns like Antigua, Chinautla, San Luis Jilotepeque and Rabinal produce beautiful, ceramic articles. Most boutiques offer clothing in contemporary fashion decorated with traditional native motifs.

One of the biggest choices is whether to buy in a store or in the markets. Buying in public markets gives a visitor access to the very heart of Guatemala's indigenous culture, since the buying and selling of *artesanía* predates the arrival of the Spanish and is still often carried out in hushed tones, although the younger generations are becoming increasingly aggressive.

Bargaining is a vital part of this tradition, and foreigners are expected to participate. In fact, sellers may feel puzzled if you do not engage in this friendly ritualistic game. That said, make sure you pay a fair price, and don't enter into the spirit of it with so much gusto that you end up nit-picking over five cents.

Experienced bargainers usually start by offering about 70 percent less of the first price that is quoted, then working their way toward a middle-ground compromise that will likely be about two-thirds to one-half of the original price. Remember to look around and compare prices before starting any serious negotiating. And do not start bargaining unless you intend to purchase the item for a price you propose. It offends Guatemalans if you offer to buy something for a stated amount and then walk away empty-handed. It is alright to ask how much but do not offer less unless you intend to buy. That said; do not feel obligated to buy the item if you cannot agree on a fair price.

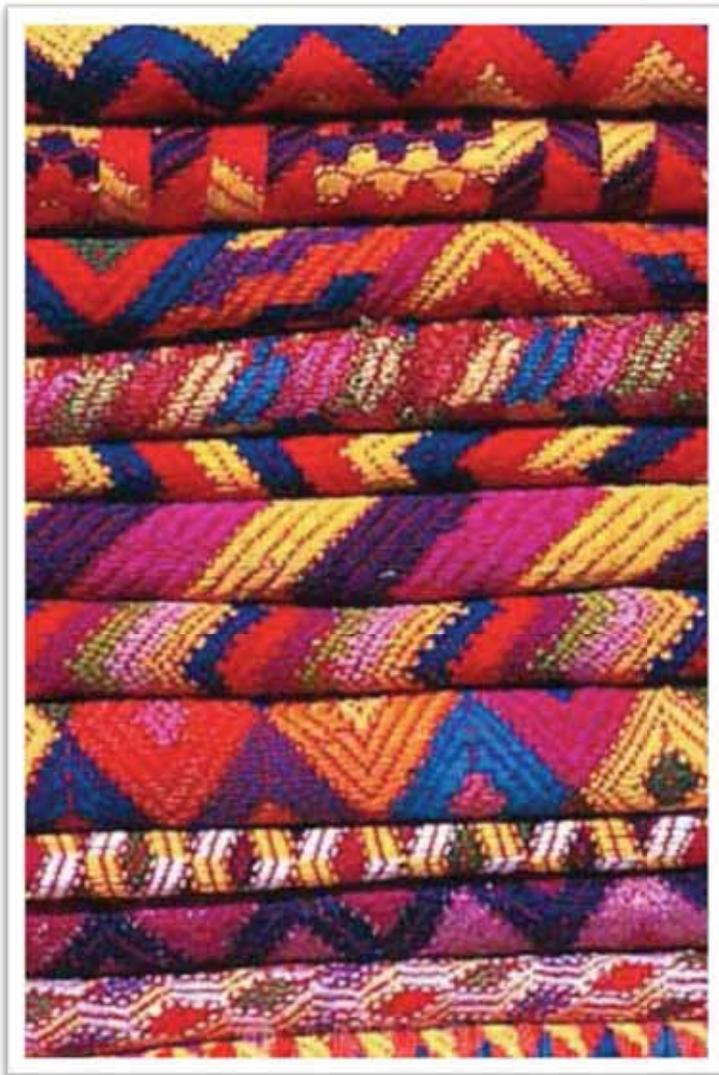
Bargaining is not allowed in most "fixed price" shops or where price tags have been attached to the merchandise. The larger stores often have more varied selection of **higher quality** items than you will find in a market. The prices are usually higher than those you will be able to obtain by going directly to the Indian artisans. But unless you are planning to buy large quantities of one item or will be going to many of the smaller towns, you can do fairly well shopping in stores.



Textiles

Few countries in the world have an indigenous textile tradition as dramatic as that of Guatemala. When the custom began of elaborate ornamentation in the fabric materials is not known, but it was certainly present when the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in 1524. Different designs denoted ethnic groups and the Spanish encouraged the idea that designs should be specific to towns and villages, partly as an “identity card”, to monitor the movements of the indigenous population.

Until recently, this custom has prevailed and it is still possible to spot where a Maya woman lives from the *huipil* (blouse) she is wearing. There may be other information on her status and that of her family in the design. The *corte* (wrap-around skirt) has become more standardized, usually red, blue or black, with or without modest design, but normally each community group will wear the same.



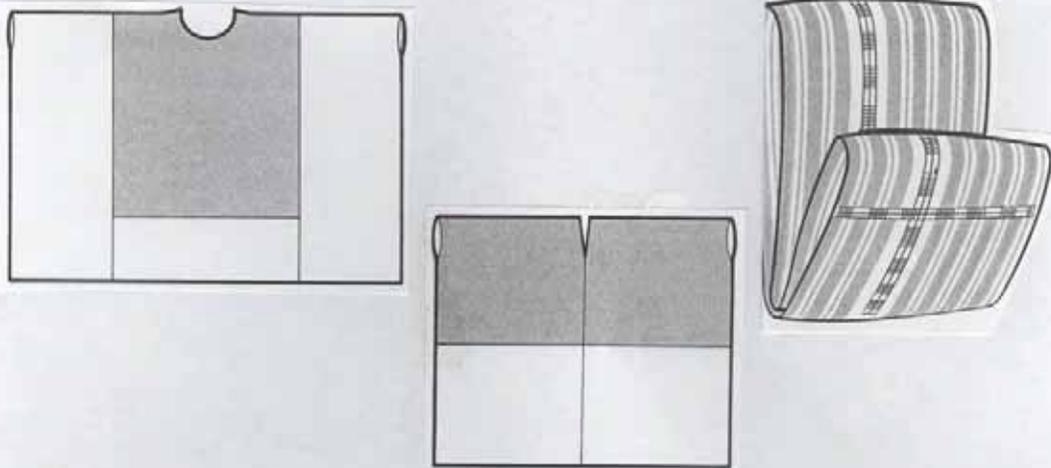
Looms are simple, made of wooden rods (e.g. bamboo) and cords, with the main warp threads stretched between the front and back rods. The front rod is strapped to the weaver’s waist and the back rod to a fixed point, e.g. a post in the house or a tree outside. By moving the body, the thread tension can be varied.

Transverse rods separate the warp threads, and by weaving the weft threads through, the cloth and patterns are created. This is the “back-strap” or more correctly the “hip-strap loom”.

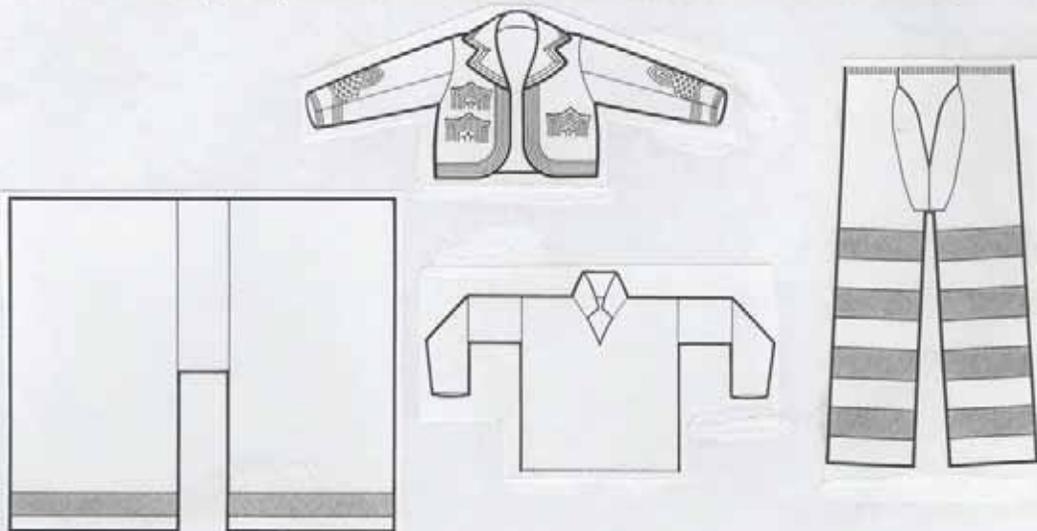
The whole procedure is costly and time consuming. Though the level of skill is high, the time required can be weeks or months, especially for clothing designed for special occasions. Once made, a garment will belong to the owner for life and will normally be used on a daily basis with another outfit for “best.”

Traditional Highland Maya Attire

Despite the many ceremonial and regional differences, the typical dress of the Guatemalan Maya woman usually includes a *huipil* (untailored smock-style blouse), *corte* or *refajo* (skirt), *faja* (sash), *tocoyal* (head ribbon), *rebozo* or *perraje* (shawl), and a *tzute* (an all-purpose cloth for cushioning baskets atop the head, carrying babies or wrapping goods from the market). The word *huipil* is derived from an Aztec phrase meaning "my covering".



Traditional men's attire includes *patalones* (trousers), *cincho* or *banda* (belt or sash), *camisa* (shirt), *chaleco* or *capixay* (tunic or vest), *cotón* or *chaqueta* (jacket), *sombrero* or *gorra* (hat or cap), *morrall* (shoulder-bag which is often crocheted), *tzute* (used as a head-covering, a carrying cloth or an adornment thrown over the shoulder) and some men, in the colder climates, use a *ponchito* or *rodillera* (woolen blanket worn over the trousers).



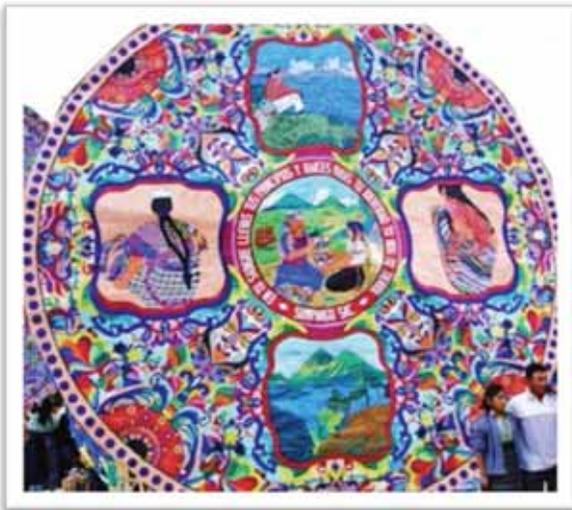
All Saints Day

Today's Highland Maya practice religious rituals based on ceremonies with roots in the world of their ancient forbearers and in the world of medieval and Renaissance Spain. Some wondrous customs and holidays are the result of the blend of Catholic and indigenous traditions in Guatemala. You will have the opportunity to witness some of these rites during visits to churches, village cemeteries, and the village of Sumpango.

On November 1st and 2nd, a powerful force stirs in all the towns of Guatemala. Traditional markets are filled with flowers of *sempa* (orange marigolds), chrysanthemums, wild daisies and the smell of copal, a pre-Columbian incense made from pine resin. November 1st is to honor the young, who have died and the 2nd is for honoring the deceased elders. People clean family graves and adorn them with cutout tissue paper called *papel picado*, wreaths of fresh flowers, and candles. They also honor the dead with festive foods such as candied fruits, tamales and *fiambre* (a cold meat and vegetable dish prepared only at this time of year). These days mark the celebration of *El día de los difuntos* or the Day of the Dead, a very important festival throughout Guatemala integrating the Catholic feast of All Saints Day with pre-Columbian Maya practices of remembering the dead.



On November 1st, early in the morning, families begin to gather in the cemetery to clean, repaint, and decorate their family tombs with flowers while fondly reminiscing about the deceased; and catch up on the latest news. Community bonds are renewed and strengthened as people work side-by-side, sharing paint, tools and brushes to refurbish tombs, while they pray and picnic together on the festive food the women have prepared.



A traditional part of the All Saints Day celebration is to fly kites in the cemetery. The kites are used as a way to communicate with the dead. The kites symbolically attract the spirits to earth at this special time of the year so family members, living and dead, can be reunited. Legends say that God permitted the departed spirits to visit their relatives, but the good spirits were bothered by the bad ones. A Maya priest said the noise of paper rustling in the wind brought happiness to the tortured spirits and allowed them to communicate with the living.

Traditionally, the kites have small messages tied to their tails in which the villagers let their deceased ones know how they are doing and ask God for special favors.

The tradition of flying kites has become a world famous event in Sumpango. The people of this community host the colorful "*Feria del Barrilete Gigante*" (Giant Kite Festival) each year where the tradition of kite flying has turned into a competition of sorts. Preparations for the celebration begin months in advance, when the people of Sumpango begin construction of the exhibition kites. The intricately detailed, awe-inspiring kites are about 52 feet in diameter and representative of their ancestral Maya culture, religion, or have a political theme. The kites are made of tissue paper, seemingly too thin to withstand the rough winds of the sky. The patterns are first drawn on white tissue paper and then colored tissue paper is pasted over the penciled design, they are true works of art, with brilliant colors and patterns.

The kites that “fly” range in size from one foot in diameter to about 20 feet. The kites that seem to best lift off the ground are the ones about eight feet across. The launching of the larger kites is a spectacle in itself. Many launchings last only a few seconds and the kites are damaged on landing. There is an organized kite-flying contest where group participants are given 3 chances to fly the kites they themselves have made. As the day comes to an end, a panel of judges award prizes based on size, color, design, and how high the kites flew.



Though the kites are not heavy, the sharp bamboo spikes radiating out can be quite dangerous, so take care not to stand under a kite that could possibly come crashing down on you and cause serious injury.

San Juan Comalapa

Nestled among pine trees and cornfields in the scenic mountainous Western Highlands of the Department of Chimaltenango, Comalapa presents a sleepy appearance. As one comes into the town, however, the first hint of a unique heritage presents itself. Along both sides of the road, murals depicting the town's major historical events are painted on walls fronting the street. The murals begin with the Maya creation story, and continue with various phases of the area's history including the Spanish conquest and more recently Guatemala's civil war.

Along the way to the center of town are the homes of a number of well-known artistic families. Usually the front rooms of the homes double as galleries, and with any luck a visitor will be greeted by the artist himself. This interesting village has become an important indigenous popular art center of *Naïf* painting. Perhaps best known of the artists from Comalapa is Andrés Curruchiche (1891-1969), a Kaqchikel Maya oil painter whose paintings are in galleries the world over.

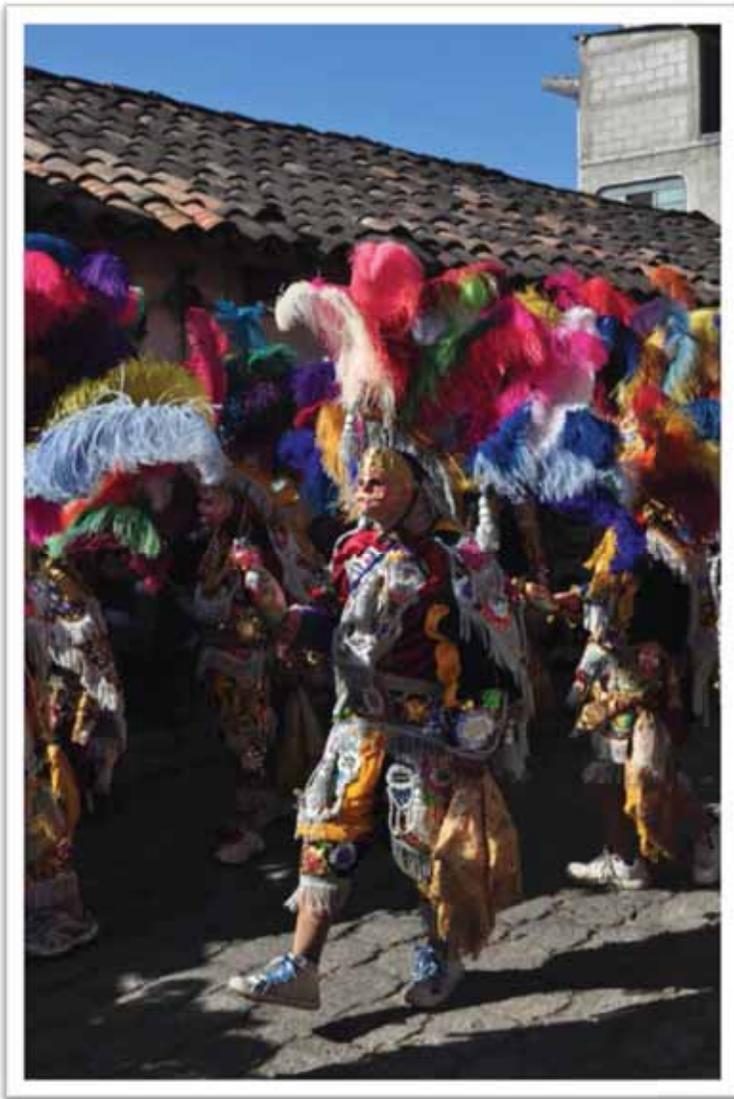


Today there are many artists here and their paintings mostly depict customs, daily-life activities, and women in native dress, focusing on the long, colorfully striped shawls with tasseled ends, and often including the Cathedral façade.

The Guatemala markets that characterize the Maya towns in the highlands can be especially enjoyable and colorful. Market days draw people from all around the vicinity; a social event, where traditionally dressed women can catch up on the latest news and gossip with distant neighbors while doing their weekly shopping. The authenticity of the Comalapa market alone makes it worth the visit. You will see blue corn tortillas, colorful displays of produce, bargain toothpaste, discount shoes, all kinds of dried fish, and colorful textiles. This wonderful, authentic indigenous market, which is less visited by foreign visitors, provides insight into the real lives of the local highlanders. If you're discreet with your zoom lens you can get some great candid shots, but you can also find people happy to pose for a few Quetzales.

Chichicastenango

Often we look at the ruins of Maya cities and think of the great culture that has disappeared. In Chichicastenango you are suddenly struck with the opposite thought: How much of what goes on there all around you is the same as what went on in the great Maya market and ceremonial centers hundreds and thousands of years ago? The society has changed, the outward forms have



changed, but what is essential - the deep, perhaps unconscious, ancient cultural impulse - is unchanged. For what brings the Indians to Chichicastenango again and again is exactly what brought their distant ancestors down from the mountain villages or out of the jungles to the pyramids and plazas of Kaminaljuyu or Tikal or Xelaju - the chance to exchange goods at the market, to socialize for a day before returning to the hard work and grinding routine of tending mountain or jungle corn fields, and to bring offerings and prayers to the altars and temples of the gods who ruled their lives.

Trading, socializing, and worshiping, inextricably bound together so they seem at times to be inseparable, are necessary components of a single timeless impulse, and one of the strongest, most persistent, and most ancient characteristics of the people of Mesoamerica. As you see a black-clad prayer man kneeling to the four corners of the earth, then mounting the steps of the church of Santo Tomás in Chichicastenango, swinging his censer so the *pom* smoke enveloping his

prayers rises up to the gods, and calling out to the guardian spirits of his ancestors to plead for him to the gods, the picture of the Great Plaza of Tikal springs to mind. As he prays, behind him in the market thousands of his tribesmen joke, drink and bargain for goods from hundreds of temporary booths. Then you can almost imagine yourself there in 700 AD as a chanting priest in a feathered headdress mounts the steep stairway of the temple, rising above the tumult of the market on the paved plaza floor below. There is no market more picturesque, more revealing, and more mystifying than in Chichicastenango. In fact, there is nothing like it at all.

More than four hundred years old, the town of “Chichi” is quaint, with narrow cobblestone streets and many buildings from colonial days, but not remarkable. The altitude is 7,200 feet and the mountain air crisp and bracing with almost every street corner giving views on all sides of pine-blanketed mountains. Its inhabitants are mostly Ladinos. However, more than forty thousand Indians live in the surrounding mountains, and every Thursday and Sunday they fill the streets of the small town, changing it into something quite remarkable, and ancient.

The great gathering begins the night before the market (Wednesday and Saturday nights), as thousands of Indians begin arriving. Coming by bus or on foot and carrying massive loads, slung over their backs and supported by a *tumpline* across their foreheads, piled as high as ten feet, the cargo seems to dwarf the men carrying it. The great central plaza becomes a scene of intense activity and a quiet buzzing of hundreds of conversations, as long poles are erected and covered with canvas to form selling booths. When the work is completed, the social part of the market begins as men pull out *octavos* of *aguardiente* (firewater) and gather in small groups for laughter and discussion, while the women exchange news and gossip with friends from distant villages.



After a few hours of sleep on a pallet in the booths, they are up early to display their goods, and by 7 A.M. the market is under way, even as more and more traders arrive.

In the late morning, service is held in the church of Santo Tomás at one end of the plaza. The mass is said in both Latin and Quiché. After the priest leaves, a number of low wooden slabs are brought out and placed in precise positions on the church floor. For the rest of the day Santo Tomás changes from a typical colonial church to scenes of pagan rituals, prayers to dead ancestors, chants to cast spells, chants to remove spells. These rituals, spells, prayers and chants were already ancient when the church was built in 1540.

The Indians approach the semicircular front steps of the church reverently. There, before a constantly burning fire made of copal incense (pom), they mumble prayers, facing each of the four directions of the compass. The old stone block on the third step, on which the fire burns, is said to be the only remnant of an ancient Maya temple that stood on the spot where the church now stands. Casting pom into the flames, they pray that the smoke will rise straight up and reach the spirits of their ancestors, who will intercede for them with the gods. Filling his tin-can censer with burning incense, each man slowly mounts the steps, head bowed, stopping and kneeling now and then, vigorously swinging the censers forward and back, finally kneeling at the church door, praying to his ancestral spirits and the gods so they will allow him to enter the church and will receive willingly his offerings and supplications.

Inside the church there are already hundreds of worshipers kneeling around the low platforms where thousands of candles flicker like carpets of light. Each platform is the place of certain saints and spirits; each candle represents a prayer. The worshipers kneel in the proper place and begin offering their gifts – lighting candles off those already burning and carefully placing them in parallel rows, saying prayers aloud, unashamed, and sprinkling the candles with handfuls of rose petals. As the prayers continue, each worshiper meticulously arranges and rearranges the rose petals so the gods will be pleased.

Moving from altar to altar, prayers are said in memory of departed family and ancestors, in hopes of rain, of a good harvest, for recovery from illness, for healthy animals, for a safe childbirth. In many cases, for special prayers or very important ones, each worshiper is accompanied by a special Chuch-cajau - prayer-man - who knows by heart the ancient words and complicated rituals, and will be sure to speak directly with the appropriate saints and gods.

The heavy smell of pom smoke, of rose petals and pine needles, the exploding firecrackers and skyrockets outside, the loud echoing of hundreds of prayers being chanted, the myriad sparkling candles, the uncanny feeling of being surrounded by an atmosphere thick with prayers and simple, absolute faith, an atmosphere teeming with energy and, who knows, perhaps teeming with ancient gods and spirits as well - it is an experience that cannot be forgotten.

After worshipping in Santo Tomás, or Calvario - the smaller church at the opposite end of the plaza - those with special prayers might make the half-hour hike up the mountain near town to the ancient stone idol *Pascual Abaj*, or *Turkaj*. There, as incense burns in a fire and candles flicker before it, the Indians kneel and pray to the stern stone face, offering rose petals and in some cases sacrificing a live chicken. Representing natural forces, and predating Christianity, *Pascual Abaj* was attacked by orthodox Catholics in 1957 and damaged. It was damaged again by the 1976 earthquake. It has been repaired, and *Chuch-cajaus* and thousands of others still find its powers undamaged and unabated.

Back at Santo Tomás, one of the *Cofradías* might be celebrating its patron saint's day with fireworks and a procession. The *Cofradía* is a hierarchical religious brotherhood whose members also have wide civil authority within their village. There are fourteen *cofradías* in Chichicastenango; each composed of respected men in the community. It is their privilege and duty to house and care for the image of their saint, to worship him, to celebrate him, and to glorify him. Each year a different member of the *Cofradía* keeps the image in his home, gives great feasts and drinking parties for the rest of the *cofradía*, leads the processions, and often goes deeply into debt to fulfill his duties well.

On a procession day the *Cofradía* will dress in their traditional *trajes* - black woolen *pantalones* (pants) with colorful side flaps symbolically decorated with embroidered suns, each type of sun representing something different. They wear flowing sashes, black jackets embroidered in red (black is the color of the Maya priesthood), and lovely *tzutes* (head-dresses) folded over the head and tied in back, with silken tassels hanging down, (each color *tzute* representing a different rank). Carrying the saint's image on their shoulders, the leaders, with their long polished staffs capped with radiant silver suns, and led by musicians playing the *tun* (drum) and *chirimia* (oboe-flute), walk through town, stopping now and then to shoot off skyrockets, arriving at the steps of Santo Tomás Church.

Here, more rockets are fired and prayers are said in all four directions, as a dancer shakes and holds aloft an image of a man on a white horse, the *Tzijolaj*, who represents the messenger who, like Mercury, communicates between the gods and men. The *Tzijolaj* is the patron saint of the fireworks specialist, the ones who shoot off the strings of firecrackers and sends the skyrockets exploding into the heavens, attempting, like the *Chuch-Cajaua*, to communicate with the gods.

As the ceremony goes on, the men smoke cigarettes, laugh, and talk with each other, for the procession is not just a time of reverence but also of celebration. Finally, the procession winds toward the house of the new *Cofrade*, who will keep the image until the next year.



The Market

While the incense burning, praying, shooting of rockets and celebrating is going on, the market swarms with quiet but intense activity. The strength of the Indian's belief in the order and reality of his own universe is such that the people snapping his picture as he prays or celebrates seem hardly to enter his consciousness. Though the market is full of native handicrafts meant mainly for tourists (and the variety is amazing), the real business of the market goes on despite the onlookers. Pigs, beans, nails, underwear, machetes, rope, rice, salt, shoes, combs, plastic jugs, all the necessities of life, the things each family can't make or grow themselves, are bargained for and sold. Shopping lists are filled, and each family carefully packs its purchases for the long walk back to its village.

Visitors will find that, with hard bargaining items may be purchased at good prices. One of the most treasured cultural representations you can buy is the *huipil*, a colorful hand-woven blouse worn by the Maya woman. The *huipil* of the Chichicastenango women is particularly significant because spirituality is deeply entrenched within the very existence of the “Chichi” people. The blouses of the women reflect their culture's solemn respect for the universe and the part that mankind plays. The moon, woven in its four phases adorns the shoulders, breast and back, while radiating from the neck opening are the rays of the sun.

When a woman puts on her *huipil*, she emerges through the neck-hole, symbolically in the axis of the world. The designs of the universe radiate from her head, extending over the bodice and sleeves of the *huipil* to form an open cross with the woman in the middle thus she is conceived of the universe, expanding outward from a central part. The center space is sacred and within it she believes herself protected from the evil spirits and the chaos outside.

To the novice market goer, the jostling and frank commerce of the Chichi market will at first seem unsettling. The central plaza is a packed madhouse of vendors, natives doing their shopping, and tourists bargaining for handicrafts while roving sellers approach them with assorted "tourist" items. It takes patience to wade through the array of native handicrafts available: blankets, *huipiles*, purses, jackets, shirts, belts, fabrics leather goods, ceramics, wood carvings, artifacts. Decide what you want and strike a deal. When bargaining, remember not to make a final offer or you will be expected to pay if it is accepted. Instead, stroll away and if you do decide to come back the vendor will still be willing to negotiate with you.

Keep in mind that all the handicrafts of Guatemala are just that - crafts made by hand - and if you find something you want, wherever you are, BUY IT because you probably will not find the same thing elsewhere. The most important criteria to use in deciding whether or not to purchase an item is quality. Look for a tight weave, good threads, weight of the fabric, holes, snags, stains, cracks and any imperfections that would later on bother you. Heavy woodcarvings mean the wood is wet and will probably crack as it dries out. When someone tells you an item is authentic (it is illegal to take authentic Maya and colonial artifacts out of the country), be careful that you do not overpay, keeping in mind that reproductions are easy to make. At day's end, as the Indian sellers pack their remaining wares and purchases onto their heads and backs for the journey home it is fascinating to realize that the scene you are witnessing has changed little over the centuries.

The Cofradías of Chichicastenango

Indigenous and Roman Catholic customs are mixed freely and openly in Chichicastenango; you will see the devout burning incense and lighting candles on the steps of both churches, then crossing themselves as they step inside to pray or attend mass.

Because the expense of the community's many elaborate religious ceremonies is too great for a single individual or family to bear, the *Cofradías* provide a means for villagers to work together to keep these important rituals alive. There are 14 *Cofradías* (brotherhoods) consisting of six or eight members, each with different ranks and responsibilities. Each *Cofradía* is dedicated to the service of various Christian saints, whose images also symbolize sacred spirits or gods from the Maya religion.

Throughout the western highlands, each god's distinctive dominion, the sun, moon, rain, clouds and even corn, is inextricably woven with Christianity's Holy Trinity and the saints of Catholicism. Each year the most respected men of the village proudly take turns serving in the *Cofradías* and carrying out the special spiritual and secular duties associated with them.

The saint is only taken out for procession and its own feast days. The chief saint is *Santo Tomás*, whose feast (the town's principle *fiesta*) is celebrated from December 17th-21st. During Easter week Jesus, the Virgin and the 14 saints lead processions to the church. Each year after the saint's feast day, the image is moved to a new home.

The saint's host will hang two pine fronds either side of his door. In the house of *Santo Tomás*, which has the biggest *Cofradía*, the floor is covered in a carpet of pine needles. *Santo Tomás* is a life-size sculpture encased in a glass box. He used to hold a small saint – *Santo Tomás Chiquito*, but the tiny image was stolen in the spring of 2001, one of the many thefts amid a wave of religious idol robbery in Guatemala, and so the *Cofradías* are now wary of outsiders visiting the saint.

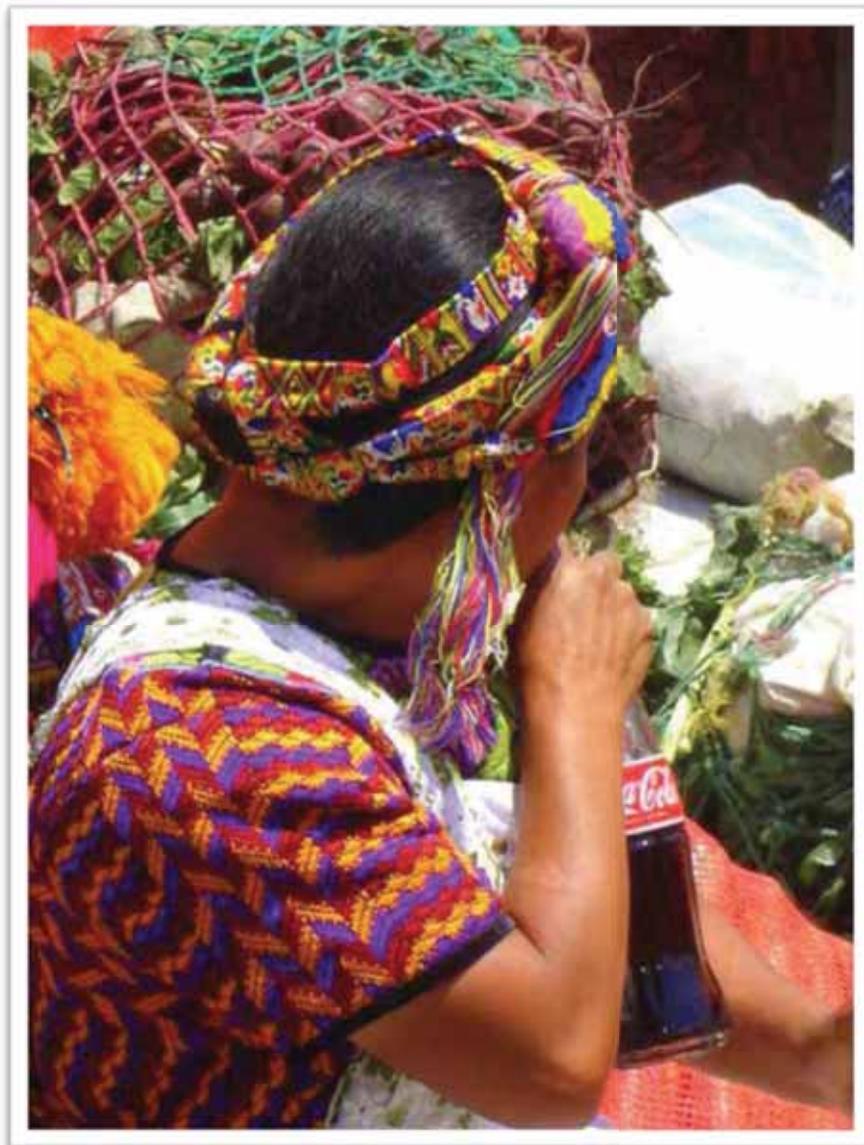
The crowned *Santo Tomás* wear a sparkling silver *traje* and tucked into his hands at chest height are dollar notes. White petals are scattered at his feet. Opposite him is a table on which sits two large wooden snakes, dried cobs, an offertory bowl, vases of white petals and white candles. Next to the saint are crates of the firewater *Quetzalteca*. The ceiling is laden with bunting and Christmas lights and decorations. Candles are kept alight all the time because it is said the saint hungers for and will punish the mayor if he doesn't keep the candles burning day and night.

Colored candles lit at Maya ceremonies and rituals all have meaning. The following is a list of what they represent:

- **white** – spirit and protection of children
- **yellow** – money and protection of adults
- **green** – health, business and prosperity
- **sky blue** – protection, money, happiness, trips and studies
- **red** – love, faith, will and protection
- **black** – black magic, the enemy
- **purple** – vices
- **pink** – health and hope.

The Mayan Inn in Chichicastenango

Off the cobblestone street, on the edge of the famed Chichi market, the Mayan Inn will sweep you into the Old World of Spanish Colonial times. Upon arrival you will be greeted by one of the many local Quiche Maya attendants, dressed in the local traditional *cofradia* costume, who will lead you to your room, bring you water, turn down your bed, start the evening fire, and be your very own dining room server. Each room replete with colonial furniture, mirrors, and sculpted Saints is uniquely “one of a kind”, creating a “museum” of Spanish art. As you walk through the many small patios with its flowers, shrubs, and colonial treasures, listen and you will hear music; unusual, intriguing...it’s the marimba being played in the courtyard. Your stay in this intimate inn with its attentive staff will remain a lasting memory.





Lake Atitlán and Surrounding Villages

Today it is the most popular vacation spot in Guatemala, both for native *Guatemaltecos* and for foreign visitors. In 1840, John L. Stevens wrote, “We both agreed that it was the most magnificent spectacle we ever saw.” Almost half a century ago Aldous Huxley called it the most beautiful lake in the world; 450 years ago the great Spanish Conquistador Don Pedro de Alvarado was also awed by the sheer majesty of the lake and its surrounding mountains and volcanoes. And it is a good guess that some traveling Maya trader of 1500 years ago, perhaps bringing quetzal feathers and jaguar skins from the jungle lowlands to trade for the obsidian and precious stones of the highlands, stood speechless on a mountain path overlooking the great lake, and sent back glowing descriptions in some hieroglyphic version of a Maya travel guide.

In any case, the verdict throughout history has been the same – Lake Atitlán, with its pure blue waters, towering volcanoes, ever-changing colors, powerful and mysterious aura, and its abundance of exotic flowers, fruits, birds and animals, is not simply a beautiful place but something altogether unique – a spot in which the earth’s forces have been brought together to such a concentrated degree that the effect is nothing less than sublime.

The lake itself is remarkable. Formed by four volcanoes which blocked the rivers flowing out of the mountains south toward the Pacific, it measures some eleven by eighteen miles and is more than 1,000 feet deep - some say as deep as 1,600 feet, though in fact its deepest point has not yet been found – and its only outlets are through underground passages on the southern end. There are hot springs bubbling out of the ground on its banks, and unseen thermal activity in its depths is probably the cause of the powerful currents that sweep and spin across the lake. Seen from a vantage point on one of the trails that wind through the mountains surrounding the water, these currents appear as huge swaths of blue, deep green or purple – patches of color that are always changing, as the colors of the lake itself change from hour to hour.

Clear and placid in the mornings, the aspect of the lake changes around noon when a gusty wind known to the Indians as the *Xocomil* (Sho-ko-meel) sweeps across the surface, ruffling up white



choppy waves and making travel by boat dangerous. Every village abounds with tales – both ancient and modern – of impatient travelers or headstrong traders who ventured out during the hours of the *Xocomil*, and were never seen again. Because of the unpredictable currents and the *Xocomil*, the Indians in the villages that surround the lake have great respect sometimes bordering on fear of its powers. Most of them prefer to carry their heavy loads of vegetables and trade goods to market or from town to town by way of lakeside trails, and those that use

cayucos – small dugout canoes with pointed prows and built-up sides – stay close to shore. Despite the fact that their villages border on the lake, fishing has never been a major Indian industry or pastime, and it is said that few of them ever learn to swim.

If the lake is remarkable for its unseen powers, the land that surrounds it is remarkable for the powers that can be seen. The reigning powers, of course, are the volcanoes. Rising above the southern rim of the lake in almost perfect cones – often with heaps of fluffy clouds at their feet, or sometimes, even on the clearest day, with a single white cloud anchored like some strange parasite to its peak – are the volcanoes San Pedro (9,920 feet), Tolimán (10,340 feet) and Atitlán (11,560 feet). These volcanoes, which can be seen from every village, almost every spot around the lake, merely by looking up, seem to have a pervasive but unspoken effect on almost every aspect of life of the people who live around the lake.

The ancient Maya myths speak of a succession of world ages, each of which ends in disaster. The last age ended with a great flood, and it is believed our present age will end in a cataclysmic eruption of earthquakes and volcanoes. The Indians, as Eric Wolf has said, “live in the mouth of the volcano”. For the people of Atitlán, the reminder of their smallness in the face of great forces of nature is always with them, towering over their shoulder, reflected on the lake. It is interesting to speculate on the relationship between the gentle, fun-loving, stolid, deeply religious nature of the highland Indians, their simple existence based on working, sharing, and living each day fully without worrying about the future, and the massive volcanoes under which they live and work.

But the volcanoes are not just mystical presences. The volcanic ash of their eruptions has permeated the soil of the surrounding countryside, making it incredibly fertile. In addition, the climate of the lake is ideal – at just over 5,000 feet, it has warm days and cool nights the year-round. The result is an abundance of plants flourish here that would not grow in the high plateaus above and the hot lowlands of the Pacific to the south. The major crops are the inevitable corn and beans - the terraced fields stretch up the mountainsides so steeply it is hard to believe anyone could stand up straight on them let alone cultivate them – which form the basis of the Indians’ diet. But also, the fruits and vegetables of Lake Atitlán are known as the best in the land: bright red tomatoes, fat onions, avocados, strawberries, coffee, anise, all grow in profusion and are carried in bulging woven sisal bags to markets all over Guatemala. And in the places that are not cultivated, lush tropical foliage, hibiscus, bougainvillea, palm trees, Jacaranda trees, and bright bursts of flowers cover the landscape. The winding trails are lined with wild flowers that would be rare anywhere else. Even the shortest walk through one of the villages or around the shore of the lake is an experience in color; not just in the brightness of the flowers and the shifting hues of green, but in the more subtle ranges of color in the constant changes of the lake, the volcanoes, the clouds and the sky.

The most fascinating combinations of colors are to be found not in the flowers but in the vibrant costumes of the Indians who live in the villages around the lake. Predominately red, white, blue and black, but with flashing oranges, greens, purples and pinks interwoven or embroidered or overlaid, the women’s *huipiles* (blouses), *refajos* or *cortes* (skirts), *tzutes* (headdresses) and *fajas* (sashes) are often so intensely colorful the patterns seem to dance before your eyes. The men too have colorful clothes, but more and more they have taken to wearing western-style dress, (dark pants, light shirts and a straw hat, sometimes worn with a sash or a short, woolen skirt, the only throwback to the old style of dress) bringing out their beautifully embroidered *pantalones* and jackets only for ceremonial occasions.

Each village has its own pattern and style, and it does not take long before an interested observer will be able to pass through a crowded marketplace and know which town each of the women comes from merely by seeing her clothes.

Descendants of the Tzutuhil, who first settled on the shores of the lake hundreds of years before the conquest, the Cakchiquel, who first allied themselves with Don Pedro de Alvarado and then rebelled against him and were conquered, and the Quiché, once the most powerful tribe of all the western highlands until de Alvarado defeated their leader Tecun Uman in hand-to-hand combat and burned their kings, lived mainly in twelve villages around the lake, many of them named after the Apostles of Jesus. The main villages are: San Jorge La Laguna, Santa Cruz La Laguna, Tzununá, San Marcos La Laguna, Santiago Atitlán, San Lucas Tolimán, San Antonio Palopó and Santa Catarina Palopó. There are some other tiny towns (including Cerro de Oro) and of course Panajachel, which despite its constantly growing population of tourists and year-round foreign residents, is still basically an Indian town.

Throughout their history, the twelve villages have been isolated from the surrounding country by the steep mountains and volcanoes that ring the lake. They have also been relatively cut off from each other. One reason for this is the fact that there has never been a good road connecting all the lake's villages. Even today several towns can only be reached by boat or by hiking great distances over steep footpaths. In a sense, a village only a few miles distant that takes three hours to reach is as far away as Guatemala City. Another reason for the separation of the villages is their different tribal identities. Three separate languages are spoken around the 67-mile circumference of the lake, Quiché, Cakchikel and Tzutuhil. So it is that sometimes people from neighboring villages cannot understand each other's language and must communicate in halting Spanish. The villages are not just a boat ride but also a world apart.

The results of this separation and isolation are fascinating to observe. Not only has each village developed its own distinctive pattern and style of clothing, their very identity and style of life are different and distinct from each other. A short walk will take one from the thatched-roofed huts of Santa Catarina to the adobe tile houses of San Antonio. The concrete homes of San Lucas are but a few miles from Santiago, with its houses made of lava rock, bamboo and cactus. And the mud-and-bamboo structures of San Marcos and Tzununá seem scattered and fragile when compared to the thick walls, tile roofs and closely built homes of San Pedro. Similarly, while each village is essentially agricultural, they have each developed different cash crops – avocados in San Pedro and Santa Cruz, coffee in San Juan, citrus fruits in Tzununá, and onions and anise in San Antonio.

This intense sense of individuality even goes so far as the crafts in which each village specializes. While Santiago is known for its textiles and making *cayucos* (dug-out canoes), San Pablo makes ropes and hammocks out of the fibers of the maguey plant, San Antonio makes mats out of reeds gathered from the lake and there is a rug co-operative in San Pedro. Happily for tourists, Indians from each village bring their specialties to local markets – the largest are in Sololá and Santiago – where one can pass along the colorful rows and sample the entire range of lake village crafts, and, with some canny bargaining, take home a work of art at prices that hardly seem possible.

Hotel Atitlán

“There is only one truly sumptuous place to stay, the Hotel Atitlán” (The New York Times, January 1999). The most outstanding hotel on the lake is the Hotel Atitlán where you will enjoy picture perfect surroundings of charming gardens along with matchless views of the lake and surrounding volcanoes. The Spanish Colonial style Hotel Atitlán is situated at the edge of the azure waters of Lake Atitlán. Nestled on an ancient coffee plantation with title dating back to 1524. In 1926, Moises and Blanca Rosa Rivera purchased San Buena Ventura and turned the *finca* into a coffee plantation. In 1970, Arturo inherited the land from his parents and he, along with his wife Sue, built the Hotel Atitlán.

As Hotel Atitlán was being built, hotel proprietress Sue Rivera was already in the process of designing the gardens you see today. As one walks the gardens it is easy to sense the devotion that went into creating these magnificent grounds. Sue's love of flowers and attention to the beauty of the gardens is ever present. Teeming with flowers of every description and color, the gardens are a wonder to this part of the world.



Over two hundred varieties of roses make up the Antique, the Modern, and the David Austin Rose Gardens. There are more than 50 varieties of hibiscus, arbors of vines, English style knot gardens and a tropical heliconia garden. Other botanical venues to delight your senses include a wedding garden, a coffee garden and a variety of orchids. More than 25 colors of bougainvillea and an azalea garden provide a dazzling display of color.

Strolling the gardens with breath-taking sights of the pristine lake and volcanoes provides the ultimate ambiance for relaxation and retreat for your body and soul. With its many stunning vistas, artists from around the world have inhaled the beauty of the gardens that surround them and expressed themselves through their medium. Around every turn in the garden, you'll find resident Parrots, Red Macaws, Toucans, and Peacocks. Bird watchers have reveled in the offerings of this serene sanctuary punctuated with the music and flight of literally hundreds of species of birds. Sue cordially invites you to enjoy the gardens but please leave them as you find them for those that follow. She would graciously request that you do not pick the flowers or fruits as they provide necessary habitat for the bird life.

Nature Walk

A Birder's paradise, this part of the old coffee plantation features many species of trees and plant; habitat for a great variety of birds. Suspension bridges lead across ravines and flowing streams up to the waterfall. At higher elevations trees are laden with Spanish moss and epiphytes, giving the impression of a cloud forest. You just may spot one of the resident monkeys hiding in the trees.

Cables X-Tremos

Zip through the air with spectacular views of Lake Atitlán while enjoying the thrill ride of a lifetime. Anyone can do it. The hardest part is walking up to where the zip lines begin. If you can do that, the rest is easy.

Panajachel

Cutting through the ring of mountains that tower more than 3,000 feet over Lake Atitlán, the Panajachel river flows into the lake from the north side. There it has created a wide rocky delta and sandy beaches gently sloping into the lake. It was on the banks of this river that Don Pedro de Alvarado and his forces, with their Cakchiquel allies, decisively defeated the Tzutuhil Indians in 1524. Shortly thereafter, following their policy of first defeating the Indians in combat and then pacifying them by converting them to Catholicism, the Franciscans built a church on the banks of the river and set out about turning the tribes of the lake into Christians. On these fertile banks of the river grew the tiny Cakchiquel village of Panajachel, a village which, much like the other Indian lake towns, was centered around the cultivation of corn and beans in terraced fields climbing up the steep banks cut by the river.

However, while the other towns of the lake, cut off from the rest of the country by their lack of roads, developed their own identities at their own sleepy pace, Panajachel was fortunately (or fatefully) connected early on into the system of roads running from the western highlands and Quetzaltenango to Guatemala City, the colonial capital of all of Central America. As a result, though it is tiny in comparison with the Indian cities of San Lucas and Santiago across the lake, Panajachel became a sort of inland port city, the center from which goods arriving from the highland cities could be shipped out across the lake to the various towns. It was also the place where Indians from the lake towns arrived by launch, canoe and on foot, carrying their loads of weavings, baskets, mats and vegetables en route to the great market towns of Chichicastenango, Sololá, Antigua, Chimaltenango and Guatemala City. And of course, in the years that followed, drawn by the beauty of the lake, the easy access and the central location, the tribes of tourists, explorers, vacationers, artists, and expatriates followed in the footsteps of the traders and missionaries.

The result is Panajachel as it is today, a strange but comfortable combination of resort town, expatriate colony, and Indian village. Originally centered about one kilometer north of the lake shore, the town has slowly crept toward the water in increments of half-hidden, colonial-style vacation homes, art galleries, small shops selling typical Indian crafts, bungalows, restaurants, *pensiones*, and finally on the shores of the lake itself, resort hotels. And still, it is an Indian town. The terraced fields rise up the mountains. Cakchiquel is still the language heard most

often in the streets, and away from the paved streets are bamboo-fenced footpaths leading to thatch-roofed huts. The launches arrive daily from across the lake with Indians carrying their huge loads and wearing their village *trajes*, and the night before the Panajachel market, the sound of singing and the smell of garlic and onions fill the town, as the Indians arrive and sit in the street by candlelight to braid their garlic and onions into knots and await the beginning of the market the next morning.

Panajachel is an Indian town, it is a *gringo* town, and yet, in the end, it all meshes somehow. Maybe it has something to do with the overwhelming presence of the lake. Though there are resort hotels and vegetarian restaurants and late-hour discos, the town is not brassy, not garish. There is calmness in the streets; an easy acceptance between people from cultures as different as day and night.

In the best sense of the word, Panajachel is a melting pot, not only a place to relax but also a place to meet people and come to know them. The modern encroaches, the neon signs grow more numerous, but ultimately, Panajachel remains a peaceful place, an international community, suspended between the old ways of the lake and the inescapable approach of the modern world.

Santa Catarina Palopó

Just three-and-a-half miles from Panajachel, this attractive little Cakchiquel village of thatch-roofed huts climbing away from a reedy bay up a steep-sided valley is an example of how a traditional culture can change radically and still retain its traditional ways. For centuries the greatest fishermen of the lake, the people of Santa Catarina, faced a challenge in recent years when the black bass introduced into the lake decimated the native fish population and they were forced to find other means of livelihood. The men turned to farming, migratory labor, and gathering reeds from the lake which they weave into mats, while the women weave and sell lovely *huipiles* and *camisas*. Still, old ways die hard, and Santa Catarina remains a lake-oriented village. Unlike most other lake villages the houses crowd down to the shore, numerous canoes line the old dock, and when they can, the men still continue to fish the waters and gather crabs and snails.

The town can be reached from Panajachel by launch or by walking, riding horseback or driving the bumpy, tortuous but lovely road that winds through the mountains high above the lakeshore. Drivers should be advised that the villagers - who must walk home from Panajachel several times a week carrying heavy loads - are avid hitchhikers, witty conversationalists and clever salesmen. Pick up one, five more will pile in, and you'll find yourself in the midst of lively talk, gales of laughter and taunts out the window as the less fortunate villagers are passed on the road. There will be frank discussions about the nature of village life, and when you reach Santa Catarina, one or two will claim to live a few blocks beyond the others so she can have you all to herself as she innocently pulls out her weavings and admits that, oh yes, she just might be willing to sell you one if the price were right.

San Antonio Palopó

Perched in a rocky natural amphitheater that rises up from the lake in several levels, this most picturesque and typical lake village is six miles from Panajachel on the same road that passes



through Santa Catarina. The town offers excellent views of the lake and contains a ruined convent from colonial days. Atop the town's high point is an interesting old church. Onion and anise seed are grown everywhere and their fine odors permeate the town. The men can be seen in their long woolen skirts with red sashes, and woven cloth wrapped around their heads like turbans (when away from town, however, they wear modern western garb, and even in town the traditional *trajes* are seen less with each passing

year). Mats and henequen bags are made here and the *huipiles* and other woven goods are lovely and less expensive than in Panajachel or Santa Catarina.

Santiago de Atitlán

The ancient capital and religious center of the Tzutuhils, this is the most fascinating village on the lake. Lately, however, perhaps because of frequent mass invasions by tourists, the Indians have taken to capitalizing on their reputation. The famous market, run by the women of the town, is open daily, but Sundays are the big days when everyone comes to town. You can walk toward the dock shortly before the tourist boat from Panajachel arrives and see colorfully dressed women and carefully groomed children sitting stolidly by their rock and bamboo huts, waiting. With the boat's arrival, however, a wave of something like greed passes up the streets. As visitors fan out through the town's streets, the women are suddenly grinning photogenically intently weaving, and both young and old are clawing at passersby crying (in English), "Take a picture, twenty-five cents!". The whole scene is false and mercenary and it is sad to see the changes that have taken place in the townspeople in recent years.

For all that, the town still must be seen. Set on the slopes of Atitlán amid great chunks of lava, its stone streets winding past stone or cactus-fenced compounds and thatched-roof stone and bamboo huts, it is surrounded by water and volcanoes and mountains. The women wear vibrant red *cortes* and *huipiles* of white and purple, intricately embroidered; their unique headdresses are long (over 30 feet) red bands wrapped around and around their heads like halos (you can see it pictured on the Guatemalan 25 centavo coin). The men's purple and white striped *pantalones* with embroidery around the knees are also lovely, both in the colors and the quality of the work (though nowadays the men wear their *pantalones* and bright sashes with western-style shirts and cowboy hats) and in fact the weavings of Santiago, especially the *huipiles*, are admired and prized throughout the world as works of art.

Perhaps the most delightful way to spend an afternoon is to sit on the huge boulders by the lake and watch the women doing their washing in the lake - scrubbing and drying their beautiful clothes on the rocks, the colors shining and dancing in the clear sunlight - as men glide by in *cayucos*, or cut reeds in the shallow water, children play on the shore, young girls carry water and baskets of laundry on their heads, and volcano San Pedro towers massively in the background. This, and not the frantic bustle of the Sunday market, is the Santiago that is worth seeing.

Santiago served as a missionary center for Franciscans, and its church and convent date from the middle of the 16th century. But its religious traditions are ancient, and the town is known for its *brujos* who cast spells, foretell the future and plead with the gods by means of a set of beads or quartz crystals. Both the ancient and the Christian seem to come together in the mysterious figure of *Maximón* (ma-she-moan). A life-sized dummy, clothed, fed, housed, cared for and worshiped by a secret brotherhood of town religious leaders known as the *cofradia*. *Maximón* seems to represent some synthesis of saint and sinner, Don Pedro de Alvarado, Judas and the ancient god Mam. Kept hidden for most of the year, he is venerated, given offerings of the most perfect fruits and vegetables as well as *aguardiente* (firewater) and *puros* (cigars) and paraded through town during the Easter celebrations.

San Juan de Atitlan

One of the least touristy villages on Lake Atitlán is San Juan la Laguna. For one who is looking for an Atitlán in a pure state will find the answer to his or her expectations here. Disembarking the boat to this village, places one in front of a lagoon, where fishermen and a community of local ducks still share the sources that come from water.

There are no hotels, shops, banks, or any of the characteristics of modern life in this town. The quietness in San Juan la Laguna is such that some of the most creative artists of the region live here. We are talking of painters such as Antonio Vasquez, who has created a prominent individual style that is valued inside and outside of the country. This flourishing cultural impulse makes San Juan la Laguna a place linked with its origins but where you can breathe in a spirit of creative energy.

Visiting San Juan allows one to learn of the customs and traditions in a very rural and authentic T'zutujil village. The village is home to a couple of textile cooperatives where one can discover how women of the village continue the traditional methods of dying thread with native plants beginning with extracting natural dyes used to create extraordinary textile products. The elaborate work of weaving using recycled materials to create styles unique to San Juan. Textiles are woven using traditional back-strap and foot looms. In San Juan, ancient methods used for generations in the production of plant-based products have been preserved by an association of midwives and health educators. Also, plant essences are used for making creams, soaps, shampoos, teas, and other products with healing and comforting properties.

Sololá

Not a lake town, but the capital of the department in which the lake is located, Sololá is 2,000 feet above the lake and only five miles from Panajachel, up a steep winding but excellent road which affords perfect views all the way. As you leave “Pana”, look up the mountain to the left. Toward the top you will see a cave. The local shaman from the village of San Jorge uses this cave. Besides worshiping in church, the Indians pray at numerous sacred places in the mountains. The shaman is called upon to give advice, invoke or revoke curses, foretell the deaths as well as ceremonies of the ancient Maya calendar, which are still observed in more remote communities.

As the midpoint between the lowlands and the highlands, Sololá is an important market center and Indians attend its Tuesday and Friday market from as far away as Quezaltenango and Guatemala City. Lowland traders bring spices, sugar, salt, cacao, rice, dried fish and shrimp, bananas, etc., while highland villagers bring exquisite wool blankets, pottery, furniture, weavings, reed mats, sisal bags, hammocks, and ropes. There is a wide range of textiles and the tightly woven woolen shoulder bags that form an essential part of the apparel of almost every Indian man. Situated near an ancient Cakchiquel capital, which was traditionally ruled by the Clan of the Bats, the sign of the bat is still worn by the men of Sololá in a stylized form, embroidered in black on the back of their white woolen waistcoats, and is available at the market.

Clan customs are still strong here, and the cofradías in their capes, black straw top hats and symbolic staffs often lead processions through the streets. Watch the homage with which they and the town's respected elders are treated by the people - the salutations, bows, and kissing of hands - let you know this is one place in which the wisdom of the elders is still respected. All in all, it is one of the most colorful and interesting markets in the area, and a good place to observe the social as well as economic function that markets serve for the Indian communities.

Antigua

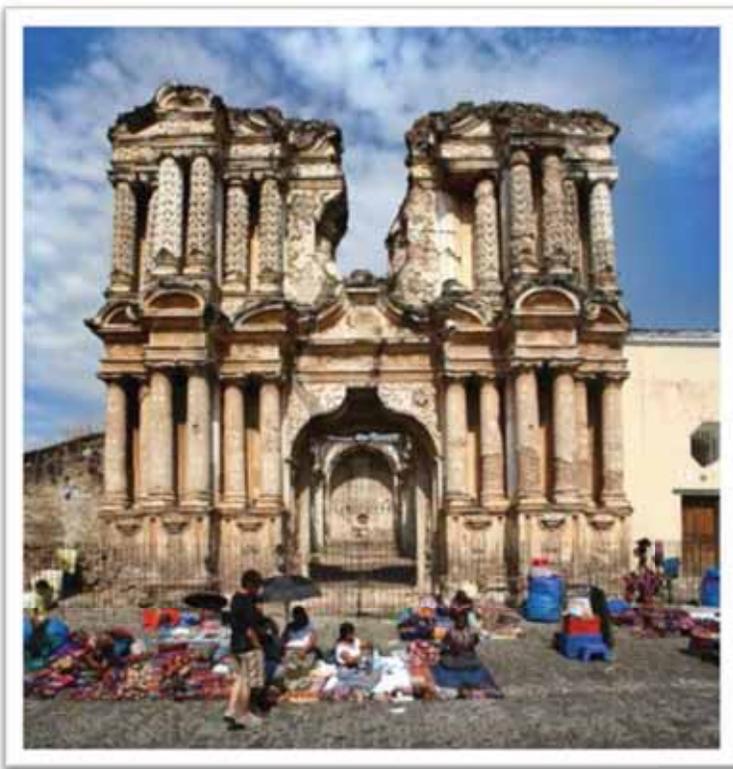
From 1543 to 1773, the capital city of the Kingdom of Guatemala – which included all of what is now the province of Chiapas in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica – was the “Muy Noble y Leal Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala”- the Most Noble and Most Loyal City of St. James of the Knights of Guatemala. Like Mexico City to the north and Lima to the south, Guatemala’s capital served as an administrative and judicial center for the Spanish Empire, as well as a center for educational and missionary work by Spanish priests.

The city attracted a total of 16 religious orders, which built their own monasteries, convents and churches. Today it is known as Antigua. In wealth, splendor, sophistication, power and size, it was rivaled only by Mexico City and Lima, and at its peak in 1773 it contained thirty-two churches, eighteen convents and monasteries, fifteen hermitages, ten chapels, a great university, seven colleges, five hospitals, an orphanage, some of the most beautiful government buildings ever constructed in the New World, countless exquisite fountains set in carefully tended parks and gardens, sumptuous private mansions, and an estimated population of nearly eighty thousand. In that same year an earthquake destroyed the city and the capital was moved to present-day Guatemala City. UNESCO has declared World Cultural Patrimony for Antigua due to its unique architectural and historic importance.

Today, Lima and Mexico City resemble modern metropolises everywhere, with their tall, multinational corporation office buildings made of steel and glass, faceless apartment

complexes, streets choked with noise, cars, exhaust fumes, and millions upon millions of people. Remnants of the colonial past are hard to find amid the parking lots, skyscrapers, teeming *barrios* (neighborhoods) and luxury hotels.

By comparison, today Antigua has a population of about twenty-five thousand. Its streets are cobblestones – just as they were 250 years ago. There are no glaring neon signs, few buildings more than one story tall, and the old *calle*s (streets) are lined with charming colonial-style homes, with wooden window grilles, ornate, metal studded doorways, white-washed walls and tile roofs.



And everywhere still stand the cathedrals and palaces, mansions, fountains, convents and other monuments – some in ruins, some looking much as they did before 1773 – reminders of Antigua and Central America’s past, of the pride, glory, wealth, opulence, and love of beauty that were colonial Spain at its best (and, at times, of the pride, cruelty, tastelessness and self-righteousness that were colonial Spain at its worst).



So, while Lima and Mexico City find

themselves choked and threatened by their own successes, it is ironic, and strangely symmetrical, that Antigua, the city that had its beginning and end in disaster, should ultimately discover that it has been preserved through disaster. But then ironies and strange symmetries (not to mention disasters) seem to be an essential part of the history of Antigua. Consider, for example, the strange story of Don Pedro and Doña Beatriz. The previous capital – now known as Ciudad Vieja – had been established in 1527 in the Almolonga valley, between the volcanoes Agua and Fuego, and ruled over by Don Pedro de Alvarado, the great Conquistador, and his young and beautiful new wife, Doña Beatriz de la Cueva. Then, on an ill-conceived expedition to Mexico, the proud adventurer and master strategist met his death, ignominiously and ironically crushed under the horse of his own secretary, remarking laconically as he died, “This cannot be helped, and should happen to fools like myself who take with them people like Montoya.”

When word of his death arrived in early September of 1541, his haughty wife ordered such flamboyant, excessive displays of mourning that people were disturbed; fearing her blatant show of grief was sacrilegious and would bring disaster to them all. Doña Beatriz imperiously demanded that she be appointed to replace her husband as governor of the realm, and ordered all who opposed her arrested and jailed. Storms and earthquakes shook the city and only thirty-six hours after she became the first female ruler in the Americas, the 22-year-old Beatriz, with eleven maids-in-waiting, was on her knees praying for forgiveness in the chapel when Volcano Agua burst open, loosing a great flood of water from its crater and causing a huge mudslide which crashed down upon the capital, destroying it and killing many of its inhabitants. Doña Beatriz was found the next morning, her arms still embracing the crucifix.

The new capital was established in the Panchoy Valley (“Valley of the Lake,” though no evidence of a lake has ever been found there), only a few miles away. Carefully laid out by engineer Juan Bautista Antonelli, Antigua was the first planned city in the Americas, with the Cathedral of San Jose and government buildings situated around a spacious central plaza, and the plaza at the center of a rectangular grid pattern, *calles* (streets) running east-west and *avenidas* (avenues) north-south. The meticulous planning failed to take one thing into account: the town was situated atop a shallow water table, which made it unusually unstable and susceptible to the vibrations of earthquakes. In the next 230 years, the city was to be severely damaged by earthquakes more than fourteen times.

Ironically, each time the shaking earth flattened its buildings, it only seemed to strengthen the resolve of the church and government leaders to stay in the Panchoy Valley. The structures were rebuilt, each time more elaborately and luxuriously, and each time more blocky and massive, with the walls reinforced and made thicker, the towers lower and more stubby, in defiance of the earthquakes, as if by pure dint of will and strength of materials the structures could be made to resist the earthquakes. Buttresses were placed against the walls, chambers were roofed with sturdy vaults, and windows were made small and placed high to keep the buildings’ mass low and concentrated; few structures over one story high were erected. And still the earthquakes came.

By the mid-18th century, the city’s architectural style had reached its full development in what has been called “Earthquake Baroque.” The buildings were solid and low to the ground, like a fire hydrant or a guard in football. However, to counteract the solidity of the buildings, the city was built with large parks and plazas, wide streets open to the sun, and the buildings themselves were lightened and lifted by façades of exquisitely detailed stucco, fluttering angels, flamboyant coats of arms, gently curved arches and double-tiered arcades. The spacious, geometrically arranged gardens and courtyards centered around the spray of delicate fountains also served to relieve the heaviness of the surrounding structures.



During these years many fascinating people in Latin American history made their homes in Antigua, including Brother Pedro Betancourt, who helped the Indians set up hospitals, and came to be so loved by the common people that his grave has become a shrine, goal of many pilgrimages; Bernal Diaz de Castillo, the crusty soldier and historian who fought alongside Cortes and Alvarado and wrote his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain and Guatemala* in a house that still stands on a side street in Antigua; Thomas Gage, the English priest who lived in Antigua and wrote a famous account of his travels; Francisco Marroquin, the first bishop of Guatemala, teacher of the Indians, friend of the poor, founder of the first school in Central America, buried somewhere beneath the cathedral; Rafael Landivar, perhaps Guatemala’s finest poet, expelled with his fellow Jesuits in 1767, but whose tomb and ruined home can still be visited in Antigua; Diego de Porres, the great architect, whose works include many of Antigua’s finest buildings (Escuela de Cristo, Santa Clara, the Royal Mint, City Hall,

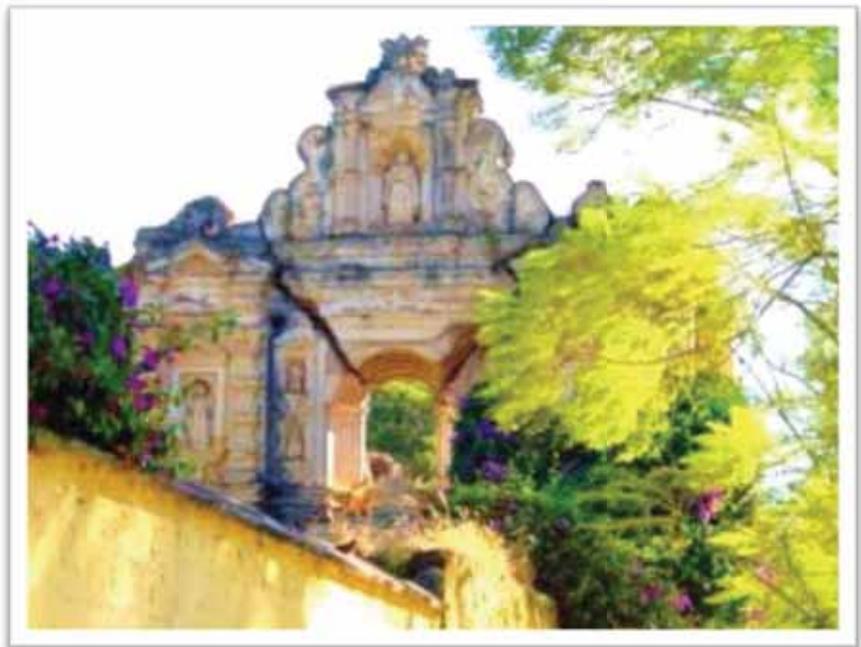
the Archbishop's Palace and many others), and such other churches as the famous basilica at Esquipulas; Bartolome de las Casas, the priest whose angry denunciations of the Spanish policy toward the Indians made the king order more humanitarian treatment, and whose missionary work brought peace to the Land of War (Alta Verapaz); these and scores of other illustrious scholars, painters, sculptors, writers, clerics, soldiers, and builders made Antigua one of the most vital, active, cosmopolitan cities in the New World.

And then, at the peak of its power, Antigua was destroyed. The church authorities, because of their sizeable holdings, resisted for several years, but in 1775 the governor, backed by the king of Spain, had ordered Antigua to be abandoned, the capital relocated in the Ermita Valley, site of present-day Guatemala City. So, stripping the ruined buildings of everything that could be used – doors, furniture, church alters and art, locks, tiles, columns, windows, floors – the people deserted Antigua, leaving the ruins to those so unconnected or poor that they had nothing to gain by moving. More than a century later, as the population began increasing again due to the rise of coffee plantations in the area, people found it easier to renovate the old houses than to tear them down and build anew. As a result, Antigua still remains quite similar in style, layout, and ambience to the colonial capital it once was.

The only way to really experience the quiet beauty of Antigua is to spend some time with it. A one-day tour of the ruins will be impressive and informative, but long, unhurried strolls through the cobblestone streets – an afternoon spent sitting by a cooling fountain spray in a tree-shaded plaza, observing the people and buildings around you, noticing the small things – will show you more and give you a deeper feeling for the subtle layers of history and tradition that lay beneath the surface of the Antigua today.

The more you come to know it, the more you understand why the Pan American Institute of Geography and History declared it to be the “Monumental City of the Americas.”

There is more to Antigua than meets the eye – more than most eyes will ever be able to see completely; a certain gentle sense of its own uniqueness, and an air of timelessness. People who have lived in Antigua for years never stop discovering new surprises – a delicate carving hidden away behind a pillar, a pattern in a stucco façade brought out by a certain slant of sunlight, a ruined hermitage in the morning fog, the new dimension to the face of a statue you'd seen a hundred times.



There are literally hundreds of buildings in Antigua that will repay extended, repeated looks, not to mention works of art, fountains, street corners, doorways, volcano, shoe shine boys, Indians, and countless others. The following are only a few of major points of interests.

The Plaza De Armas

Here, if any place, is the heart of Antigua, the social and economic center around which the city was organized. For the first 160 years, this central plaza was unpaved – dusty during the dry season, a pit of mud when it rained, and flowing with sewage from the surrounding buildings. Still it was a place of constant activity; market venders sold their wares, bullfights were staged here, as were jousts, tournaments, whippings, hangings, horseraces, pageants and processions; in the evenings the town's nobles and men of wealth and young gallants would ride around the square on their horses in one direction, while the ladies and their daughters rode the opposite direction in their carriages, as hats were tipped, eyelashes fluttered, compliments paid, assignations made, and hearts broken.

The fountain, La Sirena, now surrounded by thick-trunked shade trees, was originally constructed in 1738. Broken by the earthquake of 1773, it was for years considered too scandalous to restore; however, in 1936 good taste prevailed and it was reconstructed - only the shaft between the nubile women and the top bowl is not original.

The Palace of the Captains General

Originally built in 1558, the building was so damaged by successive earthquakes it was rebuilt almost completely in 1761. Heavily damaged in 1773, it has been largely restored, and its great size, purity of design, massive columns and double row of beautifully proportioned arches make it one of the most perfect and magnificent structures in colonial America.

The building housed royal offices and courts, great rooms for balls and ceremonies, the royal treasury, tax offices, the militia, a troop of dragoons, the prison, the torture chamber, the department in charge of Indian affairs, a chapel, rooms for the prison guard, offices for all the petty bureaucrats who write the multitudinous documents and keep records, etc., not to mention the stables, and the rooms needed to cook, clean and care for all the building's occupants. The palace was sumptuously appointed, with lovely paintings, carpets, carved walls, chandeliers, and elegant furnishings. High officials and their guests would frequently observe hangings, celebrations, ceremonies and other events in the central plaza from the second floor balcony. After the earthquake it was completely stripped. It now houses the offices for the department of Sacatepequez, police offices, and other government offices.

City Hall (Ayuntamiento)

Built in 1740, this lovely building on the north side of the central plaza, complimenting in style and beauty the facing Palace of the Captains General, housed the city government of Antigua, and continues to do so today. Built so strongly it withstood the earthquake of 1773 almost undamaged, it was less fortunate in 1976. Here was the city's first printing press (1660) and a large jail (which can still be seen).

The building now contains the Museum of Santiago, in which are displayed many artifacts from the colonial period. Under its arcade at night, many Indians who have come to market unroll their *petates* (woven reed mats) and sleep.

Cathedral of San Jose

The first cathedral was begun in 1542, but because of its poor construction it was demolished a century later. The present structure, begun in 1670, and probably never fully completed, was intended to be the most majestic cathedral in all of Central America, with five naves, eighteen chapels, a great dome (an unusual architectural feature and accomplishment in its day), huge columns sheathed in tortoise shell with bronze medallions, seventy windows pouring light into the 300 by 170 foot main chamber, the alter intricately carved and inlaid with precious metals, mother-of-pearl and ivory, with statues and paintings of angels, saints, and theologians, executed by such masters as Quirio Cataño, Antonio Montufar and Alonso de Paz, decorating the walls.

The present church is actually only two chapels of the original, and houses a statue of Christ by Cataño (sculptor of the Black Christ of Esquipulas). Behind it are the great columns, broken arches, crumbling walls, tumbled stones, which are the only reminders of its former magnificence. Buried somewhere beneath the floors are Don Pedro de Alvarado and Doña Beatriz, Bishop Marroquin, Bernal Diaz del Castillo and other illustrious figures, but the location of their graves was lost when the first cathedral was destroyed. The cathedral is currently being renovated *poco a poco* (slowly) through local, private donations and recent excavations have turned up three skeletons, whose identities can never be known. Indian women now sell their wares on the front steps of the great raised platform on which the cathedral was constructed, and often Indian musicians play their *tun* – drum – and *chirimia* – wooden flute with an oboe-like reed mouthpiece – in front of the cathedral, not for money but for the glory of God.

University of San Carlos De Borromeo

The third university in the Americas, the University of San Carlos was founded in 1676, with a curriculum including Latin, law, theology, philosophy, science, medicine and the Cakchiquel language, this building, facing the south side of the cathedral, was not erected until around 1760. Moorish in style, with deepset hexagonal windows, an exquisitely arched corridor surrounding a central plaza and ornate, delicate plaster work, including angels holding books. It is now a museum that houses colonial paintings and sculptures.

Hotel Casa Santo Domingo

The Casa Santo Domingo - once a monastery - is not only a hotel but a treasure trove full of colonial furniture, religious figures, art work, architecture and is, in itself, one of the most important archeological monuments of the Americas. The XVII century stone walls of the monastery contain gardens, fountains, patios, arched ceilings and corridors that were once home of the Dominican Friars. These ruins remained underground for more than two centuries and to this very day new discoveries are being made as the excavations continue. The Casa offers a candle factory and two museums on the premises; a museum of Spanish colonial art and a museum of classic Maya art.

Artisans of Antigua

Artisans abound in Antigua. Many of the hand-painted ceramics, forged iron and fine woodcarvings are made in and around the area of Antigua. Each craftsman – or usually the whole family – specializes in creating a particular item, for example, some families make nativity sets, and others make “chicken bus” replicas, while another family specializes in making wooden fruit. There are no “factories” as we know them but rather each family has its own production area in a room or two of their house with the courtyard in the center of their house or the roof used for drying – to dry out the wood before carving it or ceramic before firing it or after painting it. While it is hard to find these family-run workshops there are plenty of shops brimming with merchandise but look around because the details on hand-painted items run the gamut from being very primitive to exquisitely detailed.

There are also silver and jade jewelry factories in Antigua. Jade is a part of Guatemala’s cultural heritage. The material of all the artwork made of jade found in the Mesoamerican archeological sites came from Guatemalan mines. There is no other stone as resistant to breakage and chipping as jade. This inherent toughness made it a superior weapon and tool for the ancient Maya. To him it signified survival and its colors were reminiscent of nature. As a result jade became known as a gift from heaven.

The Maya used jade as a symbol of good luck and health. They cured kidney disease with the holy stone. For its life spending qualities they placed a piece of jade below the tongues of deceased kings and placed many offerings of jade artwork inside the tombs.

The Spanish *conquistadores* created the term jade when they learned the natives used jade to cure kidney diseases; they called it “*Piedra de hijada*” or “stone of the loins”. With time it became known as “jade”. The Romans also hailed jade as a treatment for kidney problems and called it “*lapis nephriticus*” or “stone of nephrite”. In 1863, a French chemist discovered that jade was two different minerals and he created the term “jadeite” for Guatemalan and Burmese jade and “nephrite” for Chinese jade. The Chinese had been aware of the difference of the two mineral types since the mid 1700s. To this day two terms – jadeite and nephrite – are still used to distinguish the two kinds of jade.

Most gems are single crystals but jade is a mass of interlocking crystals, giving it its toughness and durability. Nephrite is mainly found in Asia and jadeite, which is very rare and more valuable, is found in Guatemala, Burma, Russia and Japan. Jadeite is found in a diversity of colors – black, white, various shades of green and lavender. Small quantities of lavender jade have been recently found in Guatemala.

You can also visit a candle factory right on the Casa Santo Domingo grounds where beautiful, pure wax candles are hand-made in a profusion of shapes and colors – from thick and heavy to the most delicate flower-covered *palmatorios*, candles used for special occasions.

Antigua is also famous for its array of candy made from crystallized fruits, nuts, milk and wonderful marzipan figures. You will derive as much pleasure from picking and choosing your candy as you will eating it. *María Gordillo's* at 4 calle oriente, No 11 has a good selection, and although not for sale, there is a splendid exhibit of antique Antigua plates and pottery in glazed gray, green, and yellow ceramic.

Most shops are located on the Calle del Arco (5th Ave) and the main street leading out of town (4th Calle). A little out of the way but worth a visit is Casa de Artes located on 4th Ave Sur #11 open 9 – 1 and 2:30 – 6:30 (closed Sunday).

The Market

Located on the West side of Boulevard Santa Lucia across 4th Street West. The market is open every day and is a great place to visit a traditional market where you can admire the colorful *trajes* worn by the indigenous people representing the surrounding villages. There is also a newly expanded artisans market next door to the general market.

La Azotea Cultural Center

Free transportation provided from the main square: 9:00; 10:00; 11:00; 12:00; 13:00; 14:00

La Merced Church

The ornate church façade with its exquisitely detailed stucco, called ataurique, remains one of the finest examples of plasterwork in Antigua. The walls were constructed of great thickness and buttresses were added to impart strength. Windows were kept small and placed unusually high, keeping the mass low and concentrated. The present appearance of La Merced Church has changed very little since 1773; even the lime-based yellow paint is a traditional characteristic of colonial times.

Capuchinas Church and Convent

Located at the corner of 2nd Avenue North and 2nd Street East. Completed in 1736, the nuns of the Capuchin convent were dedicated to taking care of orphans, providing a hospital for women and schooling for boys and girls. Once the nuns accepted their vows, they were not allowed to leave the convent (nick-named Capuchinas due to the nuns' brown habit) except when earthquakes threatened the convent and the bishop ordered them to seek open shelter.

One of the best-preserved monuments in Antigua, the Capuchinas' focal point, is the Tower of Retreat for Novices. From the sub-floor of the tower a massive column rises to support the higher floor, which has a circular patio, encompassed by eighteen cells, each with a door facing the center. The sub-floor, designed as a storage room for food, has a very broad room that revolves about the supporting column. Incorporating a 133-foot circular wall are fourteen small recesses with a small vent at the top, and several have small stone rings protruding from the sides. The 14 niches were designed as Stations of the Cross, each with an air vent for candle smoke. With its cells (bedrooms), hot baths and refined sewer, the tower remains unique, with no counterpart in Spain or the Americas.

Ruins of Convento Santa Clara

Located across from Parque La Union on 2nd Avenue South and 6th Street East. The founding nuns known as the “Monjas Clarisas” came from Puebla, Mexico in 1699. The construction was funded by a large endowment bequeathed by a widow and generous donations from private citizens. The church and convent remain in picturesque ruins today since the 1773 earthquake. The magnificent monument is open to visitors and certainly worth a visit.



San Francisco Church

Located at the corner of 7th Street East and Calle de Los Pasos. The reconstructed church is one of the most lavishly decorated in Antigua and here lie the remains of the recently canonized Hermano Pedro de San José de Bethancourt, a Franciscan friar who in the late 17th century was known for his great charity and love for the poor. It is customary to first pray to Hermano Pedro for your favor or miracle and then to knock three times on his tomb. Points of interest in the ruined monastery include frescoes and paintings of the skeletons and priests found in the ruined portion of the monastery. There is also a magnificent view of the city and the volcanoes from the second story of the ruins.

Santo Hermano Pedro

Born on March 19, 1626 in the Canary Islands of Spain, Pedro of San José de Bethancur came to Guatemala in 1651, perhaps impulsively, having no identification papers, joining the fervor of other Spaniards, nobles and religious, to evangelize the indigenous. But his desire to prepare for the priesthood was thwarted by trouble with Latin. Discouraged, he left for Petapa, where he came to pray. Then he heard Our Lady of the Rosary telling him to return to Santiago de los Caballeros, as Antigua was called in the 17th century. It was then he declared, “Here I shall live and here I will die.” And so he did, in 1667, at the age of 41, after 16 years in Guatemala.

He joined an order of Franciscan brothers and dedicated himself to the care and upkeep of El Calvario Church, where he planted the *esquisúchil* tree that still stands today, the flowers of which are said to have medical value. The young brother identified with the common people and chose a life of service. He picked up the sick and abandoned and carried them to a place of shelter. He fed and cared for them.

Recognizing education as indispensable to transform lives, he taught literacy as well as Christian doctrine to both children and adults in his off-hours. With other brothers he acquired a small place to carry out the services. He founded the first hospital, and the first public school. In 1658, he built an Oratory to the Blessed Virgin Mary that he named “The House of Our Lady of Bethlehem” which became the future birthplace of the new order of the “Bethlemites” founded by Brother Pedro. Later, with donations, he began construction of the Belén Church and a shelter for travelers.

On April 24, 1667, seriously ill, he dictated his last will and testament, and asked in charity that he be buried in the church of St. Francis. The next day at 2pm he died of pneumonia.

More than 300 years later, in 1980, Fray Guillermo Bonilla founded the Obras Sociales Del Hermano Pedro, also known as the Hermano Pedro Hospital, which bears the indelible stamp of the example of Hermano Pedro. Its services bring hope to the needy and a home to almost 300 full-time residents with special needs. The hospital also provides selected medical services and surgeries. It is arguably the most significant of the echoes of Hermano Pedro.

Blessed Brother Pedro de San José de Bethancur Feast day is celebrated on April 25th. Today, pilgrims come to kneel at the tomb of the humble man who was declared a saint and coins collected from the area of the tomb represent visitors from Egypt, Russia, China, Japan, the Congo and more.

A corridor of the museum within the church is filled with photos, plaques, crutches – expressions of gratitude for the benefits received from God through the intervention of Hermano Pedro. The museum displays garments, fragments of writings and the bell he rang while he walked the cobblestone streets at night, urging prayer and repentance, and reminding people “Only one soul you have, no more; if you lose it, it cannot be recovered.”

On July 25, 1771, Pope Clement XIV decreed that Brother Pedro had practiced, the Theological and Moral virtues in a heroic degree and declared him Venerable.

On June 22, 1980, His holiness Pope John Paul II, in the name of the Church recognized the sanctity of Brother Pedro and declared him blessed.

His holiness Pope John Paul II traveled to Guatemala and on July 31, 2002 - 335 years after his death, canonized Guatemala's first Saint - Santo Hermano Pedro.

Prayer

Lord, King of Heaven, I am your beggar, and I depend completely on your charity. I beg of you through the merits and virtues of Brother Pedro De Bethancur, that you grant me the favors that I ask.

Lord, I believe in You, You are my light and my hope. May your power free me from all dangers, and defend me from my enemies. May Your justice sustain me, Your wisdom enlighten me, Your mercy help me and Your love console me in all my tribulations.

Blessed Pedro De Bethancur, my protector, the faith that I have in your power of intercession is whole and sincere, pray that the Lord will hear my prayers, have pity on me and restore to me that peace and love that I truly need. Amen.

Sacred Heart of Jesus
Save Me

Most powerful Virgin Mary,
My Queen and Mother,
Protect me.

Blessed Pedro DeBethancur,
Pray for us. Amen.

**“Remember my brothers and sisters that we have but one soul,
and if we should lose it, it can never be recovered.”**

Semana Santa



Semana Santa (Holy Week) refers to the week preceding Easter Sunday, and is the most important holiday in Central America. *Semana Santa* is a festive event, featuring religious processions and colorful carpets in the streets. The participants never forget what they are commemorating and as the week progresses, these magnificent processions become more and more solemn.

Antigua's *Semana Santa* celebrations are perhaps the most extravagant and impressive in all Latin America, rivaled only by a similar event that takes place in Seville, Spain. The celebrations, thought to have been introduced by Pedro Alvarado in the early years of the Conquest, start with a procession on Palm Sunday, representing Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and continue through to the really big processions and pageants on Good Friday. On Thursday night the streets are meticulously carpeted and on Friday morning a series of processions re-enacts the progress of Christ to the Cross accompanied by melancholic music from local brass bands. Setting out from La Merced, Escuela de Cristo and the village of San Felipe, teams of penitents wearing peaked hoods and accompanied by solemn dirges and billowing clouds of copal incense carry the image of Christ and the Cross on *andas* or massive platforms. On Friday the pageants set off at 6AM, with the penitents dressed in either white or purple. After 3PM, the hour of the Crucifixion, they change into black.

The cobblestone streets of Antigua are covered in *alfombras* (carpets) made up of colorfully dyed sawdust, pine needles, flowers, flower petals, *corozo* (yellow flowers pulled from giant pods), berries, fruits, and vegetables. The custom of making carpets was brought from Spain and the Canary Islands, but in pre-Hispanic times Indians made carpets out of pine needles, flowers, and feathers. In fact, Indians were creating ceremonial carpets long before carpet making



became a tradition for the Corpus Christi celebrations in the 14th century in Europe. Residents, friends, and families along the processional route make these artistic offerings. Many hours and elaborate detail go into making the carpets that line the streets. Often stencils are used for the

designs. The *alfombras* are offered up as a sacrifice in anticipation of the procession that will



destroy them by marching through the painstaking and fantastic creations. The flower and sawdust designs are made using stencils. Great effort and dedication go into the construction of this ceremonial art. The designs of many of the carpets reflect Maya influences, images of Christ, the cross, the sacrament, and of jungle scenes. While most carpets take ten to twenty or more hours to construct, they last on average two hours before the many feet that march over them during a procession destroy them. They are considered to be blessed and to hold magic

powers so onlookers run to pick up undestroyed flowers after the float has passed.

The day before the processions leave from each church, *velaciones* (Holy Vigils) are held, and the image to be carried is placed before the altar, with a backdrop covering the altar. Some of the sculptures displayed date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A carpet is often laid before the sculpture in the church.

Andas (floats) are topped by colonial sculptures of the cross-carrying Christ. He wears velvet robes of deep blue or green, embroidered with gold and silver threads, and the *anda* is carried on the shoulders by a team of eighty *cucuruchos* (processional carriers) who heave and sway their way through the streets. The *cucuruchos* are dressed, Arab-like, in purple with white headdresses and they process for as long as twelve hours through the town.



Following behind on a smaller float is the Virgin Mary carried by the women. The Virgin is accompanied by a band and may have smaller floats bearing Saint John and Mary Magdalene following behind. Banner and incense carriers accompany the processions, and centurions. A loud brass band with drummers, playing a funeral march that often sends a chill down the spine, brings up the rear.



The processions are arranged by the *cofradia* - a religious brotherhood. *Cucuruchos* pay to participate, and are measured to standardize the shoulder height. The original purpose of heaving these weighty floats (the La Merced float weighs 7,000 lbs) was to do penance, today it's more to do with tradition and status. The *cucuruchos* leave from their church and follow a planned processional route. Each participant is numbered and will swap in and out with others. Bat your eyelids and you will miss the effortless changeovers as they sway through the streets with their cumbersome load to meet the magnificent *alfombras*, and then continue on walking straight through them.

Tips

- Bring plenty of film - professional photographers claim that it is the most photographed event in the world.
- This is the biggest Easter attraction in Latin America so be prepared for crowds.
- Don't rush; the processions last up to 12 hours each day.
- The whole week is a fantastic opportunity for photographs – and you want a decent picture remember the Christ figure always faces right and looks down, so make sure you're on the right side of the street.
- It is said that the entire pick-pocketing fraternity of the country decamps to Antigua for Semana Santa. If you put your wallet in your pocket you are inviting somebody to swipe it. **Do not carry your passport, driver's license, airline ticket, etc. or more money than you plan to spend during each particular outing.** Just practice caution!
- You will be given a map so that you may follow the processional route before the procession to see all the carpets while they are still intact.
- Dress fairly conservatively – it is considered inappropriate to wear red on Good Friday. This is also the warmest time of the year, so be prepared with hats and sunscreen.
- Use your credit card as much as you can and do not count on ATM machines after Wednesday. They always run out of cash and all of the banks will be closed beginning Wednesday at noon. **Be prepared!**



if
of

Recommended Restaurants In Antigua

Café Condesa: Breakfast, lunch, snacks or coffee. A “local” gringo hang-out. Nice interior outdoor patio to sit and relax just off the main square on the west side. tel. 7832-0038

Café Mediterraneo: Italian cuisine. Lunch is served from 12 noon until 3:30pm and dinner from 6 to 10pm. Located at 6 Calle Poniente #6A, tel. 7832-7180 Closed Tuesday.

Hotel Museum Casa Santo Domingo: Fine dining in an elegant setting or catch the provided transportation from the Casa Santo Domingo to their other more casual restaurant **El Tenedor del Cerro** located on the mountain overlooking Antigua with spectacular views. 3a. Calle Oriente No. 28, tel. 7820 1220

Café Sky: Good, affordable, nice atmosphere – great lunch place just down the street from San Francisco Church. 1 Avenida Sur #15, tel. 7832-7300. Owner - Tom.

Epicure Deli and Garden Restaurant: Our favorite restaurant. Open daily from 10am to 7pm, 3 Avenida Norte #11B, tel. 7832-5545. Owner - John Mellen *****

Frida’s: Charming Mexican restaurant and bar, great margaritas, full of locals. Open daily from Monday to Thursday 12 noon ‘til 11:00PM, Friday and Saturday until 1:00AM and Sunday ‘til 10:00PM. Located at 5th Avenida Norte, Calle del Arco, tel. 7832-0504.

Hector’s: A tiny (4 tables) restaurant around the corner from the arch, good food and a casual, friendly atmosphere. Hector is the best and most friendly restaurateur in Antigua. 1 Calle Poniente #9. *****

Las Mil Flores: An elegant restaurant featuring international cuisine with a Mediterranean touch. Located in the Vista Real boutique-hotel, 3 Calle Oriente No. 16 “A”, tel. 7832-9715 or 9716.

Mesón Panza Verde: Italian and Int’l cuisine. Lunch - 12 noon to 3pm. Dinner - 7 to 9pm on Tue - Sat. Sunday Brunch from 12 noon to 3pm only. Closed Sunday night and Monday. Reservations necessary! 5th Avenida Sur #19, tel. 7832-2925 and 7832-1745. *****

Micho’s: Best hamburgers in town, 4a Calle Oriente No. 10, Tel: 7832-568. Owner - Fin

Sabe Rico: Deli-Restaurant, light fare served in a garden setting including some gluten free choices. 6 Avenida Sur #7, tel 7832-0648. Closed Friday.

Vivero y Café de la Escalonia: Outdoor café, great for lunch on a warm day. 5 Avenida Sur final #36C, tel. 7832-7074.

Welten: Fine dining for lunch or dinner. 4 Calle Oriente #21, tel. 7832-6967 and 7832-0630. Closed on Tuesday. *****

Useful Words and Phrases

Courtesies

Good morning.....	Buenos días	Excuse me.....	Permiso
Good afternoon.....	Buenas tardes	How are you?	Cómo está?
Good evening/night.....	Buenas noches	I'm fine.....	Estoy muy bien.
Goodbye.....	Adiós	I do not understand.....	No entiendo.
Hello.....	Hola	Pleased to meet you.....	Mucho gusto.
Please.....	Por favor	See you later.....	Hasta luego
Thank you.....	Gracias	What is your name?.....	Cómo se llama?
You're welcome.....	De nada	Do you speak English?..	Habla usted inglés?
Yes.....	Sí	Speak slowly.....	Hable despacio

Basics

Bathroom.....	el baño	How do I get to...?.....	Cómo llegar a...?
Bill.....	la cuenta	Arrive.....	llega
Cash.....	el efectivo	When?.....	cuando?
Expensive.....	caro	Where is...?.....	Dónde está...?
Family.....	la familia	On the left/right.....	a la izquierdo/derecha
Wife.....	la esposa	Straight ahead.....	todo recto or derecho
Husband.....	el esposo	Corner.....	esquina
Luggage.....	el equipaje	Road.....	Camino
Market.....	el mercado	North.....	Norte
Room.....	el cuarto	South.....	Sur
Good, okay.....	Bueno	East.....	Este
Bad.....	Malo	West.....	Oeste or Poniente
I want.....	Quiero	How much?.....	Cuánto cuesta?
Why?.....	Por qué?	Exchange rate.....	la tasa de cambio
Help me!.....	Ayudarme!	What time is it?.....	Qué hora es?

Where is the main shopping street?.....	Donde esta la calle principal de comercio? or Donde están los comercios principales?
Is it far from here?.....	Esta lejos de aquí?
Can we walk?.....	Se puede ir caminando?
What size is this?.....	Que talla es esto?
Where can I try this on?.....	Donde me puedo probar esto? or Donde están los probadores?
You haven't given me enough change!.....	No me ha devuelto bien el cambio!
When does it start?.....	A que hora empieza?
A cold beer.....	una cerveza fría (they also use <i>chela</i> for beer)
Enough Already!.....	Basta ya!

Food and Beverages

to eat	comer	bread	el pan
meal	la comida	butter	la mantequilla
breakfast	el desayuno	salt	la sal
lunch	el almuerzo	pepper	la pimienta negra
dinner	la cena	hot and spicy sauce	la salsa picante
appetizers	los antojitos	fried	frito/a
soup	la sopa	boiled	hervido/a
main dishes	platos fuertes	grilled	asada/o
desserts	los postres	eggs	los huevos
plate	el plato	toast	pan tostado
fork	el tenedor	bacon	el tocino
knife	el cuchillo	ham	el jamón
spoon	la cuchara	chicken	el pollo
glass	el vaso	beef	la carne de res
napkin	la servilleta	pork	el cerdo
to drink	tomar	shrimp.....	los camarones
bottle	la botella	fish fillet.....	el filete de pescado
water	agua pura	Snook.....	el róbalo
carbonated water	agua mineral con gas	rice	el arroz
tea	el té	potatoes.....	la papa
coffee	el café	vegetables.....	las verduras
coffee with milk	el café con leche	avocado.....	el aguacate
milk	la leche	salad.....	la ensalada
juice	el jugo	raw seafood salad.....	el ceviche
beer	la cerveza	fried plantains.....	plátanos fritos

Numbers

one.....uno/una	elevenonce	twenty one.....veintiuno	thousand.....mil
two.....dos	twelvedoce	twenty two.....veintidós,...	million.....millón
three.....tres	thirteen.....trece	thirty.....treinta	
four.....cuatro	fourteen.....catorce	forty.....cuarenta	
five.....cinco	fifteen.....quince	fifty.....cincuenta	
six.....seis	sixteendieciséis	sixty.....sesenta	
seven.....siete	seventeen...diecisiete	seventy.....setenta	
eightocho	eighteen ... dieciocho	eighty.....ochenta	
ninenueve	nineteen.....diecinueve	ninety.....noventa	
tendiez	twenty.....veinte	hundred.....cien or ciento	

Days – Months

Week.....Semana	Month.....Mes	Year.....Año
Sunday.....Domingo	January.....enero	July.....julio
Monday.....Lunes	February.....febrero	August.....agosto
Tuesday.....Martes	March.....marzo	September.....septiembre
Wednesday.....Miércoles	April.....abril	October.....octubre
Thursday.....Jueves	May.....mayo	November.....noviembre
Friday.....Viernes	June.....junio	December.....diciembre
Saturday.....Sábado		

Chronology

25000 BC	Palaeo-Indian period; nomadic hunters reach Guatemala from the north
4500 BC	First Maya-speaking groups settle in western Guatemala
1500 BC	Beginning of Maya Pre-classic period: start of Maya civilization, including their building of centers; contact with Olmec people
AD 300	Beginning of Maya Classic period: the great age of Maya building and of development of city-states; growth of trade, art and crafts; advances in use of calendars
c. 800	Instability in Central America generally, leading to end of Maya Classic period
c. 900	Start of Maya Post-classic period: decline of Maya civilization; many Maya centers abandoned
1523-40	Pedro de Alvarado conquers Guatemala; first Spanish capital founded, 1527; Formation of an intermediate social class between the Indians and conquistadores the <i>ladinos</i> ; distribution of lands among the conquistadores
17th Century	Guatemala continues as Spanish colony; Antigua becomes capital of Central America
1773	Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala is destroyed by an earthquake
1776	Construction of present capital, Ciudad de Guatemala
1821	Guatemala proclaims its independence in Sept. and is annexed by Mexico to become part of the Central American Federation
1823	Guatemala is separated from Mexico in May and becomes independent under the name of the United Provinces of Central America, a group of 5 states (Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua)
1847	Guatemala becomes a republic independent of Central America
1890	Development of sugar and cotton industries
1901	Arrival of United Fruit Company in Guatemala
1917	Earthquake destroys Ciudad de Guatemala
1976	Earthquake - 23,000 dead, a million homeless
1996	Dec. 29, Peace Accord was signed after 10 years of negotiations ending 36 years of civil war