

# Guatemala

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## Overview and Map

It is difficult to imagine that any other country in the world can offer such diversity of wonders as Guatemala. Despite its relatively small size, (roughly that of Tennessee) Guatemalan landscapes take you from tropical beaches to highland sierras, from jungles to dry lowlands. Dozens of ethnic groups share this land, all with unique cultures and customs, and speak over 20 different languages. The strength and vibrancy of Mayan culture has been tested through a remarkable past, and its richness and color will delight any visitor. Between its dramatic landscapes and warm inhabitants, Guatemala is a country you will never forget.



The majority of the population of Guatemala lives in the highlands located in the western part of the country. These highlands are formed by incredible mountain ranges interspersed with towering volcanoes upon which fall atmospheric clouds and mists. Here is your opportunity to truly live "above the clouds". Altitude averages around 1500 meters above sea level, producing an ideal climate for the cultivation of all sorts of crops, especially maize, the sacred corn of the Mayans. This altitude also ensures a delightful climate of warm, sunny days and cool evenings, earning Guatemala the name of "Land of Eternal Spring". Guatemala has even more to offer, especially in the northern jungle region of Petén, with its incredible wildlife and ancient Mayan temples. Travelers could spend years exploring and never tire of the scenery and cultural richness.

Guatemala is truly a special place. With our unmatched experience here, we believe we can offer you the best of Guatemala.

## Headquarters: Antigua - "*Colonial Capital*"

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Antigua is an exquisite colonial town situated in a spectacular setting nestled below the three imposing volcanoes of Agua, Fuego and Acatenango. It is one of the finest surviving examples of a colonial Latin American town. It is laid out in a colonial grid pattern, whilst the many fine examples of Spanish colonial architecture have earned it the status of UNESCO World Heritage Site. Antigua's pretty cobbled streets are filled with old churches, theatres and houses built around courtyards, all painted in delightful pastel colors. In addition to featuring fascinating historical sites, Antigua is also now a lively and international town, where you'll never tire of exploring the restaurants and bars filled with food from around the world. If all this weren't enough, we should add that Antigua also boasts a wonderful climate of warm, sunny days and cool evenings.

## Satellite Site: Nebaj - "*Mountain Hideaway*"

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Nebaj is home to the Ixil Region, one of the most distinct Mayan cultures. Nebaj is a place for experience traditional local culture, as ancient practices are still a large part of the lifestyle. The traditional clothing is world-renowned for its beauty and intricacy. Nebaj is far from the cosmopolitan sophistication of Antigua, but it too is a bustling, lively place. The people are warm, and travelers can take part in traditional customs such as the local sauna, a tamascal, or make the traditional food, boxboles. Nebaj is a heavenly place to visit for those who enjoy hiking, as Nebaj lies in a beautiful valley surrounded by verdant mountains. Exploring the villages around Nebaj will take the intrepid visitor to some of the most remote places in the Americas. The combination of spectacular landscapes and local culture makes Nebaj a favorite spot in Guatemala for many visitors.

## Satellite Site: Lake Atitlán - "*Nature's Gift*"

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For many, the sun setting over Lake Atitlán as the evening mist descends is one of the most spectacular sights in Guatemala. Once a visitor regains their breath after their first look at the incredible lake views, they can begin to explore the trails and nature parks that surround it. The hardy can even attempt to ascend one of the volcanoes. Lake Atitlán is a great place for outdoor activities: kayaking, swimming, and even ziplining. Over 12 villages surround the lake, from busy Panajachel, with its international scene and restaurants, to sleepy indigenous towns such as San Juan La Laguna. No matter how long your stay, the beauty of the Lake will stay with you forever.

## Satellite Site: Xela - "*The Highlands*"

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Quetzaltenango, or Xela as it is more commonly known, is fast becoming one of the most popular places in Latin America to learn Spanish and do volunteer work, and it's not hard to understand why. Xela offers the advantages of a city, with cinemas, good restaurants, bars and entertainment, and has the feel of a small town- easy to navigate and get to know. It's a friendly place, the typical bustle of highland Guatemala very much present, and the beauty of the surrounding mountains is always visible. What's more, within easy reach are many beautiful trips or treks, like the hot springs of Fuentes Georginas and Central America's largest volcano-Tajumulco.

## Satellite Site: Huehuetenango - "*Off the Beaten Path*"

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Huehuetenango sits at the foothills of the majestic Sierra Cuchumatanes Mountains. It is one of the largest regions in Guatemala and an agricultural and industrial hub with coffee plantations, mining, and sheep-raising as the principle sources of income in the region. Historically the area was a Mam Maya region until the 15th century when the K'iche' pushed them out. However, there are still plenty of Mam traditions in the many surrounding towns. Just outside of Huehuetenango, the Mam Mayan ruins of Zaculeu can be found. Zaculeu occupies a strategic defensive location that helped defend the Mam Mayans from the Spanish Conquistador Alvarado until it finally fell in 1525. Today, Huehuetenango is a popular tourist destination.