

GUATEMALA AT A GLANCE

POPULATION: 15,460,732 (July 2017 est.)

LANGUAGES: Spanish, more than 20 indigenous languages

PREDOMINANT RELIGIONS: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant) and traditional Maya

TIME ZONE: Two hours behind Eastern Daylight Time (New York City)

TELEPHONE CODES: 502, country code; 2, Guatemala City city code; 9, Quetzaltenango, city code

Guatemala, known as “The Country of Eternal Spring,” is valued for the stunning Maya ruins at Tikal, the well-preserved colonial city of Antigua, a vibrant indigenous culture, active volcanoes, highland lakes and exotic wildlife, among other highlights. But it’s also one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and poses risks for tourists and travelers who don’t use appropriate caution.

From the 1950s until the mid-1990s, political unrest, followed by the country’s bloodiest civil war, kept many visitors away. Since the war ended in 1996, there have been improvements in accommodations and infrastructure. But endemic poverty and a continuing high crime rate — including violent attacks targeting travelers — have made Guatemala at best unpredictable but also potentially dangerous.

COMPASSION IN GUATEMALA

Compassion’s ministry in Guatemala began in 1980. Today, more than 46,760 children are served by more than 190 Compassion-assisted child development centers throughout the country. Compassion’s church-based child development centers are places of hope for impoverished children in Guatemala. Under



the guidance of caring Christian adults, children’s pressing needs for nutrition and medical attention are met. Children also receive tutoring to help with their academics. Health and hygiene lessons teach them to care for their own physical well-being, and positive social skills are modeled and encouraged.

WEATHER

A good time to visit Guatemala is November through April, when less rain means less mud, but it will also be hotter in the Petén region and on both coasts. It’s cooler in the mountains (usually in the 60s-70s F / 15-22 C) and hot and humid in the lowlands (especially on the Pacific coast). Hurricanes are a distinct possibility in September and October.

CURRENCY

Guatemala’s currency, the *quetzal* (GTQ), is named after a spectacular breed of bird, whose feathers were used as currency in ancient Mayan times. ATMs are available in major cities only and will accept either Visa or MasterCard.

FOOD

Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables before eating, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the water is unsafe (stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks).

SHOPPING

The vivid colors and unusual textures of Guatemalan arts, crafts and fabrics have made shopping popular. Generally, you'll find high quality in even the smallest items; in fact, it is said that Guatemala's textiles are among the finest expressions of native art in the world. Even without bargaining (a common practice in the markets), prices are cheap, considering the work involved. Always inspect before buying, and don't hesitate to ask for better-quality items. Guatemalans themselves do the same thing. Don't try to ship anything home. Postal service is unreliable.

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS

The voltage used in Guatemala is 110V, and electrical outlets accommodate plug types A, B, G or I. (For up-to-date plug and outlet information, check whatplug.info, and click on the destination country.) You may also wish to take a universal travel plug adaptor, available in the luggage/travel sections of most big-box stores.



DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do** ask before photographing the Maya people, particularly children and women. A few travelers have been attacked while taking pictures of youngsters because locals thought they might be kidnappers. (Tales of outsiders stealing children are widespread in Guatemala.) Beyond the threat of violence, many Maya people find it offensive and belittling to have their photos taken without permission.
- **Don't** engage in loud and aggressive behavior. Guatemalans tend to be polite and on the formal side.
- **Do** leave a tip if you stop to listen to a street performance on a marimba, which looks like a large xylophone. The national instrument of Guatemala can be played by as many as nine people. Tips are the musicians' livelihood.
- **Don't** ever argue or offer resistance if you're stopped at a roadblock, whether military or otherwise. Vehicles that don't stop at roadblocks are often shot at. People who cooperate with armed robbers are usually not harmed.
- **Don't** flush toilet tissue. The wastebasket you'll find in some restrooms is a none-too-subtle request for you to throw used tissue in the basket, not in the bowl, because of narrow pipes. Only the most modern hotel facilities are designed to accommodate flushed toilet tissue.
- **Don't** go out without a photocopy of your passport at all times. It's against the law not to carry a copy with you, and police at roadblocks will ask to see it. Keep your actual passport in a secure place, such as your hotel's safe. Likewise, if you are driving a rented car, have your international driver's license at hand.

DRESS

Guatemala is a conservative country where shorts are reserved for beach resorts. Modest dress is wise when visiting churches and historical sites. In the cities and highlands, bring spring clothing and a light jacket for cool evenings. When visiting

the archaeological sites and beaches, wear light-colored cotton clothing — long pants and a long-sleeved shirt — and comfortable shoes with nonslip soles. Sandals are permissible year-round, but never in a business environment. During the rainy season, waterproof, lightweight rain gear is more practical than an umbrella. Immediately remove your sunglasses if speaking with the military or a policeman. For men, beards are much less common here than elsewhere in Latin America, and long hair is frowned on.

Women: Modest, loose-fitting tops (nothing form-fitting) are recommended; sleeveless tops are acceptable, but please cover your shoulders in places of worship; pants, capris, longer skirts and loose-fitting, casual dresses are recommended for women.

Men: Button shirts and polo shirts are recommended. T-shirts are allowed in casual settings. Long, non-denim pants are recommended for center visits and church services.

Both: Shorts are highly discouraged outside of beachside locations. A light jacket is recommended for cool evenings or rainy days.

Shoes: Closed-toe shoes are recommended during the day due to potential unsanitary or uneven terrain.

GENERAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, Social Security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; make visible only the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car or any other location. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don't take safety and security for granted.

U.S. EMBASSY INFORMATION

Website: gt.usembassy.gov

Phone: (502) 2326-4000

Address: Avenida Reforma 7-01, Zona 10, Guatemala City, Guatemala

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC (www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.

*All information taken from the World Factbook and
Compassion International.*

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The official language of Guatemala is Spanish. The country's secondary language is English. Some common Guatemalan greetings include:

Hello	¡Hola!
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
Pleased to meet you	Mucho gusto
Very well, thank you	Muy bien, gracias
Goodbye	Adiós (or chou in Bolivia)
What is your name?	¿Cómo te llamas?
My name is ...	Me llamo (name)
How old are you?	¿Cuántos años tienes?
Yes	Sí
No	No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You're welcome	De nada
I do not speak Spanish	No hablo español
Do you speak English?	¿Usted habla inglés?
I don't understand	No entiendo
You can do it!	¡Sí, se puede!
I love you	Te amo or te quiero
I am praying for you	Estoy orando por ti

Jesus loves you

You are precious to God

God bless you

I believe in you

Tell me about your family

Good/OK

I need

How much?

Too expensive

Cheaper

Where is the bathroom?

Where is the church?

Where is the bank?

Where is the hotel?

Jesús te ama

Eres precioso(a) para Dios

¡Qué Dios te bendiga!

Creo en ti

Cuénteme de tu familia

Bueno

Necesito

¿Cuánto?

Demasiado caro

Más barato

¿Dónde está el baño?

¿Dónde está la iglesia?

¿Dónde está el banco?

¿Dónde está el hotel?

SPANISH TIPS

The h is silent in Spanish; therefore, *hola* is pronounced “ola.”

The ñ is pronounced ny; therefore, *pequeño* is pronounced “pe-kenyo.”