

NORTH AMERICA · HISTORY · CULTURE · HIKING · MOUNTAINS · ADVENTURE



# Guatemala

Maya cities, highland markets and climbable volcanoes are all within reach in a country smaller than England. Tikal's temples rise above the Petén jungle, villages ring volcano-rimmed Lake Atitlán, and the cobbled colonial streets of Antigua make a far more relaxed base than the capital.



**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Guatemala.**

Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice. FCDO advice last updated 13 August 2026.

|                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  CAPITAL<br>Guatemala City               |  CURRENCY<br>Guatemalan quetzal (GTQ)<br>£1 ≈ GTQ 10.20 |  LANGUAGE<br>Spanish, Q'eqchi'<br>K'iche', Mam                                   |  BEST TIME<br>Nov–Mar                |
|  DAILY BUDGET<br>£35–£170<br>££ Moderate |  PLUGS<br>Type A, B<br>120V · adapter needed            |  FLIGHT FROM LONDON<br>15h via Madrid or<br>Miami/Houston<br>~£650–£1,150 return |  TIME ZONE<br>UTC-6<br>standard time |

Guatemala is the heartland of the Maya world, and it shows: more than 40% of people identify as Maya, many still wear handwoven traje, and some 22 Mayan languages are spoken alongside Spanish. A first trip usually forms a loop. Fly into Guatemala City and head straight to Antigua, then on to Lake Atitlán and the Chichicastenango market, before travelling north via the turquoise pools of Semuc Champey to Flores and Tikal. Many travellers continue overland into Belize or Mexico, or climb Acatenango for a night watching neighbouring Fuego erupt.

Guatemala is one of Central America's cheapest countries for travellers, with tourist shuttles linking the main stops, and Antigua and Quetzaltenango offer some of the region's best-value Spanish schools. Distances look short but mountain roads make them slow; reaching Flores from Antigua by road takes a long day. The highlands sit at around 1,500–2,500 m, so evenings are cool. It suits backpackers, hikers and anyone interested in living indigenous culture. Many are surprised by the colour of market days and by how Catholic and Maya rituals mix, as at Chichicastenango's church of Santo Tomás.

## Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Tikal

One of the largest Maya cities, flourishing from around 200 to 900 AD, Tikal still rises above the Petén rainforest. Stay nearby to climb Temple IV early for views over the canopy, with howler monkeys roaring below.

2

NATURE

Lake Atitlán

A deep caldera lake ringed by three volcanoes and Maya villages, each with its own character: Panajachel for transport, San Pedro for backpackers, San Marcos for yoga and Santiago for traditional weaving. Public boats link them.

3

## ARCHITECTURE

**Antigua Guatemala**

The former colonial capital, abandoned after the 1773 earthquakes, is a UNESCO-listed grid of cobbled streets, pastel houses and ruined churches beneath Volcán de Agua, and the country's main base for tours and cafés.

4

## ADVENTURE

**Acatenango volcano hike**

An overnight climb to a camp at around 3,600 m, with views across to Volcán de Fuego, which frequently erupts through the night. The summit, at 3,976 m, is a pre-dawn scramble; go with a reputable operator.

5

## NATURE

**Semuc Champey**

A 300 m limestone bridge over the Cahabón River, topped by a staircase of turquoise pools for swimming. Combine it with a candlelit wade through the K'anba caves and a lookout hike; most people stay in nearby Lanquín.

**Biggest cities**

## LARGEST CITY

**Guatemala City**

≈ 3 million people

Most travellers pass straight through, but the Zona 1 historic centre, the Popol Vuh and Ixchel museums of Maya culture and the Zona 4 restaurant scene reward a day.

## 2ND LARGEST CITY

**Quetzaltenango**

≈ 290,000 people

Known as Xela, Guatemala's second city sits at about 2,330 m and is a cheaper, less touristy alternative to Antigua for Spanish schools, with volcano hikes and hot springs nearby.

## 3RD LARGEST CITY

**Cobán**

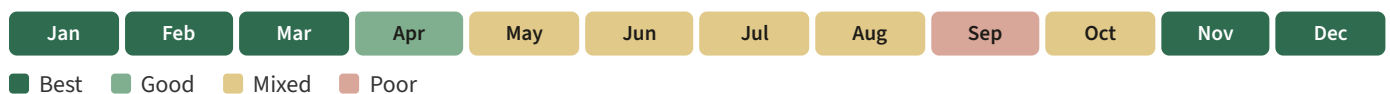
≈ 230,000 people

Capital of misty Alta Verapaz, the heart of coffee and cardamom country; most visitors pass through en route to Semuc Champey, but its orchid nurseries and coffee farms merit a stop.

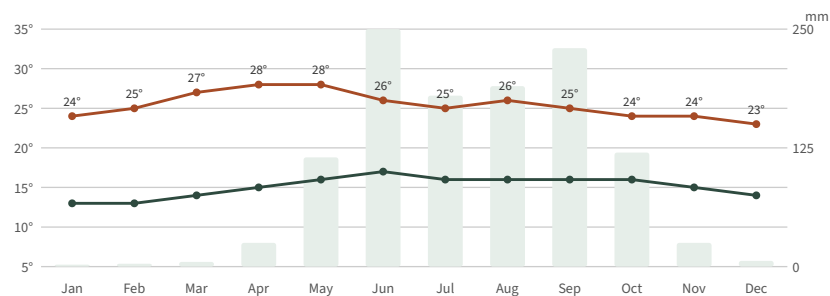
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

**When to go to Guatemala**

Best time: **Nov–Mar.**

**Average climate in Guatemala City**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



## Festivals & events

Mar–Apr

### Semana Santa in Antigua

Holy Week brings vast processions carrying statues through Antigua's streets over carpets of dyed sawdust, flowers and fruit; the Lent weekends beforehand are busy too, so book months ahead.

Nov

### Giant kites of Sumpango

On 1 November, Sumpango and Santiago Sacatepéquez fill their cemeteries and fields with enormous, intricately made paper kites, some more than 15 m across, to honour the dead.

Dec

### Quema del Diablo

At 6pm on 7 December, Guatemalans burn rubbish and devil effigies outside their homes to cleanse the year's bad spirits; Antigua's giant devil burning draws big crowds.

## How much does Guatemala cost?

SHOESTRING

**£35**

per person / day

≈ GTQ 357

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

**£80**

per person / day

≈ GTQ 816

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

**£170**

per person / day

≈ GTQ 1,734

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

## Food to try

### Pepián

Guatemala's national dish: chicken or beef in a thick sauce of roasted tomatoes, chillies and toasted pumpkin and sesame seeds, served with rice and tortillas.

### Kak'ik

A brick-red Q'eqchi' turkey soup from Alta Verapaz, spiced with achiote and chillies, best eaten in and around Cobán.

### Fiambre

An elaborate cold salad of cured meats, sausages, cheeses and pickled vegetables, made by families once a year for the Day of the Dead on 1 November.

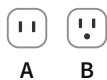
## Getting around

Tourist shuttle minibuses connect the airport, Antigua, Lake Atitlán, Chichicastenango, Lanquín and Flores, and can be booked through hotels and agencies. Colourful chicken buses are cheaper but crowded and slower. TAG and Avianca fly from Guatemala City to Flores in about an hour, saving a very long road journey. Lanchas (public boats) link the Lake Atitlán villages, and Uber works in Guatemala City.

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## Practical information

### PLUGS & VOLTAGE



120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

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### DIALLING CODE

+502

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### TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

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### TIPPING

Restaurants often add a 10% 'propina sugerida' to the bill, so check before tipping again; tip guides and shuttle drivers for good service.

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### ETIQUETTE

Ask before photographing Maya people, especially children, and never photograph ceremonies inside churches such as Chichicastenango's Santo Tomás. Dress modestly in villages and greet with 'buenos días'.

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### MAIN AIRPORTS

La Aurora International Airport (GUA), Guatemala City; Mundo Maya International Airport (FRS), Flores

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### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Fire and Ambulance: **122** or **123**

Police: **110**

PROATUR: , Guatemala's tourist assistance service, provides **24**-hour emergency assistance and routine guidance to tourists (call centre staff speak English and Spanish):

PROATUR: Telephone: **+502 2290 2810** or **1500** if dialling from inside Guatemala

Source: FCDO "Getting help"

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### TIME ZONE

UTC-6 (standard time)

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### DRIVING

On the right

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## Visas & entry for Guatemala

Shown for a British passport.

**No visa needed**

You can visit Guatemala for up to 90 days without a visa.

If you overstay the 90 days, you'll have to pay a fine before leaving the country. You can pay this fine at the main Institute of Migration (in Spanish) office in Guatemala City. You can also pay fines at the airport or land borders, but administrative processes can cause serious delays.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

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## Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

- Hepatitis A
- Tetanus
- Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Measles
- Rabies

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in Guatemala below 1,500m: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Guatemala

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

|                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Sun 1 Nov 2026  | All Saints' Day  |
| Fri 25 Dec 2026 | Christmas Day    |
| Fri 1 Jan 2027  | New Year's Day   |
| Thu 25 Mar 2027 | Maundy Thursday  |
| Fri 26 Mar 2027 | Good Friday      |
| Sat 27 Mar 2027 | Holy Saturday    |
| Sat 1 May 2027  | Labour Day       |
| Mon 28 Jun 2027 | Army Day         |
| Sun 15 Aug 2027 | Assumption Day   |
| Wed 15 Sep 2027 | Independence Day |
| Wed 20 Oct 2027 | Revolution Day   |

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

| ENGLISH           | SPANISH         | SAY IT            |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Hello             | Hola            | OH-lah            |
| Thank you         | Gracias         | GRAH-see-ahs      |
| Please            | Por favor       | por fah-VOR       |
| Excuse me         | Disculpe        | dees-KOOL-peh     |
| How much is this? | ¿Cuánto cuesta? | KWAN-toh KWES-tah |

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## Know before you go

Book door-to-door tourist shuttles between the airport, Antigua and Lake Atitlán; they cost more than chicken buses but save hours, and your luggage stays with you.

Acatenango's summit camp can drop below freezing at night, so rent gloves, a hat and a warm jacket in Antigua if you didn't pack them, and choose an operator with proper shelters.

Carry small quetzal notes, as change for Q100 and Q200 notes is scarce in villages, and use ATMs inside banks or shopping centres rather than standalone street machines.

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Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice ([gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](https://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)) and TravelHealthPro ([travelhealthpro.org.uk](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk)). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.