



## GUATEMALA CITY

Guatemala's capital city is the most modern and cosmopolitan city in Central America. Fast paced and vibrant, Guatemala City (or Guate as its' referred to locally) is a wonderful blend of old and new and possesses a distinct Latin charm. Today, Guatemala City has two million inhabitants. Its location, facilities and the International Airport "La Aurora" make it the starting point for visits to the rest of Guatemala.

Guatemala City was founded in 1776, after a devastating earthquake destroyed the former Spanish capital of Central America, "La Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala", known today as Antigua Guatemala (or simply Antigua). Sitting on top of three tectonic plates, Guatemala City is spread out in a valley with the Agua volcano reigning on its horizon.



Guatemala City has an active cultural life throughout the year. Most of the country's museums are to be found here. There are also more than 30 galleries showing Guatemalan artists in painting, photography, engraving and sculpture. Theaters present a wide range of plays, especially national playwrights.

Visitors interested in handicraft will find them in the Central Market, located a block away from the Cathedral. At the Central Market you will not only find unique Guatemalan handicrafts, but also see the colorful variety of local flowers, fruits and vegetables. The Relief Map in Minerva Park is a good place to see the extension of Guatemala and if you have never been to Paris you should visit "Torre el Reformador", the world's only scale replica of the Eiffel Tower.

## TIKAL: CITY OF TEMPLES

The Tikal National Park is located in Guatemala's north, 65 kms northeast of Flores and 20 miles north of El Remate. Reclaimed by the jungle, the ancient city is now surrounded by lush tropical forest inhabited by toucans and monkeys. The site is so densely covered that it was virtually lost for centuries; the earliest European account is that of a Spanish priest in the late 17th century.

Tikal was one of the most important cities of the Maya Classic period, developing a complex society that excelled in art, architecture, mathematics and astronomy. It was occupied from 800 BC to 900 AD. At its height (from 250 AD to 900 AD) it supported a population of approximately 55,000.

Over 3,000 ancient structures have been identified within the six-square mile site. Among these are ceremonial ball courts, tombs, temples, stelae and palaces. The most spectacular include the 65-meter Temple of the Two-headed Serpent—the tallest pre-Columbian structure in the Americas. The iconic temple of the Grand Jaguar was built in 700 AD and is 45 meters high. Other notable structures include the Lost World pyramid, the South Acropolis (57 meters high), Maler's Palace and the 60-meter Temple of the Great Priest.



## CHICHICASTENAGO

The hillside town of Chichicastenango is home to the most famous indigenous market in Guatemala. Sundays and Thursdays are the main market days, drawing farmers and craftsmen from around the region. Smaller markets held on Saturdays and Wednesdays offer many of the same goods, but at lower prices and with fewer tourists.

"Chichi" is also a holy city to the Quiche Maya. Evidences of traditional beliefs are ubiquitous, from the pine boughs tied above doorways (an appeal for rain) to the hilltop shrine of Pascual Abaj south of town, where daily ceremonies are still conducted.

The most conspicuous displays of traditional belief take place on the front steps of Iglesia de Santo Tomas, across from main market plaza. This church was built in 1540, reportedly on the site of a Mayan temple. Tradition holds that the ancient altar lies just in front of the heavy wooden doors—the spot where local worshippers still burn incense and drop rose.



## ANTIGUA

Just twenty-eight miles southwest of Guatemala City, Antigua seems three centuries distant. This exquisite city is steeped in colonial charm; cobblestone streets, colorful houses, and dozens of churches and convents make it well worth visiting. UNESCO recognized this in 1979 when it declared Antigua a World Heritage Center.

Antigua was damaged and rebuilt several times before the massive 1773 earthquake almost destroyed it entirely. Soon after, the Spanish regional capital was moved to the north, diminishing Antigua's economic and administrative importance. Happily, this exodus helped preserve the town. In recent years, several historic buildings have been lovingly renovated into fine hotels and restaurants. Today, Antigua is an excellent base for visiting the highland towns to the west.

Holy Week in Antigua is celebrated with more pageantry than almost anywhere. Hundreds of men stagger under the crushing weight of platforms bearing Catholic icons, and the streets are decorated with colorful carpets of sawdust and flowers.

