

Did You Know?

- Although most people eat three meals a day, some families can only afford to eat one meal. They snack on tortillas for the rest of the day.
- Soldiers serving in the Guatemalan army are not allowed to vote in elections. They are required to stay in their barracks on election day.
- Guatemalans don't usually point to something or someone with their finger. Instead, they point with their lips!
- Instead of saying "psst" to get someone's attention, Guatemalans say "tsst tsst."
- To make tortillas, people grow corn, dry it (sometimes on their roof), and take it to a *molino* (a mill that grinds the corn into flour). Then they take the flour, add some water, and cook the dough.
- What makes chewing gum chewy is *chicle*, made from the sap of the sapodilla tree, which grows in Guatemala.

Flag

The white stripe represents the land, and the blue stripes on either side of the white show how two different bodies of water border the land. In the center of the flag, there is an emblem with the national bird and the date Guatemala achieved independence from Spain (1821).



National Image

The quetzal is the national bird. It is very rare. The quetzal's back and wings are green and its breast is ruby red. Its colorful tail is sometimes twice as long as its body!



People and Places

Land and Climate

Guatemala is covered with mountains and 32 volcanoes. More than half of the volcanoes still erupt, like the Pacaya Volcano did in January 2000. The country also has many forests. These forests hide ancient ruins, possibly some that haven't even been discovered yet. In Guatemala City, the weather usually stays at about 70°F (21°C). It's no wonder the people there call their country the Land of the Eternal Spring! However, the coasts can get hot and humid. Rain usually falls from May to October.



Population

The Maya lived in Guatemala when European explorers discovered the land. There are many different groups within the Maya, such as the Quiché, Cakchiquel, Mam, and Kekchí. More than half of Guatemalans are a mixture of Maya and Spanish. These people are called *ladinos*. *Ladinos* usually consider themselves more Spanish than Maya. Another group, the *Garifuna*, is from Africa. Guatemala's current population is more than 12 million people.

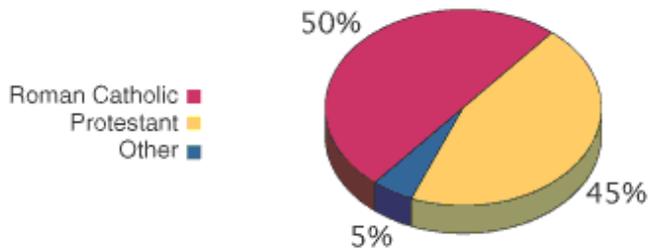
Language

Spanish is Guatemala's official language. However, that doesn't mean that everyone speaks it. Dozens of languages are spoken in the country. *Ladinos* speak Spanish, but each Mayan group often uses its own language, like Quiché, Cack'chiquel, Quek'chi, Mam, and Garifuna. Sometimes the Maya (mostly the men) speak a little Spanish, but they're often not fluent in it.

Can You Say It in Spanish?

Hello	<i>Buenas</i>	(BWEH-nahs)
Good-bye	<i>Adiós</i>	(ah-dee-OHS)
Please	<i>Por favor</i>	(POHR fa-VOHR)
Thank you	<i>Gracias</i>	(GRAH-see-ahs)
Yes	<i>Sí</i>	(see)
No	<i>No</i>	(noh)

Religion



Most Guatemalans are Roman Catholics. Although membership in the Catholic Church has declined, Catholicism still influences many celebrations and customs, regardless of people's religious beliefs. In the last 20 years, many Guatemalans have converted to Protestant and other Christian churches. About 45 percent of the people are now Protestants, known generally as *evangélicos* (evangelicals). Freedom of religion is guaranteed.

History

Time Line

AD 800

AD 800s The great Maya civilization begins to break up



1500

1524 Spanish rule begins

1773 An earthquake hits and destroys the capital, Antigua Guatemala

1776 Guatemala City is made the new capital

1800

1812 Spain relaxes its hold over Guatemala and allows the people to participate more in government

1821 Guatemala wins its independence from Spain and is taken over by Mexico



1823 Guatemala breaks away from Mexico and joins the Central American Federation

1838 The Central American Federation falls apart

1900

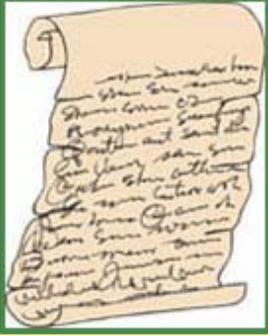
1944 A new government begins to reform the entire country

1954 Carlos Castillo Armas, a colonel in the military, removes the president from power



1960–96 Guatemala suffers a devastating civil war

1984 The people try to help bring peace by writing a new constitution

		
1986	After having military rulers since 1954, a president is elected once again	
1991	President Jorge Serrano Elías begins peace talks with the rebels	
1992	Rigoberta Menchú wins the Nobel Peace Prize for showing what life was like for Guatemalans during their civil war	
1996	The government and the guerrillas sign a peace agreement	
2000		
2000	Guatemala signs a trade agreement with Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras to help its economy	
2004	The government pays \$3.5 million to victims of the civil war that ended in 1996	
2005	The government approves a free trade deal with the United States	
2005	Tropical Storm Stan hits Guatemala, causing flooding and mudslides; hundreds of people are killed, and thousands are left homeless	
PRESENT		

The Ancient Maya

Thousands of years ago, the Maya lived in Guatemala. These people were amazing architects, astronomers, and mathematicians. The pyramids and temples they built in their great cities still stand today. The Maya also charted the sun's and moon's movements and developed a calendar from their discoveries. They could even calculate when eclipses would occur! The Maya also used the zero in their math long before the Greeks or Romans caught on to the idea.



Spanish Rule

The Spanish came to Guatemala in the early 1500s. Pedro de Alvarado was in charge of conquering the Maya so Spain could take the land and resources. His armies killed many natives. Many more died because they had no resistance to European diseases. The Spanish made the Maya that were left work in the fields. From 1524 to 1821, the Spanish ruled the area. During this time, the natives had little money and few rights.



Independence

In the 1800s, Spain had problems within its own borders. It couldn't concentrate on ruling its colonies anymore, so Guatemala and the rest of the colonies became independent in 1821. Right afterward, Mexico took over Guatemala, but it broke away in 1823. Along with some of its neighbors, Guatemala formed the Central American Federation. This lasted until 1838. After that, Guatemala decided to try running things on its own.

Troubled Times and Peace

After independence, a few rich people controlled most of the land. Landowners and poor workers often clashed with each other. In 1944, a new government was elected. It took some land from the rich and gave it back to the poor. However, the military didn't approve of these reforms, so it took control of the government. Many who disagreed with the military were jailed, kidnapped, or even killed. Some groups, called *guerrillas* (rebel warriors), fought against the government anyway. In 1996, the government and the guerrillas signed a peace agreement that ended 36 years of civil war. Now Guatemalans are trying to rebuild their country after so many years of fighting.



Games and Sports

All Guatemalans need is a ball and a flat field and they're ready to play their favorite sport: *fútbol* (soccer). Going to watch their favorite league teams is always a big event. Sometimes fireworks are lit after a game to celebrate. Kids also like to play basketball and *eléctrica* (tag).



Holidays

Guatemalans say that there are more celebrations than days of the year. Their favorite holidays are Christmas and Easter. The Christmas season starts early, on 7 December. People clean their houses and burn their garbage so that their homes are "free from evil" for when Christ comes. On Christmas Eve, they light firecrackers and then eat a delicious meal of tamales and fruit punch. During the week before Easter, many parades fill the streets. Men carry statues of Christ on platforms and then burn dummies of Judas Iscariot on Saturday.



Food

Even though Guatemala is a small country and doesn't have a lot of different regions, not all the people eat the same types of food. Some dishes might only be made in certain villages. This is because spices or other important ingredients might grow only in that area. However, some typical foods are black beans, bananas, rice, and tortillas or *tamalitos* (cornmeal dough that is steamed in a corn husk). Coffee is a popular drink, even for young children. For a treat, Guatemalans might eat fried *plátanos* (bananas) with honey or cream.



Schools

Kids who have a chance to go to school consider themselves lucky. Because Guatemala is a poor country, schools often don't have enough desks, books, or school supplies, making learning difficult. Many children attend class in a one- or two-room school. These kids study reading, writing, math, and science, as you might. As they get older, they might be able to take a music or art class. However, more than half of all kids who are old enough to go to elementary school don't go. In the countryside, many don't even speak the same language as their teachers, which is Spanish.

Life as a Kid

Many kids go to school. However, some families don't have enough money to pay the school fees, so the kids stay home and work. At home, they might babysit little brothers or sisters, clean the house, work in the garden, or help make food for the family. When they have time, kids enjoy spending time with their cousins or grandparents, who often live in the same house or close by. Or they might play a game of soccer or some other sport with their friends.



Society

Government

President: Oscar Berger

Guatemalans have been working hard to make their government more democratic. The people elect a president to lead the government. They also elect a legislature to make the country's laws. There are 158 members of the legislature, called the Congress of the Republic. However, there are still many problems. Up until almost 20 years ago, the country was suffering under a *dictatorship*, which is when the people don't get a chance to help decide how the country should be run. In comparison, the United States has been refining its democratic system for more than two hundred years!

Money and Economy

The name of Guatemala's money is the same as the national bird: the *quetzal*. There's not a lot of money in the country. Many Guatemalans live on less than one dollar a day. In some areas, as many as three-fourths of the people don't have running water, electricity, money for school or the doctor, or enough food. More than half of Guatemalans are farmers. The main crop they grow is coffee, but they also grow bananas, cotton, sugarcane, corn, and beans.



Getting Around

Most people get around the old fashioned way—with their own two feet. If they have a long way to go, they might take a bus (which are old school buses from the United States that have been painted bright colors). These buses are often so crowded that three or more people are crammed onto a seat, whether they know each other or not! Guatemalans in *rural* (country) areas sometimes hitchhike to the nearest city when it's too far to walk. The wealthy can afford their own cars, but the roads are sometimes so bad that they can't



drive on them.

Fun Facts & Contacts

Clothing of Many Colors

People (especially *ladinos*) who live in Guatemala's cities might wear clothing that you could find in the United States. However, many also wear traditional clothing, which is usually very colorful. Women wear a shirt called a *huipil* and a wraparound skirt called a *corte*. Men wear pants that come to their knees or calves. Guatemalans often make the fabric for their clothing themselves! All types of patterns and pictures might be weaved into or embroidered onto the cloth. Sometimes, Guatemalans can tell where someone is from just by looking at the designs on a person's clothes!



Learn More

Contact the Embassy of Guatemala, 2220 R Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 745-4952; web site www.guatemala-embassy.org.

© 2007 ProQuest-CSA LLC and Brigham Young University. All rights reserved. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without written permission from ProQuest-CSA.

CultureGrams™
People. The World. You.

ProQuest
789 E. Eisenhower Pkwy
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.528.6279
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

ProQuest

Guatemala



The ancient Maya built temples and pyramids in Tikal. Many people visit the ruins each year.

The Petén region is covered with thick tropical rain forests and swamps.

The Tajumulco Volcano is the tallest peak in Central America; it is 13,845 feet (4,220 m) high.

At 42,043 square miles (108,890 sq km), Guatemala is a little smaller than Tennessee.

