Trek Guatemala's
Guatemala Travel Guide & FAQs

TREK GUATEMALA
travel in full color

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Trek Guatemala
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We've put together a "Guatemala Travel Guide" and Frequent Asked Questions (FAQs) that we hope will help with your Guatemala travel planning, organized under the following topics:

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Health Considerations

Do I Need Any Special Immunizations in Guatemala?

You do not need any special immunizations to travel to Guatemala (similar to Mexico). Of course it's always good to be up-to-date on routine vaccinations prior to travel anywhere in the world. Bring any important medications. Because it is so lush, Guatemala can cause some people to have allergies (even if never experienced before), so always good to pack some allergy meds if you're susceptible.

Can I Drink the Water in Guatemala?

It's very important to realize that you shouldn't drink any water from the tap in Guatemala. Therefore, it's a good idea to always have a bottle of water around. Any reputable restaurant or hotel will always serve purified or bottled water, ice made out of purified water, and salads/vegetables washed with purified water. BUT, even will all the precautions, some guests are bound to have a touch of traveler's diarrhea. If this happens, it's best to let your body naturally get it out of your system, but if symptoms persist more than 2-3 days, local pharmacies stock all needed medications and/or let us know so we can help provide medical attention.

What About Bugs, Snakes & Other Creepy Crawly Things!

Antigua, Lake Atitlán and Guatemala City do not have excessive mosquitos or other nasty flying things that bite you, particularly during the dry season. Along the temperate, upper elevations of our volcano and trekking routes, bugs are almost non-existent. With that said, we do recommend you pack some bug repellant for your trip, especially if your sensitive to bites.

The paths we walk on our excursions are also quite snake free, especially poisonous snakes, and are rarely if ever seen. Snakes or anything else that could harm you are non-existent in urban areas. There are also no major mammals that could cause any kind of harm along our trekking routes as well.

If you're traveling to Tikal National Park or the northern region of Guatemala know as Petén, the landscape is more tropical and there tend have more creepy crawly things, and we simply recommend you always walk with a qualified guide in these areas.

What about Medical Services?

Pharmacies are ubiquitous throughout the country, offering nearly all medications (even without a prescription). Antigua has a modern medical center called "Vital Med"(+502 2339 9210) on the south side of town, just a 5-10 drive from downtown. Guatemala City is home to a number of modern hospitals. For medical services required outside of these regions, please contact us.

Safety Considerations

Is Guatemala a Safe Place to Visit?

We understand that most international news regarding Guatemala is often negative. Unfortunately, this news doesn't always reflect the reality here. Yes, there are pockets of Guatemala City that you might not want to visit (much like any major city worldwide), but you won't come close to those areas. Antigua is peaceful, as are villages around the Lake…and Guatemalans are some of the kindest people on the planet.

Is Trekking Safe in Guatemala?

Our treks passes through quiet, rural Maya farming communities that pride themselves on being welcoming to visitors. As you hike through agricultural areas, local farmers often stop to say hello while villagers are quick to share an "Hola!" as we pass through. Our treks have never had a single issue with safety or security.

Safety & Common Sense Travel Considerations

Although Antigua is a very safe place to visit, there are some things to keep in mind...rules of thumb that are important to remember when traveling anywhere:

- Keep your purse, wallet, or money in a place where it is not easily accessible at all times.
- Pick-pocketing is not at all common in Antigua, but it does happen…particularly in crowded area like markets. Don't flash money around when paying for things.
- Antigua is as safe at night as it is during the day, but it is wiser not to walk alone after dark. Better to stay in pairs or groups.

And some things NOT to worry about...

- Guns: Private security companies are very common in Guatemala, and you will see many private security guards who work with hotels, stores, etc. carrying guns in public. It's a bit unnerving, but normal for Guatemala.
- The Police: The police in Guatemala are very friendly and used to helping tourists. In fact, there is a special unit in Antigua whose job is to simply help and protect tourists. The won't bribe or harass you, but rather will go out of their way to help you!
- Fireworks: Guatemalans love fireworks…the louder the better. So, don't be alarmed if you hear what sounds exactly like gun shots nearly all hours of the day. And there is a baffling tradition in Guatemala of launching very loud fireworks if it's your birthday. And guess what folks…every day is someone's birthday! So, don't be alarmed to wake up to this some days.

General Travel Planning Considerations

Where Should I Get Money in Guatemala?

The Guatemalan currency is called the Quetzal, or "Q" for short. The current exchange rate is USD $1 to Q 7.8, and has remained steady for years. Bills come in Q 1,5,10,50, 100 & 200 notes. There are also coins in smaller amounts. We don't recommend you exchange money at the airport, they always offer the worst rates, other than having some initial spending money. Rather, we recommend you use one of the many ATMs/money machines available throughout Antigua, most around Central Park/Parque Central. The bank "BAC" on Parque Central offer the largest daily withdrawal amounts (up to Q 5,000/day) and charges the most reasonable ATM fees. You can also withdraw USD from BAC ATMs as well.

Most local banks will also exchange foreign currency (USD and Euros) for local currency at competitive rates, but be aware…if the bill isn't perfect – without marks or tears – they won't accept it. You'll need your passport as well.

Can I Use a Credit Card in Guatemala?

Most tourism businesses around the country offer credit card payment options. If you do use a credit card, the POS systems in Guatemala do not normally require a signature. They will simply process the transaction, and give you a receipt.

How Much Should I Tip?

Tipping is delightfully simplified in formal restaurants in Guatemala. Most restaurants automatically include a 10% tip on the bill (both cash and CC), and you just pay the final amount. Additional tipping is always appreciated for superb service, but it's never expected. For other services such as guides, long-distance transportation drivers, or other customer service-intensive positions, a 5-10% tip of the total sale price is also appreciated, and more expected.

What is Bartering, and When Should I Do It?

Although a personal decision, "bartering" is a very common practice in markets and with street vendors in Guatemala. You may prefer to pay full price, but if you feel like a good old-fashioned negotiation, our proven approach to bartering is take the first price your given, offer half, and expect to pay somewhere in the middle. For example, if a vendor asks Q 200 for a necklace, offer 100, be prepared for a bit of back and forth and you might end up paying Q 150. Everyone's happy. Brick and mortar stores and restaurants have non-negotiable prices.

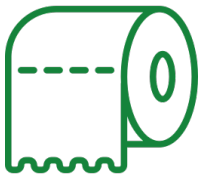
Can I Buy a Local SIM Card?

Short term phone and data packages are cheap in Guatemala (an average plan for a week might cost around USD $20-$30) and popular providers include TIGO, Claro, and Moviestar. There isn't much difference between them, and it's most convenient to get a local SIM card (if you need one) at the airport prior to going through immigration & customs. If you choose to wait until you get to Antigua, there are also many place you can buy a local SIM card & package. You will need to present your passport. Many phones also now offer "eSIMS" by simply going into your phone settings and selecting a country and package. Popular providers include Holafly & Airalo.

What Kind of Electrical System Does Guatemala Have?

Guatemala uses 110 volt, 60 cycle electricity, same as the US. Plugs are typically the 2 pronged flat type so US travelers do not need a converter or adapter. Outlets rarely have 3 holes so if your device has a third prong, bring an adapter.

Why Am I Putting Toilet Paper in the Trash Can?



Most plumbing in Central America is constructed of old, ceramic pipes. For this reason, many establishments may ask you (in the form of a sign in the bathroom) to place TP in a provided trash can rather than the toilet. As a general rule of thumb, if it didn't come out of your body, don't put it in the toilet. This may seem strange, but "when in Rome!"…

Begging & Child Labor

You may have people, both young & old, approach you to ask for money, usually by saying "Un Quetzal?" ("a dime?"). How you respond to this is your choice, but we recommend you do not give out money or candy, particularly to children, as it reinforces a "hand out" mentality. Rather, if you would like to support poverty reduction in Guatemala, we suggest you consider our "Travel Philanthropy Program" (see next page) or you give a "hand up" by donating to one of the many reputable charity organizations that exist in the country.

Unfortunately, in Guatemala many kids start helping families earn money and when then are quite young. For this reason, it is a very common sight to see kids selling jewelry, shining shoes, and also taking care of younger siblings.

Trek Guatemala's Travel Philanthropy Program

Trek Guatemala works to improve the quality of life in the communities that we visit throughout our four-day adventure. Our Travel Philanthropy Program allows our staff and guests to work hand-in-hand in supporting community development projects in the small Mayan villages we visit. In support of our sustainable travel initiatives, we invite all guests and friends of Trek Guatemala to join us on our mission to help enhance education, environmental awareness and medical services in rural Guatemala. ***Here's how you can help!***

School Supplies, Clothing & Home Health Donations

The children of many Guatemalan villages lack access to basic resources needed to help further their education, both in and out of the classroom. That's why Trek Guatemala has partnered with Pack for a Purpose, a non-profit organization built to link tourists to local communities. Even the smallest amount of extra space in your luggage can go a long way. Simply hand us the supplies during the pre-trip briefing, and we'll proudly share your kind donations with the schools we work with. Here's a list of items most in need by rural Guatemalan school children:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">School Supplies</th><th>Clothing | Home Health</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">General School Supplies:
Solar Latern Lights, College-Ruled Notebooks, Colored Construction Paper, Colored Pencils, Crayons, Erasers, Handheld Pencil Sharpeners, Markers, Pencils, Pencil Cases, Solar Calculators</td><td rowspan="3">Clothing/Shoes:
New or Gently Used Warm Children's Clothing and Shoes (Smaller Sizes)

Home Health:
Children's Toothbrushes, Toothpaste, Shampoo, Band-aids, cough drops, aspirin</td></tr>
<tr><td>Flash Cards (English and Spanish):
Alphabet and Math</td><td>Laminated Wall Charts:
(Spanish): Language, Math, Science, and World Maps</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Educational Games/Toys:
Puzzles, Learning Games, and Soccer Balls</td></tr>
</table>

Financial Donations

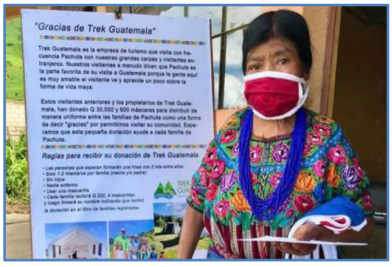
Trek Guatemala has created a way for guest to give financial donations to our community develoment efforts. For those guests who want to contribut to our Travel Philanthropy Program, Trek Guatemala has created a GoFundMe Campagn that is used for community development projects like the ones listed below. Any level of support is appreciated!

Success Stories

Guest Donations

Throughout 2022, Trek Guatemala guests brought down more than $4,000 in school and home health supplies for the rural Mayan communities we visit in support of our **Travel Philalanthropy Progam.** In March 2023, we distributed the supplies to kids who have never held a crayon, and who can now draw the colorful world around them! We are proud members of PackforaPurpose.org.

COVID Relief



In 2021, Trek Guatemala raised nearly **$5,000 and distributed 600 masks** to the indigenous Mayan community of Pachute, one of the rural villages we visit during our multi-day treks. The money helped to buy much-needed food, clothing, and medicine.

Panibaj Footbridge

In 2017, Trek Guatemala partnered with the small coffee-growing community of Panibaj to rebuild a **hanging footbridge** that connected Panibaj to surrounding communities and also enabled us to cross the Rio Madre Vieja along our 4-day trek. It was a great project of collaboration and started a friendship with the community that continues today. We feel a sense of pride every time we cross it!

Arrival & Departure

What's the Best Way to Get To & From Guatemala?

Direct flights to Guatemala City (which is one hour from Antigua) arrive from NYC, Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, Orlando, Miami, Houston, Dallas, LAX and Madrid.

What's the Best Way to Get To & From Antigua?

Trek Guatemala offers private shuttle service from the Antigua airport, which can range from one hour (no traffic) to two hours (mornings/evenings). We also offer private shuttle service between all of the country's major tourism destinations. Uber also works in larger metropolitan areas around Guatemala. Be prepared, the cars are normally quite small, but usually very clean and professional. We do not recommend you use the public taxis anywhere in the country. And as fun as they look, we also recommend you stay off the local "chicken buses" due to their aggressive driving practices.

What's the Best Way to Get Around Antigua?

You can walk almost anywhere in Antigua in less than 15 minutes, but there will be times when you might prefer to ride. As mentioned, Uber is an good option in most Guatemala urban areas, including Antigua. There a few taxis in Antigua (parked next to the Central Park) but more common are "Tuk Tuks" or covered 3-wheelers. They seat 3-4 people, and cost approximately Q 15-20 anywhere in town during the day and Q20-25 after dark (per ride, not per person). They are loud and tight, but safe and kind of fun to ride in!

What Do I Do When I Arrive to the Guatemala City Airport?

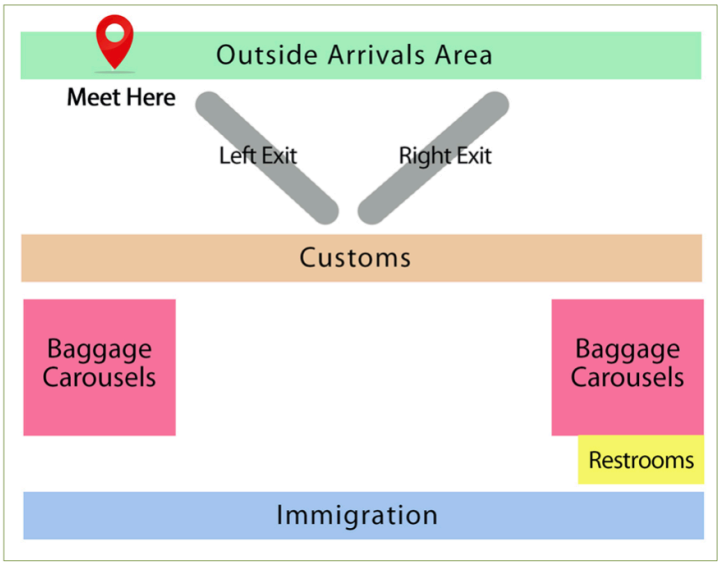
The Guatemala City airport is a relatively small international airport and easy to navigate. You will need to complete an online arrival form (and departure form as well) which can be filled out any time prior to arrival (or at arrival) via the following link:

https://farm2.sat.gob.gt/declaDelViajeroGt-web/pages/public/declaracionViajero.jsf#no-back-button

Be prepared, the form is sort of in "Spanglish" if you select the English option. For example, they don't list the "United States" but rather "Estados Unidos". The completed form will generate a QR code (and an email of the QR code sent to your inbox). You will need to show the QR to the customs agents prior to departing the airport.

Baggage Information

Please be sure to save your checked baggage slips, they sometimes ask you to show them when departing the baggage area.



Where do I Meet My Trek Guatemala Shuttle at the Airport?

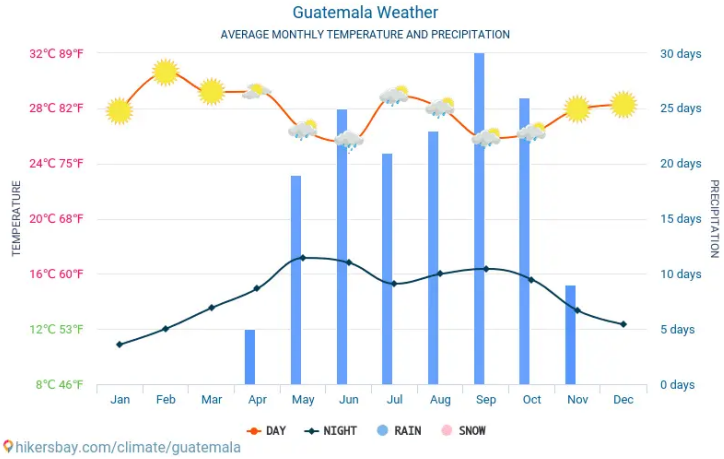
Please refer to the Guatemala City Airport map provided here, and proceed to the meeting point indicated. Simply continue out the left exit as you leave the airport. Your driver will be holding a Trek Guatemala sign with your name on it. If for some reason you don't see your driver, don't panic! Simply contact us at +502 4888-6315 or +502 3031-0511 and we'll help coordinate.

Weather

What's the Weather Like in Guatemala?

From November to April/May (Guatemala's "dry season"), the weather in Antigua, Lake Atitlán and Guatemala City is sunny and temperate, with daytime temperatures ranging from 72°-85°F/ 22°-29°C & evenings ranging from 50°-60°F/10°-18°C). Rain at these destinations during the dry season is almost unheard of, although it's always good to pack a light jacket.

Along our trekking route the weather characterized by slightly cooler temperatures but warm, sunny days (65-80°F/16-29°C) & cool evenings (35-50°F/2-10°C). Although technically the dry season, Guatemala's highlands can get some rain & mist as well, particularly at night.



From May to October (Guatemala's "rainy season"), the weather can vary considerably. Morning are often partly sunny and fresh, with passing showers occurring mostly in the late afternoons and evenings. The higher you go in elevation, the more likely you are to have precipitation during the rainy season in Guatemala, with the wettest months being September & October. With that said, the rainy season is beautiful in Guatemala…with mountainsides covered in lush vegetation.

Antigua to Atitlán 4-Day "Sky Route" Trek

Is the Trek Hard?

Although every hiker is unique, the short answer is yes…the trek is designed to challenge guests each day. 7-9 miles per day is average, with a few thousand feet in elevation change…all taking place at elevations between 6,000 to 9,000 feet. But it's not a death march. We leave camp each morning around 8:30, and are usually arriving to our next camp by 4pm each afternoon. Hikers can go at their own pace, and to date it's been done by a group of 9-year olds as well as a 74-year old grandfather.

Does the Trek Have Bathrooms or Showers?

Not to worry! Each trip is supported by our overland "trek truck", a modified vehicle that not only carries our gear from camp to camp, but also features a nifty hot water shower, portable flush toilet and sink. It's private, but you can look up at the stars as you rinse off each night.

What are the Tents Like?

Our 10' x 14' canvas tents are spacious, comfortable, and fit up to two queen-size inflatable mattresses along with a shared bedside table. The comforters are goose-down and we provide hot water bottles as well to guests to ensure a warm and cozy night's sleep.

What is the Food Like?

Our food is a highlight for most of the guests on our trek. We serve a fusion of traditional Guatemalan dishes and international cuisine. The food is fresh, healthy and most importantly delicious! Vegetarian and vegan options available. We also offer beer & wine along the trek.

What Happens with our Luggage?

Each day of the trek, guests hike only with daypacks carrying their clothes, 2-3 L of water and personal items. Larger overnight luggage is transported from one beautiful camp to the next via our Trek Truck, and is waiting for you upon arrival.

How Large is Each Trekking Group?

Our maximum group size is 12 guests, although most groups rarely exceed 6 guests. We pride ourselves on small group travel!

Will There Be a Need for Extra Money Along the Trip?

Guatemala is famous for its handicrafts, which include woven fabrics, carved wood and ceramics. Both Antigua and Lake Atitlán provide opportunities for shopping. 8

Is a Packing List Provided?

Yes! We provide a detailed "packing primer" that includes suggestions for clothing and equipment to guests to bring.