

Guatemala

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Guatemala is a fascinating country in which the possibilities for discovery are endless. The Mayan ruins nestled in the jungles of El Peten, the culture and people (the majority of which are direct descendants of the Maya) the abundance of bird life and animal life, as well as the variety of natural landscapes makes Guatemala a unique destination.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

Visas

- ❖ No visas required for US citizens
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas

Health, Immunizations

- ❖ Some immunizations are highly recommended, but none are required for entry
- ❖ Recommended immunizations: tetanus, polio, measles, hepatitis and others that may be addressed by your health professional
- ❖ Malaria has been present in some rural and coastal areas – a prophylactic may be recommended
- ❖ Seek independent medical advice from your personal physician or health service
- ❖ SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the International Traveler's Hotline at the Center for Disease Control: 1-800-232-4636; 1-877-394-8747, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

Time Difference

- ❖ Guatemala is on Central Standard Time (-6 GMT) all year-round

Electricity

- ❖ Standard 110V/220V 60 HZ
- ❖ Plug outlets are the same as found in the U.S.

ARRIVAL

Entry

- ❖ Direct flights from the United States gateway cities: Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Los Angeles, and Miami
- ❖ JOURNEYS travelers will be met upon arrival at the airport in either Guatemala City or Flores
- ❖ Taxis in Guatemala are inexpensive by our standards. Most taxis do not have meters so agree on a price with the driver before you accept the ride
- ❖ Get an entry stamp (In Guatemala City, this will not be a problem, but in Flores they might not give it to you, and then someone might ask for a tax or a bribe when you try to leave again.)
- ❖ Contact information is sent with your Last Minute Reminders from JOURNEYS

Customs

- ❖ Anything you are bringing into the country for personal use - camera gear, snorkeling equipment, binoculars, etc. - will be readily allowed



GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

Food & Restaurants

- ❖ Look for a restaurant where lots of locals are eating - chances are the food will be delicious and reasonable
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes
- ❖ Don't buy food from street vendors or stalls
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water
- ❖ Avoid dairy products that are unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly
- ❖ Local offerings that are usually a part of every meal include plantains, beans, rice, and corn tortillas
- ❖ Expect to pay between \$3 and \$8 as a guideline for meals not included in your itinerary

Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ The unit of currency in Guatemala is the quetzal
- ❖ Both US dollars and traveler's checks are widely accepted for exchange into quetzals
- ❖ Exchange your currency for small bill denominations as merchants may not have change for a large bill
- ❖ Banks generally offer the best exchange rate
- ❖ Be prepared to be approached by black market currency exchangers at any facility of international arrival such as border crossings and/or outside of airports. We recommend you do not exchange money with black marketers as they may not be reputable
- ❖ Traveler's checks, Visa, and Mastercard are honored at most shops, restaurants and hotels in the main cities and resorts
- ❖ You may need to show your passport when using a credit card. Also, credit card companies are now charging a 3%+ surcharge on all foreign currency purchases (purchases of goods made outside of the US). Check with your credit card company before you travel as the charges change frequently without notice and vary with card and destination
- ❖ You should carry local cash in order to barter with the local artisans or in the craft markets of smaller towns and villages
- ❖ We suggest bringing \$500 or more for items not included in the cost of the trip, emergency money, and for shopping. (not included: departure tax, some meals, gratuities...)
- ❖ It is a good idea to bring newer dated currency that has no rips, marks, folds, or holes

Tipping

- ❖ 10% is appropriate for restaurant tipping in town
- ❖ After your stay at any lodge it is appropriate to leave tips for the local staff (table service, cooks, boatmen, etc.) \$1 per day for cleaning staff, .50 for porters... or look for a tip jar in the lobby of each hotel/lodge
- ❖ Taxi drivers do not expect a tip unless they carry your bags - .50-\$1
- ❖ Suggested tipping is \$3-\$5 per person a day for a tour guide
- ❖ Tips may either be pooled together on a group tour, or you may tip individually at the end of the trip
- ❖ Anytime you especially appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is always gratefully accepted.

Climate

- ❖ The tropical climate of Guatemala varies with elevation
- ❖ December through April is the dry season and glorious sunny days are the norm, however, occasional rainy weather does occur
- ❖ During other times of the year, from May to November, you can expect an afternoon rain shower nearly every day with sunshine between the rain

Emergency Services

- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy.
- ❖ It is important to note that medical services are not free to visitors, and are in fact quite expensive
- ❖ We strongly recommend you take out travel insurance
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need during your tour

SPECIAL REMARKS

People

- ❖ You will find the people very friendly and welcoming
- ❖ Many Guatemalans know some English and will enjoy practicing their English with you
- ❖ Spanish is the official language today and is spoken throughout the country. Many indigenous Indians still speak their own languages and some (but not all) speak Spanish as a second language.
- ❖ It is best to ask permission before taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask your guide
- ❖ Most people in Latin America greet with a hearty handshake when meeting for the first time
- ❖ Many finger and hand gestures are vulgar in Latin American culture, so pointing with a finger or the hand may be misinterpreted

Time

- ❖ Relax and enjoy the easy-going rhythm of Latin America
- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Despite best efforts, departures and arrivals could be a little before or after the time given. This applies particularly to aircraft movements. Operating requirements, weather and terrain sometimes present problems, and on these occasions, to ensure your safety, flight times may vary

Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet - most sewage systems can't handle paper. Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt a bulging wallet, always lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist
- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace

Shopping

- ❖ Markets offer hats and baskets, leather products, jewelry, embroidered goods, t-shirts, crafted wood
- ❖ Items will probably be less expensive once you get away from the capital or larger cities but the selection may not be as extensive
- ❖ Bartering is the norm at street markets. The actual price you can expect to pay may be anywhere from 50-80% of the original price. But don't push too hard - remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.
- ❖ Remember that items made from materials protected under the endangered species act (such as coral, fish or sea turtle shells) will not be allowed into the US or many other countries.
- ❖ Do not bring back pre-Columbian artifacts, as they may be confiscated or land you in jail!

Equipment & Packing

- ❖ It is a tropical environment and will generally be warm
- ❖ If your trip includes excursions into the higher elevations of the mountains, be prepared for cooler temperatures
- ❖ Shorts are not generally acceptable in the city, but are acceptable on the coast and useful in the field
- ❖ Women traveling in the cities and areas other than the coast or field might feel most comfortable (due to cultural norms) in light weight pants or a long skirt
- ❖ Bring versatile clothes that can be worn comfortably day or night, in the jungle, on beaches and in towns
- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.
- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free.
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage.
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Weight limits on checked luggage for in-country flights is 25lbs per person - please pack accordingly
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items in a city hotel while you are on an excursion or to use on your return for souvenirs



CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations
- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

Clothing

- Washable tennis, running or walking shoes (with good traction)
- Lightweight hiking boots (optional)
- "Teva" style sport sandals with Velcro strap, flip-flops or extra shoes
- Shorts - quick dry material
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Nicer pants or skirt (optional)
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt, for warmth and/or protection from sun or mosquitoes
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts and/or tank tops
- Sweater/Jacket and windbreaker (July-Nov, and anytime in the Andes)
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket and pants
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suits
- Socks
- Sleepwear
- Under clothes

Personal Items

- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables
- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Underwater camera (disposable kind is very handy)
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Lightweight binoculars
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs
- Small packable umbrella



Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
 - Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
 - Band-aids, gauze pads
 - Antibiotics
 - Prescription medicines
 - Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
 - Anti-diarrhea medicine
 - Antibiotic cream/ointment
 - Supply of feminine hygiene items
 - Motion sickness tablets
 - Earplugs
- Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag
- Passport
 - Domestic and international air tickets
 - Travelers checks, money and credit cards
 - Insurance certificates
 - Address and telephone number of emergency contact
 - Prescription medicines
 - Extra set of underclothes
 - Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
 - Camera gear, film and other valuables

Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Small washcloth
- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family
- Mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit (if applicable)
- Map
- Silica bags for moisture (protect camera equipment)
- Video camera
- Phrase book

