



GUATEMALA

A LAND WHERE YOU'LL FIND EVERYTHING,
EXCEPT THE WORDS TO DESCRIBE IT.

Guatemala

Heart of the Mayan World



HEART OF THE MAYAN WORLD



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INGUAT

GUATEMALA IS THE best-kept secret in Central America, holding countless surprises for visitors and natives alike. It is the birthplace of Mayan civilization, a haven of beauty and quiet and one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, with thousands of unique plants and animals calling it home.

A trip to Guatemala is an invitation to immerse yourself in history, culture, tradition and romance. To enjoy unique and delicious food. To get carried away by dreamlike landscapes. To experience wild adventure and some of the best fishing in the world. To let yourself surrender to your senses.

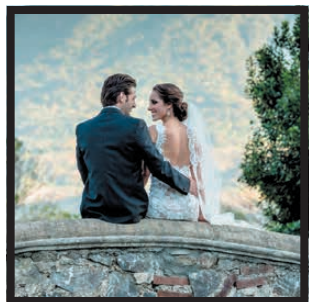
ROMANCE AND TRADITION CALL

Close to Guatemala City, we find La Antigua Guatemala, the former capital city, where time has stood still: With its beautiful old facades, the largely unchanged cityscape exerts an inescapable allure. Centuries of history are reflected in the numerous churches, museums and ruins that come into view as you walk through La Antigua's cobblestone streets. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the city has a bohemian charm, as its Spanish colonial influences contrast with Mayan traditions and the dramatic

backdrop of three awe-inspiring volcanoes.

WEDDING DESTINATION

La Antigua Guatemala is one of the most romantic destinations in the Americas, so it's no surprise many couples choose to say "I do" here, in both civil and religious ceremonies. Trained multilingual professionals are on hand to



plan your dream wedding, an unforgettable ceremony that will uniquely express your love. Choose from among many incredible locations, like the ruins of San José el Viejo, the churches of La Merced and Santa Clara, the Jardín Real de Santiago, Casa Santo Domingo or Finca Filadelfia, a 150-year-old coffee estate that's been transformed into a five-star resort. In a region known for its ancient Mayan roots, wedding ceremonies in La Antigua combine elegance and formality with a colorful atmosphere, offering a synergy of cultures, cuisines and celebrations.

La Antigua is also a

coveted spot for an idyllic and secluded honeymoon, as you celebrate love and commitment amid the romance and nostalgia that surround the city.

And, of course, the weather's never a problem—Guatemala is known as "the land of eternal spring," with temperatures averaging 72 degrees Fahrenheit year-round.

HOLY WEEK IN LA ANTIGUA GUATEMALA

Holy Week, or Semana Santa, is an excellent time to visit this colonial gem steeped in Catholic heritage. Honoring the passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, La Antigua is the setting for a colorful expression of faith: Teams of purple-robed participants, known as *cucuruchos*, take turns carrying heavy floats through the cobblestone streets, a sign of devotion and penitence brought by the Spanish in the 16th century.

Another breathtaking aspect of Semana Santa is the intricate, colorful "carpets" laid down by locals and religious orders along the processional route. Made with colored sawdust, pine needles, flowers, fruits, native plants and other materials, they are a true spectacle to behold.

THE MAYAN WORLD CALLS

In the north of Guatemala lies Petén, the heart of the

Top left: Tikal, Top right: Lake Atitlán, Below: A wedding at La Antigua Guatemala.

Mayan world. Fourteen municipalities form the heartland of this ancient realm, where indigenous languages like Itzá, Lacandón, Mopán, Q'eqchi' and Ixil are still spoken.

Getting here is easy—Mundo Maya International Airport in Flores welcomes national and international flights, as well as carriers taking travelers to nearby Mayan ruins. Nestled alongside Lake Petén Itzá, Flores is a destination in its own right, with picturesque shops and restaurants, winding alleys and aromatic street carts.



In Petén, you'll find archaeological wonders like Ceibal, Aguateca, San Bartolo, Uaxactún, Piedras Negras and, of course, Tikal, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. You'll uncover the mysteries of Yaxhá and El Mirador, home to the largest pyramid in the world by volume. In 2018, archaeologists uncovered more than 60,000 Mayan structures hidden in the jungles of Petén, forever changing what we understood about the scale and complexity of this ancient civilization.

Those tropical rainforests are considered one of the "lungs" of planet Earth because of their sheer size. The Maya Biosphere Reserve, established to preserve the biodiversity of the region, encompasses

Above: Surfing in Monterrico.
Right: Holy Week in La Antigua.





more than 8,340 square miles. Take a tour through the rainforest, go horseback-riding on trails or canoe along the San Juan, the Azul or the Chiquibul rivers.

LIVING MAYAN CULTURE CALLS

Altiplano, which includes the departments of Chimaltenango, Sololá, Quiché, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Huehuetenango and San Marcos, is one of the most visited areas in Guatemala, offering a wide range of natural attractions. Discover extensive and diverse fauna and flora, idyllic mountain landscapes, imposing volcanoes rising like colossi and splendid lakes that transmit utter serenity. You can also experience the ancient traditions of Mayan culture, with 21 indigenous tribes of Mayan origin still living in the region, each

with their own gastronomy, clothing, traditions and language. An impressive array of thousand-year-old traditions are on display at popular open-air bazaars, like the legendary street market in Chichicastenango.



Guatemalan cuisine is as varied as its people, having evolved with the passage of time and influences from abroad. Starting in the 16th century, the flavors and traditions of Mayan recipes were modified to reflect the tastes of Europeans. Some of Guatemala's

most iconic dishes come from this fusion: *pepián* (pictured), *kak'ik*, *tapado*, *piloyada antigüeña* and *gallo en chicha*, or “hen stew.” At the core of Guatemalan gastronomy is the four cornerstones—corn, chili peppers, beans and rice—combined in countless ways with meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, spices, nuts and more.

ADVENTURE CALLS LAKE ATITLÁN

Surrounded by the majestic Atitlán, Tolimán and San Pedro volcanoes, Lake Atitlán is often cited as the most beautiful lake in the world—Aldous Huxley once famously claimed the breathtaking body of water was “too much of a good thing.”

Here, warm air currents from the south intermingle with colder air masses from the high plateau, stirring the waters and producing

a notorious wind called Xocomil (“the sin collector”).

Numerous towns dot the shores of Atitlán, including Santa Catarina, San Antonio Palopó, San Lucas Tolimán, Santa Cruz La Laguna and the largest, Santiago Atitlán. The connection to Mayan culture is still strong, with traditional dress still worn and pre-Christian rituals still embraced.

The lake itself is a popular destination for paragliding, zip-lining, hiking and kayaking. More athletic travelers may want to enter the Atitlán marathon, known as “Corramos por el Lago.” Recognized by ESPN as one of the most demanding extreme marathons in the world, the full circuit starts in Panajachel, 4,900 feet above sea level, then ascends to 7,220 feet in less than 5 miles. (Half-marathons and other less grueling races are also available.)

GUATEMALA'S VOLCANOES Don't miss the opportunity to climb to the top of a volcano to admire the breathtaking vista.

One of more than 33 active volcanoes in Guatemala, Pacaya is one of the most active in all of Central America. Rising 8,373 feet above sea level, it last erupted in 1965 and has been constantly active since then. If it's quiet, you can access the Mackenney Crater, or opt to visit the Calderas Lagoon for sailing, fishing and relaxation.

Jutting 13,045 feet above sea level, Acatenango lies just outside the town of La Soledad, near La Antigua. Having last erupted in 1972, it's a sleeping giant —and the third-highest volcano in Central America. It's a real adventure to walk on its summit and watch the sunrise or sunset. Spending

the night camping at the base of Acatenango is a unique life experience.

Located in the department of Chiquimula, Ipala can be ascended via two routes: One begins in Agua Blanca and is 5.5 miles from base to summit, including several villages. The other, also starting in Agua Blanca, is longer and more complicated, but it crosses the beautiful hill Cerro Zacarías. When you reach the top, relax in the crystal clear waters of Ipala's stunning crater lagoon.

SAILFISH FISHING

As a destination for sailfish fishing, Guatemala is unmatched in Central America and was named one of the best in the world by *Sports Fishing* magazine and the United Nations World Tourism Organization. It is also one of the few countries

that regulates the sport, using more humane circle hooks to avoid causing harm and ensure the conservation of the species. The high season runs from November to May, though even veteran fishers should be aware that, averaging 110 to 150 pounds, the Pacific sailfish is considerably larger than its Atlantic counterpart.

Travelers to Guatemala can also enjoy more than 185 miles of black-sand beaches, forged from nearby volcanoes. Practice surfing and enjoy other water sports, or connect with nature by whale watching or visiting Monterrico, a small fishing village that's now a refuge for leatherback and olive ridley sea turtles. ♦

This special feature was produced in collaboration with MC Press America.

Lake Atitlán is often ranked one of the most beautiful in the world. Guatemala's sailfishing season runs November to May. Pacaya volcano in Escuintla last erupted in March 2014.



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