

Guatemala: meaning the “land of the forests”

Overview: While Guatemala is still primarily a country of transit, it is increasingly also perceived as a country of destination for refugees fleeing violence and persecution in neighboring countries.

Language: There are 25 languages spoken in Guatemala. Guatemalen Spanish is the official and most spoken language. In addition, there are 22 different Mayan languages as well as two other indigenous languages - Garífuna and Xinca.



COMMON PHRASES

Hello – Hola!

Welcome – Bienvenido(a)!

How are you? – Como estás?

What’s your name? – Cómo te llamas?
Cuál es tu nombre?

Thank you – Gracias/ Muchas Gracias

Reply to thank you – De nada / No hay de qué

Goodbye – Adiós / Hasta luego

Facts:

- **General:** Capital: Guatemala City, President: Alejandro Giammattei, Currency: Guatemalan quetzal, Population: 16.86 million (2020) World Bank.
- **Greetings:** When meeting someone for the first time, it's customary to say, “mucho gusto” (a shortened version of “nice to meet you”). **Simply saying “hola” is considered too casual.** The usually well-received hola is formally replaced in Guatemala with the more acceptable buenos días, good morning; buenas tardes, good afternoon; or buenas noche, good evening. Women greet one another, and men, with air kisses, while men greet one another with firm handshakes.
- **Food** is an important part of **Guatemalan customs** and culture. Three meals a day is the norm with the largest meal being lunch. Staple foods throughout the country include corn tortillas and tamales, black beans, rice, wheat bread, pasta, corn, pork, beef, chicken, and cheese form the backbone of most Guatemalan cuisine. Meat stews (*caldos*) and soups (*sopas*) are easily the most popular dishes among locals.
- **Guatemalan Food in Fort Worth** – El Mason Chapin, 1560 N Sylvania Ave Fort Worth, TX 76111,
- **Religion:** #1 Roman Catholic – 50%, #2 Protestant -37%, Atheism, Agnosticism, or Irreligion- 11% (World Atlas.com)
- **Don’t take photos without asking.**

Current Events

- **In 2020**, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the economic prospects, heightened insecurity and exacerbated displacement across borders. Guatemala, principally a transit country, but also hosting over 1,500 asylum-seekers and refugees, saw an increased number of arrivals of people in search of protection. (UNHCR)
- **Poverty:** The main issue in Guatemala is its searing poverty; however, gangs are becoming more of an issue here as well. (EIT)
- **Gang Violence:** many gangs are more powerful than the police or politicians. They have a sophisticated recruitment system which targets children around the ages of 9 – 12. They recruit young boys to be drug dealers and young girls to be girlfriends. Should the children and their families refuse to join the gangs, they are targeted and killed. (EIT)
- **Lack of Opportunities:** Even with a college degree, the economies are so destabilized that it is nearly impossible to find work. If you do find work, you often have to pay a portion of your salary as a “war tax” to the gangs who run your neighborhood.
- **Drought:** also has plagued parts of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in what is known as the “Dry Corridor.”

Sources for further study: (UNHCR)<https://reporting.unhcr.org/guatemala>, (EIT)
<https://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/border-crisis-101-answering-your-biggest-questions-about-the-immigration-crisis-at-the-border/>, <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-guatemala>

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