



GLOBAL THEOLOGY CONFERENCE

WELCOME TO GUATEMALA

THE LAND

Guatemala lies in the middle of the Central American isthmus. It has a short stretch of coastline on the Caribbean, and a 200-mile coast on the Pacific Ocean.

Most of Guatemala is mountainous and volcanic. A number of the volcanoes are intermittently active, and earthquakes are frequent. Guatemala's capital cities have been destroyed four times by earthquakes. A devastating earthquake in 1976 left 23,000 dead and 1.5 million homeless.

From November to May there is a dry season, and from May to November there is abundant rainfall. Guatemala City, on a plateau surrounded by mountains, is 5,000 feet above sea level, thus enjoying a pleasant year-round spring-like climate.

HISTORY

The old Mayan empire flourished in what is today Guatemala for over one thousand years before the Spanish conquest. Guatemalans are justly proud of their Mayan and Spanish ancestors. Guatemala won its independence from Spain in 1821, was briefly annexed by Mexico, and then was a member of the Central America Federation until the federation was dissolved in 1838. From that time until the revolution in 1944, Guatemala was under the control of a long line of military dictatorships. The present constitution defines Guatemala as a sovereign democratic republic. The executive power is vested in the president and vice-president, who are elected every four years by popular vote.

Although the economy of Guatemala is based on agriculture, manufacturing and tourism have played an increasing role. The leading exports are coffee, cotton, bananas, sugar, and beef.

The monetary unit used in Guatemala is the quetzal (1 quetzal = \$1.00 U.S.).

Buses are inexpensive and available within the city and around the country. Stay off public transport unless you are fluent in Spanish and the culture, and know the bus routes exactly. Taxis are also available, and cars may be rented.

THE PEOPLE

Almost half of the 5.7 million people in Guatemala are Indians. The rest of the population is largely a mixture of Spanish and Indian.

Spanish is the official language of the republic, but there are over twenty Indian dialects spoken. The most widely spoken Indian languages are Quiché, Cakchiquel, Mam, and Kekchí. Many of the Indians do not speak Spanish. English is understood in tourist centers.

Roman Catholicism is the religion of the majority, but there is complete freedom of worship. Protestant groups are very active.

Family incomes vary greatly; those in the large cities are much higher than those in the rest of the country. The average income in the city is about \$325 per month; however, in rural Guatemala the average is about \$60 a month. This income provides the family food and some other necessary items. A large number of city dwellers and middle-income families own cars, television sets, and other conveniences. Some of the homes in the small towns also have these conveniences, but not to the same extent. Men usually support their families, but sometimes their wives must work. Among the very poor, children also work as soon as they are able.

Typical native dishes are tamales (cornmeal or rice dough filled with meat and spices), fried yucca (a starch plant), and fried plátanos with honey, cream or black beans. Black beans are as popular in Guatemala as hamburgers are in the U.S.

The most popular sports are basketball, soccer, and volleyball. Tennis, golf, baseball, horse racing, cockfights, and occasional bullfights are also enjoyed. Guatemalans are an industrious people; many work long hours making attractive leather, silver, gold, and woven handicrafts, which are either sold in the country or exported. Guatemala is also noted for its marimba, a musical instrument invented by the Mayans, made of wood and played with sticks padded with rubber.

GREETINGS AND GESTURES

When meeting someone:

- Make eye contact, shake hands, and say something such as “Glad to meet you” (“Mucho gusto de conocerle”) or “How do you do?” (“¿Cómo está?”).
- Show personal interest in getting to know the people.
- Give complete attention to the person one you are greeting.
- Men greet each other with a hearty handshake, and close friends hug and pat each other on the back.
- Between close women friends, the usual greeting is a kiss on the cheek and a gentle hug.
- Elderly people usually give a warm hug and also shake hands.

- When greeting government officials or other important people, respect is shown by calling them Señor and their title.
- Ask permission before taking someone's picture.
- Eating is mixed with conversation.
- Meals generally last longer than in the United States.
- Punctuality is admirable but not strictly observed. Individuals are considered far more important than schedules.
- A soft voice is preferred to any loud, boisterous talking.
- Most common United States gestures are all right.
- Avoid making a fist with the thumb sticking out between the index and middle fingers.
- The American "OK" sign, with thumb and index finger forming a circle, is obscene in Latin America.

COMMONLY USED PHRASES

English	Phonetic	Spanish
Good day	BWEN-ohz DEE-ahss	Buenos días
Good evening	BWEN-ahss NO-chey	Buenas noches
How are you?	Ko-mo ess-TA oo-STED	¿Cómo está usted?
My name is . . .	may YA-mo . . .	Me llamo . . .
What is your name?	KO-mo say YA-ma	¿Cómo se llama?
Please	por fa-VOR	Por favor
Thank you	GRAHSS-yahss	Gracias
Excuse me	payr-DO-nay-may	Perdóneme
Goodbye	ah-DYOHss	Adiós
Yes	SEE	Sí
No	NO	No
Sir	sen-YOR	Señor
Madam/Mrs.	sen-yo-rah	Señora
Miss	sen-yo-REE-tah	Señorita
Do you speak English?	AH-blah oo-STED een-GLAYS	¿Habla usted inglés?
Sit down, please	See-EN-tay-say, por fa-VOR	Síntese, por favor
Goodbye, see you again	ah-DYOHss AH-stah LWAY-go	Adiós, Hasta Luego
You have been very kind	Ah-SEE-tho MOO-ee ah-MAH-blav	Ha sido muy amable
Too much	day-mah-see-AH-tho	demasiado
At what time?	AH-KAY OH-raw	¿A qué hora?
The food is tasty		muy sabaroso
The food is very good		muy delecioso
I'm sorry		

TRAVEL TIPS

Don't be a tourist:

- travel very light—one bag
- avoid electronic equipment and cameras carried in traditional cases marked with brand names--carry simple bag with essentials.

- dress bland (plain shirt and pants, dark shoes)
- never carry anything of value in your pockets
- leave your wallet at home—use a money belt

Make photocopies of your passport.

Carry two extra passport photos.

If you go off on your own, carry a card with the name and address of where you are staying written in Spanish.