



CULTURAL COURSES: SPANISH ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA



With majestic volcanoes rising out of lush green rainforest, highland villages steeped in tradition and vibrant, spirited people, Guatemala put quite simply is a magical destination!

A natural paradise that ranks at the pinnacle of biological diversity for Central America, this 'Land of Eternal Spring' plays host to 19 ecosystems and a staggering array of flora and fauna, set amidst mountainous forest highlands, jungle plains and glistening volcanic beaches.

The unique geology of Guatemala also includes a tremendous system of above-ground and subterranean caves, which the indigenous Maya believe serve as mystical portals between our world and the underworld. Rising between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, Guatemala covers an area just slightly smaller than England where rich coffee, cacao, fruit and sugar cane grow in abundance.



Brilliantly coloured weavings and textiles abound at the endless array of raucous fiestas and bustling market stalls, hinting at the magnificent human tapestry of living cultures which colours daily Guatemalan life and captivates even the most worldly of travellers. Guatemala is also famous for its kaleidoscopic buses!

For many, Guatemala's rich and often turbulent history is another enticing aspect of visiting the country. Characterised by the rivalry and struggle between the indigenous Maya and colonising Europeans, this sometimes harmonious but often violent relationship is deeply rooted in the country's history and still plays a role in modern day politics.



Guatemala was the centre of the great Mayan civilisation from about 300 to 900 A.D. From the crumbling ancient ruins of this lost civilisation to the colonial architecture of the cobble-stoned villages, history oozes from every pore of Guatemala's towns and cities, hinting at an infinitely complex past which continues resonate into the present as different cultures mingle in this fascinating melting pot of humanity.



In the wildly beautiful Central highlands, the indigenous Mayan Indian culture still dominates, whereas in the sprawling metropolis of Guatemala City you are likely to see a colourful population of Ladinos, descendents of Europeans and Indians, African immigrants and the predominantly Hispanic European minority.

Beautiful **Antigua**, where all of our placements are based, is arguably the most picturesque and certainly one of the oldest cities in Central America, characterised by a mellow, yet distinctly international feel. The local residents of Antigua are warmly referred to as Green bellies or *panza verde* due to the abundance of avocados that grow in the region.

Antigua's splendour is protected by three giant guardian volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango, providing a stunning setting which attracts thousands of visitors every year. Antigua is one of the most popular places in Central America to learn Spanish so you are bound to meet lots of other students and travellers!

As for **things to do** with your spare time, whether you're an adventure-mad extreme sports enthusiast or a nature-loving bird-watcher, Guatemala's awesome unspoilt natural habitat will have something for you. The extraordinary terrain around the volcanoes and caves provides the perfect setting for **mountaineering** and **caving** (spelunking) whereas the fast-moving rivers are ideal for **boating**, **white-water rafting** and **windsurfing**, with Lake Atitlán also popular for **diving**.

Besides this you can also find ample opportunity to go **mountain biking**, bathe in **hot springs** surrounded by lush green jungle, or indulge your passion for nature in one of the country's national parks - you might even catch a glimpse of the resplendent quetzal, Guatemala's national bird.

Doing a placement in Guatemala will give you a chance to immerse yourself in this fascinating culture and to explore one of the world's most naturally diverse and beautiful lands. Whether you are doing a teaching placement or learning Spanish, amazing Guatemala is bound to leave a lasting impression!

YOUR PROJECT : LEARNING SPANISH

Did you know that Spanish is either an official language or is spoken by a significant portion of the population in no less than 23 countries around the world? Pick up a useful skill and gain confidence by practising it in a Spanish-speaking country!

Many travellers in foreign countries feel that learning at least something of the language can open up a whole new world of experience for you. In Guatemala, a simple 'hello' or 'thank you' in Spanish will often earn the respect of local people not to mention making it easier to find your way around.

But for travellers who are seriously interested in learning or improving their Spanish, what better way forward than to take a language course at a prestigious Spanish Academy in Antigua. On a Travellers language course here you will study with fully qualified and experienced Spanish teachers, giving you an ideal foundation to practice your newfound skills around the town.

The Academy was founded in 1992 and guarantees a completely professional, yet informal and fun teaching service for its students. The Spanish course consists of intensive, one-on-one tuition along with a few larger group classes. You will be taught using the highly reputed 'global method' which has been used successfully by the Peace Corps in Latin America and uses visual, auditory, verbal and accumulated knowledge techniques applied to specific situations.

Standard courses consist of five lessons per week each lasting four hours (20 hours per week). All classes are predominantly held in Spanish and you will be encouraged to speak and eventually think in Spanish as much as possible! However, don't let this intimidate you as most teachers will speak English.

At the end of the course, you'll receive a Certificate issued by the Spanish School, stating that you have done the course, to what level, and the duration in hours of the course you have completed.

See right for two photographs of some of the gorgeous Spanish school buildings (centre two photos)

ABOUT THE LANGUAGE CENTRES

We work with three language centres in Guatemala, all located in and around Antigua:

Antigua Location – Main School : First founded in 1543 Antigua remained the capital city for the over 200 hundred years until the earthquake of 1776, reducing the city back to rubble. The city repopulated gradually managing to retain the traditional character.

San Juan Del Obispo – Rural: Four Kilometres south of Antigua is the picturesque town of San Juan. It is named after its founder Francisco Marroquin, the first Bishop of Guatemala. The town is located 1600 meters above sea level at the base of the slopes of volcano Agua.

This is a small rural town with, on a clear day, absolutely awe inspiring views of the dramatic landscape. From the north you can see across the marvellous outstretching Panchoy valley, where the conquistadors founded the very noble city of 'Santiago of the Horses' or Antigua in 1543. The Town of San Juan has far less local amenities at hand compared to its two bigger brothers but has far more to offer for both its local culture and inspiring views. Buses to Antigua are



normally every 30 minutes, costing 2 Quetzals. The peaceful nature of San Juan offers the student the opportunity to completely immerse themselves in their Spanish studies.

Jocotenango (Hoco-ten-ango) – A New Modern Suburb: A suburb of Antigua in Sacatepéquez; it was first founded by the survivors of the catastrophe which destroyed the city of Santiago Almolonga in the year 1541. The word Jocotenango means “Land of Jocotes”.

It is a warm and friendly town that offers a real taste of local life and is located just 2 kilometres from Antigua Guatemala. From here you can walk to Antigua in around 30 minutes or you can take the bus which costs 1 Quetzal. The town is modern and there is access to most of the usual amenities of modern life such as internet cafes, Laundrettes, health centres (doctor’s clinics).

SUPPORT

Our support staff in Guatemala are excellent and there is a 24 hour emergency international telephone line direct to the Head Office. You’ll also receive lots of help from the very friendly and helpful staff in Guatemala there to look after you!

ON YOUR ARRIVAL IN GUATEMALA

You will fly into Guatemala City Airport where you will be met by Mr Leonel Garcia, a member of Travellers staff. Leonel will introduce you to the area and escort you directly to your homestay accommodation. The next day you will be met at your accommodation and taken to the site of your placement. Our staff on the ground will ensure that you are given a full induction and orientation around the town of Antigua.



Travellers General Manager in Guatemala is Ms Lilian Santizo (right), who lives just outside Antigua. Lilian will oversee your placement and be on hand for help, advice and support throughout.

ACCOMMODATION & FOOD

Accommodation with host families means that Travellers volunteers get to eat, sleep, work, socialise and generally live like a Guatemalan. Local family homestays enable you to fully experience the local culture *from the inside*. Many of our volunteers remain friends with their host families long after they leave Guatemala and in some cases they return to the country later especially to visit their family.



Some homestays are more like small hotels, which can accommodate between 1 and 10 volunteers at any one time. Many offer the option of single or shared rooms, and generally houses within the same town are in close proximity with each other.

The accommodation is comfortable, with a ‘western-style’ bathroom (usually shared with the family).

For the more independently-minded traveller, we also work with families who will ensure that your needs are taken care of whilst leaving you free to come and go as you please. Please let your Project Coordinator know your preferences, and we will make sure that you are placed in the most suitable accommodation.

All of your meals will be provided from Monday to Saturday, leaving you free to sample local eateries on Sundays. Expect to develop a taste for corn tortillas, tostadas and tacos in plentiful supply! Although it could be said that the emphasis with Guatemalan food is more nutritional than culinary, western and international dishes are also easily available in Antigua.

Although Guatemalans are big on eating meat, we can easily cater for vegetarians as long as we know in advance.

THE NEXT STEP

If you wish to join us on one of our exciting projects then please fill in either an online application form at our website (www.travellersworldwide.com) or one that is attached to our brochure. Once you have booked and confirmed your place we will send you detailed pack information regarding your placement and country.

I do hope you join us and please do call or email if you have any questions at all about this or any of our other projects – 01903 502595 or email info@travellersworldwide.com

If you would like to know more about Guatemala in general, or about any of our other projects, please visit our website at www.travellersworldwide.com

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