

Soggy Paws Guatemala Travel Notes 2007

Books and Other Resources	
Lonely Planet Guide to Guatemala	A "must have". In Guatemala and don't have it? Download it in PDF from the LP website, about \$2-\$3 per chapter.
Central America on a Shoestring	Another good pub from Lonely Planet.
Spanish Now	A very good self-teaching guide for Spanish. Get the 'Teacher's Edition' (has answers and CD's) about \$30 from Amazon.com. Get this book even if you're going to 'language school'. Schools tend to emphasize verbal skills and if you're a visual learner this will be a good supplement to a language school.
Spanish Verb Tenses	Very good supplement to Spanish Now. Even if you don't think you need to learn all the tenses, the first half of the book is good explanations and workbook practice for present tenses of most useful verbs.
Spanish Pronouns and Prepositions	Another good supplement to Spanish Now.
Thorntree Forum on Lonely Planet	The 'Thorn Tree' forum on the Lonely Planet site has a very active 'branch' (subforum) on Central America, Guatemala and Belize in particular. http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com/
Maps	Best set of maps I've seen, by area in Guatemala, download and unzip PDF file http://www.prensalibre.com/especiales/ME/mapas/index.htm
FAQ's	
Weather & Seasons	The weather in the Rio Dulce and Tikal area is similar to Florida, but wetter. Hot and steamy in the summer and cooler in the winter. The weather in the higher parts of the country (Guate City, Antigua, Atitlan) is much cooler and can be quite chilly at night even in the summer. High Season in Guatemala is June-Aug and Easter. Prices tend to be higher then and places more booked (but also more scheduled activities going on). Wet season is Aug - November.
Money	The local currency is the Quetzal. Current exchange rate (11/07) is \$1 to 7.6Q. Take some emergency US cash, including some smaller bills, but ATM's are available in country all over, and are the best way to get Quetzales. Many Guate establishments will accept credit cards but typically charge you a 6-12% premium. Cash is preferred everywhere. Many places quote prices in US dollars. Sometimes you can pay in USD, especially in an emergency. If quoted in one currency and you pay in the other, sometimes you get ripped on the exchange rate, so ask. Check the current exchange rate in the local paper, Prensa Libre (in Spanish). http://www.prensalibre.com Right now it is now fluctuating that much.
Flying Here	Spirit Airlines (www.spiritair.com) flies into Guatemala City and several other Central American locations from several U.S. cities. They are a good budget choice (\$200 r/t from Ft. Lauderdale). American flies here also. Taca is a local airline that I've heard mentioned by other people www.taca.com
Newspapers	There are several daily newspapers. I like the Prensa Libre, it's a little more upscale than the others. 3Q on the street. Or find it here: http://www.prensalibre.com
Security	Guatemalans are extraordinarily friendly and generally as honest and trustworthy as the rest of the world. However, as elsewhere, tourists attract people who prey on them. You should always be on 'high security'. Keep your money and expensive things close and hidden as much as possible. Keep your daily money in a different pocket than your 'stash' so you are never flashing a big wad. Take personal pepper spray (check in your luggage, don't carry on) and keep it with you in case you feel threatened. Ask at your hotel where it's safe to be and where it isn't and get them to recommend a cab. See Thorntree 'security' threads. See also the US Embassy notes on security. http://guatemala.usembassy.gov/
Contact by Telephone	Recently they added an extra digit to the phone numbers. All phone numbers should be 8 digits. If you have a 7 digit number, try putting a '2' in front. This *may* work. To call any 8 digit phone number from the U.S. 011-502-xxxx-xxxx.
Cell Phone	You can buy a 'pay as you go' cell phone in any bigger town for about \$20 and calling in country and out of country costs about 10-15 cents a minute. Look for Tigo, Claro, or

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	Movistar signs. You can roam in Guatemala on Cingular/ATT but it costs about \$2.75/minute. It doesn't take many minutes to justify purchase of a local phone. If you have your GSM phone 'unlocked' before you come, all you need is a Sim card (but it may cost the same as buying the whole phone). Watch for 'triple minute' and 'double minute' days for your carrier and charge your minutes then. (doble saldo in Spanish).
Medical	For the most part, the Guatemalan doctors are well trained and *most* speak pretty good English. The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City has a list of English speaking doctors in Guate City. You can get treatment for just about anything here at a pretty reasonable price. However, we were 'taken' at least once by a Guatemalan plastic surgeon who wanted to charge us exorbitant US prices. ASK the price!
Speaking Spanish	Do you NEED to know Spanish to get around? No, but you will in general pay more and not have as good time if you don't have at least some basic Spanish. There are hotels and tour companies that cater to English-only tourists, but you will pay US prices for these. See Antigua Language Schools. If you have time, start in Antigua and go to school for a couple of weeks, it will be well worth the time spent, and you can see all of the Antigua, Atitlan, Chichi, and highlands area in daytrips while in school. Almost every major town has a couple of language schools so if you want to go someplace different, try Quetzaltenango (aka Xela), San Pedro, Coban.

Buses

*** See table of major bus companies at end of document ***

Litegua	Fronteras, Guatemala City, Morales, Puerto Barrios	50Q 'Express' bus from Frontera (aka Rio Dulce) 0830 to Guat City. Reserved seats, few stops, sometimes A/C. Pre-Booked 40Q Litegua shuttle from Guate to Antigua (if you wait til you get to Guate, a taxi will cost you plenty).
Fuente del Norte	Hourly runs between Fronteras and Tikal	Has mostly old poor condition second class buses, but the prices are right. You can buy a ticket that assures you of a seat, but they also cram on more people so there are usually people staning in the aisles. This company also has a Premier Class service bus called Maya del Oro, it is much better, but more expensive. The cruisers in the Rio Dulce call Fuente del Norte Muerte del Norte.
Shuttle Buses	All Over	With the exception of the Greyhound style 'express' buses, the local buses are cheap but dangerous. If you have luggage, the door to door service of the minivans is well worth it. Every town visited by tourists has shuttle buses for the other major cities.

Antigua – Hotels

Travel Dates: July – December 2007 (several trips)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Description</u>
Posada Don Quixote	Next to 'Yellow House' at 1a Calle Poniente 24		Not in 2007 Lonely Planet. Several hotels we chose were full. This wasn't. Similar to other 'budget' hotels. About \$16US for a small double/private bath. Had wifi.
Posada Juma Ocag	Calzada de Santa Lucia Norte 13 (near the Mercado at the west end of town)	7832 3109	This was our budget hotel of choice. Decent clean rooms (but not luxurious), hot water, pretty grounds. A few blocks from Central Plaza and right next to local market. \$15 US for double/private. No wifi/internet in room but several café's nearby. Restaurant across the street.
Posada de Don Rodrigo	5a Ave Norte 17	7832 2664	Not in 2007 Lonely Planet. Dave stayed here before and it is nice and pricey \$85US. Restaurant on site and gorgeous grounds.
Casa Santo Domingo	3a Calle Oriente 28	7832 0140	We did not stay here, but toured it as part of the Elizabeth Bell tour. It looked gorgeous. LP says it is 'from \$120US'. Multiple professionally done museums
Hotel Casa Rustica	6th Ave. Norte # 8	7832 3709	One block west of plaza, across from Black Cat Hostel. Great location, adequate rooms, reasonable price. WIFI http://www.casarusticagt.com/

Antigua – Eating / Entertainment

Café la Escudilla	4a Ave Norte 4		Good food, great value, nice grounds, clean bathrooms. Our favorite restaurant in Antigua. See LP writeup.
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Café Condessa	Off the center square, thru the bookstore.		Very good, convenient, reasonable prices. Has good bathrooms.
La Fonda del Calle Real	3 Locations, see LP		This was ok, seemed a little on the touristy side. We were serenaded at our table by guitars. A little pricey for what you get.
Café Sky	1 Ave Sur 15		A little away from the center square, but worth the walk.. both for drinks on the roof and lunch in the middle section (covered) Awesome quesadillas.
Weiner	Across from Juma Ocag		Had a nice inexpensive lunch here. Has free internet use with meal.
Bagel Barn	Just off the Central Park, on the road that runs on the south side of the park.		Good bagels, also bring-your-laptop wifi Free while you eat
Café Flor	4a Av Sur 1	7832-5274	Good Thai food. Live piano music nightly, interesting film star photo collection.
Pena del Sol Latino	Same road as Bagel Barn		Great food. Run by an American couple (ie well run). Live music nightly, usually Peruvian acoustic music (very nice).
Mono Loco	5 Avenida Sur		Close to square, has bar, food, nice internet café with wifi, several TV's for sports.
Cuevita del las Urquizas	2a Calle Oriente 9D		We finally found this place on our 3 rd trip. It was a great meal for cheap—where the locals eat. They close early on Sunday evening.
Antigua – Language Schools			
La Union	1a. Avenida Sur #21	7832 7337	Located in the SE side of town, on 1 st Ave Sur, near Café Sky. Good operation, reasonable prices, no registration fee. Sherry attended school here for 2 weeks. http://www.launion.edu.gt/
Centro Linguistico Internacional	Avenida Espritu Santu #6	7832 1039	Located on the SW side of town. Our friends went here and had a few better amenities for the price of lodging. Reported good teachers, same one-on-one as La Union http://www.spanishcontact.com/
Antigua – Wifi			
Though there are lots of internet café's in Antigua, most don't have wifi or encourage laptops. Below locations are verified laptop friendly places.			
Bagel Barn	Just off the Central Park, on the road that runs on the south side of the park.		Good bagels, also bring-your-laptop wifi Free while you eat. Free DVD movies on big screen twice a day. Serves beer and other drinks.
Mono Loco	5 Avenida Sur		Close to square, has bar, food, nice internet café with wifi, several TV's for sports.
Y Tu Pina	1 Ave Sur (across from Café Sky)		Nice laptop lounge area with a number of couches and tables, AND 3-prong plugs for your charger. Serves coffee, drinks, and smoothies.
Antigua – Other			
La Ruta Maya	Tour Company off Central Park		They book lots of tours. Door to door shuttle service all over Guatemala. They were the best price and the only company that put together a shuttle package to go to ChiChi, leave our luggage in the van, and go on to Pana. \$7 US pp for each leg. New van with good driver. Reliable services (have now taken 5 trips with them) Emergency number 24 x 7 (in case your driver doesn't show).
Plus Travel	Tour Company		Best prices in town. OK service. They tend to 'pack' their shuttle buses.
De la Mancha Expeditions	Tour Company Yellow House lobby		Where we booked the 8\$ Pacaya Hike. Great guide and good driver. 10 persons on our hike.
Elizabeth Bell City Tour	Meet in Central Square	7832 5821	Pricey (\$20 US pp) but very good 3 hour walking tour in English with lots of insight. Great way to learn the town. 9:30am in the Central Park Tu, Wed, Fri, Sat. No

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			reservations required. http://www.antiguatours.net
Textile Demo at Casa de Artes	4a Avenida Sur #13		Wed 4:30-6 PM. \$4 pp. Seminar in English with best description of textiles and what to look for before buying. Racks of textiles for sale (\$\$).
Textile Museum Casa del Tejido Antigua	1a Calle Poniente #51		Inexpensive entry, has textiles on display (and for sale \$\$) by region. English speaking guide available sometimes.
Artisans Market	On West side of Calzada Santa Lucia		Extensive local artisan market, also regular city market next door
Museo de Santiago de las Caballeros	On the Main Square	7832-2868	Good museum with old paintings, arms, clothing, furniture, etc of the Colonial period. Great bronze cannon display. 10Q pp
Great Marimba Band	Daily in Posada Don Rodrigo from 2pm to 4pm		Don Rodrigo is one block N of the park. LP only lists them under 'restaurants' but they have (fairly expensive) lodgings too. But for Marimba, just walk in and hang out.
Cerro de la Cruz walk	Meet at Municipal Police Tourism Office on side of City Hall Palace		10 AM and 3 PM daily hike to city overlook with police officers. 1.5 hours. Free.
Nim P'ot Artisan Market	5 th Ave Norte		Many huilpuiles and lots of other local artisanry. Comparable price to the markets, but no one bugging you to buy. Inside out of the weather. Also can pick up the Finca Azotea shuttle there. http://www.nimpot.com
Jades, SA	4a Calle Oriente#34		Great place to learn about Jade from experts. Lots on the history of jade in Guatemala and the best displays of old pieces. Lots to spend money on here. MUCH cheaper prices but unknown quality in local vendor stands.
Finca Azotea (coffee tour)	Just outside Antigua on the north side	7831-1120	A coffee plantation with a visitor's center and also 2 other museums on site. 30Q entry includes free shuttle service from Central Park in Antigua (comes by every hour on the hour from 10am to 4pm) Good tour, good coffee. http://www.centrozotea.com
Panajachel & Atitlan Hotels			
Trip Dates: August 2007			
Hotel Utz Jay	Panajachel-5ta Calle 2-50.	762-0217	Small, quiet, nice grounds, very clean. Restaurant. \$25-\$30. Best value we saw in Pana. We personally checked 4-5 hotels in the \$15-25 price range. http://www.hotelutzjay.com
Hopedaje Tzutujil	Panajachel		Lonely Planet made this sound much better than it was. Average budget hotel in a not great location for a private-bath-double.
La Casa Del Mundo	On Lake Atitlan at Jaibolito	5218-5332	<u>A not to be missed hotel.</u> Best on the lake. Great food, swimming, hiking, kayaking. \$25-\$85. Reserve ahead. http://www.lacasadelmundo.com/
Atitlan Eating			
Sunset Bar and Grill	On the water at foot of Calle Santander		Great view of the lake, big seating area with good food and drinks.
Hotel Utz Jay	See hotels		Nice quiet good breakfast.
Casa Del Mundo	See hotels		They serve meals to the public (come by water taxi or on foot). Every meal here was very good. If you're staying there, don't miss the 'family style' dinner.
Atitlan Other			
Boat transport	From lake docks in Pana		Local boat shuttles leave from Pana to most points on lake every half hour. Check at hotel or with Inguat for fees to where you want to go (generally 10Q for a 1 leg trip, 20Q

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			for a full lake run). Full day lake tours leave in morning to several towns around the lake, stop in each town and wait for you, higher prices for tourists.
Santiago Atitlan Visit			Most visited town on lake besides Pana. Interesting history and lots of artisan shops. Hike to church at top of town for great view.
Other Lake towns visits			See Lonely Planet Guide for description of what there is to see in each town.
Guatemala City – Hotels			
Trip Dates: July-Dec 2007			
Hotel Spring	Zone 1 8 th Avenida btwn 12 & 13 Calle		Good Zone 1 location. Longtime cruiser favorite in old building with big courtyards. Very helpful staff. Clean rooms \$22 private bath, but a little shabby. 4 blocks to Litegua bus station.
Posada Belen Museo Hotel	Zone 1 13a Calle 10-30 13 th Calle btwn 11 th & 12 Ave.		\$43 double with private bath. Will pick up at airport (for cost). Within walking distance of Litegua terminal & Zone 1 shopping. Friends said nice things about it. Great pillows! http://www.posadabelen.com
Las Torres	Zone 10		Mixed rep with cruisers. Rooms about same as Spring. \$25 private bath with 'Rio Dulce Cruiser' discount. Walking distance of shopping and restaurants in Zona Viva. http://www.aparthotel-lastorres.com
Biltmore	Zone 10		Supposedly \$65/nite if you reserve ahead. A nice (in US terms) hotel for high-end Guatemalan prices
Hotel Patricia's	Zone 13, 19 Calle 10-65, Aurora II	2261-4251	Very close to airport. WIFI. \$12-\$15pp, call ahead for reservations. Price includes airport pickup and Continental breakfast. Will accept credit cards but it's cheaper to pay cash. Family hotel, quiet, clean but simple. Only has shared bathrooms (3 rms to 1 bathroom). http://patriciashotel.com/
Hotel Dos Lunas	Zone 13, 21 Calle C 10-92 Zona 13, Aurora II	2261-4248	Very close to airport. Includes transport to airport. Free wifi. Double w/ private bath \$32 US. Bunk bed \$12. http://www.hoteldoslunas.com
Hotel Casa Blanca	Zone 13, 15 Calle C 7-35 Zona 13, Aurora I	2261-3116	About \$35/nite. Bar and (limited) food on premises. Free shuttle to airport. Our picky friends really liked this place. http://www.casablancagt.com/
Good comments on Guat City Hotels (and some other places) here: http://www.mostlymaya.com/2Guathotels.html			
Restaurants	Lots throughout city, Check Lonely Planet		Zone 10 is best area for having a variety of restaurants within walking distance of hotel.
Guatemala City – Other			
Transportation			Taxis are relatively expensive, city buses ridiculously cheap-1Q to anywhere. Most hotel staff can tell you which busses to catch. Watch your wallet and stuff anywhere you go. Backpacks should be hard to open and worn on front (friends had camera stolen out of backpack while walking)
Taxi Drivers	Roderico Lopez	5703-0606 (c) 2288-3180 (h)	English speaking taxi driver near Zone 10 that can be had for approximately \$10/hour and will escort you anywhere you want to go. Recommended by Vita.
Taxi Drivers	Moises Hernandez	5616-0282 (c) 5482-4565 (h)	Taxi driver that can be had for approximately \$10/hour and will escort you anywhere you want to go. Recommended by Vita. Little English.

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City Market	Just east of the main Square at the top of 8 th Avenida		Full city block 4 stories high. Anything you want including excellent quality \$3 Guatemala souvenir Tshirts
Shopping	6 th Avenida Zone 1		Daily inexpensive street stalls along the top of 6 th Avenida
Shopping	Los Proceros Mall, Zone 10		There are 2 huge malls within sight of each other at the intersection of Proceros and Reforma. You can buy any U.S. style goods you are looking for there.
Rio Dulce			
Van Driver	Edgar	5529 8140	Has done several trips with cruisers around here. We did a half day trip for Q600. Not much English, but good driver & OK van.
Van Driver & English Guide	Dimus Pinto Julio Cordoba pepecajas@gmail.com	5942 4059 4010 0710	These two guys are based in Puerto Barrios. We met them in Quirigua, where Julio was assisting as a guide/interpreter for a group. Dimas is his buddy the van driver who seemed more knowledgeable, but doesn't speak much English. Not necessarily a pair, but could be.
Catamarans Hotel	Has several free boat shuttle trips a day to/from town		Again, didn't stay here ourselves, but this is a fairly upscale resort with nice accommodations, some with A/C. Also has a pool, big restaurant and sports bar. Wifi & internet.
Tortugal Hotel	Go to Brunos and ask them to call Tortugal on the radio.	5306 6432	Since we are on a boat, we didn't stay here ourselves, but several travelers have told us how much they liked Tortugal. They have both backpacker and 'rustic' accommodations. Nice grounds, can swim off their docks and can walk to town. (Many other places in Rio Dulce require a boat ride to get to/from town) Has internet & wifi http://tortugal.com/bungalows.htm
For lots of Rio Information: http://www.riodulcechisme.com			
Coban, Lanquin, Semuc Champey Trip Dates: October 2007 Also see http://www.cobanav.net Note that this is NOT Copan in Honduras, where the ruins are!			
Casa D'Acuna	4a Calle 3-11, Zona 2, Coban	7951 0482	A hotel and restaurant in Coban. They organize trips to Lanquin and Semuc Champey.
Posada Las Marias	800 Meters from Semuc Champey	7861 2209	Where we stayed in Semuc Champey. They have dorms and a couple of newer/nicer doubles with private bath. Q25 Dorm, Q70 private room, Q150 for the big new rooms. Can arrange a shuttle to Tikal Q120, leaves at 6:30am or a River Rafting trip 8:30am - 2pm Call Ahead to arrange. Juan Carlos. http://posadalasmarias.com/
El Retiro	In Lanquin	7983 0009	Inexpensive backpacker type place. My friends stayed there and raved about it.
Grutas de Lanquin			This is a cave system that you can visit. It is a huge area, lit. You must use a guide to visit, but it's not expensive. It is cool, damp, and kind of dirty. Book trips from Coban or Lanquin.
Semuc Champey			A waterfall and pools area that has to be seen to be appreciated. Definitely worth the long and bumpy ride to get there. Book trips from Coban or Lanquin, or walk from Las Marias.
Tikal, Flores, El Remate, Peten Trip Dates: December 2007			
Casona de la Isla	Flores		A hotel and restaurant on the water in Flores. Pretty nice but I recommend staying at Casa de Don David instead. http://www.hotelesdepeten.com/casislaenglish.html
Tikal Inn	At Tikal		OK hotel, pricey, but steps from Tikal Park entrance. No electricity in rooms except 2 hrs in am and 4 hrs in pm. Internet café but no wifi. Restaurant food mediocre. \$105

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		for a room with 3 people, private bath, and dinner.
Jaguar Inn	At Tikal	We didn't stay here, but ate lunch here. Better food than Tikal Inn. Wifi (\$5/day) available in restaurant. Tent spaces & rental hammocks available for about \$5/day. Quoted \$73 for a room for 3 people.
Casa de Don David	El Remate	Great hotel/good value/good food, on the water with great sunsets. 20 minutes from Tikal. Recommend you stay here vs Flores or Tikal. http://www.lacasadedondavid.com/
San Juan Travel	Santa Elena Bad - Don't Use!!	Almost every travel agent booking Tikal trips in Flores uses SJT as their tour company for Tikal Tours. We had a really bad experience... didn't get picked up when were supposed to, didn't get the tour we expected and had to pay our own way back to Flores. SJT refused to refund any of our money (stalled until we left town, basically). If you can avoid using these guys, do.
Finca Ixobel		Not directly associated with Tikal but is on the road from Rio Dulce to Tikal, about halfway. Really nice place to take a break from your travels. Has low-end backpacker accommodations (tree houses, really) as well as nicer upscale places. Well run, good food, some great day hikes. Also has a 'volunteering' program so it's always staffed with young interesting travelers from all over the world. http://www.fincaixobel.com

Other Links with Similar Info

Guatemala City Recommendations by Monkey Bay Cruisers <http://www.svargo.com/guatcityrecmonkeybay.htm>

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Major Bus Companies in Guatemala (Greyhound style buses)

Company	Location	Telephone	Web Page or E-mail	Destinations
MONJA BLANCA	8ª Avenida 15-16 Zona 1, Guatemala City - Cobán	2238-1409 2251-1878	www.autopullmanmonjablanca.com	El Rancho, Biotopo del Quetzal, Coban
ADN AUTOBUSES DEL NORTE	8ª. Av. 16-41 Zona 1 Guatemala City - Santa Elena, Peten	2251-0050 2251-0079 2251-0610	www.adnautobusesdelnorte.com	Río Dulce, Poptun, Flores, Tikal
TRANSPORTES LITEGUA	15 Calle 10-40 Zona 1 Guatemala City - Zacapa, Izabal	2220-8840 2326-9400	www.litegua.com	Puerto Barrios, Río Dulce, Zacapa
RUTAS ORIENTALES	19 calle 8-18 Zona 1 Guatemala City - Zacapa, Chiquimula	2253-7282 2251-2160 2251-5373	rutasorientales@gmail.com	Zacapa, Chiquimula, Honduras
FUENTES DEL NORTE	Calzada Aguilar Batres 7-55 Zona 12 Rutas del Sur: 8ª. Av. 4-25 Zona 12	2471- 0952/53/54	fdn@intelnet.net.gt	Peten, Izabal (special buses) Retalhuleu (normal buses)
LINEA DORADA	16 calle 10-03, Zona 1 Guatemala City - Peten , Izabal, Quetzaltenango, Hehetenango,	2220-7990 2232-9658	tikalmayanworld.com	Tikal, Flores, Poptun, Rio Dulce, Huehuetenango, Belice