



GUATEMALA
Quetzaltenango GLT Site Profile

AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
GLOBAL LEARNING TERM

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INTRODUCTION TO QUETZALTENANGO

Quetzaltenango may well be the perfect Guatemalan town – not too big, not too small, enough foreigners to support a good range of hotels and restaurants, but not so many that it loses its national flavor. The Guatemalan 'layering' effect is at work in the city center – once the Spanish moved out, the Germans moved in and their architecture gives the zone a somber, even Gothic, feel.

Quetzaltenango is big, like its name – which the locals kindly shorten to Xela (*shell-ah*), itself an abbreviation of the original Quiché Maya name, Xelajú – but by Guatemalan standards, it is an orderly, clean and safe city. It tends to attract a more serious type of traveler – people who really want to learn Spanish and then stay around and get involved in the myriad volunteer projects on offer.

Xela also functions as a base for a range of spectacular hikes through the surrounding countryside – the ascent to the summit of Volcán Tajumulco (Central America's highest point) and the three-day trek to Lago de Atitlán, to name a few.

Quetzaltenango came under the sway of the K'iche' Maya of K'umarcaaj when they began their great expansion in the 14th century. Before that it had been a Mam Maya town. It was near here that the K'iche' leader Tecún Umán was defeated and killed by the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado in 1524. The town prospered in the late-19th-century coffee boom, with brokers opening warehouses and *finca* (plantation) owners coming to town to buy supplies. This boom busted when a combined earthquake and eruption of Santa María in 1902 wreaked mass destruction. Still, the city's position at the intersection of roads to the Pacific Slope, Mexico and Guatemala City guaranteed it some degree of prosperity. Today it's again busy with commerce, of the indigenous, foreign and *ladino* variety.





GENERAL INFORMATION

Guatemala is a predominantly mountainous country, split into three distinct regions: the northernmost Peten region, the Highlands, and the Pacific coast. Most of the major cities are situated in the Highlands, all at altitudes of 1,500 m or more above sea level. The highest point in Central America is also here: the Tajumulco Volcano.

The country has fascinating and diverse flora and fauna, with 14 different eco-regions ranging from mangroves to desert, and five ecosystems. There are 252 listed wetlands, including lakes, lagoons, rivers and swamps, which are teeming with wildlife, some of which is endangered.

The population of Guatemala is approximately 15 million and the median age is 21, making it one of the youngest populations in Central America. The population is growing faster than other Latin American countries, possibly due to a lack of information about contraception. Health and development problems, such as malnutrition, illiteracy, and infant mortality, are rife and disproportionately affect the indigenous people.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Guatemala is a predominantly mountainous country, split into three distinct regions: the northernmost Peten region, the Highlands, and the Pacific coast. Most of the major cities are situated in the Highlands, all at altitudes of 1,500 m or more above sea level. The highest point in Central America is also here: the Tajumulco Volcano. The country has fascinating and diverse flora and fauna, with 14 different eco-regions ranging from mangroves to desert, and five ecosystems. There are 252 listed wetlands, including lakes, lagoons, rivers and swamps, which are teeming with wildlife, some of which is endangered.

The seasons in Guatemala are effectively the dry season and the wet. The dry season runs from November to April and the wet season from May to October.





DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in Guatemala. You should be willing to try the local cuisine and share in your host family's mealtimes. Guatemalan cuisine is based around tamales, chilis, corn and beans..

MONEY

Currency used in Guatemala is called Quetzal. \$1 US = 7.5 Quetzal. ATMs are plentiful, but credit cards are accepted at very few businesses. Upon arrival you will have the opportunity, exchange money at a Furex Beaux or withdraw money at ATM's. Citi bank is a common bank for internationals and accepts Visa and debit cards. Be sure to bring large bills (US\$50 and US\$100), as they are better exchange rates than small bills. Your dollar bills should also be issued post 2006, otherwise they will fetch a very low rate or they will not be accepted. ***Be sure to call your bank and let them know you are ¹traveling out of country to Guatemala and any other countries.**

Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter>



TRANSPORTATION

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Travel within the county is typically done by road. The majority of the road network is unpaved, but roads within the major cities are paved and often one-way. Guatemalans typically get around by bus and the quality of vehicles varies vastly.

So-called 'chicken buses' are recycled old vehicles, often-American school buses, and will stop anywhere, for anyone. These buses are often overcrowded with people and livestock, hence the name. Pullman buses operate between cities and are of a higher standard. There are also decent taxi services and tuk-tuks for short distances in the cities.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, sometimes unreliable electricity. Past students have found it convenient to buy a cheap cell phone while in Guatemala (no more than US\$50), which comes in handy when communicating with other students and with people in the United States. The cell phone will work in Guatemala, after you have inserted a chip (typically no more than US\$2 in each location) and purchased pay-as-you-go minutes. Text messaging is cheap and many students find this method affordable and convenient. You may choose to bring your cell phone from home if it can accommodate a chip, and is GSM or international compatible. However, be aware that it may be easily lost or stolen.²

GETTING THERE

Most international flights land at Aeropuerto La Aurora in Guatemala City, but some flights from neighboring Central American countries come in to Flores. The Guatemalan national carrier is called Aviateca, which is part of the larger TACA group. The flight time from New York is just over five hours, and from Madrid it is 11 and a half hours.

There are entry points into Guatemala by road from all of its Central American neighbors, including Ciudad Hidalgo and Talisman for Mexico, El Florido for Honduras, San Cristobal for El Salvador and Melchor de Mencos for Belize.

La Aurora International Airport serves Guatemala City (GC), Guatemala. It is located 6.4 km south of Guatemala City's center. Most of the “good” (first class) bus lines that go to Xela are in **Zona 1**. The terminals are generally clustered in an area south of the Plaza Barrios (by National Palace) bounded north by 15 Calle, south by 20 Calle, west by 2a Avenida and east by 12a Avenida. **Take a taxi** to the bus depot from the airport. The cost is around \$10. There are a number of good bus companies that transport folk from GC to Xela (see below). Alamo is a good choice, but it leaves from **Zona 7**. **Every taxi driver will know where it is**. A bus leaves for Xela about every two hours (see below). The address is: **Transportes Alamo, 12 Avenida 'A' 0-65, Zona 7 Cd Guatemala, ☎ +502 7767-4582, 2471-8626**. Arrive at the bus station at least one hour ahead of departure to get a good seat. Try to arrive before dark in order to view the landscape on the road to Xela Guard your gear and stay alert at the bus terminal. They are old American school buses (“Blue Bird”), now retired in Guatemala (and other Latin American

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countries). They are not recommended for travel from Guatemala City to Xela as it might be “over-immersion.”

VISA

- Passport must be valid for length of stay.
- One blank passport page required for entry stamp.
- 10,000 USD maximum currency restriction for entry and exit



While in Guatemala, U.S. citizens should carry a photocopy of their passports with them at all times due to the high rate of passport theft and leave the original passport in a safe place. **U.S. citizens do not need a visa for a stay of 90 days or less. That period can be extended for an additional 90 days upon application to Guatemalan immigration.** (If the initial period of stay granted upon entry is less than 90 days, any extension would be granted only for the same number of days as the initial authorization.) There is a fine of 10 quetzales (approximately 1.30 USD) for each day that a traveler overstays. The fine must be paid directly to the Guatemalan Immigration Agency. (U.S. citizens born in Guatemala are currently exempted from this fine.) Even if dual nationals are permitted to enter Guatemala on a second nationality passport, U.S. citizens returning to the US from Guatemala are not allowed to board their flights without a valid U.S. passport. There is an exit tax (currently 30 USD) for departing Guatemala by air. **The tax is generally included in an airline ticket price, but may be charged separately.** There is an additional airport security fee (currently 20 quetzales, or approximately 2.60 USD) that is also included in the ticket price. In June 2006, Guatemala entered a “Central America-4 (CA-4) Border

Control Agreement” with **El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua**. Under the terms of the agreement, citizens of the four countries may travel freely across land borders from one of the countries to any of the others without completing entry and exit formalities at immigration checkpoints. **U.S. citizens and other eligible foreign nationals who legally enter any of the four countries may similarly travel among the four without obtaining additional visas or tourist entry permits for the other three countries.**

Immigration officials at the first port of entry determine the length of stay, up to a maximum period of 90 days. **Foreign tourists who wish to remain in the region beyond the period initially granted for their visit are required either to request a one-time extension of stay from local immigration authorities in the country where the traveler is physically present, or to travel outside the CA-4 countries and reapply for admission to the region.**

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/guatemala.html>



IMMUNIZATIONS

Before departing, it is required for you to visit your physician to complete your health clearance forms. To protect your health in Guatemala, you may need certain pre-departure immunizations followed by reasonable health precautions while in the country. Vaccinations are not required, but recommended against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies, and typhoid. Influenza, yellow fever, tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations should also be up to date.

It is important to follow the health recommendations from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/travel).³

LANGUAGE LEARNING

In Xela, the language school serves as “Site Facilitator.” They are “full service” operations, offering not only language lessons but also family stays, volunteer/internship opportunities, in-house cultural activities, and field site excursions. Most will also have a command of political history (esp. 1960-1996), Spanish-indigenous relations, current events, etc. in order to help you process your experience. Although they provide a good support system, the staff is not pastors. Students are expected to be self-regulating in

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terms of moral behavior and basic safety/health precautions.

1. PROYECTO LINGÜÍSTICO

QUETZALTECO DE ESPAÑOL (PLQE)

<http://www.plqe.org/>

Proyecto Lingüístico Quetzalteco de Español is a one-of-a-kind language institute that is collectively managed and politically minded. (Be sure to read about their philosophy, programs, courses, and projects on their website.) The PLQE runs the Escuela de la Montaña, a limited-enrollment language-learning program in a rural zone nearby the town of Colombia. Courses in **K'iche'** (indigenous language) are also offered.

- **K'iche' classes: 25 hrs/wk for 6 wks = 150 hours @ \$185/wk**
- **Host family: \$160/mo.**

[Ap. 17, 2015] “We can provide **K'iche'** classes and have some possibilities of families in a town called **Cantel** that's about 30 minutes outside of Xela. The only additional information that I have for you is that the **K'iche'** program is actually a little longer than I thought, and of course depending on the student, can take 8-10 weeks in total. Of course if the student wants to only study for 6 weeks that would be a great amount of time to get well underway in the program. I would be happy to start in direct communication with the student, arranging exact dates and talking about anything else he needs to get set up prior to his visit.”

Audra Kyrk, Student Coordinator

plq@plqe.org

Office phone: +4977631061

Carlos Sanchez, Director

plq@plqe.org

2. CASAXELAJU

casaxelaju.com

Luciana de León

Academic director]

luciana@cx.edu.gt

(612)3531809, (612)2875867, (502)77615954

Julio E. Batres [owner]

<http://casaxelaju.com>

<http://cx.edu.gt>

<http://facebook.com/casaxelaju>

<http://twitter.com/casaxelaju>

612 281 5705

Prices are: \$ 155.00 for 25 hours per week more classes. Daily cultural activities from August to May and \$ 165.00 the rest of the year. But the cost of the family is \$ 55.00 per week. The students receive three meals a day for six days. Except Sunday they do not give them food but can sleep with his family. Payment can be:

1. By check payable to Xelaju sending him home office
United Unidoo can bring to the office in Quetzaltenango.
2. It may also be personal check.
3. The other way to pay is through paypal to name
julio@casaxelaju.com

More on CasaXela:

In Xelaju, Guatemala: Callejón 15, Diagonal 13-02, Zona 1, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Guatemalan Office Hours: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM, and 2:30 PM to 5:00 PM, Saturday 2:00 to 7:00 PM and Sunday 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM Mountain time (Summer) or Central Time (Winter) June, July, and August 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM and 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM. (Mountain Time)

USA phones operating in Guatemala (612) 353-1809, (612) 287-5867, Guatemalan phone number 011(502) 7761-5954

A great school, with a warm and student-centered staff. Part of the student payment is used to help rural schools in Aldea Francisco Vela, Nuevo Palmarcito, Caserio Guadalupe and La Pedrera Community Project to run the computer lab and pay for internet services. **CASAXELAJ** has five people working in the main office, including **Teresa de Leon**, La Pedrera Community Project director and **Patricia Rojas**, international coordinator. There are several hospital and clinics in the city. When a student gets sick, the international coordinator goes with him/her to visit the doctor to help and translate. Go to <http://casaxelaju.com/welcome> to see the list of doctors and hospitals that are available to students.

HOST FAMILY

Students are required to live with a host family for at least two months of their GLT. Host families support cultural integration and understanding, language learning, and local relationship formation. The role of the site facilitator is to assist student-host family placements. Once students have identified their host families, they are encouraged to communicate with their host families prior to departure in order to know the expectations their host family has for them. Room and board payments are estimated to be \$250-\$300 a month, but will vary depending on the location and family.⁴



EXCURSIONS

All excursions and recreational travel should be postponed until after you have completed all academic work. Sites that may be visited include museums, Antigua, Santa Maria, Lake Izabal, Lake Atitlan, Tikal National park, Mayan ruins and open air markets.

VISITORS

Parents or friends may wish to visit you while they are on GLT. This can be a wonderful experience; however, GLT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and can interrupt your academic research process. You should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and you will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. Visitors are also not allowed to stay with the host family that you are living with. Even if the host family seems ok with it, it is not allowed due to the fact that it could cause economic strain on the family, as well as it may violate cultural taboos within the community.

ACCOMODATIONS

- **Hostal Casa Dona Mercedes:** 6a. calle y 14 av. 13-42 zona 1 Quetzaltenango
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/guatemala/western-highlands/quetzaltenango-xela/hotels/hostal-casa-dona-mercedes> From where the bus from GC drops you, walk or take a taxi to Parque Central (Central Park) in zone 1. The hostel is two blocks west of the park.
- **Xela Hostel** [+502 4471 8569].
- **Black Cat Hostel:** 3 Avenida 3-33 Zona 1
<http://www.hostelz.com/hostel/80378-The-Black-Cat-Hostel---Xela>





Potential GSP Topics:

- Indigenous Rights
- Blend of Cultures
- Effects of Globalization and/or Study Abroad
- Livelihood Cooperatives and Economic Development
- Fair Trade
- Environmental Sustainability
- Health Care for Indigenous Communities

Potential Internship Sectors:

- Craft Cooperative
- Women's Empowerment
- Animal Rights
- Art and/or Music
- Youth Development
- Education
- Indigenous Rights
- Public Health
- Fair Trade
- Economic Development
- Eco-Tourism



RESOURCES

Rigoberta Menchú, I, *Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, 2nd ed. Verso Press, 2010.

Judith Zur, *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala*. Westview Press, 2001.

Robert S. Carlsen, *The War for the Heart and Soul of a Highland Maya Town*. University of Texas Press, 1997.

Galeano, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. Trans. Cedric Belfrage. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Schlesinger, Stephen, and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1983. [Especially 65-77, 159-255]

Elizabeth Oglesby, Greg Grandin and Deborah T. Levenson, *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press, 2011. [It's thick but good; get the e-book]

When the Mountains Tremble (1983 documentary film about the war between the Guatemalan military and the Mayan indigenous population)

Voice of a Mountain: <http://www.voiceofamountain.com/> [Documentary film by Michael Fields, a global studies alum who completed GLT in highland Guatemala]

“UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/>

“UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/>

“UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” UNHCHR. <http://www.ohchr.org/>