

Guatemala Smart Card



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For additional information see:
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Overview

- ◆ Capital: Guatemala City
- ◆ Population: 14.3 million
- ◆ Large indigenous (Maya) population
- ◆ Official language: Spanish
- ◆ 21 different Maya languages spoken

Guatemala is located in one of the most violent and lawless regions of the world. The 1996 Peace Accords ended a 36-year civil war, but its legacy continues to affect the nation in issues such as distrust of the military, marginalization of the indigenous community, and reconciliation for human rights abuses during the conflict.

When President Otto Pérez Molina took power in January 2012, he pledged to “repair the social fabric” of the nation through a series of “profound structural changes, not cosmetic”. Molina also promised to improve the conditions of the nation’s indigenous community, a segment of the population which faces the worst levels of poverty and human development.



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and President Molina

National Challenges

Guatemala has one of the highest **murder rates** in the western hemisphere.

- ◆ 40% of murders are committed by **youth street gangs**, or *maras*. The most prominent *maras* are the Mara 18 and the MS-13.

- ◆ Most other violent deaths are attributed to organized crime groups and **Mexican DTOs** (Drug Trafficking Organizations), notably the Sinaloa and the Zetas, who are having increased influence in areas along the Guatemalan-Mexican border.

Impunity in the justice system has led to a high percentage of criminal cases being unpunished.

- ◆ 95% of criminal cases are not successfully prosecuted.
- ◆ Lack of confidence in judicial processes has led some citizens to take the law into their own hands.

Border dispute with Belize

Frequent **earthquakes**



History

100-1100: Maya Empire

Maya civilization flourished in the Yucatán Peninsula and much of northern Central America; began to fracture and decline in 1100.



1523-1524: Spanish Conquests

Maya tribes in the area of Guatemala are conquered and subjugated by the Spanish, except for some Maya in remote areas of the western highlands.

1524-1821: Spanish Colonial Period

- ◆ The Spanish moved the indigenous into new self-constructed communities, placed them into systems of slavery, and forced them to adopt Catholicism.
- ◆ Hundreds of thousands of Maya died within decades by European diseases and harsh working conditions.

1821-1839: United Provinces

- ◆ Central American independence won from Spain; five nations form the United Provinces of Central America.
- ◆ Political union disintegrates; Guatemala becomes independent (1839).

1839-1944

- ◆ Guatemala is ruled by several authoritarian presidents.
- ◆ Coffee production creates infrastructure in the countryside; many Indians are forced off their lands.
- ◆ The U.S.-based United Fruit Company establishes itself (1901) and begins to acquire large amounts of land.

1944-1954: ‘The Ten Years of Spring’

- ◆ The 1944 “October Revolution” overthrows the government; democratic rule lasts a decade.
- ◆ The U.S. backs a 1954 coup for political (spread of communism) and economic (Fruit Company lands distributed back to Guatemalans) reasons.

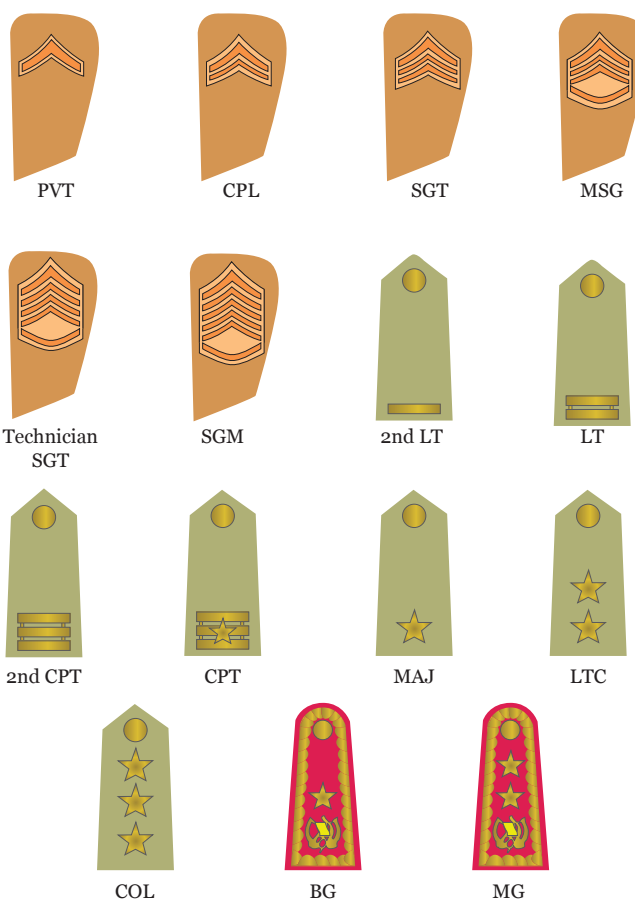
1960-1996: Civil War

- ◆ A Marxist insurgency against the government begins.
- ◆ In the early ‘80s, army campaigns ethnically-target entire indigenous villages in the highlands.
- ◆ 200,000 die and a million are displaced during period.

1996-Present

- ◆ The 1996 Peace Accords end the civil war.
- ◆ Army reduced from 27,000 to 15,500 personnel.
- ◆ Former President Rios Montt (1982-83) stands on trial for human rights violations and charges of genocide.

Rank Insignias



Security Forces

The Armed Forces include the Army, Air Force, and Navy. The current doctrine of the military is focused on low intensity warfare and counter insurgency.

According to the 1996 Peace Accords, its role is solely for external defense of the nation. The National Civil Police (*Policía Nacional Civil: PNC*) was created after the accords for internal security measures, though corruption in the force has led to the Army gaining a wider role in maintaining internal security.



The Army is currently involved in border security operations, anti-narcotics, and re-establishing its presence in areas that have been compromised to drug cartels.

Army total force: 16,200 active personnel, 3,500 reserves (2012). Three months of basic training is required for new army recruits. Specialist training, for both officers and enlisted, is provided by a military school in Guatemala City. The Advanced Strategic Studies School and High Command Staff School both function as higher education establishments.

The **Kaibiles** are special forces units, and are known to be among the best trained in jungle warfare in the world. Each Kaibil group is a company-sized unit of 162 soldiers divided into four platoons with nine troops per squad. Before volunteering for the Kaibiles, a year of service and parachute training is required.



U.S. Marines with Kaibiles

The **National Civil Police (PNC)** is a non-military organization responsible for internal security. The current strength stands at 25,000-which is considered understaffed by international standards-with one officer per 600 Guatemalans. Many officers are incapable (and considered to be poorly trained and ill-equipped) or unwilling to challenge drug traffickers in the most volatile regions in northern Guatemala.

Private security companies employ upwards of 100,000 agents. Poor regulation of companies and inadequate training for agents have been concerns.

Race and Ethnicity

During the Spanish colonial period, caste systems developed in Guatemala, and a racial hierarchy was produced in which Spaniards were at the top and Indians were at the bottom. Cultural and racial mixing (*mestizaje*) through time between these groups produced the **Ladino** intermediary racial group.

Today, the term applies to both non-indigenous and mixed heritage Guatemalans, as well as to Indians who have adopted Western cultural patterns and lifestyles. Many Ladinos consider the Maya to be inferior and uncivilized. Upwards of 60% of Guatemala’s population identifies as Ladino.

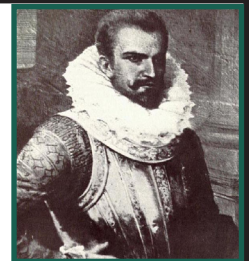
40-50% of Guatemalans are of indigenous descent and represent over 20 Maya groups. More remote Mayas (more commonly women than men) may only speak their native language. German, Middle Eastern,



and Chinese immigrant groups are present as well. Garifuna (descendents of Carib Indians and West Africans) are found mainly in the Caribbean coastal areas.

Tecún Umán

A popular Guatemalan legend revolves around a historic battle between the Spanish conqueror **Pedro de Alvarado** and **Tecún Umán**, a K’iche’ Maya warrior, believed to have been killed by Alvarado in 1524.



Pedro de Alvarado

“The Dance of the Conquest” or “**El baile de la conquista**” is still memorialized through school pageants in indigenous communities today. The dance depicts the battle where Umán-now a national hero and whose image is commonplace in Guatemala-is said to have transformed himself into an eagle or a quetzal while defending his people. Umán’s image, along with the quetzal bird, have appeared on Guatemala’s currency, the Quetzal.



Author: Unai Txola Source: Wikimedia Commons

Geography and Regions



The North is a sparsely populated lowland region that has a diverse population of Indians and Ladinos, with Garifuna and Jamaican migrants in the Caribbean coastal areas. Security in the large tropical area of the Petén (labeled on map to left) is a rising concern. A number of small towns in this area have been taken over by drug traffickers who use intimidation and money to influence residents. Criminal groups in these areas also gain influence, and resources, through the use of political networks.

The Highlands area hosts a series of volcanoes and has seen many devastating earthquakes. This area is split into two regions: the eastern, which is predominantly Ladino, and the western, which is mostly Maya.

The Pacific Lowland is a strip of land no more than 200 miles long and 30 miles wide. Mainly grassland with small areas of forest, it is the most agriculturally-productive region in Guatemala. This area is mostly Ladino, but migrant Maya workers also come there for work during harvest seasons.

Land

Land is of utmost importance; it is a source of ritual and culture for the Maya as well as a symbol of power and source of wealth for non-Indians.



Milpa

Land is disproportionately distributed among the population, where a very small percentage of the Ladino elite owns around 70% of all agricultural lands. The loss of land through history has affected the indigenous population in many ways, often forcing them to seek migrant work or work as wage laborers on large agricultural estates.

In the past few years, many indigenous peoples have been involved in protests (some which ended violently at the hands of the state) for issues such as their eviction off of and access to land, as well as to end mining efforts on their lands.

Many small, often isolated highland villages survive mostly by cultivating *milpas*. *Milpas* are plots of land where domestic animals and crops are raised for family and community consumption.

Customs, Communications, Language, and Etiquette

◆ Although admired, punctuality is given less emphasis than personal relationships—which tend to trump strict schedules—though being on time for business functions is usually expected.

◆ Guatemalans, or **Chapines** (another term Guatemalans use for themselves), greet with a handshake and direct eye contact. Shake hands with everyone before/after the meeting; waving to the group is inappropriate. If you do not know a female, wait for her to extend her arm before shaking hands.

◆ In small groups, greet each individual; in large group settings where this may not be possible, greet as many people as you can. When greeting strangers, wait to be introduced by your Guatemalan counterpart.

◆ Start conversations by exchanging pleasantries, failure to do so will imply a lack of a personal relationship. Soccer, literature, dance, and family are appropriate conversation topics; avoid conversing about the civil war, violence, poverty, religion, Guatemala’s neighbors, or the difficult political situation in Guatemala.

◆ Kissing on the cheek is common in greetings between men and women and women and women when a relationship is established.

◆ Show respect by using titles, in both the professional and personal realms. It is common to address Guatemalans by a title before either their first or last name. One example of a title before a first name is “*Don/Doña*”, used to show great respect. Some other key phrases/titles include:

<i>Buenos días</i>	Good morning
<i>Buenas tardes</i>	Good afternoon
<i>Buenas noches</i>	Good evening
<i>¿Cómo estás?</i>	How are you?
<i>Mucho gusto</i>	Pleased to meet you
<i>¿Qué tal?</i>	How’s it going?
<i>¿Qué onda?</i>	What are you doing?
<i>Señorita</i>	Miss
<i>Don/Doña</i>	Male (elder)/Female (elder)
<i>Señor/Señora</i>	Mr./Mrs.
<i>Doctor/a</i>	College Graduate
<i>Que le vaya bien</i>	May you go well
<i>Nos vemos</i>	See you later
<i>Más tarde</i>	Later
<i>No tenga pena</i>	Don’t worry
<i>Muchas gracias</i>	Thank you very much

Religion

Guatemala has no official state religion. Independent of their religion, Guatemalans often make reference to God in everyday conversation. Some examples of this are the phrases **Si Dios quiere** (If God wills it), used when speaking of future plans or hopes, or **Solo Dios sabe** (Only God knows), used when speaking of future outcomes.



Maximón

The majority of Guatemalans are **Roman Catholic** (60%) though many nominally practice their faith. Catholic and indigenous belief systems have mixed over time to produce myths, practices, and symbols that represent elements of both.

One example is the **Cult of Maximón** which is found in the western highlands, principally in and around the city of Santiago Atitlán (situated on the shores of Lake Atitlán).



Maximón (pictured left) is kept in a residence—which changes yearly—of the area. Offerings of money, tobacco, alcohol, food items, incense, and other items are presented to him in exchange for the performance of miracles. **Cofradías** are religious brotherhoods dedicated to a particular saint. The Cult of Maximón is an example of one such *cofradía*.

Protestants, locally known as **evangélicos**, comprise nearly 40% of the remaining population. Protestants frequent church more regularly than Catholics. Rising tension between between the two groups is a concern.

In **Maya religion**, the natural and supernatural worlds are interrelated and harmonic. Earth deities are associated with the natural world, such as mountains, volcanoes, and bodies of water. Celestial bodies represent supreme sky deities. Caves and mountains are important **ritual places** and are seen as doorways which link the two Maya worlds together. Maya shamans (**Ajq’ijab’**) serve as intermediaries between the natural and supernatural worlds.



Volcano outside of Antigua

The Family/Gender Roles

Elders receive a great deal of respect and often hold a great degree of power within the family, especially in large families. It is the responsibility of the children to care for their parents in old age. It is also common for elders to move in with their children after retirement and share in the responsibilities of raising their grandchildren. Working mothers depend on their parents or children to take care of their younger children, though are still responsible for household chores. Family members in the same household are considered an individual’s primary obligations and social ties.



Author: Calamardosa
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Gender roles are rigid in Guatemala. Women traditionally play nurturing roles while men play roles as public leaders. Elder sons in Maya households may begin to work the fields at very young ages. Elder daughters take care of their siblings and are often considered their primary caregivers.

Rapport Building and Negotiation Tips

Rapport is built through **mutual trust**, **understanding**, and **respect**.



Understanding a culture will aid greatly in building rapport, and should be done before deployment through studies and while in-country through observation and speaking with the people.

Speaking Spanish is an in-road towards building rapport, and may be more important initially in building a relationship with Guatemalans than anything else.

Respect is a reciprocal commodity. It can be built with Guatemalans through generosity, politeness, and honesty. Speak your mind carefully. For Guatemalans, maintaining pride and honor is critical. Do not insult a Guatemalan’s, or his/her family’s or extended family’s honor, pride, or beliefs.

Mutual trust is built over extended periods of time, and is necessary for lasting relationships. Building personal trust and an understanding of the other is necessary before any business will be done.

Rapport can also be nurtured through enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and respecting a counterpart’s age, rank, status, and experience. Assessing yours and others’ perceptions will also enable effective communication and rapport-building.

In **negotiations** in Guatemala, the senior leader makes final decisions. It is essential to observe the chain of command; bypassing it will cause more problems than recognizing it. Legal contracts, when final, may be revisited if a need arises.

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