**Guatemala Facts and Culture**

* [Food and Recipes:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/recipes.htm) Tortillas are often used as a scoop for some foods. Other foods are eaten with the hands, but utensils are... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/recipes.htm)
* [Family:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/family.htm) The father is the head of the family, but the wife yields great influence over the household. Unmarried adults live... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/family.htm)
* [Fashion:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/fashion.htm) In cities, people generally wear clothing fashion's from the West. However, the rural Maya have retained traditional dress. Clothing may... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/fashion.htm)
* [Visiting:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/visiting.htm) Visiting is important to building strong relationships with relatives and friends. Not visiting frequently can be an insult, as it... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Guatemala/visiting.htm)

**Guatemala Facts**

Guatemala stats

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital  | Guatemala City  |
| Government Type  | constitutional democratic republic  |
| Currency  | GTQ; USD  |
| Population  | 14,373,472  |
| Total Area  | 42,042 Square Miles108,889 Square Kilometers  |
| Location  | Central America, bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between El Salvador and Mexico, and bordering the Gulf of Honduras (Caribbean Sea) between Honduras and Belize  |
| Language  | Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)  |

Map of Guatemala



**Guatemala Geography**

**Terrain and geography**

Guatemala is the most northern and populous of the five Central American countries. Guatemalan coastlines cover about 200 miles on the Pacific Ocean and 70 miles on the Caribbean. The country is roughly divided into four geographic regions: the central-western highlands, the low northern plateau which is largely jungle, the southern volcanic belt, and tropical coastal lowlands. The temperate mountain regions are the most densely populated. Guatemala has 33 volcanoes, 4 within view of the city. Although most are inactive, Pacaya, about 27 miles south of Guatemala City, erupts occasionally with lavaflows to nearby localities. Fuego, about 30 miles from the city, periodically produces displays visible from Guatemala City.

**Geography - note**

no natural harbors on west coast

**Guatemala Geography**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Location  | Central America  |
| Total Area  | 42,042 Square Miles108,889 Square Kilometers  |
| Land Area  | 41,374 Square Miles107,159 Square Kilometers  |
| Water Area  | 668 Square Miles1,730 Square Kilometers  |
| Land Boundaries  | 1,048 Miles1,687 Kilometers  |
| Irrigated Land  | 1,205 Square Miles3,121 Square Kilometers  |
| Border Countries  | Belize 266 km, El Salvador 203 km, Honduras 256 km, Mexico 962 km  |
| Coastline  | 249 Miles400 Kilometers  |
| Geographic Coordinates  | 15 30 N, 90 15 W  |
| Terrain  | mostly mountains with narrow coastal plains and rolling limestone plateau (Peten)  |
| Highest Point  | 4,211 Meters  |
| Highest Point Location  | Volcan Tajumulco 4,211 m  |
| Lowest Point Location  | Pacific Ocean 0 m  |
| Natural Resources  | petroleum, nickel, rare woods, fish, chicle, hydropower  |

**Guatemala Weather and Climate**

**Climate and Weather**

Guatemala City's rainy season is May through October, and its dry season November through April. Temperatures are generally moderate during both seasons, ranging from an average low of 53°F in January to 60°-85°F in April. Frost and snow are unknown, and flowers bloom year round.

Rainfall is heaviest from June through October, and the annual average is about 52 inches. Wet months can cause mildew damage to clothing, shoes, luggage, and upholstered furniture. During the dry season, days are clear and the sun is hot at midday with chilly to cold mornings and evenings. During these months it is dusty, foliage turns brown, grass and shrubs wither, and gardens must be watered.

**Guatemala Environmental Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Climate  | Guatemala City's rainy season is May through October, and its dry season November through April. Temperatures are generally moderate during both seasons, ranging from an average low of 53°F in January to 60°-85°F in April. Frost and snow are unknown, and flowers bloom year round.Rainfall is heaviest from June through October, and the annual average is about 52 inches. Wet months can cause mildew damage to clothing, shoes, luggage, and upholstered furniture. During the dry season, days are clear and the sun is hot at midday with chilly to cold mornings and evenings. During these months it is dusty, foliage turns brown, grass and shrubs wither, and gardens must be watered. |
| Terrain  | mostly mountains with narrow coastal plains and rolling limestone plateau (Peten)  |
| Natural Resources  | petroleum, nickel, rare woods, fish, chicle, hydropower  |
| Natural Hazards  | numerous volcanoes in mountains, with occasional violent earthquakes; Caribbean coast extremely susceptible to hurricanes and other tropical storms  |
| Irrigated Land  | 1,205 Square Miles3,121 Square Kilometers  |
| Environmental Issues  | deforestation in the Peten rainforest; soil erosion; water pollution  |
| Environment - International Agreements  | party to: Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements  |

**Guatemala Population Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Population  | 14,373,472  |
| Population Growth Rate  | 1.91%  |
| Urban Population  | 49.8%  |
| Population in Major Urban Areas  | GUATEMALA CITY (capital) 1.168 million  |
| Nationality Noun  | Guatemalan(s)  |
| Nationality Adjective  | Guatemalan  |
| Ethnic Groups  | Mestizo (mixed Amerindian-Spanish or assimilated Amerindian - in local Spanish called Ladino), approximately 55%, Amerindian or predominantly Amerindian, approximately 43%, whites and others 2%  |
| Languages  | Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)  |
| Rate of Urbanization- annual rate of change  | 3.43%  |

**Guatemala Medical Information**

The full range of medical care is available in Guatemala City, but medical care outside the city is limited. Guatemala's public hospitals frequently experience serious shortages of basic medicines and equipment. Care in private hospitals is generally adequate for most common illnesses and injuries, and many of the medical specialists working in them are U.S.-trained and -certified.

**Guatemala Health Information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Health Expenditures (% of GDP)  | 6.7%  |
| Death Rate/1,000 population  | 4.87  |
| Obesity- adult prevalence rate  | 19.2%  |
| Hospital Bed Density/1,000 population  | .7  |
| Physicians Density/1,000 population  | .93  |
| Infant Mortality Rate/1,000 population  | 24.32  |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Female/1,000 population  | 22.09  |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Male/1,000 population  | 26.44  |
| Underweight - percent of children under five years  | 13%  |
| Total Fertility Rate  | 3.08  |
| Age of Mother's First Birth  | 20.3  |
| Contraceptive prevalance rate (female 15-49)  | 43.3%  |
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births  | 120  |
| HIV Adult Prevalence Rate  | 0.8%  |
| HIV Aids Deaths  | 3,400  |
| HIV Aids People Living With  | 62,000  |
| Drinking Water Source: unimproved  | 6.2%  |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of rural population improved  | 88.6%  |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of urban population improved  | 99.1%  |
| Sanitation Facility Access: unimproved  | 19.7%  |
| Sanitation Facility Access - percent of urban population improved  | 88.4%  |
| Sanitation Facitlity Access - percent of rural population improved  | 72.1%  |
| Major Infectious Diseases - degree of risk  | high  |
| Food or Waterborne Disease (s)  | bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever  |
| Vectorborne Disease (s)  | dengue fever and malaria  |

**Guatemala Crime**

**Crime Information**

To decrease the likelihood of becoming a victim, do not display items of value such as laptops, iPods, tablet computers, cameras, or jewelry and refrain from using a cell phone on the street. Carry a photocopy of your passport when out and about to avoid losing it during a robbery. The Embassy discourages its employees from carrying large sums of money. Do not resist if you are being robbed. Victims have been killed when they resisted attack or refused to give up their money or other valuables. Assailants are often armed with guns and do not hesitate to use them if you resist.

Emboldened armed robbers have attacked vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. Travel on rural roads increases the risk of being stopped by a criminal roadblock or ambush. Widespread narcotics and alien-smuggling activities make remote areas especially dangerous. There is no evidence that U.S. citizens are specifically targeted, although an appearance of wealth could increase the chances that you might become a focus of attention for criminal gangs. Criminals look for any opportunity to strike, so all travelers should remain constantly vigilant.

A number of travelers have experienced carjackings and armed robberies after just having arrived on international flights, most frequently in the evening. In the most common scenario, tourists or business travelers who land at the airport after dark are held up by armed men as their vehicle departs the airport, but similar incidents have occurred at other times of the day. Private vehicles, taxis and shuttle buses have all been targeted. Typically, the assailants steal money, passports, and luggage, and in some but not all cases, the assailants steal the vehicle as well. In some cases, assailants have been wearing full or partial police uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles, indicating that some elements of the police might be involved. Armed robberies have occurred within minutes of a tourist’s vehicle having been stopped by the police. Recently, many of these attacks have taken place far from the airport, just as travelers were arriving at their homes, or in less busy areas of the city. Victims who did not resist the attackers were not physically injured.

Security escorts for tourist groups and security information are available from the Tourist Assistance Office (PROATUR) of INGUAT (the Guatemalan Tourism Institute) at 7a Avenida 1-17. Zona 4, Centro Civico, Guatemala City. INGUAT’s PROATUR division has 24-hour/seven days per week direct telephone numbers for tourist assistance and emergencies. You may call them at (502) 2421-2810, fax them at (502) 2421-2891, or simply dial 1500 in Guatemala to reach INGUAT Tourist Assistance. You can also contact INGUAT by e-mail. PROATUR also maintains regional offices in all major tourist destinations in Guatemala, and the regional delegates provide rapid and appropriate assistance to crime and accident victims. Travelers may also wish to visit INGUAT’s web site (Spanish only). Tourist groups are advised to request security escorts from INGUAT. There have been no incidents of armed robbery of groups escorted through the Tourist Protection Program. The request should be submitted by mail, fax, or e-mail and should arrive at INGUAT at least three business days in advance of the proposed travel. Requests should be directed to the attention of the Coordinator of the National Tourist Assistance Program, and should provide the itinerary, names of travelers, and model and color of the vehicle in which they will be traveling. Travelers should be aware that INGUAT might not be able to accommodate all requests.

Taxis: Hailing taxis on the street in Guatemala City is discouraged. Taxi Seguro can be reached at 2312-4243, but may not always be available, especially late at night. Taxi Amarillo Express is a radio-dispatch taxi service, and can be reached by dialing 1766. The Guatemalan tourist assistance agency, PROATUR, may be able to provide additional information, and can be reached by dialing 1500. Some best practices for travel safety include:

Coordinate arrival times with those picking up passengers, minimize time spent standing outside in the airport passenger pick-up area, and do not walk out of the airport with valuables in plain sight.

Carry laptops inconspicuously in a backpack or other carry-on luggage.

Avoid using electronic devices in traffic or leaving purses on seats in plain sight.

Buses: Avoid low-priced intra- and inter-city public buses (commonly recycled U.S. school buses). They are often attacked by armed robbers and are poorly maintained and dangerously driven. In the first three months of 2012, nine bus drivers were killed and in 2011, 91 bus drivers were murdered in robberies staged by holdup gangs targeting public transportation, both urban and inter-city. Outside the capital, shuttles and buses carrying tourists have been stopped and robbed, including incidents on the road to Tikal. Do not hail taxis on the street in Guatemala City. For shorter trips, the safest option is to take radio-dispatched (Taxi Amarillo) or hotel taxis.

The use of modern inter-city buses somewhat improves security and safety; however, several travelers have been attacked on first-class buses on highway CA-2 near the border areas with both Mexico and El Salvador, and on highways CA-1 and CA-9 near the border with El Salvador, and in the highlands between Quetzaltenango and Sololá. Be cautious with personal items such as backpacks, fanny packs, and passports while riding buses, as tourists’ possessions are a favorite target of thieves.

Highway Safety: There have been numerous reports of violent criminal activity along Guatemala’s main highways, including the Carretera a El Salvador (Inter-American Highway CA-2). In addition, travelers using alternate routes out of Antigua have reported armed assaults in recent years. There has also been an increase in alcohol-related traffic accidents on this same road at night. Embassy employees are discouraged from driving at night. Due to the dangers of travelling Guatemalan highways with an abundance of valuables, U.S. Embassy employees are prohibited from driving from or through Mexico and Belize to their assignment in Guatemala and must have their possessions shipped in.

The main road to Lake Atitlán via the Inter-American Highway (CA-1) and Sololá is safer than the alternative secondary roads near the lake. Specifically, the main road is preferable to the alternative road through Las Trampas and Godinez to Panajachel (RN-11) where robbery, rape, and assault are known to have occurred in the past. Armed attacks have occurred on roads between Guatemala City and the Petén as well as between Tikal and the Belize border. Visitors to the Mayan ruins at Tikal are urged to fly to nearby Flores and then travel by bus or tour van to the site. Violent attacks have occurred in the Mayan ruins in the Petén, including in the Cerro Cahui Conservation Park, Yaxha, the road to and inside Tikal Park, and in the Tikal ruins, particularly during early morning sunrise tours of the ruins. However, tourist police (POLITUR) patrols have significantly reduced the incidence of violent crime inside the park and there have been no reports of armed assaults on tourists there in the past year. Travelers should remain in groups, stay on the principal trails leading to the Central Plaza and the Temple IV complex, and avoid remote areas of the park.

Flat-tire Scam: In one popular scam, robbers place a nail in a parked vehicle’s tire. The vehicle is then followed by the robbers who pose as “good Samaritans” when the tire becomes flat and the victims pull to the side of the road. While “help” is being rendered, the contents of the car are stolen, often without the knowledge of the victims. However, in some cases, the robbers have threatened the tourists with weapons. Parking areas in and around the Guatemala City International Airport are particularly prone to this crime.

Parking Lot Scam: Victims are approached in a hotel, restaurant or other public place by an individual claiming that there is some sort of problem with his or the would-be victim’s automobile in the parking lot. On the way to investigate the “problem,” usually in a remote or concealed area near the parking lot, the robber pulls a gun on the victim and demands cash, credit cards and other valuables.

Swimming and Boating Safety: Travelers should be aware that basic safety precautions commonly required in the United States for swimming, boating and other outdoor activities may not be observed in Guatemala. Multiple boaters in the Rio Dulce area of the Department of Izabal have been victimized in violent armed attacks while on their boats.

Indigenous Areas: Indigenous activists have taken foreign tourists hostage in the Rio Dulce and Livingston area. Although all hostages have been released unharmed, tensions between indigenous activists and authorities remain. In January 2012, a group of National Geographic explorers, including U.S. citizens, were detained in Quiche by local residents when they jumped into a pond considered sacred in the Mayan tradition. They were released unharmed but the incident serves as a warning to be mindful of local traditional practices when visiting indigenous Mayan communities.

Armed robberies are common in all areas of the country; persons carrying laptop computers and expensive cell phones are often targets. Areas that offer wi-fi computer services have been targeted. Several individuals have been killed and their laptops taken upon departure from these establishments after they were seen using their computers in public. Avoid carrying laptop cases or anything that resembles one, even if they do not contain laptops.

Pickpockets are active in all major cities and tourist sites, especially the central market and other parts of Zone 1 in Guatemala City. Pickpockets also are common throughout the country. For security reasons, the Embassy does not allow U.S. government employees to stay in hotels in Zone 1 and urges private travelers to avoid staying in this area. In a common scenario, an accomplice distracts the victim while an assailant slashes or simply steals a bag or backpack. The Embassy advises tourists and residents to be very vigilant of their surroundings and report any crime incidents promptly to the police.

Use of ATMs: We strongly encourage you not to use ATMs. Scams involving attempts to acquire a victim’s ATM card and personal identification number (PIN) are common. Some sophisticated criminals have even placed electronic boxes outside ATM kiosks to record the PIN of unsuspecting victims who believe they must enter their PIN to gain entry to the ATM foyer. After recording the PIN, robbers then steal the owner’s ATM card to complete their crimes. There have been a number of incidents in which foreigners have been robbed immediately after making a large withdrawal from local banks. While complicity by bank employees is strongly suspected in these crimes, the police have only arrested credit card forgers. There are dozens of techniques scammers can use to rob victims of money and possessions. While most people mean no harm, always be cautious when strangers approach you for any reason or make unusual requests. Dozens of victims (mostly foreign tourists) have had their bank accounts emptied remotely from places such as Bogota, Lima, Caracas, and the Dominican Republic shortly after using their ATM cards at banks in Antigua and other places. Recently, U.S. Embassy employees have had money fraudulently taken from their accounts due to the theft of their ATM card information and pass-code.

**Guatemala Penalties for Crime**

**Criminal Penalties**

While in a foreign country, you are subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, prosecutable in the United States.

If you break local laws in Guatemala, your U.S. passport won’t help you avoid arrest or prosecution. It’s very important to know what’s legal and what’s not wherever you go. Persons violating Guatemalan laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Guatemala are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. Pseudoephedrine is banned in Guatemala since it can be used in the manufacture of methamphetamines. Possession or distribution of drugs containing pseudoephedrine is illegal and can result in arrest of violators.

Arrest notifications in Guatemala:

While some countries will automatically notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if a U.S. citizen is detained or arrested in a foreign country, that might not always be the case. To ensure that the United States is aware of your circumstances, request that the police and prison officials notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate as soon as you are arrested or detained overseas. If you are arrested in Guatemala, you have the option to request that the police, prison officials, or other authorities alert the U.S. Embassy or Consulate of your arrest, and to have communications from you forwarded to the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

**Guatemala Life Expectancy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life Expectancy At Birth  | 71 Years  |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Female  | 73 Years  |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Male  | 69 Years  |
| Median Age (female)  | 21 Years  |
| Median Age (male)  | 20 Years  |
| Median Age  | 20 Years |

**Guatemala Literacy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Predominant Language  | Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)  |
| Literacy Definition  | age 15 and over can read and write  |
| Literacy Female  | 63.3%  |
| Literacy Male  | 78%  |
| Literacy Total  | 69.1%  |

**Guatemala Education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Education Expenditures - percent of GDP  | 3%  |
| Literacy - female  | 63.3%  |
| Literacy - male  | 78%  |
| Literacy - total population  | 69.1%  |
| Literacy Definition  | age 15 and over can read and write  |
| School Life Expectancy - female  | 10 Years  |
| School Life Expectancy - male  | 11 Years  |
| Total School Life Expectancy - (primary to tertiary)  | 11 Years  |

**Guatemala Age of Population**

Age 0-14: 36.8 %Age 15-24: 22.2 %Age 25-54: 31.8 %Age 55-64: 5.1 %Over 64: 4.1 %Highcharts.com

**Classroom**

Because there are few schools in rural areas, many private schools have been opened, usually run by the Roman Catholic Church. In rural areas, some grade schools with between 100 and 200 students have only one teacher for the entire school.

Even when schools have sufficient desks and teachers, which is too often not the case, they usually lack books. Very often, as much as 80% of the class time is taken up in copying material from the blackboard at the front of the classroom because students don’t have books. This lack of books also prevents teachers from requiring homework, which means that students do not practice their study skills at home either. Teachers also are not well trained, especially in rural schools. Currently it is possible to become a teacher right after passing the exam at the conclusion of secondary school.

Guatemalan schools are not well equipped with computers or other electronic technology. Although some universities are making good progress in this area, schools for the younger children lack even the basics, especially in the mountainous, rural areas. Students who are able to afford such technology often take courses offered outside the country via the Internet.

Most schools require a uniform, which families must pay for in addition to the school enrollment fee and monthly tuition.

**Education Culture**

The literacy rate in Guatemala is one of the lowest in Central America. Education is valued among the wealthier families, but even they find the costs difficult to manage. For the poor, many find it simply impossible, especially for girls. More boys than girls in Guatemala can read, and girls are sometimes encouraged to stay home from school and prepare for marriage.

Many children in Guatemala do not attend school. Rather, they begin working at a fairly young age to support the family, and often do not understand the value of an education. Two-thirds of all students do not attend school after elementary school. Approximately only 2% will ever attend a university, and only half of those will graduate. Perhaps more significant, however, are the numbers who end up marrying young or joining gangs instead of pursuing secondary and high school.

Because of the rather significant adult reading problem in the country (the country produces one million illiterate citizens every nine years), Guatemala began a rather interesting program for their high school students. In order to graduate and obtain an official certificate from high school, each student wishing to graduate must teach five people to read. Although schools initially were concerned about this program, it has turned out to be quite successful.

Another challenge in some parts of the country is that the Indian populations often feel discriminated against and will not send their children to school. The lessons are in Spanish, and they include nothing of the local customs or culture.

School in Guatemala runs from January through October.

**Learning**

Children attend up to four years of preschool, six years of elementary or primary school, three years of secondary school, and two or three years of high school, depending on the technical training they are receiving. School is required from ages 7 to 14.

Spanish is the official language of Guatemala, but approximately 40% of the country’s population speaks one of the local Indian languages instead. For this reason, many of the rural schools are taught in the local language rather than in Spanish. Better equipped schools, such as one might find in the larger cities, will teach students not only Spanish but also emphasize English-language learning or perhaps French, German, or Italian. Other standard courses include science, mathematics, and history.

At the end of each school year, students are given a test. If a student fails any part of that test, he or she must repeat that entire school year. Compulsory education ends at the end of elementary school.

Like many Latin American countries, the quality of education can vary widely throughout the country, with money being the most important influence. In communities with more money, the schools have better resources; in poor villages, the local school can struggle to even provide the most basic education.

A higher quality of education is available from private schools, but only the upper-middle and upper-class families can afford to send their children there. The biggest problem throughout the country and in all levels of schools is the lack of money.

**To School**

School generally begins at 7:30 in the morning and is done at around 1:30 in the afternoon. Kids will usually walk or ride a public transportation bus to school, depending on how far from the school they live.

Children are home for lunch, which may consist of a traditional Guatemalan stew made of chicken, potatoes, and local vegetables and seasonings. It might also include rice and tortillas. Lunch is the biggest meal of the day for most areas, especially in the country and mountainous regions.

In some schools, mothers will take turns preparing lunch for the children, but the government provides the money to buy the food.

**Guatemala Government**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital Name  | Guatemala City  |
| Country Name  | Guatemala  |
| Local - Long  | Republica de Guatemala  |
| Full Country Name  | Republic of Guatemala  |
| Local - Short  | Guatemala  |
| Government Type  | constitutional democratic republic  |
| Capital - geographic coordinate  | 14 37 N, 90 31 W  |
| National Holiday  | Independence Day, 15 September (1821)  |
| Constitution  | 31 May 1985, effective 14 January 1986; suspended 25 May 1993; reinstated 5 June 1993; amended November 1993  |
| Legal System  | civil law system; judicial review of legislative acts  |
| Suffrage  | 18 years of age; universal; note - active duty members of the armed forces and police may not vote by law and are restricted to their barracks on election day  |

**Guatemala Government and Politics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Government Executive Branch  | chief of state: President Otto Fernando PEREZ MOLINA (since 14 January 2012); Vice President Ingrid Roxana BALDETTI Elias (since 14 January 2012); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government head of government: President Otto Fernando PEREZ MOLINA (since 14 January 2012); Vice President Ingrid Roxana BALDETTI Elias (since 14 January 2012) cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the president elections: president and vice president elected on the same ticket by popular vote for a four-year term (may not serve consecutive terms); election last held on 11 September 2011; runoff held on 6 November 2011 (next to be held in September 2015) election results: Otto Fernando PEREZ MOLINA elected president in a runoff election; percent of vote - Otto Fernando PEREZ MOLINA 53.7%, Manuel BALDIZON 46.3%  |
| Legislative Branch  | unicameral Congress of the Republic or Congreso de la Republica (158 seats; members elected through a party list proportional representation system)elections: last held on 11 September 2011 (next to be held in September 2015)election results: percent of vote by party - PP 26.62%, UNE-GANA 22.67%, UNC 9.50%, LIDER 8.87%, CREO 8.67%, VIVA-EG 7.87%, Winaq-URNG-ANN 3.23%, PAN 3.12%, FRG 2.74%, PU 2.70%, other 3.59%; seats by party - PP 57, UNE-GANA 48, LIDER 14, UCN 14, CREO 12, VIVA-EG 6, PAN 2, Winaq-URNG-ANN 2, FRG 1, PU 1, VICTORIA 1; note - changes in party affiliation now reflect the following seat distribution: as of 2 March 2012 - PP 62, LIDER 25, UCN 18, Independents 12, CREO 11, GANA 9, UNE 8, VIVA 3, EG 3, PAN 2, PAN 4, FRG 1, PU 1, Winaq 1, URNG 1, VICTORIA 1  |
| Judicial Branch  | Constitutional Court or Corte de Constitucionalidad is Guatemala's highest court (five judges and five alternate judges are elected by Congress for concurrent five-year terms); Supreme Court of Justice or Corte Suprema de Justicia (13 members are elected by Congress to serve concurrent five-year terms and elect a president of the Court each year from among their number; the president of the Supreme Court of Justice also supervises trial judges around the country, who are named to five-year terms)  |
| Regions or States  | 22 departments (departamentos, singular - departamento); Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Escuintla, Guatemala, Huehuetenango, Izabal, Jalapa, Jutiapa, Peten, Quetzaltenango, Quiche, Retalhuleu, Sacatepequez, San Marcos, Santa Rosa, Solola, Suchitepequez, Totonicapan, Zacapa  |
| Political Parties and Leaders  | Commitment, Renewal, and Order or CREO [Rodolfo NEUTZE]; Democratic Union or UD [Edwin Armando MARTINEZ Herrera]; Encounter for Guatemala or EG [Nineth MONTENEGRO]; Grand National Alliance or GANA [Jaime Antonio MARTINEZ Lohayza]; Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity or URNG [Hector Alfredo NUILA Ericastilla]; Guatemalan Republican Front or FRG [Luis Fernando PEREZ]; National Advancement Party or PAN [Juan GUTIERREZ]; National Unity for Hope or UNE; National Welfare or Bien [Fidel REYES Lee]; Nationalist Change Union or UCN [Mario ESTRADA]; New National Alternative or ANN [Pablo MONSANTO]; Patriot Party or PP [Ingrid Roxana BALDETTI Elias]; Renewed Democratic Liberty or LIDER [Manuel BALDIZON]; Unionista Party or PU [Alvaro  |
| International Law Organization Participation  | has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; the Congress ratified Statute of Rome on 18 January 2012, and ICCt jurisdiction entered into force on 23 February 2012  |
| International Organization Participation  | BCIE, CACM, CELAC, FAO, G-24, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO (correspondent), ITSO, ITU, ITUC, LAES, LAIA (observer), MIGA, MINUSTAH, MONUSCO, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, PCA, Petrocaribe, SICA, UN, UNAMID, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNIFIL, Union Latina, UNISFA, UNITAR, UNMISS, UNOCI, UNSC (temporary), UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO  |
| Politicial Pressure Groups and Leaders  | Alliance Against Impunity or AI (which includes among others Center for Legal Action on Human Rights (CALDH), and Family and Friends of the Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)); Agrarian Owners Group or UNAGRO; Committee for Campesino Unity or CUC; Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations or CACIF (which includes among others the Agrarian Chamber (CAMAGRO) and the Industry Chamber of Guatemala (CIG)); Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce (Camara de Comercio); International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala or CICIG; Mutual Support Group or GAM; Movimiento PRO-Justicia  |

**Guatemala Economy Data**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GDP - Gross Domestic Product  | $81,510,000,000 (USD)  |
| GDP - official exchange rate  | $53,900,000,000 (USD)  |
| GDP - real growth rate  | 3.3%  |
| GDP Per Capita  | $5,300.00 (USD)  |
| GDP by Sector- agriculture  | 13.5%  |
| GDP by Sector- Industry  | 23.8%  |
| GDP by Sector- services  | 62.7%  |
| Population Below Poverty Line  | 56.2%  |
| Inflation Rate  | 3.9%  |
| Labor Force  | 4,260,000  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- agriculture  | 38%  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- industry  | 14%  |
| Labor Force By Occupation- services  | 48%  |
| Unemployment Rate  | 3.2%  |
| Fiscal Year  | calendar year  |
| Annual Budget  | $4,897,000,000 (USD)  |
| Budget Surplus or Deficit - percent of GDP  | -2.7%  |
| Public Debt (% of GDP)  | 26.9%  |
| Taxes and other revenues - percent of GDP  | 11.9%  |
| Major Industries  | sugar, textiles and clothing, furniture, chemicals, petroleum, metals, rubber, tourism  |
| Industrial Growth Rate  | 2.6%  |
| Agriculture Products  | sugarcane, corn, bananas, coffee, beans, cardamom; cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens  |
| Currency Code  | quetzal (GTQ), US dollar (USD), others allowed  |
| Child Labor - % of children ages 5-14  | 21%  |
| Child Labor - # of children ages 5-14  | 929,852  |
| Child Labor - note  | note: data represents children ages 5-17  |
| Commercial Bank Prime Lending Rate  | 13.4%  |

**Guatemala Economy**

**Economic Overview**

Guatemala is the largest and most populous of the Central American countries with a GDP per capita roughly one-half that of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The agricultural sector accounts for about one-fourth of GDP, two-thirds of exports, and half of the labor force. Coffee, sugar, and bananas are the main products. The 1996 signing of peace accords, which ended 36 years of civil war, removed a major obstacle to foreign investment, but widespread political violence and corruption scandals continue to dampen investor confidence. The distribution of income remains highly unequal, with perhaps 75% of the population below the poverty line. Ongoing challenges include increasing government revenues, negotiating further assistance from international donors, upgrading both government and private financial operations, curtailing drug trafficking, and narrowing the trade deficit.

**Guatemala Exports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exports  | $8,470,000,000 (USD)  |
| Major Exports  | coffee, sugar, bananas, fruits and vegetables, cardamom, meat, apparel, petroleum, electricity  |
| Top Export Partners  | US 59%, El Salvador 9.4%, Nicaragua 3.2% |

**Guatemala Imports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imports  | $12,650,000,000 (USD)  |
| Major Imports  | fuels, machinery and transport equipment, construction materials, grain, fertilizers, electricity  |
| Top Import Partners  | US 34.3%, Mexico 8.6%, South Korea 8.4%, El Salvador 5.9%, China 4.1%  |

**Guatemala Flag**

Blue stands for justice and steadfastness, and the white is for purity and uprightness.

**Guatemala Flag Description**

three equal vertical bands of light blue (hoist side), white, and light blue with the coat of arms centered in the white band; the coat of arms includes a green and red quetzal (the national bird) and a scroll bearing the inscription LIBERTAD 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1821 (the original date of independence from Spain) all superimposed on a pair of crossed rifles and a pair of crossed swords and framed by a wreath

TRANSLATE



Guatemala flag



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Anthem Lyrics English  | Guatemala FelizFortunate Guatemala!  May your altarsNever be profaned by cruel men.May there never be slaves who submit to their yoke,Or tyrants who deride you.If tomorrow your sacred soilShould be threatened by foreign invasion,Your fair flag, flying freely in the wind,Will call to you:  Conquer or die.Your fair flag, flying freely in the wind,Will call to you:  Conquer or die.For your people, with heart and soul,Would prefer death to slavery. |

**Guatemala Interesting Facts**

* An important family event is the quinceanos, the party given to celebrate a child’s 15th birthday, the year they achieve adulthood. Quinceanos, birthday parties and other events such as weddings often feature pinatas, hanging figurines stuffed with treats and batted until bursting by blindfolded gues
* At fiestas, dancers sometimes perform pieces that act out historical events. In the Dance of the Conquerors, performers wear masks with pink skin and large noses to represent Europeans. The Dance of the Volcano reenacts a battle between the Spanish and Indians near the volcano Agua during the Conquest.
* Cocoa beans were used as money in ancient Guatemala. Counterfeiters were at work even in those days: some people removed the insides of the beans and filled the beanskins with clay.
* During festival seasons, Guatemalans enjoy flying kites, Barriletes or cometas are flown yearly on November 1 (All Saints’ Day) some places . Made with hundreds of sheets of tissue paper and bamboo poles, with rope and old clothes for tails, these handmade kites can be up to six meters long and require four to six people for handling.
* For many Indians, the Christian cross corresponds to the ancient Maya symbol of the four directions of the sky.
* Guatemala has restaurants and also comedors, which are small cafés without formal menus. Diners are able to view and select the food that is available for that day.
* Guatemalan volcanoes can be very helpful: the town of Fuentes Georginas has hot baths and steam rooms heated entirely by volcanic heat.
* Guatemala’s name is a Spanish corruption of the Nahoa (Mexican) word coactlmoctl-lan, meaning “land of the snake-eating bird,” a phrase that refers to the country’s eagle.
* In Guatemala, lemons are green and limes are yellow.
* Lying northwest of Guatemala City, Lake Atitlán is famous for its beauty.
* Mayan weavers use the indidenous telar de mano or backstrap loom to make items such as scarves, blouses and blankets. Made of sticks, the loom has a backstrap that secures it around the weaver’s hips. The weaver sits or squats in a position that gives tension to the loom’s strings.
* Mayans are born under the sign of a protective animal or nahual, who helps them communicate with nature throughout life. Children lean about their nahual between the ages of 10 and 12. Various personality traits are attributed to people because of correspondence to their particular nahual.
* Most Guatemalans have two last names, but only the first is used in speech. For example, Humberto Urruaquín Ixcán would be called Señor Urruaquín, while his wife Maria Majú n de Urruaquín would be called Señora de Urruaquín.
* On Immaculate Conception (December 8) and the Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe (December 12), people perform loas, short plays in which the Virgin defeats the devil.
* Some homes still have an outdoor steam-bath hut or temaxcal, used since ancient times. The hut has an outer adobe shell around an inner stone structure. Bathers light a fire inside to heat the stones, then throw water against them to produce steam.
* Some Indians believe that illnesses can be caused by ojo¸ the evil eye or stare. Infants and pregnant or menstruating women are thought to be especially susceptible. Babies are kept away from strangers or outfitted with a tight hat to ward off the ojo.
* Some Indians believe that illnesses can be caused by ojo¸ the evil eye or stare. Infants and pregnant or menstruating women are thought to be especially susceptible. Babies are kept away from strangers or outfitted with a tight hat to ward off the ojo.
* The Guatemala highlands produce some of the world’s best coffee, which is available in Canada. Much labour is still done on plantations by hand.
* The indigenous Mayan leader Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work in heightening worldwide awareness of her people’s situation.
* The national symbol of Guatemala is the quetzal - a bird that signifies freedom because it dies in captivity.
* Tikal National Park in the Petén region houses some of Guatemala’s most spectacular ancient architecture. At 70 meters, the pyramids of Tikal are the highest in the Americas and are still among the highest structures in Central America. Achaeologists have reconstructed 130 square kilometers of the ancient city, including over 300 buildings and temples.
* When a child loses a tooth they put the tooth under their pillow and wait for El Raton to leave some money.

**Guatemala Lost Tooth Traditions**

They put the tooth under their pillow and wait for El Raton to leave some money.

**History of Guatemala**

The Mayan civilization flourished throughout much of Guatemala and the surrounding region long before the Spanish arrived, but it was already in decline when the Mayans were defeated by Pedro de Alvarado in 1523-24. During Spanish colonial rule, most of Central America came under the control of the Captaincy General of Guatemala.

The first colonial capital, Ciudad Vieja, was ruined by floods and an earthquake in 1542. Survivors founded Antigua, the second capital, in 1543. In the 17th century, Antigua became one of the richest capitals in the New World. Always vulnerable to volcanic eruptions, floods, and earthquakes, Antigua was destroyed by two earthquakes in 1773. The remnants of its Spanish colonial architecture have been preserved as a national monument. The third capital, Guatemala City, was founded in 1776, after Antigua was abandoned.

Guatemala gained independence from Spain on September 15, 1821; it briefly became part of the Mexican Empire, and then for a period belonged to a federation called the United Provinces of Central America. From the mid-19th century until the mid-1980s, the country passed through a series of dictatorships, insurgencies (particularly beginning in the 1960s), coups, and stretches of military rule with only occasional periods of representative government.

**1944 to 1986**
In 1944, Gen. Jorge Ubico’s dictatorship was overthrown by the "October Revolutionaries," a group of dissident military officers, students, and liberal professionals. A civilian President, Juan Jose Arevalo, was elected in 1945 and held the presidency until 1951. Social reforms initiated by Arevalo were continued by his successor, Col. Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz permitted the communist Guatemalan Labor Party to gain legal status in 1952. By the mid-point of Arbenz’s term, communists controlled key peasant organizations, labor unions, and the governing political party, holding some key government positions. Despite most Guatemalans’ attachment to the original ideals of the 1944 uprising, some private sector leaders and the military viewed Arbenz’s policies as a menace. The army refused to defend the Arbenz government when a U.S.-backed group led by Col. Carlos Castillo Armas invaded the country from Honduras in 1954 and quickly took over the government. Gen. Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes took power in 1958 following the murder of Colonel Castillo Armas.

In response to the increasingly autocratic rule of Ydigoras Fuentes, a group of junior military officers revolted in 1960. When they failed, several went into hiding and established close ties with Cuba. This group became the nucleus of the forces that were in armed insurrection against the government for the next 36 years. Four principal left-wing guerrilla groups--the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT)--conducted economic sabotage and targeted government installations and members of government security forces in armed attacks. These organizations combined to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in1982. At the same time, extreme right-wing groups of self-appointed vigilantes, including the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA) and the White Hand, tortured and murdered students, professionals, and peasants suspected of involvement in leftist activities.

Shortly after President Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro took office in 1966, the army launched a major counterinsurgency campaign that largely broke up the guerrilla movement in the countryside. The guerrillas then concentrated their attacks in Guatemala City, where they assassinated many leading figures, including U.S. Ambassador John Gordon Mein in 1968. Between 1966 and 1982, there was a series of military or military-dominated governments.

On March 23, 1982, army troops commanded by junior officers staged a coup to prevent the assumption of power by Gen. Angel Anibal Guevara, the hand-picked candidate of outgoing President and Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia. They denounced Guevara’s electoral victory as fraudulent. The coup leaders asked retired Gen. Efrain Rios Montt to negotiate the departure of Lucas and Guevara. Rios Montt had been the candidate of the Christian Democracy Party in the 1974 presidential elections and was widely regarded as having been denied his own victory through fraud.

Rios Montt was at this time a lay pastor in the evangelical protestant "Church of the Word." In his 1982 inaugural address, he stated that his presidency resulted from the will of God. He formed a three-member military junta that annulled the 1965 constitution, dissolved Congress, suspended political parties, and canceled the electoral law. After a few months, Rios Montt dismissed his junta colleagues and assumed the de facto title of "President of the Republic."

Guerrilla forces and their leftist allies denounced Rios Montt. Rios Montt sought to defeat the guerrillas with military actions and economic reforms; in his words, "rifles and beans." In May 1982, the Conference of Catholic Bishops accused Rios Montt of being responsible for increased militarization of the country and for continuing military massacres of civilians. General Rios Montt was quoted in the New York Times of July 18, 1982 as telling an audience of indigenous Guatemalans, "If you are with us, we’ll feed you; if not, we’ll kill you."

The government began to form local civilian defense patrols (PACs). Participation was in theory voluntary, but in reality, many Guatemalans, especially in the heavily indigenous northwest, had no choice but to join either the PACs or the guerrillas. Rios Montt’s conscript army and PACs recaptured essentially all guerrilla territory--guerrilla activity lessened and was largely limited to hit-and-run operations. However, Rios Montt won this partial victory at an enormous cost in civilian deaths.

Rios Montt’s brief presidency was probably the most violent period of the 36-year internal conflict, which resulted in about 200,000 deaths of mostly unarmed indigenous civilians. Although leftist guerrillas and right-wing death squads also engaged in summary executions, forced disappearances, and torture of noncombatants, the vast majority of human rights violations were carried out by the Guatemalan military and the PACs they controlled. The internal conflict is described in great detail in the reports of the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) and the Archbishop’s Office for Human Rights (ODHAG). The CEH estimates that government forces were responsible for 93% of the violations; ODHAG earlier estimated that government forces were responsible for 80%.

On August 8, 1983, Rios Montt was deposed by his own Minister of Defense, Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores, who succeeded him as de facto President of Guatemala. Mejia justified his coup, saying that "religious fanatics" were abusing their positions in the government and also because of "official corruption." Seven people were killed in the coup, although Rios Montt survived to found a political party (the Guatemalan Republic Front) and to be elected President of Congress in 1995 and 2000. Awareness in the United States of the conflict in Guatemala, and its ethnic dimension, increased with the 1983 publication of the book *I, Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. The book recounts the life of the title character, a young woman whose often tragic life experiences reflect the experiences common to many indigenous people suffering under that nation’s injustices.

General Mejia allowed a managed return to democracy in Guatemala, starting with a July 1, 1984 election for a Constituent Assembly to draft a democratic constitution. On May 30, 1985, after 9 months of debate, the Constituent Assembly finished drafting a new constitution, which took effect immediately. Vinicio Cerezo, a civilian politician and the presidential candidate of the Christian Democracy Party, won the first election held under the new constitution with almost 70% of the vote, and took office on January 14, 1986.

**1986 to 2003**
Upon its inauguration in January 1986, President Cerezo’s civilian government announced that its top priorities would be to end the political violence and establish the rule of law. Reforms included new laws of habeas corpus and amparo (court-ordered protection), the creation of a legislative human rights committee, and the establishment in 1987 of the Office of Human Rights Ombudsman. The Supreme Court also embarked on a series of reforms to fight corruption and improve legal system efficiency. With Cerezo’s election, the military moved away from governing and returned to the more traditional role of providing internal security, specifically by fighting armed insurgents. The first 2 years of Cerezo’s administration were characterized by a stable economy and a marked decrease in political violence.

Dissatisfied military personnel made two coup attempts in May 1988 and May 1989, but military leadership supported the constitutional order. The government was heavily criticized for its unwillingness to investigate or prosecute cases of human rights violations. The final 2 years of Cerezo’s government were also marked by a failing economy, strikes, protest marches, and allegations of widespread corruption. The government’s inability to deal with many of the nation’s problems--such as infant mortality, illiteracy, deficient health and social services, and rising levels of violence--contributed to popular discontent.

Presidential and congressional elections were held on November 11, 1990. After a runoff ballot, Jorge Serrano was inaugurated on January 14, 1991, thus completing the first transition from one democratically elected civilian government to another. Because his Movement of Solidarity Action (MAS) Party gained only 18 of 116 seats in Congress, Serrano entered into a tenuous alliance with the Christian Democrats and the National Union of the Center (UCN).

The Serrano administration’s record was mixed. It had some success in consolidating civilian control over the army, replacing a number of senior officers and persuading the military to participate in peace talks with the URNG. Serrano took the politically unpopular step of recognizing the sovereignty of Belize. The Serrano government reversed the economic slide it inherited, reducing inflation and boosting real growth.

On May 25, 1993, Serrano illegally dissolved Congress and the Supreme Court and tried to restrict civil freedoms, allegedly to fight corruption. The "autogolpe" (or self-initiated coup) failed due to unified, strong protests by most elements of Guatemalan society, international pressure, and the army’s enforcement of the decisions of the Court of Constitutionality, which ruled against the attempted takeover. In the face of this resistance, Serrano fled the country.

On June 5, 1993, the Congress, pursuant to the 1985 constitution, elected the Human Rights Ombudsman, Ramiro De Leon Carpio, to complete Serrano’s presidential term. De Leon, not a member of any political party and lacking a political base but with strong popular support, launched an ambitious anticorruption campaign to "purify" Congress and the Supreme Court, demanding the resignations of all members of the two bodies.

Despite considerable congressional resistance, presidential and popular pressure led to a November 1993 agreement brokered by the Catholic Church between the administration and Congress. This package of constitutional reforms was approved by popular referendum on January 30, 1994. In August 1994, a new Congress was elected to complete the unexpired term. Controlled by the anti-corruption parties--the populist Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) headed by ex-Gen. Efrain Rios Montt, and the center-right National Advancement Party (PAN)--the new Congress began to move away from the corruption that characterized its predecessors.

Under De Leon, the peace process, now brokered by the United Nations, took on new life. The government and the URNG signed agreements on human rights (March 1994), resettlement of displaced persons (June 1994), historical clarification (June 1994), and indigenous rights (March 1995). They also made significant progress on a socioeconomic and agrarian agreement. National elections for president, the Congress, and municipal offices were held in November 1995. With almost 20 parties competing in the first round, the presidential election came down to a January 7, 1996 runoff in which PAN candidate Alvaro Arzu defeated Alfonso Portillo of the FRG by just over 2% of the vote. Arzu won because of his strength in Guatemala City, where he had previously served as mayor, and in the surrounding urban area. Portillo won all of the rural departments except Peten. Under the Arzu administration, peace negotiations were concluded, and the government signed peace accords ending the 36-year internal conflict in December 1996. The human rights situation also improved during Arzu’s tenure, and steps were taken to reduce the influence of the military in national affairs.

Guatemala held presidential, legislative, and municipal elections on November 7, 1999, and a runoff presidential election on December 26. In the first round the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) won 63 of 113 legislative seats, while the National Advancement Party (PAN) won 37. The New Nation Alliance (ANN) won 9 legislative seats, and three minority parties won the remaining four. In the runoff on December 26, Alfonso Portillo (FRG) won 68% of the vote to 32% for Oscar Berger (PAN). Portillo carried all 22 departments and Guatemala City, which was considered the PAN’s stronghold. Portillo was criticized during the campaign for his relationship with the FRG’s chairman, former Gen. Efrain Rios Montt, the de facto President of Guatemala in 1982-83. Many charged that some of the worst human rights violations of the internal conflict were committed under Rios Montt’s rule. Nevertheless, Portillo’s impressive electoral triumph, with two-thirds of the vote in the second round, gave him a claim to a mandate from the people to carry out his reform program.

President Portillo pledged to maintain strong ties to the United States, further enhance Guatemala’s growing cooperation with Mexico, and participate actively in the integration process in Central America and the Western Hemisphere. Domestically, he vowed to support continued liberalization of the economy, increase investment in human capital and infrastructure, establish an independent central bank, and increase revenue by stricter enforcement of tax collections rather than increasing taxation. Portillo also promised to continue the peace process, appoint a civilian defense minister, reform the armed forces, replace the military presidential security service with a civilian one, and strengthen protection of human rights. He appointed a pluralist cabinet, including indigenous members and others not affiliated with the FRG ruling party.

Progress in carrying out Portillo’s reform agenda was slow at best, with the notable exception of a series of reforms sponsored by the World Bank to modernize bank regulation and criminalize money laundering. The administration made some progress on such issues as taking state responsibility for past human rights cases, supporting human rights in international forums, and pressing labor rights reforms, but it failed to show significant advances on combating impunity in past human rights cases, military reforms, and legislation to increase political participation. It renounced a so-called Fiscal Pact that had been established together with business and civil society groups to finance the reforms called for under the peace accords. The government later was involved in a series of high-level corruption scandals, none of which resulted in successful prosecution of those responsible. The United States determined in April 2003 that Guatemala had failed to demonstrably adhere to its international counternarcotics commitments during the previous year. The popularity of the government, as measured by opinion polls, steadily declined as evidence of corruption and mismanagement accumulated.

A high crime rate and a serious and worsening public corruption problem were cause for concern for the Government of Guatemala. These problems, in addition to issues related to the often violent harassment and intimidation by unknown assailants of human rights activists, judicial workers, journalists, and witnesses in human rights trials, led the government to begin serious attempts in 2001 to open a national dialogue to discuss the considerable challenges facing the country. This dialogue has not taken place, despite the creation of the Guatemalan Forum, a coalition of civil society and private sector interests calling for political reforms.

National elections were held on November 9, 2003. Oscar Berger Perdomo of the Grand National Alliance (GANA) party won the election, receiving 54.1% of the vote. His opponent, Alvarado Colom Caballeros of the Nation Unity for Hope (UNE) party received 49.1% of the vote. The new government assumed office on January 14, 2004.

**Guatemala History Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Guatemala Year in History | Guatemala Timeline |
| 1523  | **Pedro de Alvarado led a Spanish expedition from Mexico and invaded Guatemala.**Pedro de Alvarado led a Spanish expedition from Mexico and invaded Guatemala. Alvarado established Spanish rule.  |
| 1570  | **Spain established the Audiencia in Guatemala.**Spain established the Audiencia in Guatemala. It was a high court of judges and administrators. It was headquartered in Antigua.  |
| 1776  | **The Audencia was moved to Guatemala City.**The Audencia was moved to Guatemala City. An earthquake had destroyed Antigua.  |
| 1821  | **Guatemala becomes independent and joins the Mexican empire the following year.**Guatemala becomes independent and joins the Mexican empire the following year.  |
| 1823  | **Guatemala broke away from Mexico and formed the United Provinces of Central America.**Guatemala broke away from Mexico and formed the United Provinces of Central America which also include Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.  |
| 1839  | **Guatemala left the United Provinces of Central America.**Guatemala left the United Provinces of Central America. Rafael Carrerea became the dictator.  |
| 1871  | **A number of liberal dictators ruled Guatemala.**A number of liberal dictators ruled Guatemala. They promoted economic growth. They also encouraged foreigners to immigrate to the country.  |
| 1873  | **Guatemala ruled by liberal President Justo Rufino Barrios.**Guatemala ruled by liberal President Justo Rufino Barrios, whomodernises the country, develops the army and introduces coffee growing.  |
| 1906  | **The United Fruit Company began banana plantations in Guatemala.**The United States company called the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita Brands International) began developing banana plantations in Guatemala.  |
| 1941  | **Guatemala declares war on the Axis powers.**Guatemala declares war on the Axis powers.  |
| 1944  | **Jorge Ubico, the dictator, was forced to resign.**Jorge Ubico, the dictator, was forced to resign and a social and economic revolution began in Guatemala.  |
| 1945  | **A constitution was adopted.**A constitution was adopted. Juan Jose Arevalo became the president. He encouraged education and medical improvements.  |
| 1952  | **The government began to take over privately owned land.**The government began to take over privately owned land and distribute it among landless peasants. Large areas owned by the United Fruit company were taken as part of this government program.  |
| 1963  | **Colonel Enrique Peralta becomes president following the assassination of Castillo.**Colonel Enrique Peralta becomes president following the assassination of Castillo.  |
| 1976  | **A major earthquake struck Guatemala**A major earthquake struck Guatemala causing around 23,000 deaths and $700 million in damage.  |
| 1982  | **General Efrain Rios Montt seized power from Pres. Lucas Garcia.**GeneralEfrain Rios Montt seized power from Pres. Lucas Garcia. Under his17-month rule the army burned Indian villages and killed thousands ofsuspected leftists. Montt established the Guatemalan Republican Front(FRG).  |
| 1985  | **Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo was elected president.**Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo was elected president. He was a civilian. A new constitution was written and Congress was reconvened.  |
| 1986  | **The civilian government took office.**The civilian government took office. Military leaders tired several times to take control of the government, but they were unsuccessful  |
| 1991  | **Jorge Serrano Elias was elected president.**Jorge Serrano Elias was elected president.  |
| 1993  | **Serrano was removed from office by military officials.**Serrano was removed from office by military officials. Ramiro de Leon Carpio was then elected president  |
| 1996  | **Anti-government groups signed a peace treaty.**Anti-government groups signed a peace treaty with they government ending the widespread violence.  |
| 2003  | **Guatemala agrees on free-trade agreement with US.**Guatemala, along with Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, agrees on free-trade agreement with US.  |
| 2005  | **Tropical Storm Stan**Hundreds killed as Tropical Storm Stan sweeps through, triggering landslides and floods.  |
| 2007  | **Adoption treaty**Guatemala ratifies an international adoption treaty, committing it to ensure that babies are not bought or stolen.  |
| 2010  | **Police chief and czar fired**Country's police chief and anti-drugs czar are fired over the theft of cocaine.  |
| 2013  | **Efrain Rios Montt convicted**Efrain Rios Montt is convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity, only to have the ruling overturned by the constitutional court on a technicality.  |

**Guatemala Holidays and Events**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Display Date | Title |
| December  | **Fiesta de Santo Tomas**Chichicastenango (Chichi)A mixture of Mayan and Christian culture, the Fiesta de Santo Tomas celebrates Chichicastenango's patron, Saint Thomas. Streets are decorated with colorful cloth, flags and streamers and the town becomes a giant street fair.Costumes, masks, music and dancing, a giant parade and fireworks--all are part of the festivities. But especially exciting is the palo volador ritual. In front of the church is a tall pine pole, representing yaxche, the Mayan tree of life. Acrobats jump from a framework at the top, spinning and dancing their way to the ground while dangling by ropes attached to their ankles.Also popular is the Baile de la Conquista (Dance of the Conquest) in which masked dancers in elaborate costumes act out the Spanish conquest of the Americas.  |
| December 25th  | **Christmas** |