



Focus on GUATEMALA School Program

"It was an interesting, lovely and great experience, and I would do it again."

Lies Verrijcken, sojourner from Belgium

Guatemala's glories include Mayan relics—the ancient city of Tikal, for example, towering over a rainforest preserve, has more than 2,000 ruined buildings and temples—as well as rugged mountain scenery. In fact, Central America's highest mountains, at least three of which are active volcanoes, frame the city of Antigua, once Guatemala's capital and still filled with beguiling colonial architecture. Guatemala may also be Latin America's least socially assimilated nation. Descendants of European colonists maintain their own, mostly urban communities, while native Mayans—perhaps half the population—live more often in mountain villages, supporting themselves by ancient modes of farming and crafts, while dressed in colorfully embroidered, centuries-old fashions. These two cultures, as well as right- and left-wing political factions, are proud to be Guatemalans, though they sometimes feel tension among themselves. Most of the time, however, Guatemalans are soft-spoken, courteous and hospitable to everyone.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Guatemala has been in existence since 1958. AFS volunteers, divided into 12 chapters across the country, provide support to more than 70 AFS students and about 50 community service participants every year.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Guatemala

Participants arrive at La Aurora International Airport, often on a Friday afternoon or evening. AFS staff and volunteers meet them and escort them to their arrival orientation. This program lasts through Saturday in Guatemala City. It discusses Guatemalan culture, safety tips and AFS procedures.

Arrival Orientation

Your one-day arrival orientation will discuss your expectations, AFS Guatemala's mission and rules as well as life in Guatemala.

Living in Guatemala

Lifestyle and Family Living

In Guatemala City, families live much as they do in the cosmopolitan centers of Europe, whereas within an hour's drive of the capital are people whose patterns of daily life remain those of past centuries.

Still, much of Guatemalan life revolves around families. Guatemalans say that parents are *espejos* (mirrors): through them, you learn who you are and what you can become. Children depend on their parents for advice and guidance throughout their lives.

Family members tend to live near each other, and Guatemalans rarely live or spend much time alone. An invitation to a party or social function, for example, would be interpreted to include all family members, including children and grandparents. Most families consist of parents and their unmarried children, though they may also include married sons or daughters and their families. Families also care for elderly relatives, and godparents (*padrinos*) are considered an important part of the family. However, traditional family patterns are changing as Guatemalans adopt more North American values.

Guatemalan women tend to marry young and have many children. In rural areas, some couples cannot afford or access a church wedding and often live in common-law marriages. Mayan couples may also perform commitment ceremonies that differ from church weddings. Women give birth at home, though in cities they may go to a hospital.

Guatemala's population is unique in Central America for its strong resistance to assimilation; even today, there are as more *Indigenas* than Ladinos. A fundamental split has developed in Guatemala between *Indigenas*, those who have continued to follow their traditional Mayan lifestyle and speak their traditional languages, and Ladinos, Hispanics and people of Mayan descent who have adopted a Westernized lifestyle and use Spanish as their primary language. Guatemalan Ladino culture has been characterized as urban-oriented, receptive to new (especially foreign) ideas and impatient with the slow, unchanging patterns of traditional life.

Families are often conservative, and parents expect children to observe curfews. They also disapprove of children smoking or drinking in the home. In fact, parents themselves often refrain to set a proper example.

Dress and Appearance

Most Guatemalans have adopted some forms of Western clothing, though some men still wear the *sandalsor* or sash and woolen *ponchito* that identify them as Mayans. Mayan women use *tzutes*, a type of blanket, for cushioning baskets on their heads or swaddling infants.

AFSers should bring clothing for all seasons including bathing suits, jeans, T-shirts, shorts, comfortable walking shoes and a sweater. You may also need more formal clothes for special occasions (for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys a jacket, slacks and tie).

Diet and Meals

Corn occupies first place in the daily diet of Guatemalans. It forms the base for such dishes as tortillas, tamales, enchiladas and more. Other indigenous contributions to culinary variety are beans, squash, and complex sauces made of ground chilies, seeds, chocolate, and plantains. *Pepian* is one such sauce, usually served with meat. The Spanish influence is more obvious in soups, stews, and such special dishes as *fiambre*, a mixture of meat, fish, sausage, and vegetables. Avocados and a variety of other fruits, including melon, mangos and papayas, form a part of most meals and serve as desserts as well. Other local ingredients for desserts include honey, nuts and cinnamon. Guatemalans also drink coffee, their country's principal export.

Do not ask your family to provide you with food from your home country that you may miss. It could be very expensive or scarce.

Though food in Guatemalan homes is usually safe, students are advised not to buy food directly from vendors on the street and to make sure that drinking water is purified. As a rule, students should drink only bottled and boiled beverages, such as soft drinks or coffee.

Teen Life

Teenagers in Guatemala enjoy themselves much like other teenagers around the world, but they have less freedom than in some other Western countries. Parents are conservative and want to know what their children are doing, when and with whom, and they expect their children to accept parental decisions.

Guatemalan host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their family lives.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Guatemala will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Guatemala, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Guatemala. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. AFS Guatemala recommends that US\$1,000 should be sufficient to cover such expenses for an entire year. Students can open bank accounts or use a credit card.

Remember that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Guatemalan. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Guatemala may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Guatemala (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour

emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Guatemala's 50,885 square miles of diverse landscape ranges from towering mountains, which include 33 volcanoes, to low-land jungles, rainforests and clear lakes and rivers. The altitude ranges from sea level to 12,467 feet.

The average annual temperature is around 75 degrees F (20 degrees C). In the coastal regions, the temperature reaches 100 degrees F (37 degrees C), while in the highlands it drops to freezing. Nights are quite cool at any time of the year. In the central highlands, the rainy season lasts from May to October. In regions where the weather is particularly hot and humid, Guatemalans are conscientious about showering daily.

Population

Guatemala has more than 12 million inhabitants. The mestizos (descended from Indians and Spanish), who are a minority, have traits from both cultures and have developed their own identity. Guatemala's multicultural populace includes more than 20 ethnic groups descended from the ancient inhabitants of the country. Many inhabitants of the Caribbean area retain their African roots.

Language

Spanish is the official language. In addition, some 20 autonomous languages are spoken in highland regions.

Government

A constitutional democratic republic with executive, legislative and judicial branches, Guatemala is divided into 23 departments each administered by an appointed governor.

Religion

The majority of Guatemalans are Catholic, although there is religious freedom. Certain communities still practice rituals that refer to ancient Mayan gods.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. To get ready, first make every effort to learn

some key Spanish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Guatemala, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Guatemala and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Guatemala. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Guatemalan. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Guatemala will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Guatemalans will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Guatemalan

- * The University of San Carlos, established in 1676, is the third oldest university in the Western Hemisphere.
- * In 1944, Guatemala became one of the first Latin American countries to legislate women's right to vote.
- * Guatemala is the only major source of jade in the Western Hemisphere.
- * Guatemala's currency, the quetzal, is named after the country's national bird.
- * In 1910, Guatemalans Federico Lenhoff and Estuardo Cabarrús invented the formula for instant coffee, still in use today.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	50,885 square miles
	Population	12 million
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Constitutional democratic republic
Currency	Quetzal	
Useful website	http://nuestraguatemala.com www.prensalibre.com http://www.parquetikal.com www.guatemala.terramagica.com http://mapasred.com	

AFS Guatemala website	http://afsweb.afs.org/countryp.nsf/pages/guatemala
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AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>