AWESOME ANTIGUA!

A Backpacker's Guide to Antigua, Guatemala

Get the *Inside Scoop* on Antigua’s Best Spanish Language Schools

Plus:
- Rocking Nightlife
- Volcano Hikes
- Volunteer Opportunities
- & Much More!
Learning a foreign language isn’t an easy thing – at least not for most of us. Some of you were lucky enough to be born into multi-lingual families, and you grew up with a foreign tongue. The rest of us have to struggle. It involves a lot of book work, and self control, and a lot of embarrassing, stunted conversations with strangers. On my last trip to Central America, I decided it was time to sit down and actually learn the language. I took classes in Mexico and in Guatemala, both very different experiences that I took a lot from. I made a real effort to speak Spanish with locals and practice whenever I could. I really think that I learned most of my Spanish during booze-fueled conversations with rum-soaked locals. I’m happy to say that by the end of my few months in Central America, I was able to hold a decent conversation in Spanish. I could negotiate a good price with a taxi driver, and I could make jokes with locals at the bar, and (perhaps most importantly) I could flirt with local girls.

This was an amazing personal accomplishment for me, but I had no idea how much it would change the way I travel. No longer was I relegated to the gringo hangouts. Suddenly a whole new world opened up to me. I’d meet locals and end up going out for drinks at local hangouts where no gringos ever came. I found myself spending weeks in small towns and un-touristed cities where I was often the only foreigner for miles. I made real friends, some of whom I’ve still never spoken to in English. I had some truly wonderful experiences that I know I never would have had as an English-only gringo.

Writing this guide was part of the learning process as well. The World Travel Buzz team and I researched, interviewed and spoke with local business owners and tour guides – all in Spanish. Our hope is that you’ll use some of the information that we’ve compiled here to actually go to Antigua and learn Spanish.

It’s a real challenge to learn a new language. It’s difficult and it takes a lot of time, but for me, it was absolutely worth it, amigos.

Definitivamente vale la pena! 🌸
AWESOME ANTIGUA!

Gorgeous scenery, buzzing night life, a delicious variety of food, authentic cultural experiences, and a diverse range of activities: what more could you ask for in a city? Antigua, Guatemala has long been a favorite place of international appeal for backpackers and travelers of all stripes. The Spaniards made it the capital in 1543 and even though it experienced numerous natural disasters leading to the removal of its capital status, it remains a top destination for all types of travelers. From luxury vacationers to budget backpackers, Antigua has the ability to appeal to a variety of budgets.

The town itself is situated between several volcanoes which not only supply a stunning view, but also great opportunities for hiking and exploring nature. The dramatic backdrop provides the perfect inspiration for artists and musicians to thrive in this lively city. Expect to experience a variety of music, day and night, both in the streets and in restaurants.

As far as nightlife goes, Antigua wins top spot, hands-down in all of Guatemala. There are an abundance of awesome and entertaining bars all over town, so if you like to party, you won’t be disappointed. And no matter what your party style is, you’ll find something to suit your mood. Maybe you want to chill out while sipping cocktails, listen to amazing local musicians while swilling Cerveza Gallo (the local brew of choice) in a dark and brooding dive, or maybe you prefer to take shots while dancing on a bar – whatever you’re looking for, there is always a place for you in Antigua!

Part of the reason Antigua’s nightlife is so great is because it’s a youthful city full of local young adults. They travel from all over the country because Antigua provides lots of opportunities for work and great universities, and they bring with them liberal and open attitudes, and a zest for new and innovative music and art. Most of the young locals speak some English but they are...
usually happy to speak with you in Spanish to help you practice. Antigua is a very international city, and the locals are eager to meet people from around the world. So let down your guard and spark up a conversation with a cute Guatemalteca -- You won’t regret it!

One of the main reasons young travelers flock to Antigua is to study Spanish. Guatemalan Spanish is generally clearer and less accented than some of its Central American neighbors, which makes it easier to learn. Whether you choose to stay long-term and get your own place for a few months, or if you want an authentic experience by living with a host family, there are a variety of opportunities to fit everyone’s needs. Antigua provides the perfect environment to foster language-learning, coupled with relaxation, cultural experiences, adventure, and fun. There’s no question why Antigua’s name is synonymous with Spanish schools.

Spanish isn’t the only class you can take to expand your Guatemalan culture though. From a gourmet chocolate making class to cooking classes where you’ll learn recopies for local Guatemalan dishes, there are plenty of experiences on offer. Take a textiles class and learn how to weave a scarf using the traditional method – not only will you acquire a new appreciation for the craft, but you’ll have a unique souvenir to take with you.

Outside the city limits lays a plethora of opportunities to experience local culture. With markets to explore, volcanoes to climb, and coffee plantations to visit, the surrounding area of Antigua leaves little to be desired. And it’s all easily accessible by tours, chicken buses, and rental cars or bikes.

Whether you’re studying, working, volunteering, or just passing through, Antigua remains a top travel destination from all over the globe. Now all that remains is for you to personally discover what this great city has to offer. Stroll down the cobblestone streets, sip a cold beer on a rooftop bar, and pick up a new language. The opportunities for adventure and fun are endless here. Buy the ticket, take the ride – Antigua is waiting!

Guatemala is world renowned for its quality coffee. The mineral rich volcanic soil, unique microclimates, and traditional harvesting and processing methods make for a better bean and a better cup of coffee. The agricultural area surrounding Antigua is predominately owned by coffee fincas (plantations) and they provide interesting tours that usually culminate in a delicious fresh cup of the local brew.

Around Antigua: Coffee Connoisseur

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Filadelfia
150 m North of Iglesia de San Felipe de Jesús, www.filadelfia.com.gt
One of the best and oldest coffee plantations is Filadelfia Coffee. They offer a variety of unique and varied tours including latte art and cupping, nature walks, and even zip lining for the more adventurously inclined. They also have 3 tours daily, explaining the process of coffee making, from harvesting the bean to brewing the cup. If you want the complete experience, you can book a room at the resort, complete with a restaurant and pool.

Finca Los Nietos
www.fincalosnietos.com, christina.raul@yahoo.com, 502 7831-5438
This boutique organic coffee finca is located 7 km out of town and their popular one-hour tour will teach you how coffee is grown, processed, roasted, and of course, how it tastes. Feel free to relax and enjoy some mellow time bird watching in the garden afterwards. This tour includes a free coffee gift bag so you can remember the experience long after you’ve gone home. To get there, catch a bus headed towards San Antonio Aguas Calientes.
Mundo Spanish School offers individual and group Spanish classes to students from around the world. We can also provide placement with a host family and in a volunteer project for full immersion in Guatemalan culture.

- Individual Classes
- Sunny Courtyard
- Experienced Teachers

- Homestay Placement
- Volunteer Placement
- Fun Atmosphere

www.MundoSpanishSchool.com
1a Calle del Chajón #11  |  502 7882 4255  |  info@mundospanishschool.com
Spanish Schools in Antigua

Antigua is the place to go in Central America to study Spanish and the demand for good Spanish schools is so high, that there are over 80 schools in this town. Antigua is the perfect place to relax while studying, with beautiful colonial buildings, amazing nightlife, and fantastic scenery. The city is welcoming, walkable, and modern, and it offers plenty of gringo-friendly options for eating, sleeping, and partying, while still maintaining its local Guatemalan culture and charm. It basically ticks all the boxes on any would-be language-learner’s list, making it the premier destination for those looking to study Spanish in Central America.

With the plethora of options for Spanish schools, it’s important you find one that suits your needs and desires. Remember that any school is only as good as its teachers, if for whatever reason you’re not happy with yours, make sure you tell the school; It’s usually easy enough to swap.

The following is our list of some of the best Spanish schools in Antigua.

Mundo

1a Calle del Chajón #11, 502 7882 4255, info@mundospanishschool.com, www.MundoSpanishSchool.com

Most classes at Mundo Spanish Language School take place in the sunny courtyard, complete with a lush green lawn, plenty of flowers, and a babbling fountain. The tranquil setting is ideal for soaking up sunshine as well as Spanish. Lessons are normally one-on-one, and the profesoritas are all experienced and patient teachers. The overall vibe is fun, friendly, and casual, and the level of teaching is top notch. Mundo can also place you with a local Guatemalan host family, and provide volunteer opportunities ranging from working with children to offering medical support in the local communities.

La Union

1a Avenida Sur #21, (502) 7832 7337, info@launion.edu.gt, www.launion.edu.gt

La Union is the biggest Spanish school in Antigua, and probably the most social. The school often works with as many as 80 students, which might sound like a lot, but they have the staff and facilities to handle it. If you’re looking for a fun group experience, and want to meet lots of people, then La Union is for you. They also offer lots of afterschool activities for students, including organized trips. The staff is friendly, the price is good, and the location is great. La Union is next door to the Historic San Francisco Church and ruins, as well as dangerously close to the amazing bars, Café No Se and Juan Caravela, making this school the perfect choice for social Spanish learners.
Around Antigua: Volcano Hikes!

Nestled in a valley of volcanoes, Antigua has always been known for its scenic beauty. With the local volcanoes dominating the horizon, the most obvious activity to do in Antigua is to hike one of these volcanic monsters. The most popular hike is Volcan Pacaya, followed by Volcan Agua and Volcan Fuego. All of the Volcanoes are easily accessible on a daytrip, and you can choose the difficulty and type of experience you want. Fuego remains the most active, while Pacaya is the most easily accessible and least difficult to climb in a single day. Check out the Antigua Travel Agencies Section for prices and more information about where to book Antigua’s

Spanish Schools cont’d

Centro Linguistico Maya

5a Calle Poniente #20, (502) 7832-0656, clmmaya@guate.net.gt, www.clmaya.com

Centro Linguistico Maya is a great school that has been around for a long time – in fact, it was founded in 1979! They have a gorgeous rooftop terrace that makes sunny morning lessons more enjoyable, and the view is so spectacular, it’s surreal. With age comes experience and they have plenty of veteran teachers, including Guillermo, a 70 year old Guatemalteco, who is a barrel of laughs and will keep you entertained all day with his stories from a very interesting life. The Central building of CLM is located in downtown Antigua, just 2½ blocks from Central Park and 1½ blocks from the bus station.

Ixchel

4a Avenida Norte #32, +(502) 7832-3440, info@ixchelschool.com, www.ixchelschool.com

The entire staff at Ixchel is warm, welcoming, friendly, and will make you feel like family. They have knowledgeable professors, a nice courtyard for sunny classes, and two fabulous on-site apartments, making this school a great choice. Delicious food is included with your accommodation and the courtyard is a great place to hang out after class and mingle with other students.

Cima del Mundo (CDM)

6a. avenida Norte #45, www.cdmschool.com

CDM is a smaller and slightly quieter school, compared to some of the others on this list. This makes it a great choice if you’re looking for a place where you can really focus on your learning. Like most schools, they will sort out accommodation for you, and you can choose to live with a local family for the true Antigua experience. Great value for money and a friendly staff who will teach you in the classrooms, the local coffee shops, or while soaking up some sun in Parque Central – this school is extremely flexible. And when it’s time for you to head home, you can continue your Spanish education via their convenient Skype classes! 🌍
Antigua Bars

One thing you will learn about Antigua is that it’s a fantastic city to party in. It seems like everyone here likes to study hard and party harder, and that includes locals as well as foreigners. If you enjoy the occasional night on the sauce, you’re in luck. Many days here begin with crawling out of bed, grabbing a bite to eat at the local panaderia, and heading to school, bleary-eyed and trying to remember what kind of trouble you got yourself into the night before. It’s no fun to be nursing a large goma (hangover) while trying to study Spanish, but it’s all part of the Antigua experience! No matter the occasion or the mood, there are bars to suit all needs, whether you want a quiet place for a drink with a friend, to shake your moneymaker on the dance floor, or cold beer and a good burger, Antigua always delivers.

The ancient wooden bar at Café No Se

Juan Caravela

1a. Avenida Sur no. 7, +502 7832-9239

Juan Caravela is the jack of all trades. It’s one of the best places to eat in Antigua, with great Sushi, Pizzas, nachos, and other international cuisines. But it’s not just a restaurant; they have a great bar with daily drink specials and a distinctly classy vibe. The main bar is a great place to join in with the locals and watch a Real Madrid or Barcelona game. There’s a roof terrace and a disco at the back that is often packed with sexy young locals and travelers, boogying down to international dance beats. If you’re looking for a place to get the party started, head to Juan Caravela and you won’t be disappointed.

Café No Se

1st Avenida, Antigua, Guatemala, www.cafenose.com, masmezcal@cafenose.com

Café No Se is less of a café and more of a perfectly executed dive bar. Imagine all your favorite dive bars, balled into one and transported to Guatemala. Café No Se greets costumers with a dark and sweaty room, where a dilapidated bar is manned by a cute gringo serving cheap beer, cocktails, and bottles of dirt-cheap Guatemalan Aguardiente. There is always live music and it’s always good. The back room is a more spacious version of the first, with a long wooden bar and some seating. The real gem of Café No Se can be found through a small hole in the wall. It’s actually a tiny door, only about 4 feet tall, and on the other side, you’ll find the Illegal Mezcal bar. This place is perfect: dim lighting with lots of candles, Tom Waits perpetually grumbling through the speakers, and behind the bar is local madman Randy, a self proclaimed asshole, who serves nothing but Mezcal and beer. This is one of our favorite bars in the world.
Café No Sé
Because every dive needs a town

Live music
Cold beer
Draft beer
Great food
Uncomfortable seats
Confused staff
2.5 dogs
Deviant behavior
Hearts to break
Heartbreakers
The mezcal bar
Bo’s Ashes

1ra Avenida Sur 11c
between 5th and 6th calle
Antigua Guatemala

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Antigua Bars cont’d

Lava

4a Avenida Norte No. 3,

Lava has the best burgers and coldest beer in town. It’s a terrace bar with amazing views of the city – the perfect place to soak in the views of the volcano while sucking down a cerveza at sunset happy hour. And if you like good burgers, try the Antigua burger: bacon and guacamole with quality meat. Add an ice-cold Victoria beer and you’re in heaven! They always have great happy hour deals, like their 5Q sangria on Sundays, which are not to be missed! Go visit the lovely Sofi behind the bar and tell her World Travel Buzz sent you.

Monoloco

5a Avenida Sur #6, +502 7832-4235

Nachos as big as your head! That’s the claim to fame at Monoloco, and they aren’t joking. What else do you really need in life besides nachos big enough to feed the Spartan army? Well, how about cold beers, tasty cocktails, big screen TVs showing whatever game is on, and two floors of awesome. The party atmosphere is thick at Monoloco, and you’ll find a good time here on most nights. But if you want some real action, Tuesday night is Ladies Night, and it’s always packed with the hottest and wildest of the Antigua party scene. Happy hour is from 5PM to 8PM every day of the week.

Reilly’s Irish Tavern

5a Avenida Norte, Antigua, www.reillysantigua.com +502 5499 2331

Reilly’s, situated just behind Parque Central is a great place to pop in for lunch or to party the night away. The staff (a mix of gringos and Guatemalan locals) are generally all cute, friendly, and drinking with the customers. The atmosphere in this home away from home is lively and fun – this is one of the booziest party bars in Antigua. You can almost guarantee a bar-top dance-off here! Flex your brain at their Sunday night pub quiz and spend your winnings on drinks for everybody or just chill out and use their wi-fi. Don’t miss the curry fries!

Ocelot

4ta Ave Norte #3, +502 5658 9028

Ocelot is Antigua’s local blues and jazz bar. It’s an amazing place for live music, but couple that with great cocktails and an epic pub quiz on Sunday nights, and you’ve got a really great bar. If you’re looking for place to take that cute girl from your Spanish class, Ocelot offers a perfect mix of classy and casual. The courtyard is expansive and tranquil – a great place to relax with a drink and soak up some sunshine or enjoy the alfresco evening air. They have happy hour from noon to 7PM, with great drink specials. 🍺

Around Antigua: Sustainability Nuts!

Valhalla

www.exvalhalla.net Km 52.5 a San Miguel Duenas
exvalhalla@gmail.com, 502 5889 4925

This organic macadamia nut farm provides free tours, nut and chocolate tasting, and face massages so that you can experience their macadamia nut oil lotions and beauty products. What’s great about this place is their natural, self-sustaining farming methods and commitment to helping the indigenous community. The Valhalla Project seeks to reverse Global Warming by giving macadamia seedlings to indigenous farmers as an alternative to slash and burn agriculture. To date, they have donated over 200,000 macadamia trees to local indigenous communities!

To get to Valhalla, catch a chicken bus headed to San Miguel Dueñas and ask the driver to drop you at the macadamia nut farm. Ten minutes and 3.5 Quetzals later you’ll be ordering their mouth-watering macadamia nut and blueberry pancakes.
Antigua’s Cafe Culture

Guatemalan coffee is world famous. These people live and breathe coffee. It’s Guatemala’s biggest export for a reason: Taste. The coffee is so good here, that you’ll almost always find yourself going for a second cup. But good coffee is nothing without a good coffee shop. The mark of a good café is one that lured you in with an aromatic cup and bids you to stay with comfortable furniture, mellow ambiance, and free wifi. These are the kind of places where you end up staying for lunch because you just don’t want to leave. We’ve selected a few of our favorite coffee shops in Antigua all for different reasons, some for the food, some for the coffee, and some for the vibe.

Café Condessa

5th Avenida Norte No. 5, +502 7832-0038, lastrescondesas@hotmail.com

You can’t beat the location of Café Condessa, which is on the western edge of Parque Central, built into the courtyard of a 16th-century mansion. The vibe is all class and tranquility, and the menu is spectacular. Whether you’re in the mood for a decadent pastry, an artisan sandwich or a signature quiche, they’ve got you covered. And the coffee? Expertly roasted, brewed and served. If you really want to splash out, try their legendary Sunday brunch buffet from 10am to 2pm.

Café La Parada

6th avenue north, across from La Merced Church.

This little cafe has room for less than 10 people inside, but don’t let the diminutive size fool you, these guys have a big passion for coffee. The owner, Romeo Lopez, started La Parada on Lake Atitlan, near the bus stop, hence the name (La Parada literally means the stop), and now Antiguans can also enjoy his perfectly brewed cups of coffee. If you’re a coffee snob who knows the difference between a conical burr grinder and a DRM, you’ll definitely want to sample this classy cup.

Choco Museo

4a Calle Oriente #14
http://guatemala.chocomuseo.com/
Guatemala@ChocoMuseo.com
+502 7832 4520

Looking for a new experience and fun indulgence? Then stop by Antigua’s Chocolate Museum one afternoon to taste some of the best chocolate in Guatemala. Take the chocolate-making workshop and after you learn the history of the cocoa bean, you get to make (and taste!) both the Mayan and old European style hot chocolates. Then you get a batch of melted dark chocolate, mini bar-molds, and about 20 ingredients to play with. Not only do you get to keep all your delicious creations, but it’s an entertaining and interesting activity to experience!
Antigua Cafes cont’d

Refuge Coffee Bar

7th avenue north 18a

This gringo-owned establishment has a decidedly hip and loungey vibe, and their coffee is on par with our other favorite, Cafe La Parada. In fact, I’d put these two cafes in competition for the best coffee in Antigua. The owner is from the States, and knows a thing or two about good coffee, citing Intelligentsia as one of his favorite coffee shops in the world, so if you’re into high-brow coffee without the snobbery and a chill spaces with free wifi, definitely head to Refuge. Highly recommended!

Doña Luisa Xicotenca

4a calle oriente #12

Doña Luisa is a Bakery, restaurant, cafe, and generally just an amazing place to sit and relax. Locals and gringos all agree, this is one of the best spots in Antigua. The café bakery is situated in a 350 year old house and named after Luisa Xicotencatl, a Mayan princess that was given as a present to Pedro de Alvarado, Spanish conquistador and then Governor of Guatemala. The place is hard to miss when you walk down 4th street – you’ll smell the fresh bread wafting over the cobblestones. We dare you to try to walk past it! And if when you do visit, try the club sandwich. Simply amazing.

Luna de Miel


Luna de Miel (which means Honey Moon) has good coffee, but this place is really all about the crepes. They serve standard sweet and savory selections, and a few custom creations that you won’t find anywhere else. The ingredients are always fresh and locally sourced, and the quality and taste is superb! The restaurant itself is small and a bit cramped, but there is usually space to sit on pillows on the floor at one of the low tables, with star-shaped lights hanging overhead. The cute factor is key here – you can bring your date for crepes and coffee under the stars any time of day or night at Luna de Miel.

GUATAMAWHAARATA?

The word Guatemala always reminds me of the word guacamole, but our team of etymological scientists were unable to find a link. Luckily, Wikipedia has the real answers. In fact, there are several theories, but the most convincing is that the name Guatemala is derived from Goathamala which means “The Land of the Trees” in the Maya-Toltec language.
Around Antigua: Market Madness!

It doesn’t matter if you shop a lot while traveling or not at all; visiting the local markets is an activity not to be missed. Antigua has its own Market with a great selection of handcrafts and an always lively food section, but if you want the real Guatemalan Market experience, you’ve got to check out the Chichi!

An array of fresh vegetables at a typical Guatemalan Market

Chichi Market

Chichicastenango, Guatemala
Thursdays and Sundays until 3PM

Nearly every day of the week, various villages put on huge outdoor markets. One of the biggest and best in Guatemala is the Chichi market located just over two hours away from Antigua in the town of Chichicastenango, also known as Santo Tomás. Thousands of locals and tourists flock here every Thursday and Sunday to take over the streets and admire the various indigenous handicrafts. If you want to try local food and buy souvenirs, this is the place to do it. Tourism is essential to the Guatemalan economy and they need your support, especially in markets like this one. Bargaining is still widely accepted and expected; just don’t be rude with price quoting – a couple extra Quetzals probably won’t ruin your day, but it just might make theirs.

To get here it’s best to book with a tour agency as chicken buses can be slow and grueling. It’s best to plan a two-day excursion unless you want a really early morning (the market closes around 3pm). All tour agencies can shuttle you there and back easily and cheaply enough.
Antigua’s Best Restaurants

Guatemala isn’t really known for its cuisine. Sure, there is the traditional meat and vegetable stew called Pepián, and it’s totally worth trying, but other than that, you’ll find more fried chicken shops than anything else in this country. But Antigua is a very international city, and the range of restaurants available reflects its multicultural citizenry and touristic appeal. You’ll find everything from Italian to Bavarian to Mexican to standard American fare. This city caters to tourists, so you can find pretty much anything your taste buds are craving, but the locals have their favorite spots too, and we’ve got a little of everything on this list.

Cheap and delicious tacos al pastor, topped with onion, pineapple, cilantro, and spicy green habanero sauce at Ronny’s Tacos

Juan Caravela

1a. Avenida Sur, no. 7, Antigua, 7832 9239

Juan Caravela is the kind of place that has something for everyone. You can hang in the bar for a drink and a snack, or have a seat in the restaurant and feast on nachos, sushi, or pizza. The portions are big and everything on the menu is delicious. The place has a decidedly classy vibe, but don’t let that scare you off - every day they feature deals like 2x1 Sushi, so you’ll find lots of budget backpackers here cashing in on the good deals and the decadent vibe. You’ll come for the sushi deals, and stay for the cocktails and atmosphere.

Ronny’s Tacos

6a Ca. Poniente and Av. Santa Lucia,

A good taco can be hard to find outside of Mexico. Ask any local Antiguan, and they’ll tell you, the best tacos and gringas in town are at Ronny’s. This little taco shop can’t be beat for a quick, cheap, and delicious meal. They have tacos, tortas, gringas, burritos, and more. Order your meal, salivate over the massive portion, and hit the salsa bar to load up on every possible topping you could imagine, from pineapple chunks (highly recommended on the tacos al pastor) to super hot habanera salsas. Buen provecho!
Pollo Campero

5 Avenida Norte | No. 14, Antigua, Guatemala

No list of restaurants in Antigua could be complete without a mention of Pollo Campero. This fried chicken fast food restaurant is the Guatemalan version of Kentucky Fried Chicken. If you’re looking for a cheap and greasy fix of fried deliciousness, Pollo Campero can’t be beat. It’s not fancy, not healthy, and probably not the best place to take a date, but a good plate of fried chicken and fries always hits the spot. Also: free wifi!

Circus Bar

4a Calle Oriente no. 10, El Jaulon 2nd Level

This Italian restaurant might not be on every budget backpacker’s list, but it’s a great hidden gem in Antigua. Despite the name, it’s more of a circus-themed restaurant than a bar, and they have a great collection of old European Circus Knie posters on the walls. The pastas and pizzas are fantastic – add a nice bottle of wine and some friends, and you won’t be disappointed.

Lava

4a Avenida Norte No. 3, Antigua

Lava is probably not named for its slow pace, but for its proximity to (and view of) the nearby volcano, Volcán de Agua. In fact, there’s nothing slow about this lively bar and burger joint. The music is always lively, the staff is fun, and the burgers are the best in town.

Reilly’s Irish Tavern

5a Avenida Norte, Antigua, www.reillysantigua.com +502 5499 2331

Reilly’s, situated just behind Parque Central is a great place to pop in for lunch or to party the night away. The staff (a mix of gringos and Guatemalan locals) are generally all cute, friendly, and drinking with the customers. The atmosphere in this home away from home is lively and fun – this is one of the booziest party bars in Antigua. You can almost guarantee a bar-top dance-off here! Flex your brain at their Sunday night pub quiz and spend your winnings on drinks for everybody or just chill out and use their wi-fi. Don’t miss the curry fries!

MonoLoco Restaurant and bar

5a Avenida Sur, no 6, 7832-4235

Mono Loco is a favorite restaurant and bar among the backpacker set. It’s a huge place with a modern, fun and funky vibe. Their claim to fame is their nachos, and the menu proudly proclaims (on every page) that they are “as big as your head!” And they are. Not to mention delicious! They also have typical American fare, with great burgers and fries and really strong drinks. If you like to party, stay for a drink or ten after dinner. Tuesday night is Ladies Night: free drinks for all the senoritas – and the party is sure to get loco.

McDonalds

4a Calle Poniente No. 21

If you know the World Travel Buzz Crew, you know we’re not the types who travel around the world and end up eating at McDonalds in every country. Nay! We’re adventurers who challenge our gringo guts with dodgy street food and strange local concoctions. So it should come as a bit of a surprise when we include McDonalds in this guide to Antigua. But here’s the catch – don’t go for the food, go for the view! Inside, it’s the same as every other Golden Arches, but the McDonalds in Antigua features a dramatic courtyard with plants and flowers, a tranquil, burbling fountain, and an unbeatable view of the Volcan de Agua to the South. Grab a coffee from the McCafe (not half bad), and enjoy the view in this strange, but stunning locale.
La Merced Church

1a calle Poniente and 6a Avenida Norte

Some travelers shy away from street food, for fear of getting sick from unclean vendors. Sure, stomach bugs are an issue, and yes, we’ve seen some reckless disregard for health and safety standards by street vendors around the world, but the truth is, if you travel long enough, you’re going to get sick sooner or later. But if you skip the street food, you’re missing out on a big part of the local culture and cuisine. We think a big part of any good travel experience should include a bit of culinary adventuring.

Every weekend (and on any holiday) in Antigua, you’ll find the city’s best street food stalls in front of La Merced church. There’s everything from delicious quesadillas, filled with meats, vegetables and local cheese, to strange and wonderful sandwiches made from chopped salchichas and spicy guacamole. You’ll find Guatemalan Churros (slightly different than their Mexican counterparts) and a wide array of dulces (sweets) to sample, ranging from candied apples to sweet condensed milk candies. Eating street food is a great way to discover the unique intricacies of the local cuisine, while rubbing elbows with the real people of the city. Try it!
Lascivious Lactating Mermaids: La Fuente de las Sirenas

In Antigua’s central park, you’ll find La Fuente de las Sirenas (The Fountain of the Mermaids) which features 4 mermaids, clutching their ample, bare breasts in their hands, water spraying freely from their nipples. The fountain was originally built by architect Diego de Porres in 1739, who was influenced by the Neptune fountain in Bologna, Italy. The story behind these lactating mermaids is an interesting one. Legend has it, a king and his queen gave birth to 4 daughters, who then all refused to breastfeed their own children. This went against church law of the time, so he ordered his daughters to be chained to the fountain in the center of town, and told the townspeople not to feed or give water as punishment. The 4 daughters soon died.

Porres’ fountain in Antigua features the 4 daughters, cupping their breasts, water flowing from their nipples and is now one of the most iconic symbols of Antigua. The original statue was destroyed and later rebuilt by Roberto González Goyri, but the original mermaid torsos can still be seen in the St. James Museum, on the first floor of City Hall. ♥
Hand Made Artesian Italian Gelato

Specialities:
- Rocky Road
- Greek Yogurt
- Snickers Gelato
- New Flavors Every Week!

Our gelato is produced fresh daily, and all our ingredients are high-quality, Italian products. We use 100% natural, fresh milk with no artificial flavors. And our best ingredient: Passion for gelato!
Dulces Typicos: Antigua’s Sweet Tooth

No trip to Antigua would be complete without a sampling of the local Dulces Tipicos or Typical Guatemalan candies. Guatemala has a wide selection of unique sweets that you can’t find anywhere else in the world, and Antigua is home to some of the best that this country has to offer. The strange and wonderful sweets include condense sweetened milk candies, toasted coconut cookies, dried fruits and a myriad taffies and hard candies. Gelato might not be traditionally Guatemalan (it’s Italian, for those of you who’ve never had the chance to sample this super-suave type of ice cream), but in Antigua, you’ll find plenty of gelato shops, serving up sweet scoops to eager customers. No matter what you’re sweet tooth is craving, you’ll find something special to satiate it in Antigua, and we know the best places to start your search.

A street vendor in traditional dress sells candied and chocolate-covered apples during Semana Santa.

La Gelateria
7a. Avenida Norte, 3a. calle poniente No. 28, facebook.com/lgelateria

If the brightly colored and seductively sweet handmade gelato doesn’t win you over, the charming and beautiful owner will. This Italian-owned ice cream shop has all the standard flavors and a few unique ones (try the Greek Yoghurt), and everything is made fresh daily, using high-quality, all natural, Italian products. La Gelateria is the real deal when it comes to ice cream in Antigua. Ask any local and they’ll tell you: this place has the best gelato in town.

Dulces el Sombreron
4 ° Calle Oriente no. 31, La Antigua, (502) 7832-2209, www.dulceselsombreron.com

Dulces el Sombreron has been making sweets in Guatemala since 1986, using traditional recipes passed down through generations. They have over 100 types of traditional Guatemalan candies to choose from, made from local fruit, milk, and honey. The Canillitas de Leche are second to none, and you can find plenty of other unique and traditional sweets, such as Nuegano, Dulce de Tamarindo, and Dulce de Coco.

Dona Maria Gordillo Dulces Tipicos
4a Calle Oriente #11

If you’re looking for Dulces Tipicos (typical Guatemalan candies), you’ll definitely want to head to Dona Maria Gordillo Dulces Tipicos. There are literally hundreds of small tiendas and makeshift storefronts all over the city, selling Arropía (taffy), canillitas de leche (sweet milk candies), and candied fruits (try the sweetened whole figs), but one of the best places in town to get your sweet-tooth fix is Dona Maria’s.
Hostal el Pasar de los Años
Antigua’s Five Star Hostel

- Brand New Hostel
- Clean Rooms
- Comfortable Bunk Beds
- Large Secure Lockers
- Communal Kitchen
- Bar with Dance Floor
- Salsa Lessons
- Central Location
- Onsite Car Rental
- Sunny Courtyard

Quinta Calle Oriente #10
00 502 4006 9552
Hostals are a backpacker’s best friend. They provide you with cheap accommodation and easy access to new friends and fellow travelers from around the world. Whether you’re staying in Antigua for a couple days or a couple months, you might consider renting a room or a dorm bed from a hostel for the duration of your stay – you can usually score a good deal if you book for a week or a month at a time. Hostels in Antigua range from quite and tranquil escapes from the bustling city life, to wild party hostels with lots of young travelers, looking for a good time. There are also plenty of small hotels where you can book a room for your stay, which will provide you with a bit more privacy. The other option is to book a home-stay through your language school, which will give you a much more authentic cultural experience and help you improve your Spanish quickly. Whichever you choose, at some point in your stay, you’ll probably still want to stop in and check out the party at these hostels!

**Antigua’s Hottest Hostels**

Hostal el Pasar de los Años

*Quinta Calle Oriente #10, +502 4006 9552*

Hostal el Pasar de los Años is a brand new hostel, so everything is new, fresh, clean, and comfortable. The location is excellent, if a little hard to find, just a few blocks east of Parque Central. We consider Pasar de los Años as Antigua’s only 5 star hostel, and for good reason. As soon you walk in the door, you’re greeted by friendly staff in a classy reception area. Just past reception, you’ll find a large and luxurious courtyard, with tables and chairs surrounding an inviting lawn and a brightly painted fountain. There is a separate bar area with a small dance floor for salsa lessons and late night boogies. The rooms are clean, the linens are fresh, the vibe is tranquil, and you’ll feel instantly at home.

Banana Azul Hostel

*3rd Street Poniente #33, between 7th avenue and Market Street, BananaAzulHostel@hotmail.com, 502 7832-4822*

Banana Azul is a hostel and travel agency combined, making it easy for you to plan your adventures in and around Antigua. The hostel features dorms and private rooms, both with and without private bathrooms. The showers have hot water, and there is a small kitchen so you can save money by cooking your own meals. The courtyard is sunny and green, and there is a nice adjacent chill-out area with a huge flat screen TV and a great selection of current movies. The reception and travel agency area also has a bar, serving cold beers and fresh fruit smoothies. Free wifi for all you tech-packers!
Jungle Party Hostal

6a Avenida Norte #20, www.junglepartyhostal.com

Despite the name, Jungle Party Hostal is not in the jungle. But when it comes to parties, they’ve got you covered. Located near the center of town, this party hostel is constantly one of the best places to grab a drink and start your night, whether you’re staying there or not. The central feature of this hostel is the bar, where you’ll find backpackers sipping cuba libres and cervezas day and night. The courtyard is filled with hammocks and beanbag chairs, perfect for lounging around with your new hostel friends. The staff is fun and always up for a party which means there is a lively vibe just about every night. The accommodations might not be the most luxurious in town (it’s all dorms here), but the mattresses are relatively new and comfortable. Plus you’ll always find a great group of backpackers, looking to party.

There is a 4 bed dorm, a 6 bed dorm, and loft has been turned into a 27 bed super-dorm – just watch your head on those ceiling beams! There is a restaurant and bar on site, a chill-out room for watching movies on their 42’ Plasma TV, and free wifi throughout.

Base Camp Hostel

1st Av. Sur #4b (502) 7832-0074, www.oxexpeditions.com, BaseCampHostel@yahoo.com

Base Camp Hostel is a small and unique hostel that caters to adventure travelers. They only have 10 beds (6 dorm beds and 2 double private rooms), so the place feels homely and relaxed from the start. One of the first things you’ll notice are the bikes hanging in the living room. The owner is an avid cyclist and leads tours of the volcanoes and other areas around Antigua via O.X. Outdoor Excursions, the attached adventure travel agency. The common areas are huge and comfortable, featuring a dining room, living room (with ping pong!) and a large, fully equipped kitchen.

Hostal Santiago


Behind the Ash Travel Agency Office, is a small, relatively hidden hostel, with a few cheap dorms and private rooms for rent. The location is excellent, situated between the main market and Parque Central. There is a small courtyard with lots of plants and a comfortable sitting area for relaxing. There is a partial kitchen, but don’t expect to make any fancy meals here – stick to instant noodles and hot-plate dinners. Hostal Santiago is a good place for a cheap bed if you’re looking for a more quiet and private place to stay. And the Ash Travel Agency out front offers convenient options for planning your travels.

Earth Lodge

http://www.earthlodgeguatemala.com, earthlodge@gmail.com, +502 5664-0713

If you feel like you need a bit of an escape from the big city bustle in Antigua, head out to Earth Lodge, an eco-friendly hotel and hostel, located just 20 minutes from central Antigua. At 6000 feet up the mountain, you’ll be able to relax with one of the best possible views of Antigua and the surrounding volcanoes. The hotel is located on an avocado farm, and there are plenty of hikes to take, or you can simply enjoy the stunning view and delicious family-style dinners. Rooms range from private tree houses to cozy dorms and tent sites. Earth Lodge also hosts occasional events, so if you’re interested in live music, barbecues, and good imported beer, then head over for a sunny Sunday afternoon. To get there, just call or email and they will arrange for their driver to meet you in town.

The Resplendent Quetzal

The Guatemalan currency is called the Quetzal, and so is the national bird. The bird, known as The Resplendent Quetzal, is exceptionally beautiful and increasingly rare. It lives in the cloud forests of Central America and is known for its long, iridescent tail feathers. The Aztec and Maya people viewed the Quetzal as a god, a symbol of good and light, and it’s said the tail feathers of the Quetzal were once used as currency.
Banana Azul
Hostel & Travel Agency

Hostel
- Dorms & Private Rooms
- Cable TV
- Hot water
- Kitchen
- 24 Hour Wifi
- Huge Flat Screen TV
- Quad rentals
- Full Bar
- Fruit Smoothies
- Free Breakfast!

Travel Agency
- Trips to Tikal
- Lago Atitlan
- Copan
- Semuc Champey
- and more!

Contact us for Special Weekly or Monthly Rates!

Excellent location!
Only 3 blocks to Central Park and 1 block to the Artisan Market.
3 Calle Poniente #33, Antigua Guatemala
BananaAzulHostel@hotmail.com
502 7832-4822
Volunteering in Antigua

If you’re going to be spending any significant amount of time in Antigua, you should really consider adding a volunteer program to your itinerary. Many of the Spanish Schools in Antigua already offer free placement for those who want to volunteer, and programs range from building to teaching to medical assistance. Volunteering abroad (or voluntourism, as we like to call it) can be a great way to get involved with the community, practice your Spanish with real locals, and give something back. There are lots of agencies and schools in and around Antigua who offer volunteer programs for willing workers – below are a few to get you started.

Inter Coined

www.intercoined.com

Inter Coined is a global organization that strives to develop life-changing experiences for volunteers in the fields of education, languages, and other work. They have intercultural centers in 32 cities in 13 Latin American countries, and they specialize in programs that give volunteers the chance to experience full Spanish immersion. In Antigua, programs range from volunteering at health care centers, where you’ll contribute to community health development and to improve the quality of life of those most in need, to volunteer teaching, where you’ll help children to learn language, handicrafts, music, sports and participate in many other fun activities. Every year, over 4000 volunteers participate in their Experiencias en Español program, throughout Latin America.

Karine Kobelt, A volunteer with Rising Minds in Lago Atitlan takes a break from building the school to play with the children.
Volunteering cont’d

Rising Minds
www.isingminds.org

If you want to get out of Antigua for a couple days, or a couple weeks, you can’t beat a trip to Lago Atitlan, about 80 km east of Antigua. This pristine lake is nestled between lush mountains and volcanoes, and is home to many small lakeside towns that cater to backpackers, including San Pedro and San Marcos. And if you’re interested in volunteering in the Atitlan area, head to San Pedro and get in touch with Rising Minds. This organization has a mission to bridge cultural, economic, and developmental gaps in the Atitlan area. They work with locals and travelers to help the indigenous population in any way they can. You can learn to weave a scarf with indigenous women, help to educate the local youth, or assist in building school houses made form natural and recycled materials. The projects they offer are fun and engaging ways to give real meaning to your travels, and help some locals while you’re at it. Highly recommended.

Cosmic Volunteers
www.cosmicvolunteers.org

Cosmic Volunteers is a US-based non-profit organization that offers volunteer programs and internships in countries all over the world, including Guatemala. In Antigua, they offer volunteer programs at orphanages, as well as in home construction. Most volunteers are from the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia, and everyone works together to help build local communities and make positive change. Home Construction volunteers help to build houses for families in the Antigua area – and it only takes two weeks to build a house from scratch, so you get a real sense of accomplishment when you see the work you’ve completed. Orphanage volunteers live in Antigua while working either in the city, or a nearby pueblo. Volunteers teach English, basic math, and arts and crafts to the children, as well as playing games, sports, and sometimes taking them on day-trips.

St Hermano Pedro’s Tree

In Antigua’s Parque Central, there are 3 Esquisúchil trees, which are all cuttings from the famous tree, planted by Santo Hermano Pedro in 1657 at El Calvario Church in Antigua. Hermano Pedro was Guatemala’s first saint, and while he was planting trees and healing the sick in the 1650’s, he wasn’t even canonized until 2002. His tree is said to have magical healing properties, and you’ll often find locals collecting the flowers that have fallen. They take the flowers home, brew a special tea, and wait for their miracle to occur.

St. Hermano Pedro’s tomb is in San Francisco Church, and it is often covered in messages, plaques and notes, thanking Sainto Hermano Pedro for the miracles that he (and his tree) have given their families.
Rising Minds

Education. Awareness. Action.

Volunteer in Guatemala with Rising Minds!

Our mission is to bridge cultural, economic and developmental gaps through the integration of education, awareness and action. Rising Minds works WITH local initiatives, ranging from women's cooperatives to youth leadership programs, to develop sustainable solutions that address community-identified needs. Through empowering educational initiatives, personalized volunteer programs, and proactive international partnerships, Rising Minds is working to redefine sustainable development and improve international relations.

www.RisingMinds.org
Email: RisingMinds@gmail.com | International Phone: 978.633.7155
Guatemala Mobile: (502) 4854.3841 | Skype: risingminds
A 501c3 U.S. based non-profit organization
Luxury on a Budget

There is so much to see and do in Antigua that sometimes it’s nice to just unwind and relax. Lavish spas are not only for the super-rich here; pretty much any backpacker can splash out every once in a while and appreciate the finer things in life. You can take a day or overnight trip for a bit of relaxation and escapism. Whether you want a massage package or just to slip out into the countryside for a bit, there are several opportunities to experience a bit of luxury for a fraction of what you would pay back home.

Kawilal Spa - Banos Termales
Santa Teresita
For a true getaway out of town, come to this hideaway located near the Pacaya volcano. There are a plethora of hot thermal spas, pools, steam rooms, and treatments available to relax your mind and body after a tiring hike up the volcano. Try a coffee and chocolate body rub down or mud mask. Spend the night here to truly unwind and escape.

Casa Madeleine
Calle del Espíritu Santo # 69, casamadeleine.com, +502 7832 9348
This luxurious hotel and spa is conveniently located in town and its facilities are available to guests and non-guests alike. They use all natural products and offer a range of therapy, from nail care to various types of massages and reflexology. Package specials make this an affordable luxury everyone should splash out on if they can.

El Reposo Spa
1a Calle Poniente #13 A, elreposo@gmail.com
This refreshing spa also provides a variety of indulgences including facials, massages and waxing. But their specialties lie in Dead Sea scrubs; from full body to facials, this all natural exfoliating mud is bound to leave you completely stress free and smooth.

All Your Yavin Rebel Base Are Belong to Guatemala!

Here’s one for the scifi fans: A scene from the original Star Wars movie, A New Hope, was shot in Guatemala at Tikal National Park! Tikal is one of the largest archaeological sites of the pre-Columbian Maya civilization, and it is famous for its beautifully preserved ruins in the jungle. You can see some of the ruins, and the expansive jungle, in the Star Wars scene where a rebel watches the Millennium Falcon landing at the Yavin rebel base.
Hostal Santiago
& Ash Travel Agency

Hostel Santiago offers a quiet and fun place for Backpackers and travelers to relax and enjoy our many amenities.

- Private Rooms
- Private Bathrooms
- Dorms
- Hot Water
- Free Wifi 24 Hours
- Communal Kitchen
- Sunny Courtyard
- Cable TV

Ash Travel Agency is conveniently located in the same building and is happy to help you book transportation and tours.

- Local Tours
- Tikal
- Lago Atitlan
- Xela
- Transportation
- Copan
- Semuc Champey
- And More

www.AshTravelAntigua.com
(502) 7832-6325 • 6th Ave. North #7 • AshTravelAntigua@yahoo.com
Travel Agencies

Antigua is ripe with travel agencies – you’ll find one on just about every corner. There is a high demand for tours and transportation because there is just so much to do in Guatemala. Whether you’re looking to climb the local Pacaya Volcano or take a trip to Tikal, Semuc Champey, Lago Atitlan, or Chichicastenango, you’ll probably end up booking through a travel agency. For the most part, they all offer the same services and similar prices. It doesn’t hurt to ask for a discount, especially if you’re traveling in a small group. You can usually get them to knock off 10 or 15 percent with a bit of friendly haggling. Below are some of our favorite travel agencies in Antigua.

Ash Travel
6th Avenida Norte No. 7 (502) 7832-6325 ashtravelantigua@yahoo.com www.ashtravelantigua.com
Ash Travel is conveniently located in the same building as Hostal Santiago, and it’s a travel agency that caters to backpackers and independent travelers. If you’re planning a big trip through Guatemala, or just a couple days to visit the ruins at Tikal, Ash Travel is happy to help book your transportation, tours, and accommodation. They can provide private and shared shuttles to the airport, as well as various other cities in Guatemala. Not sure where you want to go, let their friendly (and cute!) staff point you in the right direction.

Banana Azul Travel Agency and Hostel
3rd Street Poniente #33 between 7th avenue and Market Street, BananaAzulHostel@hotmail.com, 502 7832-4822
Banana Azul is another convenient hostel and travel agency combination. They offer good deals on the standard trips to Tikal, Lago Atitlan, Copan, Semuc Champey, and they even offer a few special trips and direct shuttle services that you won’t find at other travel agencies. The best part about Banana Azul? They have a bar, serving cold beers cocktails right in their lobby! So, if you’re having trouble making the decision about where to go, you can relax and mull it over with a cold one!

O.X. Outdoor Excursions
1st Av. Sur #4b, (502) 7832-0074, www.oxexpeditions.com, For_the_OX@yahoo.com
O.X. Outdoor Excursions isn’t your run-of-the-mill travel agency in Antigua. They offer unique local trips, all geared for the adventure traveler, or anyone looking to add a bit of awesome to their all-too-touristy itinerary. O.X. specializes in volcano expeditions, bikes rental, bike tours, and lake tours, but they can also offer shuttle services and much more. The location is clean and friendly and the staff is fun and very well-informed. They also run the Base Camp Hostel, a great place to stay, for adventure-savvy travelers, looking for a place to relax between excursions. 😊
Dangers and Precautions

Antigua is a generally safe city, especially when compared to nearby Guatemala City, but it’s still good to take precautions and always play it safe. Any city with a high rate of tourists will have its share of pickpockets, muggers, and general derelict ne’er-do-wells, but don’t let that deter you from enjoying your time! Keep your guard up, use your street smarts, and follow the advice in this section to keep yourself as safe as possible.

Muggings

Muggings occur fairly regularly in Antigua, and tourists are often targeted by muggers hoping to score expensive cameras, smart phones, and fat wallets. The best way to avoid a mugging is to avoid walking at night, especially if you’re alone. If you do find yourself alone in a sketchy part of town after a night at the club, grab a taxi or a tuk tuk (auto rickshaw), and get home safe – it’s worth the 20 Quetzals.

Stray Street Dogs

While all the street dogs that we encountered in Antigua were friendly, sometimes these stray dogs can cause problems, especially for folks who aren’t comfortable around dogs. There can be scuffles between the rival gangs of street dogs, especially when there is food around. Never get between a dog and his food. If he growls, back off. The locals are often very unkind to these dogs, and many of them just want some love. But if a stray is approaching you, and you don’t feel comfortable, your best bet is to pretend to pick up a rock and throw it. These poor animals have been pelted with rocks by locals for their whole lives, and usually, a feigned rock-scoop and throw is all you need to send them scurrying off. Don’t actually throw a rock! Remember, these poor animals usually just want some food and some love – just like the rest of us.

Some street dogs just need a bit of love. Justin Jones nicknamed this sweet girl Calcetines. She would wait for me outside the bar to walk me home at night.
Dangers and Precautions cont’d

Pickpockets

The more crowded the location, the better the chances of being pick-pocketed. During any special events or community celebrations (Semana Santa is a pickpocket’s heaven in Antigua), pay close attention to your belongings. You should be especially vigilant during festivals, but you need to keep your wits about you at all times when traveling. Keep your wallet in your front pocket, and your purse worn across your body, not just draped over one shoulder. The main Market in Antigua is especially notorious for pickpockets, so play it safe.

Only Carry What You Need

If you’re going out for a night on the town, bring a couple hundred Quetzals, but leave your bank cards at home. If you do happen to have a run-in with a thief, at least you won’t lose it all.

Hiking Ambush

We’ve heard reports that some industrious local thieves have set up ambushes along remote hiking trails and volcano trails around Antigua. They lie in wait for single hikers or small groups without machete-wielding guides to pass by. If you happen upon one of these sneaky thieves, they will relieve you of your cameras and any other possessions you may have with you. If you’re planning a hike, it’s best to go with a guide or with a large group.

Bonus Tip: Barred Windows, Antigua’s unseen danger!

Most street-level windows in Antigua have small, protruding ledges with security bars for the safety of residents. These windows pose one of Antigua’s biggest dangers to boozy pedestrians. You’re more likely to end up with a black eye from running right into a security barred window, than from a mugging – watch your head!✈️