



T: 1-800-985-4852
E: info@realgap.com
P: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

Guatemala Spanish Language School

Adventure



Relaxation



Culture



Trip Name: Guatemala Spanish Language School **Trip Code:** GUSL **Duration:** From 1 week

Trip Highlights

- Become fluent in the world's fastest growing language in just one week!
- Practice 24/7 with locals in your homestay accommodation
- Immerse yourself in culture with regular salsas lessons and fiestas in colonial Antigua
- Explore the stunning area, surrounded by three volcanoes, one of which, Volcan de Fuego is constantly active
- Visit the Mayan temple ruins of Tikal deep inside the wildlife-packed rainforest



Overview

Steeped in history with a rich and diverse culture, Guatemala is fast becoming one of the hottest locations to explore in Central America and a fantastic location to learn Spanish and immerse yourself in the local culture.

As with any country it's the people that make it special and by making sure you study Spanish in Guatemala at our language school you'll learn quickly which will mean you can get to know the locals and get the most out of your time here. Intensive one-to-one tuition at our school based in colonial Antigua will ensure you are able to chat freely with your friendly homestay family and new friends. This course will put a stop to the endless pointing in restaurants and is the perfect way to help you get the most out of your future travels or volunteering in Central America.

Destination Info

Sharing borders with Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize and sandwiched between the Caribbean and the Pacific oceans Guatemala could feel somewhat overshadowed. Instead it is arguably the pick of the bunch with a geography that boasts stunning beaches, live volcanoes and one of the most bio diverse rainforests in the world. Guatemala goes toe-to-toe with its South American counterparts in the history and culture stakes with evidence of the Mayan civilisation dating back to 200BC dotted around the country.

The highlight is undoubtedly the temple of Tikal built deep into a rainforest that teems with jaguars, howler monkeys, ocelots and toucans to name but a few. Antigua, where the language school and your accommodation is based, is about 40 miles from the capital of Guatemala City but a million miles from the hustle and bustle.

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, the colonial architecture of the city is appreciated by a small population and superbly complimented by the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. 3 volcanoes - Volcan de Agua, Acatenango and Volcan de Fuego border the city with the active volcano of Fuego gently rumbling and breathing. Regarded as one of the best locations in the world to learn and practice Spanish you'll be hard pushed to not love your time here and it will be difficult to drag yourself away.

You will need to fly to Guatemala City airport where you will be met and taken to your accommodation.

Itinerary



Day 1 – Arrival day:

Today you'll fly into Guatemala City, the capital of Guatemala. Luggage collected and passport stamped you'll be met by one of our team as you come through the departure gate. From the airport you'll be taken straight to your accommodation in Antigua on a 40 minute drive that will allow you to take in your first sights of the country. You can arrive at anytime during the day and once arrived you'll have the rest of the day to meet your homestay family, settle in and recover from your flight.

Day 2 – Orientation:

After breakfast you'll embark on your orientation. This will include a full briefing on what to expect from your project, what is expected of you during your stay, support and guidance, a culture lesson and also a chance to meet our team and your fellow students. More interestingly, a member of our team will take you on a guided tour around your new home of Antigua, pointing out all the hidden gems you'll want to get to know during your stay. The rest of the day is yours to go out and explore the city and find out why Antigua is loved by so many!



Day 3 onwards - Let's learn!:

And so the lessons begin! Your one-on-one tuition will begin today with 4 hours per day broken down in 55 minute sessions to keep you focussed and rapidly progressing. Generally you'll have 2 lessons in the morning and 2 in the afternoon and cover all aspects of reading, writing, speaking and listening. By using the one-on-one approach you'll get maximum benefits from the course whilst allowing you to progress at your own pace. The same itinerary is repeated each day giving you 4 full days of non-stop learning! After lessons are done you'll have time to study, practice and also do more exploring of the area. Our team will also arrange activities in the afternoons and evenings including salsa lessons, parties, fiestas, visits to local sights & villages and much more.



Day 7 – Weekends! :

For those staying a week this is your last day and night together with your adopted homestay family and also your fellow students and friends. Take the time to visit the Tikal temple or the surrounding volcanic areas of Antigua. Alternatively you may choose to stay in the city and absorb as much of the culture, sights and sounds of Antigua as possible before you leave. You are free to do as you please but one thing is for sure; you'll not be short of ideas!

For those staying for more than one week you may like to use your weekends to travel further afield and explore more of what Guatemala has to offer.

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Day 8 – Departure:

It's time to say goodbye...but the good news is you'll by now be able to say it in Spanish! You'll be taken back to the airport today in time for any onward flights or travel. Wave goodbye to your host family and new friends with memories and skills that will last a lifetime. For those staying on longer, today is another day to do as you please with Sunday a good day to take advantage of the local restaurants as meals aren't included for today only.

Accommodation

Your lodging will be with one of our typical Guatemalan families. Our staff personally know all the families and their homes must meet a good standard to be eligible for the project. They will speak Spanish with you most of the time, (to help you get the most from your time in Guatemala) although there will always be at least one person that can speak English. Our families are all very warm sociable people and are very keen to accommodate international students.

You will instantly be made to feel at home and will be included in all day-to-day social activities (shopping, parties, barbecues etc) throughout your stay - a fantastic insight into life in this unique and diverse country. Families belong to Guatemala's middle class, although students should note that living standards in the country are generally lower than Europe or North America.

Homes are usually located no more than four blocks from our language school. You will be given a key and be able to come and go as you please. All families have hot water and flushing western style toilets and showers. You will have your own private room and generally share a bathroom with other volunteers.

Programme Services and Facilities

Internet

The school has Internet access on site that is free to all students. Beyond this, you can expect to find cyber cafes in Antigua and Guatemala City.

Telephone

You will find public telephones in most towns, which may accept coins, but they will more usually operate with a phone card that you can purchase from small shops and kiosks. Make sure you check the card is suitable for international calls.

Your mobile phone may or may not work in Guatemala, depending on your network, and if it does, please be aware that in many areas you may not always get a signal. It may be worth taking your phone with you and buying a pay-as-you-go SIM card when you arrive, or getting a Real Gap SIM before you depart, so that you can call and text cheaply. Before you depart, please ensure that your mobile is set up with international roaming and unlocked, so that you can use a pay-as-you-go SIM while you are away.

Alternatively it is possible to purchase one out there for around \$15 if you wish to do so.

The international dialling code for Guatemala is +502. To place an outgoing, direct dialled international call, dial +44 for the UK followed by the telephone number. For example to call Real Gap dial +44 1892 516164.

Laundry

There are launderette facilities within easy reach of your accommodation and will cost you no more than a couple of dollars.

Meals

Your family will provide you with three meals a day (except on Sundays) throughout your stay; a great opportunity to chat and get to know your host family in an informal way! All families are more than happy to cook any dishes that you'd like (within reason!) and can accommodate special dietary requirements for vegetarians and vegans.

What's Included

- Four hours per day individual language tuition
- Private room and three meals per day with host family
- Afternoon activities every week
- Full support from on-site staff
- 24-hour Emergency Support
- Mail service
- Money exchange
- Safety box
- Luggage storage



What's Not Included

- Flights
- Extra activities
- Personal travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages/any extra food



Is This Trip For You?

You may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. However, you will still have the full support of your in-country team and those at the project. If you are looking for a group volunteering experience we have plenty of options for you to consider.

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore you may not need all of the listed items on your travels.

Personal Admin

- Passport, insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money
- Proof of inoculations (please speak to your GP about necessary immunisations)
- Guidebook on country - recommended Lonely Planet or Footprints

General

- Camera / Film / Batteries
- Notebook and pen / diary
- Torch / Extra Batteries
- Sunglasses
- Pocket-knife (comes in handy for general use)
- Water bottle- at least one litre

- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use
- A three-season Sleeping bag (especially useful when on weekend excursions)
- Mosquito Net
- Toiletries
- Personal enjoyment - books, cards, music, to enjoy with your fellow volunteers etc.
- Spanish dictionary, verb book etc.

Clothing (consider extra excursions and travelling after your course)

- Hat
- A pair of thick socks for walking
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Sandals
- Waterproof Jacket
- Fleece/pullover (for cool evenings)
- Long trousers
- Warmer clothing for winter
- Swimwear
- Towel

Medical Kit

- First Aid Kit (e.g. Antihistamines, Anti-diarrhoea tablets, headache tablets)
- Personal Medication
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito and insect repellent

Minimum Age

Minimum 18 years, maximum decided on participants' health.

Minimum Numbers

There are no minimum numbers on the trip.

Please note: you may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact us

Flights

Your flight to Guatemala should arrive at Guatemala City Airport on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

Please note: If you are flying to Guatemala via the USA you will need to obtain Travel Authorisation by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) no later than 72 hours before departure. This is compulsory and will cost USD\$14 to register. To register, please visit: www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

FAQs

- 1. Does the language school run all year round?**
Yes it does.
- 2. How much time do you spend per day at the school?**
Classes are held from Monday to Friday with four lessons of 55 minutes per day. Your personal timetable will be worked out for you during your orientation.
- 3. At the home stay do other students stay at the same accommodation?**
There will be one or two students per host family and you can expect a private bedroom and shared bathroom facilities. All families have Western amenities such as showers and flushing toilets.
- 4. Are there other activities we can do during time off?**
The school can help organise trips for many of the attractions in the local area.
- 5. Do I need to take a sleeping bag?**
A sleeping bag is not needed, all bedding is provided.
- 6. Do I need to take a mosquito net?**
No, you will not need one, unless you really want to take one.
- 7. Is there a safety deposit box/safe?**
There is a safety deposit box at the school and you are welcome to put them in there if you wish.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

In Guatemala the currency is the Quetzal (GTQ; symbol Q), which is subdivided into 100 Centavos. Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 Centavos and 1 Quetzal. Notes come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Quetzals.

The US Dollar is also accepted as an official currency and Euros are increasingly easy to change at central banks. The best credit cards to take are American Express, Visa or MasterCard which are accepted by larger business and at ATMs (cajeros automáticos) in all but the smallest towns.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant \$3.36
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) \$2.72
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) \$0.84
Water (0.33 litre bottle) \$1.21

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

For stays of up to 90 days, citizens of the European Union, the USA, Australia and New Zealand are not required to hold a visa when visiting for tourist purposes only. All other nationalities should consult their nearest Guatemala Embassy or High Commission.

Cultural Considerations

Greetings

Pleasantries are taken seriously in Guatemala, as many native Guatemalans are raised to greet strangers formally. It is simply polite to always say "Buenos Días" upon entering a building or when meeting somebody, and to say "con permiso" when leaving or passing someone.

You should address people in the polite “usted” form, and show additional respect for older people. If you know the person then it is customary to shake hands or kiss in greetings. Any kind of conversation is usually preceded by small talk, and being able to speak at least basic Spanish will get you a long way with the locals and demonstrate your keenness to fit in.

Saying “no”

A Latino always wants to help you and it's considered impolite to say 'no' or 'I don't know'. Whatever you ask, always expect to get an answer, even if it is not correct. The best thing to do is to ask three different people the same questions and if you always get the same answer it's probably right!

Taboos

Latinos are not used to discussing 'sensitive' subjects with strangers (a stranger is anyone who is not family or they haven't known for ten years). Only discuss religion, politics and money with your teacher (or if the other person brings it up in conversation and you feel comfortable with this). Although nosiness is common, certain subjects are taboo, for example: abortion, casual sex, social politics, etc. Listen first to get used to the norms.

Social Hierarchy

The family is hugely important to Guatemalans. It is common for three generations of families to be living together under the same roof. It is a way to increase the household income and to help one another. As you would expect, older people are treated with great respect. Women are traditionally responsible for bringing up the children, although this has begun to change in recent years. Men are still very proud of their machismo and view whistling at women as a compliment. Ladies, take it in your stride. You may be subjected to catcalls and the best way to deal with these is simply to ignore them! Dress more formally than you would normally or even wear a wedding ring and talk about your husband (unfortunately men tend to have more respect for your husband than they do for you.)

Religion

The dominant religions in Guatemala are Catholicism, Pentecostal and Mayan- Christianity infusions.

Clothing

It is important to remember, especially for female travellers, that the kinds of clothes you feel comfortable wearing in your own country may not be an acceptable form of dress in Latin America. Short skirts for example, will invite unwanted attention. Just use your common sense and adapt your style in accordance with your surroundings.

On certain projects, you should avoid wearing shorts, flip-flops, tank tops, and so on. Cover up for your own safety, and in respect of the local culture and customs.

With the warm climate and humidity, we advise that you pack a selection of lightweight layerable clothing. As the evenings can get quite cool, a jumper or jacket is advisable. Always bear in mind the activities you will be doing when you are packing, both at the project and socially.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Guatemala, and readily available. However, please respect other volunteers. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact on your volunteer work during the week. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated at the project.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Guatemala. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Guatemala has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Tipping

It is customary to tip 10% in restaurants and hotels generally add 10% tourist tax on top of the Value Added Tax.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Crime is endemic throughout Guatemala and particularly bad in certain areas, which we advise you avoid. As crime is mostly gang related, it tends to be focused on businessmen and residents rather than tourists, but, of course, it is still better to be safe than sorry.

Petty crime is more of a problem for tourists, so keep an eye on your things, especially in crowded and particularly tourist-orientated areas.

Violent crime is on the increase in Guatemala, so it is advisable to not drive at night, especially on the highways between tourist destinations e.g. from the airport into Guatemala City, from Flores to Tikal, as tourists have been intercepted en route to their destinations. Particularly in Guatemala City you should be extra vigilant if you are going out after dark. Woman travellers should especially take care. Here is a general list of precautions:

Avoid walking alone, especially at night

Avoid driving at night

Don't carry all your valuables

Make sure your luggage is locked when you are travelling on buses and so on

Walking trails around/ to Lago de Atitlan and Volcan Agua are notorious spots for robberies against tourists. Get on an organised tour or go in a big group if you want to walk in these places.

This information is not supposed to scare you or put you off, it is just to make sure that you are informed and can

take the appropriate precautions where necessary.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk

USA: www.travel.state.gov

Australia: www.smarttraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief. To avoid this it is advised that you withdraw cash inside the bank at the counter. You will need your passport and driving licence and they will direct you to the teller to obtain your funds. It is more time consuming than using the ATM, but is the most secure way of withdrawing money.

Food & Drink

Guatemala is not a country famous for its gastronomic delights and in the more touristy areas you will be able to find all the regulars - Italian, American, Asian and so on. Traditionally lunch is the big meal of the day and most eateries offer a two or three-course offer at a lower price. Dinner prices tend to be a bit more expensive. Breakfast Guatemalan style features tortillas, eggs and beans but if this doesn't appeal you will be able to find something a little more suitable in the tourist areas!

Proper Guatemalan food is Mayan Cuisine, which features maize, in the form of tortillas and beans rather a lot. Other than Mayan, there is also latino food, which has a slightly more Western edge to it; meat stews and meat broths tend to be really tasty. Look out for typical Caribbean food on the east coast.

You should not drink tap water (including ice) unless it's boiled or bottled. Remember, most fruit juices are made with un-boiled water.

Be careful around dairy products and milk. Hamburger meat is not always safe. Make sure that uncooked vegetables are cleaned with purified water or peeled. Be careful with seafood and avoid undercooked meat. Remember, it's always better to be safe than sorry.

Remember to let us know before you depart if you have any special dietary requirements.

Drinks

All the normal soft drinks are available and popular throughout Guatemala. The locals also drink a flavoured water drink called 'Refresco', if you felt that way inclined. Decent coffee may be quite difficult to come across, but is becoming easier to find in the tourist resorts. Try a Licuado, a fruit drink made from milk or water (be careful with the water one!) for something a bit different.

Alcohol-wise, bypass the Guatemalan wine for a cheap bottle of the Chilean variety. Unless you want to get plastered, avoid the aguardiente, a local and lethal sugarcane spirit. Rum could be a satisfactory alternative. Beer is widely available and there is a small range to choose from.

Public Holidays

To view a list of the public holidays for Guatemala, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/guatemala/

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. Many schools, government offices, stores and banks are closed on National Holidays. Please note that there may be slight date variations for some of the holidays each year and that the list is not exhaustive.

Weather

Guatemala's climate remains warm and pleasant for most of the year. The Pacific and the Caribbean coast both get quite hot and humid, with a cool sea breeze to stop things from getting too balmy. The rainy season falls between May and October with most of the showers occurring in the afternoons. Altitude controls the climate somewhat, meaning that the low-lying jungle areas are hot and humid all year round, whereas the higher areas including Antigua and Guatemala City have a more comfortable climate that gets cooler at night.

Time

Guatemalan time is six hours behind GMT.

Electricity

In Guatemala the electric system is 120 Volts and frequency 60 Hertz. If your device does not accept this voltage you will need to bring a converter.

Outlets in Guatemala generally accept 3 types of plug:



Flat blade plug



Two parallel flat pins with ground pin



V-shaped flat prongs



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Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as we make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of recommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

Phone: 1-800-985-4852

Email: info@realgap.com

Post: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

Web: www.realgap.com