

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of Guatemala  
**CAPITAL:** Guatemala City  
**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Republic  
**AREA:** 108,889 Sq Km (42,042 Sq Mi)  
**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 11,560,900

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Guatemala is located in Central America. It is bound by Mexico to the north and west, the Pacific Ocean to the southwest, Belize and the Caribbean Sea to the east and Honduras and El Salvador to the southeast. More than 66% of the country is mountainous while 62% is covered by forests. The country can be divided into four topographical regions. (1.) The Pacific coast with a tropical savannah plain and lagoons. (2.) The high plateau and mountain systems which include the Sierra Madre, Sierra de Chaucus, Sierra de las Minas, Montanas del Mico, Sierra de los Cuchumatanes and the Sierra de Chama. This region also contains around 30 volcanoes. (3.) The Continental Divide and Caribbean Lowlands which include three deep river valleys, the Motagua, Polochic and Sarstun. (4.) The El Peten which is a rolling limestone plateau covered with dense tropical forests. Eighteen short rivers flow from the highlands to the Pacific Ocean and there are four major lakes, Lake Atitlan, Lake Amatitlan, Lake Izabel and Lake Peten Itza. Major Cities (pop. est.); Guatemala City 1,167,500, Mixco 436,700, Villa Nueva 165,600, Chinautla 61,300, Amatitlan 40,200 (1995). Land Use; forested 54%, pastures 24%, agricultural-cultivated 17%, other 5% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Guatemala has a tropical climate along the El Peten Lowlands and the Caribbean coast, although it is more temperate in the highlands. There are generally two seasons, the wet season from May to October and the dry season from November to May. Average annual precipitation varies from 1,140 mm (70 inches) to 5,080 mm (200 inches) depending on the region. Average annual temperature ranges in Guatemala City are from 12 to 23 degrees Celsius (54 to 73 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 16 to 29 degrees Celsius (61 to 84 degrees Fahrenheit) in May.

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**PEOPLE:** Guatemalans are principally of two main ethnic groups, (1.) the AmerIndians who account for 45% of the population and (2.) the Ladinos, which is a term used to define all non Indians, such as Mestizos, Mulattoes, Black Africans and Europeans, account for 45% of the population. Other Ladino minorities include Black Caribs or Morenos, Asians, Lebanese and Syrians.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 84 persons per sq km (218 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 34.8% urban, 65.2% rural (1989). Sex Distribution; 49.0% male, 51.0% female (1989). Life Expectancy at Birth; 59.7 years male, 64.4 years female (1990). Age

Breakdown; 46% under 15, 25% 15 to 29, 15% 30 to 44, 8% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 2% 75 and over (1989). Birth Rate; 39.4 per 1,000 (1989). Death Rate; 7.3 per 1,000 (1989). Increase Rate; 32.1 per 1,000 (1989). Infant Mortality Rate; 43.6 per 1,000 live births (1989).

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**RELIGIONS:** Mostly Christians with 75% of the population Roman Catholic while around 20% are Protestant and the remainder following local native tribal beliefs.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is Spanish with around 60% of the population speaking and using it. The remainder of the population speak any one of eighteen native languages with the four main AmerIndian language groups being Quiche, Kekchi, Cakchiquel and Mam.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 50.0%, incomplete primary 21.6%, primary 16.2%, secondary 9.2%, higher 3.0% (1989). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 2,809,000 or 60.3% (1989).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** In 1950 Col. Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was elected President and in 1952 embarked on a controversial land reform program which saw the nationalization of 387,000 acres owned by the American United Fruit Company. The US government, which had begun to fear communist influences in the Arbenz administration, supported a June 1954 coup which replaced him with Col. Castillo Armas and resulted in the country's fifth constitution in 1956. In 1963 the military seized power again and a sixth constitution went into effect in 1966. In 1976 a major earthquake struck Guatemala causing an estimated 23,000 deaths and around \$700 million worth of property damage. From 1821 to 1883 Guatemala claimed ownership of Belize, however, Great Britain ruled Belize and granted it independence in 1981 which Guatemala opposed. In 1978 guerrilla activity became widespread and the four presidential elections between 1970 and 1982 were all won by military officers. In Apr. 1982 Gen. Angel Anibal Guevara was elected President, but before he could take office a group of military leaders led by Gen. Efraim Rios Montt took control of the government and established a three member military Junta. The Junta suspended the constitution, abolished the Congress and banned all political parties. Following which Montt removed the other Junta members from power and declared himself Guatemala's only leader. In Aug. 1983 military leaders led by Brig.Gen Oscar Mejia Victores overthrew Montt and organized fresh elections for 1985. In Nov. 1985 Vinicio Cerezo became President and the first civilian leader in 16 years. A new constitution was established and political parties legalized. In May and Dec. 1988 and again in May 1989 unsuccessful military coups were attempted. In Jan. 1991 Jorge Serrano Elias was elected as the new civilian President while continuing violence escalated with right-wing, military backed, death squads and the guerrilla group of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) both increasing their activities. In Aug. 1991 the National Police homicide division chief, Jose Miguel Merida Escobar, was murdered for helping to uncover and exposed high-level

military officers in several murders. Also during the year severe droughts seriously affected electricity production with rationing introduced on Sept. 1, 1991. In early 1992 Edmond Mulet Lessieur of the National Centrist Union was elected as President of the Congress and while nine justices were elected to the Supreme Court to serve six year terms. During 1992 there was an insurgence from Human Rights Groups after they released their figures on abuses for 1991 while in Aug. 1992 the UN released a report that condemned Guatemala for the continuation of human rights violations. Also during 1992 the government held talks with the URNG and although some accords were reached the guerrillas continued their military action. In 1993 the Christian Democrats and the National Center Union withdrew their coalition support leaving the government without a ruling majority. On May 25, 1993 President Serrano suspended the constitution and dissolved the Congress and the Supreme Court. Within days Pres. Serrano was ousted by a cooperative of military, business and political leaders, following which the Congress elected a former human rights ombudsman, Ramiro de Leon Carpio, as his successor. On July 3, 1993 the President's cousin, Jorge Carpio Nicolle, was assassinated in an attempt to destabilize the new government while the new human rights ombudsman, Jorge Garcia Laguardia himself received death threats after questioning the police investigation. On Aug. 26, 1993 Pres. de Leon in an attempt to rid the government of corruption through constitutional reforms requested the resignation of the Congress along with top Supreme Court justices. A planned referendum to settle the issue planned for Nov. 28, 1993 was canceled by the Supreme Court, although it was later agreed to hold the reform referendum in Jan. 1994. Also during 1993 some 2,500 mostly displaced Maya refugees as a result the country's 32-year civil war returned to Guatemala from Mexico.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Quetzal (Q) divided into 100 Centavos.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$11,123,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$2,301,000,000 (1993). Imports; USD \$2,647,629,800 (1994). Exports; USD \$1,502,610,400 (1994). Tourism Receipts; USD \$265,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; USD -\$755,300,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 2,797,117 or 31.4% of total population (1990). Unemployed; 2.9% (1990).

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are the USA, CACM, Japan, Germany and Venezuela.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Bananas, Cardamom, Cattle, Coffee, Cotton, Crude Oil, Lead, Maize, Nickel, Rice, Sugar, Timber, Tobacco.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Crude Oil Refining, Food Processing, Pharmaceuticals.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Bananas, Cardamom, Chemicals, Coffee, Cotton, Meat, Petroleum, Sugar.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 782 km (486 mi) (1988), passenger-km 9,094,000 (5,651,000 passenger-mi) (1988), cargo ton-km 48,180,000 (32,998,000 short ton-mi) (1988). Roads; length 18,000 km (11,185 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 125,000 (1989), trucks and buses 100,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 7 (1990), deadweight tonnage 6,803 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 168,000,000 (104,390,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 23,400,000 (16,027,000 short ton-mi) (1989).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 5 with a total circulation of 180,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 570,000 (1994). Television; receivers 475,000 (1994). Telephones; units 231,100 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 44,200 (1994) total active duty personnel with 95.0% army, 3.4% navy and 1.6% air force while military expenditure accounts for 1.0% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).