



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ❑ Driving is on the right.
- ❑ Drivers are required to carry a valid driving license, vehicle documents and proof of insurance. US driver's licenses may be used for up to 30 days. An International Driving Permit (IDP) is recommended and is necessary for longer stays, and may be required for those holding non-US issued licenses.
- ❑ Official photo identification should be carried at all times. Authorities in San Pedro La Laguna and Sololá may not accept a passport copy, and may fine or detain those who are unable to produce an original or certified copy.
- ❑ Public buses are often involved in deadly crashes and should be avoided. These vehicles are often poorly maintained and recklessly driven, and are subject to frequent armed attacks.
- ❑ Pedestrians are at high risk, and account for an estimated 39% of all traffic deaths. Sidewalks and crosswalks may not be present, and motorists frequently disregard those on foot.
- ❑ Riders of motorized two- and three-wheeled vehicles make up about 33% of road traffic fatalities.
- ❑ Violent crime rates are high. Armed criminals often travel by motorcycle. Visitors are advised by the US State Dept. to request security escorts, available through UNGUAT (Guatemala Institute of Tourism) at 1500 or +502-2290-2800.
- ❑ Violent crimes against motorists including carjackings and armed attacks have occurred on routes leading from the airport. Drive with windows up and doors locked. If confronted, resistance increases the risk of violence.
- ❑ Legal blood alcohol limit is 0.08 g/dl. Despite legal limits, alcohol use is a common factor in serious and fatal crashes.
- ❑ There are 26.5 road deaths per 100,000 people in Guatemala, compared to 2.2 in Sweden and 2.3 in the UK.



Source: CIA Factbook

ROAD CULTURE

- **Motorists frequently** ignore traffic laws and speed limits.
- **Drivers often** operate vehicles in poor condition that may lack standard safety features including adequate tires, working brakes, turn signals, headlights, taillights and seat belts.
- **Drivers** rarely signal before turning. Speeding and reckless road behavior are common.
- **Drivers often** overtake on blind curves or under other dangerous conditions, particularly on highways.
- **Motorcyclists** frequently weave through traffic.
- **Pedestrians** may step into traffic or run across busy streets.
- **Many bus drivers** speed and drive recklessly.

ROAD CONDITIONS

- **There are** 17,440 km (10,836 miles) of roads; 7,458 km (4,634 miles) are paved, 9,982 km (6,202 miles) are unpaved, and 4,548 km (2,825 miles) are rural roads.
- **Heavy traffic** is common on the CA-1/Pan American Highway and the CA-9 road linking Guatemala City to the Atlantic Ocean.
- **Road conditions** vary widely. Paved main roads may be safer than secondary roads.
- **Many secondary** roads are unpaved and require a four-wheel drive vehicle. Mudslides and rock falls are common during the rainy season and may also affect highway travel.
- **There are** many potholes, especially outside of cities.
- **Unmarked speed bumps** are common, even on highways.
- **Secondary** and rural roads are hazardous due to poor maintenance, inadequate lighting, lack of road signs, steep and winding routes, and large numbers of pedestrians on roadways.
- **Toll roads** include the route linking Palin to Antigua. Tolls must be paid in local currency at toll booths. Credit cards are not accepted.
- **Pedestrian infrastructure** is underdeveloped. Many areas lack sidewalks and crossings.
- **Pedestrians** may be forced to share roadways with motorized traffic.
- **Travel** in a convoy. Leave travel information including planned routes with a trusted person.
- **Download** maps prior to travel and carry up-to-date physical maps. Cellular reception may be unavailable.



Road Conditions, continued

- **Beyond major** urban areas, gas stations may be located long distances from one another.
- **Attendants** pump gas at stations. Be sure the amount has been set to zero before attendant begins pumping fuel.
- **There are** frequent public demonstrations and protests. Avoid all demonstrations. Even peaceful gatherings or protests may become violent.
- **Roadblocks** may be erected at any time, and may block access to the international airport. Do not drive through roadblocks, even if they appear to be unattended. Some roadblocks are in place due to construction, including roads within the following areas: Alta Verapaz, Escuintla, Huehuetenango, Petén, Quiché and San Marcos. Signage alerting motorists to these work areas may be inadequate or non-existent. Construction areas may be unlit.
- **Illegal roadblocks** are frequent, particularly on main roads leading to the airport in Guatemala City.
- **Checkpoints** are common. Cooperate with police and military officers at official checkpoints.
- **Motorists** should avoid all border areas with Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize. These areas are subject to ongoing disputes involving violence. If crossing is necessary, use only official, staffed border crossings during daylight.
- **Crossing times** may be affected by heavy traffic. Border stations often close at lunch hour and at dusk.
- **Avoid** Zone 18 in Guatemala City, Huehuetenango Department (except the city of Huehuetenango), and San Marcos Department (except the city of San Marcos) and all roads within these locations due to criminal activity and a high risk of personal injury.
- **Organized criminals** may puncture rental car tires at rest stops or intersections, then follow motorists to offer assistance for the purpose of robbery.
- **Loose animals**, including horses and dogs, are common on rural roads.
- **The following roads** may present particular challenges to motorists:
 - » **The CA-13 and other roads** in the northwestern area of Petén near the border with Mexico are regarded as high-risk due to major drug activity and alien smuggling (when persons are actively encouraged, induced or aided by others to illegally enter the US). Avoid the CA-13 and all roads in this area. If heading to Tikal, flights to Flores may be a safer alternative. Within the historic Tikal site, remain on main trails and avoid all remote areas.
 - » **The CA-2/Carretera a El Salvador (Inter-American Highway)** is the location of violent criminal activity. Armed attacks on motorists, including sexual assault, are common. Crossroads at Fraijanes, San Jose Pinula and Las Luces are frequent locations for “express kidnappings.” Drivers first pick up an associate; passengers are then taken to an ATM to withdraw funds, or family members are contacted for ransom.
 - » **The Godinez By-Pass** via Patzun between Guatemala City and Panajachel is the location of ongoing violent criminal activity that may target drivers. Avoid this road. Instead, use the Pan American Highway to Sololá. When traveling in and around Sololá, Panajachel and Lake Atitlan, avoid the road connecting Cocales (Suchitepequez) and San Lucas Toliman (Atitlan). This road is unsafe due to violence.

REGIONAL AND SEASONAL CONDITIONS

- **Guatemala** is subject to seismic activity including earthquakes and tremors; volcanic activity, hurricanes, wildfires, tropical storms, floods and landslides.
- **There are** four active volcanoes.
- **Earthquakes occur** frequently and may be followed by strong aftershocks.

Signs are generally pictorial and may not follow European Union conventions.

			
Stop and one-way signs on building	Sign and street light placement	Animal warning signpost	Example of local road sign

Maximum Speed Limits

Type of road	Maximum speed
Urban areas	50 kph (30 mph)
Rural roads	80 kph (50 mph)
Highways	110 kph (68 mph)

Always adjust speed according to signage, hazards and weather conditions.



Road Safety Review: Guatemala

Regional and Seasonal Conditions, continued

- **Wildfires occur** from November to June; fires are common in the Petén area. Heavy smoke may impair driver vision.
- **The rainy season** is from May/June to November, and coincides with the Caribbean hurricane season. Heavy rains may result in road closures. Roads and bridges may collapse and services may be interrupted for multiple days or longer.
- **Standing water** may obscure deep potholes, tree branches or other hazards.
- **Floods** and flash floods may follow heavy rains. Floodwater may contain strong currents capable of shifting large vehicles. Do not step into floodwater.
- **Heavy rains** and floods may wash away manhole and sewer covers.
- **Cities including** Guatemala City, Antigua, and Lake Atitlan are at high altitude. Be alert to symptoms of altitude sickness. Dizziness, lack of coordination, headache, fatigue, shortness of breath and nausea can impair driver judgment and increase road risks.
- **Be familiar with emergency procedures.** The Red Cross provides a website and free, downloadable emergency app: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies>

TRANSPORTATION

- **Transportation options** include cars, public buses, private coaches, taxis, “collectivo” shared taxis, tuk-tuks (also called rickshaw taxis), moto-taxis (motorcycle taxis) and “lancha” boats.
- **Public buses** (commonly referred to as “chicken buses”) are unsafe and are often involved in serious and fatal crashes. Many are poorly maintained and recklessly driven.
- **Drivers** of public buses may speed and ignore traffic safety laws, and are often unlicensed and untrained.
- **Many** public buses are recycled US school buses painted in bright colors.
- **Public** buses are often targeted by criminals.
- **First-class buses/coaches** have also been subject to attacks, including on Highway CA-2 near the borders of Mexico and El Salvador; highways CA-1 and CA-9 near the border with El Salvador; and in the highland region between Quetzaltenango and Sololá.
- **If traveling** by bus, choose a reputable company and travel only during daylight hours.
- **Women** traveling alone may be subject to harassment, verbal abuse or assault. Use only reputable tour guides and buses; verify guide’s identification prior to travel.

- **Do not** hail taxis on the street, especially in Guatemala City. Use only radio-dispatched taxis, taxis hired through reputable hotels, or INGUAT-approved taxis found at the “SAFE” stand at the airport.
- **If using** pre-arranged taxis to or from the airport, verify driver’s identification before entering vehicle.
- **White taxis** are regarded as unsafe. PROATUR (Guatemalan Tourist Assistance Program) can provide information on reputable taxis in various areas of the country: Call 1500 or +502-2290-2800
- **When using** hotel taxis, request pick-up through hotel front desk staff and verify that the hotel logo appears on the taxi vehicle.
- **Do not share** taxis with strangers. Insist that driver not pick up additional passengers.
- **Criminal taxi drivers** may commit express kidnappings.
- **Tuk-tuks and moto-taxis** are licensed but unregulated. These vehicles are frequently involved in serious and fatal crashes. Avoid using these forms of transport.
- **Collectivo** shared taxis follow set routes, are overcrowded and generally unsafe. Drivers do not depart until vehicles are filled. Attendants lean out of doors to call out stops.
- **Pick-up trucks** fitted with metal bars in the back operate as taxis in rural and remote areas. Vehicles are unregulated. Passengers are required to stand in truck beds and hold on to bars.
- **Multiple** rideshare services are available. Safety records vary with company.
- **Use only** rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver’s name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- **Lanchas** are speedboats that provide service on Lake Atitlan and Rio Dulce. Lancha travel is regarded as unsafe. Boats may be attacked by armed criminals.
- **Lanchas do not** depart until filled, and are frequently overcrowded and lack life-saving gear. If traveling by boat, bring your own life preserver.

TRAFFIC REGULATIONS

- **Drivers must** be a minimum of 16 years of age. To rent a car, drivers must be at least 21. Individual rental agencies may have other restrictions.
- **Seat belt use** is compulsory for drivers and front seat passengers. For safety, all vehicle occupants should wear seat belts.
- **Safety restraints** are not required for children, and laws do not prohibit children from being seated in front seats. For safety, children should be seated in



Traffic Regulations, continued

- rear seat of vehicle and be secured in a child restraint appropriate to age, height and weight.
- **Helmet use** is mandatory for motorcycle drivers and passengers; helmets must display a registration number. Laws do not require helmets to be fastened. For safety, helmets should be securely fastened.
- **Motorcyclists** must wear an orange vest.
- **Children** are not restricted from being motorcycle passengers. If possible, children should not be passengers on motorcycles.
- **When making** left turns, drivers must yield to oncoming traffic.
- **Police may** administer random breath tests.
- **Extortion**, assault and theft against visiting motorists may be carried out by persons pretending to be police officers who are dressed in police uniforms.

Guatemala City (Capital)

- » Transportation options include cars, buses, taxis, colectivo shared taxis, tuk-tuks (also called rickshaw taxis), moto-taxis and boats.
- » All major highways in Guatemala begin here. Central American highways CA-1 and CA-9 run through the city.
- » Driving is not recommended. Traffic is chaotic and drivers are aggressive.
- » All areas of the city are regarded as dangerous.
- » Occupied vehicles are frequently targeted by criminals. Common tactics include criminals on pairs of motorcycles who pull up on both sides of vehicles stopped at traffic lights.
- » Pedestrian infrastructure is underdeveloped. There are few crosswalks. Many sidewalks have broken surfaces.
- » Pedestrians should avoid walking alone and should not walk after dark, particularly in Zone 10/Zona Viva and Zone 1/historic center.
- » Motorists and pedestrians should avoid Zones 3, 18, 19 and 21.
- » Transmetro bus rapid transit (BRT) system vehicles are green, run in dedicated lanes, and have fixed stops.
- » There are six Transmetro lines (1, 2, 6, 12, 13 and 18). Buses and stops are guarded by municipal police, though not all stops may be monitored at all times.
- » Transmetro buses operate from 4:30 am to between 8:00 and 10:00 pm.
- » Exact change or prepaid bus Transurbano travel cards are required for payment on BRT buses.
- » Transurbano buses are blue and white and provide service on additional routes. Pre-paid travel cards are required; cash is not accepted.
- » Public buses (“chicken buses”) are unsafe and often involved in serious and fatal crashes. Vehicles are brightly-painted, repurposed US school buses; many are poorly maintained and recklessly driven.
- » Drivers of public buses are often unlicensed and untrained. Drivers may speed and ignore traffic safety laws.
- » There are four main bus stations: Centra Norte, Centra Sur, Terminal Trebol and Estacion de Occidente.
- » Pullman and public intra-city/chicken buses operate out of terminals adjacent to the former train station in Zona 1.
- » Guatemala City Council prohibits some public inter-city buses from entering the city center. Passengers may be required to exit buses on the city outskirts.
- » Tuk-tuks and moto-taxis are licensed but unregulated. These vehicles are frequently involved in serious and fatal crashes. Avoid using this form of transport.
- » There are two kinds of car taxis: yellow and white. Most yellow taxis are metered. Driver may refuse to activate meter unless passenger insists.
- » White taxis are regarded as unsafe. PROATUR (Guatemalan Tourist Assistance Program) can provide information on reputable taxis: call 1500 or +502-2290-2800
- » Do not hail taxis on the street. Use only radio-dispatched taxis, taxis hired through reputable hotels, or INGUAT-approved taxis found at the “SAFE” stand at the Guatemala City Airport.
- » When using hotel taxis, request pick-up through front desk staff. Verify that hotel logo appears on the taxi vehicle.
- » Do not share taxis with strangers. Insist that driver not pick up additional passengers.
- » Taxi drivers generally do not speak English. Carry destination written in Spanish.



Guatemala City, continued

- » Collectivo shared taxis follow set routes, are overcrowded and generally unsafe. Drivers do not depart until vehicles are filled. Attendants lean out of doors to call out stops.
- » Multiple rideshare services are available. Safety records vary with company.
- » Ongoing tension and disputes between rideshare drivers and taxi operators may affect passenger safety.
- » Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver's name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.
- » La Aurora International Airport is located 6.4 km (4 miles) from the city.
- » Transportation from the airport to the city includes cars, city buses and taxis.
- » City buses from the airport are regarded as unsafe.
- » If using a taxi, choose only licensed yellow taxis, found at ranks outside of the arrivals terminal, and INGUAT-approved taxis found at the "SAFE" stand Many hotels, including those located in Zona 10 provide shuttles for registered hotel guests.
- » If using pre-arranged taxi service to or from the airport, verify driver's identification before entering vehicle.
- » Some major car rental agencies are represented at the airport. Vehicles may be in poor condition.

Villa Nueva

- » Second-largest city. Located within the Department of Guatemala.
- » Transportation options include cars, buses, taxis, colectivo shared taxis, tuk-tuks/rickshaw taxis) and moto-taxis.
- » Traffic is heavy and undisciplined. Driving is not recommended.
- » Criminals frequently target occupied vehicles. Attacks including carjacking and robbery may be carried out by motorcyclists working in pairs who pull alongside vehicles on both sides.
- » There is little pedestrian infrastructure. Many sidewalks have broken surfaces and deep potholes.
- » Walking alone should be avoided, particularly after dark.
- » Brightly-painted, repurposed US school buses locally known as "chicken buses" are unsafe. These vehicles are often involved in serious and fatal crashes. Many chicken buses are in poor repair and are recklessly driven.
- » Many bus drivers speed and ignore traffic regulations. Drivers may be unlicensed and untrained.
- » Tuk-tuks and moto-taxis are frequently involved in serious and fatal crashes. Vehicles are licensed but unregulated. These forms of transportation should be avoided.
- » Car taxis include yellow and white vehicles. Yellow taxis are generally metered, but drivers may not turn on meter unless instructed to do so by passengers.
- » Use only radio-dispatched taxis or taxis hired through reputable hotels. PROATUR (Guatemalan Tourist Assistance Program) can provide information on reputable taxis. Call 1500 or +502-2290-2800
- » White taxis are regarded as particularly unsafe.
- » Taxis should not be hailed on the street. Request pick-up through a reputable hotel and verify that the hotel logo is visible on the taxi vehicle.
- » Verify driver's identification before entering a pre-arranged taxi service to or from the airport.
- » Do not enter a taxi that is already occupied, or share taxis with strangers. Insist that taxi driver not pick up additional passengers.
- » Many taxi drivers do not speak English. Visitors should carry a copy of their destination written in Spanish.
- » Collectivos are overcrowded and regarded as unsafe. Collectivos follow set routes and have onboard attendants who lean out of doors to announce stops. Drivers do not depart until vehicles are filled.
- » Rideshare services are available. Safety records vary. Passenger safety may be affected by disputes between rideshare drivers and taxi operators.
- » Use only rideshare services that have a dispatch app providing vehicle description, license plate number and driver's name. Verify all information before entering vehicle.



ACCOMMODATIONS AND INCLUSIONS FOR MOBILITY CHALLENGED

- **Laws prohibit** discrimination against persons with physical, intellectual or mental challenges. Laws may not be uniformly enforced. There may be greater compliance in Guatemala City than in other areas of the country.
- **Accessibility is** limited in public transportation, information including signs, and general infrastructure such as ramps and elevators. Accessibility is more common in lodging and communications.
- **Social acceptance** of persons with disabilities in public is not as prevalent as in western countries.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

- **Pre-program** emergency numbers into your phone before departure. Police and responders to emergency numbers may speak little or no English.
 - » Police, ambulance : 110 and 120
 - » Fire: 122 and 123
 - » 24-hour PROATUR tourist emergency assistance (English and Spanish): 1500 or +502-2290-2800
- **Ambulance services** are limited and unavailable in areas beyond major cities. Service is unreliable.
- **Outside of** major urban areas, medical professionals and first responders to emergency calls may take longer to reach the injured or to provide life-saving care.
- **Adequate** basic medical care is generally available only in or near major cities. Medical care outside of Guatemala City is limited.
- **Medical care** in private hospitals is generally regarded as adequate for common illnesses and minor injuries; some specialists may have been trained or certified in the US. Do not expect doctors or medical staff to speak English.
- **Public**, state-funded hospitals often experience shortages of basic medicines and medical equipment. These facilities are often under-staffed, under-funded, ill-equipped, and may be unhygienic.
- **Payment** may be required prior to treatment, particularly in private hospitals. Some private hospitals may accept insurance. Hospitals may deny discharge until all fees are paid in full.
- **PROVIAL roadside assistance** patrols most major highways, but service is sporadic. Call +502-2422-7800
- **If involved in a crash:**
 - » Call police.
 - » Notify car rental agency and insurance representative.
 - » Do not move vehicle until directed to do so by police.
 - » Take photographs of scene.
 - » Collect contact details from other driver(s) and any witnesses. In crashes with injuries, all drivers may be held in protective custody until investigations are complete and full payment of alleged damages has been made.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION FOR SAFE INTERNATIONAL ROAD TRAVEL (ASIRT)

ASIRT is a non-profit humanitarian organization established in memory of Aron Sobel, age 25, who was killed along with 22 other passengers in a Pamukkale Bus Company crash on the roads of Turkey.

Disclaimer: ASIRT provides this information as a service to travelers. This Road Safety Review is intended to provide general guidelines for travelers to countries around the world. Any electronic links provided in this Report are for illustrative purposes and ASIRT is not responsible for the content provided within these electronic links and/or videos.

Copyright: Purchasers of this Road Safety Review are entitled to use it for purposes of research, education, information on health, safety and general road and traffic conditions or other non-commercial uses. Neither the whole nor any part of this ASIRT Road Safety Review may be copied in any form or provided to any other party without the prior written consent of the copyright owner. Flag images are © Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

To order more copies or to order Road Safety Reviews for other countries please contact:

Association for Safe International Road Travel, 11769 Gainsborough Road, Potomac, MD 20854 USA,

Phone: 1-240-249-0100; Email: asirt@asirt.org; Website: www.asirt.org; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ASIRT.org/>