

Antigua



In all the long, boring discussions about where the ‘real Guatemala’ is, you can be sure the word Antigua has never come up. This is fantasyland – what the country would look like if the Scandinavians came in and took over for a couple of years. It’s a place where power lines run underground, building codes are adhered to, rubbish is collected, traffic diverted and stray dogs ‘disappear’ mysteriously in the middle of the night.

But you’d be a fool to miss it. Antigua’s setting is gorgeous, nestled between three volcanoes: Agua (3766m), Fuego (3763m) and Acatenango (3976m), and its streetscapes – with sprays of bougainvillea bursting from crumbling ruins, and pastel facades under terracotta roofs – offer photo opportunities at every turn. The language school scene is thriving, the hostels offer colonial-chic accommodations and the dining is some of the best in the country.

The most exciting time to visit Antigua is during Holy Week – especially Good Friday. It takes planning (reserve hotels at least four months in advance), as this is the busiest week of the year. Other busy times are June through August and November to April.

Antigua is cold after sunset, especially between September and March, so bring warm clothes, a sleeping bag or a blanket. Antigua residents are known by the nickname *panza verde* (green belly), as they are said to eat lots of avocados, which grow abundantly here.

TOP FIVE

- Catching the views of active Volcán Fuego from the 3976m summit of **Acatenango** (p105)
- Dusting off your high-school Spanish with well-trained teachers at one of the city’s many highly-regarded language schools, such as the **Escuela de Español Cooperacion** (p106)
- Dining fine in **El Sabor del Tiempo** (p114), just one from the excellent range of restaurants – the widest variety that Guatemala has to offer
- Getting historical in Antigua’s museums, monasteries, mansions, churches and convents, like **Iglesia y Convento de Santo Domingo** (p103)
- Snapping up bargains at **Diez Mil Pueblitos** (p116) while shopping for Mayan crafts, fine jewelry, home wares, etc



■ POPULATION: 45,200

■ ELEVATION: 1530M

HISTORY

Antigua wasn't the Spaniards' first choice for a capital city. The first place they tried was in Iximché, which was settled in 1524 in order to keep an eye on the Kaqchiquel, with whom they had an uneasy truce. Things got uneasier in 1527 when the Kaqchiquel rebelled, so the city was moved to present-day Ciudad Vieja (p118) on the flanks of Volcán Agua. That didn't work out, either – the town practically disappeared under a mudslide in 1541 and everybody packed up and moved again. And so it was that on March 10, 1543, La muy Noble y muy Leal Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Goathemala, the Spanish colonial capital of Guatemala (for the time being), was founded.

Antigua was once the epicenter of power throughout Central America, and during the 17th and 18th centuries little expense was spared on the city's magnificent architecture, despite the fact that the ground rumbled ominously on a regular basis. Schools, hospitals, churches and monasteries sprang up, their grandeur only rivaled by the houses of the upper clergy and the politically connected.

At its peak Antigua had no fewer than 38 churches, including a cathedral, as well as a university, printing presses, a newspaper and a lively cultural and political scene. Those rumblings never stopped,

though, and for a year the city was shaken by earthquakes and tremors of varying degrees until the great earthquake of July 29, 1773, destroyed the city (which had already suffered considerable damage). In 1776 the capital was transferred again, this time to Guatemala City. Antigua was evacuated and plundered for building materials, but, despite official decrees, it never completely emptied of people, and began to grow again around 1830, by then known as La Antigua Guatemala (Old Guatemala). Renovation of battered old buildings helped maintain the city's colonial character. In 1944 President Jorge Ubico declared Antigua a national monument, and in 1979 Unesco designated it a World Heritage site.

ORIENTATION

Volcán Agua is south of the city and visible from most points within it; Volcán Fuego and Volcán Acatenango are to the southwest (Acatenango is the more northerly of the two). These three volcanoes provide easy reference points.

Antigua's focal point is the broad and beautiful Parque Central. Few places in town are more than 15 minutes' walk from here. The city's street-naming system is unusual in that it has no *zonas* (zones), and compass points are added to the numbered Calles and

ANTIGUA IN...

Two Days

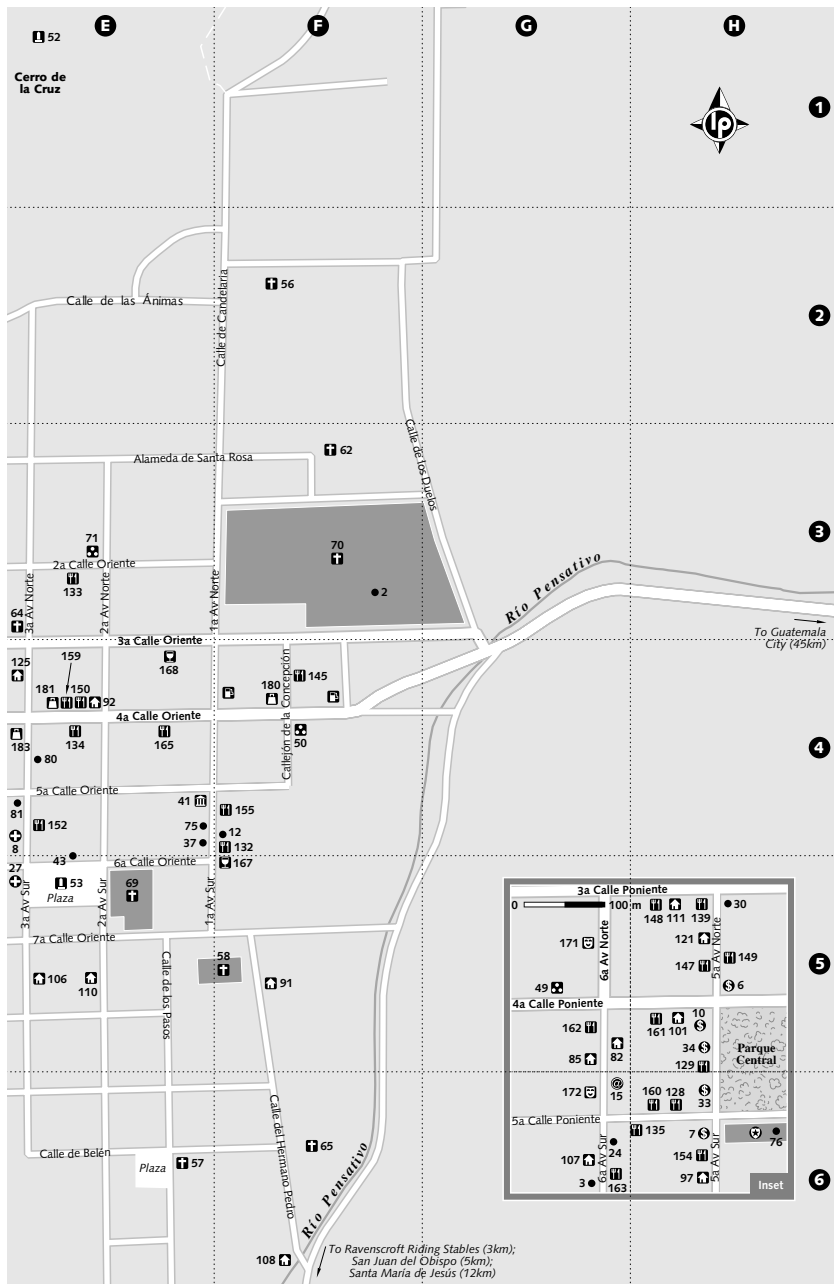
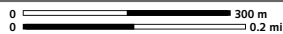
Start with breakfast in colonial surroundings at **Café La Escudilla** (p112), then drop by one of our recommended agencies to set up a volcano trip for tomorrow – Acatenango if you can afford it, Pacaya otherwise. Spend the day exploring some of Antigua's colonial buildings – the **cathedral** (p101), **Santo Domingo** (p103), **Las Capuchinas** (p103), **La Merced** (p102) – with a light lunch along the way. Eat a hearty typical dinner at **Cuevita de las Urquizas** (p113) then check out **Café No Sé** (p115). Don't stay out too late: in the morning you leave early for your **volcano** (p104). Afterwards enjoy the dinner you've earned at **Mesón Panza Verde** (p114) (or **Nokiate**, p114, if you're jonesing for a little sushi), followed by a couple of drinks at **El Muro** (p115), **Sangre** (p115) or **Fridas** (p114). Round things off, if you still can, with a shimmy at **La Casbah** (p115).

Four Days

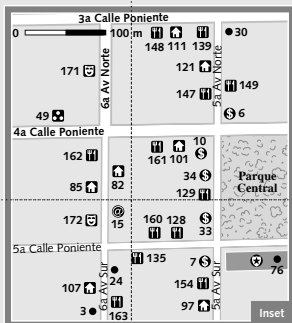
Follow the two-day itinerary, then visit the **Centro Cultural La Azotea** (p118) at Jocotenango on day three. At night catch a dinner show at **La Peña de Sol Latino** (p113), the best **movie** (p115) you can find, and a drink at **Gaia** (p114) – in any order!. On day four reactivate with an out-of-town **guided walk** (p107), **bike ride** (p105) or **horse ride** (p105). Watch the sun go down from **Café Sky** (p115) before enjoying food and the lounge scene at **Estudio 35** (p113). Then revisit your favorite bar...

ANTIGUA





ANTIGUA



To Ravenscroft Riding Stables (3km);
San Juan del Obispo (5km);
Santa Maria de Jesus (12km)

INFORMATION	Sin Fronteras.....	30 H5	Bike Tours.....(see 167)
Adrenalina Tours.....(see 115)	STA Travel.....	31 C5	Iglesia de la Candelaria.....
Adventure Travel Center.....	Un Poco de Todo.....(see 10)		Iglesia de la Escuela de
Aló Internet.....(see 116)	UPS.....	32 C5	Cristo.....
AmeriSpan Guatemala.....(see 40)	Viajes Tivoli.....(see 184)		Iglesia de San Francisco.....
Antigua Tours.....	Visa & Mastercard ATM.....	33 H6	Iglesia de San José.....
Atitran.....	Visa & Mastercard ATM.....	34 H5	Iglesia de San Sebastián.....
Aventuras Vacacionales.....	Vision Travel & Information		Iglesia de Santa Lucía.....
Aviator.....	Services.....(see 80)		Iglesia de Santa Rosa.....
Banco del Quetzal.....	Voyageur Tours.....(see 150)		Iglesia de Santiago.....
Banco Industrial.....	Western Union Kall Shop.....	35 C5	Iglesia El Carmen.....
Casa de los Nahuales.....			Iglesia y Convento de Belén.....
Casa de Salud Santa Lucía.....	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Iglesia y Convento de la
Conexion.....(see 150)	Academia de Español		Recolección.....
Credomatic.....	Antiguaña.....	36 C3	Iglesia y Convento de Nuestra
DHL.....	Academia de Español Sevilla.....	37 E4	Señora de la Merced.....
Dyslexia Books.....	Academia de Español Tecún		Iglesia y Convento de San
El Cofre.....	Umán.....	38 C5	Agustín.....
El Naufrago.....	Antigua Cooking School.....(see 142)		Iglesia y Convento de Santa
Enlaces.....	Arco de Santa Catalina.....	39 D3	Clara.....
Enlinea.....(see 74)	Casa de Lenguas		Iglesia y Convento de Santo
Funky Monkey.....(see 154)	Guatemala.....	40 C3	Domingo.....
Gran Jaguar Travel Agency.....	Casa Popenoe.....	41 E4	Ixchel Spanish School.....(see 8)
Hamlin y White.....(see 159)	Catedral de Santiago.....	42 D4	Las Capuchinas.....
Inguat.....	CATour.....	43 E5	Market.....
Internet Café.....(see 94)	Cementerio General.....	44 A4	Monumento a Landívar.....
Ixmucane.....	Centro Lingüística Maya.....	45 C4	Museo de Arte Colonial.....(see 81)
Lavandería Dry Clean.....	Centro Lingüístico De La		Museo de Santiago.....(see 77)
LAX Travel.....	Fuente.....	46 C3	Museo del Hermano Pedro.....(see 58)
Libería Casa del Conde.....(see 129)	Centroamerica Spanish		Museo del Libro Antiguo.....(see 77)
Lloyds TSB.....	Academy.....(see 150)		Old Town Outfitters.....
Mayan Spa.....	Christian Spanish Academy.....	47 D3	Ox Expeditions.....
Monarcas Travel.....	Colegio de San Jerónimo.....	48 C3	Palacio de los Capitanes.....
National Travel.....	Convento de la Compañía de		Palacio del Ayuntamiento.....
Nueva Er@.....	Jesús.....	49 G5	Pasaje El Corredor.....(see 154)
Nueva Er@.....	Convento de Nuestra Señora		Portal del Comercio.....(see 129)
Obras Sociales de Hermano	de la Concepción.....	50 F4	Probigua.....
Pedro.....	Convento de Santa Teresa.....	51 D3	Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco
Política Municipal de	Cross.....	52 E1	Marroquin.....
Turismo.....(see 77)	Cruceiro.....	53 E5	Proyecto Mosaico Guatemala.....
Policía Nacional Civil.....(see 76)	Escuela de Español		Universidad de San Carlos.....
Post Office.....	Cooperacion.....	54 C3	
Quick Laundry.....	Escuela de Español San José el		SLEEPING 
Rainbow Reading Room.....(see 157)	Viejo.....	55 D5	Black Cat Hostel.....
Rainbow Travel Center.....(see 157)	Guatemala Ventures/Mayan		Casa Cristina.....

Avs, indicating whether an address is *Norte* (north), *Sur* (south), *Poniente* (west) or *Oriente* (east) of the Parque Central.

Another famous Antigua landmark is the Arco de Santa Catalina, an arch spanning 5a Av Norte, 2½ blocks north of the Parque Central, on the way to La Merced church. This is one of the few Antigua constructions that withstood the 1773 earthquake.


Buses arrive at and depart from the streets around the large open-air market, about 400m west of the Parque Central.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Dyslexia Books (1a Av Sur 11) Secondhand and new books, mainly in English. Some politics and a good selection on indigenous culture.

El Cofre (6a Calle Poniente 26) Secondhand books, mainly in English.

Hamlin y White ( 832-7075; 4a Calle Oriente 12A) New and used books in several languages, including many Lonely Planet titles.

Libería Casa del Conde (Portal del Comercio 4) New books on Guatemala and the Maya in several languages; carries International Travel Maps and some used books.

Rainbow Reading Room (7a Av Sur 8) Thousands of used books in English and Spanish for sale, rent or trade. Also has one of the best notice boards in town.

Un Poco de Todo (5a Av Norte 10A) New books in English and Spanish.

Emergency

Policía Municipal de Turismo (Municipal Tourism Police;  7832 7290; Palacio del Ayuntamiento, 4a Av Norte;  24hr). The helpful tourism police will go with

Casa de los Cántaros B&B.....	84 D5	Ummagamma.....	126 C3	Traveler Menu.....	164 D5
Casa Rustica.....	85 G5	Yellow House.....	127 C3	Welten.....	165 E4
Casa Santa Lucía No 1.....	86 C4			Wiener.....	166 C4
Casa Santa Lucía No 2.....	87 C3	EATING 🍴			
Casa Santa Lucía No 3.....	88 D2	Bagel Barn.....	128 H6	DRINKING 🍷	
Casa Santo Domingo Hotel.....	(see 70)	Café Condesa.....	129 H5	Café Condesa Express.....	(see 129)
Cloister.....	89 D3	Café Flor.....	130 D4	Café Sky.....	167 F5
Guest House Los Encuentros.....	90 C3	Café La Escudilla.....	131 D4	El Muro.....	168 E4
Hostal el Montañés.....	91 F5	Café No Sé.....	132 F4	Onis.....	169 C4
Hotel Aurora.....	92 E4	Café Terraza.....	(see 114)	Reilly's.....	170 D3
Hotel Casa Azul.....	93 D4	Cuevita de las Urquizas.....	133 E3	Riki's Bar.....	(see 131)
Hotel Convento Santa Catalina		Doña María Gordillo Dulces		Sangre.....	(see 170)
Mártir.....	94 D3	Típicos.....	134 E4		
Hotel Cristal.....	95 C2	El Cafecito.....	135 H6	ENTERTAINMENT 🎬	
Hotel la Casa de Don		El Mix.....	136 D4	Antiguo Colegio de la	
Ismael.....	96 C4	El Papaturo.....	137 D3	Compañía de Jesús.....	171 G5
Hotel La Sin Ventura.....	97 H6	El Punto.....	138 C4	Café 2000.....	172 G6
Hotel La Tatuana.....	98 C4	El Sabor del Tiempo.....	139 H5	La Casbah.....	173 D3
Hotel Meson de María.....	99 D3	El Sereno.....	140 D3	La Chimenea.....	174 C3
Hotel Palacio Chico.....	100 D4	Estudio 35.....	(see 170)	La Salsa.....	175 C3
Hotel Plaza Mayor.....	101 H5	Fernando's Kaffe.....	141 C2	Proyecto Cultural El Sitio.....	176 C4
Hotel Posada del Sol.....	102 B2	Fridas.....	142 D3		
Hotel Posada La Merced.....	103 C3	Gaia.....	143 D3	SHOPPING 🛍️	
Hotel Posada Landívar.....	104 C4	Jardín Bavaria.....	144 C2	Casa de Arte Popular.....	(see 184)
Hotel Posada San Pedro.....	105 C3	La Casserole.....	145 F4	Casa del Tejido Antiguo.....	177 B3
Hotel Posada San Pedro.....	106 E5	La Cocina de Lola.....	146 D3	Diez Mil Pueblitos.....	178 D3
Hotel Posada San Vicente.....	107 G6	La Fonda de la Calle Real.....	147 H5	El Reino del Jade.....	179 D3
Hotel Quinta de las Flores.....	108 F6	La Fonda de la Calle Real.....	148 H5	Jades SA.....	180 F4
Hotel San Jorge.....	109 D5	La Fonda de la Calle Real.....	149 H5	Jades SA.....	181 E4
Hotel Santa Clara.....	110 E5	La Fuente.....	150 E4	Jades SA.....	182 D4
Hotel Uxlabil.....	111 H5	La Peña de Sol Latino.....	151 C4	Jades SA.....	(see 2)
Jungle Party Hostel.....	112 C3	Las Antorchas.....	152 E4	Joyería del Ángel.....	183 A4
Las Golondrinas.....	113 C3	Los Arcos.....	153 D3	La Casa del Jade.....	184 D4
Mesón Panza Verde.....	114 D6	Monoloco.....	154 H6	Mercado de Artesanías.....	185 B4
Posada Asjemenou.....	115 D3	Nokiate.....	155 F4	Nim Po't.....	(see 142)
Posada de Don Valentino.....	116 C4	Perú Café.....	156 D4		
Posada del Ángel.....	117 D6	Rainbow Café.....	157 C5	TRANSPORT	
Posada Don Ché.....	118 C3	Restaurante Don		Buses to Chimaltenango,	
Posada Don Diego.....	119 C3	Rodrigo.....	158 D3	Esquitla, Jocotenango, San	
Posada Don Tono.....	120 C4	Restaurante Doña Luisa		Antonio Aguas Calientes &	
Posada Doña Clara.....	121 H5	Xicotencatl.....	159 E4	Santa María de Jesús.....	186 B4
Posada Juma Ocag.....	122 C4	Restaurante Korea.....	160 H6	Buses to Guatemala City, Ciudad Vieja	
Posada Lazos Fuertes.....	123 C5	Restaurante La Estrella.....	161 H5	& San Miguel Dueñas.....	187 B4
Posada Ruiz 2.....	124 C3	Restaurante Las Palmas.....	162 G5	Dollar.....	(see 30)
Posada San Sebastián.....	125 E4	Sabe Rico.....	163 G6	Tabarini.....	188 C5

you to the national police and assist with the formalities, including any translating that needs to be done.

Policía Nacional Civil (National Civil Police; ☎ 7832 0251; Palacio de los Capitanes, Parque Central) Formal reports to the police about a crime or loss should be made to the Policía Nacional Civil.

Internet Access

Antigua has a large number of affordable internet services. Among the best for price, connection quality and convenience are the following:

Aló Internet (5a Calle Poniente 28; per hr US\$0.80)

Conexion (Centro Comercial La Fuente, 4a Calle Oriente 14; per hr US\$0.80; ☎ 8:30am-7:30pm) All-purpose communications center; charges US\$2 per hour to hook up your laptop; plus printing, photocopying and CD-burning services.

El Cofre (6a Calle Poniente 26; per hr US\$1)

El Naufrago (5a Av Norte 30A; per hr US\$1.30;

☎ 8:30am-10pm)

Enlaces (☎ 7832 5555; 6a Av Norte 1; per hr US\$0.80;

☎ 8am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) Good connections, smoking and nonsmoking areas.

Enlínea (5a Av Sur 12; per hr US\$1)

Funky Monkey (5a Av Sur 6, Pasaje El Corregidor; per hr US\$1) Inside Monoloco.

Internet Café (Hotel Convento Santa Catalina Mártir, 5a Av Norte 28; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 8am-10pm) Some of the most reliable connections in town.

Nueva Er@ (6a Av Norte 34 & 39; per hr US\$1)

Laundry

Laundries are everywhere, especially along 6a Calle Poniente.

Lavandería Dry Clean (6a Calle Poniente 49; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) Charges US\$3.75 a load.

Quick Laundry (6a Calle Poniente 14; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Fast and reliable; charges US\$3.25 to wash and dry a 5lb (2.25kg) load.

Media

The Antigua-based **Revue Magazine** (www.revemag.com) runs about 90% ads, but has reasonable cultural events information. It's available everywhere.

La Cuadra, also Antigua-based, is a much more underground publication, which mixes politics with irreverent commentary. You should be able to get onto a copy at Café No Sé (see p115).

Medical Services

Casa de los Nahuales (☎ 7832 0068; 3a Av Sur 6) Offers alternative medical and spiritual services, including Mayan horoscopes, massages, aromatherapy and Bach flower remedies.

Casa de Salud Santa Lucía (☎ 7832 3122; Calzada de Santa Lucía Sur 7) If possible, you're probably best going to a private hospital such as this one.

Hospital Nacional Pedro de Betancourth (☎ 7832 2801) This public hospital in San Felipe, 2km north of the center, has an emergency service.

Hospital Reina de los Ángeles (☎ 7832 2258; Calle Ancha de los Herreros 59) Another private hospital.

Ixmucane (☎ 7832 5539; womanway@aol.com; 4a Av Norte 32) Provides a complete range of gynecological and obstetrical services, from dispensing birth control to delivering babies. Herbal supplements, treatment and information are available here too, in English and Spanish.

Obras Sociales de Hermano Pedro (Hospital San Pedro; ☎ 7832 0883; 6a Calle Oriente 20) This is the more central of Antigua's two public hospitals, but it has no emergency service. It's primarily a refuge for the handicapped, elderly and abused, but does give medical consultations.

Money

Banco del Quetzal (4a Calle; ☎ 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) Facing Parque Central. Often has the best rates; has a MasterCard ATM outside. Also changes US dollars (cash and traveler's checks).

Banco Industrial (5a Av Sur 4; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Has a Visa ATM and changes US dollars (cash and traveler's checks).

Credomatic (Portal del Comercio; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Gives Visa and MasterCard cash advances. Changes US dollars (cash and traveler's checks).

LAX Travel (☎ /fax 7832 1621; lanxantigua@intelnet.net.gt; 3a Calle Poniente 12) You can change cash euros here.

Lloyds TSB (cnr 4a Calle Oriente & 4a Av Norte; ☎ 9am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-12:30pm Sat) Gives Visa and MasterCard cash advances. Changes US dollars (cash and traveler's checks).

Visa & MasterCard ATM (5a Av Norte) Facing Parque Central.

Post

DHL (☎ 7832 0073; 6a Calle Poniente 34) Offers door-to-door service.

Post office (cnr 4a Calle Poniente & Calzada de Santa Lucía) West of Parque Central, near the market.

Telephone & Fax

Many businesses, including several internet cafés, offer cut-rate international calls. Some of these are by internet telephone – very cheap, but line quality is unpredictable.

Funky Monkey (5a Av Sur 6, Pasaje El Corregidor) Offers internet calls anywhere in the world, from US\$0.15 to US\$0.40 per minute. Inside Monoloco.

Guatemala Ventures (1a Av Sur 15) Rents cell phones on which you can call the US for US\$0.10 per minute or Europe for US\$0.20 per minute, for US\$10 per week (with a US\$50 deposit).

Western Union Kall Shop (6a Av Sur 12; ☎ 8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-4pm Sat) Pay US\$0.30 per minute to call the US or Canada, US\$0.45 to Mexico, Central America or Europe, US\$0.55 to South America and US\$0.60 to anywhere else.

Tourist Information

Inguat (☎ 7832 0763; Palacio de los Capitanes, Parque Central; ☎ 8am-12:30pm & 2:30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12:30pm & 2:30-5pm Sat & Sun) This tourist office has free city maps, bus information and schedules of Semana Santa events, and the staff will try to find the answers to any poser you might throw at them.

Travel Agencies

Everywhere you go in Antigua, you'll come across travel agencies. These agencies offer international flights, shuttle minibuses, tours to interesting sites around Antigua and elsewhere in Guatemala, and more. Reputable travel agencies include the following:

Adrenalina Tours (☎ 7832 1108; www.adrelinatours.com; 5a Av Norte 31) Specialists in the western Highlands; can arrange everything from tours and shuttles to domestic and international flights.

Adventure Travel Center (☎ /fax 7832 0162; viareal@guate.net; 5a Av Norte 25B)

Antigua Tours (☎ /fax 7832 5821; www.antiguatours.net; Portal de Santo Domingo, 3a Calle Oriente 28) Inside the Casa Santo Domingo Hotel.

Atitrans (☎ 7832 3371; www.mundo-guatemala.com; 6a Av Sur 8)

Aviator (☎ /fax 7832 5989; aviaturfer@yahoo.com.mx; 5a Av Norte 34)

LAX Travel (☎ /fax 7832 1621; laxantigua@intelnet.net.gt; 3a Calle Poniente 12) An international flight specialist.

Monarcas Travel (☎ 7832 1939; Calzada de Santa Lucía 7) Operates shuttles to Copán and elsewhere.

National Travel (☎ 7832 8383; antigua@nationalgua.com; 6a Av Sur 1A) Offers one-way flights, including student and teacher fares.

Rainbow Travel Center (☎ /fax 7832 4202; rainbowtravel@gua.gbm.net; 7a Av Sur 8) Student and teacher air fares are a specialty here.

Sin Fronteras (☎ 7832 1017; www.sinfront.com; 5a Av Norte 15A) Sells one-way international air tickets; issues student and youth cards for US\$8; sells International Travel Maps; runs tours to Cuba, among other destinations.

STA Travel (☎ 7832 4080; www.isyta.com; 6a Calle Poniente 21) Offers student and teacher air fares and a change-of-date and lost-ticket-replacement service for tickets issued by student/youth travel agencies. Issues student, teacher and youth cards for US\$8.

Viajes Tivoli (☎ 7832 1370, 7832 4274; antigua@tivoli.com.gt; 4a Calle Oriente 10, local 3)

Visión Travel & Information Services (☎ 7832 3293; Casa de Mito, 3a Av Norte 3) Tours to places ranging from Tikal to local coffee *fincas* (plantations) are offered here, as are shuttle services and many guidebooks (including Lonely Planet titles) to buy or simply read on the spot.

Voyageur Tours (☎ 7832 4237; www.travel.net.gt; Centro Comercial La Fuente, 4a Calle Oriente 14) Operates some good-value shuttle minibus services.

Volunteer Work

Many of Antigua's language schools can help you find volunteer work. See p106 for more details.

AmeriSpan Guatemala (☎ 7832 0164; www.amerispan.com; 6a Av Norte 40A) Can hook you up with volunteer opportunities all over Guatemala. It charges a US\$60 registration fee.

Proyecto Mosaico Guatemala (☎ /fax 7932 0955; www.promosaico.org; Casa de Mito, 3a Av Norte 3; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri) This is a nonprofit organization providing volunteers and resources to over 60 projects in Guatemala. Its resource center in the Casa de Mito has information on these projects and matches up volunteers with projects. It's very interested in people with medical experience but there's work for periods from one week to one year doing things as varied as carpentry, teaching, environmental protection, helping HIV-positive kids, and organic farming. You need to be at least 18 and fit.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Though you'll probably never have a problem, be wary when walking empty streets late at night, especially away from the center, as robberies have taken place. Pick pocketing is

rife during Semana Santa: even more than at other times of year, don't carry anything you don't immediately need. Armed robberies have occurred in the past on Cerro de la Cruz and in the Cementerio General, but crime in these places has effectively ceased since the formation in 1996 of the Policía Municipal de Turismo (p99), who provide free escorts to both sites and to some of the ruins around town. Some of the volcanoes visited from Antigua, especially Pacaya and Agua (p104), have also been the scene of robberies.

SIGHTS Parque Central

This broad and beautiful plaza, easily the loveliest in the country, is the gathering place for Antigüenos and visitors alike – a fine, verdant place to sit or stroll and observe Antigua happening around you, from hawkers and shoe shiners to school kids and groups of tourists. The famous central fountain is a 1936 reconstruction of the original 1738 version.

PALACIO DE LOS CAPITANES

Dating from 1558, the **Captain-Generals' Palace** was the governmental center of all Central America from Chiapas to Costa Rica until 1773. It didn't gain its stately double-arcaded facade, which marches proudly along the southern side of the park, until the early 1760s, however. Today the palace houses the Inguat tourist office, the national police and the office of the governor of Sacatepéquez department.

CATEDRAL DE SANTIAGO

On the east side of the park, **Catedral de Santiago** (☎ 9am-5pm) was begun in 1542, demolished in 1668, rebuilt between 1669 and 1680, repeatedly damaged by earthquakes, wrecked in 1773, and only partly rebuilt between 1780 and 1820. The present cathedral, without its expensive original decoration, occupies only the entrance hall of the 17th-century edifice, and strictly speaking is not a cathedral but the Parroquia (Parish Church) de San José. It's most striking at night when it is tastefully lit. More interesting by day are the **remains** (admission US\$0.40; ☎ 9am-5pm) of the main part of the cathedral, entered from 5a Calle Oriente. Slightly overhyped itself as 'the most important monument in the country,' it's nonetheless an impressive place with sweeping brick archways, massive columns and underground crypts (according to graffiti, inveterate Latino

traveler Paco was here). Some statues and plasterwork remain and vegetation sprouts from cracks in walls – it's a good place to take photos for the CD cover of your goth band.

Conquistador Pedro de Alvarado, his wife Beatriz de la Cueva, their daughter Leonora de Alvarado, Guatemala's first bishop Francisco Marroquín, and the conquistador (and historian of the Spanish conquest) Bernal Díaz del Castillo, were all buried beneath the main altar, though their bones went astray at some stage in history. Behind the main altar, steps lead down to a former crypt now serving as a chapel, with a smoke-blackened Christ.

PALACIO DEL AYUNTAMIENTO

The **City Hall**, on the north side of the park, dates mostly from 1743. In addition to town offices, it houses the **Museo de Santiago** (☎ 7832 2868; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 9am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9am–noon & 2–4pm Sat & Sun), in the former town jail. The mermaid statues that once graced the fountain in the Central Park are here, along with a room full of creepy portraits whose eyes follow you everywhere. Also on exhibit are canons from the Castillo San Felipe (see p254) and some good examples of colonial era pottery. Next door is the **Museo del Libro Antiguo** (Old Book Museum; ☎ 7832 5511; admission US\$1.50 Mon–Sat, by donation Sun; ☎ 9am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9am–noon & 2–4pm Sat & Sun), showcasing the greatest hits of the early days of Guatemalan printing, plus a replica of Guatemala's first printing press, which began work here in the 1660s. There is an entire room dedicated to the process of making marbled paper.

UNIVERSIDAD DE SAN CARLOS

The **San Carlos University**, now in Guatemala City, was founded in Antigua in 1676; what used to be its main building (built in 1763), half a block east of the park, houses the **Museo de Arte Colonial** (☎ 7832 0429; 5a Calle Oriente 5; admission US\$3.25; ☎ 9am–4pm Tue–Fri, 9am–noon & 2–4pm Sat & Sun), with sculptures of saints and paintings by leading Mexican artists of the colonial era, such as Miguel Cabrera and Juan de Correa.

Churches & Monasteries

Once glorious in their gilded baroque finery, Antigua's churches have suffered indignities from both nature and humankind. Rebuilding after earthquakes gave the churches thicker walls, lower towers and belfries and unem-

bellished interiors, and moving the capital to Guatemala City deprived Antigua of the population needed to maintain the churches in their traditional richness. Still, they are impressive. In addition to those churches mentioned below, you'll find many others scattered around town in various states of decay. The **Policía Municipal de Turismo** (p99) will provide free escorts to some of the outlying monuments, where robberies have sometimes occurred.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA MERCED

From the Parque Central, walk three long blocks along 5a Av Norte, passing beneath the **Arco de Santa Catalina**, which was built in 1694 (to enable nuns to cross the street without being seen) and rebuilt with its clock tower in the 19th century. At the northern end of 5a Av is La Merced – Antigua's most striking colonial church.

La Merced's construction began in 1548. The most recent of its several bouts of rebuilding has taken place since the 1976 earthquake, and the place is in pretty good shape. Inside the **monastery ruins** (admission US\$0.80; ☎ 9am–6:30pm) is a fountain 27m in diameter, said to be the largest in Hispanic America. It's in the shape of a water lily (traditionally a symbol of power for Mayan lords), and lily motifs also appear on the church's entrance arch, suggesting the influence of indigenous laborers used to construct La Merced. Go upstairs for a bird's-eye view of the fountain and the town. A candlelit procession, accompanied by much bell ringing and firecrackers, starts and ends here on the last Thursday evening of each month.

IGLESIA DE SAN FRANCISCO

Little of the original 16th-century **Iglesia de San Francisco** (cnr 8a Calle Oriente & Calle de los Pasos) remains, but reconstruction and restoration over the centuries have produced a handsome structure. In the north transept is the tomb of Santo Hermano Pedro de San José de Betancurt (1626–67), a Franciscan monk who founded a hospital for the poor in Antigua and earned the gratitude of generations. He's Guatemala's most venerated local Christian figure, and was made a saint in 2002 when Pope John Paul II visited Guatemala. His intercession is still sought by the ill, who pray fervently by the tomb. On the south side of the church are the **Museo del Hermano Pedro** and the

ruins of the adjoining **monastery** (joint admission US\$0.80; ☎ 8am–5pm Tue–Sun). The museum houses relics from the church and Santo Hermano's curiously well-preserved personal belongings, including some spectacularly uncomfortable-looking underwear. The *pasillo de los milagros* is a corridor jam-packed with testimonials, photos, plaques and crutches donated by people who claim to have been healed by the Hermano.

LAS CAPUCHINAS

Inaugurated in 1736 by nuns from Madrid, **Las Capuchinas** (Iglesia y Convento de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza; cnr 2a Av Norte & 2a Calle Oriente; adult/student US\$4/2; ☎ 9am–5pm) was seriously damaged by the 1773 earthquake and thereafter abandoned. Restoration began in 1943 and continues today. Looking around at the high, arched passageways, pretty gardens and stately courtyards, it's tempting to think that the nuns who lived here were onto a good thing. The building has many unusual features, including a unique towerlike building of 18 nuns' cells built around a circular patio.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE LA RECOLECCIÓN

The massive **La Recolectión** (Av de la Recolectión; adult/student US\$4/2; ☎ 9am–5pm) is among Antigua's most impressive monuments. It's set a little ways out of town, and a serene air pervades the site. Built between 1701 and 1715, the church was inaugurated in 1717, but suffered considerable damage from an earthquake that same year. The buildings were destroyed in the earthquake of 1773; enormous chunks of masonry still lie jumbled around the ruined church. You can clamber up to the second story for better views, but watch your step.

COLEGIO DE SAN JERÓNIMO

Built in 1757, the **Colegio de San Jerónimo** (Real Aduana; cnr Calzada de Santa Lucía & 1a Calle Poniente; adult/student US\$4/2; ☎ 9am–5pm) was used as a school by friars of the Merced order, but because it did not have royal authorization, it was taken over in 1761 by Spain's Carlos III, and in 1765 designated for use as the Real Aduana (Royal Customs House). Today it's a tranquil, mostly open-air site. The handsome cloister centers on a lovely octagonal fountain, which operates most days – it's an evocative setting for various dance and other cultural performances. Make your way upstairs for

some excellent photo angles of Volcán Agua through stone archways.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE SANTA CLARA

Santa Clara (2a Av Sur 27; adult/student US\$4/2; ☎ 9am–5pm) was first completed in 1702, and the existing construction, inaugurated in 1734, was wrecked in 1773 but remains large and impressive.

In front of the church is one of Antigua's prettiest plazas, lined with palm trees. At the eastern end are public clothes-washing sinks, where some women still come to do their washing, spreading their laundry out on the ground to dry. Also in the plaza stands a gift made to Antigua (formally Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala) in 1988 by the city of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain: a *cruceiro*, a typically Galician stone cross carved with biblical scenes.

IGLESIA Y CONVENTO DE SANTO DOMINGO

Founded in 1542, **Santo Domingo** (☎ 7832 0140; 3a Calle Oriente 28; archaeological area guests/nonguests US\$free/6; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun) became the biggest and richest monastery in Antigua. Its large church was completed in 1666. Damaged by three 18th-century earthquakes, the buildings were further depleted when pillaged for construction material in the 20th century. The site is currently occupied by the Hotel Casa Santo Domingo. You can visit the hotel's public spaces, which are tastefully dotted with colonial statuary and archaeological pieces, any time. The *áreas arqueológicas* (archaeological areas) form part of the *paseo de museos* (museum walk). It includes the very picturesque ruined monastery church (cleared of a 5m layer of rubble in the 1990s and now used for mass and weddings), the adjacent cloister with its large fountain created in 1618, and two crypts discovered in the 1990s – one, the Cripta del Calvario, boasts a pristine mural of the Crucifixion; the other holds two graves with human bones. The *paseo* also includes museums dedicated to colonial and contemporary art, archaeology, handicrafts and even a pharmacological museum. The price for all this may seem steep, but the entire complex is very well done – with excellent, evocative lighting and signage, it's just modern enough to let the pieces speak for themselves. Without doubt the leading museum in Antigua.

Casa Popenoe

The beautiful **Casa Popenoe** (☎ 7832-3087; 1a Av Sur 2; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Sat) was built in 1636 by Don Luis de las Infantas Mendoza. After the 1773 earthquake the house stood desolate for 150 years until it was bought in 1929 by agricultural scientist William Popenoe and his wife Dorothy. Their painstaking, authentic restoration yields a fascinating glimpse into how a royal official lived in 17th-century Antigua.

Monumento a Landívar

Commemorating Jesuit priest and poet Rafael Landívar (1731-93), **Monumento a Landívar** (cnr Calzada de Santa Lucía & 5a Calle Poniente) is a structure of five colonial-style arches set in a pristine little park. Landívar lived and wrote in Antigua for some time, and his poetry is esteemed as the best of the colonial period, even though much of it was written in Italy after the Jesuits were expelled from Guatemala. Landívar's ruined house is behind the monument.

Market

Antigua's **market** (btwn Calzada de Santa Lucía & Av de la Recolectión; ☎ Mon, Thu & Sat) – chaotic, colorful and always busy – sprawls north of 4a Calle. Morning, when villagers from the Antigua vicinity are actively buying and selling, is the best time to come. On the official market days Mayan women spread their wares over open-air areas north and west of the covered market area. Like many Guatemalan markets, Antigua market is cheek-by-jowl with the bus terminal, adding to the crowds, noise and dirt.

Cementerio General

Antigua's **Cementerio General** (☎ 7am-noon & 2-6pm), southwest of the market and bus terminal, is a beautiful conglomeration of tombs and mausoleums decked with wreaths, exotic flowers and other signs of mourning. There have been robberies here, so go with the free escort from the Policía Municipal de Turismo (see p99).

Cerro de la Cruz

Overlooking Antigua from the north is Cerro de la Cruz (Hill of the Cross), which provides fine views looking south over town toward Volcán Agua. In the past this hill was famous for muggers waiting to pounce

on unsuspecting visitors, and Antigua's tourism police were formed precisely to counter this threat. The Policía Municipal de Turismo (see p99) offer a free escort, and it's still best to go with them.

ACTIVITIES

Two professional, established and friendly outfits offering a big range of activities are **Old Town Outfitters** (☎ /fax 7832 4171; www.bikeguatemala.com; 5a Av Sur 12C) and **Guatemala Ventures/Mayan Bike Tours** (☎ /fax 7832 3383; www.guatemalaventures.com; 1a Av Sur 15). Drop by either place to chat about possibilities.

Ox Expeditions (☎ 7832 0074; www.guatemalavolcano.com; 1 Av Sur 4B) is a new outfit offering rigorous climbing opportunities in the area. Part of the company's profits goes to local environmental projects.

Volcano Ascents

All three volcanoes overlooking Antigua are tempting challenges but how close you can get to **Fuego** depends on recent levels of activity. In many ways the twin-peaked Acatenango, the highest of the three and overlooking Fuego, is the most exhilarating summit. For an active-volcano experience many people take tours to **Pacaya** (2552m), 25km southeast of Antigua (a 1½-hour drive). In general the weather and the views on all the volcanoes are better in the morning. In the rainy season (May to October) thunderstorms are possible in the afternoon. Get reliable advice about safety before you climb, for example from the Inguat tourist office, or from your embassy in Guatemala City if need be. Take sensible precautions: wear adequate footwear (volcanic rock can be very rough on shoes), warm clothing (it can be very cold up there) and, in the rainy season, some sort of rain gear. Carry a flashlight (torch) in case the weather changes; it can get as dark as night when it rains on the mountain – though it's better not to go at all if rain is expected. Don't neglect food and water.

In view of the possible dangers not only from volcanic activity and the elements but also from armed robbers preying on tourists on some volcano trails, it's safest to go with a reputable agency. People like Old Town Outfitters, Guatemala Ventures and Ox Expeditions (see above) know what's happening on the mountains and will keep you clear of trouble. **Agua** trips with Guatemala Ventures (US\$49) drive to the end of the dirt road, well

LOCAL LORE: LA LLORONA

There was once a beautiful peasant woman who lived in Antigua, back when it was the capital. She fell in love with a nobleman, and bore him two children.

Predictably enough, he never married her, and one day announced that he was going to Spain, where he would marry a noblewoman his family had chosen for him.

The woman was stricken with grief, and in a jealous rage took the two children to the Río Pensativo and drowned them.

When she came to her senses and realized what she had done, she let out a fearful wail and threw herself into the river to drown.

The legend goes that La Llorona (the wailer) appears near water, and there have been reports of her appearing all over the country, near rivers, lakes, fountains – even *pilas* (laundry troughs). They say that, if you are near water and you hear wailing late at night, it is La Llorona, lamenting the loss of her children.

beyond the village of Santa María de Jesús, in whose vicinity hikers have been robbed. The summit is about two hours' walk from the end of the road (against five hours from the village).

Trips of varying difficulty are available. A trek to within two hours' walk of the top of **Acatenango** with Old Town Outfitters costs US\$49 for a day trip, US\$80 with a night camping on the mountain.

One-day Pacaya trips, with 1½ to two hours' walking uphill and one to 1½ hours down, cost around US\$60. With luck you'll be able to look down into the crater of this active volcano. Various companies run bargain-basement, seven-hour Pacaya trips daily for US\$8 (leaving Antigua at 6am) or US\$6 (leaving at 1pm). Extra costs include food, drinks and US\$3.25 admission to the Pacaya protected area. The installation of park rangers on Pacaya has made this volcano, once notorious for robberies of tourists, much more secure.

Another possibility in these areas are hike-and-bike trips (see right).

Other Hikes

Old Town Outfitters (☎/fax 7832-4171; www.bike.guatemala.com; 5a Av Sur 12C) has a popular range of guided half-day walks (US\$30) in the hills around Antigua. It can also take you to any summit in the country or on a three-day trek through eastern Guatemala's Sierra de las Minas, with its cloud forests. It rents out and sells camping gear too. **Guatemala Ventures/Mayan Bike Tours** (☎/fax 7832 3383; www.guatemalaventures.com; 1a Av Sur 15) offers a range of hikes including some interesting cloud-forest, bird-watching and ridge-hiking options.

Cycling

Old Town Outfitters (☎/fax 7832 4171; www.bike.guatemala.com; 5a Av Sur 12C) rents out quality bikes with gloves, helmets and maps for US\$8/12 per half/whole day. It also takes a great range of mountain-bike tours at all levels of difficulty, including the two-day Pedal & Paddle Tour (US\$140 to US\$175), which includes kayaking and hiking at Lago de Atitlán.

Guatemala Ventures/Mayan Bike Tours (☎/fax 7832 3383; www.guatemalaventures.com; 1a Av Sur 15) also rents out good mountain bikes for US\$2/12 per hour/day and offers some tasty bike tours from intermediate to expert levels. It does hike-and-bike tours to Pacaya volcano (US\$29) and bike-and-kayak trips to Lago de Atitlán and Monterrico (US\$129, both two days). Another, lazier option is its trip up Cerro Alto in a minibus with a coast back down on mountain bike (US\$29).

Horse Riding

Ravenscroft Riding Stables (☎ 7832 6229; 2a Av Sur 3, San Juan del Obispo), 3km south of Antigua on the road to Santa María de Jesús, offers English-style riding, with scenic rides of three, four or five hours in the valleys and hills around Antigua, for US\$15 per hour per person. You need to be fairly fit. Reservations and information are available through the **Hotel San Jorge** (☎ 7832 3132; 4a Av Sur 13). You can reach the stables on a bus bound for Santa María de Jesús (p116).

You can also ride at La Azotea in Jocotenango (p117).

Cooking Classes

Antigua Cooking School (☎ 5944 8568; www.antigua.cookingschool.com; 5a Av Norte 25B; 4-hr class US\$50) offers

classes in traditional Guatemalan cooking, preparing classics like corn tamales, *subanik*, *pepian* and *chuchitos*. Classes are available Tuesday through Saturday.

Spa & Massage

Mayan Spa (☎ 7832 3537; Alameda Santa Lucía Norte 20) Offers massage, facials, exfoliations, manicures, Pilates and yoga.

LANGUAGE COURSES

Antigua's famous Spanish-language schools attract students from around the world. There are around 75 schools to choose from.

The price, quality of teaching and student satisfaction varies greatly from one school to another. Often the quality of instruction depends upon the particular teacher, and thus may vary even within a single school. Visit a few schools before you choose one and, if possible, talk to people who have studied recently at schools you like the look of – you'll have no trouble running into lots of Spanish students in Antigua. The Inguat tourist office has a list of authorized schools. They include the following:

Academia de Español Antiguaña (☎ 7832 7241; www.spanishacademyantiguaena.com; 1a Calle Poniente 10) A highly recommended school, only hiring experienced teachers. They can arrange volunteer work in hospitals for social workers, lab assistants and child care workers on request. Also supports an educational project in San Antonio Aguas Calientes.

Academia de Español Sevilla (☎ /fax 7832 5101; www.sevillantigua.com; 1a Av Sur 8) This school has a good free activity program, and offers a shared student house as an accommodation option. Can arrange volunteer work in the local orphanage, home for the aged, hospitals and other community projects.

Academia de Español Tecún Umán (☎ /fax 7832 2792; www.escuelatecun.com; 6a Calle Poniente 34A) Also has a school on Lago de Atitlán. Organizes volunteer placement with Obras Sociales del Hermano Pedro (a local hospital) and the project Familias de Esperanza (doing education and medical work).

Casa de Lenguas Guatemala (☎ 7832 4846; www.casadelenguas.com; 6a Av Norte 40) This school has group classes (US\$65 per week) as well as individual classes (US\$95 per week). Volunteer opportunities for social workers, teachers, health-care professionals and in environmental, nature and wildlife programs as well as construction of low-cost housing and classrooms.

Centro Lingüístico De La Fuente (☎ 7832 2711; www.delafuenteschool.com; 1a Calle Poniente 27) Offers volunteer positions as classroom assistants, hospital

workers and in local orphanages. Supports local projects to fund an ambulance service in Antigua and provide school supplies to economically underprivileged schoolchildren in local villages.

Christian Spanish Academy (☎ 7832 3922; www.learnca.com; 6a Av Norte 15) Very professional outfit where students get to report on the teachers weekly.

Escuela de Español Cooperación (☎ 7812 2482; www.geocities.com/escuela_coop; 7 Av Norte, 15 B) A highly recommended school run as a cooperative, ensuring teachers get paid fairly.

Escuela de Español San José el Viejo (☎ 7832 3028; www.sanjoseelviejo.com; 5a Av Sur 34) Professional, 30-teacher school with pool, superb gardens, tennis court and its own tasteful accommodations.

Ixchel Spanish School (☎ /fax 7832 7137; www.ixchelschool.com; 3a Av Sur 6) Comfortable, welcoming school with enjoyable group activities and lush garden. Has information on more than 50 volunteer projects in the area, ranging from helping in hospitals and orphanages to working as an assistant teacher in a local school as well as construction work and reforestation projects.

Probigua (☎ 7832 2998; www.probigua.org; 6a Av Norte 41 B 2) A highly regarded, nonprofit school helping Guatemalan children by donating the school's profits to establish and maintain libraries in the many rural villages where there is no access to books.

Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (☎ /fax 7832 2886; www.langlink.com/plfm; 7a Calle Poniente 31) Antigua's oldest Spanish school, founded in 1971; run by a nonprofit foundation working to preserve Mayan languages and culture. Courses in some of these are also available.

Other recommended schools include the following:

Centro Lingüística Maya (☎ 7832 0656; www.dmmaya.com; 5a Calle Poniente 20)

Centroamerica Spanish Academy (☎ 7832 3297; www.quik.guate.com/spanishacademy; 4a Calle Oriente 14)

Classes start every Monday at most schools, though you can usually be placed with a teacher any day of the week. Most schools cater for all levels and allow you to stay as long as you like. Three or four weeks is typical, though it's perfectly OK to do just one week. The busiest seasons are during January and from April to August, and some schools request advance reservations for these times.

Instruction is nearly always one-on-one and costs US\$65 to US\$115 per week for four hours of classes daily, five days a week. You can enroll for up to 10 hours a day of instruction, although this may lead to brain meltdown. Most people find that four to

five hours a day is plenty. Most schools offer to arrange room and board with local families, where you'll usually have your own room, often with shared bathrooms, for around US\$55 per week (including three meals daily except Sunday). Some schools may offer accommodation in guesthouses or their own hostels for similar or slightly higher prices.

Homestays are supposed to promote the total immersion concept of language learning, but often there are several foreigners staying with one family. This can make it more like a hotel than a family atmosphere. Often there are separate mealtimes for students and the family. Make a point of inquiring about such details if you really want to be totally immersed.

Antigua is not for everyone who wants to study Spanish; there are so many foreigners about, it takes some real discipline to converse in Spanish rather than your native tongue. Many enjoy this social scene, but if you think it will bother you, consider studying in Xela, El Petén or elsewhere, where there are fewer foreign students and more opportunities to dive into Spanish.

TOURS

Elizabeth Bell, author of books on Antigua, leads three-hour cultural walking tours of the town (in English and/or Spanish) on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 9:30am. On Monday and Thursday, the tours are led by her colleague Roberto Spillari and start at 2pm. The cost is US\$18 (US\$15 for Spanish students and project volunteers). Reservations are suggested and can be made through **Antigua Tours** (☎/fax 7832 5821; www.antiguatours.net; Portal de Santo Domingo, 3a Calle Oriente 28) which is inside the Casa Santo Domingo Hotel. Adventure Travel Center, Vision Travel, El Condor Expeditions and Sin Fronteras (see p100) also offer daily city walking tours, visiting a variety of convents, ruins and museums. These firms also do interesting tours of assorted villages and coffee or macadamia plantations for US\$20 to US\$30. Bell's book, *Antigua Guatemala: The City and Its Heritage*, is well worth picking up at a bookstore: it describes all the city's important buildings and museums, and neatly encapsulates Antigua's history and fiestas.

CATour (☎ 7832 9638; www.catours.co.uk; 6a Calle Oriente 14) offers two-day motorbike tours to Lake Atitlán or Monterrico from US\$140.

Numerous travel agencies offer tours to more distant places, including Tikal, Copán, Río Dulce, the Cobán area, Monterrico, Chichicastenango, Guatemala City and Panajachel. Two-day trips to Tikal, flying from Guatemala City to Flores and back, cost between US\$150 and US\$300, largely depending on where you stay. A hectic one-day Tikal round-trip costs US\$150 to US\$180. Two-day land tours to Copán (some also including Quiriguá and Río Dulce) are between US\$115 and US\$150.

On long-distance tours be sure of what you are paying for – some of the cheaper tours simply amount to shuttling you to Guatemala City then popping you on a public bus.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The most exciting time to be in Antigua is **Semana Santa** (Easter Week), when hundreds of people dress in deep purple robes to accompany the most revered sculptural images from the city's churches in daily street processions remembering Christ's crucifixion and the events surrounding it. Dense clouds of incense envelop the parades and the streets are covered in breathtakingly elaborate *alfombras* (carpets) of colored sawdust and flower petals. These beautiful but fragile works of art are destroyed as the processions shuffle over them, but are re-created the next morning for another day of parades.

The fervor and the crowds peak on Good Friday, when an early morning procession departs from La Merced, and a late afternoon one leaves from the Escuela de Cristo. There may also be an enactment of the crucifixion in Parque Central. Have ironclad Antigua room reservations well in advance of Semana Santa, or plan to stay in Guatemala City or another town and commute to the festivities.

Processions, *velaciones* (vigils) and other events actually go on every weekend through Lent, the 40-day period prior to Semana Santa. Antigua's tourist office has schedules of everything, and the booklet *Lent and Holy Week in Antigua* by Elizabeth Bell gives explanations.

On a secular note, beware of pickpockets. It seems that Guatemala City's entire population of pickpockets (numbering perhaps in the hundreds) decamps to Antigua for Semana Santa. In the press of the emotion-filled

crowds lining the processional routes, they target foreign tourists especially.

SLEEPING

Antigua's climate, combined with the plaster and cement used in construction, means some hotel rooms can be damp and musty, and this holds true for all price ranges, not just the budget places. Rooms on the ground floor and/or with carpet seem to fare worst, so avoid the mildew funk by going for an upstairs room, preferably with wood or tile floors. Upper floors generally get more air and more light.

Book as far ahead as you can for accommodations during Semana Santa, and be prepared for rates to double then.

Some Antigua hotels have desks in the Guatemala City airport arrivals area, where you can book a room and/or obtain transportation (often free) to the hotel.

Budget

When checking a budget establishment, look at several rooms, as some are much better than others. Where hot water is indicated, expect an electric unit taped to the shower head; feel especially blessed if there's actually a separate hot-water tap.

Posada Ruiz 2 (no phone; 2a Calle Poniente 25; s/d US\$3/6) The rough-hewn archway over the entrance is by far the most impressive aspect of this super cheapie. The rooms are small rooms

and the bathrooms are moderately clean. It's a fair deal for the price, and some budget travelers stay here, congregating in the courtyard in the evening.

Guest House Los Encuentros (☎ 7832 4232; 7 Av Norte 60; dm/s/d US\$5/6/12; ☑) Nothing fancy going on here – the rooms are basic, running down one side of a narrow house and the bathrooms are shared, but this family-run place has a great feel to it in this often impersonal town. Kitchen access and breakfast are available.

Ummagumma (☎ 7832 4413; www.ummagumma hostel.blogspot.com; 7 Av Norte 15; dm/s/d US\$5/7/12, s/d with bathroom US\$10/20) Slightly tatty at the edges, the Ummagumma has some of the best atmosphere in town – it's a great place to relax, meet people and hang out on the leafy rooftop terrace. A well-stocked kitchen is available for guest use and the owners run a good travel agency downstairs.

Black Cat Hostel (☎ 7832 1229; www.blackcatantigua.com; 6 Av Norte 1A; dm US\$6.50) A near-inexplicably happening hostel right in the middle of the action. The dorms are cramped, you can't use the kitchen, but the place is hopping, both as a hostel and at the bar out front for the nightly happy hour. Plenty of tours are on offer, free movies, good local advice and a huge breakfast are included in the price.

Jungle Party Hostel (☎ 7832 0463; www.jungleparty hostel.com; 6a Av Norte 20; dm US\$7) One of Antigua's hottest hostels keeps going from strength to strength, with a great hostel atmosphere, bar

LOCAL VOICES: EDUARDO VASQUEZ, SHOEMAKER

The small village of Pastores, just outside of Antigua, is famed for its leatherwork. People come from all over the country to buy their cowboy boots and rodeo hats here. We spoke to Eduardo Vasquez about the cobbler's life.

How long have you been making shoes?

About 15 years. When you start, you cut the hides to learn how it's done. Later you do the moldings. Then, if you're good, you start sewing.

Have the techniques changed over the years?

Not really. Hardly anybody in Pastores uses machines – we do pretty much everything by hand.

There are a lot of cheap imports coming in from Asia now. Have they affected business?

We haven't seen that. People come here when they want quality, because they know that hand-made shoes are better. We have people who come from Zacapa, Jalapa, Jutiapa...

What kind of materials do you use?

(Laughs) We can make shoes out of anything. We mostly use leather, but we also work with ostrich, lizard, python, crocodile, manta ray, cobras... anything, really.

You do custom work – what's the strangest order you've had?

A woman came in with a pair of boots that she'd bought in Italy, and wanted us to make a copy of them... We did a pretty good job... I think we did alright.

service, hammock hang-outs and the famous all-you-can-eat Saturday barbecue.

Posada Don Tono (3a Calle Poniente, Lotificación Cofiño, 20 Callejón 4; s/d US\$9/13) Next-door to Don Ismael (below), this is another friendly little spot with six simple, clean rooms alongside a small patio, free drinking water, and use of a kitchen.

Yellow House (☎ 7832 6646; main@granjaguar.com; 1a Calle Poniente 24; s/d US\$8/16; ☒ ☑) Rooms here are simple but clean and nonsmoking, with comfy beds, wooden furniture, pastel walls and big mosquito-netted windows. Try to get one upstairs. The shared bathrooms are immaculate and use solar-heated water. Rates include use of the guest kitchen, unlimited internet and drinking water.

Hotel Cristal (☎ 7832 4177; Av el Desengaño 25; s/d US\$8/12, s/d with bathroom US\$10/14) There's some good solid value on offer here, even if the place is a little out of the center. Rooms at the front can be noisy and the bathrooms aren't huge, but it's well priced by Antigua standards.

Posada Juma Ocag (☎ 7832 3109; Calzada de Santa Lucía Norte 13; s/d/US\$12/14) Sun bursts through the patio at this cheerful little hotel – the budget prices belying the tranquil atmosphere. The seven spotless, comfortable rooms have high-quality mattresses and traditional appointments including wrought-iron bed heads, reading lamps and mirrors made by your friendly, attentive host, Juan Ramón. Each room has a private hot shower; there's also a rooftop patio and well-tended little garden. Touches like drinking water and decorative ceramic masks make this great value. It's peaceful, despite the location on a busy street. Reservations are accepted in person only. Grab a room upstairs for even more peace in this central location.

Hotel la Casa de Don Ismael (☎/fax 7832 1932; www.casadonismael.com; 3a Calle Poniente, Lotificación Cofiño, 20 Callejón 6; s/d US\$10/15) Safe, friendly Don Ismael's, hidden down a small side-street, fills up fast. The seven cheerful, comfy rooms share three hot-water bathrooms. There's a pleasant roof terrace, washing sinks, drinking water and breakfast available.

Posada Doña Clara (☎ 5432 6091; 5a Ave Norte 16; s/d US\$12/18) The maze of rooms set around leafy patios just keeps unwinding, but persevere and head for the rear upstairs, where they're most spacious and the balconies come with volcano views. The entrance is through the handicrafts store on the street.

Casa Santa Lucía No 1 (☎ 7832 7418; Calzada de Santa Lucía Sur 9; s/d US\$13) Of all the Santa Lucías in town, this is probably the nicest, and definitely the most central. Why is it the cheapest? Another mystery of Guatemala... There's an excellent, colonial atmosphere on offer here, at a fraction of what it usually goes for.

Las Golondrinas (☎ 7832 3343; drrios@intel.net.gt; 6a Ave Norte 34 Apt 6; s/d US\$12/24, with kitchen US\$15/30) An excellent option for serious self-caterers are the apartment-like rooms with balconies (and views) here. They're set around a grassy garden area dotted with trees. The apartments are well set up, with enough furniture to keep long-termers happy. Good weekly and monthly discounts are available.

Casa Cristina (☎ 7832 0623; www.casa-cristina.com; Callejón Camposeco 3A; s/d US\$16/20) A near-overdose of quaint in this comfy little two-story hotel – they lay it on thick with the indigenous bedspreads and soft pastel paint job, but it's a quiet spot in a good area and a good deal for the price.

Posada Don Diego (☎ 7832 1401; posadadon_diego@hotmail.com; 6a Ave Norte 52; s/d with bathroom US\$18/20) Probably the thing that stands out most about this place is the Dunkin' Donuts franchise in the café out front. The handful of rooms are set beside a pretty little patio with wooden pillars, a patch of lawn and a stone fountain. Bathrooms are actually across the hall from the rooms.

Casa Santa Lucía No 2 (☎ 7832 7418; Calzada de Santa Lucía Norte 21; s/d US\$19; ☐) Sparklingly clean, light and spacious, the rooms at the second of the four Santa Lucías have terracotta tiled floors waxed to perfection and plenty of colonial charm. The showers are rippers here, too – just make sure you ask what time they turn on the hot water.

Casa Santa Lucía No 3 (☎ 7832 1386; 6 Ave Norte; s/d US\$19) Stepping way back in time brings you to this grand colonial-style house with arched hallways and heavy wooden exposed beams. Rooms are nothing special, but a good deal for the price and the blasting hot showers do the job.

Midrange

Some of Antigua's midrange hotels allow you to wallow in the city's colonial charms for a moderate outlay of cash.

Hostal el Montañas (☎ 7832 3046; Calle del Hermano Pedro 19B; dm/r US\$20/50) Rooms in this modern

family home are well-appointed and bright, with spotless bathrooms. The three-bed dorm is a good deal and there are discounts for longer stays.

Hotel Posada La Merced (☎ 7832 3197; www.merced-landivar.com; 7a Av Norte 43; s/d US\$20/25, with bathroom US\$40/45; (P) ☒) Deceptively colonial from the outside, La Merced has big wooden doors that open onto a fiendishly modern interior. The whole effect is softened somewhat by plenty of native weaving and Nahualí furniture. Hammocks are hung in a couple of interior patios. Bonuses include a rooftop terrace and a well-appointed guest kitchen.

Posada de Don Valentino (☎ 7832 0384; www.posada.donvalentino.com; 5a Calle Poniente 28; s/d US\$20/30) The unassuming entranceway here, clogged with internet users, opens onto a charming little hotel with well appointed, spacious rooms. No 109 is best for light and views of the pretty interior patio, but the two right up top have volcano views.

Hotel Posada Landivar (☎ /fax 7832 8819; 5a Calle Poniente 23; s/d US\$20/30; (P)) This is a friendly little place with five of its seven rooms set round a pretty little patio with a fountain. Rooms vary – some are cramped. Colorful weavings and paintings, drinking water, baggage storage and a little roof garden add to the appeal.

Hotel Posada San Vicente (☎ /fax 7832 3311; 6a Av Sur 6; s/d/tr US\$20/30) Clean, colorful rooms, all with bathroom, on two stories around a wide patio dominated by a massive ornamental fountain. There's a roof terrace and an in-house travel agency. The upstairs rooms are a bit bigger.

Hotel La Tatuana (☎ 7832 1223; latatuana@hotmail.com; 7a Av Sur 3; s/d US\$20/36) This brightly painted, cozy little hotel feels more like a B&B. There's a cute little patio/sitting area and a small roof terrace. Rooms vary greatly – ask to see a few.

Posada Asjemenou (☎ 7832 2670; asjemenou1@yahoo.com; 5a Av Norte 31; s/d US\$20/26, with bathroom US\$26/35) Just north of the Arco de Santa Catalina, the Asjemenou is built around two patios, the front one being a lovely grassy courtyard with a fountain, the back one being not quite so impressive. Rooms are sizable and clean, with drinking water provided. Rates include breakfast in the front patio. In quieter seasons prices can be slashed by almost half.

Hotel La Sin Ventura (☎ 7832 0581; www.lasinventura.com; 5a Av Sur 8; s/d US\$25/38; (P)) An impres-

sive hotel on many fronts – the proximity to the park, the tile work and, believe it or not, a great smell. Rooms are spacious and although windows face onto a corridor, they have good views of the park and cathedral. Excellent views are to be had from the small roof terrace.

Casa Rustica (☎ 7832 3709; www.casarusticagt.com; 6a Av Norte 8; s/d US\$28/32; ☒) Everything about this place is big, right down to the Texan owner. It's also one of the few hotels in this price range to offer guests full kitchen access, wi-fi, a good bar, double hammocks on the rooftop and a quiet, central location.

Hotel Posada del Sol (☎ 7832 6838; Callejón de los Nazarenos 17; s/d US\$28/35; (P)) Hanging plants and a cheerful little courtyard welcome you to this cute little option a little ways out of town in a peaceful, leafy street. Try to get an upstairs room as the ones below get chilly.

Hotel Plaza Mayor (☎ 7832 0055; juanchew@gmail.com; 4a Calle Poniente 9; s/d US\$30/40) A curious blend of rustic and modern styles makes this an interesting option. Rooms are surprisingly spacious, but the big winner here is the location, a few short steps from the park.

Posada Don Ché (☎ 7832 3895; posadadonche@hotmail.com; 7a Av Norte 15; s/d US\$30/40) A tranquil little spot not too far from the action. Rooms are well decked out with classic tile work and firm beds. Upstairs rooms are by far the better choice here, for air, light and volcano views.

Hotel Posada San Pedro (☎ 7832 0718; www.posada.sanpedro.net; 7a Av Norte 29; s/d US\$30/40) Somebody's restored this one with a whole lot of love and attention to detail. Rooms are spacious and well furnished and look out onto two lush patios surrounded by hanging plants.

Hotel Palacio Chico (☎ 7832 0406; www.palaciochico.enantigua.com; 4a Av Sur 4; s/d with breakfast US\$30/40) Close to Parque Central and with a friendly reception, this hotel is good value, although the bedspreads may be a little too furry for some. Rooms are spacious, attractively painted with that sponged-over technique that is so fetching in Antigua, and have lots of wood.

our pick Posada Lazos Fuertes (☎ 7832 9436; www.posadalazosfuertes.com; Calzada Santa Lucía Sur 5; s/d US\$35/42; (P) ☒) Yet another of Antigua's beautifully restored colonial hotels, the Lazos Fuertes stands out with its location right next to the market and the fact that profits go to the project Safe Passage (www.safepassage.org), which helps rehabilitate kids who work picking through trash in Guatemala City dumps.

Hotel Santa Clara (☎ 7832 4291; santaclara12000@yahoo.com; 2a Av Sur 20; s/d US\$35/45) In a quiet area south of the center, the 19-room Santa Clara has some older rooms with character featuring tiling and brickwork, set around three pretty patios. It also has newer, mostly brighter rooms on two levels at the rear. It's clean, and popular with small groups.

Hotel Posada San Pedro (☎ 7832 3594; www.posada.sanpedro.net; 3a Av Sur 15; s/d US\$35/45) The 10 rooms here are super-clean and inviting, with pink and white paint, good wooden furniture, cable TV and tiled bathrooms. Two spacious sitting areas and two terraces with great views add to the comfortable, friendly atmosphere. Rooms in the front on the upper floor are bigger and get better light.

Hotel San Jorge (☎ /fax 7832 3132; www.hotelsanjorge.centroamerica.com; 4a Av Sur 13; s/d US\$45/50; (P)) Though in a modern building, this hotel has a rustic reception area and all 14 rooms share a long balcony and overlook a beautiful flower-filled garden replete with an insanely loud fountain and chirping birds. The rooms have a fireplace, cable TV, pretty tiles and a bathroom with a tub. Ask about discounts in low season.

Top End

Hotel Aurora (☎ 7832 0217; www.hotelauroraantigua.com; 4a Calle Oriente 16; s/d US\$50/60) The Aurora has a good, old-timey feel to it. The large rooms are centered on a grassy patio that comes replete with tinkling fountain and wicker lawn chairs. Breakfast (included in the price) is served on the wide interior balconies.

Posada San Sebastián (☎ /fax 7832 2621; ssebast@hotmail.com; 3a Av Norte 4; s/d US\$50/60) Crammed full of antiques, but still spacious, rooms here are some of the most tranquil in town. Megasized bathrooms with tub are an added bonus, as are the use of a kitchen, roof terrace and a pretty little courtyard garden.

Hotel Uxlabil (☎ 7832 9090; www.uxlabil.com; 3a Poniente 5; s/d US\$60/70) The wild (or, to be kind, eclectic) array of colonial and indigenous furnishings somehow hangs together in this medium-sized hotel set around two lush patios. Ask to see a few rooms – styles range from four-poster beds and chandeliers to rough stone and plant-filled, grottolike bathrooms.

Hotel Convento Santa Catalina Mártir (☎ 7832 3080; www.convento.com; 5a Av Norte 28; s/d US\$60/70; (P) (☎)) The Arco de Santa Catalina (right

outside the front door) was built for the nuns of this ex-convent. Of all the fabulously dressed up renovations in this town, this has to be one of the most impressive for the price. Rooms in the colonial section are large and atmospheric. Out back there are newer ones that are larger, face private, leafy gardens and have kitchenettes.

Casa de los Cántaros B&B (☎ 7832 0674; www.travellog.com/guatemala/casa/cantaros.html; 5a Av Sur 5; s/d US\$75/95) An excellent balance between rustic and swanky awaits at this exclusive little B&B with only three rooms, a few steps from the park. Pay a bit more for the suite and you basically get a small house.

Hotel Quinta de las Flores (☎ 7832 3721; www.quintadelasflores.com; Calle del Hermano Pedro 6; r from US\$70, bungalows US\$120; (P) (☎) (☎)) More like a miniresort than a hotel, this place is bursting with charms – the grounds are carpeted in flowers and dotted with fountains, there's a well-equipped kids playground, a good-sized swimming pool and a restaurant on the premises. There are eight large, luxurious rooms, most with a fireplace, plus five rustic-style, two-story houses each with two bedrooms, a kitchen and living room. Considerable discounts are offered for stays by the week.

Hotel Casa Azul (☎ 7832 0961; www.casazul.guate.com; 4a Av Norte 5; r from US\$83; (P) (☎)) One of Antigua's original boutique hotels, this little place right by the park is almost impossibly stylish, combining a designer's eye with colonial charms. Each room has a unique design, but all are picture-perfect. The upstairs units are spectacular, with sweeping views, luxurious baths, telephones and minibars. The cheaper downstairs rooms are just as impressive, but without views. Still, they give better access to the pool, Jacuzzi and sauna.

Hotel Meson de María (☎ 7832 6068; www.hotelmeson.demaria.com; 3a Calle Poniente 8; s/d US\$80/100) You'll forgive the rooms for being a bit, ahem, tight on space when you see that the bathrooms feature real live tubs. Everything else is as good as it should be – firm beds, big TVs and a couple of gorgeous patio/breakfast areas.

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Cloister (☎/fax 7832-0712; www.thedcloister.com; 5a Av Norte 23; r with breakfast US\$90; (P) (X)) A romantic option is this renovated cloister from the 16th century, one of the most exclusive hotels in Antigua. Bubbling fountains highlight the horticultural triumph that is the Cloister's garden courtyard, and guests will likely spend a lot of time relaxing here. All seven rooms and suites have antique furniture, fireplace and library. Prices include breakfast. Credit cards are not accepted.

Casa Santo Domingo Hotel (☎ 7832 0140; www.casasantodomingo.com.gt; 3a Calle Oriente 28; r from US\$120; (P) (Q) (R)) This is quite the most gorgeous large hotel in Antigua, a town well known for its gorgeous hotels. It is set amid the beautiful remains of the Santo Domingo monastery. The 97 rooms and suites are of an international five-star standard, but the public spaces are wonderfully colonial, dotted with antiques and archaeological relics, and include a large swimming pool, fine restaurant, shops and three museums. The Dominican friars never had it so good. A fine place to spend a lot of money, the prices go down from September to November and up during weekends.

Posada del Ángel (☎ 7832 5244; www.posadadelangel.com; 4a Av Sur 24A; s/d US\$130/150; (P) (X) (R)) The Posada became Antigua's most celebrated B&B when Bill Clinton bedded down here in 1999. It doesn't look like much from the outside, but behind the garage door the luxury just keeps unfolding. If you didn't think it was possible to fit a swimming pool into an Antigua patio, stop by. The three rooms and one suite all have fireplaces, fresh flowers, gorgeous furnishings and highly polished tile floors.

Mesón Panza Verde (☎ 7832 2925; www.panzaverde.com; 5a Av Sur 19; d US\$75-250; (P) (R)) The stunning Panza Verde is an elegant American-owned guesthouse with four rooms and eight suites. It's decked out with sumptuous furniture and fittings, some pieces ever so fashionably tatty due to being semi-outdoors. Upstairs there is an art gallery, reached by a staircase with a beautiful iron balustrade. The atmosphere and restaurant here are among the most appealing in Antigua.

EATING

Within 10 minutes' walk of Parque Central you can dine well and inexpensively on Italian, Spanish, French, Greek, Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Irish, Austrian, German, American, Chinese, Peruvian, Mexican and even Guatemalan food.

Note that most formal restaurants in Antigua whack on a 10% tip before presenting the bill. It should be itemized, but if in doubt, ask.

Budget

The cheapest eating in town is the good, clean, tasty food served from street stalls a block west of Parque Central, in the early evening. Small restaurants north of the bus station on Alameda de Santa Lucia do good-value set lunches for around US\$2.50.

Doña María Gordillo Dulces Típicos (4a Calle Oriente 11) This shop opposite Hotel Aurora is filled with traditional Guatemalan sweets, and there's often a crowd of Antigüenos lined up to buy them.

Fernando's Kaffe (cnr 7a Av Norte & Calle Camposeco; breakfast US\$1-3; ☎ 7am-8pm) Ignore the shop-front-look from the street and head for the back patio. Antigua has no shortage of coffee or cafés, but Fernando's is the sort of place where you could end up hanging out all day, munching your way through the menu of salads and empanadas and sipping some of the best coffee in town.

Sabe Rico (6a Av Sur 7; sandwiches & salads US\$4; ☎ 9am-6pm) This little deli whips up some super-tasty snacks, picnic items, delicious homemade cookies, organic fruit and veg and also sells a range of hard-to-find imported foods like couscous and soba noodles.

Café La Escudilla (4a Av Norte 4; pasta US\$2.50-3.25, meat dishes US\$3.50-5.50; ☎ 7am-midnight) Hugely popular with travelers and language students, La Escudilla is an inexpensive patio restaurant with tinkling fountain, lush foliage and some tables under the open sky. The food is simple but well prepared and there are plenty of vegetarian options, as well as economical breakfasts and a one-course set lunch or dinner for under US\$2.40. At the back is Riki's Bar (see p115).

Restaurante Doña Luisa Xicotencatl (4a Calle Oriente 12; sandwiches & breakfast dishes US\$3-4; ☎ 7am-9:30pm) Probably Antigua's best-known restaurant, this is a place to enjoy the colonial patio ambience over breakfast or a light meal. The bakery

here sells many kinds of breads, including whole grain. Check out the hot-from-the-oven banana bread daily at around 2pm.

our pick **Cuevita de las Urquizas** (2 Calle Oriente 9D; mains US\$4-5; ☺ lunch & dinner) Sumptuous *ti-pico* food is the draw here, all kept warming in earthenware pots out front – a very dirty trick as the smells wafting out are impossible to go past. Hugely popular with locals, it's worth getting here early to avoid waiting for a table.

Bagel Barn (5a Calle Poniente 2; bagels US\$2-3.25; ☺ 6am-9pm) Just off Parque Central, this is popular for bagels with almost anything, and breakfasts and coffee. They also offer decaf espresso, although we fail to see the point.

Restaurante La Estrella (4a Calle Poniente 3; mains US\$2.50-4; ☺ lunch & dinner) An efficient, friendly, economical Chinese restaurant, the Estrella has several tofu options.

Jardín Bavaria (7a Av Norte 49; breakfast US\$2.20, mains US\$2.20-4.50; ☺ high season 7am-1am Mon-Sat, low season 1pm-1am Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun) This is a bar-restaurant with a verdant patio and spacious roof terrace, offering a mixed Guatemalan-German menu including buffalo steak and suckling pig. There's a good range of beers and US\$4.50 Sunday buffet lunches.

Weiner (Calzada Santa Lucía Norte 8; mains US\$3-7; ☺ lunch & dinner) Possibly the biggest wiener schnitzel you've ever seen, alongside some good-value set lunches and the sort of beer list you'd expect from a German restaurant.

Café No Sé (1 Av Sur 11C; mains US\$3-5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Advertising uncomfortable seats, confused staff and battered books, this is a pleasantly downbeat option among all of Antigua's finery. There's a little bit of everything here – breakfast (including one option of a shot of mescal and two boiled eggs; US\$2.50), burritos, fried chicken, sandwiches, movies, a tequila bar and live music.

El Mix (4a Av Sur 2A; mains US\$3-5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) As the name implies, there's a good mix of things on the menu here – comfort foods, Israeli dishes and a couple of Guatemalan numbers. The star of the show is the mind-boggling array of make-your-own sandwich options.

Rainbow Café (7a Av Sur 8; mains US\$4-6; ☺ 7am-midnight) Fill up from an eclectic range of all-day breakfasts, curries, stir-fries, Cajun chicken, guacamole and more, and enjoy the relaxed patio atmosphere. The Rainbow has a bookshop and travel agency on the premises.

Traveler Menu (6a Calle Poniente 14; mains US\$4-5; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun) Not nearly as unimaginative as the name would imply, this little bar-restaurant serves up big portions of food that you may have been craving (chow mein, curry etc) in an intimate candlelit environment.

La Fuente (4a Calle Oriente 14; mains US\$4; ☺ 7am-7pm) Another pretty courtyard restaurant, tranquil La Fuente has lots of vegetarian selections, good breakfasts and desserts.

Café Condesa (Portal del Comercio 4; snacks US\$2.50-5) Walk through the Librería Case del Conde on the west side of the Parque Central to this delightful restaurant around the patio of a 16th-century mansion. On the menu are excellent breakfasts, coffee, salads, sandwiches, quiches, cakes and pies. The Sunday buffet, from 10am to 2pm, a lavish spread for US\$7, is an Antigua institution.

Midrange

La Peña de Sol Latino (5a Calle Poniente; mains US\$3-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) With good, cheap and innovative food and free live music nightly, this little indoor-outdoor place is fast becoming one of the hottest bar-restaurants in town. Get there before 7pm for a good table.

Café Flor (4a Av Sur 1; mains US\$4-8; ☺ 11am-11pm) The Flor makes a good stab at Thai, Indonesian and Chinese cuisine. Dishes come in generous quantity and there's live music nightly.

Los Arcos (1a Calle Poniente 3; mains US\$4-10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This English-run place has the longest menu in town, from all-day breakfasts to Thai stir-fries, and does a decent job of most of it.

Restaurante Korea (5a Calle Poniente 6; mains US\$5-6; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This little restaurant, plonked in the middle of a hotel courtyard, serves up incredibly tasty, authentic Korean dishes. Wash them down with a Korean beer or some rice wine!

Estudio 35 (5a Av Norte 35; mains US\$5-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) A hip little bar-restaurant serving up some good pizzas and crepes. There's a few different, laid-back and loungey sitting areas to choose from.

Perú Café (4a Av Norte 7; mains US\$7-11; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Enjoy tasty Peruvian specialties in this pretty patio restaurant. The excellent *causas* are like burgers with layers of mashed potato instead of bread; *aji de gallina* is chicken in yellow chili sauce with baked potatoes, parmesan and rice.

El Cafecito (5a Calle Poniente 7A; mains US\$8-10; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Some good, hearty Portuguese food is on offer here, including *feijolada* (US\$8), a chunky stew made with beans, vegetables and four kinds of meat.

El Papaturro (2 Calle Oriente 4; mains US\$8-11; ☺ lunch & dinner) If you've got a hankering for Salvadoran food, but you're not likely to make it that far, check this place out for some authentic dishes and good steak plates.

Restaurante Las Palmas (6a Av Norte 14; mains US\$6-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) Twinkling lights and gentle guitar music make this a popular romantic dinner spot. The staples are chicken, seafood, steaks and pasta: try the fettuccine with goat's cheese, shrimps, herbs and garlic.

El Punto (7a Av Norte 8A; mains US\$7-9; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Highly popular El Punto serves probably Antigua's best Italian food in a neat but animated setting of three adjoining rooms and a patio, each with three or four tables – and some particularly interesting posters on Italian and Guatemalan themes.

Monoloco (5a Av Sur 6, Pasaje El Corredor; dishes US\$4-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) An old-time tourist hangout (take that as a recommendation or a warning), this place serves up a good blend of comfort foods and local dishes, as well as ice-cold beers in a relaxed environment.

Gaia (5 Av Norte 35; mains US\$7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner) An almost painfully hip Mid East flavored restaurant with an excellent menu, a long wine and cocktail list and *nargilas* (water pipes) for US\$6.

Fridas (5a Av Norte 29; snacks US\$2.50-4, mains US\$6-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) Dedicated to Ms Kahlo, this bright bar-restaurant serves tasty, if not cheap, Mexican fare and is always busy.

El Sabor del Tiempo (5a Av Norte & 3a Calle; mains US\$6-8; ☺ lunch & dinner) One of the town's more atmospheric eateries, done out in rich woods and antique fittings. The menu features some good Italian-themed dishes like rabbit in white wine (US\$7) and there's draft beer on tap.

La Fonda de la Calle Real (mains US\$5-8.50) 3a Calle Poniente 7 (☎ 7832 0507; ☺ noon-10pm); 5a Av Norte 5 (☎ 7832 2629; ☺ noon-10pm); 5a Av Norte 12 (☎ 7832 3749; ☺ 8am-10pm) This restaurant with three spacious branches, all in appealing colonial style, has a good, varied menu ranging from generous salads and sandwiches (US\$3) to grilled meats (up to US\$8.50). The speciality *caldo real*, a hearty chicken soup, makes a good meal. The 5a Av Norte 12 branch is a little cheaper than the others but 3a Calle

Poniente 7 is the most attractive, with several rooms and patios.

Top End

La Casserole (☎ 7832 0219; Callejón de la Concepción 7; 2-course meals US\$15-18; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This French restaurant with friendly but smooth service is one of Antigua's best. It's great for steak and dessert lovers. There are just a dozen tables in a patio and one side room.

Nokiate (☎ 7821 2896; 1a Av Sur 7; mains US\$8-15; ☺ dinner Wed-Sun) Antigua's most authentic sushi bar has the lot – the tranquil, minimalist atmosphere, the sake and some excellent, fresh sushi.

Mesón Panza Verde (☎ 7832 2925; 5a Av Sur 19; mains US\$6-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) This guesthouse restaurant provides divine continental cuisine in an appealing Antiguan atmosphere. Two courses should cost you about US\$20. If you don't have the budget for a full meal but want to check out the great ambience and gorgeous patio, have a drink or snack at the Panza Verde's Café Terraza.

Las Antorchas (3a Av Sur 1; mains US\$10-15; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This place has a beautiful courtyard to go with its sumptuous steaks. The *pincho gigante* (giant shish kebab; US\$15) should be enough for two.

Restaurante Don Rodrigo (☎ 7832 2664; 5a Av Norte 17; mains US\$12-16; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The food's up to scratch here – lots of meat and seafood with light Guatemalan twists. The real draw is the setting, a gorgeous courtyard with plenty of wrought iron, blossoming flowers and tinkling fountains.

Casa Santo Domingo Hotel (☎ 7832 0140; 3a Calle Oriente 28; 2-course meals US\$13-25) The restaurant at this luxurious hotel is another beautiful spot for a splurge, with mixed Guatemalan and international delights served inside or out in the garden.

El Sereno (☎ 7832 0501; 4a Av Norte 16; mains US\$15-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Another of Antigua's beautiful courtyard restaurants, this one offers a careful blend of Asian, Italian and Guatemalan influences. There's a full bar inside, but outside is the place to be for lunch, under the shade of two big trees.

Welten (☎ 7832 6967; 4a Calle Oriente 21; mains US\$15; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Despite some very snooty service, this is an enjoyable restaurant, lovingly decorated and serving up some of Antigua's more imaginative dishes.

DRINKING

Antigua's bar scene is jumping, except for the nationwide law that says that all bars must close at 1am. Many people roll in from Guatemala City for a spot of Antigua-style revelry on Friday and Saturday. La Peña de Sol Latino (p113), Estudio 35 (p113) and Rainbow Café (p113) are good places to go for drinks.

Riki's Bar (4a Av Norte 4; ☎ until midnight) Behind Café La Escudilla, this old favorite gets packed every evening with Antigua's young, international scene of locals, travelers and language students. For quieter moments, slip through to the low-key Paris Bar in the rear.

Monoloco (5a Av Sur 6, Pasaje El Corregidor) The 'Crazy Monkey' is the place that everybody goes until they get sick of it, so often has a real party atmosphere with plenty of newcomers. It's a two-level place (semi-open-air upstairs, with benches and long tables), with sports on TV and good-value food.

Reilly's (5a Av Norte 31) Guatemala's only Irish bar (so far), Reilly's is sociable and relaxed, with a young international crowd. Sadly, small bottles of Guinness are US\$4.50 – more than double the cost of local beers! The Sunday evening quiz is one of Antigua's most enjoyable events.

Sangre (5a Av Norte 33A) Antigua's jet set gathers on the upstairs deck out back of this wine bar, sipping from a choice of over 40 types of wines (from US\$4 per glass) and munching on creative *boquitas* (snacks; US\$5 to US\$7) while checking out the skyline views.

El Muro (3a Calle Oriente 19D) A friendly little neighborhood pub with a good range of beers, some decent snacks and plenty of sofas to lounge out on.

Café No Sé (1 Av Sur 11C) This downbeat little bar has live music most nights and an attached tequila bar where they serve their own brand of mescal.

Onis (7a Av Norte 2) With a back terrace overlooking the illuminated ruins of San Agustín church, Onis is another travelers' and students' haunt. Unlike some Antigua bars, it has a liquor license: shots and cocktails cost US\$2 to US\$3, but rum, vodka or gin are just US\$0.15 for women from 7pm to 10pm on Thursday. There's good, economical food too.

Café Sky (1a Av Sur 15) On the rooftop above the Guatemala Ventures/Mayan Bike Tours office, this is a very popular place for sunset drinks.

Los Arcos (1a Calle Poniente 3) Come here for pool, draft beer and all-drinks-one-price offers.

For a quick caffeine fix, hit **Café Condesa Express** (Portal del Comercio 4; ☎ 6:45am-6:45pm) on the west side of the Parque Central.

ENTERTAINMENT

Proyecto Cultural El Sitio (☎ 7832 3037; www.elsitio.cultural.org; 5a Calle Poniente 15) This arts center has lots going on, from music, dance and theater events (including plays in English) to exhibition openings most Saturdays. Stop by to check the schedule.

Classical concerts happen in the **Museo de Arte Colonial** (☎ 7832 0429; 5a Calle Oriente 5) and the **Antiguo Colegio de la Compañía de Jesús** (6a Av Norte), between 3a and 4a Calles.

Cinema, TV & Slide Shows

Several cinema houses show a wide range of Latin American, art-house and general-release movies: some in English, some in Spanish, usually for US\$1.25 to US\$2. Check the programs of the following:

Bagel Barn (5a Calle Poniente 2) Café with movies at 8pm.

Café 2000 (6a Av Norte 2) Café showing free movies on big screen.

Proyecto Cultural El Sitio (☎ 7832 3037; www.elsitio.cultural.org; 5a Calle Poniente 15) Movies usually on Tuesday evening.

For North American and European sports on TV, check the programs posted at Café 2000 (see above), Los Arcos and Monoloco.

For North American and European sports on TV, check the programs that are posted at **Café 2000** (6a Av Norte 2), **Los Arcos** (1a Calle Poniente 3; mains US\$4-10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) and **Monoloco** (5a Av Sur 6, Pasaje El Corregidor).

Writer Elizabeth Bell gives a fascinating one-hour English-language **slide show** (admission US\$3; 6pm Tue) about Antigua called *Behind the Walls*. It's in the Christian Spanish Academy (p106).

Dancing

La Casbah (☎ 832 2640; 5a Av Norte 30; admission incl 1 drink US\$2.50-4; ☎ 9pm-1am Mon-Sat) This two-level disco near the Santa Catalina arch has a warm atmosphere, is reportedly gay-friendly and quite a party most nights.

La Chimenea (cnr 7a Av Norte & 2a Calle Poniente) This is the latest hot spot for salsa and merengue dancers.

You can learn to salsa at several places around town. **La Salsa** (☎ 5400 0315; www.lasalsadance.com;

7 Av Norte 11) comes highly recommended, both for teaching style and lack of ‘sleaze factor.’

SHOPPING

Nim Po’t (www.nimpot.com; 5a Av Norte 29) This shop boasts a huge collection of Mayan dress, as well as hundreds of masks and other wood carvings. This sprawling space is packed with *huipiles*, *cortes*, *fajas* and more, all arranged according to region, so it makes for a fascinating visit whether you’re in the market or not.

Diez Mil Pueblitos (6 Av Norte 21; diezmilpueblitos@yahoo.com) One of the country’s few exclusively fair-trade stores (where the majority of profits go to producers) sells an excellent selection of quality handmade products as well as crepes and coffee in the café out back.

Mercado de Artesanías (Handicrafts Market; 4a Calle Poniente; ☎ 8am–8pm) At the west end of town by the main market, this market sells masses of Guatemalan handicrafts. While not at the top end of the quality range, it has a variety of colorful masks, blankets, jewelry, purses and so on. Don’t be afraid to bargain.

There are also a number of craft shops on 4a Calle Poniente, between Parque Central and the market. Vendors will also approach you in Parque Central, or while you are drinking a coffee or eating breakfast in a casual dining place. Prices for handicrafts can be much higher in Antigua than elsewhere in Guatemala. Always bargain for a fair price.

Casa del Tejido Antiguo (1a Calle Poniente 51; admission US\$0.70; ☎ 9am–5:30pm Mon–Sat) This is another intriguing place for textiles; it’s like a

museum, market and workshop rolled into one. It claims to be the only place in Antigua managed by indigenous people.

Antigua has some excellent but pricey jewelry and clothes shops. If you’re not flush, stay away from these places, but if you have the cash and see something you like, grab it as you probably won’t find the same quality elsewhere in Guatemala.

Joyería del Ángel (4a Calle Oriente 5A) This shop has exquisite pieces of imaginative, up-to-the-minute exotic jewelry using shells, semi-precious stones, bone and classy clasps. Many pieces are large and flamboyant; others are daintier with unusual combinations like jade and rose garnets. Some pieces are moderately priced but on the whole this place is quite expensive.

Casa de Arte Popular (4a Calle Oriente 10) One of the interesting art galleries along 4a Calle Oriente, it’s in the same building as La Casa del Jade. For information on the distinctive style of art exhibited here, see the boxed text, p142.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Bus

Buses to Guatemala City, Ciudad Vieja and San Miguel Dueñas arrive and depart from a street just south of the market. Buses to Chimaltenango, Escuintla, San Antonio Aguas Calientes and Santa María de Jesús go from the street outside the west side of the market. If you’re heading out to local villages, it’s best to go early in the morning and return by mid-afternoon, as bus services drop off dramatically as evening approaches.

TRUE JADE

Jade, beloved of the ancient Maya, isn’t always green. It can be lilac, yellow, pink, white or even black. On the other hand, a lot of stones passed off as jade are not the real thing. There are two main forms of genuine jade: nephrite, found in Asia, and jadeite, found in Guatemala. Albite, serpentine, chrysoprase, diopside, chrysolite and aventurine – none of these are true jade. It seems that the ancient Maya themselves had a hard time telling the difference. Many items of Mayan ‘jade’ in museums have been revealed, on testing, to be one or other of these inferior stones.

To discern quality jade, look for translucency, purity and intensity of color and absence of flaws – and ask if you can scratch the stone with a pocket knife: if it scratches, it’s not true jadeite but an inferior stone.

Several Antigua shops specialize in jade, including **La Casa del Jade** (www.lacasadeldjade.com; 4a Calle Oriente 10), **Jades SA** (www.jademaya.com; 4a Calle Oriente 1, 4a Calle Oriente 12 & 4a Calle Oriente 34; Hotel Casa Santo Domingo, 3a Calle Oriente 28) and **El Reino del Jade** (cnr 5a Av Norte & 2a Calle Poniente). At La Casa del Jade and Jades SA’s 4a Calle Oriente 34 branch, you can visit the workshops in the rear of the showrooms. Jades SA’s jade comes from a rediscovered ancient Mayan jade mine in Guatemala’s Motagua valley. You should ask about prices at a few places before making any purchase.

To reach highland towns such as Chichicastenango, Quetzaltenango, Huehuetenango or Panajachel (except for the one direct daily bus to Panajachel), take one of the frequent buses to Chimaltenango, on the Interamericana Hwy, and get an onward bus from there. Making connections in Chimaltenango is easy, as many folks will jump to your aid as you alight from one bus looking for another. But stay alert and don't leave your pack unattended, as bag slashing isn't unheard of in Chimal. Alternatively, you can take a bus from Antigua toward Guatemala City, get off at San Lucas Sacatepéquez and change buses there – this takes a bit longer, but you'll be boarding the bus closer to the capital so you're more likely to get a seat.

Chimaltenango (US\$0.50, 30 minutes, 19km, every 15 minutes from 5am to 7pm)

Ciudad Vieja (US\$0.30, 15 minutes; 7km, take a San Miguel Dueñas bus)

Escuintla (US\$0.80, 1 hour, 39km, 16 buses daily from 5:30am to 5pm)

Guatemala City (US\$1, 1¼hours, 45km, every few minutes from 6am to 7pm)

Panajachel (US\$5, 2½hours, 146km, one Pullman bus daily at 7am) Departs from El Condor Expeditions (☎ 5498 9812; 4a Calle Poniente 34)

San Antonio Aguas Calientes (US\$0.30, 30 minutes, 9km, every 20 minutes from 6:30am to 7pm)

San Miguel Dueñas (US\$0.25, 30 minutes, 10km, every few minutes from 6am to 7pm). Placards just say 'Dueñas.'

EXPLORE MORE OF ANTIGUA

While Antigua itself is pretty much well-trodden territory from end to end, there are plenty of little villages just outside of town just begging to be explored:

- Santa María de Jesús is a traditional Guatemalan village, just 30 minutes outside of town.
- San Juan del Obispo has a wonderful colonial church and sweeping, panoramic views of Antigua.
- San Felipe, an artisans' village, has some of the finest jade, silver and ceramic work in the area.
- San Antonio is famed for its weaving and textiles (p119).
- Pastores is ground zero for leatherwork. This is the place to come for those hand-made cowboy boots and stock whips.

Santa María de Jesús (US\$0.30, 30 minutes, 12km, every 45 minutes from 6am to 7:30pm)

Shuttle Minibus

Numerous travel agencies and tourist mini-bus operators offer frequent and convenient shuttle services to places tourists go, including Guatemala City and its airport, Panajachel and Chichicastenango. They go less frequently (usually on weekends) to places further afield. These services cost a lot more than buses, but they are comfortable and convenient, with door-to-door service at both ends. These are some typical one-way prices:

Chichicastenango US\$6

Copán (Honduras) US\$12

Guatemala City US\$5

Monterrico US\$8

Panajachel US\$6

Quetzaltenango US\$15

Río Dulce US\$13

Pin down shuttle operators about departure times and whether their trip requires a minimum number of passengers. Be careful of 'shuttles' to Flores or Tikal. This service may just consist of taking you to Guatemala City and putting you on a public bus there.

Car & Motorcycle

Rental companies include the following:

CATour (☎ 7832 9638; www.catours.co.uk; 6a Calle Oriente 14) Rents motorcycles from US\$10/45 per hour/day as well as motorcycle tours from US\$140.

Dollar (☎ 2219-6848; www.dollar.com; 5a Av Norte 15)

Tabarini (☎ 832-8107; www.tabarini.com; 6a Av Sur 22)

Taxi

Taxis and tuk-tuks wait where the Guatemala City buses stop, and on the east side of Parque Central. A ride in town costs around US\$1.60. A taxi to or from Guatemala City usually costs US\$30 (US\$40 after midnight).

AROUND ANTIGUA

JOCOTENANGO

This village just northwest of Antigua (effectively a suburb) gives you a taste of more typical Guatemalan life than downtown Antigua. Storefronts are occupied by tailors at their sewing machines, school kids throng the streets in the middle of the day, and women linger over their purchases to chat.

Sights

Jocotenango's **Centro Cultural La Azotea** (☎ 7832 0907; Calle del Cementerio, Final; adult/child US\$3.25/0.65; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-2pm Sat) is an excellent three-in-one coffee, music and costume museum. The coffee section includes a 19th-century water wheel-powered processing plant: you get a free cup to drink at the end of the tour. Part two of the center is the Casa K'ojom, a top-class collection of traditional Mayan musical instruments, masks, paintings and other artifacts amassed by dedicated cultural conservationist Samuel Franco. The displays set the objects in the context of the many ceremonies and customs in which they are used, with a particularly interesting section on Maximón, the semipagan deity revered by many highland Maya (see p140). A good audiovisual show illustrating the musical instruments in action is part of the visit. The third exhibit is the Rincón de Sacatepéquez, displaying the colorful costumes and crafts of the Antigua valley. Free tours to all this are available in English and Spanish.

Also at La Azotea are two shops selling quality coffee, local crafts, Mayan instruments and recordings and videos of them, a restaurant with good, moderately priced Guatemalan food. There is also the **Establo La Ronda**, where you can take a one-hour morning horse ride round the grounds for US\$3.25 (ring the museum two days ahead).

The **church** dominating the main square is a marvel of crumbling pink stucco that still holds services. About 100m along the street toward Antigua from the square, the **Fraternidad Naturista Antigua** (☎ 7831 0379; Calle Real 30; ☎ 7am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7am-1pm Fri) offers massages, saunas and chiropractic services. It also sells an amazing variety of medicinal herbs. A 45-minute massage with unlimited sauna time costs US\$6.50; a sauna alone is US\$5. There are separate, very clean, facilities for men and women. The massages can be strenuous, some say rough, and men should be especially careful here as the masseurs are wicked strong!

Getting There & Away

You can also use local buses (US\$0.15, 10 minutes) between Jocotenango and Antigua. They run about every 15 minutes during daylight from behind Antigua market and from Jocotenango's square. It's also quite possible to walk: it's less than 1km along Calle Ancha

de los Herreros from the north end of Antigua's 6a Av to Jocotenango's square.

Free minibuses to La Azotea leave from Antigua's Parque Central hourly from 9am to 2pm, returning from La Azotea hourly from 10:30am to 2:30pm and at 4pm. You're quite free to explore the village before hopping back on the bus. From La Azotea's ticket office, walk 350m back along the driveway then 350m straight on along the street ahead (1a Calle) to reach Jocotenango's main square.

SAN LORENZO EL TEJAR

These hot springs are a 25-minute ride from Antigua. Catch any bus headed for San Lorenzo (US\$0.25) and tell the driver you're going to the *aguas calientes*. You'll get dropped at the signposted turnoff. The **hot springs** (admission US\$1; ☎ 7am-5:30pm Mon, Wed-Thu, Sat-Sun, 7am-noon Tue & Fri) are 500m down the narrow valley on a dirt road. The place is best avoided Sundays, when it packs out with family groups.

EL HATO

An excellent getaway from the bustle of Antigua is the **Earth Lodge** (☎ 5664 0713; www.earthlodgeguatemala.com; dm US\$4, cabins s/d US\$9/14), high in the hills above Jocotenango. This little slice of hippy heaven is set on 40 acres of avocado farm, and the views of the Panchoy valley and volcanoes are truly mesmerizing. There's plenty to do out here – hiking trails, Spanish lessons, a *chuj* (Mayan sauna) as well as just hanging in a hammock and taking it all in. Nutritious and filling meals (US\$4 to US\$6) are served. You can work on the farm for a reduction in room rates. Accommodation is in comfortable wooden cabins and an eight-bed dorm, and you can camp here for US\$3 per person.

Getting here is slightly complicated – your best bet is to call (with plenty of advance warning) to see if the friendly owners can come and pick you up from Antigua. Otherwise, there's a pickup that leaves from outside the basketball court on 1 Av Norte in Antigua that makes the trip to Aldea El Hato. From there it's a 10-minute walk – any villager can give you directions – just ask for *'los gringos.'*

CIUDAD VIEJA

Seven kilometers southwest of Antigua along the Escuintla road is **Ciudad Vieja** (Old City), site of the first capital of the Captaincy General of Guatemala. Founded in 1527, it

was destroyed in 1541 when Volcán Agua loosed a flood of water penned up in its crater. The water deluged the town with tons of rock and mud, leaving only a few ruins of La Concepción church.

Java junkies in this neck of the woods will want to check out the coffee plantation **Finca los Nietos** (☎ 7831 5438; www.geocities.com/losnietosfinca; ☞ 8-11am Mon-Fri) for a tour and a taste. The hour-long tour (US\$6 per person, minimum two people) will answer all your nitty-gritty coffee questions, from how seedlings are propagated to how beans are roasted. The price includes a bag of coffee. Phone for an appointment and mention then if you want to roast your own beans (minimum 2.5kg or 5lb). The *finca* is 7km from Antigua, just off the bus route to San Antonio Aguas Calientes: you go through Ciudad Vieja and San Lorenzo El Cubo, then get off the bus at the crossroads before the textile shop called Carolina's (bus drivers know this intersection). This is before the road goes downhill to San Antonio. Walk two blocks to the right (toward Volcán Agua) until you come to a white wall with bougainvillea and pine trees showing above it. Ring the bell and you're in.

SAN ANTONIO AGUAS CALIENTES

If you continue on to **San Antonio Aguas Calientes**, you'll see why this village is noted for its textiles as soon as you enter its plaza. Stalls in the plaza sell local woven and embroidered goods, as do shops on side streets (walk to the left of the church to find them). Bargaining is expected.

Valhalla Experimental Station (☎ 7831 5799; exvalhalla@yahoo.com; ☞ 8am-4:40pm), a macadamia farm raising 300 species of this delicious nut, is near the village of San Miguel Dueñas, 4km west of Ciudad Vieja. You can tour this organic, sustainable agriculture project and sample nuts, oils and cosmetics made from the harvest. Bring a picnic and save some room for the stellar, hand-dipped chocolate-covered macadamia nuts for sale at the shop here. To get there take a San Miguel Dueñas bus from Antigua or, if under your own steam, follow the Escuintla road past Ciudad Vieja and turn right at a large cemetery on the right-hand side. From here, the farm is about a 15-minute walk or five-minute drive downhill. This road goes on to San Miguel Dueñas. To continue round to San Antonio Aguas Calientes from here, take the first street on the right – between two houses – after com-

ing to the concrete-block paving in Dueñas (if you reach the Texaco station in the village center, you've missed the road). The road winds through coffee *fincas*, farming hamlets and little vegetable fields.

For information on buses to these villages, see p116.

SAN JUAN COMALAPA

Another interesting day trip from Antigua is this small artisans' village 16km north of Chimaltenango. Set on the side of a deep ravine, it's a relatively modern town, founded by the Spanish when they amalgamated several Kaqchiquel towns.

The plaza's worth a quick look in, where there's a collection of dilapidated pre-Colombian sculptures and a monument to Rafael Alvarez Ovalle, who was born here and composed Guatemala's national anthem.

Most people come, though, for the primitive folk paintings that the town is famous for. San Juan gained its reputation when Andrés Curuchich rose to fame for his paintings of village life and his works ended up on display as far away as New York and Los Angeles.

Curuchich died in 1969, but his legacy lives on, as many villagers have taken up the brush and work in a similar style. Several galleries around the plaza show and sell their work. Some of Curuchich's original works are on display at the Museo Ixchel in Guatemala City (p78).

Also of interest is a mural that runs down the side wall of the cemetery, a collaborative effort on the part of local artists, depicting the Mayan creation story, the Spanish conquest and the events of the civil war.

Painting is (mostly) considered men's work – the women here are recognized as expert weavers, traditionally using silk and *cuyucate* (an untreated brown thread distinctive to the region), although these days modern fibers are much more common.

The best time to pick up a weaving (and just about anything else) is on Sunday, when the town's market is in full swing.

Several *comedores* line the plaza, dishing out good, unexciting meals for US\$2 to US\$4. If you want to stay the night, your best bet is **Hotel Pixcayá** (☎ 7849 8260; 0 Av 1-82; s/d US\$5/10, with bathroom US\$9/18; ☐).

Buses (US\$0.80, 45 minutes, hourly) run from Chimaltenango, with minibuses and pickups leaving when full.

SANTIAGO SACATEPÉQUEZ & SUMPANGO

Throughout Latin America, All Saints' Day (November 1) is a spectacle. In parts of Guatemala they celebrate with the **Feria del Barrilete Gigante** (Festival of the Giant Kite). The two biggest parties happen in Santiago Sacatepéquez and Sumpango, about 20km and 25km north of Antigua respectively. These kites are giants: made from tissue paper with wood or bamboo braces, and with guide ropes as thick as a human arm, most are more than 13m wide and have intricate, colorful designs. They're flown over the cemetery to speak with the souls of the dead. Judges rank the kites according to size, design, color, originality and elevation. Part of the fun is watching the crowd flee when a giant kite takes a nose dive!

Unfortunately, the wind is sometimes insufficient to lift these giant kites, which

makes for an anticlimactic festival, despite the plethora of fantastic street food. *Fiambre* (a traditional dish made from meat, seafood and vegetables served cold in vinaigrette) is typically eaten on this day. It's a labor of love to make a decent *fiambre*, and women take pride in their prowess at preparing it. It is, however, an acquired taste.

Many agencies run day trips from Antigua to Santiago Sacatepéquez on November 1 for around US\$8 per person, though you can easily get there on your own by taking any Guatemala City-bound bus and getting off with the throngs at the junction for Santiago. From here, take one of the scores of buses covering the last few kilometers. The fastest way to Sumpango is to take a bus to Chimaltenango and backtrack to Sumpango; this will bypass all of the Santiago-bound traffic, which is bumper to bumper on fair day.