

Guatemala City



Guatemala's capital city, the largest urban agglomeration in Central America, spreads across a flattened mountain range run through by deep ravines. Let's just say that there are more beautiful places on earth.

Depending on who you talk to, Guate (as it's known) is either big, dirty, dangerous and utterly forgettable or big, dirty, dangerous and fascinating. Either way, there's no doubt that there's an energy here unlike that found in the rest of Guatemala, and the extremes that categorize the whole country are in plain view.

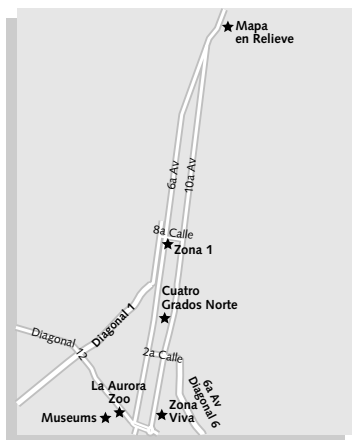
It's a place where dilapidated buses belch fumes next to Beemers and Hummers, where skyscrapers drop shadows on shantytowns and immigrants from the countryside and the rest of Central America eke out a meager existence, barely noticed by the country's elite.

This is the real cultural capital of Guatemala – the writers, the thinkers, the artists mostly live and work here. All the best museum pieces go to the capital, and while nearly every city dweller dreams of getting away to Antigua or Monterrico for the weekend, this is where they spend most of their time, a fact reflected in the growing sophistication of the restaurant and bar scene.

Many travelers skip the city altogether, preferring to make Antigua their base. Still, you may want, or need, to get acquainted with the capital because this is the hub of the country, where all transportation lines meet and all services are available.

TOP FIVE

- Visiting the country's best **museums** (p79) and **zoo** (p79)
- Hitting the bars in Zona 10's **Zona Viva** (p88)
- Getting amongst the thick of it in busy **Zona 1** (p76)
- Gazing on Guatemala from above at the **Mapa en Relieve** (p78)
- Soaking up some culture in Zona 4's **Cuatro Grados Norte** (p89)



■ POPULATION: 3.1 MILLION

■ ELEVATION: 1500M

HISTORY

Kaminaljuyú, one of the first important cities in the Mayan region, flourished two millennia ago in what's now the western part of Guatemala City. By the time Spanish conquistadors arrived in the 16th century, only overgrown mounds were left. The site remained insignificant until the earthquake of July 29, 1773, razed much of the then Spanish colonial capital, Antigua. The authorities decided to move their headquarters to La Ermita valley, hoping to escape further destruction, and on September 27, 1775, King Carlos III of Spain signed a royal charter for the founding of La Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción. Guatemala City was officially born.

Unfortunately, the colonial powers didn't move the capital far enough, for earthquakes in 1917, 1918 and 1976 rocked the capital and beyond, reducing buildings to rubble. The 1976 quake killed nearly 23,000, injured another 75,000 and left an estimated one million homeless.

ORIENTATION

The formal and ceremonial center of Guatemala City is the Parque Central at the heart of Zona 1, which is home to most of the city's better budget and midrange hotels, many of its bus stations and a lot of commerce. South down 6a or 7a Av from Zona 1 is Zona 4. Straddling the border of the two zones is the Centro Cívico (Civic Center), with several large, modern government and institutional buildings, including the main tourist information office. Southwestern Zona 4 is a chaotic area where the city's local market district and the biggest 2nd-class bus station, the Terminal de Autobuses, fuse into one overcrowded mess.

South from the southeast corner of Zona 4 runs Av La Reforma, a broad boulevard forming the boundary between Zonas 9 and 10. These zones are among the city's poshest residential and office areas, especially Zona 10 with its Zona Viva (Lively Zone) where deluxe hotels, fancy restaurants and nightclubs, and glitzy malls all congregate.

The city's airport, Aeropuerto La Aurora, is in Zona 13, just south of Zona 9 and a 6km drive or bus ride from the heart of Zona 1. Zona 13 has several museums and the parklike La Aurora Zoo.

Maps

Intelimapas' *Mapa Turístico Guatemala*, Inguat's *Mapa Vial Turístico* and International Travel Maps' *Guatemala* all contain useful maps of Guatemala City (see p315). Sophos (below) is one of the most reliable sources of maps. The **Instituto Geográfico Nacional** (IGN; ☎ 2332 2611; www.ign.gob.gt in Spanish; Av Las Américas 5-76, Zona 13; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) sells 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 topographical sheets of all parts of Guatemala, costing US\$6 each.

INFORMATION

Airline Offices

American Airlines (www.aa.com) airport (☎ 2260 6550; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2422 0000; Guatemala City Marriott Hotel, 7a Av 15-45, Zona 9)

Continental Airlines (www.continental.com) airport (☎ 2331 2051; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2385 9601; Edificio Unicentro, 18a Calle 5-56, Zona 10)

Copa Airlines (☎ 2385 5555; www.copaair.com; 1a Av 10-17, Zona 10)

Cubana (☎ 2367 2288/89/90; www.cubana.cu; Local 29, Edificio Atlantis, 13a Calle 3-40, Zona 10)

Delta Air Lines airport (☎ 2260 6439; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 1 800 300 0005; Edificio Centro Ejecutivo, 15a Calle 3-20, Zona 10)

Grupo TACA (Aviateca, Inter, LACSA, Nica, TACA; www.taca.com) airport (☎ 2260 6497; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2470 8222; Avenida Hincapié 12-22, Zona 13)

Iberia (www.iberia.com) airport (☎ 2260 6337; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2332 0911, 2332 3913; Oficina 507, Edificio Galerías Reforma, Av La Reforma 8-00, Zona 9)

Mexicana (www.mexicana.com) airport (☎ 2260 6335; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2333 6001; Local 104, Edificio Edyma Plaza, 13a Calle 8-44, Zona 10)

United Airlines (www.unitedguatemala.com) airport (☎ 2660 6481; Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora); city (☎ 2336 9900; Oficina 201, Edificio El Reformador, Av La Reforma 1-50, Zona 9)

Bookstores

Geminis Bookstore (☎ 2366 1031; Casa Alta, 3a Av 17-05, Zona 14) Good range of books in English, but rather far from the center of things.

Sophos (☎ 2334 6797; Av La Reforma 13-89, Zona 10) Relaxed place to have a coffee and read while in the Zona Viva, with a good selection of books in English on Guatemala and the Maya, including Lonely Planet guides, and maps.

Vista Hermosa Book Shop (☎ 2369 1003; 2a Calle 18-50, Zona 15) Ditto.



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Internet Access

Zona 1 throngs with inexpensive internet cafés. Elsewhere, rates tend to be higher.

Café Internet Navigator (14a Calle, Zona 1; per hr US\$0.80; ☎ 8am-8pm) East of 6a Av.

Carambolo Café Internet (14a Calle, Zona 1; per hr US\$1.30; ☎ 8:30am-8:30pm) East of 7a Av.

Internet (Local 5, 6a Av 9-27, Zona 1; per hr US\$0.65; ☎ 8am-7pm)

Web Station (2a Av 14-63, Zona 10; per hr US\$2.60; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) One of the cheapest in the Zona Viva.

Laundry

Lavandería El Siglo (12a Calle 3-42, Zona 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Charges US\$4 for up to 12lb (5.5kg).

Medical Services

Guatemala City has many private hospitals and clinics. Public hospitals and clinics provide free consultations but can be busy; to reduce waiting time, get there before 7am.

Clínica Cruz Roja (Red Cross Clinic; 3a Calle 8-40, Zona 1; ☎ 8am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) This public clinic charges for consultations but is inexpensive.

Farmacia del Ejecutivo (☎ 2338 1447; 7a Av 15-01, Zona 1) Public pharmacy. Open 24 hours and accepts Visa and MasterCard.

Hospital Centro Médico (☎ 2332 3555, 2334 2157; 6a Av 3-47, Zona 10) Recommended. This private hospital has some English-speaking doctors.

Hospital General San Juan de Dios (☎ 2253 0443/7; 1a Av at 10a Calle, Zona 1) One of the city's best public hospitals.

Hospital Herrera Llerandi (☎ 2334 5959; emergencies 2334 5955; 6a Av 8-71, Zona 10) Another recommended private hospital with some English-speaking doctors.

Money

Take normal precautions when using ATMs.

ABM (☎ 2361 5602; Plazuela España, Zona 9) Changes euros into quetzals.

American Express Zona 9 (☎ 2331 7422; Centro Comercial Montufar, 12a Calle 0-93; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In an office of Clark Tours.

Banco Agromercantil (8a Calle Zona 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Facing Parque Centenario. Changes US-dollar cash (not traveler's checks).

Banco Uno (☎ 2366 2191; Edificio Unicentro, 18a Calle 5-56, Zona 10) Changes cash euros into quetzals.

Banquetal airport arrivals hall (☎ 6am-9pm) Changes US dollars and American Express traveler's checks into quetzals, and has a MasterCard and American Express ATM; airport departures level (☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 6am-6pm Sat & Sun) Currency exchange services and a MasterCard ATM.

Credomatic (Edificio Testa; cnr 5a Av & 11a Calle, Zona 1; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Gives cash advances on Visa and MasterCard – take your passport.

Edificio Testa (cnr 5a Av & 11a Calle, Zona 1) Visa, MasterCard and American Express ATMs. There's another Visa ATM across the street.

Lloyds TSB (14a Calle 3-51, Zona 10) Changes euro traveler's checks.

MasterCard ATM (Hotel Stofella, 2a Av 12-28, Zona 10)

Visa ATMs (cnr 5a Av & 6a Calle, Zona 1) Opposite Parque Centenario; (2a Av, Zona 10) South of 13a Calle; (Edificio Unicentro, 18a Calle 5-56, Zona 10); (Guatemala City Marriott Hotel, 7a Av 15-45, Zona 9); there's also a Visa ATM at the airport arrivals hall, by the exit doors.

Post

DHL (☎ 2332 7547; www.dhl.com; 12a Calle 5-12, Zona 10) Courier service.

Post office (Palacio de Correos; 7a Av 11-67, Zona 1; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat) In a huge

KNOWING EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE

Guatemala City, like (almost) all Guatemalan towns, is laid out on a logical street grid. Avenidas run north-south; calles run east-west. Each avenida and calle has a number, with the numbers usually rising as you move from west to east and north to south. Addresses enable you to pinpoint exactly which block a building is in, and which side of the street it's on. The address 9a Av 15-24 means building No 24 on 9a Av in the block after 15a Calle; 9a Av 16-19 refers to building No 19 on 9a Av in the block after 16a Calle; 4a Calle 7-3 is building No 3 on 4a Calle in the block after 7a Av. Odd-numbered buildings are on the left-hand side as you move in the rising-numbers direction; even numbers are on the right.

In addition, most cities and towns are divided into a number of zonas – 21 in Guatemala City, fewer in other places. You need to know the zona as well as the street address, for in some places the numbers of avenidas and calles are repeated in more than one zona. Beware, too, a couple of other minor wrinkles in the system. Short streets may be suffixed 'A,' as in 14a Calle A, which will be found between 14a Calle and 15a Calle. In some smaller towns and villages no one uses street names, even when they're posted on signs.

pink building at the Palacio de Correos. There's also a small post office at the airport.

UPS (☎ 2360 6460; www.ups.com; 12a Calle 5-53, Zona 10) Courier service.

Telephone

Telgua street card-phones are plentiful.

Telefónica office (2a Av, Zona 10) Between 13a and 14a Calles. Telefónica street card-phones are fairly common too; cards can be bought at the Telefónica office.

Tourist Information

Disetur (Tourist Police; ☎ 2232 0202; 11 calle 12-06, Zona 1).

Inguat Centro Cívico (☎ 2331 1333, 2331 1347; informacion@inguat.gob.gt; 7a Av 1-17, Zona 4; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Located in the lobby of the Inguat (Guatemalan Tourism Institute) headquarters in the Centro Cívico. This main office has limited handout material, but staff are extremely helpful. Aeropuerto La Aurora (☎ 2331 4256; arrivals hall; ☎ 6am-9pm).

Travel Agencies

Servisa (☎ /fax 332-7526; Av La Reforma 8-33, Zona 10) An efficient agency.

Viajes Tivoli (☎ 238-4771/2/3; centro@tivoli.com.gt; 12a Calle 4-55, Edificio Herrera, Zona 1) Housed in a building with several other travel agencies; take your pick.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Street crime, including armed robbery, has increased in recent years. Use normal urban caution (behaving as you would in, say, Manhattan or Rome): don't walk down the street with your wallet bulging out of your back pocket, and avoid walking downtown alone late at night. Work out your route before you start so that you're not standing on corners looking lost or peering at a map. It's safe to walk downtown in early evening, as long as you stick to streets with plenty of lighting and people. Stay alert and leave your valuables in your hotel. Don't flaunt anything of value, and be aware that women and children swell the ranks of thieves here. The incidence of robbery increases around the 15th and the end of each month, when workers get paid.

The area around 18a Calle in Zona 1 has many bus stations, and hosts the lowlife and hustlers who tend to lurk around them. Nearly half of Zona 1 robberies happen here, the worst black spots being the intersections with 4a, 6a and 9a Aves. This part of town (also a red-light district) is notoriously dangerous at night; if you are arriving by bus at night

or must go someplace on 18a Calle at night, take a taxi.

The more affluent sections of the city – Zona 9 and Zona 10, for example – are much safer. The Zona Viva, in Zona 10, has police patrols at night. But even here, going in pairs is better than going alone.

All buses are the turf of adroit pick-pockets. Some armed robberies happen on buses, too, though mainly in the city's outlying zones.

Never try to resist if you are confronted by a robber.

SIGHTS

The major sights are in Zona 1 (the historic center) and Zonas 10 and 13, where the museums are grouped.

Zona 1

The main sights here are grouped around the **Parque Central** (officially the Plaza de la Constitución). The standard colonial urban-planning scheme required every town in the New World to have a large plaza for military exercises and ceremonies. On the north side of the plaza was usually the *palacio de gobierno* (colonial government headquarters). On another side, preferably the east, would be a church (or cathedral). On the other sides of the square there could be additional civic buildings or the imposing mansions of wealthy citizens. Guatemala City's Parque Central is a classic example of the plan.

The Parque Central and adjoining Parque Centenario are never empty during daylight hours, with shoeshine boys, ice-cream vendors and sometimes open-air political meetings adding to the general bustle.

On the north side of the Parque Central is the imposing **Palacio Nacional de la Cultura** (☎ 2253 0748; 6a Calle; ☎ 9-11:45am & 2-4:45pm Mon-Fri, 9-10:45am & 2-3:45pm Sat & Sun), built as a presidential palace between 1936 and 1943 during the dictatorial rule of General Jorge Ubico at enormous cost to the lives of the prisoners who were forced to labor here. It's the third palace to stand on the site. Despite its tragic background, architecturally the palace is one of the country's most interesting constructions, a mélange of multiple earlier styles from Spanish Renaissance to neoclassical. Today, most government offices have been removed from here and it's open as a museum and for a few ceremonial events.

Visits are by guided tour (available in English), lasting about 45 minutes – the tours are free, but a tip to your guide is a good idea. You pass through a labyrinth of gleaming brass, polished wood, carved stone and frescoed arches. Features include an optimistic mural of Guatemalan history by Alberto Gálvez Suárez above the main stairway, and a two-ton gold, bronze and Bohemian-crystal chandelier in the reception hall. The banqueting hall sports stained-glass panels depicting – with delicious irony – the virtues of good government. From here your guide will probably take you out onto the presidential balcony, where you can imagine yourself a banana-republic dictator reviewing your troops. In the western courtyard, the Patio de la Paz, a monument depicting two hands stands where Guatemala's Peace Accords were signed in 1996; each day at 11am the rose held by the hands is changed by a military guard and tossed to a woman among the spectators.

On the first floor of the Palacio de Correos you'll find the **Centro Cultural Metropolitano** (cnr 12a Calle & 7 Av; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), a surprisingly

avant-garde cultural center, hosting art exhibitions, book launches, handicraft workshops and film nights.

The **Casa MIMA** (cnr 8a Av & 14a Calle; ☎ 9am-12:30pm, 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) is a wonderfully presented museum and cultural center set in a house dating from the late 1800s. The owners of the house were collectors with eclectic tastes ranging from French neo-Rococo, Chinese, and art deco to indigenous artifacts. The place is set up like a functioning house, filled with curios and furniture spanning the centuries.

The **Railway Museum** (Museo de Ferrocarril; 18a Calle; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4:30pm Sat & Sun) is one of the city's more intriguing museums (and the only one with a Domino's Pizza attached). Documented here are the glory days of the troubled Guatemalan rail system, along with some quirky artifacts, like hand-drawn diagrams of derailments and a kitchen set up with items used in dining cars. You can go climbing around the passenger carriages, but not the locomotives. It's between 9a and 10a Aves.

The **Catedral Metropolitana** (7a Av; ☎ 6am-noon & 2-7pm), facing Parque Central, was constructed

WHAT'S A HUELGA?

If you're around Guatemala in the time leading up to Easter, no doubt you'll see groups of university students out in colorful robes and hoods. They could be mistaken for penitents, but in fact they're participating in one of Guatemala's oldest political traditions.

The Huelga de Dolores (strike of sorrows) started in 1898 as a protest against the corrupt rule of dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Students from Guatemala's public Universidad de San Carlos wear hoods – color coded by the faculty they belong to – a traditional defense against state reprisals.

The Huelga takes place over Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter. The most colorful part of it is the Desfile de Bufos (parade of ridicule), a massive street parade featuring floats and banners, which generally takes the opportunity to mock political leaders on a general theme. Past parades have focused on the war in Iraq and Guatemala's involvement in the Central America Free Trade Agreement.

Another unique aspect of the Huelga is the collecting of *talachas*, a tax that is placed on businesses and motorists. In the past, money collected from the *talachas* was used to fund social projects. Now, as rumor has it, it is used to fund university parties and keep the organizers of the Huelga in employment year-round. Some estimate that *talachas* bring in millions of dollars per year. No accounts are kept, so nobody really knows.

Businesses that don't pay the *talachas* are likely to have their shop front painted in burnt motor oil, the Thursday before Easter, on a night called Noche de las pintas (the Night of the paints). Motorists who don't pay have had their cars vandalized and tires slashed.

Every year newspaper editorials and business owners speak out against the *talachas*, the students say they are simply redistributing money from those who have to those who don't, and the police say they don't have the resources to stand up to the students.

Supporters of the Huelga say it is an important tradition and one of the few times in the year that popular opinion is heard. Critics say, in a country like Guatemala, the last thing graduating students need to learn is that extortion, violence and lack of accountability can be so profitable.

between 1782 and 1815 (the towers were finished in 1867). It has survived earthquake and fire well, though the quake of 1917 did substantial damage and the one in 1976 did even more. Its heavy proportions and sparse ornamentation don't make for a particularly beautiful building, but it does have a certain stateliness, and the altars are worth a look.

The **Mercado Central**, behind the cathedral, was one of the city's major markets for food and other daily necessities until the building was destroyed by the 1976 earthquake. Reconstructed in the late 1970s, it now specializes in tourist-oriented handicrafts.

The **Museo Nacional de Historia** (☎ 2253 6149; 9a Calle 9-70; admission US\$4; 🕒 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a jumble of historical relics with an emphasis on photography and portraits. Check the carefully manicured hairstyles of the 19th-century generals and politicians.

Zona 2

North of Zona 1, Zona 2 is mostly a middle-class residential district, but it's worth venturing along to Parque Minerva to see the **Mapa en Relieve** (Relief Map; admission US\$4; 🕒 9am-5pm), a huge open-air map of Guatemala showing the country at a scale of 1:10,000. The vertical scale is exaggerated to 1:2000 to make the volcanoes and mountains appear dramatically higher and steeper than they really are. Constructed in 1905 under the direction of Francisco Vela, the Mapa was fully restored and repainted in 1999. Viewing towers afford a panoramic view. This is an odd but fun place, and it's curious to observe that Belize is still represented as part of Guatemala. To get there take bus V-21 northbound on 7a Av just north or south of the Parque Central.

Zona 4

Pride of Zona 4 (actually straddling its borders with Zonas 1 and 5) is the **Centro Cívico**, a set of large government and institutional buildings constructed during the 1950s and '60s. One is the headquarters of **Inguat** (Guatemalan Tourist Institute; see p76), housing the city's main tourist office. Nearby are the **Palacio de Justicia** (High Court; cnr 7a Av & 21a Calle, Zona 1), the **Banco de Guatemala** (7a Av, Zona 1) and the **Municipalidad de Guatemala** (City Hall; 22a Calle, Zona 1). The bank building bears relief sculptures by Dagoberto Vásquez depicting his country's history; the city hall contains a huge mosaic by Carlos Mérida, completed in 1959.

Behind Inguat is the national stadium, **Estadio Nacional Mateo Flores** (10a Av, Zona 5).

Zona 7

The **Parque Arqueológico Kaminaljuyú** (☎ 2253 1570; 11a Calle, Zona 7; admission US\$4; 🕒 9am-4pm), with remnants of one of the first important cities in the Mayan region, is just west of 23a Av and is some 4km west of the city center. At its peak, from about 400 BC to AD 100, ancient Kaminaljuyú (kah-mih-nahl-huh-yuh) had thousands of inhabitants and scores of temples built on earth mounds, and probably dominated much of highland Guatemala. Large-scale carvings found here were the forerunners of Classic Mayan carving, and Kaminaljuyú had a literate elite before anywhere else in the Mayan world. The city fell into ruin before being reoccupied around AD 400 by invaders from Teotihuacán in central Mexico, who rebuilt it in Teotihuacán's *talud-tablero* style, with buildings stepped in alternating vertical (*tablero*) and sloping (*talud*) sections. Unfortunately, most of Kaminaljuyú has been covered by urban sprawl: the *parque arqueológico* is but a small portion of the ancient city and even here the remnants consist chiefly of grassy mounds. To the left from the entrance is La Acrópolis, where you can inspect excavations of a ball court and *talud-tablero* buildings from AD 450 to 550. The best carvings from the site are in the new Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología (opposite).

You can get here by bus No 35 from 4a Av, Zona 1, but check that the bus is going to the *ruinas de Kaminaljuyú* – not all do. A taxi from Zona 1 costs around US\$4.50.

Zona 10

Two of the country's best museums are housed in large, modern buildings at the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, 1km east of Av La Reforma.

The **Museo Ixchel** (☎ 2331 3634/8; 6a Calle Final; admission US\$3; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is named for the Mayan goddess of the moon, women, reproduction and, of course, textiles. Photographs and exhibits of indigenous costumes and other crafts show the incredible richness of traditional arts in Guatemala's highland towns. If you enjoy Guatemalan textiles at all, you must visit this museum. It has disabled access, a section for children, a café, a shop and a library, and guided tours are available in English or Spanish.

Behind it is **Museo Popol Vuh** (☎ 2361 2301; www.popolvuh.ufm.edu; 6a Calle Final; adult/child US\$3/1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), where well-displayed pre-Hispanic figurines, incense burners and burial urns, plus carved wooden masks and traditional textiles, fill several rooms. Other rooms hold colonial paintings and gilded wood and silver artifacts. A faithful copy of the Dresden Codex, one of the precious 'painted books' of the Maya, is among the most interesting pieces, and there's a colorful display of animals in Mayan art.

The Universidad de San Carlos has a large, lush **Jardín Botánico** (Botanical Garden; Calle Mariscal Cruz 1-56; admission US\$0.80; ☎ 8am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) on the northern edge of Zona 10. The admission includes the university's **Museo de Historia Natural** (Natural History Museum; ☎ 8am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) at the site.

Zona 11

Museo Miraflores (☎ 2470 3415; www.museomiraflores.org; 7a Calle 21-55, Zona 11; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-7pm) is an excellent, modern museum inauspiciously jammed between two shopping malls a few kilometers out of town. Downstairs focuses on objects found at Kaminaljuyú (see opposite), with fascinating trade route maps showing the site's importance.

Upstairs there are displays on textiles and indigenous clothing, separated by region, from around the country. Signs are in Spanish and (mostly) English. Out back is a pleasant grassy area with paths and seating – a good place to take a breather. To get there, catch any bus from the center going to Tikal Futura and get off there. The museum is 250m down the road between it and the Miraflores shopping center.

Zona 13

The attractions here in the city's southern reaches are all ranged along 5a Calle in the Finca Aurora area, northwest of the airport. While here you can also drop into the **Mercado de Artesanías** (Crafts Market; ☎ 2472 0208; cnr 5a Calle & 11a Av; ☎ 9:30am-6pm).

La Aurora Zoo (☎ 2472 0894; 5a Calle; adult/child US\$2.50/1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is not badly kept as zoos go, and the lovely, parklike grounds alone are worth the admission fee.

Almost opposite the zoo entrance is the **Museo de los Niños** (Children's Museum; ☎ 5475 5076; 5a Calle 10-00; admission US\$4.50; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Thu, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Fri, 10am-1:30pm & 2:30-6pm Sat

& Sun), a hands-on affair that is a sure success if you have kids to keep happy. The fun ranges from a giant jigsaw-map of Guatemala to a Lego room and, most popular of all, a room of original and entertaining ball games.

The **Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología** (☎ 2472 0489; Sala 5, Finca La Aurora; admission US\$4; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 1:30-4pm Sat & Sun) has the country's biggest collection of ancient Mayan artifacts, but explanatory information is very sparse. There's a great wealth of monumental stone sculpture, including Classic-period stelae from Tikal, Uaxactún and Piedras Negras, a superb throne from Piedras Negras and animal representations from preclassic Kaminaljuyú. Also here are rare wooden lintels from temples at Tikal and El Zotz, and a room of beautiful jade necklaces and masks. Don't miss the large-scale model of Tikal. The ethnology section has displays on the languages, costumes, dances, masks and homes of Guatemala's indigenous peoples.

Next door is the **Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno** (☎ 2472 0467; Sala 6, Finca La Aurora; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-4pm Sat & Sun), with a collection of 20th-century Guatemalan art including works by well-known Guatemalan artists such as Carlos Mérida, Carlos Valente and Humberto Gavarito. Behind the archaeology museum is the **Museo Nacional de Historia Natural Jorge Ibarra** (☎ 2472 0468; 6a Calle 7-30; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-4pm Sat & Sun), whose claim to fame is its large collection of dissected animals.

WALKING TOUR

Walking is not generally considered a recreational activity in Guatemala City. Poorly maintained sidewalks, high levels of pollution and the odd spot of street crime make the city a difficult and sometimes dangerous place to take a stroll.

That being true, the historical center of Zona 1 has a tight concentration of interesting sights, and the best way to see them all in one hit is on foot.

The best place to start is at the **Parque Concordia (1)**, which has some interesting cast bronze statues dotted around and is always full of local characters taking a breather on the shady seats.

To the northeast you'll be able to see the mock battlements of the **National Police Headquarters (2)**. Head towards it, trying not to think about what went on inside back in the

Bad Old Days – chances are it'll ruin the rest of your walk.

Heading north on 6a Av, you'll be engaged in a time-honored Guate tradition. This is the main shopping strip, and before the big shopping malls went up, there was even a verb for window-shopping along here – 'sexteando' (see p90). Right next to the police station is the **Iglesia de San Francisco (3)**, filled with artifacts brought here when Antigua was abandoned.

Keep moving north, alternating between the road and the sidewalk, whichever is less congested. On the next block, to the right is the **Capitol Shopping Center (4)**, site of the first ever electric escalators in the city. Every now and then you can still see country folk in town for the day, getting their kicks on them.

As you reach the next corner, make sure you look to the right – down the hill is one of the city's most photographed sights, the yellow and white arch of the **Main Post Office (5; Palacio de Correos)**. You'll be coming back this way later, but this is the best angle to photograph it from.

From here it's another four blocks of dodging buyers and sellers of everything from

cheap socks to probably not designer shoes until you reach the Central Park. If it's beer o'clock already, pull up just short of the park and duck into the Portal de Comercio arcade on your right. Deep in the bowels you'll find **El Portal (6)**, where Che Guevara blew the suds off a few in his time.

Back out on the **Central Park (7)**, you should have a wander around just to take it all in. If you're here on a weekend, the place will be packed out with families, and on Sundays with young (mostly indigenous) girls who work as maids in the city and use their day off to come here and canoodle with their boyfriends. Any day of the week there's generally buskers, snake charmers, Polaroid photographers and the occasional raving evangelist to liven up the scene.

WALK FACTS

- Start point** Parque Concordia
- End Point** Museo de Ferrocarril
- Distance** 2km
- Duration** 3 hours



Moving clockwise from your entrance to the park on 6a Av, you'll see the Parque del Centenario – another concrete expanse, really, with the **Biblioteca Nacional (8)**; National Library) at its western edge.

If you're up for coffee and cake at this point, make a short detour up 6a Calle to **Café de Imeri (9)**, one of Zona 1's finest cafés.

Suitably recharged, head back down to the park. On the northern end is the **Palacio Nacional (10)**, always worth a look in for its revolving exhibitions of modern and classical art, as well as its charming courtyards and colonial architecture.

If you've really got your walking shoes on, you can head further north on 6a Av, to the **Mapa en Relieve (p78)**, which is an easy 2km walk straight ahead. If you want to cheat, a taxi should cost about US\$4, and we won't tell anybody.

Moving south from the Palacio Nacional, on the eastern edge of the park you'll find the city's main **cathedral (11)**; p77), a once-impressive blend of Neoclassical and baroque styles that is most notable for the twelve pillars out front, inscribed with the names of thousands of people who were 'disappeared' during the civil war.

Leaving the park, exiting on 8a Calle heading west, you'll come to the **Mercado Central (12)**. Once the city's main fruit and veg supplier, it's now about 75% souvenirs (haggle hard), but the basement level keeps it real with a thriving mass of vendors hawking flowers, vegetables, prayer candles, fresh meat, underpants, etc.

Back out in the daylight, follow 8a Av south for six blocks until you reach **Casa MIMA (13)**; p77), a well-restored and intriguing private museum with a good little café out in the patio.

From there, it's another four blocks south, then one block east on 18a Calle to the **Museo de Ferrocarril (14)**; p77), where you can scramble around passenger carriages, check out derailment diagrams and grab a slice of pizza.

GUATEMALA CITY FOR CHILDREN

Guatemala City has enough children's attractions to make it worth considering as an outing from Antigua if you have kids to please. The **Museo de los Niños (p79)** and **La Aurora Zoo (p79)**, conveniently over the road from each other in Zona 13, top the list. Kids might also relish the dead animals in various states of

preservation at the nearby **Museo Nacional de Historia Natural Jorge Ibarra (p79)**. It shouldn't be too hard to find some food that the littl'uns are willing to eat at the food courts in the malls **Centro Comercial Los Próceres (16a Calle, Zona 10)** or **Centro Comercial Tikal Futura (Calle Roosevelt 22-43, Zona 11)**, where everyone can also enjoy a little air-conditioning and shopping (window or otherwise). The **Mapa en Relieve (p78)**, too, amuses most ages, and there are a few swings and climbing frames in the adjacent park.

TOURS

Clark Tours (☎ 2337 7777; www.clarktours.com.gt; Torre II, Centro Gerencial Las Margaritas, Diagonal 6 No 10-01, Zona 10; morning tours per person US\$26, Mon-Wed & Fri-Sat; day tours up to four people US\$260-280) Guatemala's longest-established tour operator offers morning and full-day city tours. The morning tour visits the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura, cathedral, Mapa en Relieve and Centro Cívico. The day tour adds three of the city's best museums and Kaminaljuyú. Clark tours also has branches at the Westin Camino Real (cnr 14a Av & Av La Reforma, Zona 10), Holiday Inn and Guatemala City Marriott Hotel (p83). **Maya Expeditions** (☎ 2363 4955; www.mayaexpeditions.com; 15 Calle A 14-07, Zona 10) Guatemala's most respected adventure tourism company specializes in white-water rafting and trekking, but also offers archaeological trips, wildlife viewing expeditions and a whole lot more, mostly in the Alta Verapaz and Petén regions.

SLEEPING

For budget and many midrange hotels, make a beeline for Zona 1. If you have just flown in or are about to fly out, a few guesthouses near the airport are as convenient as you could get. Top-end hotels are mostly around Zona 10. Many have desks in the airport arrivals area, where you can book a room and/or obtain transportation (often free) to the hotel.

Zona 1

BUDGET

Many of the city's cheaper lodgings are clustered in the area between 6a and 9a Aves and 14a and 17a Calles, 10 to 15 minutes' walk south from the Parque Central. Keep street noise in mind as you look for a room.

Hotel San Martín (☎ 2238 0319; 16a Calle 7-65; r with/without bathroom US\$9/7) If you're on a serious budget, the San Martín's the one to go for – nothing fancy, but good solid value and reasonably clean.

Pensión Meza (☎ 2232 3177; 10a Calle 10-17; s/d US\$7/8, with bathroom US\$9/11) The rooms are grimy

DAY TRIPPER

Guatemala City may not be your dream destination, but if you do have to hang around for a while, there are plenty of good day trips to make that are just outside of town:

- Heavily polluted and shunned for many years, **Lago de Amatitlán** (p210) is making a comeback, thanks to community groups.
- Where else but **Volcán de Pacaya** (p104), visible from the capital, are you going to get a chance to get up close and personal with flowing lava?
- A privately owned reserve on the slopes of Pacaya, **Parque Natural Canopy Calderas** (☎ 5538 5531; www.parquenaturalcalderas.com; 🕒 9am-5pm) protects a lake and a patch of rain-forest – you can go horse riding or zip lining or simply enjoy the peaceful setting.
- The old capital of the Poqomam Maya, **Mixco Viejo** (p215), has the most dramatic setting of any ruins in the country.
- The pretty little flower-growing town of **San Juan Sacatepéquez** – come on a Friday when the market is in full swing.

and the beds are spongy, but the courtyard's pretty, with plenty of places to hang out, and the management is very friendly. It's a long-time backpackers' favorite, with table tennis, a book exchange and a big notice board.

Hotel Fenix (☎ 2251 6625; 7a Av 15-81; r US\$8, with private bathroom & TV US\$11) For Zona 1 budget digs, the Fenix does alright, with a fair bit of charm (most of it crumbling off the walls). The high ceilings, spacious rooms and old-timey feel keep this hotel a popular option. The hotel has a café and spacious hang-out areas.

Hotel Capri (☎ 2232 8191; 9a Av 15-63; s/d US\$9/14, with bathroom US\$14/21; (P)) This modern three-story number is in a decent location and rooms are set back from the street, so they're quiet. Big windows looking onto patios and light wells keep the place sunny and airy.

Hotel Ajau (☎ 2232 0488; hotelajau@hotmail.com; 8a Av 15-62; s/d US\$10/14, with bathroom US\$16/20; (P)) If you're coming or going to Cobán, the Ajau's the obvious choice, being right next-door to the Monja Blanca bus station. Otherwise it's still a pretty good deal, with lovely polished floor tiles and cool, clean rooms.

Hotel Spring (☎ 2230 2858; hotelspring@hotmail.com; 8a Av 12-65; s/d/tr US\$12/17/22, with bathroom s US\$17-25 d US\$22-31 tr US\$26-37; (P) (Q)) With a beautiful courtyard setting, the Spring has a lot more style than other Zona 1 joints. It has central but quiet sunny patios. The 43 rooms vary greatly, but most are tall, spacious and clean. Have a look around if you can. All rooms have cable TV; some of the more expensive ones are wheelchair accessible.

It's worth booking ahead. A *cafetería* serves meals from 6:30am to 1:30pm.

Hotel Clariss (☎ 2232 1113; 8a Av 15-14; s/d US\$14/20, with bathroom US\$22/25; (P) (Q)) This friendly place next to the Cobán bus terminal is in a modern building. There are some good-sized rooms (and other, smaller ones). Those at the front get more air and light, but also the bulk of the street noise.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Colonial (☎ 2232 6722; www.hotelcolonial.net; 7a Av 14-19; s/d/tr US\$17/22/27, with bathroom US\$25/30/35; (P)) This is a large old house converted to a hotel with spacious communal areas and heavy, dark, colonial decor. It's a very well-run establishment whose 42 rooms are clean, good-sized and adequately furnished. Nearly all have a private bathroom and TV.

Hotel Quality Service (☎ 2251 8005; www.qualityguate.com; 8a Calle 3-18; s/d US\$22/28; (P) (Q)) There's a pleasing, old-timey feel about this place, which is balanced perfectly by the modern-but-not-overly-so rooms. The pick of the bunch near the park.

Hotel Excel (☎ 2253 2709; hotelexcel@hotmail.com; 9a Av 15-12; s/d US\$22/28) The Excel's bright, modern motel-style may be a bit bland for some, but the rooms are spotless and the showers blast hot water.

Hotel Centenario (☎ 2338 0381; centenario@itelgua.com; 6a Calle 5-33; s/d US\$30/36) Although it's looking a bit worn around the edges (and not that flash in the middle, either), the Centenario offers a pretty good deal, right on

the park. Rooms are basic and unrenovated, with TV and hot showers.

Hotel Fortuna Royal (☎ 2238 2484; hotelfortuna royal@yahoo.com.ar; 12a Calle 8-42; s/d US\$35/40; (P)) The 21 rooms are large, with good tiled bathrooms and big mirrors and wardrobes. Cable TV, phone, and touches such as oriental-style reading lamps, alarm clock and minibar help make it one of the best downtown deals in this range. There's a restaurant too.

TOP END

Hotel Royal Palace (☎ 2232 5125, 2220 8970; www.hotelroyalpalace.com; 6a Av 12-66; s/d US\$48/57; (P) ♿) A little island of glamour amidst the rough and tumble of 6a Av, this place offers most comforts. The style is modern-reconstruction, with plenty of dark woods and fancy tiling around the place. Rooms are large, sparkling clean and wheelchair-accessible. Those at the front have balconies overlooking the street – a fascinating, if noisy, spectacle. Facilities include a restaurant, bar, gym, sauna, and free airport transfers.

Hotel Pan American (☎ 2232 6807; www.hotelpan american.com.gt; 9a Calle 5-63; s/d US\$50/55; (P) ♿) Guatemala City's luxury hotel before WWII, the Pan American is still run by its founding family and is one of the few hotels in the city with any air of history. There's a fine, Art Deco lobby that's filled with plants and a not-too-shabby restaurant. Rooms are spacious and simple, often with three or more beds. The bathrooms are stylish and modern, with good-sized tubs. Avoid rooms facing the noisy street.

Zona 9

MIDRANGE

Hotel del Istmo (☎ 2332 4389; 3a Av 1-38; s/d with TV US\$20/24, s/d without TV US\$18/22) If you are arriving by Melva bus from San Salvador, this hotel at the terminal is clean, comfortable and convenient. All the rooms have a hot-water bathroom and a cable TV.

Hotel Carrillon (☎ 2332 4036; hcarrillon@guate.net.gt; 5 Av 11-25; s/d US\$30/36; (P)) In a fairly ordinary section of Zona 9 (but within walking distance of all the Zona 10 action), this hotel offers a reasonable deal. Rooms are smallish, wood-paneled affairs. Ask to see a few.

Mi Casa (☎ 2339 2247; www.hotelmicasa.com; 5a Av A 13-51; s/d US\$40/50; (P) ♿) Set in a family house on a quiet street, these rooms are big and sunny, with private bathrooms, lino floors,

standard acrylic paintings, fans and reading lamps. Prices include breakfast, which is served in a leafy little patio out back. You can call them and they'll pick you up from the airport.

TOP END

Guatemala City Marriott Hotel (☎ 2339 7777; www.marriott.com; 7a Av 15-45; s&d US\$122; (P) ✉ ♿) For that big, corporate I'd-rather-not-be-here hotel experience, it's hard to go past the Marriott.

Hotel Cortijo Reforma (☎ 2332 0712; fax 2331 8876; Av La Reforma 2-18; s/d US\$60/65; (P)) The 130 suites here, though far from modern or flashy, each feature a large living room, bedroom, good tiled bathroom, phone and TV. Some (a little costlier) also have kitchens.

Zona 10

BUDGET

Xamanek Inn (☎ 2360 8345; www.mayaworld.net; 13a Calle 3-57; dm US\$14, r with bathroom US\$35; ♿) A welcome newcomer in the often-overpriced Zona Viva area is this comfy little hostel. Dorms are spacious and airy, separated into male and female. Rates include a light breakfast and free internet. There's a book exchange, kitchen use and Skype calling for US\$0.30 per minute.

MIDRANGE

Eco Hotel los Próceres (☎ 2337 3250; www.ecohotelproceres.com; 18a Calle 3-03; s/d US\$40/50; (P) ♿) The spotless, brightly painted rooms here are a pretty good deal. They're a bit cramped, but tasteful decoration and modern bathrooms (with tub!) make up for that.

Hotel Posada de los Próceres (☎ 2363-0744; www.ecohotelproceres.com; 16a Calle 2-40; s/d US\$40/50; (P) ♿) Twenty brightly decorated, if slightly tatty, rooms right on the edge of the Zona Viva. They're surprisingly large, with attractive tiled bathrooms, phone, clock, cable TV, wooden furniture and mini-fridge. Prices include a light breakfast.

TOP END

Hotel Casa Grande (☎ 2332 0914; www.casagrande-gua.com; Av La Reforma 7-89; s/d US\$60/67; (P) ♿) Located within spitting distance of the US embassy (not that we're trying to give you any ideas), this is a refined option that mostly caters to the business crowd. Several patio areas and a log fire in the lounge area crank up the comfort factor.

Hotel San Carlos (☎ 2362 9076; www.hsancarlos.com; Av La Reforma 7-89; r US\$72, apt from US\$120; (P) (Q) (R)) OK, so it goes a little heavy on the baroque furnishings, but this place is still a good deal. Set well back from the busy street, it's quiet, and the well-appointed rooms and apartments are spacious and comfortable.

Hotel Stofella (☎ 2410 8600; www.bestwestern.com; 2a Av 12-28; s/d US\$75/80; (P) (X) (R) (Q)) This pleasant, medium-sized Zona Viva hotel is part of the international Best Western chain, and provides quality rooms – with air-conditioning, safes, and phones in bedroom and bathroom – at reasonable prices. Rates include breakfast and one hour of free internet usage daily. You can hook up a computer in your room for US\$5 a day.

ourpick Otelito (☎ 2339 1811; www.otelito.com; 12a Calle 4-51; s/d US\$90/100; (P) (R) (Q)) Screaming with Zen tranquility, this place bustles with bamboo, mood lighting and polished steel. Rooms are spacious and minimalist and bathrooms modern, with big glassed-in shower stalls. There's a garden restaurant/café out front. Book ahead.

Zona 11

Grand Tikal Futura Hotel (☎ 2410 0800; www.grandtikal.futura.com.gt; Calzada Roosevelt 22-43; s & d from US\$250; (P) (R) (Q) (R)) The towering glass architecture here is a contemporary reinterpretation of the grandiose concepts of ancient Tikal. The 205 luxurious rooms and suites all enjoy spectacular views and have their own safes.

Hook up with a Guatemalan and you can take advantage of hefty 'local discounts.' On the lower levels of the complex, you'll find one the city's biggest shopping malls, 10 cinemas and a bowling alley. It's in the west of the city on the road to Antigua, 3km from Zona 1, Zona 10 or the airport.

Zona 13

Four dependable guesthouses in a middle-class residential area in Zona 13 are very convenient for the airport. All their room rates include breakfast and airport transfers (call from the airport on arrival). There are no restaurants out here, but these places offer breakfast and have the complete lowdown on fast-food home delivery in the area.

BUDGET

Patricia's Guest House (☎ 2261 4251, 5402 3256 in English; 19 Calle 10-65; r per person US\$12) The most relaxed and comfortable option is in this family house with a sweet little backyard where guests can hang out. They also offer private transport around the city and shuttles to bus stations.

Dos Lunas (☎ /fax 2261 4248; www.xelapages.com/doslunas; 21a Calle 10-92; dm US\$12, s/d US\$15/30; (P) (Q)) An old faithful, the Dos Lunas has excellent common areas, a cramped dorm and a couple of very nice private rooms. Book through the website. Dos Lunas also offers onward-travel packages and Flores flights at good prices.

ADOPTION CENTRAL

In your travels around Guatemala City you're likely to see a surprising sight: young, hopeful couples from the US with brand-new Guatemalan babies.

The number of Guatemalan children adopted by foreign couples in 2006 was 4359, and 95% of these went to couples from the US. Adopting a child is a surprisingly simple process, due to the largely unregulated nature of Guatemala's adoption laws – a fact that has many observers worried.

There has been so much concern over kidnapping and baby selling (the lawyers alone on these transactions make an average of US\$15,000 per adoption) that the US, British and Canadian embassies now require a DNA test to make sure that the woman giving up the baby is in fact the birth mother.

Critics say this does little. Babies can be swapped between the embassy and the airport and there is no guarantee that the birth mother is not being coerced to give up her baby.

One thing is sure – with 20,000 Guatemalan children living in orphanages and another 5000 living on the streets of Guatemala City, something has to be done.

For years now, activists have been trying to get Congress to pass 'The Children's Code' – a piece of legislation designed to protect the rights of children. It seems that the political will is not there, and until it is, maybe the best hope these kids have is for a ticket out of the country.

TOP END

Restaurante Altuna (☎ 2232 0669; 5a Av 12-31; mains US\$10-15; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This large and classy restaurant has the atmosphere of a private club. It has tables in several rooms that are off a skylighted patio. The specialities are seafood and Spanish dishes; service is both professional and welcoming.

Zona 4**MIDRANGE**

Cuatro Grados Norte, situated on Vía 5 between Rutas 1 and 3, is the name for a two-block pedestrianized strip of restaurants and cafés with sidewalk tables and relaxed café society. Inaugurated in 2002, and the only place of its kind in Guatemala City, it is conveniently close to the main Inguat tourist office. It gets lively in the evening, particularly around weekends. You can choose from a dozen or so establishments, some of which double as galleries, bookstores or music venues.

Del Paseo (Vía 5 1-81, Cuatro Grados Norte; mains US\$5-8.50; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This spacious, artsy, Mediterranean-style bistro is one of Cuatro Grados Norte's most popular spots. Relaxed jazz plays in the background unless there's a live band (try Thursdays from 9pm). You might select roast chicken breast with tropical fruits and grated coconut – or spinach-and-ricotta filo pastry parcels? Wine goes for US\$3 a glass.

Tarboosh (Vía 5, Cuatro Grados Norte; mains US\$6-15; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Done out like a harem (but tastefully), this place offers authentic Middle Eastern fare like falafel (US\$6.50), *kibellah* and delicious *mezzeh* platters (US\$20).

ourpick L'Osteria (cnr Vía 5 & Ruta 2, Cuatro Grados Norte; mains US\$7-10; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Excellent Italian dishes – mostly pizzas and pastas – and a good wine list. The shady terrace out front earns top marks for people watching.

Fiamenco (Vía 4, Cuatro Grados Norte; tapas US\$6, mains US\$10; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Catch a breeze and take a breather on the upstairs balcony at this tapas bar/Spanish restaurant.

Kampai (Vía 5, Cuatro Grados Norte; mains US\$10-15; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Apart from some atrocious music selections, this is a surprisingly good Japanese restaurant. All your faves are here – sashimi, teppanyaki, tempura, plus a range of 'novelty rolls' – California rolls shaped like cars, scorpions, etc.

Zona 9

Puerto Barrios (☎ 2334-1302; 7a Av 10-65; mains US\$12-16; ☞ noon-3pm & 7-11pm) The Puerto Barrios specializes in tasty prawn and fish dishes and is awash in nautical themes – paintings of buccaneers, portholes for windows, a big compass by the door. If you're having trouble finding it, just look for the big pirate ship that it's housed in.

Zona 10**BUDGET**

A string of (mostly) nameless *comedores* opposite the Los Proceres mall serve up the cheapest eats in Zona 10. There's nothing fancy going on here – just good, filling eats at rock bottom prices.

Cafetería Patsy (Av La Reforma 8-01; set lunch US\$3.50; ☞ 7:30am-8pm) A bright, cheerful place popular with local office workers, offering subs, sandwiches and good value set lunches.

San Martín & Company (13a Calle 1-62; light meals US\$3-5; ☞ 6am-8pm Mon-Sat) Cool and clean, with ceiling fans inside and a small terrace outside, this Zona Viva café and bakery is great at any time of day. For breakfast try a scrumptious omelet and croissant (the former arrives inside the latter). Later there are tempting and original sandwiches, soups and salads. The entrance is on 2a Av.

La Chapinita (1 Av 10-24; mains US\$4-6; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Down-home Guatemalan food served in more or less formal surrounds can be hard to come by in Zona 10, but this place does it well at good prices. Tables out front on the shady terrace are cool and breezy.

Los Alpes (10a Calle 1-09; breakfast US\$4-6; ☞ breakfast & lunch) A relaxing garden restaurant/bakery. It's set well back from the road, behind a wall of vegetation, giving it a feeling of deep seclusion. The freshly made sandwiches and cakes really hit the spot.

MIDRANGE

Inka Grill (☎ 2363 3013; 2a Av 14-22; mains US\$8-15; ☞ lunch & dinner Tues-Sun) Peruvian artifacts adorn the pink and yellow walls; tasty Peruvian food makes the tables a treat. Try the specialty *arroz con mariscos* (rice with seafood). There's a good international wine list too.

TOP END

Marea Alta (10a Calle 1-89; mains US\$10-20, buffet US\$13; ☞ lunch & dinner; buffet Mon-Wed) Specializing in imported seafood, this place has some good

LOCAL LORE: THE WIDOW AND THE DEVIL

There was once a wise widow with three beautiful daughters. Every day, men would arrive, trying to woo them, but the widow saw through them and sent them away.

Then one day a handsome, charming man arrived and began to win the hearts of all three daughters.

He showed them magic tricks, turning potatoes into gold coins and pulling jewels from their hair. The daughters were enchanted. The next day he returned and his tricks became more fabulous – he turned himself into an eagle and a jaguar and a peacock.

The widow became suspicious, and went to see the priest, who came up with a plan. The next day, when the stranger returned and began his tricks again, the widow said, 'If you're so powerful, why don't you shrink yourself down into this bottle?'

In an instant he did, and the widow plugged the bottle with a cork that had been blessed by the priest.

The devil could not escape – he needed a human to release him, and the widow and the priest buried the bottle in the forest.

Years passed, and then one day Alfonso, a drunk, was walking by the spot and fell over. 'Release me,' said the devil, 'and I will make you rich.'

So Alfonso uncorked the bottle, and the devil proposed a plan. They would go from town to town and the devil would go into people's stomachs, making them sick, and Alfonso would sell them the cure.

One day they arrived in the capital, and decided to fool the governor. The devil went into his stomach and soon Alfonso was called for.

But when Alfonso entered the governor's house he was distracted by the beauty of the governor's daughter and gave the governor a glass of acid to drink by mistake. The acid burnt the devil, who refused to come out.

Alfonso began to repent his evil-doing and confessed to the governor, who organized for a loud noise to be made.

Alfonso told the devil that the noise was the widow who had trapped him in the bottle.

The devil got scared and ran away. The governor got better and Alfonso was soon engaged to his daughter.

prices considering the location. The lunch-time buffet is a winner, as is the surf 'n' turf platter for US\$10.

Txoco (13a Calle 5-17; mains US\$10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Good, hearty Spanish and Basque food in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The tapas list is long and varied and the wine list features bottles from Italy, Spain and Chile. Thursday to Sunday there are daily specials like paella and seafood stew.

Tamarindos (☎ 2360 2815; 11a Calle 2-19A; mains US\$15-20; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) A chic and delicious Thai and Italian restaurant with a Guatemalan twist. The four-cheese gnocchi is irresistible, and the vegetarian pad Thai blends a thousand flavors. The stylish decor recalls New York – but the prices are Guatemalan.

DRINKING**Zona 1**

Staggering from bar to bar about the darkened streets of Zona 1 is not recommended, but

fortunately there's a clutch of good drinking places all within half a block of each other just south of the Parque Central.

Las Cien Puertas (Pasaje Aycinena 8-44, 9a Calle 6-45)

This superhip (but not studiously so) little watering hole is a gathering place for all manner of local creative types (and a few travelers) who may be debating politics, strumming a guitar or refining the graffiti when you show up. Tasty snacks such as tacos and quesadillas are served. It's in a shabby colonial arcade that's said to have a hundred doors (hence the name) and is sometimes closed off for live bands.

La Arcada (7 Av 9-10) Drop into this friendly little neighborhood bar for a few drinks – they'll let you pick the music, or spin some of their own – anything from Guat rock to ambient trance.

El Portal (Portal del Comercio, 6a Av; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) This atmospheric old drinking den serves fine draft beer (around US\$2 a mug)

THE BIG NIGHT OUT

Guatemalans love going out and you shouldn't have any trouble finding a place to grab a beer anywhere you go in the country. The only question remains where. Generally speaking, you can go anywhere without too much trouble, but you should be aware that there are a couple of significant differences in the way that nightspots get named here.

Cantinas, for example, are generally the roughest of the drinking establishments – this is where you go to get falling down drunk, and listen to *ranchera* (Mexican cowboy) music. It's an all-male atmosphere, and while women are most certainly welcome, they won't feel comfortable.

Bars are a tricky one. In big cities, a bar can be exactly what we understand it to be – a place with music, mixed drinks and a mixed crowd. In smaller towns, however, a bar generally has the same atmosphere as a cantina, except it doubles as a brothel.

Nightclubs (or, as most of these places would have it, 'Nighthclubs') are not at all the same here as they are back home. These places are basically strip joints, with prostitutes working.

Disotecas are more what we think of when we say nightclub. They have big dance floors, dress codes and sometimes charge an entry fee.

and free tapas. Che Guevara was once a patron. Sit at the long wooden bar or one of the wooden tables. Clients are mostly, but not exclusively, men. To find it, enter the Portal del Comercio arcade from 6a Av a few steps south of the Parque Central.

El Rincón del Centro (9a Calle 6-37) In every way a halfway house between El Portal and Pasaje Aycinena, this bar attracts a mixed crowd, from students to 30- and 40-somethings, all enjoying a few beers to recorded rock.

Zona 4

Guat's restaurant/bar precinct, Cuatro Grados Norte, is taking over from Zona 10 as *the* place to go out. You can just have a drink at any of the restaurants along here, but there are a couple of good bars.

Suae (Vía 5, Cuatro Grados Norte) Hip, but not exclusive, this bar has a great, laidback ambience in the day and heats up at night. Rotating art exhibitions, a funky clothes boutique and guest DJs all add to the appeal.

La Playa (cnr Vía 5 & Ruata 1, Cuatro Grados Norte) With a heap of pool tables and cheap beer on tap, this upstairs bar is as good a place as any to start your night.

Zona 10

The best place to go bar hopping is around the corner of 2a Av and 15a Calle – there are plenty of places to choose from – check and see who's got the crowd tonight.

Mi Guajira (2 Av 14-42) This happening little disco/bar has a pretty good atmosphere and goes fairly light on the snob factor. Music varies depending on the night, but be pre-

pared for anything from salsa to reggaeton to trance.

El Establo (14a Calle 5-08) This mellow watering hole attracts both foreigners and locals with its pub-style layout, three-sided, brass-topped bar, good pub food and enormous range of music spun by the German owners. Not cheap, though, at US\$3 a Gallo beer.

Zona 12

For a seriously down to earth night out, you should go out partying with the students from USAC, Guatemala's public university. The strip of bars along 31a Calle at the corner of 11a Av, just near the main entrance to the university, all offer cheap beer, loud music and bar/junk food. Like student bars all over the world, they're busy any time of day, but nights and weekends are best. A taxi out here from the center should cost about US\$6 if it's not too late, or you can catch any bus that says 'USAC' that doesn't go along Av Petapa.

El Tarro (31a Calle 13-08) The most formal of the bunch (in that it has menus, vaguely comfortable seats and draft beer) has a dance floor out back.

Liverpool (31a Calle 11-53) Plenty of pool tables and cheap drinks keep this place swinging.

Ice (31a Calle 13-39) This one heats up later into the night, when the dance floor fills up with students dancing salsa, merengue and *reggaeton*.

ENTERTAINMENT Cinema

Various multiscreen cinema complexes show Hollywood blockbuster movies, often in

English with Spanish subtitles. Unless they're kids movies, in which case they'll most likely be dubbed into Spanish. Most convenient are **Cines Tikal Futura** (Centro Comercial Tikal Futura; ☎ 2440-3297; Calzada Roosevelt 22-43, Zona 11) or **Cines Próceres** (Centro Comercial Los Próceres; ☎ 2332-8508; 16a Calle, Zona 10). Tickets cost between US\$2 and US\$4. Movie listings can be found in the *Prensa Libre* newspaper.

Gay Venues

Don't get too excited about this heading; there are only a couple of places worthy of mention for men, and nothing much for women.

Genetic (Ruta 3 No 3-08, Zona 4; ☎ 9pm-1am Fri & Sat) This used to be called Pandora's Box, and has been hosting Guatemala's gay crowd since the '70s, although it gets a mixed crowd and is one of the best places in town to go for trance/dance music. It has two dance floors, a rooftop patio and a relaxed atmosphere with a mainly under-30 crowd.

Ephebus (4a Calle 5-30, Zona 1; ☎ 9pm-1am Thu-Sat) A well-established gay disco-bar in a former private house near the city center, often with strippers.

El Encuentro (Local 229, Centro Capitol, 6a Av 12-51, Zona 1; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat) This quiet bar, in the back of a noisy downtown mall, is another gay meeting place.

Theater

Two very good cultural centers in Cuatro Grados Norte host regular theatrical performances and other artistic events. It's always worth dropping in or checking their websites to see what's on.

The English language magazine *Revue* (www.revuemag.com) has events details, although it focuses more on Antigua. Your hotel should have a copy, or know where to get one. Free events mags in Spanish come and go. At the time of writing, *El Azar* (elazarcultural@yahoo.es) had the best info. Pick up a copy at any cultural center listed below.

IGA Cultural Center (www.iga.edu; Ruta 1, 4-05, Zona 4) The Instituto Guatemalteco Americano hosts art exhibitions and live theater.

Centro Cultural de España (www.centroculturalespana.com.gt; Via 5 1-23, Zona 4) The Spanish Cultural center hosts an excellent range of events, including live music, film nights and art exhibitions, mostly with free admission.

Centro Cultural Miguel Ángel Asturias (☎ 232 4042; 24a Calle 3-81, Zona 1) Cultural events are also held here.

Live Music

La Bodeguita del Centro (12a Calle 3-55, Zona 1) There's a hopping, creative local scene in Guatemala City, and this large, bohemian hangout is one of the best places to connect with it. Posters featuring the likes of Che, Marley, Lennon, Victor Jara, Van Gogh and Pablo Neruda cover the walls from floor to ceiling. There's live music

LOCAL VOICES: PEDRO MENDEZ, TROVADOR

Spend any time out and about in a big city in Guatemala and you're bound to hear some Guatemalan folk music, or *trova*. We caught up with *trovador* Pedro Mendez to find out what all the fuss is about.

When did you start playing *trova*?

I started playing seriously when I was about 15. Before I just played around, but my friends told me I was good so I got more serious about it.

Did you study music?

A little bit in school, but *trova* is a very street thing. We say that school for *trovadores* is in the street. Most of what I learnt was just from playing with people and listening.

What is *trova* for you?

At its most simple, *trova* is one person with a guitar, singing. But it's more complicated than that. *Trova* songs are rougher, they're not like pop songs – they speak about the hardships of life – poverty, broken hearts, bad luck...

Trova has a political side...

There's a lot of different types of *trova* – pop, alternative, romantic, but it really got big here as a political expression. There was a time in Guatemala when the *trovadores* were the only ones that could really talk about what was going on, and even they had to be careful. I guess it's still kind of like that.

of some kind almost every night from Tuesday to Saturday, usually starting at 9pm, plus occasional poetry readings, films or forums. Entry is usually free Tuesday to Thursday, with a charge of US\$2.50 to US\$5 on Friday and Saturday nights. Food and drinks are served. Pick up a monthly schedule of events.

Rattle & Hum (4a Av & 16a Calle, Zona 10) One of the last places in Zona 10 to still be hosting live music, this Australian-owned place has a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Blue Town Café Bar (11a Calle 4-51, Zona 1) If La Bodeguita doesn't suit you, check out this nearby youthful spot with live bands.

Trovaljazz (Via 6 No 3-55, Zona 4) Jazz, blues and folk fans should look into what's happening here.

Dancing

La Estación Norte (Ruta 4, 6-32, Zona 4) As far as mega discos go, this one around the corner from Cuatro Grados Norte is kind of interesting. It's done out in a train theme, with carriages for bars and platforms for dance floors. Dress well, but not over the top.

Zona 10 has a bunch of clubs attracting twenty-something local crowds along 13a Calle and adjacent streets such as 1a Av. The area's exclusivity means that door staff are well versed in the old 'members only' and 'sorry, we're full' routines. If you want to try your luck, the universal rules apply: dress up, go before 11pm and make sure your group has more women than men in it. Check flyers around town for special nights. Here are a couple to get you started:

Kahlua (15a Calle & 1a Av, Zona 10) For electronica and bright young things.

Mr Jerry (13a Calle 1-26, Zona 10) For salsa and merengue.

SHOPPING

Mercado Central (9a Av btwn 6a & 8a Calles; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Until the quake of 1976, Mercado Central, behind the cathedral, was where locals shopped for food and other necessities. Reconstructed after the earthquake, it now deals in colorful Guatemalan handicrafts such as textiles, carved wood, metalwork, pottery, leather goods and basketry, and is a pretty good place to shop for these kinds of things, with reasonable prices.

Mercado de Artesanías (Crafts Market; cnr 5a Calle & 11a Av, Zona 13; ☎ 9:30am-6pm) This sleepy official market near the museums and zoo sells similar goods in less-crowded conditions.

For fashion boutiques, electronic goods and other first-world paraphernalia, head for the large shopping malls such as **Centro Comercial Los Próceres** (16a Calle, Zona 10) or **Centro Comercial Tikal Futura** (Calzada Roosevelt 22-43, Zona 11).

For a more everyday Guatemalan experience, take a walk along 6a Av between 8a and 16a Calles in Zona 1. Back in the '70s, before the big shopping malls started stealing all the customers away, there was a verb '*sexteando*,' which meant going for a stroll along the 6a Av (La Sexta) to see what was on offer. The scene has quietened down a bit, but it's still ground central for cheap copied CDs, shoes, underwear, overalls and pretty much everything else under the sun.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Guatemala City's **Aeropuerto La Aurora** (☎ 2334 7680) is the country's major airport. All international flights to Guatemala City land and take off here. At the time of writing, the country's only *scheduled* domestic flights are between Guatemala City and Flores. The major carrier, Grupo TACA, makes two round-trip flights daily (one in the morning, one in the afternoon), plus an extra flight four mornings a week which continues from Flores to Cancún (Mexico) and flies back from there via Flores in the afternoon. See p71 for contact details.

Tickets to Flores cost around US\$127/204 one-way/round-trip with Grupo TACA, but some travel agents, especially in Antigua, offer large discounts on these prices.

Bus

Buses from here run all over Guatemala and into Mexico, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador and beyond. Most bus companies have their own terminals, some of which are in Zona 1. The Terminal de Autobuses, in Zona 4, is used only by some 2nd-class buses. The city council has been on a campaign to get long-distance bus companies out of the city center, so it may be wise to double check with Inguat or your hotel owner about the office location before heading out there.

PULLMAN BUS SERVICES

The following bus companies have Pullman services:

Escobar y Monja Blanca (☎ 2238 1409; 8a Av 15-16, Zona 1)

Fortaleza del Sur (☎ 2230 3390; Calzada Raúl Aguilar Batres 4-15, Zona 12)

Fuente del Norte (☎ 2251 3817; 17a Calle 8-46, Zona 1)

Hedman Alas (☎ 2362 5072/5; 2a Av 8-73, Zona 10)

King Quality & Confort Lines (☎ 2369 0404/56; 18a Av 1-96, Zona 15)

Línea Dorada (☎ 2232 9658; cnr 10a Av & 16 Calle, Zona 1)

Líneas América (☎ 2232-1432; 2a Av 18-47, Zona 1)

Litegua (☎ 2253 8169; 15a Calle 10-40, Zona 1)

Los Halcones (☎ 2439 2780; Calzada Roosevelt 37-47, Zona 11)

Melva Internacional (☎ 2331 0874; 3a Av 1-38, Zona 9)

Pullmantur (☎ 2332 9785/6; Holiday Inn, 1a Av 13-22, Zona 10)

Rutas Orientales (☎ 2253 7282; 19 Calle 8-18, Zona 1)

Tica Bus (☎ 2366 4038; Blvd Los Proceres 26-55, Zona 10)

Transportes Álamo (☎ 2251 4838; 12 Av 'A' 0-65, Zona 7)

Transportes Galgos (☎ 2253 4868; 7a Av 19-44, Zona 1)

Transportes Velásquez (☎ 2440 3316; Calzada Roosevelt 9-56, Zona 7)

Pullman Bus Departures

Belize City (US\$40, 16 hours) Línea Dorada has first class buses, with a few hours' wait in Flores. Alternatively, take a bus to Flores/Santa Elena and an onward bus from there.

Biotopo del Quetzal (US\$4, 3½ hours) Escobar y Monja Blanca has hourly buses from 4am to 5pm, via El Rancho and Purulhá.

Chetumal (Mexico) Take a bus to Flores/Santa Elena, where daily buses leave for Chetumal (see p281).

Chiquimula (US\$2.60, three hours) Rutas Orientales departs every 30 minutes, from 4:30am to 6pm.

Ciudad Tecún Umán/Ciudad Hidalgo (Mexican border) (US\$8, six hours) Fortaleza del Sur has 20 daily buses, from 12:15am to 6:30pm.

Cobán (US\$4.25; 4½ hours) Escobar y Monja Blanca has buses hourly, from 4am to 5pm, stopping at El Rancho and the Biotopo del Quetzal.

Copán (Honduras) (US\$36, five hours) Hedman Alas departs at 5am daily with 1st-class buses, which continue to San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba. It's cheaper, and slower, to take a bus to Chiquimula, then another to the border at El Florido, then another on to Copán.

El Carmen/Talismán (Mexican border) (US\$6.50, seven hours) Fortaleza del Sur has 20 daily buses, from 12:15am to 6:30pm.

Esquipulas (US\$4, 4½ hours) Rutas Orientales departs every 30 minutes, from 4:30am to 6pm

Flores/Santa Elena (eight to 10 hours) Fuente del Norte runs 18 daily buses (US\$9 to US\$17 depending on the service) Línea Dorada has buses at 9am, 9pm and 10pm (US\$23).

Fuente del Norte goes hourly, with a special Maya de Oro service (US\$17) at 10:30pm.

Huehuetenango (US\$6.50, five hours) Los Halcones departs at 7am, 2pm and 5pm. Transportes Velásquez also stops at Huehuetenango. All go by the Interamericana.

La Mesilla/Ciudad Cuauhtémoc (Mexican border) (US\$9, seven hours) Transportes Velásquez departs every 30 minutes, from 8am to 11am. From Ciudad Cuauhtémoc there are fairly frequent buses and vans on to Comitán & San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Livingston See Puerto Barrios (p260) and Río Dulce (p254); from either place you can reach Livingston by boat.

Melchor de Mencos (Belizean border) (US\$10.50, 11 hours)

Poptún Take a bus headed to Flores.

Puerto Barrios (First Class/Standard Pullman US\$11/5.50, five hours) Litegua departs every half hour, from 4:30am to 6pm.

Quetzaltenango (US\$6, five hours) Transportes Álamo has six buses from 8am to 5:30pm. Líneas América has seven buses from 5am to 7:30pm. Línea Dorada departs at 8am and 3pm (US\$8). Transportes Galgos has seven buses from 5:30am to 5pm.

Quiriguá Take a Puerto Barrios bus (see p250 for details on getting from the Carretera al Atlántico to Quiriguá ruins).

Retalhuleu (US\$6, three hours) Fortaleza del Sur has 20 buses from 12:10am to 7:10pm.

Río Dulce (US\$6, six hours) Litegua departs at 6am, 9am, 11:30am and 1pm. Flores-bound buses stop at Río Dulce too.

San Salvador (El Salvador) (five to six hours) Melva Internacional runs buses via the border at Valle Nuevo hourly, from 5:15am to 4:15pm (US\$10). Tica Bus departs 12:30pm daily (US\$9.50). From San Salvador, Tica Bus services all other Central American capitals except Belize City. King Quality & Confort Lines runs luxury buses at 6:30am, 8am, 2pm and 3:30pm (US\$20), with connections to Tegucigalpa and Managua. Pullmantur has luxury buses at 7am, 1pm and 3pm.

Sayaxché (11 hours) Fuente del Norte departs at 4pm (US\$12) and 7pm (US\$15) via Río Dulce & Flores, and at 5:30pm via Cobán (US\$12).

Tapachula (Mexico) (six to seven hours) Transportes Galgos departs at 7:30am and 1:30pm (US\$21.50). Línea Dorada departs at 7am and 4pm (US\$33). Tica Bus departs at noon (US\$19). From Tapachula buses run to many points in Mexico.

Tegucigalpa (Honduras) (US\$54; 12 hours) Hedman Alas departs at 5am with 1st-class buses.

Tikal Take a bus to Flores/Santa Elena and onward transportation from there.

SECOND-CLASS BUS SERVICES

The following are all second-class bus services: **Antigua** (US\$0.65, 1¼ hours, 45km) Buses depart from 1a Av between 3a and 4a Calle, Zona 7, every few minutes from 5am to 9pm. See p117 for details on shuttle minibuses.

Chichicastenango (US\$1.55, three hours, 145km) Veloz Quichelense (☎ 41a Calle btwn 6a & 7a Aves, Zona 8) Has hourly buses from 5am to 8pm.

Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado/La Hachadura (Salvadoran border) (US\$2, two hours) Buses to Taxisco depart from the Terminal de Autobuses every 30 minutes, from 5am to 4pm. Some continue to the border; otherwise change at Taxisco where buses leave for the border every 15 minutes until 5pm.

Escuintla (US\$1.25, one hour, 57km) See La Democracia & Puerto San José.

La Democracia (US\$1.50, two hours, 92km) Chatia Gomerana (cnr 4a Calle & 8a Av, Zona 12) Has buses every 30 minutes, from 6am to 4:30pm, stopping at Escuintla.

Monterrico Take one of the half-hourly buses, from 5am to 4pm, from the Terminal de Autobuses to Taxisco (US\$1.50, two hours). Change there for a bus to La Avelana (US\$1, one hour, 12 daily, from 7am to 6pm) and from there take a boat (see p208).

Nebaj Take a bus to Santa Cruz del Quiché & another onto Nebaj from there.

Panajachel (US\$2, 3½ hours, 150km) Transportes Rébuli (☎ 2230 2748; 41a Calle btwn 6a & 7a Calle, Zona 8) Departs hourly, from 7am to 4pm, with a Pullman bus (US\$4.25) at 9:30am.

Puerto San José (US\$2, 2½ hours, 90km) Various companies run via Escuintla about every 15 minutes, from 5am to 6pm, from 4a Calle between 7a and 8a Aves, Zona 12.

Salamá (US\$3, three hours, 150km) Transportes Dulce María (☎ 2253 4618; 17a Calle 11-32, Zona 1) Departs every hour, from 5am to 5pm.

Santa Cruz del Quiché (US\$3.50, 3½ hours, 163km) Buses depart from the Terminal de Autobuses every 15 to 20 minutes, from 5am to 5pm.

Santa Elena See Flores/Santa Elena.

Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa Take a bus to Escuintla and another from there.

Santiago Atitlán (US\$3.50, four hours, 165km) Various companies depart from 4a Calle between 8a and 9a Aves, Zona 12, every half hour from 4am to 5pm.

Tecpán (US\$1, two hours, 92km) Veloz Poaqueñila (1a Av btwn 3a & 4a Calles, Zona 7) Departs every 15 minutes, from 5:30am to 7pm.

Car

Most major rental companies have offices both at La Aurora airport (in the arrivals area) and in Zona 9 or 10. Companies include the following:

Ahorrent (www.ahorrent.com) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2362 8921/2); Zona 9 (☎ 2361 5661; Blvd Liberación 4-83)

Avis (www.avislinea.com in Spanish) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2260 6242); Zona 9 (☎ 2339 3249; 6a Av 7-64)

Dollar (www.dollar.com) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2261 3257); Zona 10 (☎ 2332 7525; Av La Reforma 8-33)

Hertz (www.hertz.com.gt) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2470 3800, 2470 3838); Guatemala City Marriott Hotel (☎ 2339 7777); Holiday Inn (☎ 2332 2555); Hotel Real Inter-Continental Guatemala (☎ 2379 4444); Westin Camino Real (☎ 2368 0107); Zona 9 (☎ 2332 2242; 7a Av 14-76)

Tabarini (www.tabarini.com) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2260 6343); Zona 10 (☎ 2331 6108; 2a Calle A 7-30)

Tally Renta Autos (www.tallyrentaautos.com) Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora (☎ 2277 9072); Zona 1 (☎ 2232 0421/3327; 7a Av 14-60)

Thrifty (☎ 2379 8747; thrifty@intelnet.gt; 1a Av 13-74, Zona 10)

Shuttle Minibus

Door-to-door minibuses run from the airport to any address in Antigua (usually US\$10 per person, one hour). Look for signs in the airport exit hall or people holding up 'Antigua Shuttle' signs. The first shuttle leaves for Antigua about 7am and the last around 8pm or 9pm. Shuttle services from Guatemala City to popular destinations such as Panajachel and Chichicastenango (both around US\$25) are offered by travel agencies in Antigua such as Sin Fronteras – see p100 for contact details.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Aeropuerto La Aurora is in Zona 13, in the southern part of the city, 10 to 15 minutes from Zona 1 by taxi, half an hour by bus.

For the city bus, cross the road outside the arrivals exit and climb the steps. At the top, with your back to the terminal building, walk to the left down the approach road (about 100m), then turn right to the bus stop. Buses 83 'Terminal' and 83 'Bolívar' go to the Parque Central in Zona 1, passing through Zonas 9 and 4 en route: you can get off at any corner along the way. The 83 'Terminal' goes up 7a Av through Zonas 9, 4 and 1; the 83 'Bolívar' goes via Av Bolívar and then 5a Av. Both run about every 15 minutes, from 6am to 9pm, and cost US\$0.15. Going from the city center to the airport, bus 83 'Aeropuerto' goes south through Zona 1 on 10a Av, south through Zonas 4 and 9 on 6a Av, passes by the west end of La Aurora Zoo and the Zona 13 museums and stops right in front of the international terminal. It then continues

southward, passing close to all the Zona 13 guesthouses. For information on shuttle minibuses to/from the airport, see opposite.

Taxis wait outside the airport's arrivals exit. Official fares are posted on a sign here (US\$8 to US\$9 to Zona 9 or 10, US\$10 to Zona 1, US\$30 to Antigua), but in reality you may have to pay a bit more – US\$9 to US\$10 to Zona 1, US\$35 to Antigua. Be sure to establish the destination and price before getting in. A tip is expected. Prices for taxis to the airport, hailed on the street, are likely to be lower – around US\$6 from Zona 1. For Antigua, shuttle minibuses are more economical than taxis if there's only one or two of you.

Bus & Minibus

If you spend any time out and about in Guatemala City, especially Zona 1, its buses will become a major feature of your existence as they roar along in large numbers belching great clouds of black smoke. Jets flying low over the city center intermittently intensify the cacophony. Still, Guatemala City buses are cheap, frequent and, though often very crowded, useful. They are not, however, always safe. Theft and robbery are not unusual; there have even been murders on board. Buses cost US\$0.15 per ride: you pay the driver as you get on.

To get from Zona 1 to Zona 10, take bus 82 or 101 southbound on 10a Av between 8a and 13a Calles. These buses swing west to travel south down 6a Av for 1km or so before swinging southeast along Ruta 6 (Zona 4) then south along Av La Reforma. For the main

Inguat tourist office, get off on 6a Av at 22a Calle (Zona 1) and walk east along 22a Calle, then south down the far (east) side of 7a Av.

Traveling north to Zona 1, buses 82 and 101 go along Av La Reforma then 7a Av, Zona 4 (passing right by Inguat) and 9a Av, Zona 1.

To get to the Terminal de Autobuses in Zona 4 by city bus, it makes sense simply to get any bus that's going south through Zona 4 on 6a Av (such as bus 83 'Aeropuerto') or north through Zona 4 on 7a Av (such as bus 83 'Terminal'), then walk a few blocks west to the terminal. This saves you getting caught in the snarl-ups around the terminal itself. The same holds true in reverse if you want to get away from the Terminal de Autobuses by city bus.

City buses stop running about 9pm, and *ruteleros* (minibuses) begin to run up and down the main avenues. They run all night, until the buses resume their rattling rides at 5am. Hold up your hand at a street corner to stop a minibus or bus.

Taxi

Plenty of taxis cruise most parts of the city. Fares are negotiable; always establish your destination and fare before getting in. Zona 1 to Zona 10, or vice-versa, costs around US\$5.50 to US\$8. If you want to phone for a taxi, **Taxi Amarillo Express** (☎ 2232 1515) has metered cabs that often work out cheaper than others, although true *capitalenos* (capital city residents) will tell you that taximeters are all rigged and you get a better deal bargaining.