



Doing Business In Guatemala: The 2008 Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

Chapter 8: Business Travel

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- [Business Customs](#)
- [Travel Advisory](#)
- [Visa Requirements](#)
- [Telecommunications](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Language](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Local Time, Business Hours and Holidays](#)
- [Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings](#)
- [Web Resources](#)

Business Customs

[Return to top](#)

Guatemala, with a population of over 13.3 million, has the largest economy of Central America and is one of the most important U.S. trading partners in the Caribbean Basin region. Guatemalan business executives and government officials place great importance on personal contacts with suppliers. U.S. suppliers should be prepared to have a local representative or distributor and to travel to Guatemala personally. Travelers often are surprised at the accessibility to key decision-makers and by the openness and frankness of local buyers.

U.S. executives interested in pursuing business in Guatemala should approach local business people in the same manner than they would good clients in the United States. Exporters should be prepared to explain how their products and services can complement existing products and systems.

Dress code during Guatemala City business appointments depends on the type of meetings planned. If planning to visit factories or plants, blazers and khakis are allowed but no shorts or sandals. If this is a first business meeting it is better to err on the side of more formal attire. It is advisable to exchange business cards.

Promotional material should be in Spanish and emphasize U.S. origin. Though many private and public officials speak and read English, many technicians and engineers do not. Guatemalans are extremely receptive to technical presentations that are educational rather than sales oriented.

Guatemala has a developing economy, characterized by wide income disparities. Hotels and other tourist facilities in the principal tourist sites most frequented by visitors from the United States are generally good to excellent. Violent crime is a serious concern due to endemic poverty, an abundance of weapons, a legacy of social violence, and dysfunctional law enforcement and judicial systems.

Read the Department of State Background Notes on Guatemala with more detailed information on traveling to Guatemala.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1129.html

Entry and Exit Requirements:

A valid U.S. passport is required for all U.S. citizens, regardless of age, to enter Guatemala and to depart Guatemala for return to the U.S. Even if dual nationals are permitted to enter Guatemala on a second nationality passport, U.S. citizens returning to the United States from Guatemala are not allowed to board their flights without a valid U.S. passport. Certificates of Naturalization, birth certificates, driver's licenses, and photocopies are not accepted by Guatemalan authorities as alternative travel documents. While in Guatemala, U.S. citizens should carry their passports, or a photocopy of their passports, with them at all times.

An exit tax must be paid when departing Guatemala by air. The exit tax (currently \$30) is generally included in an airline ticket price, but may be charged separately. There is an additional airport security fee (20 Quetzales, approximately \$3.00) that all travelers must pay at the airport.

A U.S. citizen whose passport is lost or stolen in Guatemala must obtain a new passport at the U.S. Embassy as soon as possible and present it, together with a police report of the loss or theft, to the Direccion de Migracion (Guatemalan Immigration Agency), Assistant Director for Migratory Control, to obtain permission to depart Guatemala. The agency is located at 6 Avenida 3-11, Zona 4, Guatemala City. Office hours are weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; telephone 2411-2411. No fee is charged by Guatemalan immigration for this service.

In June 2006, Guatemala entered a "Central America-4 (CA-4) Border Control Agreement" with El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Under the terms of the agreement, citizens of the four countries may travel freely across land borders from one of the countries to any of the others without completing entry and exit formalities at Immigration checkpoints. U.S. citizens and other eligible foreign nationals, who legally enter any of the four countries, may similarly travel among the four countries, without obtaining additional visas or tourist entry permits for the other three countries. Immigration officials at the first port of entry determine the length of stay, up to a maximum period of 90 days.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security issues are handled via an interagency process. Due to mandatory screening requirements, this process can take a little longer. Requests for a U.S. Visa should be submitted as early as possible. Visa applicants should go to the following links for further information.

- State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>
- United States Visas: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>
- Visa forms: http://evisaforms.state.gov/instructions_Spanish.asp
- Other visa information: http://guatemala.usembassy.gov/niv_general_info.html

Telecommunications

[Return to top](#)

The use of Internet is widely accessible, by computers or laptops. Hotels offer Internet telephone service and cellular phone systems can be used in Guatemala City. Calls can be placed to the U.S. without any problem. Cell phones have to be programmed for roaming to Central America. Calls can also be placed through hotel operators or directly with AT&T, MCI, Sprint, Comtech Amigo calling cards, or collect. Telefonica of Spain, Telmex of Mexico and other international companies are competing in the market, providing telecommunications services, including Internet. There are many public phone booths around the city for use with calling cards.

Transportation

[Return to top](#)

Businesspersons can access Guatemala through airlines, several of which have direct flights to the US. U.S. airlines operating between Guatemala and the United States are: American Airlines, Delta Airlines, Continental Airlines, United Airlines, Spirit and U.S. Airways. Other airlines operating in Guatemala are: TACA, COPA, Iberia, Cubana de Aviacion, and Mexicana de Aviacion. There are direct flights between Guatemala and Miami, New Orleans, Los Angeles, New York, Washington D.C., Dallas, Atlanta, Houston and Charlotte.

Transportation between airport and hotels is available by taxis. The most important hotels have shuttle service to/from airport. Rent-a-Car companies are available, such as Avis, Hertz, Budget, National, Alamo, etc. However, traffic is very heavy and disorderly in the capital, Guatemala City. It is more advisable to take taxis from the major hotels and dispatch taxis such as Taxis Amarillos (yellow cabs). Public bus transportation is not recommended as it is not up to U.S. standards.

Please take note that the international Airport La Aurora is under reconstruction and expansion, as it has long outgrown its capacity. Though inaugurated in December 2007, construction is ongoing as of March, 2008.

Language

[Return to top](#)

Spanish is the official language in Guatemala. Many firms are accustomed to work in English; however, correspondence should be in Spanish. Catalogs and technical literature should be provided with a careful translation.

Health

[Return to top](#)

Medical Facilities and Health Information: A full range of medical care is available in Guatemala City, but medical care outside the city is limited. Guatemala's public hospitals frequently experience serious shortages of basic medicines and equipment. Care in private hospitals is generally adequate for most common illness and injuries, and many of the medical specialists working in them are U.S. trained and certified.

Food: Most well-known restaurants in Guatemala serve safe food and beverages. As in any part of the world, common sense must prevail. Hot food should be eaten hot, and cold food should be cold. Meat should be well cooked.

Drink: Bottled drinks are considered safe. Tap water is not considered potable. Commercially available water bottled in Guatemala from the Salvavidas plant has been judged safe for consumption. Be sure the heat-molded seal on the bottleneck has not been broken. All the reputable restaurants in Guatemala use ice from commercial sources and it is considered safe. Contrary to notices occasionally posted in some hotels, water from spigots and other non-bottled sources should not be considered safe to drink.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions such as insect bite protection may be obtained from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via CDC's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad and further health information for travelers consult the World Health Organization's (WHO) web site at <http://www.who.int/en>.

Medical Insurance: The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as medical evacuations.

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

[Return to top](#)

Local Time:

The hour in Guatemala is 1 hour behind the Eastern Standard Time, example:

Guatemala: 12:00 noon Chicago: 12:00 noon Miami: 1:00 p.m.

This changes to 2 hours during daylight savings time, since Guatemala does not make the switch.

Business Hours:

Business hours for commercial and industrial offices are between 08:00 and 18:00 hours, Monday through Friday. Manufacturing plants and constructions start at 07:00 and close between 16:00 and 17:00. Banks are open to the public at 09:00 and close at

18:00. Auto drive-through banking closes at 8:00 p.m. Some banks have automatic tellers that are open all night.

Holidays:

The following are U.S. and Guatemalan holidays observed during calendar year 2008:

January 1	Tuesday	New Year	(A & G)
January 21	Monday	Martin Luther King's Birthday	(A)
February 18	Monday	Presidents Day	(A)
March 20	Thursday	Holy Thursday	(G)
March 21	Friday	Good Friday	(G)
May 1	Thursday	Guatemalan Labor Day	(G)
May 26	Monday	Memorial Day	(A)
June 30	Monday	Army Day	(G)
July 4	Friday	U.S. Independence Day	(A)
August 15	Friday	Feast of the Assumption	(G)
September 1	Monday	U.S. Labor Day	(A)
September 15	Monday	Guatemala Independence Day	(G)
October 13	Monday	Columbus Day	(A)
October 20	Monday	Revolution Day	(G)
November 11	Tuesday	Veterans Day	(A)
November 27	Thursday	Thanksgiving Day	(A)
December 24	Wednesday	Christmas Eve – half day	(G)
December 25	Thursday	Christmas Day	(A & G)
December 31	Wednesday	New Year's Eve – half day	(G)

Note: A: American Holidays, G: Guatemalan Holidays

In addition, the banking sector celebrates the following holiday:

July 1 Bank Worker's Day

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

[Return to top](#)

The temporary entry of materials and personal belongings for personal use while in Guatemala, such as camera equipment, cellular telephones, laptop computers, etc., is generally not a problem. Larger quantities of products and display systems for participation in trade events or tools and equipment for projects should be imported temporarily with the assistance of a customs broker, or with the help of the particular event organizer.

Web Resources

[Return to top](#)

- Department of State, travel and travel warning information: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1129.html
- State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>
- United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>
- Visa forms: https://evisaforms.state.gov/instructions_Spanish.asp
- U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs: http://travel.state.gov/http://guatemala.usembassy.gov/niv_application_process.html

- World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/ith> - <http://www.who.int/en>
- Guatemala Embassy, Wash.D.C.: <http://guatemala-embassy.org>
- Customs Assistance: <http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/gt97fr01.html>
- U.S. Embassy in Guatemala: <http://usembassy.state.gov/guatemala>

[Return to table of contents](#)

U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest **Export Assistance Center** or the **U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center** at (800) USA-TRADE, or go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov>.

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, **The Department of Commerce** does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. **The Department of Commerce** can assist companies in these endeavors.