

Customs

Guatemalans prefer direct eye contact. Men shake hands when greeting one another. Women shake hands or use light touch when greeting one another. Men greet women with a handshake. They are often a little late for social gatherings. They eat three meals a day with the largest being at noon. Sunday is viewed as a holy day and a holiday.

Drugs/Alcohol

Drugs: Getting caught with drugs or selling drugs results in being in prison for a long time.

Alcohol: Beer and rum are the most common alcoholic drinks. The legal drinking age is 18. Being drunk in public is rude. It is common to drink at funerals.

Religious Practices

The majority of Guatemalans are Roman Catholic, but there has been a rise in Protestantism over the years. The Mormon Church also has a presence, along with a small number of Jews, Muslims and Buddhists. There are also beliefs and practices that have been passed down from ancestors about agriculture, childbirth, illness, protection from certain types of weather, and honoring the dead.

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Guatemala's Culture



Who are the Guatemalans?

Background

Guatemala means "land of forest" and it is a culture that was influenced by the arrival of the Spanish and other Europeans. The country is bordered by Mexico, the Pacific Ocean, Belize, the Caribbean Sea, Honduras and El Salvador. It is a very impoverished nation. Forty percent of the population is made up of indigenous people. Most of the people live in remote rural communities. Spanish is the official language along with 22 indigenous languages, which are dialects of the Mayan language. There was a 40-year period of civil war and violence between 1965-1996. This caused many people to leave the country and head to Mexico and the United States.



Medical Practices

Traditionally: The rural people of Guatemala don't always have access to health care. There are rural government-run clinics staffed by medical students. Guatemalans with less education use folk medicine for both physical and mental illness. This may include using herbs, a change in diet, magic, and prayer to saints, gods or the dead.

Modern medicine: It is available in Guatemala City for anyone who can afford it. There are free hospitals and clinics throughout the country.

Health

Forty nine percent of the children are malnourished, 49 percent of the people don't have access to water and sanitation services. Gastrointestinal and respiratory problems are common because of poor sanitation and poor nutrition. Over a third of childbearing age women use birth control. Guatemalans have the highest fertility rate among Latin Americans. Health in rural areas is affected by poverty, malnutrition, crime and infant mortality. Depression and alcoholism are also seen in the rural areas. Other problems are diabetes, high blood pressure and dental issues.

Safe sex and use of condoms is advised. The AIDS rate is 1.1 percent out of 100,000 people.

Family Structure

The Guatemalans follow traditional family and gender roles as the women primarily care for the home and cook. The men work in farming and agriculture, in businesses and as laborers in manufacturing. The women are usually less educated and paid less than men when involved in the work force.

In marriage, the couple chooses each other; however, there are arranged marriages. They practice monogamy. The poor don't usually marry and often the relationships don't last with many kids not knowing their father. Young married couples may first live with the husband's parents or in a house near the parents. Divorce is common even though the Catholic church does not approve.

Families are very close and really depend on each other. There is a strong desire for children. The families are often large.

Children

Children of the middle and upper-class are cared for by mothers, grandmothers or nannies. Children from the rural areas are cared for by mothers and older siblings. Babies are only breastfed for a couple of months, but may have a bottle for up to five years of age. Children are often given whatever they want to keep them from crying. Children begin school when they are seven years old. Only 22 percent of the children who finish sixth grade go on to junior high. Girls have a celebration when turning fifteen and as this is a rite of passage or coming of age, for boys it is age 18.



Death

Right after death someone will arrive to bathe and dress the deceased. Common practice is to use a wood coffin and bury the dead a few hours after the death.