

GUATEMALA

Guatemala is located in Central American, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Honduras and Belize, and bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between El Salvador and Mexico.

The land is filled with mountains and volcanoes and the weather is tropical to temperate. The capital of Guatemala has an active cultural life throughout the year. It is also a great place for shopping for handicrafts, wood carvings, leather, ceramics and textiles. Although Spanish is the dominant language of Guatemala, the Mayan people retain a multitude of native dialects.

Guatemala is a young democracy. A long civil war lasting 36 years ended in 1995 with a total genocide of over 200,000 Mayan civilians, out of a total population of 11 million, leaving about 200,000 orphans. In 1996, a democracy was established and has progressed in this way, showing a voter turnout of 82%.

Antigua was established as the second capital of Guatemala in 1543, lasting to 1773, when the capital was moved to its current location in Guatemala City. Antigua retains its colonial charm with cobblestone streets throughout the small city. If you could take away the cars, you might think you stepped back in time 300 years. Antigua is surrounded by the volcanoes, Volcan de Agua, Fuego, and Acatenango, which can often be seen on clear mornings. Antigua was the religious hub of Central America with 30 monastic settlements. Remains of more than 40 churches, convents, and monasteries can still be seen and explored in Antigua today.

The people of Guatemala are deeply religious. Holy week of Easter is a very important week in Antigua, hosting the largest Easter celebration in the Western hemisphere. In general, Catholic traditions have been blended with Mayan roots. Today, many other evangelical, or “Christian” denominations are found within Guatemala.

There is a tremendous gap in Guatemala between the “have’s” and “have not’s.” 79% of the population lives in poverty, with 59% in extreme poverty, meaning no running water, reliable shelter, or adequate food and water, and surviving on less than \$1/day. 28% to 41% of children work. The UN estimates over 12,000 orphans remain, although this number does not include the 1000’s of children living on the street or in the city dumps. More information about Guatemala can be found here:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guatemala>

So, when you look to the question, “What do we do?” it becomes, “Where do we start?” Our efforts will be focused on children living in orphanages or in “managed programs”, and/or poor or disadvantaged children and their families in indigenous communities.

This is where this mission trip enters, to continue programs of humanitarian aid that have already been set to action, while developing new ideas and programs to serve these children in the name of Jesus.