

La Antigua Guatemala COV 12. How to get there and go around.

1. A history linked to volcanoes and natural hazards.

Antigua Guatemala is located at the foot of Agua Volcano, 18 km from Fuego volcano, and 16 km from Acatenango volcano. Fuego volcano being one of the most active volcanoes in the region, and the site of a tragic eruption that killed hundreds of people in 2018. The city was established in its current location in 1542, in response to the destruction of the previous nearby Capital City by lahars from Agua volcano on September 11 of 1541. It served as the Capital for about 232 years, until a series of earthquakes in 1773 destroyed the City again, and the decision was made to relocate it once more, to the current location of Guatemala City. Antigua Guatemala is therefore a City that has experienced in the most dramatic terms the violence of earthquakes and volcanoes, and in that sense, it is very much a City on Volcanoes.

Today the city has a population of 50,000 and it is one of the main tourist destinations in Guatemala. Due to its historical significance Antigua Guatemala is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It offers a diverse set of lodging and eating options, cultural and nature activities, as well as a vibrant nightlife and other tourist attractions. For both its historic significance related to volcanoes, and for its hospitality and the never ending list of things for visitors to do and see, Antigua Guatemala is the ideal City to host COV-12.

2. How to get to Antigua Guatemala and/or Guatemala City?

Travel to Guatemala is possible from most countries via commercial airlines. Your destination airport would be **La Aurora International Airport** in Guatemala City, the closest international airport to Antigua Guatemala. Roundtrip ticket prices vary depending on where you are traveling from and how far in advance you buy your tickets, in general the sooner you buy your ticket the cheaper the prices will be. Traveling is also possible by bus if you are coming from a neighboring country (in Central America and Mexico). International bus lines usually deliver you to Guatemala City as the closest destination to Antigua Guatemala. Tickets for most of these bus companies can be reserved and bought online.

IMPORTANT: When traveling internationally, make sure that you have any **visas and other similar documents you may need for entering Guatemala and any other countries you travel through**, even if it's just in transit at an airport for a few hours, be particularly aware of this when you buy your tickets. The visa application process can be long and may have to be done well in advance of the travel dates. This link of the Guatemalan Foreign Affairs Ministry (in Spanish) lists the types of visas that citizens from different countries need to travel to Guatemala: https://www.minex.gob.gt/Visor_Pagina.aspx?PaginaID=21

Once you have arrived in Guatemala City you have several options to travel to Antigua Guatemala, you can travel directly to Antigua Guatemala from the airport or you can choose to stay in Guatemala City the first night. Direct shuttle or taxi services from the La Aurora airport or the bus terminal to hotels in Antigua Guatemala cost between 25 and 50 USD and can be

arranged for different times. The time to travel between the airport and Antigua can be between 1 and 2 hours, depending on traffic. Uber services are also widely available in Guatemala, and can also be used for traveling from the airport to Antigua. Some hotels also offer a shuttle service, but make sure to ask if this is an option with your hotel. Car rental is also available, particularly if you plan to extend your travels in Guatemala and visit less accessible areas of the country, but is not a cheap and convenient option if you just plan to attend the conference in Antigua Guatemala, or be part of conference related field trips where transportation is provided.

Traveling can always be subject to delays, **make sure you leave a reasonable amount of time between connecting flights or buses** when selecting your schedule. Travel insurance may also be an option at some cost, if you are concerned about travel disruptions. If you plan to attend the full conference, **make sure your arrival in Antigua Guatemala is at least one day before the conference start**, i.e. arrive in Antigua Guatemala on the 10th of February, and your **departure is at least one day after the conference ends**, i.e. depart from Antigua Guatemala on the 18th of February. Add extra time to your arrival and departure schedule if you plan to attend pre or post conference workshops and or field trips. Also, make sure to allow for enough time when planning for your trip back home, including the time it may take you to go from Antigua Guatemala to the airport or bus station in Guatemala City.

3. Where to stay, where to eat and what to do?

Antigua Guatemala offers a large number of hotels within 1 km of the conference venue, offering a wide variety of lodging options, from hotels to hostels and Airbnb options. The prices will increase and the room availability decrease as we approach the conference dates, if possible make reservations with enough anticipation. The venue where most of the conference will take place is the Porta Hotel, a high end hotel in Antigua Guatemala, and for registered conference participants they offer discount rates, at the following link: <https://bit.ly/cov12antigua-pha> . This is a practical option for participants who wish to stay close to the conference venue and avoid commutes. If you prefer to spend the first night in the City rather than travel to Antigua immediately, it is also possible to stay in one of the many hotels and other lodging options. Several hotels are located near the airport in “zone 13”, being only a few minutes away from the airport. [This Google Map shows some of these hotels.](#)

Food options are equally varied and cover a wide range of options and prices. Food options in Antigua Guatemala include Guatemalan cuisine and international cuisine from many other countries. Street food is also widely available in Antigua Guatemala, but the visitor should be aware that there is always some risk of foodborne illness, particularly if the visitor is not accustomed to the local street food. Although water from the tap is in theory potable, in practice it is not always safe to drink it. Bottled water, although not a very environmentally friendly option, is sometimes a safer alternative from a health perspective.

Antigua Guatemala is a pedestrian friendly city, with most services well within walking distance of hotels, including restaurants, grocery stores and supermarkets, pharmacies, and other types of stores and commercial activities. Both Guatemala City and Antigua Guatemala are located at

an elevation of ~ 1500 meters above sea level, which people who are not familiar with such elevations may notice when walking or exercising. Acclimatizing to the elevation usually takes a day or two. The climate in both cities is relatively dry with minimum, mean and maximum temperatures usually in the range of 10, 20 and 25 celsius respectively. Rain is unusual during this time of the year, but it cannot be ruled out. High UV sun exposure can also be a concern, particularly for those who plan to go on field trips, but also just walking on the streets of Antigua for prolonged periods, travelers are encouraged to consider sun protection as needed.

More information can be found also in this site: <https://www.geovisitguatemala.gt/> To search for sites in Antigua Guatemala just write "Antigua Guatemala" in the search bar. The results will include hotels, restaurants, etc.

4. Other things to consider

Language: The official language spoken in Guatemala is Spanish, and although some people speak English, particularly in Antigua Guatemala, you should not expect that people will understand and speak any other language than Spanish. Make sure to at least know some basic words or phrases in Spanish in case of emergency. Real time translation apps can be useful, but you may not be able to rely on them always, particularly if you don't have access to internet or wifi, or the local cell phone network.

Money: The Guatemalan currency is the Quetzal (~ 7.8 quetzales per USD). Although some places may take US dollars, most places do not. Always carry some cash with you in quetzales. You can exchange money at the airport or at local banks, but exchange rates may be very unfavorable, and exchanging money at a bank may require waiting in long lines and doing cumbersome paperwork. The more practical option is to use an international valid credit or debit card and use an ATM (cash machine) at a secure location (hotel, bank, etc.) to get some cash (ATM fees of 5 to 10 USD usually apply as well for each transaction). As always, make sure as much as you can that the ATM is not rigged to clone your card. Although having cash in the local currency is always a good idea, credit and debit cards can also be directly used for paying in many places, like hotels and restaurants, although a fee is usually charged with each transaction. Some places also accept payment through the phone, but this form of payment is still not widely accepted, and you should make sure that this option works with a local SIM card. Be aware that many activities and amenities have different prices for nationals and foreign tourists. Some places also make discounts for students, so bring your student ID if you have one.

Phones, WiFi and internet: Cell phone networks cover extensively the country, and signal access in both Antigua Guatemala and Guatemala City is usually good. Although roaming services by international providers are a possibility, they tend to be very expensive. The cheaper and more practical alternative is to buy a local SIM card (starting at about USD 10) and install it in your phone, if your phone is not SIM-locked. If your phone is SIM-locked and you don't want to risk unlocking it in-country, you can buy a relatively cheap phone (40-80 USD) with a local SIM card. WiFi is also widely available in hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, etc., although the

strength of the signal and its quality and speed can be poor. Some hotels also provide areas with computers for the guests to use, and in some places you can also find “internet cafes”, but such places are much less common nowadays and travelers should not rely on having access to one for internet use.

Local laws and regulations: Finally, be aware that local laws and regulations can differ significantly from those in your country. The possession of certain items and substances can be considered a crime, particularly related to recreational drugs, and can lead to heavy prison sentences, even if their possession in your country may not be illegal. Make sure to know what items are legally allowed in the country before you bring them. Also, when you enter and leave the country you are required to provide a sworn declaration of the items you are bringing with you, including money in cash, and the failure to do so could be considered a crime, and can result in fines and even prison, particularly if large sums of money are not declared. If for some reason you end up in trouble with the local authorities, you should immediately request help from your country's diplomatic representation.