

36 GUATEMALA Guatemala City, general views

In a valley ringed by green hills and lofty mountains, the capital of the republic, Guatemala City, is located on a beautiful plateau almost 5,000 feet above sea level. This bustling, modern national capital, with a population of 650,000 inhabitants, has lovely parks, attractive buildings, broad avenues, and modern transportation; it dates from 1776, when it was founded to replace Antigua Guatemala -- then Santiago de Guatemala -- partly destroyed by earthquakes. In its 191 years of existence, it has achieved a well-deserved place as a center of cultural activities, commerce, and restful living.

The city was almost completely rebuilt after the devastating earthquakes of 1917-1918 in both modern and old Spanish style architecture. Some of the old houses are one or two story buildings of Spanish design with blank walls and recessed grilled windows facing the streets, while flowering patios are hidden within. In recent years, more and more tall modern buildings have been constructed, such as those which house the National Palace, the Municipality, the Social Security Institute, banks and others. To the south of the city extends the large campus of the University of San Carlos de Guatemala. At this altitude the climate is almost perfect the year round, the mean temperature ranging from 62 to 68 degrees, with brilliant sunshine most days and a crisp freshness in the air at night.

The city is laid out with numbered avenues extending north and south and numbered streets, east and west. Parque Central, in the center of town, is divided by Sixth Avenue, the most important street for shopping. The park extends for two city blocks. The eastern part, across the street from the National Palace, is called Parque Central, while the western part, containing a plaque of the Society of Geography and History commemorating the place where the Palace of the Captains-General stood and the independence of

Central America was signed, and with a bandstand and a beautiful fountain lit at night, is known as Parque de la Fuente Luminosa. The green-tinted and lavishly decorated National Palace is situated north of the park. Especially noted for its wood carvings, frescoes, and wrought-iron grillwork, this is considered one of the finest public buildings in the Americas. To the west are the National Library and the National Archives.

Behind the National Palace is the Presidential House. The Cathedral, on the east side of Parque Central, is a large structure some 320 feet long and 110 feet wide. It was begun in 1782 but not completed until 1868. The church contains five arched naves and 16 altars. Many paintings and statues of great value were brought here from the ruined churches of Antigua Guatemala. One of the few remaining colonial buildings in the city, the palace of the Archbishop, is next door to the Cathedral. Directly across the street and behind the Cathedral is the Central Market, which occupies a whole city block, built on the former site of the first cemetery of the city, where tropical and highland fruits, vegetables, flowers, and handicrafts from all over the country are sold at stalls, some attended by Indian women in native dress. There are also other markets that are equally colorful.

Among the many churches in the Capital the Church of the Cerro del Carmen, located on a small hill on the northern outskirts of the city, is of special interest, and commands an excellent view of the entire countryside. Other churches of historic interest include Santo Domingo, where the patron saint of Guatemala is enthroned; the nineteenth-century church and monastery of San Francisco; the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, which is said to contain the most beautiful altars of the city; and the church of Santa Rosa which, for 26 years after the capital was moved to its present site, served as the cathedral, and Our Lady of La Asuncion, containing the image of the patroness of Guatemala City. In marked contrast is the colorful Templo de la Expiacion in the southwestern sector of the city, a striking example of modern architecture.

Minerva Park, in the northern part of the city,

contains the celebrated relief map of the country, constructed in 1905 by Francisco Vela and Claudio Urrutia. The map covers over a quarter of an acre of land and gives an excellent bird's-eye view of the republic's mountains, waterways, roads and towns. It has been brought up to date by the Instituto Geografico Nacional.

Aurora Park, the largest and most popular park in the city, lies in the southern sector of the city. Several museums are to the south, including the National Museum of History and Fine Arts and the Natural History and Archeological museums.

An equestrian statue of Justo Rufino Barrios stands in front of the railroad station in a plaza named for him. The Tower of the Reformer, a 229-foot steel spire straddling a main street in the southern sector, was created to commemorate the centenary of Barrios' birth. The 50,000-capacity stadium, located almost in mid-city, is the scene of soccer and baseball games and track meets.

While beautiful modern homes are found in the vicinity of Avenida La Reforma, a spacious, tree-lined street with several statues of figures outstanding in Guatemalan history, the finest homes are found in the newly developed residential area, south of the city, at Santa Clara, Tivoli, Villa de Guadalupe, and nearby areas.

- 36A National Palace from Century Square
- 36B Park Scene
- 36C Telephone building
- 36D Town Hall
- 36E National Palace
- 36F National Library
- 36G Archeological Museum

- 36H "Cerro del Carmen" Chapel
- 36I "Yurrita" Chapel
- 36J Cathedral