



# CULTUREGUIDE GUATEMALA

SERIES 1  
SECONDARY (7–12)



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
**KENNEDY CENTER**  
FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



# GUATEMALA CULTUREGUIDE

This unit is published by the International Outreach Program of the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University as part of an effort to foster open cultural exchange within the educational community and to promote increased global understanding by providing meaningful cultural education tools.

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# WHY STUDY CULTURES?

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For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulous, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we're studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established International Outreach as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 *gratis* cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. *CultureGuides* derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty iMAC, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

*CultureGuides* share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try and “make culture real.”<sup>2</sup> Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that *CultureGuides* will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

<sup>1</sup> Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon. *Introducing Cultural Studies*, Totem Books, New York: 1998.

<sup>2</sup> *The Edge: The E-Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Summer 1998, Vol. 1(3) Posted 10/11/98, <http://interculturalrelations.com/v1i3Summer1998/sum98sorrellshall.htm>.



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# TRADITIONS

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## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation methods vary regionally throughout the world and have developed in order to accommodate changing lifestyles. Differing means of travel often reveal and foster a society's values. For example, in New York, swift subways and hurried taxis cater to the city's fast-paced way of life, while in Europe, the Eurail has facilitated interdependence between Western European nations.



### Starting Points

1. Think of the modes by which people travel in your country. How does transportation reflect what your culture values? How has transportation shaped culture in your society?
2. Guatemalans feel differently about personal space than Americans do. In Guatemala, extended families live in the same house, friends greet with a kiss, and people stand close to each other when talking. How do American and Guatemalan cultures differ with regards to personal space?
3. In Guatemala, few people own cars. Imagine that your car, your family's car, and your friends' cars all disappeared. How would you travel to school, to practice, or to the mall? How would this change your life?



### Information

#### Buses in Guatemala

Transportation in Guatemala is very different than in the United States. In the United States, most people own cars and use them for everything—from getting to the grocery store to traveling to the beach. In Guatemala, however, most people do not own an automobile, so they use other modes of transport.

In Guatemala, villages are often far from the city. Guatemalans often walk long distances each day to work or to go shopping. If their village is far enough from the city, they will walk many miles just to get to a bus route to ride into town.

Guatemalan buses are normally old school buses from the United States that are operated privately by bus owners (**see Traditions Visual 1**). They are often painted in bright colors and decorated with religious images, such as Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Most of the buses have overhead racks along the ceiling for personal belongings. These racks are useful because many passengers are traveling long distances with products to sell in the city, or they are returning with purchased items. Baggage and other items too large to be placed inside the bus on the ceiling racks are placed on top of the bus, secured by railings that circumvent the bus roof. A ladder on the back of



the bus allows the bus employees to load cargo onto the roof. These employees often climb up and down the outside ladders or walk on top of the bus while it is moving!

Guatemalan buses are often too full for all passengers to sit, so in order for standing passengers to keep from falling, most buses have welded a metal support bar to the ceiling. The bar runs from the front to the back of the bus and is easy to grab in these tight moments. Drivers continue to stop for more passengers even after the bus is full and the aisle is crowded, requiring an increasing amount of flexibility to let someone by who wants to exit. Often the person collecting bus fares will also squeeze through very tight crowds in order to reach everyone. Though a metal bar seems like a simple and insignificant addition to the bus, it has helped many grateful passengers avoid embarrassing falls and unfortunate injuries.

### **The Story of an American on a Guatemalan Bus**

Growing up in the United States and experiencing American culture, I learned to value my personal space and individuality. These were two gifts I greatly treasured and respected in others. My experience on a Guatemalan bus altered my view.

When I first arrived in Guatemala, I needed a ride into the capital city, so I went to wait for a bus. I waited for about fifteen minutes and finally spotted an old school bus coming up the road. I noticed that it was not a typical old school bus, but it had been painted with all types of colors, and the driver had named the bus Betty. The driver invited me on the bus, but I thought he was crazy. There was absolutely no way I was going to fit on that bus. There must have been three hundred people on it already, with people hanging out the windows and doors. Nevertheless, the driver insisted, and I squeezed my way on. I had never felt so crowded before. I turned to look at my neighbors on the bus, and they smiled and said, “*Hola. ¿cómo está?*” (How are you?). I responded, “*Bien, pero no puedo respirar*” (Good, but I can’t breathe). Then they kindly added, “*No tenga pena, se adaptará.*” (Don’t worry, you will get used to it).

We continued down the road towards the capital, and every so often the bus would stop and somehow more people would get on. While I felt uncomfortable, everyone else seemed to look happy and quite normal. The radio blasted, and the bus driver looked pleased to have a full bus and therefore a full pocket of money. I glanced at my watch and realized it would be another hour or so until I arrived in Guatemala City. My heart sank, but then I realized that I better make the best of the crowded bus ride. I began to talk to my neighbors and realized how happy and friendly they were. We talked and talked, and before I knew it, the bus arrived at my stop.

By this point, I did not feel uncomfortable, and, in fact, I was having fun with my new friends. As I got off the bus, I thought the bus ride had been fun and I did not mind being squished with a bunch of friendly people. Today, I still value my personal space and individuality, but I also understand the importance of closeness to others and friendliness, as demonstrated to me by the Guatemalan people.





## Activities

1. In a large group, stand close together in the corner of the room. Simulating a Guatemalan bus ride, after a few minutes, have someone act as the bus driver, and tell the person farthest in the corner that his or her stop is next. He or she will attempt to squeeze out in order to exit. Repeat the exercise two or three times. Discuss how you felt relinquishing your personal space to the other passengers. Discuss other ideas or feelings you had during the exercise.
2. Research and record the price of gasoline in your town, the number of gallons of gas that you or your family use each week, and the cost of a monthly bus pass. Roughly calculate the amount of money you spend on gas in one week. Multiply the amount by four to obtain a monthly total. Compare the monetary costs of riding the bus and driving. Discuss nonmonetary costs that should be considered in the comparison (i.e., time, convenience, pollution).
3. If you live more than a mile from school or work, try walking there one morning this week. If you do not, walk somewhere that is further than a mile. If you had to walk this distance every day to work or school, what adjustments would you have to make in your life?
4. Refer to and learn the phrases and gestures in **Traditions Visual 2**.



## Discussion Questions

1. How might the closeness of Guatemalan bus rides enhance or contribute to other aspects of Guatemalan life?
2. How do cultural differences with regard to personal space develop?
3. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of modes of and attitudes about transportation in the United States and Guatemala.
4. How do you think transportation throughout the world will change in the future? How will technological advances in transportation influence culture?



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# FOLKLORE & LANGUAGE

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## THE RESPLENDENT QUETZAL

All groups of people create symbols from everyday objects to stand for the values of their group. In Guatemala, the rare, resplendent quetzal bird is used to remind the people of their heritage of freedom. In ancient times, the bird's feathers were worn, but today the bird is more rare, so pictures are used instead. However, the symbol retains its significance.



### Starting Points

1. Introduce the topic by asking about familiar symbols and how they are used. You might consider the American bald eagle, a state or national flag, or the city or state seal.
2. Display pictures of the quetzal and the Mayan ruins (see **Folklore & Language Visuals 1–6**) and tell stories about its symbolic uses among the Mayans.
3. Show some Guatemalan currency (see **Folklore & Language Visual 7**) and explain how the symbol of the quetzal is used today. Talk about what can be done to save the quetzal.



### Information

#### Legends of the Quetzal

The people who first cultivated the land of Guatemala were the Mayans. Their time of greatest prosperity seems to have taken place between 500 B.C.E. to about 900 C.E. They initially lived in small villages, but with time they gathered and built remarkable cities. An example is the city of Tikal. Tremendous temple-pyramids, such as the one at Tikal, were used for religious purposes. Archaeologists have recently discovered that if you stand at the base of one of these pyramids behind its four staircases and clap your hands, the echo sounds just like the quetzal's call.

The Mayans have a sacred book called the *Popol Vuh* that describes the creation of the world and the gods. In that book, it says that the first fathers and mothers were protected by the green and blue tail feathers of the quetzal.

As you can see, the quetzal was a very sacred symbol to the Mayan people (see **Folklore & Language Visual 1**). The bird was not only recognized for its beauty, but was also believed to possess special powers that could guarantee wealth, freedom, and prosperity. The body of the quetzal is small (perhaps fifteen inches long), but the bright tail feathers can be more than two feet long. In ancient times, the Mayan kings and priests would send their most skillful hunters out to catch a quetzal. However, the bird was never killed. In fact, if the bird ever were killed, he who



killed it would be put to death. Once captured, the hunters would remove the tail feathers for the king's headdress, then release the bird. They could not transport the entire bird because the quetzal dies quickly in captivity. The king or priest would then put the feathers in his headdress, thus acquiring the quetzal's sacred powers.

In 1524 C.E., the Mayans were overtaken. The Spanish, led by Pedro de Alvarado, attacked the Mayan people, beginning a vicious war. The Battle of Pacaja was the most decisive battle, for it was here that King Tecun Uman fell. There is a legend in Guatemala that when this great Mayan king was slain, a quetzal appeared in the sky. The bird saw the suffering of the dying king and swooped down to protect him. It spread its wings to protect the wound on the king's chest, staining its own breast with blood. That is why the quetzal's chest is a deep red.

### **The Quetzal Today**

It wasn't until almost three hundred years later, in September 1821, that Guatemala regained its independence from Spain. The new flag displays a quetzal in the center, a symbol of the people's new freedom and proud way of life. Today, not only the Guatemalan flag bears a quetzal, but so does the money. In fact, the name of the currency in Guatemala is the Quetzal. There is also an award called La Orden de Quetzal, which is the highest award any citizen can receive in recognition for outstanding service rendered to the country of Guatemala.

The resplendent quetzal is a very rare bird today. Because of habitat destruction, it can only be found in the mountains and in dense rain forests (**see Folklore & Language Visual 2**). Bird watchers will wait several days, camped out in the rainforests of northern Guatemala, with the hope of catching a glimpse of this rare bird. Because it is so difficult to see this bird, there is a joke in Guatemala that if you want to see a quetzal flying free, it's best to throw a Quetzal bill and watch it fly away. If nothing is done to protect its habitat, the quetzal faces certain extinction.



### **Activities**

1. Create a quetzal headdress. You will need: green and blue construction paper, scissors, crayons or markers, and tape, glue, or staples.

Cut two strips, about one-inch wide, of green or blue construction paper. Fasten them end to end with tape, glue, or staples to make one extra-long strip. Add any colors or designs you choose. (The ancient Mayans used an alphabet of smiling faces to decorate their work and to write a message at the same time. You might try something like that.) Bend the strip around your head and measure your head size. Fasten the strip at the right; size and cut off any extra paper.

Using the picture of the quetzal as reference, draw some of the quetzal's long tail feathers on the rest of your green and blue paper. Remember that the quetzal is a rare, but powerful bird, so even a few feathers will mean a lot of power and prosperity. Use paint or markers to decorate your feathers. Then, cut them out.

Choose one of the seams in the paper loop to be the back of the headdress. Fasten your feathers at the seam in the back of your headdress so that the feathers hang down your back like a tail.



2. Create your own mascot or symbol. Consider animals, plants, or household objects. Try to choose something other than typical American symbols such as a bald eagle. Draw a picture or diagram of your symbol. Remember that colors and sizes can be important to a symbol too. Make sure you can explain how your mascot symbolizes your values and beliefs. Where might you display your symbol? On clothing? Coins? Stamps?
3. Make your own myth explaining how something in nature came about. It can be sad, like the story of the quetzal's red breast, or funny.
4. Memorize and recite the quetzal poem (see **Folklore & Language Visual 8**).
5. Act out the Battle of Pacaja. Show how the Mayans revered the quetzal before the Spanish came. Add an epilogue to your dramatization describing the eventual overthrow of the Spanish. You might make it a serious play or a comedy with a talking quetzal. Be creative.



### Discussion Questions

1. Make a list of some common school, city, state, or national mascots. Where are these symbols displayed? What do they stand for? Why do you think these particular plants, animals, or objects were chosen? Do you think any of them have ancient significance? Religious significance?
2. Who were the Mayans? When did they live? What did they believe about the quetzal? Do you think the quetzal really has special or sacred powers? Why or why not?
3. When did Spain conquer the Mayans? When did these people gain independence? Why did they choose to put the quetzal on their national flag? What are some of the values that the quetzal symbolizes?
4. Where do quetzals live? Why are they so rare? What can we do to make sure they don't become extinct? Remember, these birds will die in captivity, so we can't put them in zoos.



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# FOOD

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## MEALTIME

The Guatemalans exemplify the economic skill of working with what you have. Guatemalan food is directly connected with its climate and agricultural production. Although agricultural production is simple, it is a massive part of Guatemala's economy and feeds millions.



### Starting Points

1. Dress as an ancient Mayan and tell how important food is in your culture.
2. Go to the grocery store and purchase papaya, platanos, and mangos (or other familiar tropical fruits). Bring them to class, cut them up, and serve them on toothpicks.
3. Get into groups and discuss what types of food Americans eat. Ask each group to list what types of food they think people in Guatemala eat. Share the lists from each group with the class.



### Information

#### Mealtime

Three meals a day are normal in the city. After a breakfast of coffee and porridge or beans and eggs, city people typically do not eat until their mid-day *almuerzo* (lunch). This is a large meal which usually begins with soup followed by meat, rice, vegetables, and salad. Pudding or fruit may be eaten for dessert. After the large mid-day meal, it is usual to have a snack of coffee and a sweet pastry about 4:00 P.M. Beans and tortillas are eaten in the evening, maybe with scrambled eggs and onion.

In the country, the day begins with coffee, black beans, and tortillas. Around 10:00 A.M., people like to have a mid-morning snack, perhaps a drink of rice or corn with cinnamon. Particularly in the indigenous cuisine, the two keystones of Guatemalan food are corn and beans. The beans, black and kidney-shaped, can show up at any meal. Eating black beans and tortillas for every meal may not seem like the most pleasant diet, but Guatemalans are very grateful for what they have and never complain about the lack of something better.

Corn also may be eaten at any meal in the country. Corn mixed with sugar to make a sweet drink is called *atol*, while cornmeal wrapped in a banana leaf and steamed is called a *tamal*. A *chuchito* is a deliciously stuffed package of cornmeal steamed in a corn husk. Finely-ground cornmeal mixed with lime is shaped into thin patties and grilled to make tortillas.



## Family

Guatemalan families always sit down together at mealtime. They eat together because they love to be together. At the end of each meal, each person says “*gracias*” (thank you) and all at the table respond with “*buen provecho*” (good benefit). Guatemalans never forget to say *gracias*. This gratitude is shown out of respect for the mother who prepared the food and shows the love children and husbands have for their mothers and wives.

## Mercados, the Guatemalan Market

In Guatemala, especially outside of the capital, it is very rare to find a grocery store like those we have in the United States. Instead, Guatemalans will go to outdoor markets to buy and sell their goods. These outdoor markets are called *mercados*. Each morning, before sunrise, people selling goods gather in the mercado to prepare for those who will soon come to buy goods.

They set up little booths where they display the food that they have brought to sell (see **Food Visual 1**). Nearly anything can be sold in mercados. People will sell fruits, vegetables, meat, and all kinds of food. Besides this, one may also find clothing, pots and pans, cassette tapes, and many other items. As you may have noticed, there are no price tags displayed. This is because there is no set price. In Guatemala, it is very common to barter for products. A shopper visiting the mercado may ask how much something costs. The first given price, however, is rarely accepted by the shopper. In Guatemala, it is not rude to ask for a lower price. After some discussion, a price is determined. If both the consumer and seller agree upon it, the exchange is made.

## Traditional Foods

Just as America has its traditional foods, such as hamburgers and pizza, Guatemala is known for certain dishes. In Guatemala, it is not uncommon to eat black beans, eggs, rice, and tortillas just about every day. These foods are easy to make and are inexpensive compared to other foods. Because Guatemala has such rich soil, they also have many fruits and vegetables that we are unfamiliar with in the United States. Some fruits commonly seen in Guatemala, yet rarely seen here, are papaya, platanos, and mangos.

A Papaya is large and looks somewhat like a watermelon, but it is orange on the inside. Platanos look like oversized bananas, but they are a bit harder. They are bitter if not cooked. Guatemalans like them fried with sugar and honey on top. Platanos cooked this way make a tasty dessert. Mangos are another common treat. Although many of us may have tried these juicy fruits on occasion, we are not nearly as familiar with them as Guatemalans. In Guatemala, mangos are far more common than apples, oranges, and other fruits that we are more familiar with. These are just a few of the many kinds of tropical foods Guatemala has.

## Recipe for Eggs on Tortillas

### You will need:

vegetable oil	6 eggs
6 corn tortillas	1 1/2 C shredded Monterey Jack
1 jar (12 oz.) salsa	cheese



### Preparation

1. Cover bottom of an eight-inch skillet with oil and heat over medium heat until hot.
2. Cook tortillas, one at a time, in the hot oil, turning once, until crisp (about three minutes). Drain.
3. Sprinkle with salt if desired. Keep warm.
4. In a ten-inch skillet heat salsa to boiling. Reduce heat.
5. Break each egg into a custard cup or saucer, carefully slipping one egg at a time into the salsa.
6. Cover and cook for six to eight minutes.
7. Place one egg on each tortilla, spooning salsa over the egg.
8. Top with cheese.

Yield: six servings

### Recipe for Baked Black Beans

#### You will need:

5 C water	1 tsp salt
12 oz dried black beans	1/4 tsp pepper
2 medium onions, chopped	1/2 C water
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped	4 slices bacon, cut into 3/4" pieces
1 1/2 T instant beef bouillon	4 C hot cooked rice

### Preparation

1. Heat water and beans to boiling in a Dutch oven or on a stove.
2. Boil for two minutes and remove from heat.
3. Cover and let stand for one hour.
4. Stir onions, garlic, bouillon, salt, and pepper into beans. Add enough water to beans to cover if necessary.
5. Heat to boiling, then reduce heat.
6. Cover and simmer until beans are tender (about an hour). Don't boil or beans will burst.
7. Stir in water and bacon.
8. Place bean mixture in ungreased three-quart casserole pan.
9. Cover and bake at 350° for 1 1/2 hours.
10. Serve over rice.

Yield: eight servings



### Activities

1. Split students into groups of five to seven people. Sit around a table and simulate a Guatemalan meal provided with black beans and corn tortillas (any can of black beans and a package of corn tortillas will do). Eat, and try to speak in Spanish during the meal (**see Traditions Visual 2**). All attending should say “gracias” and “buen provecho” when the meal is over. All should try to picture themselves in Guatemala, and be grateful for the beans and tortillas.



2. Barter for your beans. You will need a bag of dry black beans and fake money (this can be made by the students in class. You may want to do this activity after talking to the students about Guatemalan money). Give each student a set amount of money and a set amount of beans. For example, you may give each student twenty-five beans and ten quetzals. Then, tell the students that they are at the mercado. Their goal is to obtain either as much money or beans as they can by bartering with one another. There is no set exchange rate. Explain that the person with the most money after five minutes will earn a prize. Likewise, the person with the most beans will earn a prize.
3. Go to the grocery store and purchase papaya, platanos, and mangos (or another tropical fruit that students may not be very familiar with). Bring them to class, cut them up, and serve them to the students on toothpicks. You may also want to try to mix this activity with the first one and have the students barter for fruit as if they were in the mercado.
4. Plan a visit to a Mexican restaurant and watch how tortillas are made, or invite someone to do an in-class presentation. Afterwards, ask what this process tells about life in Guatemala.
5. Invite a guest speaker from Central America, or another region, and have him or her explain what it is like to eat American food, how he or she views it, and how it is different or similar to the food in his or her homeland.



### Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been to an outdoor market? Did you like it better than a grocery store? Why do you think the people in Guatemala sell their goods in outdoor markets?
2. How would you like to be a farmer in Guatemala? What do you think Guatemalan farmers could teach farmers in the United States? What could we teach them?
3. Guatemalans eat black beans, tortillas, and rice every day. Are there any foods that you can eat everyday? Why do you eat them everyday?
4. How does a typical Guatemalan meal setting compare to a typical meal setting in your family?



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# CROSS-CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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## CLOTHING

The clothes people wear reflect who they are. In diverse Guatemala, clothing comes in a wide variety of colors and fabrics. Mayan clothing varies in style according to one's village or tribe. The recent westernization of Mayan clothing styles is indicative of their evolving lifestyle. Two distinct styles are visible in Guatemala: western, worn by Ladinos and some Mayans, and traditional Mayan.



### Starting Points

1. What does a typical Indian wear? What do Indians do? What do you know about Central America? Was it colonized? By whom?
2. What does your clothing say about you? How does your individual style represent your individual personality? Would you say your style is American?
3. Clothing styles evolve over time. What are traditional American clothes? Have you ever felt forced to change your style to suit your environment, such as for a job or school policy? Do you feel Americans are trendsetters, or are we simply copying European styles?



### Information

#### History

The population of Guatemala is made up of two major subgroups—Ladinos and indigenous Guatemalans. In the sixteenth century, Spaniards conquered South America and moved their way up into Central America. The Ladinos are of European or Spanish descent and live primarily in the cities. Their society tends to be very modernized and Spanish is their first language. The Ladino people make up the wealthier population of Guatemala and most of them live in the capital—Guatemala City. They wear European or American-style clothing.

The indigenous people, on the other hand, are descendants of the ancient Mayans, who have lived in Guatemala for thousands of years. They live predominantly in rural towns and villages in the highlands of Guatemala and work on small farms to earn their living. Indigenous Guatemalans speak various Mayan languages, such as *K'ekchi* and *Quiche*. Each language is very different from Spanish. They sometimes speak Spanish as a second language. Many of them still wear their traditional Mayan clothing.

#### Guatemalan Clothing

There is a variety of clothing found in Guatemala. The two main types are westernized or American clothing and traditional Indian clothing. The different types of



clothing represent different cultural aspects to the Guatemalan people. Westernized clothing is a symbol of the desire to be more modern, wealthy, and educated. Indian clothing is symbolic of Guatemalan heritage, ancestry, and tradition. The Indians represent their tribe by the clothes that they wear—each tribe having different colored clothing.

### **Traditional Mayan Clothing**

Traditional Mayan clothing is made with fabric handwoven from natural materials such as cotton or wool. After the material is woven, it is hand embroidered with intricate and beautiful designs (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1**).

### **Weaving Clothing**

Many of the designs in the clothing are ancient Mayan historical or religious symbols, which are passed down from generation to generation. The traditional women's blouse, or *huipil*, is especially detailed in design, and the construction of a single one can take a woman between one and three months to complete, working for hours each day (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2**). Indian women wear their traditional clothing every day, and it is very special to them. Little girls begin learning the difficult skill of weaving at a young age.

Indian clothing styles vary regionally. Each town has its own distinct style of clothing and design patterns. Women in some towns wear straight wrap-around skirts, or *corte*, while women in other towns wear heavy, gathered, full skirts held up by a rope-type belt. In some towns, women wear waist-length blouses, or *huipiles*, which are worn untucked over the skirt. In other towns, the huipiles are long and worn tucked in. Many of the patterns have horizontal or vertical stripes of different widths. They are embroidered with designs varying from suns and moons, to birds and flowers.

Men wear a common white shirt, but will often wear brilliantly colored *pantalones* (pants) and a *chaqueta* (jacket). Not only do these bright colors stand out to visitors, but they tell a story about the person. Traditional Indian clothing in Guatemala is known for its beautiful, vibrant colors. Guatemalans love bright colors and their clothing designs are a witness of this. Bright colors can be seen dotting the landscape as the people work in their fields. Bright colors and beauty are of great importance in the Guatemalan cultural tradition.

Because of the different color patterns, designs, and styles used in each town, it is easy to see which town a person is from merely by looking at their clothing. Each *pueblo*, or town, has its own distinct *trajes* (dress or suits of clothing). Thus, all of the women in a town wear the same type of skirt and blouse, and all of the men wear the same type of pants and shirt. Little girls and boys wear a small version of the same style of clothing (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 3–4**). If educated in these matters, one can determine what position in the family (for example eldest son, daughter, etc.) a person is just by looking at his or her clothing (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5**).

### **A Changing Heritage**

Mayan clothing tells a symbolic story of an ancient culture and heritage and has



helped preserve a rich cultural legacy. It is a tradition largely responsible for keeping Mayan culture alive. However, more Guatemalans are wearing westernized clothing instead of their traditional clothing, showing a Guatemalan desire to be more modern. Many Guatemalans wear blue jeans, T-shirts, and Nikes. In some towns, only the women continue to wear their traditional Indian dress. The men, who go to the city to work, often stop wearing their traditional *trajes*. They begin to dress in American-style clothing like the *Ladinos*. Some women stop wearing their traditional dress, or do not dress their children in it, because it is so costly and time consuming to make. Others stop wearing traditional Indian clothing when they go to school in the city in order to dress like everyone else.

### **Cultural Behavior**

The manner in which Mayans dress today is just one example of how culture is expressed. Not only do the bright colors tell a story about the area Mayans are from, but they also seem to express the personality of the Mayans, and Guatemalans in general. Guatemalans are very outgoing. When foreigners visit and walk down the street, they may be surprised by how many people greet them. Although it is perfectly normal in the United States to walk by someone without saying anything, this rarely occurs in Guatemala. Everyone seems to greet one another by saying “*buenas*,” which simply means hello.

As the sun is setting, it is very common to see people sitting on their front doorstep simply greeting people as they walk home for the evening. When Guatemalans stop to talk to one another, they stand closer than we would in the United States. When a lady meets a gentleman, she will shake his hand, but not firmly. A very gentle handshake is a sign of respect. The youth, on the other hand, will commonly give one another a nice firm handshake or high five and then snap their fingers together. Close friends will greet one another with a kiss on the cheek. Each of these are simple ways to show respect or friendship to one another. The clothes worn by traditional Guatemalans, as well as other simple cultural habits, express their open friendliness.



### **Activities**

1. Make a collage. Cut pictures from magazines and newspapers of people wearing different styles of clothing. Paste them on pieces of cardstock or posterboard. The greater variety of cultures and ethnicity, the better. Discuss diversity. Have students examine each other's collages and try to identify characteristics of the individuals represented based on their clothing. Show Guatemalan images to the class and ask them to identify possible characteristics based on their clothing.
2. Make friendship bracelets. Pass out colored thread and display examples of what the students can make. Allow them to use the colors and style they prefer, just as different Guatemalan Indian tribes would. Encourage those who have made such bracelets before to help those who have not. First, cut strands about two feet long. Then, take the number of strings to be used and tie them together in an overhand knot at one end, as described below. Then tape the tied end, above the knot, to the desk. The following are two ways the bracelets may be made:



Braiding: (Very simple and probably familiar to many participants.)

- a. Using three strands, take the one at the left and cross it over the top of the middle strand. This strand is now the new middle strand.
- b. Now take the strand at the right and cross it over the middle strand and pull it tight. This strand is the new middle strand.
- c. Repeat this over and over, crossing from the left and then the right, until the bracelet is finished.

Knots:

- a. For this style, any number of strands can be used, but it is probably best to use four to six strands. First, take the strand on the far left (strand A) and tie an overhand knot onto the strand next to it (strand B). Then tie another overhand knot on this strand.
  - b. Next take strand A and tie two overhand knots onto strand C. Do the same thing onto strand D.
  - c. Take the new string that is on the far left (strand B) and knot it twice around each strand, working your way across just as you did before with strand A.
  - d. Repeat this until the bracelet is completed.
3. Construct and wear your own Guatemalan clothing (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 6**).

Blouse (*huipil*)

Materials: one yard of solid, brightly-colored material that matches the skirt material.

Fold piece of fabric with raw edges together and right side in. Cut a circular or square opening for the head in the middle of the folded side. Then sew sides shut, leaving four-inch openings at the top for the armholes. Press seams flat with iron and turn blouse right side out.

Skirt (*corte*)

Materials: one and a half yards of a bright-colored, heavy, striped fabric.

Fold fabric in half with the right side in. Sew raw edges together on a sewing machine. Iron the seams flat and turn the fabric right-side out.

Belt (*faja*)

Materials: one and a half yard strip of a bright, heavy, solid-colored fabric that is four inches wide. (A six-inch wide strip doubled over can also be used).

The strip of fabric for the belt can be cut off of the same piece that is used for the skirt. The strip of heavy fabric that serves as a belt to hold up the wrap-around skirt is worn tied around the waist with a knot in the back or on the side. The excess fabric, after the knot has been tied, is left hanging down or tucked underneath the belt.

How to wear traditional *trajes* (suits or clothing)

Step inside the loose, wide, tubular skirt. With the top of the skirt several inches above the waist line, pull all excess material to one side and fold it around the back. The faja, or strip of fabric, is then tied around the waist to hold the corte, or skirt, up. For smaller children the top part of the skirt can be folded inside so the length is mid-to-lower calf.



4. Be Guatemalan for a day. Use the directions in Activity 3 to make the costumes. Practice some of the Guatemalan phrases (see **Traditions Visual 2**) while wearing Guatemalan clothing. Write an essay about what you imagine you would be doing all day.
5. Write a song using your Guatemalan phrases.



### **Discussion Questions**

1. How does clothing represent a culture? What does your clothing say about your culture?
2. What do you think it would be like to live in a country of such diversity of language and clothing as Guatemala? How does this diversity compare to the United States? Do we have some of the same diversity in our culture?
3. Discuss what the class is wearing and compare it to Guatemalan clothing. Does your clothing mean something to you? What does it say about you?
4. If you were Guatemalan, would you want to wear western or traditional-style clothing? Why? Do you think that we are destroying Mayan identity with our Western influence?



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# FACTS ABOUT GUATEMALA

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**Official Name:** Republic of Guatemala

**Capital:** Guatemala City

**Government Type:** constitutional democratic republic

**Area:** 108,890 sq km

**Land Boundaries:** Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico

**Climate:** tropical, hot, humid in lowlands; cooler in highlands

**Lowest Point:** Pacific Ocean 0 m

**Highest Point:** Volcan Tajumulco 4,211 m

**Natural Resources:** petroleum, nickel, rare woods, fish, chicle, hydropower

**Natural Hazards:** numerous volcanoes in mountains, with occasional violent earthquakes; Caribbean coast subject to hurricanes and other tropical storms

**Population:** 13,314,079 (July 2002 est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian–Spanish or assimilated Amerindian—in local Spanish called *Ladino*), approx. 55%, Amerindian or predominantly Amerindian, approx. 43%, whites and others, 2%.

**Religions:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs

**Languages:** Spanish, 60%, Amerindian languages, 40% (more than twenty Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)

**GDP:** \$48.3 billion (2001 est.)

**GDP Per Capita:** \$3,700 (2001 est.)

**GDP Composition By Sector:** agriculture 23%, industry 20%, services 57% (2000 est.)

**Labor Force:** 4.2 million (1999 est.)

**Unemployment Rate:** 7.5% (1999 est.)

**Industries:** sugar, textiles and clothing, furniture, chemicals, petroleum, metals, rubber, tourism

**Agricultural Products:** sugarcane, corn, bananas, coffee, beans, cardamom; cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens

**Exports:** \$2.9 billion (f.o.b., 2001) coffee, sugar, bananas, fruits and vegetables, cardamom, meat, apparel, petroleum, electricity

**Imports:** \$4.9 billion (f.o.b. 2001) fuels, machinery and transport equipment, construction materials, grain, fertilizers, electricity

**Trade Partners:** U.S., El Salvador, Honduras, Japan, Costa Rica, Germany, Venezuela, Mexico

**Currency:** quetzal (GTQ), U.S. dollar (USD), others allowed

**Exchange Rate:** 8.0165 quetzals = \$1 U.S. (January 2002)



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# HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS

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## TIME LINE

- 2500 B.C.E.** Mayan civilizations  
**1523 C.E.** Spanish Pedro de Alvarado subjugates Mayan descendants  
**1773** Earthquake destroys Spanish capital of Antigua Guatemala; capital moved to Guatemala City  
**1821** Independence declared by Central American colonies  
**1823** Mexican empire collapses; several Central American groups form the United Provinces of Central America  
**1839** Guatemalans withdraw from the federation; dictatorship imposed under Rafael Carrera  
**1871** Revolution  
**1873** Justo Rufino Barrios' accession to power; disenfranchisement of the Roman Catholic Church; economic modernization  
**1889–1920** Manuel Estrada Cabrera; third extended dictatorship  
**1944** Dictatorship overthrown; liberal-democratic coalition led by Juan José Arévalo institutes sweeping social and political reforms  
**1951–54** Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán; major program of land reform; U.S. invasion drives Arbenz into exile; social revolution comes to an end and most reforms are reversed  
**1976** An earthquake devastates large areas of the country  
**1985** Constitution approved  
**1986** Civilian rule returns to Guatemala  
**1987** Marco Vinicio plays a major role in bringing about the Central American Peace Accord  
**1990** United States cuts off most of its military aid and all arms sales to Guatemala  
**29 Dec 1996** A peace accord between the government and guerrilla forces is signed, ending the 36-year conflict  
**Jan 1996** Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, elected president; first president to meet with guerrilla warriors

## HOLIDAYS

- 1 Jan** New Year's Day  
**Mar–Apr** Easter  
**1 May** Labor Day  
**30 Jun** Army Day  
**15 Aug** Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (in Guatemala City only)  
**15 Sep** Independence Day  
**20 Oct** Revolution Day  
**1 Nov** All Saints Day  
**24 Dec** Christmas Eve (afternoon only)  
**25 Dec** Christmas Day  
**31 Dec** New Year's Eve (afternoon only)



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### **GUATEMALA EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES**

2220 R St. NW

Washington, D.C. 20008

Phone: (202) 745-4952, Fax: (202) 745-1908

Web site: <http://www.guatemala-embassy.org>

### **DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM**

Guatemala Tourism Commission, INGUAT

Phone: 1-888 INGUAT, Fax (202) 518-4415

Web site: <http://www.centroamericano.net>

### **BOOKS**

Adams, Richard E.W. *Rio Azul: An Ancient Mayan City*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Castaneda, Omar S. *Abuela's Weave*, Lee & Low Books, 1993.

Harbury, Jennifer. *Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Compañeros and Compañeras*, Common Courage Press, 1995.

Jonas, Susanne. *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process*, Westview Press, 2000.

Menchu, Rigoberta. ed. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright. *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, Verso Books, 1987.

Montejo, Victor. *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, Curbstone Press, 1987.

O'Kane, Trish. *Guatemala: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture*, Interlink Publishing Group, 1999.

Quigley, Thomas and the Archdiocese of Guatemala. *Guatemala: Never Again!*, Orbis Books, 1999.

Schlesinger, Stephen C. et al. *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

Wright, Ronald. *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico*, Grove Press, 2000.

### **FILM**

*National Geographic's Lost Kingdoms of the Maya*, Myrow, Jeff and Ed Spiegel (II), 1997.

### **INTERNET SITES**

#### **CIA World Factbook:**

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gt.html>

#### **Current Guatemalan Information (in Spanish):**

<http://www.nortropic.com>

#### **Guatemalan Art:**

<http://www.artemaya.com>

#### **Guatemalan Business Information:**

<http://www.quetzalnet.com/>



**Guatemalan Government:**

<http://www.guatemala-embassy.org>

**Guatemalan Newspaper (in Spanish):**

<http://www.prensalibre.com>

**Guatemalan Travel Web Site:**

<http://www.mayaventura.com>

**Guatemala's Geography:**

<http://www.geography.about.com/library/cia/blcguatemala.htm>

**Mayan Web Site:**

<http://www.mayarealm.com>

**Washington Office on Latin America:**

<http://www.wola.org>

**MUSIC**

*Mayan Dream*, Etherean Music, 1994.



## Traditions Visual 1: Transportation Bus





### Useful Phrases and Gestures for Travel

*gracias* . . . . . thank you  
*no gracias* . . . . . no thank you  
*espere por favor* . . . . wait please  
*pare por favor* . . . . . stop please  
*para aquí por favor* . . stop here please  
*parada* . . . . . bus stop  
*pasaje* . . . . . bus fare  
*cuánto?* . . . . . how much?

To signal to an approaching bus that you would like to board, hold your right arm out.

To signal to an approaching bus that you do not intend to board so that it doesn't stop for you, hold all fingers down except the index finger and wave it back and forth.

### Dinner Phrases

*Frijoles Negros* . . . . . Black Beans  
*Tortillas* . . . . . Tortillas  
*Gracias* . . . . . Thank You  
*Buen Provecho* . . . . . Good Benefit  
*Pasar los frijoles por favor* . . . Pass the beans please

### Dichos Guatemaltecos (Guatemalan Sayings)

*patojo/a* . . . . . boy/girl  
*chucho* . . . . . dog  
*pisto* . . . . . money  
*saber!* . . . . . who knows!  
*Sera?* . . . . . Could it be?  
*Shh-shh* . . . . . hey you!  
*Bien* . . . . . yes  
*Me caye mal* . . . . . that (he, she, it) makes me mad  
*Carro* . . . . . car  
*Coche* . . . . . pig  
*Shuco* . . . . . dirty  
*Que le vaya bien* . . . . Good luck on your way (a goodbye)  
*Pila* . . . . . wash basin  
*Grandota* . . . . . very big  
*Chapin* . . . . . native Guatemalan  
*Llevarse bien* . . . . . to get along with someone  
*Agua* . . . . . soda pop  
*Agua pura* . . . . . water

### Clothing in Guatemala

*Ropa* . . . . . clothing  
*Huipil* . . . . . blouse  
*Corte* . . . . . skirt  
*Pantalones* . . . . . pants  
*Zapatos* . . . . . shoes  
*Kaites* . . . . . sandals



## Folklore & Language Visual 1: Quetzal Bird





## Folklore & Language Visual 2: Scenic Guatemala





### Folklore & Language Visual 3: Mayan Tower













## Folklore & Language Visual 6: Jungle





## Folklore & Language Visual 7: Guatemalan Currency





# QUETZAL POEM

Of emeralds and rubies you were formed

The Jewel of the Cloud Forest

A shimmering bolt of Green Lightning

The Resplendent Quetzal-Serpent.

Ancient sages named you Kukulcan

Their supreme symbol of Light and Freedom

The Heart of Heaven, the Herald of Tatixel

Huahop, Owner of the world, giver of Wisdom

—Anonymous



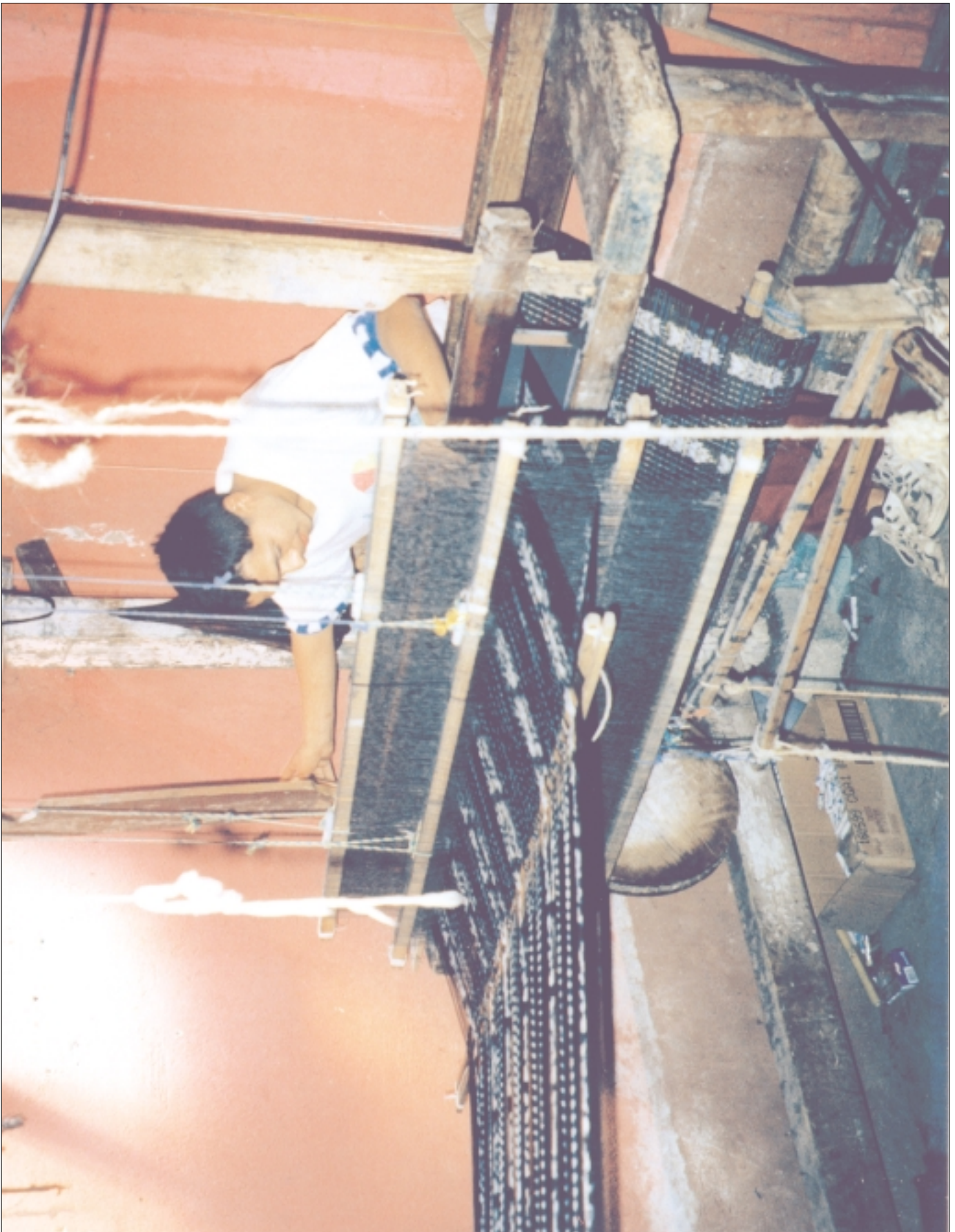


## Food Visual 1: Mercado





## Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1: Weaving Clothing







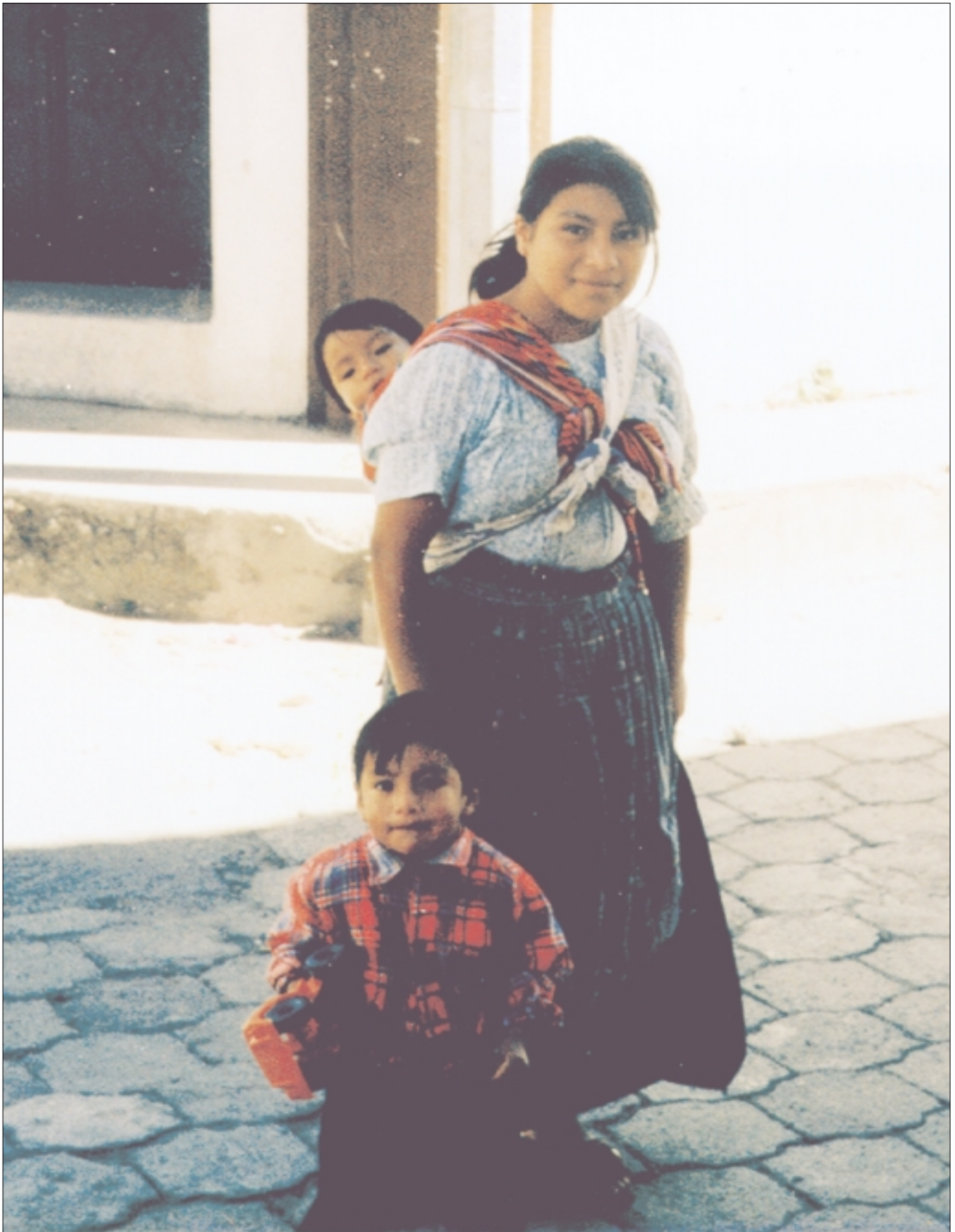
















**Huipil  
(blouse)**

**Corte  
(skirt)**





### **FLAG OF GUATEMALA**

The flag has three equal vertical bands of light blue (hoist side), white, and light blue with the coat of arms centered in the white band. The coat of arms includes a green and red quetzal (the national bird) and a scroll bearing the inscription LIBERTAD 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1821 (the original date of independence from Spain) all superimposed on a pair of crossed swords, framed by a wreath.



## Map of Guatemala

