



TOUR UPDATE



The Newsletter of mikesworldtour



Tour Highlight:

April 2026
Antigua, Guatemala

Hiking up Volcanos and Eating a McFlurry

Contributed by Michael Davis



A QUICK HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, & SOCIAL OVERVIEW

Guatemala got independence from Spain in 1821, and the area is home to the Maya civilization. Under the Spanish, Antigua was the capital, but was moved to Guatemala City in 1773 due to earthquakes. Rafael Carrera took power in 1838 and led until his death in 1865. The next leader was overthrown in 1871 which led to many reforms including a new constitution in 1876. Jacobo Arbenz was elected president in 1951. He supported agrarian reform impacting the United Fruit Company and was supported by the communists. The CIA destabilized the government and encouraged exiles in Honduras to overthrow Arbenz in 1954. The country faced a civil war from 1960 to 1996 where the military fought rural guerrillas. Violence increased in the 1980s with military attacks against Maya communities. The civil war ended with peace accords and over 200,000 died during the period. The 21st century brought democracy but problems like inequality persist.

Antigua, Guatemala



Some quick tips for Antigua :

- Have cash since some restaurants and shops do not accept card
- If hiking give yourself time before and after to rest
- Altitude is no joke, take it easy at first

TRANSPORTATION

Antigua is about 1 hour to 1.5 hours from Guatemala City and there a lot of options. We scheduled a car for \$20 each since our trip was a short and wanted it planned. Ubers are around the same price (maybe a little cheaper). You can also take a bus for ~\$2 USD which is great for balling on a budget. A lot of people we spoke to said to not spend a lot of time in Guatemala City so we went directly to Antigua. Traffic does get kinda bad so definitely plan ahead.

FOOD

FINCA PASEO DE LAS NUBES

If you are looking for something to do and have some extra time this place is cool. It is an avocado farm with a bunch of different activities and they have rooms to stay over night. We had a car so we were able to drive and it is 30 minutes from Antigua. If you like avocado you should come here. Everything on the menu has avocado and everything from the chairs to the light fixtures are in the shape of an avocado. For the average person the excessive avocado was a lot, but the food was great and they have alpacas you can see after you eat.

FAST FOOD

This goes against a lot of what I believe in traveling. Yes, we did have traditional Guatemalan food. However, due to Antigua's building preservation rules all of the fast food restaurants have to be in the same style as the other buildings. We got Dominos the night before the hike to carb-load. We also went to McDonalds to get a McFlurry since there was a courtyard where you could sit and actually see the Volcán de Agua. The McDonalds was the nicest one I have ever seen and they had statues of the mascots. It felt like we were in a five star restaurant.



Antigua, Guatemala

EXPERIENCES AND SITES

Antigua and the surrounding area offer many different nature activities. The city itself has a lot of history and should not be overlooked. A lot of the architecture has been preserved and walking through the streets all day is really cool to see. The city is also super walkable and you can go basically anywhere by foot. It is definitely getting more touristy so try to plan the busier activities in the morning to avoid crowds.

SANTA CATALINA ARCH

The most iconic landmark in Antigua, get here early in the morning to get pictures without crowds. I was here at 8am and there were already people lining up to take photos. It was built in 1694 and originally connected a convent to a school. Nuns could pass through the arch without going into the street. A clock was added in the 1800s. It has been damaged by earthquakes, but was repaired after each time. It is also on a main street used by cars, so try to use some common sense while taking your pictures.



PARQUE CENTRAL

The park was founded in 1543 and it is the main square of the town. The city is in a grid shape with the park in the center. The important political buildings surround the square and the center of the park contains the Fountain of Sirens. Throughout the day there are vendors and on the weekend there was a market selling artisan goods all day. It used to be the main market of the town which is evident in that it is still a gathering place for a lot of people. There are a lot of benches in the park so it is a great place to relax and admire the architecture around the square.

CATEDRAL DE SAN JOSE

The cathedral was first built in 1545. Its construction was an attempt to create Antigua, but its construction did not end until 1669 due to earthquakes. After an earthquake in 1773 the cathedral was moved to Guatemala City and the parish of San José was established in 1804 which helped to reestablish the church. The church is located in the Parque Central and is designated as a World Heritage Site.



Antigua, Guatemala

SANTO DOMINGO MONASTERY

The Santo Domingo Church and Monastery was built in 1538 when the Dominicans arrived. It was destroyed by an earthquake in 1773, but many of the ruins are still intact. The church and monastery were converted into a hotel that opened in 1989. Even if you are not a guest you can walk through the grounds, but be careful not to go into the areas reserved for guests (unlike me). They also have guides outside that you can pay for tours. I opted to explore the grounds solo and see the ruins.

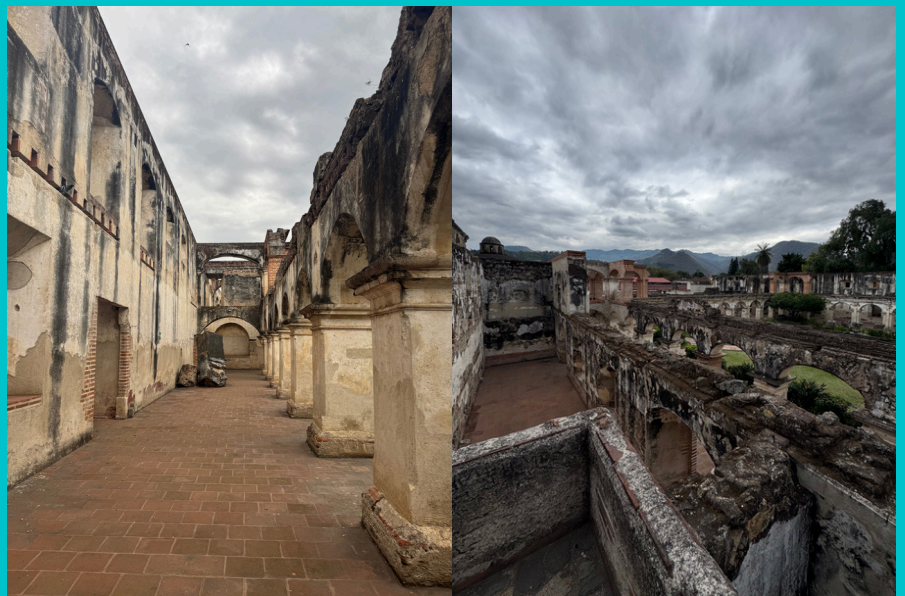


IGLESIA DE LA MERCED

The church was constructed in 1749 and was dedicated in 1767. The Fountain of los Pescados located at the church is one of the largest colonial fountains in Latin America. It is associated with the Maya and has spiritual and religious connections to them. Outside the church there are markets with vendors. It is a popular wedding venue among Antiguans and I was unable to go inside the church since there was a service going on (at least it is being put to good use). Juan de Dios Estrada was in charge of its construction which is ironic because the word dios translates to the word g-d in Spanish.

SANTA CLARA RUINS

The church was founded in 1700 and destroyed by an earthquake in 1773 (sensing a theme here). A lot of the structure remains intact and you can walk around the grounds. They charge an entry fee that must be paid in cash. It is in the Baroque architecture style and took three years to complete its construction originally. The grounds are huge and it is really peaceful to walk around and explore all of the empty rooms. There are also grass areas and gardens throughout that people were hanging out in and enjoying their day.



Antigua, Guatemala

HOBBITENANGO

This place is kinda funky, but great to see if you are looking to get out of Antigua for the day. It is an adventure park and nature park that is based on Lord of the Rings. Their site does not explicitly mention the connection to Lord of the Rings, but they sell Lord of the Rings merch inside. There is also no information on why they chose outside of Antigua to put this place here (don't worry I asked chatgpt). There are a lot of great viewpoints and picture spots. It is also fun to walk around here and they have games. It can feel like a tourist trap at times (you have to pay to take pictures with a wizard), but the views are worth the visit.



CERRO DE LA CRUZ

If you are hiking Acatenango, I highly recommend going to see this before the hike (more on Acatenango soon, I promise). It is about a 20 minute hike on a trail up to a viewpoint. The hike is not hard in comparison to the other large hikes you can do in Antigua, but the views here are stunning. At the viewpoint there are vendors selling water, snacks, and other souvenirs. The trail is pretty easy to follow and it is really well paved. There are also benches on top to enjoy the views and ponder life around you. If you want to see all of Antigua this is the place to be. You get full views of Antigua and the Volcán de Agua that is a backdrop on Antigua. If you are lazy you can call a taxi to the top, there is a street at the top where you can walk down to get to the viewpoint. I am a big proponent of being rewarded for your efforts, so I recommend hiking up to earn the views.



Antigua, Guatemala

ACATENANGO

The big reason people visit Antigua is to hike the Acatenango volcano. It has not erupted since 1972, but is next to the Volcán de Fuego which is an active volcano that erupts almost daily. Acatenango is over 13,000 feet tall, and the hike is not easy. You hike during the day, sleep overnight at the basecamp, and then hike down the next day. There are a bunch of companies in Antigua that do the trip. We paid \$80 USD each to hike with a company and they provided transportation to and from Acatenango (1 hour from Antigua), 3 meals, guided hikes up and down the mountain, and a place to sleep (nicer than a tent but not glamorous). You can also pay ~\$20 USD extra to hike to Fuego. Hiking Fuego is technically not allowed by the government so that is why it is an additional charge. We chose to do it, but we had bad weather and the Fuego viewpoint was cloudy with almost 40 mph winds (it was insane). We still got to see eruptions on our hike back and from the basecamp. The companies all have equipment rentals if you do not want to pack hiking gear. Do not bring too much water with you since your bag will be heavy and you can buy water at spots during the hike. I woke up at 4am the second day to summit Acatenango (I slept 4 hours that night), and the sunrise here was magical. The hike is pretty hard, especially Fuego, but so worth it. You are hiking into the clouds and when it clears the views are awesome and seeing Fuego erupt is a once in a life experience. I hiked in running shoes and was fine but real hiking shoes is probably recommended. Do the stair-master before to prep, it seriously helps.

Packing List

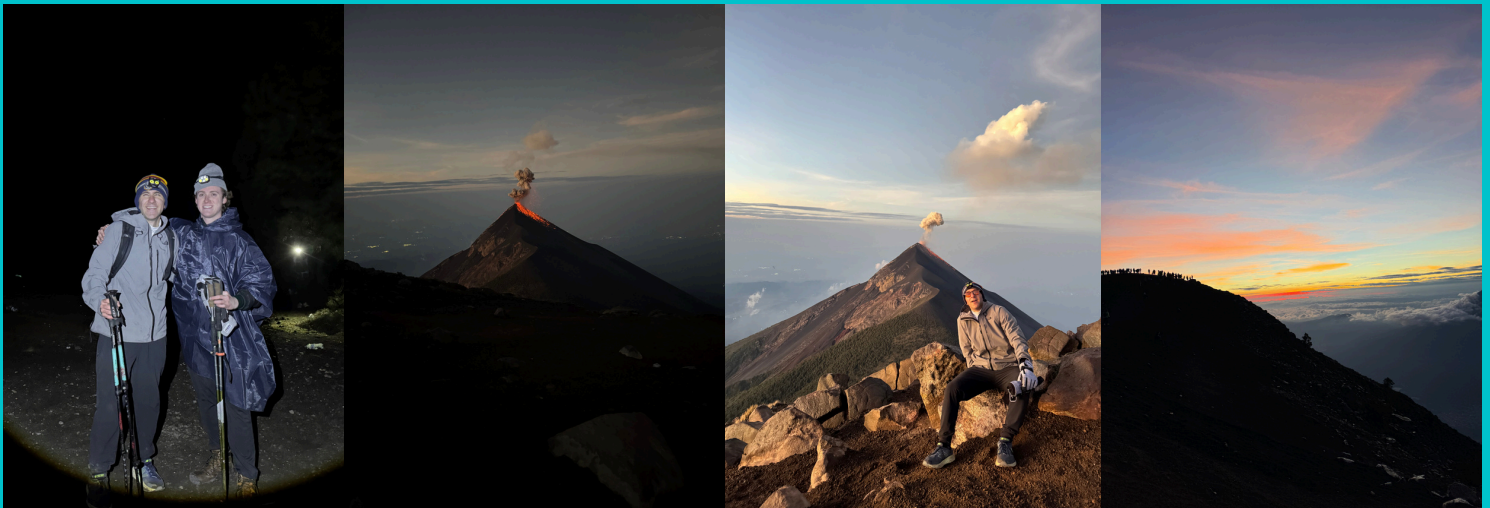
- Snacks & Water
- Energy drinks
- Hiking Poles (I rented)
- Headlamp (I rented)
- Ski Jacket
- Rain coat
- Long sleeve shirt
- 2 dry fit shirts
- Athletic pants
- Gloves & hat
- Wool socks

The Hike

- 5-6 hours to basecamp
- 4 hours to Fuego (1 hour hiking down, 1 hour hiking up, and repeat on return to basecamp)
- 1.5 hour to Acatenango summit
- 2-3 hours hiking down

Tips

- Only bring 1-2 water bottles
- Drink electrolytes in your water
- Eat a lot (I did 60k steps in two days)
- Bring headphones to listen to music or podcasts while hiking



See You On the Next Step on the Tour!