

Top 10 Questions About Guatemalans

1. Where are they from?
 - a. Guatemalans in Tuscarawas County are mainly from the west-central mountainous region known as the Huehuetenango and Quiche provinces. The main towns that you will likely hear them refer to are Aguacatan and Nebaj although many are from smaller aldeas (villages) surrounding these towns. These towns are small in nature and many make a living off of farming and textiles.
2. Why Tuscarawas County?
 - a. Guatemalans first started to arrive in the area around 30 years ago due to local companies recruiting them to work in their factories. Companies offered wages that were much higher than the men received in Guatemala as well as a better quality of life. The goal of these men was to send money (remittances) back to family in Guatemala with the hope of returning one day.
3. Language
 - a. There are 21 official Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala in addition to Spanish. These Mayan languages are not dialects of Spanish, but entirely separate languages. Other than Spanish, the two main languages spoken by the Guatemalans in our community are K'iche' and Ixil. Also, the "x" in a Guatemalan name has the "sh" sound.
4. Clothing
 - a. Women wear a traditional skirt known as "cortes" that have different colorful patterns. You can often tell which part of Guatemala a woman/girl is from by the design of their cortes which differ by region. The blouse that the women often wear with the cortes are called "huipils" and come in many colors and designs as well. You won't typically see the men dressed in traditional clothing, however, the older men can sometimes be seen wearing a cowboy hat or a traditional coat called a "chaqueta".
5. Religion
 - a. "Religion in Guatemala is fairly complex, with traditional Mayan spirituality still very much a presence, particularly in the highlands, along with Catholicism and the more recent incursions of Evangelical Christianity." "According to some estimates, a third of Guatemala now claims adherence to Protestantism and, more specifically, Evangelical Christianity. The growth of this sect will become obvious as you travel around the country and hear the sounds of loud evening worship services, known as *cultos*, emanating from numerous churches, particularly in the highlands. The trend toward Evangelical Christianity dates to the aftermath of the 1975 earthquake, which destroyed several villages throughout the highlands. International aid agencies, several of them overtly Christian, rushed into Guatemala at a time of great need and gained many grateful converts in the process. During the worst of the civil war violence of the 1980s, many Guatemalans sought comfort in the belief of a better life despite the hardships of the present." - (www.hachettebookgroup.com)

6. What do they do for fun?
 - a. Many of the local Guatemalans enjoy fútbol (soccer) and have their own leagues for both men and women. Other activities they enjoy are community festivals, visiting parks, parties and attending church.
7. Traditional Food
 - a. Most traditional foods in Guatemalan cuisine are based on Maya cuisine, with Spanish influence, and prominently feature corn, chilies and beans as key ingredients.
 - b. Some of the traditional dishes of Guatemala include Tamales (made mostly of chicken), chuchitos (Tamales made with corn husks) and a soup known as Caldo.
 - c. Atole - hot rice spiced with cinnamon drink.
8. Why do they usually have two last names?
 - a. Most women do not take the husband's family name when they marry. Also, children inherit one last name from each parent which is why you often see two last names. Some names are hyphenated while others are not which is simply a family preference. When looking at the last names, the father's surname is always first followed by the mother's. Each parent passes on their father's family name, so the paternal family name never dies if there is offspring, just like in European and North American tradition.
9. Why are many considered refugees or asylum seekers?
 - a. In 1996 a 36 year-long civil war ended in Guatemala where a genocide occurred of the indigenous Mayan population. During the war, over 200,000 people died (83% of them indigenous mayan) and it created around 1 million refugees. Over 450 Mayan settlements were wiped out by the Guatemalan government which has had a lasting effect on the Mayan communities today. Immense poverty and continued threats stemming from the war have forced families to leave their beloved homeland in search for a sustainable and safe life in other countries, specifically the U.S.
10. What is the difference in schooling in the U.S. compared to Guatemala
 - a. In Guatemala the education system is separated into five stages listed below:
 - i. Parvulitos = ages 4 and 5 (Preschool)
 - ii. Pre-primaria = age 6 (Kindergarten)
 - iii. Primaria = grades 1-6 (1st-6th grades)
 - iv. Básico = grades 1-3 (7th-9th grades)
 - v. Magisterio = 3 grades (10th-12th grades)
 - b. An estimated 60% of the indigenous population is illiterate, mainly stemming from the disruption of life caused by the civil war. Current rural schools are affected by lack of funding and teachers, overcrowded classrooms and lack of school materials.

***Created and put together by Jeff Bray*