

Culture Box

GUATEMALA



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

*Center for Latin
American Studies*

INTRODUCTION: Guatemala is a country with stunning geography, a tumultuous history, and vibrant cultures. This culture box includes items that tell stories of Guatemala's past and present. Teachers will find tools to help explore the country's customs, instruments, Maya history, culture, cuisine, daily life, and so much more.

THIS BOX INCLUDES:

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2. Indigenous Women with Traditional Loom (2)
3. Loofa Sponge
4. Map of Modern and Colonial Guatemala
5. Camioneta
6. Perfume
7. Miniature Ceramic Household Jars
8. Guatemalan Flags
9. Woven Basket
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11. Wooden Jaguar Mask
12. Queztlal Coin
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CACAO (CHOCOLATE)



DESCRIPTION

Guatemala is often considered the “birthplace” of chocolate, as the ancient Mayas worshipped the cocoa tree and consumed chocolate often. It was usually consumed as a drink called Xoconochco or Suchitepequez. Unlike typical milk chocolate we are accustomed to eating, Mayans preferred the drink bitter and spicy, adding chilies and cornmeal to the cacao mixture. Cacao has health benefits, such as reducing blood pressure and boosting energy, which make it a popular ingredient both then and now.

Today, Guatemala produces 1,000 tons of chocolate per year, and the main variety of cacao is call “Criollo”. Criollo was the most prominent cacao bean 200 years ago, but it is now fairly rare given the tree’s susceptibility to disease.

Ever wondered what the difference is between **cocoa** and **cacao**? **Cacao** is the unprocessed bean inside the fruit of the **cacao** tree (*Theobroma Cacao*). There are 20 to 40 **cacao** beans per fruit. **Cocoa** is simply the name for **cacao** that has undergone processing.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN WITH TRADITIONAL LOOM



DESCRIPTION

Weaving has long played an important role in indigenous cultures. Especially in the eras before mass-produced textiles, people usually wove their own clothing; the designs woven on the clothing are distinctive to each community. Today, weaving is still practiced on a daily basis in many parts of Guatemala by Maya women to weave fabric for their clothing and other needed household textiles such as shawls, baby wraps, tablecloths, washcloths, towels, and more. In the western highlands of Guatemala, the women for centuries have used cotton yarn for their weaving and in some of the villages it was a custom to dye the natural cotton yarn with natural plant dyes.

See *Item #19 and #20* for more on woven textiles.

LOOFA SPONGE

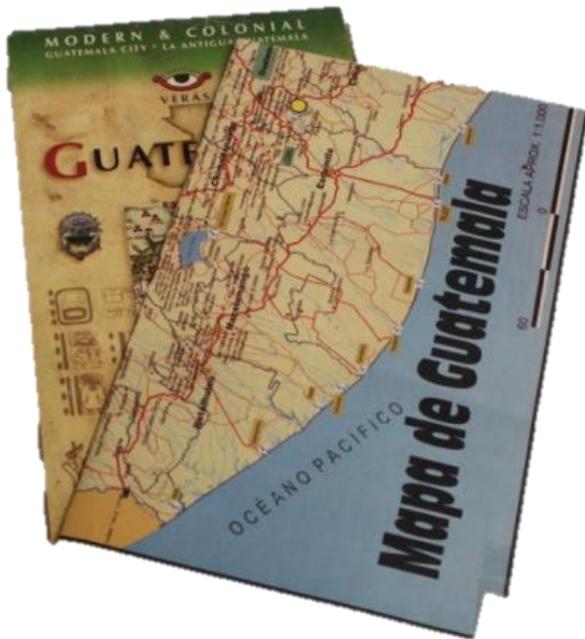


DESCRIPTION

Loofas are a typical Guatemalan export. While some of us recognize this as an object we use in the shower, the loofa is a type of gourd, just like pumpkins. The part of the plant that makes up the loofa sponge is the dried hollow shell of the plant's fruit.



MAPS OF GUATEMALA & GUATEMALA CITY



DESCRIPTION

This is a colonial layout of Guatemala City. When the conquistadores built their cities, they transplanted the architectural layout from Spain. At the center of the city was the plaza. This was used as the marketplace of the city. Surrounding the plaza was the Church, the equivalent of the courthouse, and the most powerful families. The less powerful families would live farther away from the plaza. Finally, the peasants would live on the outskirts of the city and the countryside.

Can you find any of the tourist destinations shown on the Postcards (Item #18) on the modern map of Guatemala?

CAMIONETA



DESCRIPTION

Camionetas are public buses in Guatemala that are usually old school buses that have been remodeled with luggage racks and longer seats and are usually painted bright colors. Buses go almost everywhere in Guatemala. It is not unusual for a local family of five to squeeze into seats that were originally designed for two child-sized bottoms. Many English-speaking travelers know these vehicles as “chicken buses”, because passengers would bring their chickens on the bus with them. Guatemalan buses are frequent, crowded, and inexpensive. Most camionetas will stop anywhere, for anyone. To catch a camioneta, simply stand beside the road with your arm out parallel to the ground.

Postcard J shows a real camioneta in Antigua, Guatemala.

PERFUME



DESCRIPTION

This perfume is called “Agua de Florida” or Florida Water. It is one of the world’s cheapest and oldest perfumes. Interestingly, Florida wasn’t even a state when the company began. Many users believe the perfume has healing abilities, such as stopping a fever or calming nervousness. The perfume is often added to bath water or rubbed on the skin. The scent includes citrus and herbal notes and spice and floral undertones. Agua de Florida continues to be sold in Guatemala today.

MINIATURE HOUSEHOLD CERAMIC JARS



DESCRIPTION

Pottery has a long tradition in Guatemala. It is made and sold in markets across the country, often by Maya women who craft the pots using only their hands and basic tools. Clay pots are used to cook beans, soup, and tamales. Maya would also use ceramic “vases” to drink chocolate (see *Item #1*).



GUATEMALAN FLAGS



DESCRIPTION

Like all flags, there are specific meanings behind the colors and objects on the Guatemalan flag. The sky blue and white stripes symbolize the land between two oceans: the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean. The scroll in the middle bears the date September 15, 1821, which is the date of Guatemala's independence from Spain. There is also a *quetzal* bird, which is the national bird of Guatemala, symbolizing liberty.



WOVEN BASKET & STRAW, HAND- WOVEN FAN



DESCRIPTION

Woven baskets are handmade items used to store or carry items to and from home.

This fan is used for fanning fires. This is important because fires are used to cook food in many homes in Guatemala.

MORTAR AND PESTLE



DESCRIPTION

The “mortar” is the bowl, typically made of hard wood, ceramic, or stone. The “pestle” is the heavy club-shaped object; the end of which is used for crushing and grinding. The substance to be ground is placed in the mortar and crushed or mixed using the pestle. Mortar and pestles have been used in cooking up to the present day and were historically used by ancient civilizations all over the world.

Ancient Maya made mortar and pestles out of basalt (Lava/Volcanic rock) and called them “molcajetes”.

WOODEN JAGUAR MASK



DESCRIPTION

The Maya viewed jaguars as symbols of strength and vigor. Maya believed that jaguars had the ability to cross between worlds, which in the Maya culture were the “daytime” world of the living and the earth and the “nighttime” world of spirits and ancestors. Jaguars, who are active at night, were believed to be part of the spirit world and the underworld gods. One god, Xbalanque, has a body that is covered entirely by jaguar skin. Families who ruled the Mayan cities often wore jaguar pelt, and some families even used “jaguar” in their ruling name. One family that ruled the Maya city of Tikal was known as Jaguar Paw.

See *Postcard C* to see a Maya temple named after the jaguar.



QUETZAL COIN



DESCRIPTION

The national currency of Guatemala is the quetzal coin. It is named after the national bird of Guatemala, the Resplendent (syn. attractive, impressive) Quetzal. In ancient times, the Mayas used tail feathers from the Quetzal bird as currency. This coin is one quetzal coin. It has the inscription “Paz” (Peace) as part of a stylized dove, with the legend “Paz Firme y Duradera” (firm and lasting Peace); and “29 de Diciembre de 1996” (December 29, 1996), which marks the end of the Guatemalan civil war. One quetzal coin equals USD \$0.13.

Can you find the quetzal bird on the Guatemalan flag (Item #8)?



PUMICE STONE



DESCRIPTION

Pumice is a mineral deposit, and large quantities are found in Guatemala's mountain ranges in the center of the country. It is found near volcanoes, of which Guatemala has several active volcanoes, making it one of the most volcano-dense areas in the world. Pumice stones are still used today by Maya people to clean their feet and arms.

CANDELITAS



DESCRIPTION

Many Guatemalans participate in traditionalist religions, such as Catholicism and Protestantism. Candles are used as a way of giving offerings and gifts to God; charcoal, sugar, and liquor are also typically offered.



POM & POM INCENSE



DESCRIPTION

Pom is the Mayan word for Copal, a golden or white resin (dried sap of the trees) that is used as incense for religious ceremonies and rituals at church and in household altars. The resin can be boiled, shaped into hard pellets, and then is often used as a disinfectant or pesticide in Maya villages. The most common Mayan incense comes from the tree “palo de jiote”: a tree that grows in both dry and humid parts of Guatemala. Today, people burn the pom incense for Mayan rituals with sugar, marigolds, fruits, and beverages. Some people ask for protection, successful plantations and harvests, or special favors.

JADE



DESCRIPTION

Jade was a celestial stone of the Maya. They believed it was a symbol of life and eternal love. The Olmecs, an indigenous tribe that occupied much of Modern day Mexico and Central America, made much of their jewelry from blue jade. They were used as ornaments, tools, and burial artifacts as well. Today, Guatemala is home to one of the largest deposits of jade in the world.

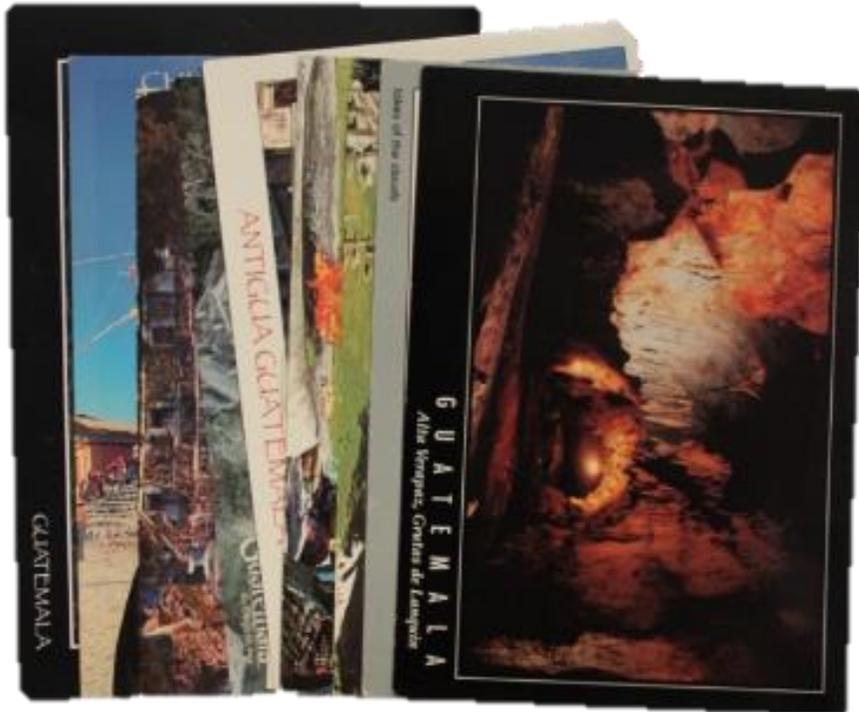
MARACA (“CHINCHINES”)



DESCRIPTION

Maracas or “chinchines” are rattles made from gourds and seeds. Generally, Guatemalan chinchines are found painted black with carvings made to expose the natural color with patterns similar to what you would find in textiles (see *Items #19 & #20*). More recently, chinchines can be found in all colors at artisan markets.

POSTCARDS



DESCRIPTION

A, B, C, D: Ruinas de Tikal - These ruins are in an ancient city in the rainforest of Guatemala. It is one of the largest archaeological site and urban center of the Maya civilization. The name Tikal is derived from *ti ak'al* in the Yucatec Maya language, meaning “at the waterhole”. The city has been completely mapped and covered an area greater than 6.2 miles, including about 3,000 structures. In **postcard C**, the middle ruin is called “el Gran Jaguar” or the Great Jaguar. See *Item #11* for more information on the jaguar in Maya culture.

E, F, G: Antigua, Guatemala - Antigua is the old capital or “la Antigua capital” of Guatemala. The city has been moved several times because of an unlucky history of destruction. It was destroyed by fire caused by an uprising of the indigenous population in 1527. In 1541 it was buried by a combination of earthquakes and an avalanche. The authorities ordered the relocation of the capital to a safer location after the Santa Marta earthquakes in 1773. The new, safer region became Guatemala City, the current, modern capital of Guatemala,

and some residents stayed behind in the original town, which they referred to as “La Antigua Guatemala”.

H, I: Chichicastenango - This small and stucco-white town is located about 2.5 hours northeast of the Guatemala City. It is home to one of the most colorful native markets in all the Americas. On market days - Thursdays and Sundays - people arrive from surrounding towns. This town in the mountains of Quiché has been, since pre-Hispanic times, one of the largest trading centers in the Maya area. If you visited today, you would need to be careful to buy quality, handmade products and not products from the neighboring factories.

J: Camioneta - See *Item #5* for more information.

K: Grutas de Lanquín - These “Caves of Lanquín” are located in the town of San Agustín Lanquín. The park was one of the first protected areas declared in Guatemala, and it stands as a majestic and huge complex of gorgeous caves; even to this day, it is not known where the cave system ends. These formations are considered sacred by the Maya Q’eqchi’ s who inhabit the area. The caves have funky stalactites, mostly named for animals; these caves are crammed with bats. At sunset, hundreds of bats fly out of the mouth of the cave in formations so dense they obscure the sky. Visitors can also swim in the nearby river.

L, M, N, O, P, Q: Artwork by Mariano González Chavajay - Mariano is an emerging Maya artist. He is a hard worker, working more than eight hours every day of the week for the past 20 years. He was among the Guatemalan artists invited to the United States for the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, and one of his paintings is in their permanent collection.

HUIPILE



DESCRIPTION

Maya women wear huipiles, a traditional garment consisting of a rectangular piece of cloth that is folded and stitched at the sides with designs on the front, back, and shoulders. In Guatemala, the design of the huipil identifies the community to which the wearer belongs. Only the statues of saints and the wives of religious officials wear Mayan ceremonial huipiles. It can take 3 - 4 months to create a traditional huipil top! Women need to memorize thousands of patterns and can save up for months to purchase one.

TZUTE



DESCRIPTION

Tzute is a Mayan term generally used for a cloth woven on a loom, and the designs are specific to a particular village. Sometimes the cloth is used to wrap things in, to carry on their head, to wrap a baby in, or to use as decoration in a religious ceremony.

BOOKS

- ⇒ Guatemala Rainbow
- ⇒ The Amazing Twins: Ancient Maya Tales from the Popol Wuj Educator guide (2)
- ⇒ ¡Guatemala Feliz! (3)
- ⇒ Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rainforest Civilization
- ⇒ The Maya
- ⇒ Variable: additional books may be included depending on your subject area and grade level



REMINDERS

- Please do not remove the labels from the items. If a label falls off an item, please replace it with one of the new labels included in the box, and report it on your return form.
- Please do not use tape on the items. When removed, tape can damage the item. Please use removable filing labels.
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