



Guatemala Travel and Etiquette: A Guide for Adoptive Parents Second edition

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Dedication

*With gratitude to the loving people of Guatemala:
those who brought our children into the world
and those who cared for them until we could*

Preface

You are about to undertake one of the most exhilarating and meaningful experiences of your lifetime: traveling to adopt an internationally born child. No venture into parenthood comes without a dash of exhaustion and sometimes even a little frustration. For this reason, we believe that the people most satisfied at the end of the journey are the most flexible. Let this be a journey that captivates you. Stay open to new experiences. Find pleasure in the moment. Your love for your child's country and your respect for its people are sure to affect your child's view of her country – and herself!

"I am not the same having seen the moon shine on another part of the world." – Author Unknown

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Finally, we wish to thank the Latin America Parents Association of New York (www.lapa.com) for generous permission to use their "Guidelines for Behavior While Visiting Another Culture," and Adoption Associates Inc., Jennison, MI (www.adoptassoc.com) for permission to use material from "Adoption Travel for Smarties." This popular and extensive guide covers China, Russia, and Guatemala and is available for order through AAI.

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1 – Introduction

This guide is intended to provide practical travel advice for adoptive parents either visiting their children for the first time or traveling to bring them home. As authors, we do not pretend to be experts on every aspect of travel, but having done it a few times we think we have the basics down! Our hope is that this guide will answer many of your questions about traveling to Guatemala either to begin or to continue the journey of “family.”

There are many variations in the process and no single explanation covers all cases. This guide represents our best understanding of the topic and is not meant to substitute for professional recommendations. We suggest that you consult your agency if you want advice from an adoption professional, your attorney for legal advice, and your physicians for medical advice. Should you want to share content suggestions or corrections with the authors, please use the comment form available at www.guatadopt.com/CSMailto/forms/GuideComments.htm.

Be aware that U.S. laws, foreign laws, and web sites may have changed since publication. Inclusion of businesses and web sites does not imply endorsement by the authors; such information is provided for your reference.

Members of the Guatemala-Adopt list serv (see Chapter 2, “What to Know Before You Go”) are another source of good information, as are the travel suggestions and checklist available at: www.guatadopt.com/archives/cat_travel_tips.html and www.guatadopt.com/documents/travel.pdf.

You may also find the travel tips provided by *Adoptive Families* magazine to be helpful: www.adoptivefamilies.com/pdf/10_tips.pdf.

Finally, we have indicated helpful Spanish phrases with this symbol:



2 – What to Know Before You Go

Learning about Guatemala

Before you go, educate yourself about the culture, economics, politics, and history of Guatemala. Here are some extensive, Guatemala-specific resources definitely worth exploring in depth. Should any of these URLs have changed since the publication of this guide, find the new site by performing a web search using key words.

- The Guatemalan tourist organization, Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo (INGUAT) – www.inguat.gob.gt/
- Various Guatemala tourism sites:
 - www.terra.com.gt/turismogt/
 - www.guatemalaontheweb.com
 - www.quetzalnet.com
- Xela Pages, an extensive site for travelers – www.xelapages.com
- The daily news (in Spanish) from *Prensa Libre* – www.prensalibre.com/
- *Prensa Libre*'s travel section (in English) – www.prensalibre.com/suplementos/RYS/vgt/english/comm/index.jsp
- *Revue, Guatemala's English-language Magazine* – www.revuemag.com/home
- Online adoptive family groups and list serves:
 - The Guatemala-Adopt list serv of Maelstrom/St. John's University*
 - Guatemala Adoption Information and News – www.guatadopt.com
 - Latin America Parents Association (LAPA) – www.lapa.com
 - www.forums.adoption.com has a wealth of information and support
- Ask your agency for an adoption support group in your area, as there is no substitute for talking directly with people who have gone before you.
- The CIA's "Factbooks" on Guatemala – www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gt.html – and the State Department's "Background Notes" on Guatemala – www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2045.htm
- The State Department's travel site, <http://travel.state.gov>, offers extensive information on international travel (http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html). It is worth the time to search this site in depth for:
 - Travel tips – http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/regional/regional_1172.html
 - Safety issues – http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html
 - Consular information – http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1129.html
- The U.S. Customs publication "Know Before You Go" – www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/
- The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City – <http://guatemala.usembassy.gov>
- The Guatemalan embassy in the U.S. – www.guatemala-embassy.org
- Travel guidebooks such as those published by Lonely Planet and Rough Guide
- Books, including:
 - *Guatemalan Women Speak* by Margaret Hooks
 - *The Hispanic Way: Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes and Customs in the Spanish-Speaking World* by Judith Noble and Jaime Lacasa

* To join Guatemala-Adopt, address a new mail message to LISTSERV@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU. Type "subscribe" in the subject line, and in the body of the message type the single line: subscribe GUATEMALA-ADOPT firstname lastname (substitute your real name where "firstname lastname" is shown here). Disable any signature normally attached to your messages and send the message. You will receive a return message to which you must respond before your subscription is activated.

- *In Focus Guatemala: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* by Trish O’Kane
- And a guide to books available at www.omega23.com/country_guides/Guatemala.html

Non-negotiables!

- Get a passport – http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html
- Research health issues for travelers and get necessary immunizations.
 - See the CDC’s site on Central America – www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm
 - Check with your physician well in advance, as some vaccinations consist of two injections spaced a month apart. Others must be administered six months prior to travel.
 - The “Health” chapter of the Lonely Planet guide to Guatemala is another excellent source of information and offers these traveler’s health web sites:
 - MD Travel Health – www.mdtravelhealth.com
 - *International Travel and Health*, a guide published by the World Health Organization – www.who.int/ith/
- Acquire an international calling card, useful for calling home from your hotel.
- Call your credit card company to confirm that your card can be used at ATM machines outside of the U.S.
- Ask your health insurance company about coverage outside of the U.S. and, if necessary, either purchase a rider or buy a separate limited-term policy, such as those available from Wallach and Company (www.wallach.com).
- Learn some basic phrases in Spanish. Try these online sources: www.learnspanish.com or www.byki.com/travelcards/index.shtml.
- Buy that camcorder or digital camera you’ve been wanting, and consider upgrading your old computer!

3 – Planning Your Trip to Guatemala

Accessibility

It is quite possible for people who use wheelchairs to travel to Guatemala to experience their children’s birth country first hand! Although Guatemala is not nearly as handicap-accessible as the United States, the big hotels are accessible, as is the U.S. Embassy.

When making hotel reservations, request an accessible room just as you would at any other time, but ask specifically if the room has a shower chair, as shower chairs may not be standard. The parents we talked to when researching this topic had all stayed at the Marriott and were pleased with their experiences there. They enjoyed dining at the hotel’s three restaurants and had no problems accessing them. They were able to visit some neighborhood souvenir shops as well, by exiting the Marriott through the hotel’s main entrance.

The hotel shuttle van provided transportation to and from the airport and the U.S. Embassy, and in one case a private driver took a couple to Antigua for the day. Although cars tend to be small in Guatemala, the driver was able to collapse the parent’s wheelchair and stow it in the trunk. Getting around the square in Antigua with a manual wheelchair was quite possible in spite of the city’s uneven sidewalks and cobblestone streets, but it would have been difficult if not impossible in an electric chair.

For more information on accessible travel, visit Accessible Journeys at www.disabilitytravel.com and Access-Able Travel Sources at www.access-able.com.

Addresses

Finding specific addresses in Guatemala is not as complicated as it may seem at first glance. *Avenidas* (avenues) generally run north to south and *calles* (streets) run east to west. Larger towns and cities are divided into *zonas* (zones), with each having its own set of *calles* and *avenidas*. A home located at “4a. calle 9-25 zona 10” would be situated on 4th street, 25 meters away from ninth avenue, in zone 10. Additionally, it would be on the right side of the street because odd numbers are on the right side of the street. Pretty simple, *si?*

Air Travel

American, Continental, and Delta airlines are the three major carriers to Guatemala City from the U.S. American’s flights connect through Miami and Dallas/Fort Worth, Delta’s through Atlanta, and Continental’s through Houston. The immigration office in the Miami airport is very busy and for this reason some parents, in an effort to save time, choose not to fly through Miami when bringing their children home.

Delta Airlines discounts full-fare tickets by 65% for adoptive parents traveling to bring home their children. While this may not be the least expensive way to travel, these tickets are fully refundable and no fee is charged for changes to the return date based on availability. Delta also offers a discounted one-way child fare. This fare is approximately half of an adult’s roundtrip adoption fare.

Regardless of your child’s age, every child needs to be “ticketed” for the flight home. Buying a “lap child” ticket for children less than two years of age allows you to hold your baby on your lap during the flight. This option is significantly less expensive than purchasing a full fare (about 10% the cost of a full fare). Alternatively, you may buy a separate seat for your child, in which case you may choose to bring a car seat for your infant to use. If you do so, it must be FAA approved. (The Sit ’n’ Stroll is recommended by some parents because it is lightweight and can be used as a car seat, airplane seat, booster seat and stroller.)

Regardless of the fare you purchase for your child, you may want to request at check-in a bulkhead seat for the extra floor space it provides. This can come in handy for feedings, diaper changes, and wiggle worms! You might also request a seat with an empty seat next to it so you can either stretch out a bit or place your car seat in it (without having purchased a full-fare ticket for you child). Should no extra seat be available, you can easily slip your car seat into a heavy duty garbage bag to keep it clean and then check it at the gate or with your luggage.

You may want to consider, as early in the process as possible, getting a credit card that accumulates airline points. Traveling on points can save you hundreds of dollars in air travel costs. Please note, however, that airlines limit the number of seats that can be purchased using points, so tickets should be reserved well in advance of travel.

There are plenty of good travel agencies out there, with some of them either catering to adoptive families or specializing in travel to Central America. Among them are:

- Tempo Travel Services (www.adoptivefamilytravel.com)
Contact Bea Evans at 262-565-3327 or 800-398-3676.
Her email address is <Bea@adoptivefamilytravel.com>.
- Guatemala Reservations (www.GuatemalaReservations.com)
Write to Nancy Hoffman <Nancy@GuatemalaReservations.com>.
- Velocity Tours (www.VelocityTours.com)
Write to Trent Hendrickson at <trent@velocitytours.com>.
- Federal Travel and Cruises (www.federaltravel.com)
- Mundo Guatemala (www.mundo-guatemala.com)

In addition to the web-based travel sites you may already know (such as Travelocity, Expedia and Orbitz), some adoptive parents have obtained low cost tickets on www.latindiscountair.com, www.airlineconsolidator.com, or www.911fly.com.

Electrical Current

Electrical current (120 volts, 60 Hz), flat-pronged plug and sockets are the same as in the U.S.

Health Considerations

Turista. Montezuma's Revenge. Food poisoning. Whatever name you give it, diarrhea is the last thing you want on this special trip. Guatemalan cuisine is delicious and interesting; take a little care, and you can enjoy some unique dining experiences during your trip.

Experts suggest eating foods that have been cooked and fruits that have been washed with purified water and/or peeled. Fresh lettuce salads may or may not be safe to eat, as some cooks wash fruits and vegetables in a solution that kills harmful surface bacteria, but not all take such care. Some restaurants will indicate on the menu if they follow these food-safe procedures. If in doubt, pass on anything that's uncooked.

Generally speaking, the large hotels are safer places to take calculated risks on such things than out-of-the-way local establishments. Perfectly ripened fresh fruits (pineapple, watermelon, cantaloupe, etc.) and fresh-squeezed juices (orange, pineapple, papaya, and others) are central to the wonderful breakfast buffets at the large hotels, and all should be safe to eat. Fruit is only a problem if it is eaten with the skin on (e.g. unpeeled apples) after being washed in tap water since it can carry the bacteria that cause stomach problems.

Regardless of where you dine, be very careful about eating at buffets. Hot foods on buffets can be breeding grounds for bacteria. In some cases, foods left over from buffets are refrigerated and reused the next day. Dangerous bacteria can grow because foods are served in chafing dishes that are never brought back to a safe boiling point. Order off the menu whenever possible, or eat foods you can see being prepared. Avoid dairy products unless you are confident that they are pasteurized-- or sterilized in the case of milk (*leche de caja*). Drink only bottled water, and carry a supply of Pepto-Bismol or Imodium in case something doesn't hit your system just right. Some travelers carry a prescription of Cipro antibiotic with them in case they contract a bacterial infection. For more information on this topic, read the Centers for Disease Control's coverage at www.cdc.gov/travel/food-drink-risks.htm.

Watch your alcohol consumption and avoid ice in mixed drinks. For simplicity's sake, wine and beer are safer bets since they are not served with ice. The section on "Water" has more information about staying healthy. Be sure to consider your personal health history and vulnerabilities when making food and beverage choices. And make sure you have health insurance coverage while in Guatemala.

If you are taking any medication, bring enough to see you through the entire trip and carry it in its original container. It's not a bad idea to carry an extra prescription, too, should you lose or misplace your medication. Contact lens solutions are NOT readily available, so plan ahead. Bring the usual "just in case" items you normally pack when traveling (pain reliever, bandages, etc.) plus pack something for diarrhea. Many over-the-counter medicines we use in the U.S. are readily available in Guatemala.

You might also consider showering after arriving in Guatemala to wash away any germs you've come in contact with on your journey. This is especially important if you are receiving your baby within the first 24 hours. Finally, coating the inside of your nose with Neosporin before getting on the plane will keep your nose moist and help ward off airborne bacteria.

Hotels

La Ciudad Guatemala, or Guatemala City, is divided into *zonas* (zones). The newest sections are *Zonas 9* and *10*, home to the U.S. Embassy, major hotels, and shopping areas. There are a number of nice hotels in the area, including the Westin Camino Real, the Princess Reforma, the Radisson, and the Marriott, all of which have web sites. These large hotels cater to international tourism and business conferences, so they have bilingual staffs, good food, comfortable rooms and their own internal water purification systems. Business centers with Internet access, spas, exercise rooms, and pools are also common-- though irons and ironing boards in the rooms are not! The Marriott, Radisson, and Westin have either designated blocks of rooms or entire floors reserved for adopting families. (Due to past incidents of harassment of foster mothers at some of these hotels, some agencies do not permit their clients to stay at them.)

Many first-time travelers look for the comfort of an "American" experience, so they choose one of these larger hotels. If you desire a bit more of an authentic Guatemalan experience, many parents and agencies recommend *La Casa Grande*. It is a simple, well-run hotel that does not have all the amenities of the large chain hotels, but is more affordably priced, caters to adopting families from all over the world, and has a charm reminiscent of colonial Spanish Guatemala (it was formerly a mansion). The staff are examples of true Guatemalan Hospitality, and you do get a flavor of what life is like in Guatemala. *La Casa Grande* is located next to the U.S. Embassy in *Zona 9* (convenient for your visa appointment).

The Guatemala-Adopt list serv (see footnote on page 2) is a great place to get up-to-date hotel recommendations.

Money

The *quetzal* (Q), named for Guatemala's rare and beautiful national bird, is divided into 100 *centavos*. There are coins and paper bills in denominations of 1/2, 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 *quetzales*. Exchange rates vary, but there are usually about seven to eight *quetzales* to one U.S. dollar. The easy-to-use currency calculator available on the Oanda website (www.oanda.com/convert/classic) not only shows the day's conversion rate, but it offers a wallet-sized cheat sheet for travelers, making it easy to shop without having to juggle purchases while doing mind-bending mathematics!

Banking by ATM is the easiest way to get currency in Guatemala because you don't have to exchange U.S. dollars for *quetzales*; simply insert your debit or credit card and withdraw cash in *quetzales*! ATM machines are available in Guatemala City and Antigua and can be used if your Visa card has the PLUS designation on the back. (Visa ATMs are much more common than MasterCard ATMs.) Please note that many credit card companies add a surcharge for purchases made outside the country.

Likewise, VISA is more widely accepted by merchants than MasterCard. U.S. dollars are widely accepted in the major cities as well, so it is not crucial that you enter the country (even after hours) with *quetzales*. Taxi drivers will happily accept payment in dollars.

Should you wish to exchange dollars or traveler's checks for *quetzales*, you can do so at most major hotels, at a *casa de cambios* (exchange house), at the airport in Guatemala City or in the U.S. airport of your departure, and by money changers on the street (this is legal in Guatemala). A small commission is charged whenever making an exchange. (When using travelers' checks, either put some in each adult's name or use dual-signature checks, so either adult can take care of the banking.)

Guatemalan banks are usually open from 8:30 or 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Hours vary from bank to bank with many closing mid-day for a couple of hours.

You will need to carry the following fees in *U.S. dollars*:

- \$380 for the Embassy Appointment.

You may also need, depending on the agency's policy:

- Approximately \$85 for your child's physical examination
- Approximately \$150 for the translator or facilitator.

And we recommend carrying:

- 25 single-dollar bills and some five dollar bills for tips.

Phone Calls

International phone calls from hotel room phones tend to be very expensive as most hotels add a service charge. When at all possible, use a pay phone in a hotel lobby and an international calling card.

International cards are widely available through long-distance providers, discount stores, and bulk-purchase clubs. Internet access is provided in the larger hotels, and Internet cafes are available in major Guatemalan cities. (Now that you have that nice digital camera, you can e-mail photos of your baby to friends and family!)

Guatemala changed its phone numbers in 2004 from seven digits to eight. Should you have an old phone number that you need to convert, use the conversion tool available at http://was.intelnet.net.gt/cambio_8d/index_en.php. To dial Guatemala from the U.S., dial 011-502-eight digit number. To dial the U.S. from Guatemala, dial 001-area code-seven digit number.

Finally, some U.S.-based cell phones can be used internationally once activated for international calls. Consider calling your carrier to see if your cell phone can be used from Guatemala, the per-minute call rate, and what you need to do to activate it.

Photography

Your child will cherish the pictures you take of her home country, so make an effort to capture Guatemala as realistically as possible. At the airports, have film hand checked even if you have never done this in the past, as contemporary X-ray equipment is very powerful and can easily ruin exposed and unexposed film.

Please exercise courtesy when photographing Guatemalans, particularly the Mayan people. Although they are resplendent in their colorful, traditional dress, Guatemalans are people just like you who are going about their daily lives-- not specimens to be documented. They do not like to be treated as such, nor do they appreciate their children being photographed without permission. Stories have circulated for many years that foreigners steal Guatemalan children either to raise them as their own or to harvest their organs. Intense fear and rumor resulted in the beating (San Cristobal Verapaz, 1994) and killing (Todos Santos, 2000) of tourists after they had photographed children. For your own safety, and out of respect for the Guatemalan people and their culture, always ask permission before taking a photo. Be prepared either to pay a small fee for the honor or to purchase whatever the person might be selling. If your request is denied, put your camera away immediately and move on. If you are allowed to take the picture, be sure to thank the person.



"May I please take your picture?" translates to "*¿Podria tomarle una foto, por favor?*" or "*¿Me da permiso para tomarle una foto, por favor?*"

Restrooms

Some restrooms may not be as sanitary as what you're used to, so try to use hotel and restaurant restrooms. Be aware that for reasons of water conservation and antiquated plumbing, damp toilet paper is often disposed of in a wastebasket, rather than in the toilet. If you enter a stall that has a wastebasket containing crumpled toilet paper, you'll know the protocol! It's also helpful to carry some tissues and wet wipes when you're out and about.



"Where is the bathroom, please?" translates to "*¿Disculpe, donde queda el baño?*"

Safety

You will be visiting areas (Zonas 9 and 10) frequented by tourists, and they are generally safe. When it comes to safety, being in Guatemala City is similar to being in New York, Los Angeles, or any large city; there are certain areas best left unvisited, especially at night. Prepare by reading the safety-related information in your favorite travel books and the State Department and U.S. Customs web sites listed in Chapter 2, "What to Know before You Go." Reports of recent attacks on foreigners are posted at <http://usembassy.state.gov/guatemala/wwhcrimee.html>.

Most importantly, use common sense! Play it safe by leaving your jewelry at home and by storing documents and extra cash in the hotel safe. When out and about, carry "on your person" the name, address, and phone number of your hotel and enough taxi money to get you there. Also note that it is very common to see heavily armed security guards in Guatemala. They are working to protect you, so try not to be alarmed.

Finally, one way to safely and conveniently explore Guatemala City and surrounding areas is to hire a taxi driver to spend the day with you, serving as your host and tour guide. Hotels generally arrange for this if

asked. Some drivers, particularly those who cater to adoptive parents, are happy to run errands for a small fee. For a list of drivers recommended by members of the Guatemala-Adopt list serv, see “Transportation” in this chapter.

Shopping

From Monday through Friday, shops and banks in the capitol generally open around 8:30 or 9 a.m. and close for an hour around 12:30 p.m. Once reopened, stores remain open until about 6 or 7 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays many stores close around 12:30 or 1 p.m., so ask your concierge or check your guide book before setting out.

Prices are fixed in larger stores but bargaining is expected in the markets and craft stores. Carrying a pocket calculator (or a cheat sheet generated by www.oanda.com makes currency conversion a breeze. Guatemalans work hard for their money, have very little opportunity, and deserve to be compensated in the same way you deserve to be compensated for your work. Getting a “great deal” is far less important than demonstrating respect and compassion for others.

Zonas 9 and 10 in Guatemala City have several shopping areas for international tourists. Beautiful hand-made children’s jumpers, vests, hats, booties, and stuffed animals in traditional fabrics make precious souvenirs. Guatemala is also known for its jade, coffee, and brightly painted folk art. If you like Guatemalan weaving and textiles, be sure to visit one of several such stores within walking distance of your hotel:

- Top quality Guatemalan textiles, books, and children’s toys can be found in the gift shop of the *Museo Ixchel del Traje Indigena*, the city’s incredible museum of Mayan dress.
- *Parque La Aurora*, near the airport in *Zona 13*, houses a good handicrafts market open Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- *In-Nola*, on the *Boulevard de los Proceres, Zona 10*, has beautiful woven fabrics by the yard, handicrafts and clothes. They have the clothes that the indigenous women use, and also tailored modern suits made of Guatemalan fabrics.
- On *14a Calle*, just ½ block west of *Avenida La Reforma* is an indoor artisans market with several shops carrying hand-made Guatemala goods.

Crafts and other souvenirs can be found at the *El Mercado Central*, a vast public market in the city’s historic *Zona 1*. Exercise caution and common sense here; as with any large, bustling public place, pickpockets can be a problem. Consider traveling to *El Mercado Central* with either a guide or a reputable taxi driver (see “Transportation” below or ask your concierge for recommendations). The market is located at *8 Avenida* and *8 Calle, Zona 1*; it is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to noon.

In the colonial town of Antigua, there are numerous wonderful shops and permanent artisans markets offering a wide variety of merchandise in all price ranges. Generally speaking, shops open at 9 or 10 a.m. and close at 7 p.m., with very few closing during lunch. Private vendors selling antique textiles and Guatemalan handicrafts can sometimes be found in the hotels, the courtyards off the main streets, and on church steps, but most are located in either the town’s “official” market near the bus station or in Antigua’s newest market, one located in the ruins of a building located at the corner of *3a Avenida* and *3a Calle*. Vendors staff stalls there daily.

In terms of individual stores in Antigua, *Colibri*, a beautiful textile boutique found just off the *Plaza Mayor (4a Calle Oriente No. 3B)*, sells lovely tablecloths, napkins, placemats, runners, and hand towels, as well as a small selection of men’s traditional shirts. The store supplies Mayan weavers with colorfast

yarn used to produce the many beautiful items featured in the store. Purchases from this store make wonderful souvenirs while also helping to provide hundreds of weavers with a steady source of income. Another must on any shopper's itinerary is the cavernous *Nim Po't* enterprise, said to house the world's largest retail Maya textile collection. Located near *La Merced* church (at *5a Avenida Norte #29*), *Nim Po't* is a consignment store for hundreds of indigenous suppliers. Here, you'll find an overwhelming number of new and antique textiles, hand-carved and painted masks, beaded jewelry, handbags, sculptures, books, t-shirts, and much, much more. For more information, visit the center on-line at www.nimpot.com.

Other recommendations from fellow adoptive families and Antigua locals include: *La Casa del Jade* (The House of Jade), adjacent to the main plaza; *Joyeria del Angel* (*Calle Oriente 5A*), for exquisite jewelry; *Casa de los Gigantes*, for craft items and gifts, including antique masks (*7 Calle Oriente 18*); and *Textura* on *5a Avenida* for higher-end textiles. Carolina Textiles, a weaving co-op situated in nearby San Antonio Aguas Calientes, is also worth a visit, though you'll need to hire a taxi for the short journey. If you plan on traveling a bit further a field, check out the small roadside shops en route to Lake Atitlan for antiques and textiles. And, if you have time, try to visit the town of Chichicastenango on Sunday or Thursday, its market days (see Chapter 9, "Day Trips"). "Chichi" is considered the largest *traje* (indigenous clothing) and *tipica* (crafts) market in Guatemala, for exporters and tourists alike.

Finally, if you can't find time to shop during your trip, allow an extra hour or so on the day of departure to browse through the shops inside the airport. Unlike most North American airports where goods can be overpriced and of mediocre quality, you'll find many of the same items in the airport gifts shops that are available throughout Guatemala, and at very comparable prices.

Special Souvenirs

There's no better place than Guatemala to pick up special items to include in your child's life book or memento box. Some typical items include airline ticket stubs, a local newspaper from the day you first met your child, brochures, Guatemalan stamps; anything that characterizes your trip is worth saving in a special place for your child. Parents frequently like to spend time at local shops and markets choosing small gifts like wallets, balls, and stuffed animals made from traditional fabrics, drums, flutes, dolls and jewelry to give to their children on Family Day each year.

Strollers

Parents are divided on the *necessity* of having a stroller with them when either visiting or picking up their children, but we can't remember any parent claim he or she actually regretted having brought one! Some argue that they did fine without one both in the hotel and in the airports, while others argue that they couldn't possibly have survived without one. We've done it both ways and recommend bringing a stroller.

Strollers are great makeshift highchairs and beds, not to mention great places to carry not only small children and babies but plenty of other stuff too! Since you will be able to keep your stroller with you all the way to the door of the airplane, you'll have the luxury of using it to carry not only your child, should you choose to, but your diaper bag, purse, jacket, and travel and immigration documents.

For information on checking a stroller at the airport, see "Traveling Home" in Chapter 12.

Time Zone

Guatemala is in the Central Time Zone but does not use daylight savings time in the summer.

Transportation

As discussed in the “Safety” section of this chapter, you can safely and conveniently explore Guatemala City and surrounding areas by hiring a taxi driver to either spend an hour or spend a day with you. We believe that hiring private drivers is safer than using the country’s many “chicken buses,” since your preoccupation with your child may make you an easy target for a thief on a crowded bus.

There are cabstands just outside the front doors of the hotels. Although taxis stationed in the queue are a dollar or two more expensive than the *rotativo* (roaming cabbies), they are licensed and therefore more trustworthy. They will gladly give you a business card imprinted with their cell numbers so you can call for pick up. Alternatively, they may prefer to wait for you at your destination.

Some drivers are more than just drivers. They are tour guides and translators and know well the particular needs of adoptive parents. Many are happy to run errands for a small fee and some even serve as translators during Embassy appointments and meetings with foster mothers. Members of the Guatemala-Adopt list serv (see page 6 for more on this list serv), recommend the following drivers. To call them from the U.S., dial 011-502-and their eight-digit phone numbers:

- *Julio Aguilar*. His email address is <juaraguilar@intelnett.com>. He is fluent in English.
- *Luciano Batres*. Either go to www.guatemalatouring.com for more information or contact Mr. Batres at <luciano@guatemalatouring.com>. His phone numbers are 2431-0466 and 2437-0073. He is fluent in English.
- *Pedro Carillo*. Contact Mr. Carillo at 2260-1326 (home) or 5302-3348 (cell). He is fluent in English.
- *Ruben Donis*. Contact Mr. Donis at 5212-1779. His e-mail is <josedonis@intelnett.com>. He is fluent in English.
- *Juan Carlos Garcia*. Contact Mr. Garcia at 5301-1904 or <transtito@hotmail.com>. He is fluent in English.
- *Wilfrido Guzman*. Contact Mr. Guzman at 5317-8453. He speaks Spanish.
- *Israel Muralles*. Contact Mr. Muralles at 5201-0593. He is fluent in English.
- *Jose Pineda*. Go to www.statravelguate.com for more information or contact Mr. Pineda at <staweb@intelnett.com>. He is fluent in English.
- *Humberto Ramos*. To arrange pick up from the airport, either call his friend Mike Buis in the U.S. at 630-205-8132 with your flight information or call Mr. Ramos directly in Guatemala at 5502-3939. Mr. Ramos speaks Spanish and a limited amount of English.
- *Edwin Rolando Rodrigues*. Contact Mr. Rodrigues at 5715-6673 or <edwin_rodrigu31@hotmail.com>. He is fluent in English.
- *Various drivers* employed by travel agent and adoption facilitator Nancy Hoffman. Contact Ms. Hoffman at <Nancy@GuatemalaReservations.com>.

Should you discover that one of these phone numbers has changed, please contact the authors using the comment form available at www.guatadopt.com/CSMailto/forms/GuideComments.htm.

Finally, addresses are articulated differently in Guatemala than they are in the U.S. For an explanation on how to read addresses, see “Addresses” in this chapter.

Travel Documents

Every traveler needs a valid passport. Sign the face page of your passport before leaving home and pack the photocopy in your checked luggage. Once you're settled, ask the hotel staff to photocopy the updated entry-stamp page for you as well. For extra security, lock your passport in the hotel safe and carry the photocopies with you.

Should you lose your passport, immediately contact the U.S. Embassy located at *Avenida La Reforma 7-01, Zona 10*, Guatemala City (phone 2326-4000/email AmCitsGuatemala@state.gov).

The Guatemalan government currently does not require U.S. citizens staying fewer than 90 days to obtain visas.

Traveling Twice

Guatemala is one of the few countries to which traveling twice (or even more!) is an option. And since the U.S. government recognizes the Guatemalan adoption as final, traveling twice gives your child the benefit of immigrating on an IR-3 visa and automatically receiving a Certificate of Citizenship. (See the note on IR-3 and IR-4 visas in Chapter 11, "The Embassy Appointment," for more on this topic.) Visiting before the adoption is finalized adds to the cost and logistical complexity of the process, and leaving behind the precious child you've adored for several days is emotionally difficult. That said, there are numerous benefits to visiting that are worth considering:

- You will get to meet the foster family while the child you are adopting is still in their care. The peace of mind that comes with knowing the baby is receiving good care will help sustain you while you wait.
- You can reassure yourself that the child is healthy. This is especially important when adopting a toddler or older child. Videos and photos are valuable, but they are no substitute for personal, direct observation.
- You will have the opportunity to enjoy the precious, wonderful child you are adopting at one or more points in his young life.
- You will smell her, kiss her, stroke her little head, talk to her, sing to her, hear her cry, experience her smile, feed her, and bond with her. What could be more divine?
- You can take the first step in helping the child become familiar with you, easing the final transition. See Chapters 7, "The Foster Family," and 8, "The Transition," for ways to build familiarization.
- You will have video and photos of him at a young age that will one day demonstrate to him that you were, indeed, part of his life during his infancy and before he came home.
- You will have the opportunity to experience Guatemala and Guatemalan culture (see Chapter 9, "Day Trips").
- You will become familiar with the city, the hotels, and the routine before your final trip, thereby easing the anxiety of traveling to an unknown place to meet an unknown child.

A mother describes it this way:

Joy and love, counterbalanced with a good dose of heartache, is basically parenthood in a nutshell. Sure, one can avoid the heartache of having to leave your baby behind, but by avoiding that bit of heartache you also miss out on the unparalleled joy of being with that special baby. I've visited twice now, and while it's hard to leave, the heartache of leaving is temporary, and the warmth, love and joy I experienced with this wonderful boy can't ever be taken away. It resides in my heart forever.

Vaccinations

No vaccinations are currently required for travel to Guatemala. However, we encourage you to check with your physician for recommendations before traveling. Changes are made occasionally by the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm), and your doctor may see a special need based on your medical history. Be sure to check with your doctor well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations consist of two injections spaced a month apart, and others must be administered six months prior to travel.

The CDC recommends that travelers to malaria-risk areas take an anti-malarial drug. Guatemala City and Antigua (areas most commonly visited by adoptive parents) are not, however, high-risk areas. Anyone planning a day trip into a jungle such as the one at Tikal National Park should consider taking an anti-malarial medication.

Water

Drink only bottled water and beverages, readily available throughout the country. Either avoid using ice or confirm that it was made with purified water before drinking iced beverages. The same holds true for water brought to you in a glass by a restaurant server.



“Is this pure water?” translates to “¿Es agua pura?” or “¿Es agua de filtro?” (filtered water).

“Is this bottled water?” translates to “¿Es agua de pote?”

“Was the ice made with pure water?” translates to either “¿Se hizo el hielo con agua de pote?” or “¿Se hizo el hielo con agua de filtro?”

Weather

If your travels only take you to Guatemala City and the surrounding region, you'll easily understand why Guatemala's official motto is “The Land of Eternal Spring.” Temperatures in Guatemala City are generally in the 70s during the day and the 50s at night. Temperatures are more extreme, however, in other areas of the country. Guatemala's rainy season spans from June through October, so if you travel during that time you will want to bring a rain poncho, an umbrella, and an extra pair of shoes. The rains are often torrential late in the afternoon. Regardless of the season, you'll want to bring a jacket or sweater, for the evenings inside and outside of Guatemala City can be cool.

Interested in what the weather was like on the day your child was born? The Weather Underground, Inc. can tell you in an instant! Go to www.wunderground.com/global/stations/78641.html to enter your child's birth date in the “History & Almanac” field.

4 – What to Pack

For Yourself

Casual, conservative clothing is both proper and practical. Guatemalan women usually wear skirts and dress pants, and men wear long trousers. Think “business casual.”

Shorts are not considered acceptable attire, especially for women, and should not be worn. Further, some teens and young adults in Guatemala wear jeans, but most adults dress more formally. The Guatemalans with whom you will be in contact will expect that you have some degree of wealth. Consequently, they will likely expect you to look nice, and that means dressing the part. *In short, leave your jeans and shorts at home and opt instead for khakis or dress pants.* Most local women do not wear sleeveless blouses or dresses. While it is okay to wear such clothing, bring along a sweater or shawl to cover your shoulders when in public. Plan on one fresh shirt per day and a pair of pants or skirt every two days. Good flat-bottom shoes with sturdy soles are best on Guatemala’s uneven sidewalks and essential when walking the cobblestone streets outside of Guatemala City. Athletic shoes are even better for long walks through Antigua. We also suggest sunglasses.

A mother reflects:

We learned that something we had heard was true: You really can’t get away with wearing shorts-- hardly anyone wears them. Even the poorest people look neatly groomed and pulled together. I usually don’t wear much makeup, but I found myself dabbing on lipstick frequently just so I wouldn’t look like a slob!

A travel book is a must-take for your first trip, as is a Spanish phrase book and a Spanish-English dictionary. Choose smaller editions that can fit into your shirt pocket or purse. Franklin (www.franklin.com) has a hand-held electronic dictionary that includes definitions, phrases, conjugations, learning games, and has audio so that one can listen to the proper pronunciation. Maps of Guatemala and Guatemala City are also nice to have, but not essential if you are sticking close to the hotel.

We recommend that you carry the cash and documents required for the embassy appointment in your carry-on luggage. See Chapter 11, “The Embassy Appointment,” for specifics. We also advise you to travel with 25 single dollar bills and a few fives, as they come in handy for tips.

Finally, you may want to consider packing bathroom essentials, a shirt, a pair of socks, a pair of underwear, sunglasses, and your photography equipment in a carry-on bag in case your luggage would be lost. Headphones also come in handy for enjoying in-flight entertainment. Mixing your belongings and your child’s things together in your checked luggage is another good strategy for dealing with the possibility of lost bags. It’s also nice to bring a few snacks that will “stick with you” (power bars, beef jerky, etc.) in case you miss a meal while traveling or while adjusting to your child’s schedule.

Due to heightened security measures, we recommend that you not lock your luggage since airport personnel may need to cut the locks to inspect the contents of your bag. You may want to instead consider using cable ties or plastic garbage bag fasteners to keep zippers closed. Make sure that whatever you use can be removed easily at checkpoints. Locks approved by the Transportation Safety Administration are another option. They can be unlocked by TSA staff as needed without destroying the locks. (Buy them from luggage retailers or search the Internet for “TSA locks.”)

For Your Baby

Don't be shocked if your child's stack of necessities is larger than yours! Get used to it, as this will be the case for years to come! The simplest part of packing for your child is gathering his or her clothes. Estimate one to two outfits per day, one pair of socks per day, a sweater or jacket, one pair of pajamas per night, and two baby blankets. You can reduce this stack if you wish by bringing fewer outfits and pajamas and using the hotel laundry service if necessary. Cotton T-shirt fabric is a very nice weight material for the weather in Guatemala. Guatemalans tend to wear long-sleeve shirts to protect themselves and their children from sun, wind, and insects. To demonstrate the same level of concern, and to show respect for the Guatemalan culture, you might consider dressing your child in long-sleeve shirts (and pants) and/or adding a sweater or jacket when you leave the room.

Bring a day's worth of bottles (six), plus some dish detergent, and a bottle brush for washing bottles and nipples in the hotel room. It is safe to wash dishes using tap water as long as the item is dry before using it again. A very thin dish towel comes in handy for drying the inside of the bottles in the event that they have not completely air-dried before it's time to use them again.

A heating element (available in the gadget aisle of your local grocery) is perfect for heating bottled water for your child's bottles. Simply place the water in a coffee mug or water glass, insert the element for a few seconds, and presto! You have warm water, ready for the addition of powdered formula. Formula that has been refrigerated can be reheated in the same manner. Another option is to run bottled water through the coffee maker in your hotel room and then add powdered formula.

Some foster mothers provide formula and diapers (estimate six a day) and others do not. For this reason, it is a good idea to bring some of each, plus a box or travel pack of wipes. Take the diapers out of the package and distribute them among your clothing to save space in your luggage.

Depending on the age of your child, pack a couple of baby spoons and a vinyl bib, plus a couple of tiny plastic containers with lids for feedings and for transporting snacks. A small Ziploc bag of baby cereal and a few jars of baby food may also be required. Talk with your agency about the specifics before you travel. Children nine months old and older enjoy Cheerios, graham cracker sticks, and Nilla wafers. They are tasty and dissolve easily so they are easy for little ones to handle. You can always buy additional supplies at a grocery store or pharmacy in the hotel district.

PARENTING Guide to Your Baby's First Year by Anne Krueger (Ballantine Books, 1999) recommends the following daily diet.

- Two-month-olds drink 3-8 ounces of formula 6-10 times a day.
- Three-month-olds drink 4-8 ounces of formula 6-8 times a day.
- Four- to six-month-olds drink 32 ounces of formula and eat 2-4 tablespoons of cereal, and 2-4 tablespoons of fruit.
- Six- to nine-month-olds drink 24-32 ounces of formula and eat 2-4 tablespoons of cereal, 3-4 tablespoons of fruit, 3-4 tablespoons of vegetables, and 1-2 tablespoons of meat.
- Nine- to twelve-month olds drink 16-24 ounces of formula and eat 2-4 tablespoons of cereal, 3-4 tablespoons of fruit, ½ slice of bread or ¼ cup pasta, 3-4 tablespoons of vegetables, and 2-3 tablespoons of meat.

This diet may be used to estimate the amount of formula and food you will need. Most Guatemalans use standard nipples-- nothing orthodontic, vented, or designed to simulate the breast. We recommend that you buy standard nipples with varying flows (slow, medium and fast) -- and be prepared to wash and reuse the one the foster mother provides if your baby does not seem interested in the nipple you introduce.

If you plan to use a particular bottle system when your baby comes home, bring it along on your first visit and ask that the foster mother transition your baby to it before he gets any more attached to a nipple you may not be able to replace.

If you plan to breastfeed your baby, we suggest waiting until you are home to begin (unless you are fostering your child in Guatemala). Not only will waiting give your baby time to become familiar with your voice, touch and smell before introducing the breast, but it is one less thing to manage while traveling. For more information on breastfeeding adopted infants, visit www.asklenore.com/, <http://fourfriends.com/abrw>, <http://breast-feeding.adoption.com/>, and other sites dedicated to supporting breastfeeding after adoption.

We recommend that you also bring infant nail clippers, baby wash (for body and hair), Q-tips, diaper rash cream, a comb, two spit-up cloths, a changing pad, a thermometer, and a fever-reducer, such as infant Tylenol or Advil. Make sure you find out in advance how much to give your child based on his weight, as the dosage is not always listed on the bottle for children under two years of age. Some parents also bring anti-gas drops if they anticipate a change in diet. A small amount of Woolite, shampoo, or dish detergent can be used for hand-washing clothes if necessary. An inkpad and paper or a plaster handprint kit (available at craft stores) can provide the makings for nice mementos of your first meeting with your child.

Not only does an umbrella stroller serve as a good makeshift highchair, it is handy for moving around the hotel, Guatemala City, and the airports. Depending on the age of your child, a front carrier or backpack is a useful alternative, especially outside of the capital city, where sidewalks and surfaces are often uneven. Age-appropriate toys and books are necessities.

For Your Toddler or Older Child

Estimate one outfit per day (plus a couple of extras), one pair of socks and one undershirt per day, a pair of shoes, and a pair of pajamas for every two days. A sweater or hooded jacket is also essential. Toddlers use four to five diapers a day. Consider “pull-ups” for the potty-trained child in case of accidents due to anxiety or travel delays. A blanket or quilt and a stuffed animal are also nice to bring along.

A small backpack of age-appropriate toys is essential (see Appendix A at the back of this guide for toy suggestions). Bring children’s Tylenol, kid-friendly toothpaste, and a toothbrush for your child, but don’t push it if he is not comfortable brushing his teeth. Carry tissues for the inevitable runny nose, wipes, and some snacks (such as crackers, cookies, raisins, or granola bars). A spill-proof cup is helpful for toddlers, and a stroller is a good idea for kids up to age four.

5 – The Trip, with a Capital T

The Flight

Scheduling flights into and out of Guatemala City is a relatively easy task, as there are numerous arrivals and departures by multiple carriers each day. Most flights into Guatemala City move through the Dallas/Forth Worth, Houston, Atlanta, or Miami airports, so the leg of your journey that will take you into Guatemala will likely be less than three hours long.

While descending into Guatemala City you may feel some turbulence due to the mountains. You'll swing around the west side of the city and land facing north, after getting a beautiful view of the double-humped volcano, Pacaya, and the huge Lake Amatitlan. (Requesting a window seat on the right side of the aircraft will afford you better views of Pacaya and the lake.) Be sure to complete customs and immigration forms distributed by the flight attendants before deplaning.

La Aurora Airport, Guatemala City

When you land, you will taxi to one of seven gates. Upon deplaning, you'll walk down a long hallway toward immigration and customs. First, you'll enter an immigration line, so have your immigration form ready, along with your passport. After the agent stamps your passport, you'll move through double doors toward the baggage claim area where you may see drug-sniffing dogs and security guards carrying rifles and submachine guns. It is very common to see armed security guards in Guatemala, so try not to be alarmed. Remember that the guards are working to protect you.

You will claim your bags from one of four baggage carousels. Once you've collected your bags, exit the baggage claim area either by passing a uniformed person who will collect your customs declaration or by moving through a baggage inspection line. We suggest taking the former path; expect that your baggage will not be searched, hand your customs form to the customs agent and be on your way!

Luggage carts are available (either for free or for \$1 each) should you need one. If you need help with your baggage, ask one of the many porters for assistance. He will remove your bags from the carousel, load them onto a cart, and escort you a short distance to the airport exit. Since the airport's glass exit doors delineate the end of the secured area, porters can't go beyond that point. You will likely meet your shuttle bus or taxi at this exit, so you will only have a few feet to manage your bags on your own. That said, should you need assistance outside of the secured area, ask someone outside to help you for a tip.

Be aware that once you go through the large, glass exit doors, you cannot re-enter the airport! In short, be definitive about your exit and transportation plans. There is a restroom to the left and just inside the exit doors, and to the right is a currency exchange. The exchange rate inside the airport is a bit better than the one outside the secured area (which is to the left through the glass exit doors). Keep your passport handy, since currency personnel will need to check it to exchange your money. For more on exchanging money see "Money" in Chapter 3.

Once you exit the secured area, you will see the INGUAT Tourism desk featuring a wide array of brochures. You can buy a good map of Guatemala for approximately \$1.50, but the other brochures are free. Your hotel driver will likely be right outside the airport exit, holding a sign for your hotel. The driver will show you to the curb, where you will wait while he gets the hotel van. There is usually a lot of activity just outside the airport exit since everyone who is awaiting someone's arrival must stand outside to greet his or her loved one. It can be disconcerting to be in a racial minority and/or in a foreign country surrounded by people who don't speak your language, but know that you are safe!

Travel from the airport to the city's hotel district (*Zona 10*) takes about 15 minutes.

The Hotel Zone

Nearly every hotel reception desk has English-speaking staff, so check-in should go smoothly. The large chain hotels have many of the amenities they offer in their U.S. locations: mini-bars, laundry service, cable TV, and coffeemakers. Most hotels offer internet access, plus there are numerous internet cafes throughout the hotel zone for accessing email. Logging on with a laptop from your room can be

prohibitively expensive, however, so use caution. If you call the U.S. from your hotel room, be prepared to pay about \$5 a minute. See “Phone Calls” in Chapter 3.

6 – Etiquette

Why Etiquette?

Your trip to Guatemala is not only the final step in the process, but an opportunity to learn about another culture, including the fact that there are wonderful people everywhere who share our same hopes and fears. This is what unites us as human beings, after all! Take the opportunity to learn as much about Guatemala as you can so you can share it with your child. Your child’s birth country is now part of your *family’s* history.

You are ambassadors for the United States, for your agency, and for those who will come after you!

Remember that others will follow you in the journey to adopt from Guatemala. Leave people you meet with a favorable impression of American adoptive parents so as not to make things more difficult for those who follow. Be gracious. Lower your voice. And fight (with all of your might!) against the stereotype of the “ugly American.”

Please Do!

- Remember that you are a visitor and guest in *their* country, and behave accordingly. Show respect for the people and the culture.
- Learn about Guatemala before you travel.
- Listen to the advice of your guide, host, or attorney.
- Show an interest in Guatemala’s customs and culture and try to adapt to them.
- Graciously accept food, drink, and gifts when they’re offered. Doing otherwise is culturally offensive.
- Go sightseeing if possible and take plenty of photographs.
- When there is a setback, remember that with patience and persistence it will pass and you will go home with your child.
- Make apologies for mistakes you may make. See Spanish suggestions below.
- Learn some Spanish before you travel, and use it. Your efforts will be appreciated.
- Bring a phrase book and dictionary with you and try to learn more of the language while you are there.



“Pardon me” or “Excuse me” translates to “*Perdoneme.*” You can use it if you bump into someone, need to get a clerk’s attention, correct a *faux pas*, or ask that something be repeated. “I’m sorry” translates to “*Lo siento,*” a broader term used to show empathy and compassion.

Being Patient and Flexible

Be patient with the process and courteous at all times. Keep in mind that Latin Americans tend to be more relaxed about time than folks from the States, so “7 p.m.” might mean “sometime tonight.” Allow plenty

of time between appointments and know that everything will come together just fine. Remember that the foster mother may not be able to get to your hotel at a precise time because she may either have other children to care for or have to depend on someone else for transportation.

We North Americans could learn a lot from our southern neighbors about healthy ways to approach the passage of time! Latin Americans are not as tied to schedules as many of us are, so meeting times arranged by your hosts may be approximate. Authors Jean Knoll and Mary-Kate Murphy said it best in their book International Adoption: Sensitive Advice for Prospective Parents: *It's not that Latin Americans are indifferent to time passing, but that time is less important than people's needs and consideration of each other. Getting angry about this relaxed sense of time is rude, and has the appearance of challenging another's importance or position—and is, therefore, counterproductive to any kind of personal or business transaction.* (p.135)

Dressing Yourself

- Dress conservatively in “business casual” style.
- Dress for the occasion. Meetings with your foster mother, attorney, or government officials require nicer clothes than those worn sightseeing.
- When packing, remember that you are not going on vacation. Leave your shorts, sweat suit, jogging clothes, and ski jacket behind.
- It is considered culturally offensive to dress either yourself or any children traveling with you in traditional Mayan clothing, as beautiful as it is.

Dressing Your Child

- Dress your child nicely when meeting social workers or other special persons.
- Dress your child as the foster mother would, even if he seems overdressed by your standards. Guatemalans often layer sweaters, jackets, blankets, and shoes over their children's exposed skin.
- Remember that we live with air conditioning, while Guatemalans generally do not. Babies, especially those younger than 18 months, do not regulate their body temperature very effectively, and can become chilled in a room that feels comfortable to you. Air conditioning can also dry out baby's nasal passages, so you might consider going easy on the A/C during baby's transition.
- Don't dress your child in sun suits in public, as doing so can be culturally offensive. You may dress your child as you wish once you get home.
- Demonstrate your love for your child by keeping shoes and socks on her while in public, since Guatemalans tend to equate bare feet with poverty.

Interacting With Your Child

- Treat your child with respect. Grabbing your child, raising your voice, or using demeaning language-- no matter how tired or frustrated you become-- will not help in the long run. If the child is misbehaving, redirect him to another activity.
- Keep an eye on your busy toddler. Do not “leash” her.
- Learn some basic Spanish phrases so you can communicate with your child. See Chapter 8, “The Transition,” for suggestions.
- Be careful about going out with your child in public; it is wise to be sensitive to the culture's views and feelings about international adoption. Many people prefer that Guatemalan children stay within the country. Ask your agency for advice.

Tipping

- A 10% gratuity is expected at restaurants. A similar level of tipping is also appropriate for taxi drivers and tour guides.
- A tip of a few *quetzals* (or one U.S. dollar) per bag for the hotel porter is appropriate.
- When using public restrooms, you may be in the care of a bathroom attendant, so be sure to have a few *centavos* ready to compensate them for their service.
- A room tip at the end of your hotel stay is strongly recommended. Adoptive families typically require high service levels (diaper disposal, bottles, formula, towel use, etc.). Be gracious and show that you appreciated the efforts of the cleaning staff that took care of you during your stay.



Using Courteous Language

- The Guatemalan people are courteous, gracious, and accommodating. It is considered proper to say “*buenos dias*,” “*buenas tardes*,” and “*buenas noches*” for “good morning,” “good afternoon,” and “good evening,” rather than the familiar “*hola*.” “*Buenas tardes*” is used until nightfall.
- Remember to say *por favor* (please), *gracias* (thank-you), *de nada* (you’re welcome), and *perdoneme* (excuse me).
- Learn a few phrases in Spanish, such as “*¿Me podria dar la cuenta, por favor?*” (“May I have the check please?”) and “*¿Disculpe, donde queda el baño?*” (“Where is the bathroom please?”).

Please Don’t...

- ...Be impatient, inconsiderate, loud, noisy, belligerent, demanding, or argumentative.
- ...Overuse alcohol.
- ...Put yourself on a time schedule and/or set deadlines that your hosts either cannot meet or will have no inclination to meet.
- ...Try to “buy” your way to faster service.
- ...Seek or expect to find your culture in the foreign country.
- ...Form a clique with other North Americans and shut out others.
- ...Be afraid to socialize with your hosts.
- ...Make demands or expect others to cater to you.
- ...Indulge in political conversation with people in your host country.
- ...Expect a foreign bureaucracy to work any more efficiently or swiftly than one of ours.
- ...Complain about or criticize different customs, attitudes, political events, or social conditions.
- ...Argue if you are told by the orphanage staff, passport office, or other entity to return tomorrow.
- ...Be afraid to ask questions, but phrase them carefully.
- ...Expect sterile conditions. Instead, remember that your child made it this far and will survive even if conditions are not up to your standards of cleanliness or newness.
- ...Take offense if you are treated rudely or brusquely. The best way to handle such situations is to rise above them, stay calm, and not respond in kind.
- ...Videotape or take pictures of foster parents, facilitators, lawyers, children, or orphanage staff without their permission.
- ...Take cameras or any electronic devices to the U.S. embassy.

7 – The Foster Family

The opportunity to spend time with your child’s foster parents is one of the privileges of adopting from and traveling to Guatemala. For many families, the time they spend with foster parents is the most deeply rewarding aspect of the trip-- besides, of course, the joy of meeting their children. Some are fortunate to form lasting relationships with their children’s “first families.” Be open to this possibility, as it is a chance to get to know someone from another culture and to establish a connection with your child’s history that will be important later in life.

A father remembers:

We were fortunate enough to have spent a lot of time with our foster family. When we visited during the process, we rented a multi-bedroom casita in La Antigua and had our foster mom stay with us (and our daughter, of course). That experience was one that we will forever cherish, and to this day we remain very close with the entire foster family. I learned so many things from our experience, including how to care for a small baby. I also learned about Guatemalan culture and what it is like for these wonderful women [to foster and then let go]. Our foster mom told me how her whole family cries for weeks every time a child leaves. And she told me that the thing she wished for more than anything else was to have the opportunity to meet all of the families, not only because it prevents her from having to send the children she loves into the arms of strangers but because it provides her with the opportunity to talk to parents about their children – their likes, dislikes, nicknames, favorite games and foods, their sleep patterns and all the other things that make transitioning easier on the child and on the adoptive parents.

Before the First Visit

Parents frequently want to send their children a care package in an effort to connect with them over the miles. We suggest that you talk with your agency to clarify their exceptions in this regard before going shopping. Should care packages be allowed, you might consider including the following items:

- Sleepers and undershirts in various sizes so baby can grow into them. (Undershirts and “onesies” are difficult to find in newborn sizes so they are always appreciated. Frequent hand-washings and harsh laundry detergents cause clothes to wear out quickly in Guatemala.)
- Pictures of the adoptive family (a 4x6 close-up of each person with his or her name and relationship written on the back). Soft-cover albums designed for use by infants and young children are available in baby superstores and in the baby department of discount stores. For older children, include pictures of your home, your neighborhood, and local attractions.
- A micro-cassette recorder or CD player with recordings of the adoptive parent(s) reading and singing to the baby or child. A collection of Latin lullabies would also be nice.
- A small blanket or stuffed toy that the parent(s) has slept with for a week or so and not washed
- Disposable cameras so the child will have photos to cherish as he or she grows
- A warm letter translated into Spanish

Foster mothers have indicated that they have noticed that children who have heard their parents’ voices on tape, have seen their parents’ faces in photos, and have smelled their parents’ scent (via a blanket or stuffed animal) seem to transition better to their families when they meet them for the first time.

The cassette recorder is a popular item and is the source of many touching stories such as this one from an adoptive mother:

We made a tape of us singing song and then sent the tape, a small tape player, and a supply of batteries to the foster mother, along with disposable cameras, a few baby outfits, and some gifts for the foster mother and her children. We asked that the family play the tape for our daughter-to-be at quiet times, perhaps once a day, so that she would know our voices. We don't know how often they played it, but among the wonderful pictures that they took during her time with them is one of her lying on a bed, the tape player nearby on the bed, and her craning her neck, clearly listening to it.

The First Visit

The way visits by prospective adoptive parents are handled varies by agency. Some agencies limit visits between adoptive parents and their intended children to a couple of hours, while others require foster mothers to be in attendance for the duration of the visit (even visits lasting several days and nights). Still others allow prospective parents to keep their children for several days without the company of foster mothers. While agency policies vary, most agree on one thing: prospective adoptive parents must remain on hotel property with their intended children-- at least while they are within the city limits of Guatemala City. Although it may be difficult to hear that another parent “got her baby longer,” please keep in mind that agency staff make rules based on their experiences and comfort levels.

Your first visit with the foster family may start out a bit awkwardly due to the language barrier and to your being thrown together as strangers at an emotionally charged time, but your mutual interest in the child will help any awkwardness to dissipate quickly. Don't worry if you don't speak Spanish; it is amazing how much can be communicated with body language and a few simple words! Should your child's foster mother arrive at the hotel unaccompanied by an attorney or agency representative, ask a member of the hotel staff to serve as translator.

Foster mothers who stay with prospective parents and their intended children for a couple of days often expect to take care of the baby just as they do on a day-to-day basis but happily discover that they are being treated to a mini-vacation since prospective parents want to care for their children as much as possible! Not only is it advantageous for the baby to have both parties present (after all, it can be very frightening and disruptive to infants and children to be left in the company of strangers), but parents who have shared extended visits with foster mothers rave about their experiences. Such visits allow both the parents and the foster mothers to get to know one another, and the parents can learn from their children's foster mothers exactly how their children are used to being cared for. (For a thorough checklist of care-related questions to ask the foster mother, see www.guatemalaadopt.com/links.htm.) Sharing an overnight visit with your child and his foster mother is a lovely gift that all can enjoy.

Keep in mind that foster mothers are paid rather minimally (approximately \$150 per month), and for some this may be the only source of household income. Always pay the foster mother's taxi fare and all of her expenses when you are with her, and treat her (and anyone accompanying her) to a meal. Conversely, always be gracious in accepting gifts from the foster family; it is bad form to decline a gift.

Words of Caution

Harassment of foster mothers by the police has occurred intermittently over the years and seems to be related to the prevailing political climate regarding international adoption. It is important to respect the wishes of your agency and lawyer as they try to minimize any chance of harassment. It is common, for

example, for agencies to insist that you not leave the hotel with your baby until the adoption is complete. Keep in mind that from a legal standpoint prospective parents have no legal right to be alone with their intended children before their adoptions are finalized.

One agency director described the situation as follows:

No matter how statistically unlikely it might be for a foster parent to be harassed by the police, it does indeed happen and it is usually not very pretty when it does. If the political climate at any moment is unfavorable, it can be one tiny step from a person being completely innocent and standing accused of a crime they did not commit to their being judged and found guilty from the outset.

Our agency's policy has been that visits between the adoptive family and the child must take place either at our attorney's office or in a hotel with the foster mother present. The foster mother and the child cannot leave the hotel, and we must approve in advance the family's choice of hotel.

Harassment can endanger the foster mother, the child, and the attorney. In some cases, even the adoptive parents have been harassed and detained by police. One such incident can lead to serious problems not only with that child's case but with all of the cases the attorney is handling. By extension, it can affect adoptions overall by generating more bad press, whether it is deserved or not. I think it is very fortunate that there aren't more such incidents. It's tragic that adoptive families, foster moms, and attorneys are subjected to this, but it's a fact of life.

Finally, remember that the foster mother is in a delicate position between you and the lawyer. Do not try to extract information from her that should come from the lawyer or the agency. She is the caretaker, not an expert in the progress of your case. And certainly do not overreact if the foster mother reveals sensitive or surprising information.

Personal Gifts for the Foster Family

Adoptive parents frequently like to give their children's foster mothers a gift at the completion of their children's adoptions. *We cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of asking your agency representative not only for their company policy on gift-giving, but for their gift recommendations should they support gift-giving.*

Personal gifts are appreciated, but they should be given with the recipient in mind. Some adoptive families have given things like perfume, bath products and jewelry only to realize that their foster mothers are not the perfume or jewelry type! Keep in mind that foster mothers are not wealthy people, so the most appreciated gift may be something practical.

The appropriateness of cash as a gift is hotly debated. On one hand, it is perhaps *the* most practical gift for someone who wishes only for the basics, but on the other hand, it could be considered crass or, worse, it could corrupt a personal relationship. It should certainly not be given as a "tip."

Here are some suggestions collected from adoptive parents:

- For anyone: postcards and calendars depicting your city or state.
- For children: candy, coloring books and crayons, barrettes, purses, and simple toys (such as small puzzles, dolls, jump ropes, Lego sets, Nerf balls, stuffed toys, and matchbox cars).
- For teens: anything that's considered "hot" by American teens (including music CDs and clothes), sunglasses, small trendy purses, and a Spanish/English dictionary or phrasebook.

- For women: jewelry (including pierced earrings), watches, cardigan sweaters or jackets (in small or medium probably), fancy lotions and soaps, colognes, picture frames, decorative towels, candy dishes, and other home goods. February and June are easy times to make selections since there are plenty of Valentine's Day-themed gifts and Independence Day-themed (Americana) gifts available.
- For men: T-shirts, sweatshirts, and caps from local colleges or professional sports teams, backpacks, wallets and coin purses, cologne, sweaters (in medium probably), polo-style shirts, and gift certificates to local restaurants.

Contact from Home

Contact with the foster family or lawyer (via telephone, mail, or e-mail) after you return home is deeply appreciated by some and easily arranged with a simple exchange of addresses during the transitional meeting on the pick-up trip. The extent to which this is allowed or promoted varies by agency. Some require that all contact with foster parents be done through the agency, while other agencies prefer not to be involved at all. In any case, remember that foster family members are breaking a bond with a child whom they have loved for several months. Letting go can be difficult. Some foster parents say that it is rare for adoptive parents to stay in touch with them, but that they sincerely appreciate it when it happens. Staying in touch is another way to reinforce an international friendship. If you choose to return to Guatemala some day, reuniting with your child's foster family will surely be a joyous time!

If your foster parents are fortunate enough to have Internet access, e-mail is the most convenient way to remain in contact. Otherwise, if you wish to send letters and photographs periodically, you may want to use Federal Express or DHL, as regular mail service in Guatemala can be unreliable. King Express, a Guatemalan-owned courier service, is another popular choice. To reach King Express in the U.S., call 800-811-5464. Be considerate when sending packages, since Guatemalans have to pay taxes on packages they receive. Consider enclosing a few dollars to compensate them for the expense of receiving your gift!

Saying "Goodbye" – A Personal Story

We had the privilege of getting to know the foster mother and her two teenage daughters on both of our trips. They all doted on our baby, and they were sad to see her go. When we arrived at the airport for our departure, we were surprised to see all three of them there to see us off. The younger daughter had purchased a set of worry dolls, one of which she placed around our baby's neck, and another around my wife's. The third she hung around her own neck with the words, "Always by my heart." There were tears all around. We have kept in contact with them over the years and have both treasured the ongoing relationship.

8 – The Transition

The First Meeting

The story of your first meeting with your child will be among the most precious stories you will ever tell, so savor the moment! If you concentrate solely on taking pictures, you will forever miss the magic.

Before the meeting-- and as difficult as it may be-- try to let go of your preconceived image of your first moments together. Although you may have been imagining for many months a joyful and loving union, your child may be hesitant at first and the foster mother may be cool and reserved. They are a team and they need to size you up! Your child will be in a new place and will be processing everything that is happening. Be patient with him, with yourself, and with your traveling companion.

You might want to have a small toy, bubbles, or a little candy in your pocket, depending on the age of the child. These items are good ice-breakers for everyone. Go slowly and watch your child-- and the foster mother-- for clues. We suggest that you bring a piece of notepaper and pen to write down the child's schedule, including how much she eats and drinks. It can be difficult to remember amazingly simple details at such emotionally charged times!

A father remembers:

“The foster mother stood up and gave our daughter to me to hold. She looked into my eyes and smiled. I was in heaven. My wife smiled an extraordinary smile radiating from her soul. After an hour playing with our daughter in the hotel room, we knew she was the perfect baby for us. We had become a forever family.”

Smoothing the Transition for Your Child

Much has been written about bonding with an adopted child, but in our experience bonding begins with the first photographs you receive and deepens with the first touch. There is an essential part of your being -- fully formed but perhaps untapped-- that knows how to love a child. Trust your instincts.

Display the emotions that you want your child to emulate, and demonstrate warmth through your tone of voice, body language, and words. Make lots of eye contact, give your child time to relax now and then, and don't be surprised if she suddenly cries for no apparent reason. Sometimes a change of place (leaving the room, going outside, or being in the company of Hispanic people) is just what the doctor ordered. Everything she is familiar with has changed and she needs time to adjust. Your child may prefer someone else over you, and this is okay too. This will change over time, so be patient.

A mother remembers:

“Our children's transitions were very different, even though they were both adopted at nine months of age. Our son was all smiles and laughter when we first met, but then he became extremely clingy for weeks on end. His way of coping with the disruption in his life was to hold on tight to the one person with whom he felt safe: me! By contrast, our daughter was very reserved and quiet, and she sucked her fingers almost constantly. She did not hold eye contact for the first several weeks and she did not like to be held close or snuggled. Over time, our son began to trust the world around him and our daughter began to trust us.”

Introduce new things gradually. Experts recommend treating your child like a newborn in many ways, no matter his or her age, so he learns to trust that you will attend to his needs. This may include holding an

infant's bottle even when she can it herself, feeding your older child with a fork, holding his cup while he drinks, rocking him and having him sit on your lap rather than beside you. You may want to continue with these behaviors until it is obvious they are no longer needed.

Do not be concerned if your child does not follow the eating and sleeping schedule reported by the foster mother. Ditto if she skips meals, eats very little-- or eats a lot! These things generally take care of themselves. If they become a problem after you return home, consult your child's physician. Initially, we suggest maintaining the child's current schedule and preferences. This is a time to build trust and demonstrate that your child's needs and wishes will be met.

Your child might find sleeping in a new place difficult at first. Heck, you might not sleep so well when traveling either! Be patient and remember that this is a process. Hold your baby, rock her, sing to her, look her in the eyes, and speak softly. If you intuit that what she really wants is to fall asleep on her own with a bottle, go that route! You may want to learn some Spanish lullabies before you travel and practice the words and phrases suggested in the "Baby Talk" section at the end of this chapter.

A note on Mongolian Spots: You may notice what appears to be a bluish-black bruise on your child's buttocks, back, shoulders, ankles, or wrists. What you're seeing is very likely a Mongolian Spot birthmark, and nothing to be concerned about. They are very common in Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and black children, and will fade with time. The spots may be noted on your child's Guatemalan medical report. Be sure that your U.S.-based pediatrician documents the presence of the spots at your child's first visit.

The Older Child

The first visit with an older child (age two and over) is a dance that should be danced with care. The first meeting may be at the orphanage, or with the foster mother at her home or in your hotel. In any case, the adoptive parents usually stay in the background so they do not confuse or overwhelm the child. Playing simple, universally-liked games – blowing bubbles, kicking a ball, or playing with a stuffed animal – will help break the ice gradually. The foster mother or caretaker stays in sight, but may move away when the time is right. It is important to follow your agency's recommendations and not expect too much at first. Keep in mind the best interests of the child in smoothing his transition. If you travel twice-- and we highly recommend you do-- the previous meeting(s) will make the final transition easier.

A father remembers:

The first meeting with our 2-year-old son-to-be was carefully orchestrated. We first met with a social worker who prepared us on how to act and what to expect. When our son was brought to the hotel, he, of course, stayed close to his foster mother. After a while of kicking a ball and blowing bubbles in the hotel courtyard, the foster mother moved into the shadows to see how he reacted. (Evidently, she had been carefully prepared for her role as well.) Later, we went up to our hotel room and made rattles out of yogurt containers and raisins. It's amazing how creative you can get in a pinch. Our son had a ball! All the while, my wife and I were careful to let go of any expectations, and to allow the relationship to develop at his pace. When our son and his foster mother left the hotel for the last time, I knelt down and he spontaneously let go of the foster mother's hand to give me a hug. I said, "Yo te amo, siempre" in my bad-grammar Spanish, and he said "Ya." I bonded at that moment.

It's a good idea to bring a few toys for your first days together. Some children will not have had many toys and others will not know what to do with them at all. Keep this in mind when packing. Bring only a

few *simple* toys (plus a few bathtub toys since bathing your child is a wonderful way to build trust and start the bonding process). Dolls, cars, crayons, bubbles, are good choices.

Even if you know a bit of Spanish, bring an English-Spanish dictionary. The language can be spoken quickly and it is difficult to get children to slow down their speech so you can understand them. If your Spanish is limited or nonexistent, then have a friend or someone from your agency teach you some basic and necessary phrases-- and then practice them to the point of mastery before you travel. You'll want to know how to reassure a frightened and mourning child, in addition to being able to communicate mealtime, bedtime, and bathroom wishes. ("Adopting from Latin America," a CD-handbook set available for purchase online, covers adoption-specific phrases for use with children and hosts. It's available at <http://worknotes.com/AZ/AdoptingfromRussia/Kelleher/h1.stm>.)

Older children are aware of what is happening to them. Although you may see this union as a joyous occasion, your child may be frightened beyond words. In most cases, the older child will realize that you are his new parents, but he will still be unfamiliar with you, your language, and his surroundings. Worse, he may feel abandoned by the people he trusted.

Don't be surprised if your child latches onto her clothes or something that she brought with her. Respect the fact that these are precious possessions to her and don't try to swap them out for something newer, fancier, and of your choosing. By contrast, your child may latch on to the beautiful new things you've brought! If she wants to sleep in her shoes, by all means let her. This will not last forever. If your child is scared of having his teeth brushed, then let it go. *Remember that your job at this point is to build trust.* If he has aversions to certain foods, respect that. This is the time to transition slowly. You can work on introducing different things later-- after you have developed a rapport.

Do not expect your child to fall in love with you the moment she meets you. Expect a lot of crying, tantrums, attitude, and anger. Be gentle and understanding. Set limits and expect them to be tested. Unlike an infant who needs your constant care, an older child may not appreciate having her independence violated! *Practice patience!*

A mother remembers:

"Our four-year-old daughter latched onto a Barbie doll, and that was her toy for the remainder of our trip. She was ecstatic about the running water in our hotel bathroom; she spent hours in the bathtub those first few days playing in the running water. The first night, she slept with her shoes on and refused to take off any clothes. She also held on tightly to two toys that she had brought with her. She was frightened that the things that were familiar and valued might be taken away from her. Our daughter cried, hit, spit, and yelled at us those first few days and months, and

in between those times I tried desperately to win her trust."

For more on this topic, see Appendix B, "Attachment, for You and Your Child."

Baby Talk



The following terms of endearment may be familiar to your son or daughter. Use them generously!

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Sweetie (same for boys and girls) | Cariño |
| Beautiful little girl | Niña bonita |
| Handsome little boy | Niño guapo |
| My baby | Mi bebe |
| My baby girl (my baby boy) | Mi beba (Mi bebé) |
| My little baby girl (my little baby boy) | Mi bebita (Mi bebito) |

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| My love | Mi amor |
| My sky | Mi cielo |
| My sunshine | Mi sol |
| My king | Mi rey |
| Doll | Munequita (Munequito) |
| Princess | Princesa |
| Little princess | Princesita |
| Pretty (handsome) | Que linda (Que lindo) |
| Little frog (while bouncing on your lap) | Sapita (Sapito) |
| Other helpful words include: | |
| Diaper | Pañal(es) |
| Pacifier | Pepe |
| Bib | Babero |
| Undershirt | Camiseta |
| Blanket | Frazada |
| Fever | Fiebre |
| Nipple (for bottle) | Mamón |

These are the very basics for communicating with an older child. We suggest that parents of older children learn additional phrases to help smooth the transition.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bathroom | Baño |
| Do you have to use the bathroom? | ¿Tienes que ir el baño? |
| It's time to take a bath! | ! Es hora de bañarse! |
| Time to get out of the tub! | ! Es hora de salir de la tina! |
| Do you need to go pee-pee/pooh-pooh? | ¿Necesitas hacer pipi/popo? |
| Please try to go pee-pee. | Por favor trata de hacer pipi. |
| Food | Comida |
| Let's go eat. | Vamos a comer. |
| Would you like something to eat? | ¿Te gustaría comer algo? |
| Do you want chicken (fruit)? | ¿Quieres pollo (fruta)? |
| Please try to eat a little. | Por favor trata de comer un poco. |
| Are you finished eating? | ¿Acabaste de comer? |
| Hungry | Hambre |
| Are you hungry? | ¿Tienes hambre? |
| Thirsty | Sed |
| Bottle | Pacha |
| Are you thirsty? | ¿Tienes sed? |
| Do you want milk (water)? | ¿Quieres leche (agua)? |
| Are you finished with your cup? | ¿Ya terminaste con tu taza? |
| Sleepy | Sueño |
| Are you sleepy? | ¿Tienes sueño? |
| Did you sleep well? | ¿Dormiste bien? |
| Go back to sleep please. | Vete a dormir por favor. |
| More/no more | Mas/No mas |
| Are you alright? | ¿Estás Bien? |
| Everything will be alright | Todo estará bien. |
| Do you want to go out? | ¿Quieres salir? |

9 – Day Trips

Guatemala is a lovely place to visit and offers many exciting destinations not far from Guatemala City. Travelers who want to see a bit of the country either before or after visiting their children may want to consider some of the area’s popular tourist destinations. The Guatemala travel guide published by Lonely Planet is excellent and offers detailed information on all of these destinations and many more.

The safest, most convenient and most enjoyable way to experience Guatemala is without the company of an infant or toddler! Since international and trans-racial adoption is sometimes misunderstood (and feared) outside of the more cosmopolitan areas of Guatemala City and Antigua, many experts do not recommend that foreigners venture outside of these cities with their Guatemalan-born children.

Many adoptive parents have had great success using Nancy Hoffman (Nancy@GuatemalaReservations.com), an Antigua-based travel agent and adoption facilitator, to coordinate private in-country travel and tours. Infant, baby, and booster car seats are available from her upon request.

Finally, we noted with interest that our recommendation to visit Antigua, Chichicastenango, Lake Atitlán, and Tikal National Park was echoed by author Patricia Schultz in her book “1,000 Places to See Before You Die.” The title says it all!

Antigua

Founded in 1543 and located approximately 45 minutes southwest of Guatemala City, *La Antigua* (Antigua) is home to the continent’s single greatest repository of Spanish colonial architecture. Historic ruins dating back as far the 16th and 17th centuries stand alongside contemporary galleries, dozens of Spanish-language schools and internet cafes, and a fine assortment of shops and restaurants. A trio of volcanoes (*Agua Volcano*, *Acatenango* and *Fuego*) stand guard over this charming town, as it is considered by many the most delightful place in Guatemala to stay for either a short time or a lifetime.

Walking tours are offered by Elizabeth Bell’s Antigua Tours (7832-0140, ext. 341) and others. If you would prefer a less structured approach to exploring Antigua, then consider picking up a copy of Moon Handbooks “Guatemala,” as it includes enough information about places of historical interest that you could create your own walking tour, *sans* guide.

Saturday and Sunday are market days in Antigua—a good time to buy any number of items made by Mayan artisans. For more information on shopping in Antigua, see the “Shopping” section in Chapter 3, “Planning Your Trip to Guatemala.”

Chichicastenango

There is no finer example of a bustling Mayan market than that which you’ll find in Chichicastenango. Market days are Sundays and Thursdays, and on them the town is an explosion of color. Mayan artists and vendors come from all over to sell their wares, which include everything from hand-woven and hand-embroidered decorative pieces and clothing, to pottery, to flowers, to fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, to chickens and machetes. The 400-year-old church of *Santo Tomas* overlooks the market and is open to visitors who may enter through its side doors. Since the church is still used for religious services and by Shamans for their rituals, visitors should demonstrate considerable respect by being as low-key as possible while on its grounds.

“Chichi” is situated 87 miles northwest of Guatemala City, a two- to three-hour trip by car. Several hours of shopping, a stop for lunch and hours spent *en route* make for a long, memorable day.

Guatemala City

La Ciudad Guatemala (Guatemala City) is a metropolitan city of 2 million people. As such, it shares many of the same conveniences and problems of other cities this size. Some significant earthquakes in the early part of the 20th century destroyed many of Guatemala’s colonial buildings, but there is still plenty to see and do. We suggest consulting your travel guide for specifics.

Families traveling with children may want to consider the following local sights. All are inexpensive and are popular with adoptive families.⁴

- **Parque Zoológico La Aurora** – The zoo near the airport is like a little oasis in Guatemala City. It is clean and safe, and children enjoy it. It’s a great place to “people watch” too! Guatemalan children dress up to go to the zoo, so clearly going is a special treat.
www.laurorazoo.centroamerica.com/main.htm
- **Museo de Los Niños**– This outstanding children's museum is near the zoo. Weekends are busy, but during the week you practically have the place to yourself. Every activity is staffed.
www.enjoyguatemala.com/info/museums_guatemalacity.htm
- **Museo Ixchel de Traje Idígena** – Not only will this small, textile museum interest adults traveling alone, but it has a hands-on kids’ area for those traveling with children.
www.ixchelfriends.org/
- **Pollo Campero** – This slick, clean Guatemalan-owned chain restaurant serves chicken in any form imaginable and has locations throughout Central America. Kids enjoy eating from plates featuring chicken super-heroes!
- **El Mercado de Artesanías** – This open-air artisan market near the airport is beautiful, clean, and safe. It’s a manageable place for kids to shop for souvenirs.

Lake Atitlán

Described by many as the most beautiful lake on earth, *Lago (lake) Atitlán* covers approximately 78 square miles and is ringed by three spectacularly close volcanoes (*Volcán San Pedro*, *Volcán Atitlán* and *Volcán Tolimán*). Many visitors to the area stay in Panajachel, but smaller towns surrounding the lake also have hotels.

Although there are a handful of sights worth visiting, the real showstopper is the scenery. You may enjoy either hiking any one of the lake’s volcanoes (guides are recommended) or spending the day doing absolutely nothing but sitting lakeside staring straight ahead! One of the big surprises of the area is the assortment of English gardens gracing the property of Hotel Atitlán. They stretch from the hotel entrance to the banks of the lake. Gardeners, rejoice!

Tikal National Park

Between A.D. 250 and 900, Tikal was a vast urban community punctuated by broad plazas, soaring monuments and numerous temples. Now it is the standard by which all other Maya ruins are judged. Situated north of Flores and slightly south of the Mexican border, the ruins of Tikal are tucked inside the largest primary tropical forest north of the Amazon.

It's possible to see much of Tikal in a day, although some people choose to stay overnight at the park so they can more spend more time exploring this gem. Daytrip packages generally include airfare from Guatemala City to Flores, lunch, and a guided tour through a jungle that is alive with howler monkeys, spider monkeys, turkeys, toucans and various other creatures big and small. Hiking through the jungle to reach the various ruins is hot and sometimes strenuous, but it is experience not soon forgotten.

10 – The Passport and Visa

The Passport

Your child will travel home on a Guatemalan passport and a U.S. visa. In most cases, lawyers secure children's passports before adoptive parents arrive. We suggest that you confirm with your agency that this will be the case for your child.

The Visa

If your child has not been photographed for his visa, then you will need to have it done before you visit the embassy. Attorneys and hotel staff generally direct parents to one of several photo shops along the block facing the left (north) side of the Embassy to have the photos taken. The cost is Q45 (about \$6). Taxi drivers may instead drop you near the Embassy in the midst of people taking photos inside of their vans. Make your decision ahead of time if you want to locate the photo shop or just barter with the "photo van." The photos produced in the van are good ones, but the photographers have been known to raise their prices after the pictures are taken. After securing the photos, you will submit them (along with all of the documents your attorney provides) at your embassy appointment.

The Physical Examination

A physical examination by an approved physician is required before the U.S. Embassy will issue a visa. The exam may be conducted prior to your arrival in the country or it may be scheduled in the days before the visa appointment, in which case you may accompany your child to the appointment. Since this varies by agency, check with your agency before traveling. A fee of \$85 is collected at the physician's office, so find out if you need to bring cash to cover this expense.

11 – The Embassy Appointment

The Visit

You must visit the U.S. Embassy Consular Section to obtain a visa for your child. Visa appointments are usually scheduled first thing in the morning. The U.S. Embassy is a few blocks from the major hotels along *Avenida La Reforma*, the main downtown thoroughfare. It is easily walked, but you may want to take a taxi, as it is amazing how long it takes to get a baby ready in the morning! With some agencies, a translator or facilitator will drive you to the Embassy and accompany you inside.

First and foremost, *travel light*. The U.S. Embassy Consular Section will not allow you to take in a large diaper bag. We suggest that you take a couple of gallon-size Ziploc bags with one bottle of formula (this is all that is allowed) or a sippy cup for a toddler, one change of clothes for your child(ren), a diaper and wipes, and a small toy or book to entertain your older child. You cannot take in camcorders, cameras, cell phones, or pagers, or any other electronic device. And please dress appropriately. Women should wear either a dress or a blouse and skirt, and men should wear a sport shirt and dress slacks. This is not the time to wear your favorite pair of jeans!

Second, *arrive early* – the Consular Section opens at 7:15 a.m. The entrance for visa applications is along the left side of the Embassy building. There will be a long line of Guatemalan citizens waiting for their visas, but since you have an official appointment you may proceed to the front of the line. Tell the English-speaking guard that you have an appointment and he will direct you to the entrance after searching you and your things. (There may be a wait to get inside as well.) Once inside, you'll see other American parents waiting as well, so this is a good chance to establish some cross-country contacts.

Either you or your translator/facilitator will approach Window 6 and show your child's visa photos and documentation. If the photos are approved, you will proceed to the payment window. (If the photos are not approved, you will exit the building and go to one of the nearby photo shops to have them retaken.) Pay the required fee and retain the receipt for later presentation to the consular officer. The consular officer will review your child's adoption file while you wait. After about an hour, your name will be called for the visa interview. You will show your passport, present your child, and answer a couple of questions to either verify or clarify the documentation provided. If everything checks out, you will sign some papers and be dismissed. This entire process takes from 2 to 3 hours, depending on the number of people waiting. *Finally, you will be instructed to return at 3:30 the next work day to pick up the final travel and immigration documentation. (This means, of course, that you must plan an extra day into your itinerary.)*

There are many shops between the Embassy and the hotels, so you may want to take a leisurely walk back to the hotel and do some shopping and exploration before lunch and naptime. After all, you're on the homestretch now!

Only one parent needs to return in the afternoon and the child does not have to be present. Be sure to verify that the visa type (IR-3 or IR-4) is correct. You will not have another chance to correct it! *This paperwork is essential for your child's immigration to the U.S., so take good care of it. Carry it with you on the plane, since it will be needed before you have access to your luggage. It is sealed and may only be opened by the immigration official at the port of entry (i.e., the airport in the U.S.).*

As an aside, some adoptive parents request that this packet of immigration documents be returned to them. This is a good idea because original photos of the birthmother (taken at the DNA appointment) will be inside, as will be other documents of interest. To request the packet when you return home, complete form G884 and send it to the local office of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigrations Services. You can order this form by calling 800-870-3676 or by visiting your local BCIS office.

The Documents

You are required to bring a number of documents to your appointment at the Consulate. *We urge you to read carefully the Guatemalan adoption procedures described on the State Department web site http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/country/country_389.html. At the time of this writing (June 2005), the State Department website listed the following as required documents. (The lawyer or facilitator usually has prepared items 1 through 4.)*

1. Guatemalan adoption documents approved by DHS with DHS approval letter (pink slip)
2. The child's valid Guatemalan passport issued with the adopting parents' surname/s
3. The medical examination report
4. Three 1 3/4-inch color photographs for the visa
5. A complete, *unsigned*, I-600 form. The form is signed in the presence of a Consular officer by the adopting parent(s) during the immigrant visa interview.
6. Forms DS-230 and 9003 completed with information regarding the child (not the parents). The DS-230 is signed at the interview.
7. For IR-4 cases:
 - a.) An original Affidavit of Support (Form I-864) signed by the adopting parent who is petitioning for the child's visa. If that parent's income alone is insufficient to meet the poverty guidelines outlined in the Affidavit of Support, the other adopting parent must sign the Agreement of Household Member (Form I-864A) and provide required supporting documents.
 - b.) Copies of the last three years of federal tax returns as filed with the Internal Revenue Service, including, if applicable, W-2 forms, 1099 forms, and all IRS Schedules. The adopting parents do not need to separately attest to the accuracy of the federal income taxes, nor have the tax copies notarized; the Concluding Provisions of Part 7 of the Affidavit of Support contain a certification to this effect.
 - c.) In addition, the adopting parents must present proof of current employment in the form of a copy of a recent pay stub or a letter from the employer.
8. For IR-3 cases, an I-864 is not required for an orphan classified IR-3, provided the child will be admitted to the U.S. while still under age 18 and will reside in the United States with and in the custody of the adoptive U.S. Citizen parent. However, an orphan exempt from the I-864 requirement must still show that he/she is not likely to become a public charge.
9. \$380 total fees for the immigrant visa application. Crisp U.S. dollars (50-dollar bills and smaller) are preferred. Credit cards are accepted, but the Consular Section's credit card processing machine does not always work. Consequently, it is essential that you bring cash in the event that the machine is inoperable. Neither personal checks nor traveler's checks are accepted. *Be sure to check the government web site to verify the cost as it changes frequently.*
10. The parents' U.S. passports for identification and citizenship purposes and to establish prior visits to Guatemala, if necessary (i.e., to qualify for an IR-3 visa)

Note on IR-3 & IR-4 Visas: Although this is not the place for an extensive discussion of IR-3 and IR-4 visas, it is important that you educate yourself on their differences and relative advantages. See:

- The State Department site mentioned just above
- The USCIS publication, "The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adopted Children," which may be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format from http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/Adop_Prospective.htm
- <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal/statutes/international.cfm> for a summary of individual state's interpretation of the regulations
- And the site www.guatadopt.com, which has a discussion of the two visa types.

This is a regular topic on the Guatemala-Adopt list serv, and a search of the archives for "IR-3" will yield many informative posts. You should also be aware of the importance of readopting your child in your home state, regardless of visa type, and, if you return on an IR-4 visa, the importance of applying immediately for a Certificate of Citizenship. Again, see the Guatemala-Adopt archives, especially during January and February 2005 when there were several informative chains on these topics.

12 – Departing Guatemala

Currency and Customs

It is possible to change back your unused Guatemalan currency for U.S. dollars for a small fee. Save your original exchange receipts, as they will be required. Customs allows each family member to return to the U.S. with \$800 worth of personal items duty free. Keep your receipts for documentation. You will fill out a declaration on the airplane before you land in the U.S. Some parents like to save a few *quetzales* for their children's treasure chests.

When checking in at the airport, you will pay an airport security tax of approximately \$3 (payable in either U.S. dollars or quetzals). A departure tax of approximately \$30 is generally included in the ticket price.

Traveling Home

When making your travel arrangements for the return home, plan to arrive at the airport *at least* two hours prior to your flight and allow plenty of time between flights to move through customs, immigration, and security. You'll likely need to change at least one diaper during the layover, as well as have something to eat. Some parents say that three hours between flights is a good baseline, but we recommend that you take into consideration your own travel habits and idiosyncrasies.

To check the stroller, complete a "gate check" form at the gate. When you board the airplane, just collapse the stroller and leave it outside the door of the plane. A bag handler will place it on the aircraft and return it to that location at the end of the flight.

When moving through security, we suggest using wheelchair/family assistance lines whenever possible. Both removing children from their strollers to take them through metal detectors and collapsing strollers to place them on X-ray machines can take some time. Not only are security personnel adept at helping travelers through this process, but others needing assistance are likely to be more patient with you as you wrestle all of your stuff on and off the X-ray machine!

Be sure to pack some age-appropriate toys to entertain your child (see Appendix A: Toy Suggestions). If you are traveling with a baby, carry bottled water for mixing formula, a couple of Ziploc bags for sealing dirty diapers, a change of clothes for the baby and perhaps an extra shirt for yourself. Give your baby a pacifier or something to drink at takeoff and landing to help his ears adjust to pressure changes.

When you land in the U.S., you will first pass through customs and then through immigration (USCIS) where you may have a long wait (an hour to two). It is here that you hand over the sealed documentation you received from the Embassy. (A note on a fine point of immigration law: Strictly speaking, a visa is not permission to enter the United States. Final authority to enter the U.S. rests with the USCIS at the port of entry.) With this done, you will be free to catch your connecting flight or jump in the car for the final leg of your journey!

For more on traveling with your child, see "Air Travel" in Chapter 3.

This will be among the longest and certainly one of the most eventful days of your life. When you get a chance, write down every detail of the day!

A mother remembers:

“We arrived at our airport at 11:30 p.m., having been up since 5:30 a.m. Some friends met us and took pictures of us getting off the plane-- some of the most precious of all our pictures. Our poor baby looks confused, but my husband and I look happy beyond description, unlike any other photo ever taken of us.”

13 – Heritage Travel

Heritage travel, quite simply, is the returning of your child to his or her birth country to better his understanding not only of Guatemala but of himself. Preparing for such a trip begins with your union as family.

Learning about Guatemala’s culture and history will equip you to talk with your child about his country of birth. Traveling to Guatemala to bring home your little one allows you to tell your child about Guatemala from first-hand experience. Your stories, along with the pictures you take while in Guatemala, will help your child to form his first impressions of Guatemala and its people.

Later you can travel back to Guatemala to continue your child’s journey of discovery. Heritage travel will offer your child the opportunity to have memories of being *in* Guatemala as opposed to just being *from* Guatemala. Heritage journeys empower children with knowledge they can integrate into the people they are becoming.

Trips usually last one to two weeks and take the shape of either group tours or private family vacations. Families traveling on their own are able to narrow the focus of their journeys and control how they want to spend all of their time. They can also take a more active role in researching and arranging travel details; this is important to some and unimportant to others.

Families traveling as part of a group can customize portions of their trips to include visits to places and with people who are important to them. They are less involved in both the making of travel arrangements and the daily logistics of travel, so they are freer to focus on supporting their children through their personal journeys. People who take group heritage tours generally report that sharing the journey with other families enriches the experiences greatly. Kids, in particular, seem to participate and process the activities in a different way when doing them with other kids.

Families generally visit some of Guatemala’s popular tourist destinations, as well as some personally significant locations. Children often like to see the hospital or town in which they were born and the towns from which their birth families originated. They like to meet their foster families and tour the children’s homes where they lived before joining their adoptive families. When planning a trip, the most important thing to keep in mind is balance among cultural activities, adoption-related experiences, and kid-friendly activities that have nothing to do with either!

Families can expect to be warmly welcomed in Guatemala. Their interactions with Guatemalans will likely be more memorable than the sights they see. Furthermore, parents can expect that kids will continue to be kids even on such an important journey. Experts advise parents to be prepared for this and to plan accordingly. Luckily, even children who don’t appear to be paying attention are absorbing that which is happening around them.

Family members can expect to experience a variety of emotions both while they are traveling and once they return home. Traveling with others provides a built in support system, something that many people appreciate. The two issues that arouse the most emotion in heritage travelers are poverty and adoption

concerns. Families who talk about these issues throughout their children’s lives tend to struggle less with them while on heritage trips.

As the parent of a newly adopted child, you can easily begin preparing now for a trip years down the road by piquing your child’s interest in Guatemala and by working to develop his cultural pride. For specific suggestion on how to do this, see “Appendix C: Developing Cultural Pride.”

Epilogue

Your days in Guatemala with your child will be some of the most intensely lived days of your lives. They will be filled with love and joy and anxiety and confusion, all in a wonderful jumble! Enjoy every minute of it! Savor those precious moments of bonding and don’t sweat the small stuff! Of course, your life has just changed forever, not just for having a new child, but also for your connection to another culture.

We would like to close with these words from Ana, a Guatemalan foster mother, who said this in farewell to some adoptive parents. Her thoughts simply and eloquently sum up your eternal connection to the people of Guatemala, and remind you of how your lives have changed and expanded irrevocably in many ways.

La sabrosa tiene dos pases que la quieren, nosotros su pasado y ustedes su presente y futuro. Por favor mantenganle vivos sus recuerdos, su pasado para que ella cuando est grande no dude ni un momento que siempre fue muy querida, es muy querida y siempre ser muy querida.

[Your baby] has two countries that love her: us, her past, and you, her present and future. Please keep memories alive from her past so that when she is big she will not doubt for a moment that she was always very loved, is very loved and always will be very loved.



About the Authors

Marcy McKay is an adoptive parent of three and a freelance writer based in the Chicago area. Marcy fostered the couple's two older children for several months in Guatemala, pending the completion of their adoptions. She supports adoption and adoption education as a personal mentor, volunteer speaker and fund raiser. She also serves on the Parent Advisory Board of *Adoptive Families* magazine. The McKays enjoy ongoing contact with their children's birthmothers. Marcy can be reached at <mckaymarcy@yahoo.com>.

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Bea Evans is the assistant director of the Ties Program, a heritage program for adoptive families (www.adoptivefamilytravel.com). As a travel agent with Tempo Travel Service in Milwaukee, she helps families arrange travel to pick up their children, and invites readers of this guide to contact her with travel-related questions. Ms. Evans is also the director of World Ties, Ltd., a charitable organization formed to provide a tax-deductible venue for monetary donations to orphanages, child welfare agencies, and maternity homes. She can be reached at (800) 398-3676 and (262) 565-3327.

A current PDF of this guide is available at
www.guatadopt.com/documents/travelguide.pdf.

Comments may be submitted through the site by using the comment form available at
www.guatadopt.com/CSMailto/forms/GuideComments.htm

Appendix A

Toy Suggestions

Young babies of less than six months old don't really require much in the way of toys. A ring of play keys or "links" and a soft book or mirror ought to suffice.

Older babies, toddlers and young children require more to help them pass the time. The following list is a compilation of items suggested by parents who participate in the Guatemala-Adopt list serv of Maelstrom/St. John's University mentioned on page 2. The items are organized roughly by age-appropriateness from youngest to oldest.

- small, non-breakable mirror
- snacks
- bottled water
- paper cups for stacking
- colorful cotton balls for sorting and dropping into cups
- post-it notes
- roll of tape, either scotch or masking
- stickers
- crayons and paper
- glue stick
- Magna-doodle
- play camera or Viewmaster
- bubbles
- Silly putty
- Play-doh
- Crayola "Color Wonder" markers and paper
- Matchbox cars
- Pocket-size trains
- deck of cards
- wrapped gifts from a dollar store (one per hour)
- a DVD player and disks
- disposable camera for documenting the trip from your child's perspective
- paper clips for making paper-clip jewelry
- pipe cleaners
- Nerf ball and attachable basketball hoop
- a small photo album of the child's new home and family
- simple games
- travel games

Appendix B

Attachment, for You and Your Child

Contributed by Teresa M. Kohlenberg, M.D.

The moment when you receive your child is the joyous beginning of your new life together. You have waited, worked, and longed for a baby or child for so long, and it has finally happened! Most of us feel not only deep joy, but some degree of anxiety about getting to know our new children while also helping them to feel safe and loved by us. We want to do everything we can to ease their transitions into our families and to help them to develop healthy attachments to us and others.

Let's begin by exploring the concept of "attachment." We use phrases like, "I feel really attached to her" to mean that we feel loving or comfortable with someone. We might say, "I felt attached to him from the moment I saw his picture" when describing the child referred to us. But in the context of parents and children, attachment has a more specific and pervasive meaning. Attachment in this context is a quality of the parent-child relationship that is built out of repeated interactions over time. When the parent correctly reads the child's signals and responds with what the child needs, the attachment pattern is usually solid, secure and reliable. When the child's signals are hard to read or the parent is not sufficiently attuned and responsive, the pattern can be insecure, anxiety-ridden or confusing. Both parent and child bring qualities into the relationship that can affect attachment, and in adoption, the child's pre-adoptive experience of attachment plays a major role.

When children have loving and attentive caregivers who are good at reading their signals and responding to them, they develop healthy, secure attachments to their caregivers. This is one reason why good family foster care attracts many of us to adopt from Guatemala. Children who experience secure attachments do better in life; they're better at calming themselves, have more energy for learning, and are better at making friends. Early attachments serve as relationship "blueprints" that show children how to form solid attachments to subsequent caregivers: their adoptive parents.

One deeply important reality is that your child by adoption comes to you with at least two major losses in his or her short life. First, she has lost the mother who carried her and gave birth to her. Although many babies adopted from Guatemala enter foster care at a very early age, research tells us that babies are specially connected to their mothers' voices and scents from before birth. Consequently, they do experience the loss of their birthmothers, even when they are separated shortly after birth. The longer children remain with their birthmothers, the deeper their connections will have grown. Although they will not remember as adults do (with specific images and stories), they will remember on a deep feeling level. Some will also have had other families and caregivers before making their final transitions home.

Your child's second major loss occurs on the day he or she is placed in your arms. At that time, he loses—quite suddenly, in most cases—everything that is familiar, and is placed in an environment that is utterly strange and confusing. Every one of his five senses is telling him that the comforting and familiar is gone, and the world is new and different. The only family he has ever known inexplicably walks out, often weeping, leaving him with complete strangers. Those strangers will shortly take him away from his culture – from the sounds of language, the tastes of food, the smells and climate that he has known. Children who have lived in multiple places suffer the added pain of losing, once again, the home that had become familiar and the people they had grown to trust. This sad truth is often unspoken by agencies and adoptive families, as if it were either unimportant or too unbearable to think about. Yet our facing it as

parents enables us to help our children cope with it from the beginning and prepares us for the range of reactions children may have in their first months of transition.

What is wonderful, and really quite amazing, is how well most children do as they move through these extraordinary changes! That said, many parents report realizing in retrospect that their children were disoriented, subdued, or grieving during their first weeks or months together-- even children who joined their adoptive families as young babies. Some parents confront more serious emotional problems in their children, ones which may result from several factors, including their transitions home.

There are things you can do to help your child with his or her shock and mourning. If your child is temperamentally vulnerable, you will have done what you can to prevent some potentially serious problems. If your child is as solid as a rock, well, hooray, what you do will only help!

To promote attachment in your newly-adopted baby or child:

- Do anything you can to build familiarity before the transition. Visit the child (with her current caregiver present) during the process. Sing simple songs or read age-appropriate stories into a tape recorder and send the tape, a small tape player, and batteries to the child. If you're adopting an infant, either wear a t-shirt or sleep on a baby blanket until it has absorbed your smell, and then send it to the foster mother with the request that she let the baby cuddle with the item until it must be washed. If you're adopting a toddler or older child, send a book of photos of your family and your home, in addition to a tape of your voices. Ask the foster family or orphanage caregivers to teach you any songs or rhymes that they have used with the child. If you send a special toy or blanket, buy a second one to have at home, since items you send to your child may be kept by the foster family or orphanage for later use.
- Request a transition period with the foster family or orphanage. Ask if you can either visit the foster parents in their home, or if one of them could stay with you at the hotel for a few days at your expense. If the child is in an orphanage, then ask to visit daily for up to a week, first observing, then taking on more of the childcare, before eventually bringing the child to visit with you at your hotel for longer periods of time. Learn what the child is used to and try to maintain familiar care patterns—even if you do not want to maintain them long-term.
- If your child is a year old or more, it will really help to learn basic baby Spanish, including the best pronunciation you can master, and to ask his foster mother or orphanage caregiver for the basic words they have used for sweetness and soothing.
- Make sure there is a single primary caregiver at first. Your child is working HARD to figure out how to feel safe and to communicate her needs, while also working HARD to deal with her grief. Let one parent meet most of the child's needs. He or she will hold the child as much as possible, wear her in a sling, bathe her, feed her, etc. There will be plenty of time for the other parent, friend or older sibling to connect later. For now the child needs to know who her safe person is.
- Consider sleeping very close together, with the crib pulled up to your bed, or consider co-sleeping, which can be wonderful in building attachment. If you're going to co-sleep with a baby, read up on how to do this safely and comfortably. It is recommended by several international adoption specialists.
- Expect that the child will not behave just as he did in his previous home. A baby or child who's just been separated from everything he knows may sleep a great deal (escaping) or have difficulty sleeping. As with the rest of us, stress can cause stomach upsets and other physical changes in babies.

- Keep it simple and stable. Consider NOT making your “pick-up” trip a three-day trip – rather, plan on staying quietly with your new child for several days or a week before going to the Embassy or traveling. If you want to sightsee or shop, do it before receiving your child. When you get home, keep visitors to a minimum and don’t travel until you and your child have really settled in.
- Do NOT assume that because your child is being “easy,” smiling, and looking happy that she is not experiencing stress. Remember, your child is in “survival mode,” trying to make sure that she is safe with her new caregivers, and part of the way she does that is by being engaging. Focus on building attachments with your child and let other things go. Warn your friends and family before you travel that you will need to put off the great wave of visitors and welcome parties for a couple of months. When someone asks if there is anything she can do for you, say “Yes! I’d love it if you could drop dinner by one night so I can spend more time with the baby. I’ve learned that these transitions can be tough on little ones, so the more time we spend together the better.” This will perhaps be your first of many chances and challenges in educating well-meaning friends and family about adoption-related issues.
- Most of all, follow your heart, and keep reading and learning. The community of parents who have adopted and are years down the road is a wonderful, rich resource for helping us all to know what lies ahead!

Resources on attachment for adoptive parents:

Becoming a Family – Promoting Healthy Attachments with Your Adopted Child, by Lark Eshleman

Attaching to Your Newly Adopted Infant or Toddler by Lynne Lyon. You can download this free booklet from www.attach-china.org. While some of it is very specific to post-institutionalized children, it is generally on-target for adopted infants and toddlers. Written by an attachment therapist and adoptive mom, it’s full of practical info, including checklists of symptoms, ways to ease the adoption transition, and tips for promoting attachment.

Attaching in Adoption – Practical Tools for Today’s Parents by Deborah D. Gray. Somewhat dense reading, but a great resource on attachment and related topics.

“*The Journey of Attachment*,” an online course offered by Adoption Learning Partners at www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/courses/attach.cfm.

About the Contributor:

Teresa M. Kohlenberg, M.D. is an adoptive parent of a child from Guatemala. She is board-certified in pediatrics, and she trained as a child psychiatrist and developmental pediatrician. She is currently co-President of the Boston Institute for the Development of Infants and Parents.

Appendix C

Developing Cultural Pride

Preparing for a heritage trip (or a return to your child's birth country) begins by developing his or her connection to her heritage. This begins well in advance of the trip—preferably *years* before traveling. We suggest the following approaches to developing cultural and racial pride in your children. You may have some additional ideas.

Be A Multi-Cultural Family – Without singling out any one culture, embrace many cultures! Develop positive role modes in everyday life. Make contacts with the ethnic communities in your area. Help your children develop respect for all people by involving people of different backgrounds in your everyday life.

Read – From the time children are infants, they love to be read to. Enhance story time by exposing children to stories from around the world, not just Guatemala. Help children see the world as a diverse and wonderful place. By broadening their knowledge of other cultures, you emphasize that we are all different and “differences are okay.”

Attend Culture Camp and Heritage Festivals – Culture camps provide kids with a foundation for understanding their birth country. Community heritage festivals are also wonderful ways to build their understanding of-- and develop connections with— people within their community who are of Guatemalan or Latin American heritage. Participating in culture camps and attending heritage festivals provides kids with a frame of reference for fully exploring their birth county when the time is right.

Commit to Staying Involved in Your Adoption Support Group – Involvement in adoptive family groups gives children an extended family that closely matches their own. Your involvement as parents sends a message that you not only understand the need to connect but that you see it as important.

Understand Issues of Poverty – Chances are good that your child will be exposed to very little poverty during his or her lifetime. Growing up in suburban American and occasionally passing through “a bad part of town” provides a glimpse into what it is like to be poor, but does little to prepare children for the emotions they will have when poverty is directly related to their heritage (or birth family). Find books that visually show a variety of countries, not just Guatemala. This way Guatemala is not the focus of the visuals, but rather a part of them, just as it is only a part of the world as a whole. Also look for books written by international authors talking about life in their countries. You'll find that the overwhelming number of them describe difficult living conditions, but happy lives. It is important to understand that while poverty can be devastating, it is also possible to live without the luxuries we enjoy and still be happy.

Dream As a Family About Returning to Guatemala – Talk as a family about your hopes and dreams and concerns surrounding a return to Guatemala, being careful not to trivialize any interest or concern. While you may be thinking about adoption issues, your child may be dreaming about shopping in his or her country of birth. This doesn't mean that your child is not concerned about adoption issues. Rather, it may be that shopping feels more familiar and therefore safer.

Experiences such as these allow children to outline pictures, like those found in coloring books, of their birth country. Returning to Guatemala on a heritage journey, allows them to add color to their outlines and take ownership of their heritage in new way.