ARTISANS &
ARTESANIA
Honorable Mention “Artesanías con Barro” Rabinal Baja Verapaz
by Edwin Xitumul
Traveling in Tandem with a Chapina

Yin & Yang of Travel Series
by Mark D. Walker

Diego de Porres
was named Architect Chief by Santiago de Guatemala City Council on July 27, 1703. His work included the construction of some of the most well-known private and official residences in La Antigua.

On the Cover
1st Place Judges Vote
“Tejedora de sueños / Dreamweaver”
San Jose Poaquil, Chimaltenango
by Hector Salaverría

Amalia’s Kitchen
by Amalia Moreno-Damgaard
Homage to the ASADO
w/ recipe for Matambre and Chimichurri

La Antigua Interactive Map

DATEBOOK
Cultural Events Calendar for AUGUST, 2019

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**From the Publishers**

It’s with great pleasure to share the entries from the August 2019 Revue photo contest *Artisans & Handicrafts of Guatemala*. And as always, a big thank you to all the photographers who participated.

The prize for 1st Place by Popular Vote is Q400. Second place in both categories is Q100, and 3rd place Q50. With appreciation to our sponsor, Antigua Hotel Solutions, in awarding the winning photographer for 1st Place by Editorial Decision a complimentary one-night accommodation for two at the Hotel Casa Antigua in La Antigua.

Hadazul Cruz looks back at the incredible career of Guatemalan *Diego de Porres* (1677-1741). Though his name may have dimmed, his works stand as monuments to his abilities as a builder extraordinaire and his genius as an architect.

After San Miguel earthquake in 1717, the Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala City Council commissioned him to assess the overall damage and repair the main buildings, including the Cathedral (1718-1721).

His personal seal is of a hand holding an architect’s compass and the words "LABRE ET CONSTANCIA." One of these seals can be seen in the keystone arch of the main door at La Escuela de Cristo Church.

Many of his architectural masterpieces are still standing in La Antigua Guatemala. As you walk through La Antigua Guatemala see if you can find any of Diego de Porres’ seals: La Recolección, church and convent; San Felipe Neri Church and Convent (1720-1730); San Alejo’s Hospital (1722); Santa Clara Church and Monastery (1730-1734); Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza (Capuchinas) Church and Monastery (1731-1736); the Real Casa de la Moneda (1734-1738); and the Palacio Arzobispal (1743), among others.

The award-winning author and keynote speaker Amalia Moreno-Damgaard feature this month is *Homage to the Argentinian and Uruguayan Asado*. As she explains, barbecue is perhaps a universal culinary language. Asados, or grilled foods, are popular worldwide and especially in Argentina and Uruguay. She also includes recipes for Matambre (Flank Steak Stuffed with Vegetables and Eggs) and Chimichurri (garlic, parsley and oregano sauce).

Contributing author Mark D. Walker (*Maya Gods & Monsters; Luis Argueta – Telling the stories of Guatemalan Immigrants; and In the Kingdom of Mescal*) shares a section from his Yin and Yang Travel Series featuring *Traveling in Tandem with a Chapina*.

Events and activities will keep you entertained throughout the month of August. This month we’re spotlighting *Santiago de Guatemala Profiles*, A look at what could have been … by Guatemalan artist Ludwing Paniagua. The exhibit consists of eight pieces in which you can appreciate La Antigua Guatemala’s monumental buildings before the catastrophes occurred that left them in their current state. Next up is a *Watercolor Workshop* with illustrator Desirée Iturbide where students can learn how to paint different types of flowers. For more listings check *DateBook*.

Have a wonderful August here in the Land of Eternal Spring.

— John & Terry Kovick Biskovich

**Using the interactive features**

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3rd Place Popular Vote
“Orfebrería en plata”
San Juan del Obispo by Mirna Ortiz
3rd Place Judges Vote
“Maestro Artesano Quichelense” Santa Cruz del Quiché
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Guatemalan-born Diego de Porres is revered as a builder extraordinaire and a remarkable architectural genius.

Son of Joseph de Porres and Teresa Ventura, his early work and designs developed while laboring alongside his father, Joseph, the first master of Architecture in Santiago de Guatemala (designated by the City Council in 1687).

In addition to the instruction of his father, Diego de Porres was influenced by several manuals of Renaissance architecture illustrated with engravings. Among these books are Tutte l’Opere d’Architettura et Prospectiva by Sebastiano Serlio, and the Fontane diverse Che si vedano nel’Alma Città di Roma et altre parte d’Italia by Giovanni Maggi.
On the corner, next to the Cathedral it is the “Palacio Arzobispal. (Ralf Steinberger)
Diego de Porres was named Architect Chief by Santiago de Guatemala City Council on July 27, 1703. His work included the construction of private and official residences as well as other projects.

Inspired by the Fountain of Neptune in Bologna, Italy, designed by Giovanni de Bologna, in 1739 Porres constructed the first “Fuente de las Sirenas” (Mermaid Fountain in the city’s Central Plaza).

The fountain in Central Park is not the original which was designed by Diego de Porres in 1737. At the beginning of the 20th century, the fountain had gone through extensive damage and was removed from the site to be replaced by a gazebo. In 1949 Guatemalan sculptor Rodolfo Galeotti Torres was commissioned to restore and resurrect the fountain. Inspired by Porres’s original work the present-day fountain represents its transformation created by two renowned Guatemalan sculptures.
La Antigua Central Park Current Fuente de las Sirenas (John Hurd)
He also designed a pilaster inspired by the fourth book of Architecture by Sebastiano Serlio. It became his signature as he used it profusely in several facades of churches he built. The pilaster is also a sort of “characteristic icon” of Guatemala’s late Baroque style. It is known as “Pilastra de doble lira” (double lira) for its similarity to the musical instrument. It is also known as “Pilastra abalastrada or Pilastra de estípite serliana.”
Structures

La Recolección, church and convent, which he finished when his father died in 1703; San Felipe Neri Church and Convent (1720-1730); San Alejo’s Hospital (1722); Santa Clara Church and Monastery (1730-1734); Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza (Capuchinas) Church and Monastery (1731-1736); the Real Casa de la Moneda (1734-1738); and the Palacio Arzobispal (1743), among others.

1. La Recolección
2. Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza (Capuchinas)
3. Palacio del Ayuntamiento
4. Palacio Arzobispal
5. Fuente de las Sirenas
6. Real Casa de la Moneda
7. Santa Clara Church and Monastery
8. San Felipe Nery Church and Convent
LEFT/ABOVE Capuccinas Convent
(Fernando Reyes Palencia)

Part of Capuccinas Convent
(Fernando Reyes Palencia)
After the San Miguel earthquake in 1717, Santiago’s City Council commissioned Diego de Porres to assess the overall damage and repair the main buildings, including the Cathedral (1718-1721).

La Recoletción Church ruins (John Pavelka)
His personal seal is of a hand holding an architect’s compass and the words “LABRE ET CONSTANCIA.” One of these seals can be seen in the keystone arch of the main door at La Escuela de Cristo Church.

Many of his architectural masterpieces are still standing in La Antigua Guatemala. As you walk through La Antigua Guatemala see if you can find any of Diego de Porres’ seals.
Escuela de Cristo Convent, former San Felipe Nery
(Hadazul Cruz)
1st Place Popular Vote

“Convite Mujeres 2019, más que un centenario”, San Pedro Jocopilas, by Francisco Javier García Cabrera
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“Piñatas” Ciudad de Guatemala
by Javier Alvarez Vassaux
2nd Place Judges Vote
“Blessing hands” Chichicastenango
by Cristhian Salazar
Santiago de Guatemala Profiles
A look at what could have been ...

Ludwing Paniagua is a Guatemalan born artist, interested in the art world from a young age. He never imagined that his works were to be seen by many people when he entered the world of Digital Matte Painting as part of the Guatemalan team that worked on movies like: The Chronicles of Narnia, Fast and Furious (Tokyo Drift) and The Nativity Story.

“In using digital painting techniques I had the opportunity to recreate Jerusalem at the time of Jesus Christ’s birth, Why not recreate the city of Santiago before its ruin?”

This was the question that the artist asked himself and that is how this project was born.

The exhibit consists of eight pieces in which you can appreciate La Antigua Guatemala’s monumental buildings before the catastrophes occurred that left them in their current state.

EXHIBIT DATES & TIMES
August 15th, 5pm Conversatory
7:00 pm, Exhibit Opening
La Casa del Río,
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La Antigua Galería de Arte is honored to present Colombian artist **Andrea Paola Castillo** in a solo exhibit entitled **“Silencio”** (Silence).

“And here I continue, looking optimistically at the future, with a little detachment from the past and grateful with the present. I keep silent finding infinite portraits that tell me what I am and give me images that I have not seen. I am still immersed in continues present that shows me how far I can go and from where I must let go of life.

While the story continues its course, it plays with our destiny, day after day. And whatever happens, it will happen.

Eternal search for peace. Eternal presence that transcends leaving our way calm.

Believing, knowing that everything, whatever happens, will be fine. This is silence, the beauty of an instant.” Andrea Paola Castillo.

This collection gathers more than 30 new pieces of mixed medium paintings, hand-painted ceramic plates, and drawings.

We look forward to sharing with you her latest works. The artist will attend the opening.

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Amalia’s Kitchen

text & photos by
chef and author
Amalia Moreno-Damgaard
Barbecue is perhaps a universal culinary language. Asados, or grilled foods, are popular worldwide and especially in Argentina and Uruguay where beef consumption is higher. I have vivid memories of asados at Argentinian and Uruguayan steakhouses and churrascos (barbecues) with family, friends, and co-workers in Guatemala City where these restaurants abound.

I have had the good fortune to visit Argentina and Uruguay recently, and while the cuisine is similar, there are nuances in the food and culture. I must say that the differences are reflected in the seasonings and style as both share Spanish and Italian influences. Uruguay also blends in Portuguese and French culinary cultures as well. There is a wide variety of beef cuts which includes organ meats, sausages, blood sausage, and other preparations.

Matambre, a vegetable and hard-cooked eggs-stuffed meat roll, is a favorite of mine that is not only delicious but elegant. It is a specialty dish in Argentina and also in my kitchen.

There are as many recipes for Matambre as recipes for barbecues, and I favor the simpler preparations that take minutes to prepare and cook. One key component of Argentinian and Uruguayan barbecue is chimichurri, a garlic-parsley vinaigrette that everyone makes their own.

Perhaps the best pairing for meat is potatoes, but at home you can include a green salad and other cold dishes of choice such as Ensalada Rusa (Russian salad made with potatoes, carrots, and green beans dressed with vinegar, mustard and mayonnaise), or grilled vegetables, served hot or cold also dressed with chimichurri sauce (recipe below).

Another salsa to add pizzaz to your asado table is a Salsa Criolla, popular in both countries with some distinctions. This sauce is a combination of diced bell peppers, tomatoes and sometimes onions dressed with olive oil and maybe vinegar, depending on...
the maker. Both sauces are fresh and uniquely delicious and complementary to asados.

In Argentina and Uruguay asados in public spaces are large set on backyards with burning coals set on the ground with large parrillas (grills) on top and giant skewers holding larger pieces of meat alongside the grills.

Oftentimes, meats are not seasoned (not even with salt) and they rely entirely on the sauces such as chimichurri and salsa criolla to add a special touch to the meat when served.

Here is my rendition to chimichurri and the elegant Matambre. When I make it for special events, it turns heads every time. I hope you enjoy it as much as my guests do! It is easy to make, so don’t fret.

¡Buen provecho! Bon Appetit!

MATAMBRE
Flank Steak Stuffed with Vegetables and Eggs
Recipe by Chef Amalia Moreno-Damgaard
(AmaliaLLC.com)

Serves 4-6

1 (2-1/2) lbs. flank steak, butterflied, pounded to a ¼-inch thickness with a meat mallet
2 teaspoons fresh garlic paste
1 tablespoon oregano, crumbled
1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
⅔ cup chopped parsley
2 cups raw spinach leaves, uncut, cooked al dente
3 carrots, halved lengthwise, cooked al dente
3 bell peppers, fire-roasted, in eighths (strips)
6 hard-cooked eggs, whole or in eighths (wedges)
Kitchen twine
Olive oil

Spread the butterflied steak on a wide surface and season with garlic, oregano, onion powder, salt and pepper, vinegar, and chopped parsley. Rub these seasonings well on one side of the (the inner part) flank steak. Rub the other side with salt and pepper only.

Stuff the well-seasoned side of the flank with the rest of the ingredients starting with a layer of spinach well distributed throughout the entire piece of meat. Then lay the rest of the ingredients making 3 rows of each ingredient, distributing them evenly along the length of the meat.
Roll the meat slowly as tight as possible, making sure the stuffing ingredients stay inside. Tie the roll with kitchen twine to secure the roll. Rub the roll generously with olive oil.

Sear on a stovetop on a griddle and finish in the oven at 400 degrees for 20-30 minutes for medium-rare meat. Rest the meat for 10 minutes covered with foil after taking it out of the oven. Slice it right before passing it to the table.

**Dress it with chimichurri.**

**CHIMICHURRI**
Garlic, Parsley, and Oregano Sauce

Chimichurri is popular in Guatemala because there are many Uruguayan and Argentinean steakhouses in Guatemala City. Chimichurri can be either green or red, depending on the dominant ingredient. It varies from restaurant to restaurant, even within Argentina. Chimichurri is a delicious topping for grilled meats. It also makes a great marinade.

**Makes about 1-1/4 cups**

- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves
- 3 tablespoons roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley stems and leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon red chili flakes
- 1 teaspoon adobo: 1/2 teaspoon crumbled oregano, ½ teaspoon crushed coriander seeds, ½ teaspoon thyme, 1 teaspoon Spanish paprika
- 1 small bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Combine all the ingredients by hand or food processor to make a chunky sauce. Taste and adjust seasonings, if needed.

Use immediately or refrigerate for later use. Bring to room temperature before using. Chimichurri keeps in the refrigerator for 1 week.
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Our Honeymoon Journey Through Mexico

You might think that my plans for the honeymoon with my Guatemalan bride, Ligia, would have revolved around staying at one of the elegant hotels located in the colonial capital of La Antigua Guatemala, or one of the first-class accommodations on the shores of picturesque Lake Atitlán surrounded by three imposing volcanoes.

We’d received a number of typical wedding gifts like blenders and a vacuum cleaner, but the best gift was from Ligia’s best friend, Maria Rene — the use of her new, yellow VW Bug! We started out on our three-week, 2,600-mile journey beginning in Guatemala then up through the Gulf of Mexico with a return via the Pacific side.

We headed up the Pan-American Highway to Huehuetenango in the Guatemala Highlands and then traveled over some very sketchy roads through the Cuchumatanes Mountains into Mexico. After seven or eight hours on the road, we arrived in San Cristóbal de las Casas, a historic colonial town mostly populated by Maya Indians, which, according to Ligia, really should be part of Guatemala. The next day we drove to what would become my favorite archeological ruin, Palenque with its unique tower-shape-like an observatory — the Maya did pay attention to the stars.

We continued our journey north to Mexico City which was a mega-city even back in 1973. After seven hours of traipsing through El Museo de Antropología, Ligia refocused our itinerary with, “Mi amor, we need to get back to the hotel early today if we hope to make it to the symphony orchestra performance this evening.”

We also spent another peaceful afternoon on the terrace of the Chapultepec Castle which had been the site of a sacred Aztec place and the only royal castle in the Americas that includes an incredible view of Chapultepec Park and the city.

The next day we glided along on one of the colorful, flat gondola-like boats through the ancient canals of Xochimilco and then spent the rest of the day listening to local music, eating tamales and tortillas with a variety of tasty fillings, and whispering sweet nothings to each other.

On the last, but longest, leg of our trip, we headed north, toward Saltillo, Monterrey, and eventually Torreón. We were close enough to Texas to listen on the radio to English programs and Tex-Mex music, which Ligia detested. This provided a good opportunity to
chat about the pluses and minuses of living in the U.S. Ligia’s biggest concern was, “You mean we can’t have any maids to cook and help out?” “No mi amorcita,” I responded, “they’re too expensive in the States.” That was a big negative for returning to my homeland right away.

We drove through the vast northern desert until we reached Torreon, where we spent the night in the car next to the road. This did not impress my new wife, “We’re sleeping where?” The oppressive heat woke us early the next morning, so we immediately headed south, through the beautiful city of Guadalajara, then Morelia, then farther south through Oaxaca. As the little yellow VW Bug glided along the pines in the hills above Oaxaca, we saw a large truck coming right towards us as he passed another truck, forcing us off the road, at which point I saw the sign on the door of one of the trucks — “Cuidado, Dinamita A Bordo!” [Be Careful, Dynamite on Board]. I let out a few descriptive expletives and Ligia a scream of terror, but, under the circumstances, we were fortunate to come out of it in one piece. By then, we were only a matter of hours from Guatemala; upon reaching the border and after a relatively quick security check, we were on our way to Guatemala City to start our new life together.

During this trip, I found out that my Guatemalan partner loved travel as much as I did, although she would have appreciated better quality hotels. We were able to sort out issues on our relationship during the long drives through the countryside and discuss future plans, including our next big trip.

Europe On A Very Few Dollars A Day

Four years, one child and one move to the U.S. later, Ligia and I decided on a trip through Europe. We packed our bags and headed back to Guatemala where we dropped off our daughter, Michelle, with Ligia’s parents and then on to Europe for a four-month trek. We would cover 10 countries on that trip using public ground transportation almost exclusively, only flying from Portugal to England when our funds were depleted.

When I informed Ligia of my decision to hitchhike, she just looked at me incredulously and said, “En serio?” (Are you serious?) I remember that we got a ride outside of Dusseldorf, which took us all the way to Trier, Germany.

Towards the end of our trip, we arrived at the renowned Lake District in North West England. Unfortunately, it was very hot, and the roads were packed with cars, as it was vacation season, and nobody was
picking up hitchhikers. I hadn’t anticipated that all the hotels and hostels would also be packed; so, there we found ourselves, stranded on a roundabout with no way out. With that, Ligia totally lost her patience, “Bruto!” she yelled, and threw her wedding ring onto the ground. It took us over an hour but, fortunately, we were able to find it. Ligia calmed down and allowed me to come up with a new plan of action. I apologized (aka groveled).

_Mi Amor_, I don’t know what I was thinking! I should have known that the place would be packed with vacationers and you couldn’t just turn up and expect to find a place to stay! First off, let’s get off this roundabout since everyone is staring at us. I’ll find a bus and we’ll head on down to find Michael and Sarah, the British friends I met in Bolivia years ago. They live on the south coast where it will be cooler. How does that sound?

“Oh, okay,” she responded, “but NO more hitchhiking. Period.”

I did finally give up on hitchhiking, and our money had just about run out anyway, so we made our way home. In a moment of transparency, based on what I know today, I might have shared a list of reasons why Ligia might want to reconsider traveling around the world with me in the first place. Here’s my “She’d Reconsider” or Yin & Yang Travel List:

- He’ll continue to travel as if he’s alone.
- He’ll say you can pack whatever you want, as long as it will fit into a relatively small backpack.
- He’ll avoid trip planning, preferring to “go with the flow” to determine what to visit next.
- He’ll never suggest a night out because he’ll want to get up at the break of dawn to start exploring the next day.

The Yin & Yang Travel List served us well for many years while living and working in Latin America and West Africa. After we returned to the States, Ligia convinced me to take several river cruises through Europe on the Elbe, Danube and Rhone Rivers. The cruises offer the advantage of only packing and unpacking once during the entire trip. Someone else will wash your clothes and the meals are five courses with a menu and local entertainers. Guided tours are organized daily making it next to impossible to get lost. We’d spend more than one late afternoon on the top of cruise boat watching the sun dip down behind one of the many castles lining the river.

After almost 25 years of marriage and three children, all of whom were born in Guatemala, we realized it was time to reintroduce them back to their native land. Our middle daughter Nicolle hadn’t been back for close to 25 years, and her significant other, Ed, had never been there. Our son, John, hadn’t been back for 20 years. Michelle, our oldest daughter, also hadn’t been back to Guatemala for many years, but she had her hands full with five children. Nicolle and John, however, were available, so in 2013 we all headed to Guatemala together.

_Trekking Through Guatemala with Our Kids_

Traveling in Guatemala had changed radically since I was kicking around the Highlands in the early 1970s in the brightly painted “chicken” buses. When
I had applied for a position as Peace Corps Guatemala Country Director several years prior to our trip, I was informed that Peace Corps volunteers were not even allowed into Guatemala City, the capital, unless in an official van, and some had curfews starting at 6 p.m. Local robberies and drug-related incidents had put volunteers at serious risk.

This definitely was not “my” Peace Corps, so past experiences traveling with Ligia had forced me to radically update my Yin & Yang Travel List, starting with my propensity to base all decisions on what is cheapest. In order to get everyone ready I recommended they read *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, as it provides the most extensive source of background information about the country’s culture and history. For my part, the first thing I did was connect with our old friend, Chati, manager of the Hotel Tolimán in San Lucas Tolimán, Guatemala, who would arrange a driver with a van to get us around.

Conrado was waiting for us at the Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City and we headed for one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, Lake Atitlán, via the south coast route through Escuintla. Although Guatemala City is filled with fascinating sights and its organization, cleanliness and some aspects of security have improved over the years, it’s still a big, expensive city, so I decided to leave it for the end of our trip.

After leaving the airport, we zipped down the paved highway headed for the south coast, past endless dark green sugar cane plantations and innumerable Cebu cattle grazing on grass-covered hills, oblivious to the damp, sticky, hot air of the coast. Occasionally we’d pass under huge majestic Ceiba trees. Gradually we began gaining altitude through Patulul, which was not far from the coffee and cardamom plantation where I initially courted Ligia. Her family owned plantation (San Francisco Miramar), which was situated at the base of the majestic volcano Atitlán.

As we gained altitude, we turned off the air conditioning and opened the windows. A cool breeze entered the van. Ligia and I began telling stories of how we rode horses up the back side of the plantation into the “cafetal” during the Easter holiday when the hills were covered with white flowers and the sweet perfume smell engulfed us.

As we climbed up the Sierra Madre mountain range and caught our first glimpse of Lake Atitlán, our collective breath was taken away. German explorer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt, called it “the most beautiful lake in the world.” Atitlán, the deepest lake in Central America, sits among the mountains and is bordered by three volcanoes and twelve Maya villages, some named after the apostles. The Maya peo
ple here are predominantly Tz’utujil and Kaqchikel, and still wear their colorful traditional attire.

The Hotel Tolimán was on the side of the towering volcano Tolimán and faced the lake. We would start each day on the second-floor patio with a traditional Guatemalan breakfast of eggs with black beans and sour cream, fried plantains, papaya with a piece of lemon, cantaloupe and, of course, a strong cup of Guatemalan Arabic coffee fresh off the slopes of one of the volcanoes. From the balcony, Ligia and I would finish our coffee as the kids pushed their kayaks off onto the lake below.

Conrado told us about the celebration of Corpus Cristi in the community of Patzún, known by few foreign tourists, but where over 20,000 locals came to town. When we arrived in Patzún the streets were covered with colorful sawdust carpets similar to those which fill the streets of La Antigua during Easter Week. The local women add to the collage of colors with their *huipiles* (hand-woven brightly colored red blouses woven in strips with native dyes).

As we entered the middle of town, which overlooked the Cathedral, many of the locals were leaving Catholic Mass, praying and singing as they walked over the sawdust carpets lining the streets. The Eucharist, known as the Blessed Sacrament, was placed in a monstrance and held aloft by a member of the clergy, but soon he seemed intermingled with a number of local Maya priests with statues and costumes. Eventually the procession returned to the church where Benediction took place. As we left, my daughter reflected, “What an amazing cultural mix between the Maya groups and the Catholic church!”

The next day we wound our way through the Sierra Madre Mountains to the Maya town of Chichicastenango, where the Sierra Madres meet the Sierra de Chaucus at more than 6,000 feet. Chichi (as it is often called in Guatemala) is the spiritual center of the K’iche Maya and includes the iconic, 400-year old Catedral Santo Tomás, which is built atop a pre-Columbian temple platform where Maya priests still burn incense and candles as part of their rituals. Each of the eighteen stairs that lead up to the church stands for one month of the Maya calendar and is covered
with flowers, food and other things being sold at the market next to the church.

The market is filled with colorful Maya handicrafts — the wooden masks have been our weakness over the years and we just had to add to our collection. The masks are used in the traditional dances, such as the Dance of the Conquest. Pottery, condiments, medicinal plants, pom and copal (traditional incense that is constantly burning on the steps), cal (lime stones used for preparing tortillas), pigs, chickens and machetes round out the collection of items. Although my wife and children speak fluent Spanish and could bargain with the local merchants, I reminded them not to negotiate the price down too hard, though at the same time I didn’t want to pay the highest “tourist” price for our purchases.

Later, we hiked out of town to the Cofradia of Pascual Abaj, which is an ancient carved stone venerated by the locals, and where Maya priests perform different rituals. The writing on the stone reportedly records the activities of a deity of the K’iche Maya king named Tohil (Fate). We didn’t take any photos out of respect for the local priests. When we finally reached the top of the hill, the air was filled with the smell of copal as the priests added local items to the fire they worked and prayed over.

I passed on the cheapest pension in Chichi in favor of the venerable Hotel Santo Tomás, which was designed like a colonial convent. Once inside the hotel we passed by the large fountain in the center of the courtyard with sculpted lions at the base. The courtyard also had several large macaws perched on hanging stands, showing off their multi-colored plumage. The Guatemalan national instrument, the marimba, was being played in the background, which provided a traditional, very Guatemalan ambience, enhanced by all the colonial relics such as religious carvings, and colonial swords hanging on the walls in the hallways and inside the rooms. Each room was unique, and they all had fireplaces. The hotel was only a few blocks from the Cathedral and the marketplace, which is where most of the action took place.

That evening in the hotel we had dinner sitting next to the fireplace which generated a warm glow that permeated the entire dining area. During dinner we enjoyed several Gallo beers, the local favorite. Modelo is the other excellent local beer, but none could compare with my favorite of years ago, when Cabro was sold in two-liter bottles and provided the best excuse to sit down and chat with some of the local men. After dinner, the girls had to stop at the gift shop before leaving. There they found an excellent book on the German influence on the coffee culture, *The History of Coffee*.
in Guatemala by Regina Wagner, filled with historic black and white photos and maps of the coffee-producing areas.

The next day we returned to Lake Atitlán. On our last evening at the Hotel Tolimán a cold mist hung over the area making the fireplace in our room the perfect place to warm up and discuss the next day’s plans. The following morning our van climbed the steep roads out of the lake area, then headed down the Pan-American Highway (highway in name only) bound for the former colonial capital of Guatemala, La Antigua, a World Heritage site. In Antigua cobblestone streets and streetscapes of pastel facades unfold beneath the gaze of three imposing volcanoes. The town is filled with colonial buildings, which are often right next to well-restored ruins from the sixteenth century.

I took the family to the dining area of the hotel La Posada de Don Rodrigo as it has the most spectacular open courtyard in town. It is filled with wrought iron, bright colored bougainvillea and other flowers, tinkling fountains and, of course, the iconic marimba being played the entire time. Local women in their traditional Maya dresses make the tortillas as you wait. Most all of us ordered the plato típico, which includes a tender piece of grilled meat (carne a la parilla), black beans, rice, chirmol (a roasted tomato-spearmint-based sauce), avocado, cooked plantains with sour cream, sausages, and as many corn tortillas as you could possi-
bly eat. All the servers wore traditional Maya clothing and some even pulled a few of us away from the table to dance the *son*, a traditional Maya waltz-like dance.

After dinner we strolled under the iconic Santa Catalina Arch and headed down the cobblestone street towards the historic baroque church known as La Merced. Its yellow and white colors make it unique in town and possibly in the whole country. After a long day sightseeing, we stopped in at one of the many local watering holes and had a few Gallos while watching Peru and Panama play a regional soccer game.

The next day the kids rented bicycles and eventually made it to the large cross on top of the high hill (Cerro de la Cruz) which faces the iconic Volcán de Agua in one direction and in the other offers a spectacular view of the historic colonial town.

With two of our three children in-country, it seemed like a great time to host a family reunion! We decided to host it at Las Orquideas, a restored hacienda on the highway between Guatemala City and La Antigua. We had grilled beef, rice, black beans, avocados and lots of Gallo. Ligia put together a collage of photos of our children at the entrance of the eating area, since many of their cousins hadn’t seen them in over twenty years, and everyone seemed to have grown up!

Most of Ligia’s family was from Guatemala City, but on her father’s side they had to come from San Jeronimo in Baja Verapaz, where I met Ligia as a Peace Corps volunteer all those years ago. My favorite image of the event was when three generations of teachers — Christi (who taught for 60 years), her daughter Chris-tabel (50 years), and Ligia (who has taught for over forty years) huddled together commiserating. Close to one hundred people attended the reunion, making it almost the same number who had attended our wedding so many years ago albeit I was told that only the “immediate” family would come.

After many hours of embraces and hugs with family members (some almost forgotten), the kids headed off together to an old bar in the middle of town. Several of the children had taken similar paths in life. The son of Ligia’s cousin became a lawyer, as did our son, John. Ligia’s niece, Vera María, worked for an international development group and our daughter, Nicolle, has been working for International Rescue Committee for 15 years. Nicolle expressed a real nostalgia for her native country, culture and family that developed towards the end of our trip. She hadn’t stayed in touch with her cousins who were only children when we left but she was impressed that these “familiar strangers” had grown into “fantastic adults.” Not only did she hold a similar career path, but they also had much in common in regard to their love of travel and music.
She went on to reflect:

These feelings were bittersweet because, while I appreciated rekindling those connections, it left me wishing I had been there to grow up with them. I get the sense that we would have made great musical discoveries together, attended more than a few protests and rallies as cousins and would have become great friends. The beautiful thing is that we will always have each other in our lives, and there will be future chances where our paths might cross again. But there is a bittersweet nostalgia of what you’ve missed over the 30 years of being away.

Today our three children have produced seven, soon to be eight, grandchildren, which will necessitate our updating the Yin & Yang Travel List for the next generation to reconnect with their Guatemalan roots.

About the author
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Mark’s passion for Guatemala started as a Peace Corps volunteer, followed by a career working for eight international organizations including MAP International, Make-A-Wish International, and as the CEO of Hagar, which works with survivors of human trafficking.


His most recent article, “My Life in the Land of the Eternal Spring” magazine.cc//mark-walker takes place on a coffee plantation in Guatemala and was published by Wising Up Press as part of the Crossing Class: The Invisible Wall anthology.


Mark is a board member of Partnering for Peace and Advance Guatemala and was the recipient of the Service-Above Self Award from Rotary International. His wife and three children were born in Guatemala.
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