

Harnessing tourism's potential

By **PEDRO DUCHEZ**

DIRECTOR GENERAL, GUATEMALA TOURISM INSTITUTE (INGUAT)

'The Land of Eternal Spring' had a total of 2,000,126 international visitors in 2013 and achieved a growth of 2.5 per cent compared to 2012

Guatemala is a country with all the ingredients to achieve a world-class tourism product. It has places with unique views, hotel infrastructure, roads, space to practice extreme sports and the most privileged climate in the region. "The Land of Eternal Spring" had a total of 2,000,126 international visitors in 2013 and achieved a growth of 2.5 per cent compared to 2012. In addition, US\$1.48 billion entered the country in 2013 through tourism, an increase of 4.4 per cent compared to 2012.

In an area of 108,889 km² (67,660 mi²), Guatemala concentrates a variety of attractions unique in the world: The magnificence of the Mayan cities, the tranquility of the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea and the exciting sea adventures of the Pacific coast; the Spanish past of one of the most beautiful colonial cities in the world, La Antigua Guatemala, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979; the grandeur of Lake Atitlán, surrounded by three majestic volcanoes, and other destinations beyond compare.

With an average temperature of 21°C (70°F) throughout the year, coupled with 360 microclimates, majestic rainforests and the most modern and cosmopolitan city in the region, Guatemala City,

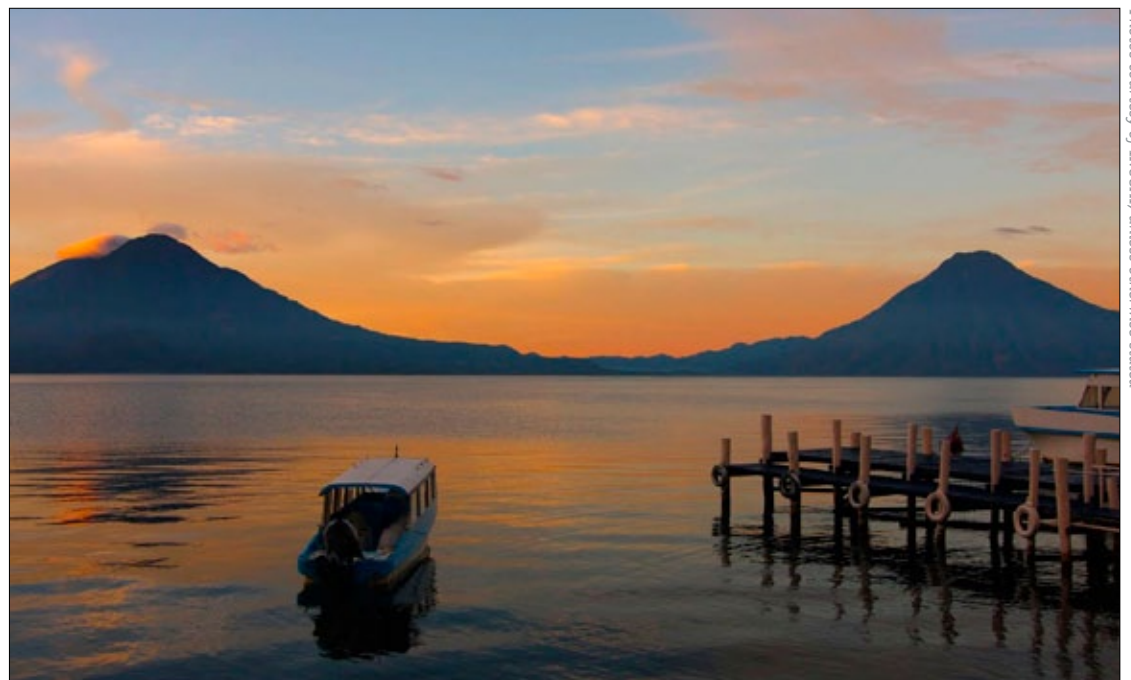
Guatemala is undoubtedly a one-of-a-kind destination.

Guatemala's history goes back four thousand years, to the emergence of the Mayan civilisation, whose legacy continues today with the traditions and culture of its people.

The historic, natural, and cultural heritage of Guatemala can be found throughout the length and breadth of the country. The magic and mystery of the Mayan world persist in the millenary cities such as Tikal, Yaxhá, Aguateca, and Quiriguá, among others. The faces, the colourful regional costumes, and the kindness of the people are also important features of the Guatemalan Highlands.

Tourism and culture are closely related. That is why tourism is a priority for the economic and social development of this country, and why the government is working together with the private sector to position Guatemala as a world-class tourist destination.

Guatemala's geographical location is strategic; it is the perfect platform for the largest markets in the world. It has privileged access to both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, facilitating direct commerce with Asia, North America and Europe, through modern seaports. Furthermore, Guatemala serves as the hub



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Sunset on Lake Atitlán

of Mesoamerica, a region with great potential due to its more than 50 urban centres, 25 of which are located in Central America, with a population of 68 million inhabitants and an economy of US\$319 billion.

Guatemalan gastronomy represents a wide variety of flavours, textures, aromas and colours. Our cuisine is the inheritance of two great culinary traditions. With the Spanish conquest, the pleasures of the Arabic taste arrived, transformed by the Spaniards; and the local ethnical indigenous traditions that contributed to the unique flavours of its foods.

A diversity of unique destinations

Guatemala has been recognised as a unique destination for tourism, due to its magnificent natural resources, Mayan and Colonial history, and the impressive modern development of its capital city.

The Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT) and the government agency Invest in Guatemala have identified seven major areas that present the greatest investment possibilities. These areas are in: Petén, Guatemala City and Antigua Guatemala in Sacatepéquez; Atitlán in Sololá; the Pacific Coast; the Caribbean coast in Izabal; Alta and Baja Verapaz; and the Eastern region of the country.

Tikal: Adventure in the Mayan world

In Petén lies the Mayan city of Tikal, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979.

Besides Tikal, another major Mayan city is El Mirador, which is in the process of exploration, an ambitious project that will become a world-class

tourist destination. It is a region that lacks tourist infrastructure, however: only 3,277 rooms that do not meet the existing demand, of which less than 10 per cent offer 5 star service.

The region of Petén and the attractions of the Mundo Maya meet the demand of 58 per cent of the tourists visiting the country in search of cultural, nature, adventure and sporting activities. The Petén region is rich in natural resources, preserving the main Central American backwoods.

The main areas of development in the Mundo Maya region are located in the area of Lake Petén Itza, El Remate, Jocompiche, Picháin, and Yaxhá Quexil, and several other tourist spots in Petén are suitable for guesthouses, bars, restaurants, exclusive hotels, tour operators and other mixed-use projects.

Guatemala City and Antigua: Contrasts of modernity and the colonial past

Guatemala City attracts large numbers of business tourists, accounting for 21 per cent of the country's visitors for business or conventions, and is home to the headquarters of the largest and most important multinationals located in the Central American region, which has enabled the development of the city's culinary industry, entertainment and recreation. It is in Guatemala City where the international hotel chains focus, including InterContinental, Westin Camino Real (part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts), Barceló, View Royal, Holiday Inn, Clarion Suites, Radisson, Best Western, and Crowne Plaza, among others.

On the other hand, Antigua Guatemala is the

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The Northern acropolis and plaza at Tikal

According to UNESCO, La Antigua Guatemala is the best-preserved colonial city in the whole of Latin America

main tourist destination after Guatemala City. For UNESCO, Antigua is the best-preserved colonial city in Latin America. Walking around Antigua you will also find a rich cafe and chocolate culture, great people watching, a chance to sample Guatemala's renowned coffee and to practice Spanish.

The accommodation in this city consists mostly of small hotels, with 2,331 rooms to meet the demand from tourists, while at Easter the city hosts more than 76,000 foreign visitors, as well as local tourists. The favourable climate of Antigua also makes it an attractive destination for retirees and allows outdoor activities all year round, including golf.

Antigua has become a destination of hotels and high-class services, bringing greater value to the industry. In the last five years, major hotel chains have invested over US\$500 million in Antigua, including: Westin Camino Real, La Reunion Golf Resort & Residences, and Casa Santo Domingo – all exclusive 5 stars hotels.

The Highlands: Living Mayan culture

The most deeply-rooted indigenous culture can be found in the Highlands of Guatemala. The pine forests and active volcanoes allow visitors to practice hiking, canyoning, and ecotourism. The Western region provides a folkloric display that unifies the pre-Columbian cosmogony and the customs of the conquerors. This region is a perfect combination of natural beauties, like Lake Atitlán and traditions, like the market of Chichicastenango, famous for its size and colourfulness.

Sololá, the department that houses the majestic Lake

Atitlán, has an area of 437,145 km² (271,626 mi²). It is the second most important tourist destination (after Guatemala City/Antigua) for foreign visitors due to its rich Mayan culture and traditions, which make it one of the main cultural attractions of the country. Its landscapes, suitable for adventure and extreme sports, meet the demands of 58 per cent of the tourists who seek this type of activity.

In this department, the main areas of development are located in the vicinity of Lake Atitlán and its shores, with the potential to develop exclusive hotels, mixed-use projects and resort hotels.

The Pacific Coast

Its splendid 300 kilometre-long beaches allow visitors to practice surfing and sport fishing, especially for sailfish, an activity that has been recognised as the number one in the region and second in the world. The habitats of this region are great for the development of turtle hatcheries and mangroves, and facilitate the subsistence of the ecosystems for many different species. In this region it is also possible to climb volcanoes, to practice bird watching, to visit important archaeological sites like Takalik Abaj in Retalhuleu and El Baúl in Escuintla.

The Pacific Coast is considered worldwide as one of the best destinations for sport fishing, with records of up to 1,663 caught in four days, averaging 660 on a single day. The Pacific Coast is also the setting for famous fishing tournaments: the ILTTA, Presidential Challenge and others.

The Pacific Coast of Guatemala attracts more than 85 per cent of national tourism, while income from Pacific cruises has doubled in the last four years.

The Pacific Coast offers increasingly attractive investment opportunities, especially thanks to the boom in tourism from other countries in Central America. The sun and sea route called "Guatemágica" combining adventure activities, fun at the theme parks Xetulul and Xocomil, rural and ecological tourism, culture, archaeology and beaches in one place, has increased the flow of tourists that also seek leisure fishing activities in the volcanic sand beaches of the country. This is a demand which increases year-on-year and enables the development of new tourism projects to meet it.

The Caribbean Coast: Izabal

The country's diversity is well represented in the green Caribbean, with its rich ecosystems that provide a habitat for many different species. Among its natural reserves are: Río Dulce, Bocas del Polochic, Punta de Manabique, and Biotopo Chocón Machacas.

This region is also home to Quiriguá, an archaeological site declared a World Heritage Site by

The jewel in the crown:
La Antigua Guatemala

Photo: Alastair Harris



UNESCO in 1981, where the famous “Estela E”, the biggest Mayan stela (monumental stone sculpture), at 10.5 metres high is found. In addition, the experience of visiting Castillo de San Felipe, built in the colonial era to avoid English pirate attacks, is offered to visitors. The stunning Lake Izabal, the largest in the country, the contrast among jungle, rivers and sea, and the mixture of the Garifuna and Mayan cultures make this a magical and fantastic paradise.

Izabal is the third most visited destination in Guatemala, due to its white sandy beaches and calm waters, ideal for sailing yachts and sailboats, in places like Amatique Bay, Río Dulce and Lake Izabal. Close to Izabal, tourists can also visit other interesting places such as the ruins of Quiriguá. A few miles from there, tourists can also visit the Tikal National Park (Petén), one of the largest archaeological sites and urban centres of the Mayan civilisation; the Keys of Belize and other Caribbean islands; or engage in many other cultural, recreational or sports activities, such as diving.

The Verapaces region: A natural paradise

Characterised for its lush forests, this region has significantly contributed to the high level of biodiversity in the country. Home of the Quetzal (Guatemala’s national bird), the Verapaz region offers a wide range of potential tourist destinations thanks to its many waterfalls, natural pools, and varied flora and fauna.

The area is a perfect destination to venture into tourism development projects linked with adventure and outdoor recreation. For this, the mountainous territory of the rainforest allows the incorporation of tourism services for places such as the Quetzal Biotope area and the river Cahabón.

The investment possibilities become more attractive when exploring other attractions such as the long caves of Lankin or Candelaria, and the majestic waterfalls of Semuc Champey, one of the more complex waterfalls and natural bridges of limestone in the Central American region.

The East: Mystical and natural

This region offers great natural resources, whilst at the same time being an ideal destination for investment in hotels and timeshare services, due to the religious importance of Esquipulas, the house of the Black Christs, considered the

“Central American Capital City of the Faith”.

The Eastern part of the country, mystical and natural, provides an ideal environment for the development of enterprises that integrate the services of tour guides, tour operators, food service and lodging. In addition, there are other important places in this region, such as the volcano and lagoon Ipala and Ouija. These and other destinations have been developing constantly, and nowadays demand services such as eco-tours. In addition, the historical and cultural wealth offered by the Museum of Palaeontology and Archaeology “Roberto Woolfok Saravia” in Estanzuela, where are kept the bones of mastodons and whales over 50 thousand years old, is also very attractive for both national and foreign visitors.

Furthermore, Guatemala offers advantages for specific segments in tourism, such as its strategic location and the facilities of its land and maritime terminals, which make it an important destination for cruise ships from the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts. The Sport fishing resources of the Pacific Coast are well-known and have made it one of the best places in the world to enjoy this activity. More than 720 species of birds also make Guatemala a wonderful and important destination for bird watching. Besides this, the country has all the necessary characteristics to propitiate business activities and to be an ideal location for national and international conventions. The richness and diversity of Guatemala offer numerous ways to enjoy vacations or business trips, since the visitor will find different tourism segments across all seven of its wonderful regions. **E**

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Sport fishing off Guatemala’s Pacific Coast

