



APPENDIX 2

Camping Places

THE FOLLOWING LISTS CAMPING PLACES WE USED DURING THE TRIP AND others recommended by other travelers. Very few of these places are certified “campsites.” Although we found each place safe, and for the most part enjoyable, we cannot guarantee that they will even be available when you arrive. One of the pleasures of the trip was finding new locations, and we would certainly like to hear about new campsites that readers find. Send updates to updates@brindlepress.com. We will post updates on our web site at www.brindlepress.com.

Most campsites are boondock parking places, which means there are no services. We have indicated services, if any, as **W** **E** **D** (Water/Electricity/Dump).

Refer to the maps at the beginning of each country for reference to the day we arrived at a new camp. If we stayed in the same camping place for more than one day, only the first day we stayed there is indicated for reference. The extremely rough roads, where the average speed was 10-15 miles per hour, are indicated as dashed lines on the maps. Costs are in U.S. dollar equivalents. Our thanks to Bill Cone, Carol Kulish, Kathe Kirkbride and Colleen Regan for providing data on additional camping places.

U.S.A

Day 1 Raymondville, Texas. Wal-Mart Parking Lot. Hwy 77 Freeway off ramp. \$0.

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Mexico (Day 2 - 10, 95 - 97)



Day 2 North of Soto La Marina, Tamaulipas. Cafeteria Ojo de Agua. (N24:13.218 W98:12.504) \$0. Route 180 between Km markers 201 and 202. 144 miles south of Matamoros (about 3 1/2 hours). **Comments:** Barren highway with not many stops. The owner of this store allowed us to park behind the restaurant. **Other Sites:** There is a trailer park at **La Pesca**. Adventuretours stops at La Gata Camp in **Soto La Marina** (Starcher). See day 97.

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Day 3 Tuxpán, Hidalgo. On the beach (La Playa). \$0. Take Route 180 into Tuxpán, and follow signs for La Playa. **Comments:** We bypassed Tampico and tried to reach Poza Rica. Look for a small stand selling refreshments, with a packed sand drive beyond it passing between houses to the beach parking lot.

Day 4 Monte Gordo, Emerald Coast, Hidalgo. Trailer Park Quinta Alicia. (W) (E) (D) \$10. Route 180 between Poza Rica and Nautla; Km marker 84, just north of Monte Gordo. **Comments:** A fine place with full hookups. We had it to ourselves. A large caravan was staying up the road at Hotel Playa Paraíso campsite. **Other Sites:** There are numerous campsites all along this beach. (See Day 96)



Day 96 (return) Monte Gorda, Emerald Coast, Hidalgo. Trailer Park Neptuno (N22:48.856 W98:17.896). (W) (E) (D) \$13. Six miles north of Nautla near km 81 marker. On Route 180. **Comments:** Swimming pool **Other Sites:** Numerous trailer parks along this beachfront road

Day 5 Veracruz, Veracruz. Balneario Mocambo. (W) (E) (D) \$15. South of city center on Boca del Rio, behind the Hotel & Balneario Mocambo. **Comments:** Extra charge for electric hookups. **Other Site near Veracruz** (Courtesy Carol Kulish) **Playa Chachalacas, Veracruz.** \$0. North of Veracruz about 30 miles where Route 180 joins Route 140. Follow signs to Playa Chachalacas and watch for signs to the Playa, about 5 more miles. This is close to the Zempoala archeological site. See <http://www.playachachalacas.com/> **Comments:** No services. Busy place until dark, lots of stands and boat rides available. Watch for soft sand.



Day 6 Lake Catemaco, Veracruz. Trailer Park La Ceiba. (W) (E) (D) \$15. Take main Catemaco entrance off Route 180 next to Pemex station. Turn right just before arch. 0.5 mile down hill turn left on the malecón (jetty). The trailer park is on your left in 0.1 miles.

Day 7 La Venta, Oaxaca. Refresquería Lolita. \$0. There is a turn south to La Venta off Highway 190, about 12-15 miles east of the intersection with the cross isthmus road, 185, at La Ventosa. The store of Sra. Dolores Giren Carrasca is on the right just before the town square. **Comments:** See write-up for our nice experience here.



Day 8 Ocozocoautla, Chiapas. Hogar Infantil. (W) (E) \$0 (donations to U.S. address encouraged). From the west, turn off towards town at the beginning of the bypass. Pass a cemetery and at 0.5 miles turn left just before the bus terminal. Go 0.4 miles and look for the Hogar on the right. **Comments:**

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Electricity had reverse polarity. **Other Sites:** The entrance to **Sumidero National Park**, 14 miles (23 km) north of Tuxtla Gutierrez.



Day 9 San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. Hotel Bonampak Trailer Park. Ⓜ ⓔ ⓓ \$16. From the west, avoid the Periférico and continue into town. The hotel is just beyond Pemex #0349 on your right. **Comments:** Plenty of interesting sights in the area. **Other Sites Near San Cristóbal** (Courtesy Carol Kulish) Tzisco. Lagunas De Montebella National Park. About 35 miles east of Mexico 190 between Guatemala border and San Cristóbal in

Chiapas (turnoff at La Trinitaria). Take first left in town, down a hill and then left along the lake to the end. ⓔ \$4. **Comments:** Watch for overhead cables. Power and showers at the restaurant. **San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.** (N16:44 W92:39) "...camped in a grassy area near the edge of town at the local sports complex. Colleen found the man who is in charge of the security here and got permission for us to stay for three nights." (Kirkbride/Regan)

Day 95 Villahermosa, Tabasco. Carrefour Parking Lot (Supermarket) (N17:59.376 W92:59.376). \$0. From the west take the first off ramp when crossing the river into town, marked Teapa 195, turn left and pass under the highway. From the east, you will pass a WALMART on your right (another possible camping spot), exit 180 to the feeder road, this is the main boulevard, Ave. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. Continue on feeder road and you will find Carrefour on your right next to a large cinema complex and near a Sam's Club. **Other Sites: Rancho Hermanos Graham**, 80 miles east, and Campgrounds at **Palenque**, 70 miles southeast.



Day 97 Manuel (Tampico), Tamaulipas. Comedor La Canchita. (N22:48.856 W98:17.896). \$0. Hwy 180, 6 miles north of Manuel, between km marker 9 and 10. East side of the road. **Comments:** Friendly family running this *comedor*, let us park on their fenced property.

Other Sites in Mexico (Courtesy of Kathe Kirkbride and Colleen Regan): **Las Cabras, Sinaloa.** "We boondocked in the village of Las Cabras, 50K from the carretera on the road to El Fuerte from El Carrizo. The *comisario*, Rogelio Guerrero, would like other RVers to know that they are also welcome to camp here for 25 pesos per night. I wrote out the words he will put on a sign on the road...it should say "Las Cabras...RV dry camping...25 Pesos". It is a very nice wide area with easy access for any kind of a rig with a large thorny tree near the highway. The money derived from this venture will go to the local primary school. Las Cabras is located at 14 Kilometers from El Fuerte and 50K from El Carrizo on the road from El Carrizo." **Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco.** "...we found a great boondocking spot on a cliff overlooking the ocean near **Punta Mita** several kilometers north of Pto Vallarta. We had originally thought to approach from the road that goes through **Sayulita**, but that turned out to be an interesting side jaunt through a very small town square with lots of onlookers as we extricated ourselves. The map showed a heavy red line for both approaches to Punta Mita and so we chose the shortest route. We ended up about five miles west of the main highway on the south road that angles out to Punta Mita. It was an overlook point that allowed you to see from one end of **Bahia Banderas** to the other so at night we looked south to the lights of Pto Vallarta." **Punta Perula, Jalisco.** (N19:35 W105:7). "...we found a beach access road used by the local

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fishermen to get to the beach with their boats. It was right alongside the Punta Perula RV Park, where one of our members decided to go for the full hookups for the night.”

Cuyutlán, Jalisco. “a large parking lot (N18:55 W104:4) that was right on the beach near an area that we suspect fills up on the weekends and holidays with hundreds of Mexican families who head for the beaches just like we do...”

Maruata, Michoacan. (N18:16 W103:20) “at the end of an abandoned airstrip in front of a military outpost at the east end of town.”

Playa Linda, Guerrero (N17:41 W 101:39). “...a free camping spot just down the street from Club Med **Ixtapa.** It is a large, sandy, peninsular area with ocean on a couple of sides and a lagoon with beautiful egrets just behind where we camped.”

Acapulco, Guerrero. Diamante RV Park (N16:47, W99:48). **Pinotepa, Oaxaca.** (N16:20 W98:4) “...abandoned airstrip next to a soccer field.”

Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca. (N15:51 W97:3). “...incredible boondock spot. We strung ourselves out along a sandy road that paralleled the main street right next to the beach. As we parked, two men from a nearby hotel arrived to tell us that we couldn’t park there as it was parking for their guests. The cook in the restaurant on the beach told us that it was really to keep us from blocking the view of their guests and that it was a public street and it was fine to stay there. We found a policeman who told us that it was fine and we stayed for two nights.”

Zipolite Beach, 43 miles east of **Pto. Escondido, Oaxaca.** (N15:40 W96:31). “...a dirt lot owned by the church...negotiated a rate of 300 pesos for all the rigs for two nights. That works out to \$2.50/night/rig.”

Tapanatepec, Oaxaca. (N16:22 W94:11). “...a parking spot between a construction site and the public market.”

Chetumal, Quintana Roo. (N18:39 W88:25) RV park called Cenote Azul, across the street from the *cenote* near Chetumal.

Guatemala (Days 11-36, and Days 87-89)



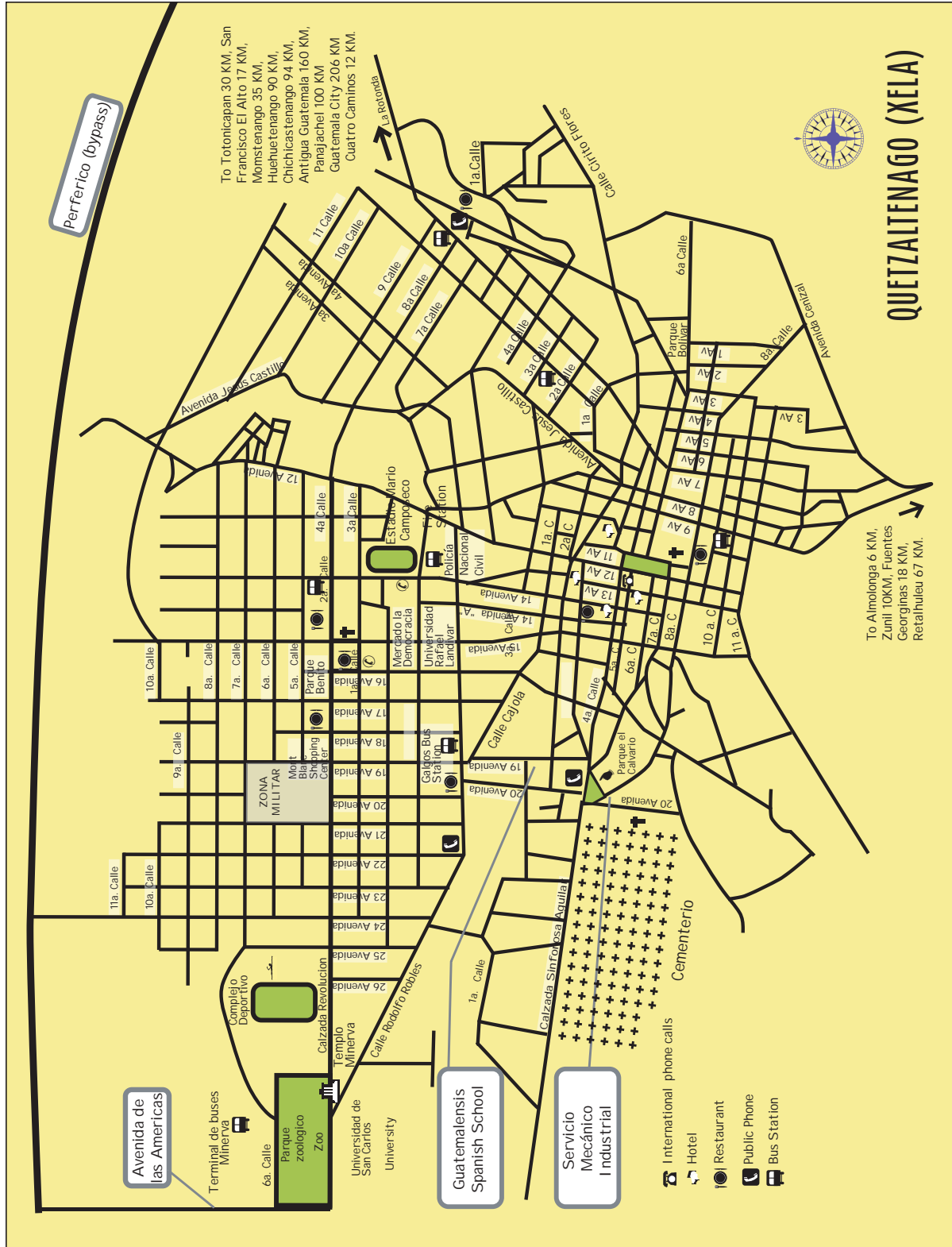
Day 11 Huehuetenango. Hotel Los Cuchumatanes. (N15:18.561 W91:27.667). Ⓜ Ⓔ \$5. Ask taxi driver to guide you upon approaching town! Sector Brasilia, Zona 7, Huehuetenango, Apartado Postal No. 46 Phone: +502-764-1951 Fax. +502-764-2816. **Other Sites:** Ruinas Zaculeu (or “further on the same road at the riverside”). The ruins are west of town (N15: 20.023 W91:29.529) and worth a visit. Approach is difficult from town because of the narrow streets. A better

access to the Ruins with an RV is as follows: The Ruins are 17.2 miles off the highway. Turn west off Pan-American Highway at yellow, *zona militar* (N15:18.397 W91:31.621), pass big military base on left. This turnoff is 3 miles west of the main turnoff for Huehuetenango (N15:17.000 W91:29.474). At the Metro gas station (N15:19.294 W91:29.717), go Northwest between soccer fields on dirt road. Take two left forks. At main blacktop road turn left about 0.4 miles to the ruins.

Day 12 Quetzaltenango (Locally called Xela). *Servicio Mecánico Industrial.* \$33/mo parking

Comments: This is where we stored our rig while living with the dePalma family. Guatemalensis Spanish School can set you up, see Language Schools section. The owner of the machine shop where we parked is Dona Mariana, +502-761-2807. **Other Sites:** Hiperpaiz, Avenida Las Americas, Zona 3, allows parking in their lot.

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Day 19 Chichicastenango. Shell Gasolinera. Ⓜ ⓔ ⓓ \$4. Take highway from Los Encuentros to Chichi. Turn right on 7th Ave. Shell Gas station is between 6th and 7th street, next to Hotel Santo Tomás.

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Day 27 Panajachel, Lake Atitlán. Hotel Visión Azul. (N14:44.936 W91:9.866). (W) (E) \$6. Turn off the Interamerican Highway towards Sololá west of Los Encuentros. Pass through Sololá. Turnoff to Visión Azul is just before the town of Panajachel, but the turn is too sharp for a motorhome. Continue into town and turnaround at the bottom of the hill. **Comments:** There is electricity and water available in the bar next to the swimming pool. Bring a long extension cord and hose. This was our favorite location. www.latinlatitudes.com gives a different view. **Other Sites:** **Panajachel.** Hotel Tzanjuyu has space for parking many RVs. (W) (D)

Day 28 Antigua Guatemala. Private home. We found Antigua difficult to navigate. Ask a taxi or a local guide to lead you to your destination. **Comments:** This town is not friendly to large vehicles. To visit Antigua you might consider parking your motorhome at Hotel Vision Azul at Lake Atitlán, and either rent a car or take a bus. There are plenty of good hotels and restaurants in Antigua. **Other Sites, Antigua Guatemala:** The Kirkbride party stayed at a regional park called Florencia, just outside the village of **Santa Lucia Milpas Altas** (N14:34 W 90:41). Hotel Jorge, 4a. Avenida Sur, Calle del Conquistador No. 13, Tel/Fax: 832-3132) (Plaxton). Plaxtons also stayed at the Hotel Santa Lucia. Hotel La Real Plaza, 9a Calle, Pte #40,

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Tel 832-2239, email operasa@itelgua.com. Experimental Botanical Garden “Valhalla”. Email exvalhalla@yahoo.com and their website is www.exvalhalla.org. El Rosario at 5a. Avenida Sur final No. 36. and Hotel Antigua at 8a Calle Pte 1. It is possible to get to both of these places without going through the main town and they are near each other. Call these places in Antigua before you go, and you might have to rent a room. **Other Sites: Southern Guatemala.** The “best campground” in Central America is Turicentro Automariscos (Plaxton). This is South of Guatemala on the road towards Escuintla between **Amatitlán** and **Palín** at km marker 33.5. Telephone +502-330479.



Day 36 Esquipulas. Pollos Camperos Restaurant. \$2 tip to guard. Take the left fork at the approach into the town. Follow signs to Pollo Campero, next to Basílica. We parked right next to the restaurant with permission from the guard. **Comments:** There are two huge grass parking lots near the restaurant for pilgrims that flock on special days. Adventure Caravans uses these lots when they come through. There is a small charge.

Day 87 Rio Dulce. Bruno’s Hotel and Restaurant. (N15:39.573 W89:00.122). Ⓜ ⓔ \$6.50. Bruno’s is under the north end of the bridge over the river. There is a small slip road on the east side of the bridge where the north end of the bridge joins the town. Northbound, make a U-turn immediately over the bridge onto the slip road. About 50 yds. down you can pass under the bridge to reach a gated entrance for Bruno’s. The clearance at this signposted underpass is too low for most RVs! Instead, continue about 300 yards towards the water where the bridge is higher off the ground, and back-track. **Comments:** Bruno’s is a hangout for the yachting crowd. For more on Rio Dulce see <http://www.mayaparadise.com/index.htm> **Other Sites:** Planeta Rio (previously Hotel Ensenada) on the south side of the river (N15:31 W 88:59). Finca Ixobel in **Poptún** is a remarkable eco-tourism resort that allows camping. It’s about 3 hrs north of Rio Dulce and 1-1/2 hours south of **Santa Elena**. The resort is 2 km off the main road. Turnoff near Km 376 marker (N16:18.558 W89:24.868). Cost about \$3 per person. Buffet dinner for \$4.50 and many tours offered.



Day 89 Santa Elena, Cuevas Actun Can. (N16:54.206 W89:53.704). Ⓜ \$6.50. From the south go to Santa Elena. Pass the Tikal turnoff, and airport, and keep right at the Texaco station where the road becomes one way (this is *la calle*). At the causeway to Flores, turn left on 6a Ave and take it about 3/4 mile past the market and microwave towers to the end. Turn left about .2 miles, turn right at the electricity generating plant and go another 0.6 miles

to the site. **Comments:** The caves are a tour opportunity. They close at 5:00PM but you can park overnight. Carlos, the manager, is from California and speaks English. Bring a flashlight. Tikal is a 1-1/2 hour drive from here. **Other Sites in Peten:** (Courtesy Carol Kulish): **Tikal Ruins.** On right just after Visitors Center. \$7.00 **Comments:** Large grassy field with thatched roof, cement floor *palapas*. Unisex bathroom and showers. Very quiet at night. Easy walk to

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tour the ruins and visit the museums. There is one small store and several restaurants. No pets. **Yaxja.** This is 33 miles west of Melchor de Mencos, on the Belize/Guatemala border, then about 7 miles north on a passable dirt track during the dry season. Do not go in the rainy season. \$5. **Comments:** Large grassy field on Laguna Yaxja with toilets and *palapa* with pit fireplaces. Restoration of the ruins is in progress. When the road is improved, it will rival its neighbor Tikal.

Honduras (Days 37 - 50, 86)



Day 37 Copán Ruinas. Doña Belia's. \$0. From the SW corner of the Parque Central head three blocks west (watch for low overhead cables in town), turn right (north), go to the end of the block and turn left. This is the road out of town. Wind to your left on this road and you will see the large dirt area between cemetery and Doña Belia's house. Coming from Guatemala, the main road cuts off from the highway about 5

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miles from the border, but there is no sign. Look for a nicely paved and curbed road going to the left as you head away from the border. If you come in on this road from the border you go right by the cemetery before you enter town. **Other Sites:** Romilio Daniel Sandoval owns Hotel and Restaurante Katu Sukchij and balneario about 9 miles west of the **El Florido** border on the Guatemala side, east of **Jocotán, Guatemala**, at the Rio Grande river crossing at a place called Puente Jupilingo, km 204 marker. +502-946-5205 (Spanish only). **Gracias, Lempira** (N14:35 W88:35)...behind the DIPPSA gas station". **Lago de Yojoa** (N14:56 W88:00). Finca las Glorias, a resort and conference center on the lake. We camped for free on the soccer field." Between **Jesus de Otoro** and **Comayagua** (N14:27 W87:38). Tracasa truck stop. (Kirkbride/Regan).



Day 38 Copán Ruinas. Texaco Gasolinera (N14:50 W89:09). Ⓜ Ⓜ \$3. Take road to archaeological site, this is right next to the site entrance. **Comments:** Electricity available between the coke machines in front. They had water but no pressure in the morning. Top off when you can. **Other Sites:** We observed a nice Balneario in **Santa Rita**, 6 miles east of Copán ruins, 1 km west of Shell gas.

Day 40 Tela. Honduras Beach Plantation, Tela Beach Club (N15:47.379 W87:30.770). Ⓜ Ⓜ \$11.50. This is actually in **San Juan**, about 5 miles west of Tela. Take 9a Calle southwest until it turns left. Follow the dirt road straight on for a few hundred yards, turn right and follow the signs to "Tela Beach Club", about 3 miles of dirt road through the village of San Juan. **Comments:** The "Plantation" is a private land development. They have eight cabanas for rent about 400 yards off the beach where we parked. Electricity available at an outside plug of the closest cabana, and we used an irrigation tap for a water hookup. Management said they would rig up a dump to their septic tank with advance notice. This is a good self contained resort with a nice beach, pool, bar and restaurant. Warning: watch for soft sand. Garífuna tours (www.garifuna-tours.com) has an office in town on 9a Calle NE near the south corner of the plaza. The Mango Café is the tour meeting area and also an interesting internet café. **Other Sites** There is a Tourist Police office with secure concrete parking lot at the foot of 4a Ave NE next to the beach. They are very helpful and you can camp for \$1.75 per night. There is an electrical outlet in the bathroom, and water. **Other Sites:** **Tela** (N15:44 W87:27) "Lancetilla Botanical Gardens...and enjoyed the area." (Kirkbride/Regan).



Day 43 Corozal (La Ceiba). Hotel Brisas del Mar (N15:47.237 W86:40.890). Ⓜ \$3. Corozal is about 15 km east of La Ceiba on the coast road towards Saba and Trujillo. To reach Brisas del Mar, go about 0.2 miles east of the main Corozal turnoff. Turn north at the small white sign for the hotel, and follow the dirt road across railroad tracks to the beach. **Comments:** We met Francisco Vivas runs La Ceiba Eco-

tours in this area. AP 70, La Ceiba, Honduras, Ph. +504 443-4207. **Other Sites:** **La Ceiba.** (N15:46 W86:52) "We had heard about an RV park run by a Canadian and found it just east of La Ceiba. It was a very tight squeeze getting down the little dirt lane, and our CB antenna was a casualty of the tree limbs." (Kirkbride/Regan)

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Day 45 Trujillo. Christopher Columbus Hotel. (N15:55.592 W85:56.385). **W** **E** **D** \$0. Turn north from main road to airstrip, about 1/2 mile east of town. Cross airstrip to large hotel next to beach. **Comments:** We took advantage of their electricity, water and sewer, and earned our keep by eating in their restaurant and enjoying their Piña Coladas. This is a beautiful spot for a hotel stay too. **Other Sites:** **Trujillo**

(N15:54 W85:59) “Campamento, an RV park with cabanas and a restaurant right on the beach west of town about 5 miles. We stayed five nights there and enjoyed getting to know Trujillo and swimming at the beach in front of where we were parked. The owners, Orleis and Arturo Ramos, were very friendly and welcoming.” (Kirkbride/Regan). Thor Janson recommends a restaurant/campsite that is about half-way between Trujillo and **Puerto Castilla** on the road around the bay. As we left **Saba** going east we noted The Executive Hotel that had a pool and a walled in lawn with easy access. It would have been suitable for camping. There is also an enormous gravel lot, big enough for twenty motorhomes, opposite the Texaco station in the town of **Saba**.

Day 48 La Union. Muralla National Park. (N15:5.837 W86:44.314). \$11 for the tour, for the two of us. Turn west off main (dirt) road into La Union and continue through town. There is a river to ford which may flood in rainy season. At a T-junction a sign directs you 8.4 miles (14 km) to the National Park. The park headquarters is about a mile past the sign announcing entrance to the park.



Day 49 Valle de Angeles (Tegucigalpa). Parque Turístico. (N14:8.412 W87:2.400). **W** \$3. Proceed 1.2 miles west of Valle de Angeles, on south side of road to Tegucigalpa. **Comments:** This is a large public park with swimming pool and ball courts designed to handle day trippers from the capital. Plenty of space for caravans! **Other Sites:** Caravans stay in **Valle de Angeles** near a “wood factory” and the pavilion of arts and crafts has a large parking lot. (Plaxton)

Day 50 Danlí. Esso Gasolinera. (N14:1.497 W86:35.085). \$1.20. This is on the west end of town on road from Tegucigalpa (CA6). **Comments:** *Vigilante* on duty all night. Pay money directly to him. **Other Sites:** Texaco in town. Also there is a soccer field close to downtown we were told could be used.



Day 83 San Jerónimo, near Choluteca. Pinto family farm and refresquería. (N13:11.173 W87:8.267). \$0. This is off main road between Choluteca and the border at **Guasaule** (not the Pan-American which goes to El Espino). Between Km 15 & 16, turn north on dirt road next to “Pepsi Emanuel” store. Go about 1 km to end of dirt road and turn right. The Pinto shop and farm is a few hundred yards on your right.

Comments: One of our best experiences meeting the local people. See text.

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Nicaragua (Day 51-51, 80 - 82)

Day 51 Estelí. Colegio Adventista Maranatha (N13:4.211 W86:20.933). Ⓜ ⓔ \$0. This is south of town, about 1/4 mile south of the intersection of the Pan-American Highway and Calle Principal. Turn west just north of restaurant Mirador, with viewing tower. Colegio is about 100m off highway. **Comments:** Administrator Ronaldo gave us permission to stay. Caretaker Alberto is on duty all night. **Other Sites:** **Ocotal** (N13:06 W86:21). Gas station. **Estelí.** Fire department “where we were made very welcome”. **Sébaco**

(N12:51 W86:06). “Just off the main highway in front of a large vegetable warehouse... We paid the night watchman 100 córdobas for watching our rigs.” (Kirkbride/Regan)

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Day 52 San Jorge, on Lake Nicaragua near Rivas. In a small parking lot next to restaurant. (N11:27.554 W85:47.468). \$0. Go east from Rivas to San Jorge. Turn left at the main square of San Jorge and right toward beach (La Playa) after a few blocks. **Comments:** Park on hard packed sand beach or next to restaurant. A caravan comes here once a year. Ometepe Tours is to the right of the ferry entrance. (Sr. Cipriano

Quiroga +505 453-4779) **Other Sites:** There is a tourist restaurant and small zoo about 2 miles north of the **Peñas Blanca** border crossing. It has a very large flat area perfect for parking. The restaurant has showers and water available, probably power also if you park next to the restaurant. Also, 35 miles south of **Rivas** there appears to be camping opportunities at Cabana Castilas and Hotel Colinas del Norte.

Day 80 Sto. Domingo, Ometepe Island, Lake Nicaragua. Finca Sto. Domingo. (N11:30.737 W85:33.277) Hotel. \$20. We parked our RV in the secure parking at the dock in San Jorge and took a passenger boat to Moyogalpa, Ometepe. **Comments:** You could bring a small RV on the ferry that runs from San Jorge. It would be an adventure and not worth it unless you planned to spend several days on the island. Reservations recommended, 278-8190. The road around the south side of the island from Moyogalpa around Concepción is rough but OK. The road north between Moyogalpa and San Marcos is terrible and not recommended. The Isthmus road is OK as far as Belgue. Hotel rooms are cheap at Sto. Domingo beach. Hotel Villa Paradaiso next door is recommended. **Other Sites:** “El Tesoro del Pirata” is on the South Side of Concepcion. Inquiries may be made at Hotel El Pirata in **Moyogalpa** (tel 459-4262). There is a bar/restaurant, a few new cabanas, restrooms and open air showers. Water & power is available. El Tesoro is reached by taking the road around Concepcion south from Moyogalpa about 12 miles. There is a turnoff signposted just beyond marker Km 11, which goes to the beach (right turn). The campground is a kilometer or so down this road on the right (N11:29.359 W85:37.088). Camping fees for a motorhome would be less than \$2. They also rent tents and have the cabanas for about \$4.

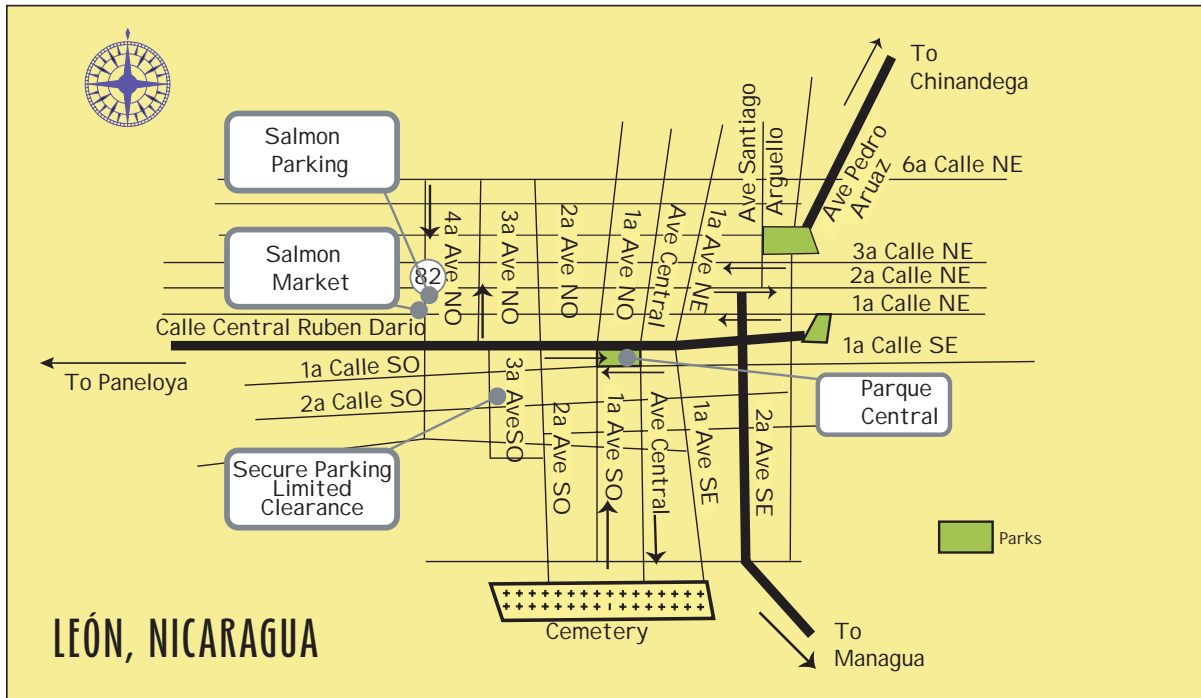
Day 81 Granada. Centro Turístico. (N11:55.264 W85:56.356). \$4 plus tips to two *vigilantes*. From Parque Colón, take Calle La Calzada east to lake front and turn south. Entrance to Centro is directly in front. About 1/2 mile down row of bars and restaurants is a small place to park on the east (left). **Comments:** We were expecting a lot of activity but Friday night was quiet. **Other Sites:** **Managua.** The Plaxtons parked their RV at the Managua Camino Real while they took a flight to the Corn Islands. The hotel is located at 9.5 km Carretera Norte, 1.5 km south of the airport. **Masaya.** “We are camped in front of the police station along the malecón overlooking Laguna de Masaya.” (Kirkbride/Regan)



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Day 82 León. Parking Lot, Salman Market. (N12:26.20 W86:52.96) **W** **E** \$2. From Parque Central, take 1a Av north three blocks, turn east (left) 3a Calle NE for three blocks, turn south (left) on 4a Av NO. Parking lot is on east side (left) in 2nd full block between 2a and 1a Calle. **Comments:** Electricity went off in the morning when they turned off the lights. Water pressure is bad in the morning. Note: Road from Chinandega to Honduras border is terrible. It took us nearly 5 hours to get from León to Guasaules. **Other Sites:** A few miles west of **Nacoame**, about 18 miles east of **El Amatillo**, there is a shallow river with a wide hard packed gravel approach that would have made a great camp, or at least cool lunch stop.



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Costa Rica (Day 53-63, 74-76)

Day 53 5 km N of Liberia. Delfín Trailer Park. (N10:39.441 W85:28.156) . \$4 + \$2 for the swimming pool. Look on the west side of Interamerican Highway, 3 miles north of Liberia. **Comments:** It is a large field with a long white fence and a small sign next to the entrance. The place is a decommissioned trailer park but there is a welcoming caretaker, and central water, electricity, dump and shade.

Other Sites: **Parque Nacional Santa Rosa**, 22 m north of Liberia, has camping by the park headquarters (4 miles from the highway). Pets are not allowed. There are also campsites on the northwest coast that we didn't visit. "Brasilito" near **Flamingo Beach** and North of Flamingo, Playa Potrero reportedly have camping. Lonely Planet lists campsites near **Playa Tamarindo**. Hotel Capazuri, 1.2 miles north of **Cañas**, has places suitable for camping (phone +506-669-6280, fax +506-669-6080, Email capazuri@racs.co.cr). A Shell gasoline station 2 miles north of the route 18 turnoff from the Interamerican Highway, about 11 miles south of **Cañas**, has a huge parking area. **Las Juntas**. "...a jumping off point for Monteverde. We found a place to park the rigs at the Balneario Cayuco where we were assured that they would be fine while we went off to other areas. We tipped the manager \$16 U.S. when we got back for all six rigs for 3 nights in his parking lot." (Kirkbride/Regan)

Day 54 Puntarenas. Paseo de Los Turistas. (N9:58.469 W84:50.647). \$0. Take main road (Rt. 17/ ave Central) westward from the Interamerican Highway to the end of the peninsula. Turn left onto Paseo de Los Turistas. Park anywhere along the beach. **Comments:** Puntarenas is active on weekends, quieter camping is found toward the west end of



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the beach. Other Sites on the Central Pacific Coast of Costa Rica: There is camping at **Playa Herradura north of Jacó**. Caravans have used the Marriott in Jacó. Parque Manuel Antonio near **Quepos** has unconfirmed camping. RV parks can be found on the **Nicoya Peninsula** at **Tambor** and **Cabuya**. "You can park near Playa Bejuco, between **Jacó** and **Quepos**". (Plaxton). Caravans we met drove from Palmar Norte to Quepos along the coast. Some were spooked by the narrow railroad bridges they had to cross.



Day 55 San Antonio de Belén, San José. Belén Trailer Park, P.O. Box 143-4005, Belén, Heredia, Costa Rica. Phone 239-0421, Email: lasutter@racsa.co.cr (N9:58.801 W84:10.727) © E D \$12. Exit Pan-American Highway just east of the 12k marker. Turn south toward San Antonio. After 0.4 miles, turn right at flashing yellow light (beginning of one way). Take first left 0.1m, then 0.5m on left immediately past gas station is the small, poorly signposted entrance to

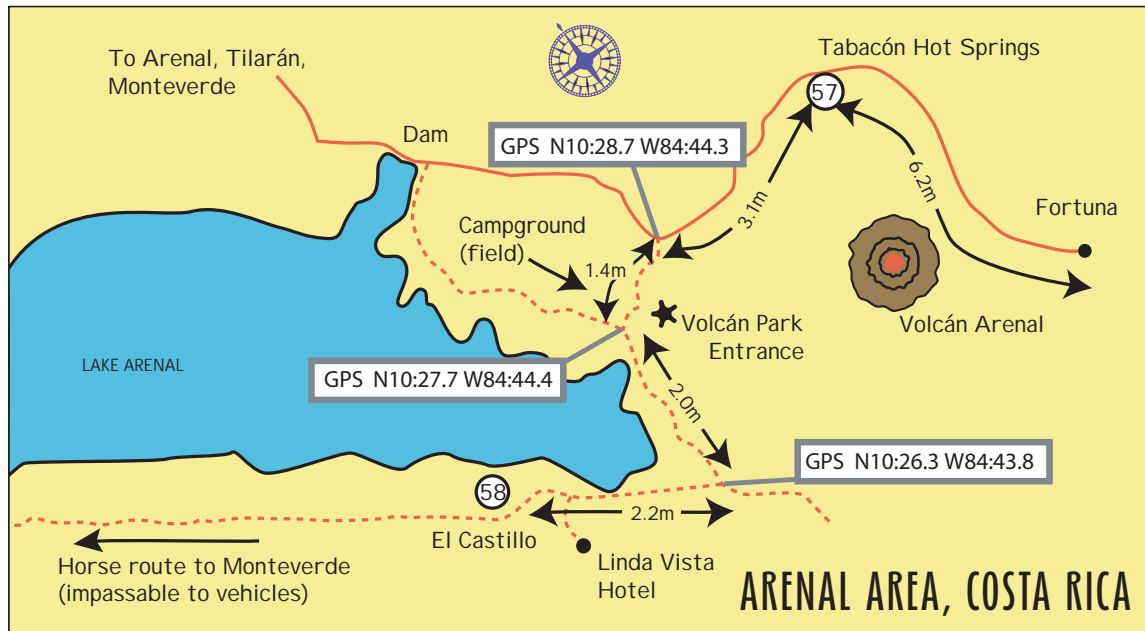
the trailer park. If you miss it go forward about three blocks, turn left one block and return on the parallel street where there is another entrance past a tall concrete wall. **Comments:** The owner, Laurie, is a transplanted Californian. This is a good place to stop and regroup after boondocking. Caravans stop here and do their Costa Rican tours by bus. Laundry and hot showers are available.



Day 57 Near Fortuna. Tabacón Hot Springs. (N10:29.245 W84:43.380). \$0. About 6 miles west of La Fortuna. **Comments:** This is across the road from hot springs and restaurant. **Other Sites:** Other RVers told us you could camp on the grass next to Cabinas Sissy at the west end of **Fortuna**. There is also campground across from the

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Arenal National Park entrance (N10:27.691 W84:44.404). In **La Fortuna** “we camped right next to the bullring on a large gravel area in front of Hotel Dorothy (N10:28 W84:39) for free.” (Kirkbride/Regan).



Day 58 El Castillo (Arenal Volcano). El Castillo. (N10:25.969 W84:45.001). \$0. This is north of Tabacón. Turn toward Volcán Natl Park on dirt road. 1.4 miles to Park Entrance, pass entrance and turn left toward “Linda Vista” hotel. Two miles on dirt road, turn right just past “Linda Vista” to pueblo of El Castillo. Next to soccer field. **Comments:** Beautiful view of the volcano across the lake. Horses are available to ride to Monteverde.

Day 59 Monteverde. Ecological Reserve. \$0 Follow signs to reserve from Sta. Elena, through Monteverde to the end of the road. **Comments:** We received permission to camp in the lower parking that is usually closed at night. We had to promise to keep Brindle in the RV. The road to Monteverde may be impassable in the wet season. Approaching from Tilarán is better than directly from the Pan-American Highway.



Day 60 Sta. Elena/ Monteverde. Orquídeas Bar and Hotel. (N10:18.777 W84:49.650). \$0 The bar is 1/2km out of Sta. Elena on the San José road, on the left next to toll booth. **Comments:** The owners, Danilo and Nadia Zamora, lived in the States and speak English. They are very friendly and helpful. Excellent view and wildlife.

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Day 63 San Isidro de El General. Shell Gasolinera. (N9:20.459 W83:40.374) \$0 This is at the southern edge of town on the Pan-American Highway. **Comments:** Restaurant next door cooks traditional Costa Rican food. **Other Sites:** Gas stations at the north end of town were hosting many 18-wheelers. North of San Isidro is a beautiful mountainous area in the **Rio Macho Forest Reserve**. There were several camping areas advertised off the main road that we

didn't explore. 60 miles south of San Isidro we found a nice pull off next to the Grande de Terraba river just east of **Palmar Norte** (N8:57.896, W83:17.209). 3 miles south of Palmar Norte there was a huge 24 hour gas station with plenty of camping room. The road to Golfito is 26 km. Seven km before you reach **Golfito** there is camping at La Perruja Lodge (Box). The beaches and National Parks in the area may provide camping venues.

Day 74 Puerto Viejo. Salsa Brava Restaurant (N9:39.532 W82:45.082) \$0. This is in the center of town, two doors south from the discothèque! Public parking is next to restaurant on the beach. **Comments:** A more tranquil campsite might be at north end of beach, about a mile from town. **Other Sites:** You can camp by the beach in **Manzanillo** (Kirkbride/Regan).



Day 75 Cahuita Village. Under tree by beach. (N9:44.231 W82:50.337) \$0. Turn off the highway to Cahuita. Turn right in town, left just before the National Park entrance. Shady spot at end of street offers welcome coolness. **Comments:** There is additional camping along black beach about one mile north, and you might be able to camp in the National Park without a pet.

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Day 76 Guayabo. National Monument (N9:58.244 W83:41.363) \$0. Take road to Guayabo monument from **Turrialba**. The turn is signposted near the west end of town. 11 miles on poor road takes about 45 minutes. **Comments:** Archeological site is well worth visiting. We parked on wide flat spot on road directly in front of entrance. No traffic at night. **Other Sites:** **Guapiles.** “we

stayed at the PoliDeportivo about 2 miles north of the highway on the road to **Cariari** near the swimming pools (N10:14 W83:47). It was an incredibly wonderful facility and a secure place to leave the rigs [while we went to Tortuguero]. As always the group left a tip for the watchman.” “...It was a beautiful mountainous drive through Turrialba to **Orosi** where we spent the night in the center of town next to the soccer field in front of the church (N9:48 W83:51 Elevation 3490).” (Kirkbride/Regan)

Panama (Days 64 - 73)



Day 64 Tolé. Public commons. (N8:14.048 W81:40.387) \$0. Turn east off highway 58 miles south of David. **Comments:** Plenty of room for caravans. There is a fixture near the east end of the commons where you might get electricity and water by asking.

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Day 65 Playa Santa Clara. Beach next to Restaurante Y Balneario Playa Santa Clara. (N822.478 W806.402) (Turnoff is N8:23.253 W80:6.600) (W) (E) (D) \$3 per person. The turnoff for Playa Santa Clara is 4.2 miles east of Rio Hato between Km markers 113 and 114. This is about 3 miles east of the Santa Clara airport runway, which crosses the Pan-American Highway. The turnoff is marked by an overhead

footbridge. The beach is 1.8 miles south at the end of the road. **Comments:** This is a beautiful beach with cabanas. One power outlet is available at a cabana near the defunct pizza stand. There is a latrine at the far end of parking area we used to dump our tanks. Water to fill tank is available outside a nicer restroom and shower closer to the entrance. We visited mid-week and had the place to ourselves. **Other Sites:** Panama's only true RV park with full hookups is just across the highway from the **Playa Santa Clara** exit. Turn north off the Pan-American Highway at this exit, and 100 yards down the road is XS Memories (www.xsmemories.com, 507-993-3096). Americans Dennis and Sheila run this secure, friendly, place, and arrange Kayak expeditions. Caravans stay put here and visit Panama by coach. The food is excellent.

Day 66 Balboa, Panama City. Country Inn, Balboa Yacht Club. (N8:56.486 W79:33.310). (W) \$0. Cross Puente de las Americas eastbound and take 1st exit to Balboa. Turn left at bottom of exit on Calle Amador (leading to causeway). Take the first right. **Comments:** Balboa Yacht Club used to allow camping but since the clubhouse burned down there doesn't seem to be a yacht club parking lot. The guard would not let us overnight in the enormous lot. You might have better luck. The hotel manager next door condescended to letting us stay in the hotel parking lot. **Other Sites:** We heard that the Hotel Plaza Paitilla, **Punta Paitilla**, offered parking to Caravans for the price of a room night. Locals suggested the parking lots of the Horoko Golf Course on the West Bank, and the Summit Golf Course on the road north towards Gamboa, as well as the Police Academy grounds. Another idea is to ask Kunkel-Weise, an engineering firm in the Rodman compound. This is where a caravan stayed (Starcher). This area is reached from the west side of the Bridge of the Americas. Take a road northbound from **Lacona**, about 1.2 miles west of the bridge.



Day 69 Near Playa Maria Chiquita, Portobelo. Bar y Restaurante Las Palmeras. (N9:27.329 W79:44.330) EL148 (W) (E) \$5 dry. \$8 w/elect. Take the trans-isthmus road from Panama to **Colón**. Turn off towards Portobelo just north of **Sabanita**. This Restaurante is 2 miles north/east of Playa Maria Chiquita, or about 9 miles from the turnoff at Sabanita. **Comments:** This is right on the beach. The Caribbean is cooler and more pleasant than Pacific Beaches. The owners

changed price on us when we decided to stay a second day.

Day 71 Playa Langosta. Playa Langosta (Bar, Restaurant). (N9:28.223 W79:43.444). (W) (E) \$10. This is 10 m east of Sabanita, a couple of miles past Las Palmeras. **Comments:** Contrasted to the black sand at Maria Chiquita and Las Palmeras, this is a wide white-sand beach. The helpful English speaking manager, Omar Vega, said power is available in the restaurant, but it is a

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long way from the beach parking. There is good snorkeling and lobsters were being caught while we were there. **Other Sites:** We took a day trip through Portobelo and on to **Isla Grande**, or more correctly, **La Guaira**, which is the mainland jumping off point to Isla Grande. You can park your RV and take a boat to Isla Grande where there are numerous hotels. Or you can spend the night in your RV on the mainland. The Bananas Village Resort (www.bananasresort.com) is the classiest place on the island.

Day 73 Chiriquí Department. “Vista Hermosa”. (N8:40.450 W82:13.308) \$0 This is near the continental divide, on the road between **Chiriquí** and **Chiriquí Grande**. It is 27 miles north of the turnoff from the Pan-American Highway, 1 mile N of a toll plaza. **Comments:** “Vista Hermosa” is on a sign next to a residence where there is a place to pull off the road. This was a cool respite from the coastal heat. **Other Sites:** Between **Chiriquí Grande** and **Almirante**. There is a place by the river between km markers 20 and 21 that looks like a nice boondock. The Restaurante Onelys, just east of km 50 (village of Quebrada Pitti), (N9:11.589 W82:20.308), 18 km south of **Almirante**. The manager, Pedro, welcomes tourists. There is a large grass space to park and *palapas*. Water and electricity is available. There is a terrific view of the archipelago. This is a tranquil venue compared to Almirante itself where we would not recommend camping. If you take the boat from **Almirante** to **Bocas del Toro**, you can park your RV at the fire station in Almirante.



El Salvador (Day 84-86)



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Day 84 San Miguel. Shell Gasolinera. (N13:30.462 W88:9.185) Ⓜ ⓔ Ⓞ \$0 (tip for guard suggested). On CA7 from **El Amatillo** (not the Pan-American Highway). This is a better road from the border. The gas station is on the east side of town, between km 140 and 141, on the south side of the road, Ruta Militar. **Comments:** The station has electric hookups in the back where you park. Water is available near the lube station. There is a concrete sewer cover in the back which can be slid to the side for dumping. The owner said we could also dump into the toilets. Showers are available. **Other Sites:** We were told that the Metrocenter in **San Miguel** would make a suitable campsite.



Day 85 San Salvador. Hotel Marriott Parking Lot (ex Hotel Presidente). (N13:41.535 W89:14.417) Ⓜ \$1+tips. Turn north on Ave. Revolucion off the Pan-American Highway just after the turnoff to Autopista Sur (coming from the south/west). Continue straight at the roundabout (traffic circle) for Blvd del Hipodromo. Covered parking is opposite hotel. **Comments:** We stayed in the hotel but the parking attendant said that we could stay in the vehicle. There might be electricity if you ask.

Day 86 Santa Ana. Centro Escolar Madre del Salvador. (N13:59.373 W89:32.834) Ⓜ \$2 Contribution. 23 Ave Sur between 7th and 5th Calle Oriente, near the Turicentro Sihuatehuacan. From Parque Libertad, in the center of town, take Libertad Oriente eastward. Turn right on 23rd Ave Sur (this is two blocks west of the turicentro, look for telephone kiosk on the southeast corner). Go three blocks.



Church and school are on the left where the road splits into two one-way streets. **Other Sites:** The Turicentro might let you stay if you arrive before closing. Hotel y Restaurante Montevista, 6 miles south of Frontera **Anguila**, north of Metepan. (N14:21.933 W89:26.960) has a big lot.

Other Sites in El Salvador courtesy of Kathe Kirkbride and Colleen Regan. **San Miguel** "...at another Shell Gas Station (N13:29 W88:28) for \$2/night." **Playa El Espino** on the Pacific Coast: "...we were shown a place to park under a palapa for \$5 for the day. This fee also included chairs and a hammock hanging under another palapa right on the beach." **Santiago de Maria** on either side of the Parque Central (N 13:29 W 88:28 Elev 2181'). **San Vicente** at a Puma Gas Station on CA-1 (N13:41 W88:46) "...where they had a large area where we could park and gave us permission to stay the night. It was big enough that a largish caravan could fit; they were very welcoming of us and had a security guard 24 hours a day." **La Libertad.** "...found an absolutely delightful place to camp at a private recreation center called Rio Mar (N13:29 W89:17 E 46') just east of town less than 2 miles. It has two swimming pools, a restaurant, lots of palapas, difficult access to a rugged beach, and beautiful palm and almond treed grounds. We are being charged \$5/night per rig and think it is a bargain. Talking them into allowing us to stay after they close at 5:00 pm was another fine example of persuasive communication as they were definitely not open to the idea when Colleen and I first approached them. After 5:00 we have the place to ourselves." **Playa Costa del Sol**, 30 miles east of La Libertad, Hotel Tesoro Beach "...lends itself to large RV caravans with tall rigs. Colleen talked to the receptionist there who said that RVs could stay there and use the resort; ...the cost would be \$15/day/rig. The beach is beautiful, clean, and has good boogie boarding."

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Belize (Day 90-94)

Day 90 Santa Elena. Caesars Place Guest House. (N17:12.261 W88:57.169) Ⓜ ⓔ ⓓ \$5 for water and sewage, \$3.75 pp camping. This is 6 miles east of the center of Santa Elena, near milepost 60 on the north side of road. Look for the signs for the Guest House and Gift Shop. **Comments:** It is not dog friendly because of local guard dogs. There is a very good gift shop here. **Other Sites:** **Santa Elena.** "...the Inglewood RV Park on the western edge of town (N 17:08

W 89:05) ...is owned by Greg Carrillo who lived for 30 years in Southern California and has now retired to his home country. The park is the nicest one we have stayed in our entire trip so far. He charges \$7.50/night with electricity extra if you need it." (Kirkbride/Regan).

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Day 91 Hummingbird Highway. Ian Anderson's Caves Branch Adventure Company & Jungle Lodge. (N17:10.043 W88:41.012). Ⓜ \$2.50 pp The turnoff is near milepost 33 on the Hummingbird Highway, almost across from the Blue Hole swimming area. Tel +501-822-2800, fax 888-265-4579 (US), www.cavesbranch.com. **Comments:** This is an all inclusive eco-tourism resort, but there are no special areas for RVs. Parking is available near the main building. Water hookups are along the dirt road. You need to stay here to participate in their tours, which are among the best in Belize. Dogs are accepted but they have territorial dogs on premises. **Other Sites:** Blue Hole National Park allows overnight parking at the Visitors' Center for \$2.50. They can also arrange a guide for cave tubing. Five Blue Lake National Park, closer to **Dangriga** at milepost 22, offers an off the beaten track boondocking opportunity near lake. The unmanned Visitors' Center is 4.5 miles off the highway on a dirt track. \$4. **Dangriga** "...we found two places to stay and part of the group stayed at a town park ...and the rest of us stayed in a grassy area near a bar called the Malibu Beach Club by the Pelican Bay Resort (N16:59, W88:14). Both spots were free, grassy and right on the beach." (Kirkbride/Regan)

Day 92 Sittee River Village. Public park next to soccer field. (N16:49.611 W88:18.072) \$0. From southern highway take Sittee Road east for five miles to Sittee River Village. The Sittee Road turnoff is about 3 miles south of the Hopkins turnoff. To get there from Hopkins, take Sittee Road turnoff 1.7 miles south of the Hopkins Road intersection with the main street. **Other Sites:** Several sites appeared interesting along the beach in **Hopkins** and South of town. Best site in town appears to be at the foot of Hopkins Road from the Southern Highway (next to pier and police station). South of Hopkins check out the "Beaches and Dreams" hotel about 0.4m south of the Sittee River Rd turnoff. On Sittee Road, next to river instead of ocean, Toucan Sittee have space for camping.



Day 93 Belmopan, Western Hwy. Amigos Restaurant (N17:19.141 W88:34.234) \$0. This is between mile markers 31-32 on the Western Highway. **Comments:** The friendly owner, Sue Bufford, says she can make a dump available through her septic cleanout valve, and can provide water. Electricity is expensive in Belize and she wasn't sure how to work out the reimbursement.



Day 94 Corozal. Public Park (N18:23.090 W88:23.605) \$0. Follow the main road through Corozal town. Where it runs along the ocean is a public small park that is available for parking on the grass. **Other Sites:** Caribbean Village trailer park is almost across the street from this location, a block south of the Hotel Maya. Lagoon Campground, 1 1/2 miles from the border at mile marker 91, looks attractive and is reported to be one of the nicest campgrounds in Belize.

Day 94 Corozal. Public Park (N18:23.090 W88:23.605) \$0. Follow the main road through Corozal town. Where it runs along the ocean is a public small park that is available for parking on the grass. **Other Sites:** Caribbean Village trailer park is almost across the street from this location, a block south of the Hotel Maya. Lagoon Campground, 1 1/2 miles from the border at mile marker 91, looks attractive and is reported to be one of the nicest campgrounds in Belize.



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Other Sites in Belize Courtesy of Carol Kulish: **Bermudian Landing.** Community Baboon Sanctuary. Ⓔ \$2.50 per person. At west end of town on left. Information Center for Sanctuary is well marked. **Comments:** The \$5 entry fee into the Sanctuary includes a guided walk. There are pit toilets, a thatched roof palapa with cement floor, and a nice inexpensive restaurant next door. **Maya Centre.** Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (Jaguar Reserve) \$2.50 per person East of Maya Centre about 6 miles on a good dirt track **Comments:** Parking is in Sanctuary's grass parking lot. Toilets are the only amenity. The \$5 park fee allows endless hiking in the jungle. Best short hike is to the outlook for a view of Victoria Peak. Tubing and night hikes can be arranged. Good wildlife spotting. **Gales Point** \$7 Large, sloped, grassy area on left hand side heading north about 1/4 mile before resort, at end of spit. Park, and someone (possibly James) will show up to collect. **Comments:** Many men in the town make and play beautiful wooden drums. If it is not your favorite instrument, you may not sleep well. **Placencia.** Harrys Cozy Cabanas. \$10 Ask at Information Center. Turn right after soccer field, about a block before main road into town hits wharf. Take a right in one block, then a left at next block. Follow this road straight about 1/2 to 3/4 mile. Go straight past next right, and watch for a small sign on the left. **Comments:** Room for a couple of small rigs. Outside cold shower is only amenity. Beach is as close as you dare drive your rig. Watch your head on the Tree of Knowledge. This huge tree provided nice shade and is the local social center. **Punta Gorda.** TCs By the Sea B & B Hotel. Ⓜ Ⓔ \$7.50 w/o power. Driving south towards town, it is about 1/4 mile after road hits the waterfront on the right hand side. About a mile north of Punta Gorda. **Comments:** Excellent restaurant. Bathrooms, with shower (extra charge). (Courtesy Kirkbride/Regan) **Orange Walk.** "...parked on the soccer field right in the center of town where we all had fun talking and playing with the kids... We were glad when we moved down to the edge of the New River at the Lamanai Riverside Restaurant and Retreat (N 18:05 W 88:33) which we found when we took the boat trip. What an incredible spot to camp for the four rigs that moved there from the town square..."

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4. Box, Ben, *Mexico & Central America Handbook*, Footprint Handbooks, Bath, England
5. Plaxton, John & Liz, *Mexico and Central America by Campervan*, ITMB Publishing, Ltd., Vancouver, Canada, 1998. This describes a trip similar to ours only for 270 days instead of ninety-nine!

Other Guidebooks

Moon Handbooks, Published by Avalon Travel Publishing (www.travelmatters.com). are recommended. In addition to several selections on Mexico, they have guidebooks on Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

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A recommended reference for El Salvador is *On Your Own in El Salvador*, published by On Your Own Publications, P.O. box 5411, Charlottesville, VA 22905 USA (or order by e-mail jjb9e@uva.pcmail.virginia.edu).

Recommended Reading

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Maps

Best maps are the ITMB Travel Maps for each country: International Travel Maps, 530 West Broadway, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5Z 1E9, www.itmb.com. Also, pick up country maps and tourist information at consulates whenever you can.

RV Caravans: Guided RV Trips

Adventure Caravans, (800) 872-7897, www.adventurecaravans.com

Adventuretours RV Tours, (800) 455-8687, www.adventuretrek.com

Alaska RV Caravans, (800) 842-7764, www.rvalaskatours.com

Baja Adventures RV Tours, (800) 383-6787, www.bajawinters.com

Copper Canyon RV Tours, (800) 206-8132, www.coppercanyon.com.mx

Creative World travel, (800) 732-8337, www.creativeworldtravel.com

Fantasy RV Vacations, (800) 952-8496, www.fantasytours.com

Good Sam Club Caravents, (800) 664-9145, www.goodsamclub.com

Overseas Motorhome Tours, (800) 322-2127, www.omtinc.com

Tracks To Adventure, (800) 351-6053, www.trackstoAdventure.com

Web Sites

Links to useful web sites can be found on our web site: www.BrindlePress.com.

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Introduction

This guide has been assembled to help travelers in Central America find secure interesting places to camp. It consolidates our own experiences on two separate trips (the first documented in *99 Days to Panama*), plus numerous updates and inputs from a variety of travelers. In the case of these contributions, we have elected to leave the descriptions and commentary in the persons' own words with minimal editing. For the most part these places have been documented on our web site, www.99daystopanama.com. We will continue to place updates there.

The traveler should be aware that there only a few established “camp grounds” in Central America. Most of the places described here are boondocking locations. One of the joys of traveling in these undeveloped countries is discovering new places. We hope you will keep us informed of your new places so we can update this list.

Things are constantly changing and we of course can not guarantee that the places described here will be as hospitable upon your arrival. Also, the places we mention are not necessarily 100% secure and we urge you to take suitable pre-cautions against theft. For the most part, crime in Central America is limited to theft of opportunity. The populace is poor, and if you leave your valuables in the open or in an unsecured place you are tempting fate.

We always followed two rules when selecting a camping place:

- Arrive before dark,
- Always ask a local for permission and whether it is safe to camp there.

When arriving at a new location we would normally allow a few hours to reconnoiter to find a suitable camping place.

References

The following are our recommended references to take on the trip.

99 Days to Panama by John and Harriet Halkyard. Of course we would recommend our own book. It is full of descriptions of the places we stayed plus many other experiences such as getting a free ride in a Yacht through the Panama Canal, acting as an ambulance, and the many interesting people we met. Available at www.99daystopanama.com, www.amazon.com. There is also more general information on boondocking included there.

Traveler's Guide to Mexican Camping: Explore Mexico and Belize With Your Rv or Tent, 3rd edition by Mike and Terri Church. This is the best guide book on Mexico. Available from www.rollinghomes.com, www.99daystopanama.com or www.amazon.com.

Driving Through Latin America, by Chris Yelland. This is a somewhat dated but very useful trip-tic like book giving details of Chris Yelland's caravan route through Central and South America. To order call 800-455-8687 or 956-630-9565. They will also provide an update.

Central America and Mexico, 16th edition by Peter Hutchison, Footprint Guide. This is the best general guide for driving in Central America. The Lonely-Planet Central America guide is designed for backpackers.

Lonely-Planet guides for individual countries. To get the detail you need stock up on those countries you will be spending the most time in.

ITMB Maps. These are the only maps we would recommend. Others we have tried, including AAA, have proven inaccurate. Procure the America Central map if you plan to stay on the Pan-American highway. Procure the map for each country if you plan to explore off the beaten track at all. Available from www.itmb.com and most travel book stores.

You may also want to print detailed maps where available from www.maps.google.com. Google Earth is another resource worth exploring if you have access to the internet while you travel.

GPS. We have indicated GPS coordinates for most of the camping places in this book. Our Map Datum is WGS 84. We have used the hand held Garmin IQue 3600 and have been happy with it. We have not found detailed digital maps, although the Garmin downloadable maps for Central America are of some use even for back roads (although not totally accurate).

Main Camping Places in Central America

Central America does not have nearly the RV infrastructure of Mexico. There are only three (maybe four) actual "Trailer Parks" with the amenities that American RVers are used to South of Mexico, excluding Belize. Nevertheless, if you are driving a moderately small rig by yourself, there are endless interesting boondocking sites. This books reports on those that we are aware of, but you will enjoy discovering your own private spots. We would like to hear about these (send your updates to info@brindlepress.com).

Those with larger rigs, and those traveling in a caravan do not have the flexibility to change of each day with no idea of where they will spend the night. The Caravan Companies (e.g. Adventure Caravans) have set places they camp. They have local agents to make sure things are ready, and the hire their own security when necessary.

We have compiled a list of places that we believe are suitable for large rigs or caravans on the main routes in Central America. These are shown in Figure 1. These are no more than a days drive apart.



Figure 1 Recommended Spots for Caravans and Large Rigs

There are four well established trailer parks:

- Automariscos in Amatillo, Guatemala
- Bontillo in La Ceiba, Honduras
- Belen Trailer Park in San Jose, Costa Rica and
- XS Memories in Santa Clara, Panama

El Delfin near Libreria Costa Rica is a defunct trailer park, but it is still maintained, has a dump and water available for a small fee.

Mexico

Essential Reference: “Travelers Guide to Mexican Camping” by Mike and Terri Church (www.rollinghomes.com) is the essential guide to Mexican camp sites. They have updates on their web site. Below are primarily boondocking sites along the route which the Churches normally don't include.



Figure 2 Gulf Coast Route through Mexico

Matamoros or Reynosa to Veracruz

This is the fastest route to Central America. Camping places are arranged in order from north to south.

Hwy 180 Matamoros to Veracruz (three days)

Intersection Hwy 101 – Hwy 180 [L, M10] (N 24:25.686' W098:21.965') \$0. Large parking lot next to restaurant. We have not checked it out but there is plenty of room.

Soto La Marina {2}. Cafeteria Ojo de Agua. [L, M3] (N24:13.218' W98:12.504') \$0. Route 180 between Km markers 201 and 202. 144 miles south of Matamoros (about 3 1/2 hours). Barren highway with not many stops. The owners Humberto & Mitalla Garcia welcome RVers behind their store. There is even a shower (which we haven't tried). Room for a few large rigs.

Soto La Marina, Camp La Gata [RV, L, M10+, E, W] (N23:46.709' W98:9.327') Occupies a large and pleasant layout next to a river. There is plenty of space but limited hookups. Caravans use this occasionally. Electricity is available if you have a long extension (100+ ft). Camping is \$10 per night with cold showers. Cabanas with hot showers are available for \$30. To find the camp go 3.3 miles east on the highway from Soto la Marina towards La Pesca. Turn right just past the large group of silos down a

dirt road. The camp is about .6 miles down this road (N 23° 46.709' W 098° 9.327'). Call Mariza at +52-835-100-2020 for more information or if you are coming with a large group.

La Pesca Trailer Park. See Travelers Guide by Church's. This is a detour off the main highway and during the rainy season has been known to cause large rigs to get stuck. Nevertheless it is reported to be a pleasant place to spend some time (www.whirledvision.com).

Manuel (Tampico) {97}. Comedor La Canchita. (N22:48.856 W98:17.896). \$0. Hwy 180, 6 miles north of Manuel, between km marker 9 and 10. East side of the road. **Comments:** Friendly family running this *comedor*, let us park on their fenced property. Room for 1-2 rigs. This is a private home. We bought dinner at their Comedor.

Tampico, Via Manresa Hotel [L], 46 km West of Tampico (N 22:30.175' W 098:6.605'). Room for many RVs but we have not checked it out. Please report any success staying here.

Tampico, Airport (N22:17.476' W97:51.973'). North of city along bypass route (see Church's book for Tampico bypass). Long term parking at airport. Pay for one day parking and you can stay overnight.

Tuxpán, Beach Parking {3} [L, M10] Barra de Tuxpan (La Playa). \$0. Take Route 180 into Tuxpán, and follow signs for La Playa along Riverfront Drive (north side of river) until you run into the beach. Park on shoulder of beach access road, under pine trees near the lighthouse (N 20:58.404, W 97:18.504'). Smaller rigs can continue north along beach road. Look for a small stand selling refreshments, with a packed sand drive beyond it passing between houses to the beach parking lot (N 20:58.488' W 97:18.558').

Papantla, El Tajin Ruins [L, M20] (N20:26.88 W97:22.68). The ruins are about four miles east of Papantla. Caravans use the parking lot for overnight parking. You will bypass this if you take the tollway from Tuxpam. There are signs to El Tajin.

Guitierrez Zamora, PEMEX 2865 (N20:26.899 W97:5.964). This was an emergency stop for us as it was getting dark and too late to reach the Emerald Coast (southbound). Room for a few large rigs. The road between Papantla and the coast (Guitierrez Zamora) is narrow and winding.

Barra de Tecolutla, Nice small Mexican Beach Town. [L, M?] Turn off Hwy 180 at Guitierrez Zamora. I noticed Garmin shows Hwy 180 passing through here but there is a turnoff. At first stop light in Tecoluta turn right for the plaza (N20:28.631' W97:0.519') or Left for Hotel El Coral (N20:28.792' W97:0.467'). Large rigs can park near the plaza, ask permission at the City Hall. Small rigs can park at the El Coral, check tight entrance before entering.

Monte Gordo, Emerald Coast, Hidalgo {4, 96}. [L,E,W,D,M20+] Many trailer parks are along this stretch of beach. Our preferred Quinta Alicia, km 84 just north of Monte Gordo and Neptuno, km 81 (N22° 48.856 W98° 17.896) . See Church for descriptions.

Playa Chachalacas, Veracruz. [L] Between Nautla and Veracruz (about 30 miles north of Veracruz) where Route 180 joins Route 140. Follow signs to Playa Chachalacas and watch for signs to the Playa, about 5 more miles. This is close to the Zempoala archeological site (www.playachachalacas.com). No services. Busy place until dark, lots of stands and boat rides available. Watch for soft sand.

Veracruz. Balneario Mocambo {5}. \$15. South of city center on Boca del Rio, behind the Hotel & Balneario Mocambo. See Church's book for other camp sites around Veracruz.

Lake Catemaco, Veracruz {6}. Trailer Park La Ceiba. See Church for description. Take main Catemaco entrance off Route 180 next to Pemex station. Turn right just before arch. 0.5 mile down hill turn left on the malecón (jetty). The trailer park is on your left in 0.1 miles.

Routes from Veracruz to Belize or Guatemala

From Veracruz you have the choice of entering Central America via Belize or Guatemala.

Towards Belize

Continue east to Villahermosa, from there you can continue on Highway 156 and 186 to Escarcega, Chetumal and Belize. It is about a 12 hour drive from Villahermosa to Chetumal in an RV.

Towards Guatemala

- A) Head directly for the coastal highway in Guatemala (CA 2) by crossing the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on route 185 from Acayucan to La Ventosa. It is a rough, potholed road. From La Ventosa take Highways 190 and 200 through Tapachula to the Guatemala border at Tecum Umán. This is the shortest route if you don't want to explore the Guatemala Highlands but want to get further south as fast as possible.
- B) A relatively new (but already potholed) toll road provides a fast connection between Minatitlan (between Veracruz and Villahermosa) and Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas. From here you can continue east to San Cristobal de Las Casas and CA1, or west towards Tapachula and CA2. This is longer than option A for taking the coastal route through Guatemala, but probably faster.
- C) From Villahermosa, take 156 and 199 through Palenque Ruins towards San Cristobal de Las Casas and on to CA1. This is a slow, winding road. Check your brakes.

Villahermosa to Belize

This is a long days drive and we have not camped on this stretch. Before crossing into Belize you can camp at Cenote Azul, below.

Villahermosa, Carrefour Parking Lot {95} (Supermarket) (N17° 59.376 W92° 59.376). \$0. From the west take the first off ramp when crossing the river into town, marked Teapa 195, turn left and pass under the highway. From the east, you will pass a WALMART on your right (another possible camping spot), exit 180 to the feeder road, this is the main boulevard, Ave. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. Continue on feeder road and you will find Carrefour on your right next to a large cinema complex and near a Sam's Club.

Villahermosa, Rancho Hermanos Graham, 80 miles east,

Villahermosa, Palenque, 70 miles southeast, are described in Church's' book.

Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Cenote Azil. (N18:39 W88:25) RV park called Cenote Azul, across the street from the *cenote* near Chetumal.

Chiapas (and Western Oaxaca) to La Mesilla and CA-1

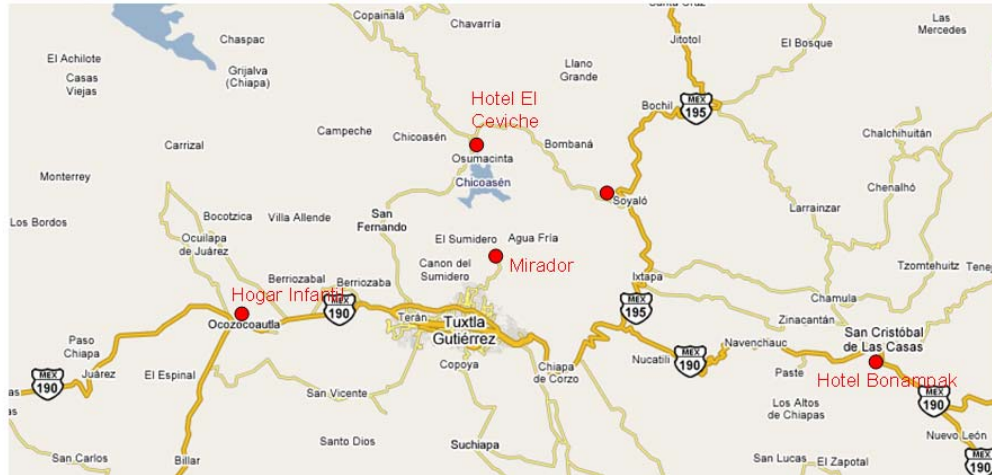


Figure 3 Camping Places in Central Chiapas (Map courtesy of Google)

La Venta, Oaxaca {7}. Refresquería Lolita. There is a turn south to La Venta off Highway 190, about 12-15 miles east of the intersection with the cross isthmus road, 185, at La Ventosa. We did not capture the coordinates, so look for the sign to “La Venta”. The store of Sra. Dolores Giren Carrasca is on the right just before the town square. See *99 Days to Panama* for a discussion of our experience there. This is a wind swept town with little to commend it other than the fact that we had a good experience with Sra. Carrasca. If you are alone and speak some Spanish this can be a pleasant place to spend a night.

Ocozocoautla (just west of Tuxtla Gutierrez) {8} Hogar Infantil orphanage (N 16:46' 37" W 093:23' 01.5") [L, M5+, E, W]. From the west, turn off towards town at the beginning of the bypass. Pass a cemetery and at 0.5 miles turn left just before the bus terminal. Go 0.4 miles and look for the Hogar on the right. Electricity had reverse polarity. See Churches' for more info. This is free but donations to the U.S. organization are appreciated. Contact hogar2@aol.com.

Tuxtla Gutierrez, Sumidero Canyon. It is worth taking the time to take a boat cruise on the Rio Grijalva into the Sumidero Canyon. The canyon has 3000 ft high walls where, the story goes, Indians would jump to their death rather than face the conquering Spanish armies. Organized boat tours originate in Chiapa del Corzo about five miles east of Tuxtla Gutierrez. The boats leave from underneath the bridge over the river (16°44'23.04"N 93° 1'52.41"W). There is a restaurant and big parking lot where you could probably camp overnight if you ask permission (we have not done this). Footprint Guides said you could camp at the “entrance” to the National Park. We have not done this either, but it is probably the best bet to see the Canyon and camp. Take a good paved road north from Tuxtla Gutierrez about 2-3 hours drive to the final Mirador. There is a restaurant and large parking lot for camping. The Mirador is at (16°49'42.76"N 93° 5'42.32"W). From Tuxtla Gutierrez, take 3A Ave. Sur Poniente north until it turns into Puerto Madero. Turn right at Chihuahua and go two blocks to the end and turn left (16°47'41.67"N 16°47'41.67"N). Go here for a map: http://www.glosk.com/MX/Tuxtla_Gutierrez/-2396967/gmap_en.htm. We found Tuxtla hard to navigate through. Have patience.

Instead of this, we drove to the north end of the canyon where we could rent a small boat for a partial tour into the canyon (this is much closer than Chiapa del Corzo). The boats are available at the Hotel y Restaurante El Ceviche (16°56'9.41"N 93° 5'34.39"W). You can also get a good meal here (fish) and camp for the night (small rigs only) in their courtyard. To get here from Tuxtla Gutierrez, there is a road just west of Tuxtla on 190 heading north towards San Fernando and Osumacinto, location of the Sumidero Dam. The hotel and restaurant are just south of the dam.

Soyaló, Town Plaza (16°53'26.55"N 92°55'31.02"W). This is a pleasant small town with an interesting Cultural Center. There is space to park around the plaza for most sized rigs. It is on highway 195 between Villahermosa and San Cristobal de las Casas, about 24 miles north of route 190 towards San Cristobal (195

is another option to those mentioned above to transit from the Gulf to Chiapas.) This road passes through San Juan Chamula (indigenous town). We approached Soyalo from the Sumidero Dam on a rough winding dirt road we wouldn't recommend for large rigs.

San Cristóbal de Las Casas Hotel Bonampak Trailer Park {9}. [L, M10, E, W, D] (N 16:43'52.9" W 092:39'12.8") From the west, avoid the Periférico and continue into town. The hotel is just beyond Pemex #0349 on your right. See Church for further details. Plenty of interesting sights in the area including the town of Las Casas and neighboring Mayan Villages of San Juan Chamula and Zinacantan. Tours can be arranged by the hotel, or you may drive there yourself. You might be able to camp in these villages but you need to ask for permission locally. The Indians are sensitive and there have been political problems in the area. The Na Bolom Museum and Cultural Center in Las Casa is the place to find out more information about the local culture. It is worth having an authentic meal there. *Check out Footprint Guides.*

San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Grassy Field (N16° 44' W92° 39') [L] [Kathe Kirkebride and ColleenRegan, see www.whirledvision.com for a good travelogue] A grassy area near the edge of town at the local sports complex. This is one the road to Chamula. Our friend Colleen Regan found the man who is in charge of the security here and got permission for us to stay for three nights. They were driving a 40 foot Class A.

Tziscaco, Lagunas De Montebella National Park. [L, M5+] (N 16.08818 W 91.66617) This is a side trip about 35 miles east of Mexico 190 between Guatemala border and San Cristóbal in Chiapas (turnoff at km 189 near La Trinitaria). Take first left in town, down a hill and then left along the lake to the end. **Comments:** Watch for overhead cables. Power and showers at the restaurant.

Another camping possibility is to continue past the paved road about 1.5 miles to a small village. Take first left down to lake where there are palapas for picnics and a large grassy area by the lake to park (N16 8.123' W91 45.147). This could take many large rigs.

The West Coast of Mexico

We have not traveled the west coast of Mexico all the way to Central America. Even if you start from the west coast of the U.S. we believe the fastest route is through the Southwest to Texas and down the Gulf Coast of Mexico.

If you have the time and want to explore the west coast, the following camping places were reported by Kathe Kirkebride and Colleen Regan in 2004 (see their travelogue at www.whirledvision.com). Of course refer to the Church's book for RV Parks and other information on camping in Mexico.

Las Cabras, Sinaloa. "We boondocked in the village of Las Cabras, 50K from the carretera on the road to El Fuerte from El Carrizo. The *comisario*, Rogelio Guerrero, would like other RVers to know that they are also welcome to camp here for 25 pesos per night. I wrote out the words he will put on a sign on the road...it should say "Las Cabras...RV dry camping...25 Pesos". It is a very nice wide area with easy access for any kind of a rig with a large thorny tree near the highway. The money derived from this venture will go to the local primary school. Las Cabras is located at 14 Kilometers from El Fuerte and 50K from El Carrizo on the road from El Carrizo."

Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. "...we found a great boondocking spot on a cliff overlooking the ocean near **Punta Mita** several kilometers north of Pto Vallarta. We had originally thought to approach from the road that goes through **Sayulita**, but that turned out to be an interesting side jaunt through a very small town square with lots of onlookers as we extricated ourselves. The map showed a heavy red line for both approaches to Punta Mita and so we chose the shortest route. We ended up about five miles west of the main highway on the south road that angles out to Punta Mita. It was an overlook point that allowed you to see from one end of **Bahia Banderas** to the other so at night we looked south to the lights of Pto Vallarta."

Punta Perula, Jalisco. (N19:35 W105:7). "...we found a beach access road used by the local fishermen to get to the beach with their boats. It was right alongside the Punta Perula RV Park, where one of our members decided to go for the full hookups for the night."

Cuyutlán, Jalisco. "a large parking lot (N18:55 W104:4) that was right on the beach near an area that we suspect fills up on the weekends and holidays with hundreds of Mexican families who head for the beaches just like we do..."

Maruata, Michoacan. (N18:16 W103:20) "at the end of an abandoned airstrip in front of a military outpost at the east end of town."

Playa Linda, Guerrero (N17:41 W 101:39). "...a free camping spot just down the street from Club Med **Ixtapa**. It is a large, sandy, peninsular area with ocean on a couple of sides and a lagoon with beautiful egrets just behind where we camped." **Acapulco, Guerrero.** Diamante RV Park (N16:47, W99:48).

Pinotepa, Oaxaca. (N16:20 W98:4) "...abandoned airstrip next to a soccer field."

Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca. (N15:51 W97:3). "...incredible boondock spot. We strung ourselves out along a sandy road that paralleled the main street right next to the beach. As we parked, two men from a nearby hotel arrived to tell us that we couldn't park there as it was parking for their guests. The cook in the restaurant on the beach told us that it was really to keep us from blocking the view of their guests and that it was a public street and it was fine to stay there. We found a policeman who told us that it was fine and we stayed for two nights."

Zipolite Beach, 43 miles east of **Pto. Escondido, Oaxaca.** (N15:40 W96:31). "...a dirt lot owned by the church...negotiated a rate of 300 pesos for all the rigs for two nights. That works out to \$2.50/night/rig."

Tapanatepec, Oaxaca. (N16:22 W94:11). "...a parking spot between a construction site and the public market."

Guatemala

Guatemala is the first stop south of Mexico, and in some ways it is the most interesting country in Central America. Over half the population is Maya, and the country is full of interesting culture, markets, volcanoes, Mayan ruins and great scenery. Lake Atitlan is, in our opinion, one of the most beautiful places on earth!

There are three routes into Guatemala from Mexico....

- A) The Pan-American Highway CA1 from La Mesilla to Guatemala City
- B) The Coastal Highway CA2 from Tecum Uman to the El Salvador border at Pedro de Alvarado,
and
- C) Via Belize from Melchor de Menchos through the Peten district.

Figure 4 shows the major routes in Guatemala. This is extracted from our book *99 Days to Panama*, the numbers indicate the camping places according to the day of our trip as recorded there.



Figure 4 Map – Guatemala Routes

The Highlands route, CA1 is our favorite. **Large rigs and caravans** do not usually take this route because there is not a suitable camping place for large groups within an easy day's drive. Instead, they take the Coast Route, CA2 (see below) and make to the RV Park Auto Mariscos in Amatitlan on the first day.

On our last trip we discovered a place called **Corazon del Bosque**, located just west of Los Encuentros, about a 5-6 hour drive from La Mesilla. This place is an eco-tourism initiative with plenty of space for a large group of RVs. We have discussed RV amenities with them and they seemed determined to install them, but we have no confirmation. Nevertheless, this is a good place for large rigs and caravans to aim for on the first night in Guatemala. It can serve as a base for exploring the other points of interest in the Highlands, particularly if you have a tow car! More information is given below.

The Coast Route, CA2, is the fastest transit to El Salvador and the rest of Central America. If your objective to get to Costa Rica as fast as possible this is the best route, but you miss the interesting parts of Guatemala. Also, the climate most of the year is hot and oppressive along this route, while it is cool and spring-like most of the year in the Highlands. There are two border crossings from Mexico on the Pacific route. El Carmen is the busiest with long lines of trucks waiting to enter and leave Central America. Tecun Uman is a quieter and easier crossing.

The eastern route from **Belize** allows you to take in that interesting country, and coming from Mexico it is the fastest route to Honduras and the Caribbean coast. RVers should be cautioned, however, that Belize customs officials have the tendency to confiscate food and drink when you enter their country. The theory and law is that you are not allowed to import consumables into the country that are available for purchase within the country. We have had our refrigerator cleaned out of produce, meat, canned goods and soft drinks. Hence, if you begin your journey in Belize be prepared to lose your stock of consumables. We have left Belize for our return. Also, people with pets have avoided Belize because of the steep fee (around USD \$50) per pet.

Phone Numbers in Guatemala (2/21/06)

A new digit has been added to the phone numbers in Guatemala since we published *99 Days to Panama*. For example, the number for the Guatemalensis Language School in Xela is was +502 - 765 - 1384 but is now +502 - 7765 - 1384. A separate "7" has been added. All numbers in Guatemala now have eight digits.

Propane in Guatemala

These are a few of the propane locations in Guatemala. You will find propane near most larger cities.

Escuintla, Pacific Highway (CA2). Z-Gas west of town at km. 61 (14°17'2.00"N 90°48'21.83"W) and east of town at km. 65 (14°16'31.34"N 90°45'34.18"W).

Quetzaltenango, CA1 (N 14 52.004 W 91 28.01), on the road between Quetzaltenango and Cuatro Caminos, about .2 miles north of the turnoff for the Periferico, about 5.5 miles off the Pan-American Highway.

Coban, CA14 (N15 25.380 W 90 24.272) between Santa Cruz Verapaz and Coban.

La Mesilla to Guatemala City

Guatemala CA1

Our favorite part of Central America is the Highlands of Guatemala. The border at La Mesilla is the most laid back and easy crossings, and the culture of the Highlands is the most fascinating of any place I n Central America. These mountains provided sanctuary for the Maya against the invading Spanish Conquistadors. Many Mayan villages remain relatively untouched by European influences. You can even study the Mayan language and live with a Mayan family.

CA1 in Guatemala is a two lane paved road. The pavement is generally in good condition. In most places in the mountains there is no shoulder, however. Driving times to major locations of interest are shown in Figure 5. Allow about 2 ½ hours from San Cristobal to La Mesilla and another hour for border formalities.

That means if you leave San Cristobal and 8:00 AM you can reach most of the interesting places in Guatemala the same day. Since we usually leave later in the morning, our first stop in Guatemala was Huehuetenango.

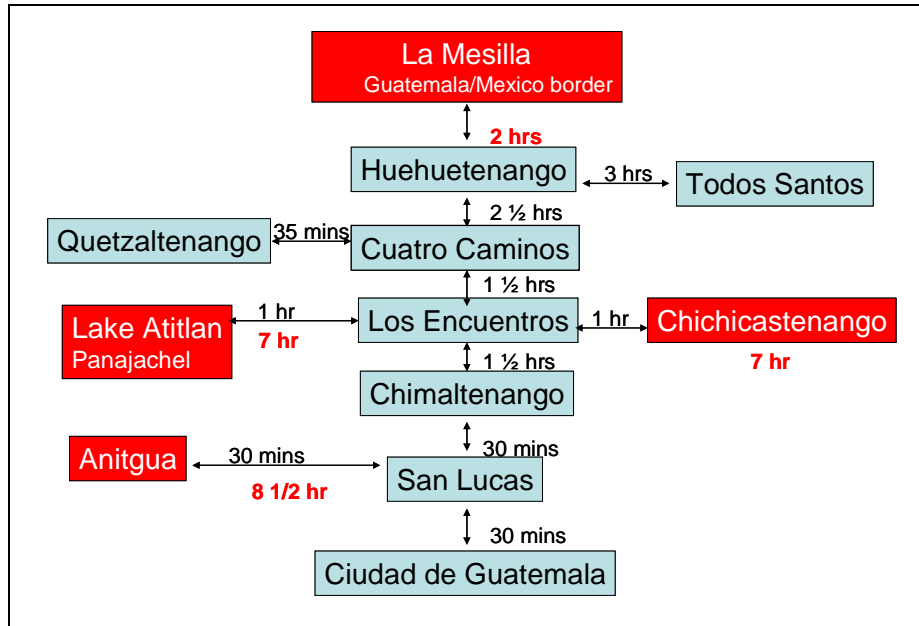


Figure 5 Driving Times La Mesilla - Guatemala City (total times in red)

Huehuetenango. This is the first major town south of La Mesilla on the Pan American Highway and a good stop if you are late crossing the border, or a good place to stay on your last day in Guatemala on your way north. The town is a little congested for RVs. We found the Hotel Los Cuchumatanes a mile out of town very receptive and comfortable. The Zaculeo Ruins west of town are also worth visiting, and an alternate camping spot. In addition to a convenient stop close the Mexican border on the Pan American Highway, this is also a point of departure to the east toward Todas Santos and San Cristobal Verapaz through the Cuchumatanes Mountains.

Huehuetenango - Hotel Cuchumatanes (N15:18.561 W91:27.667). \$5. Sector Brasilia, Zona 7, Huehuetenango, Apartado Postal No. 46 Phone: +502-764-1951 Fax. +502-764-2816. This is a nice resort with swimming pool, restaurant and a soccer field behind some meeting rooms. We parked on the edge of the soccer field and were able to use water from the irrigation system and electricity from one of the meeting rooms.



Directions. We found our way to this hotel by asking directions at the police station. It is best to avoid the downtown area, however, as the roads are narrow and traffic is congested. There are two turnoffs from the Pan American highway for Huehuetenango. The western one is next to a military camp. From this turnoff you enter town on 6a Calle (see map) about 2.5 miles from the turnoff. Turn right on 4a Avenida. Jog to the left about 2/10th of a mile southeast to cross a bridge over the Secumá river. Keep right on 7a Calle to the intersection of the road south to the Hotel. You could alternately approach from the eastern turnoff (about 1.75 miles from the western turnoff) as shown on the map. This avoids more of the downtown. Waypoints are identified in the table.

Huehuetenango – Hotel San Francisco. We ... landed up staying at Hotel San Francisco in Huehue. The hotel is on the right on the main road leading to town. They charged us \$2.50 and we dry camped in their gated parking lot. Lots a traffic noise until 9 pm and then the traffic started up again at 5 am. But it was worth it. We know of people that boondocked just beyond the Zaculeu Ruins alongside the river (large parking area) but as we were travelling alone we didn't feel safe enough do it by ourselves. Great place to boondock, if you feel comfortable. [www.nextmillionmiles.com]

Huehuetenango - Ruinas Zaculeu (N15: 20.023 W91:29.529). The ruins are west of Huhuetenango and worth a visit. You can camp in their parking lot. The ruins are west of town Approach is difficult from town because of the narrow streets. A better access to the Ruins with an RV is as follows:The Ruins are 17.2 miles off the highway. Turn west off Pan-American Highway at yellow, *zona militar* (N15:18.397 W91:31.621), pass big military base on left. This turnoff is 3 miles west of the main turnoff for Huehuetenango (N15:17.000 W91:29.474).At the Metro gas station (N15:19.294 W91:29.717), go Northwest between soccer fields on dirt road. Take two left forks. At main blacktop road turn left about 0.4 miles to the ruins.

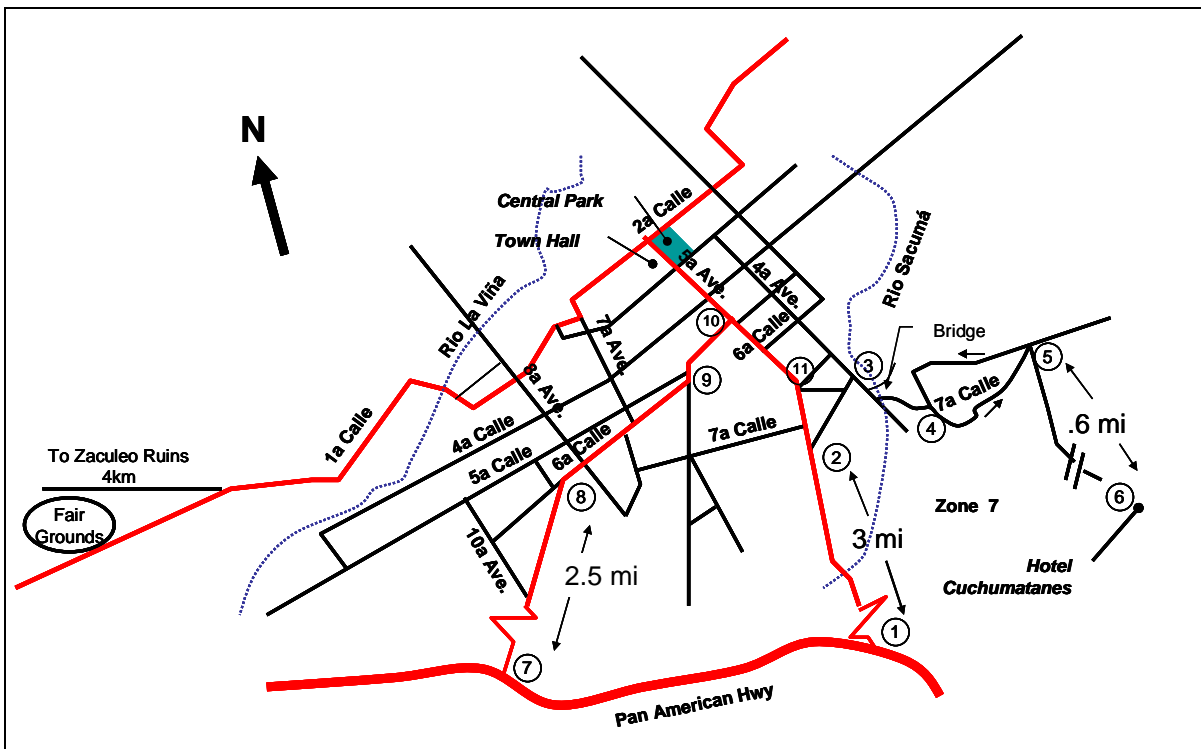


Figure 6 Directions to Hotel Cuchumatanes, Huehuetenango, Guatemala

1	Pan Am Turnoff East	15°, 17.0' N	91°, 28.1' W
2	Turn 1	15°, 19.0' N	91°, 28.1' W
3	Turn 2	15°, 19.1' N	91°, 28.1' W
4	Turn 7a Calle	15°, 19.0' N	91°, 28.0' W
5	Turn South	15°, 19.0' N	91°, 27.9' W
6	Hotel Cuchumatanes	15°, 18.5' N	91°, 27.6' W
7	Pan Am Turnoff West	15°, 17.7' N	91°, 29.5' W
8	6a Calle	15°, 19.1' N	91°, 28.4' W
9	6a Ave	15°, 19.1' N	91°, 28.2' W
10	5a Calle/5a Ave	15°, 19.2' N	91°, 28.2' W
11	6a Calle 1A/5a Ave	15°, 19.1' N	91°, 28.1' W

Table 1 Waypoints for Huehuetenango Map

Quetzaltenango (Locally called Xela). We parked our RV at Servicio Mecánico Industrial (The owner of the machine shop where we parked is Dona Mariana, +502-761-2807) while we took our Spanish classes and stayed with a family in 2003. Guatemalensis Spanish School can set you up with families with facilities for parking your RV at their house (we did this in 2006). See Language Schools section.. Other Sites: Hiperpaiz, Avenida Las Americas, Zona 3 (14°51'0.86"N 91°32'8.97"W) , allows parking in their lot.

To get in to Quetzaltenango, turn south off CA1 at Cuatro Caminos. Set odometer to zero. Go about two miles and pass through the small town of Salcajá. At 3.5 miles turn right on the periferico (bypass). At 5.3 miles turn a sharp left on Avenida Las Americas. Arrive at the Hiperpaiz supermarket at 6.4 miles. Ask permission from the guard in the parking lot for overnight parking.

To get to the Guatemalensis Language School and Calvaro Park, continue south on Ave. Las Americas to the Zoo, turn left on Calzado Revolucion which becomes 4a Calle. Turn right on 20 Avenida, left on Calle Rodolfo Robles and right on 19 Avenida.

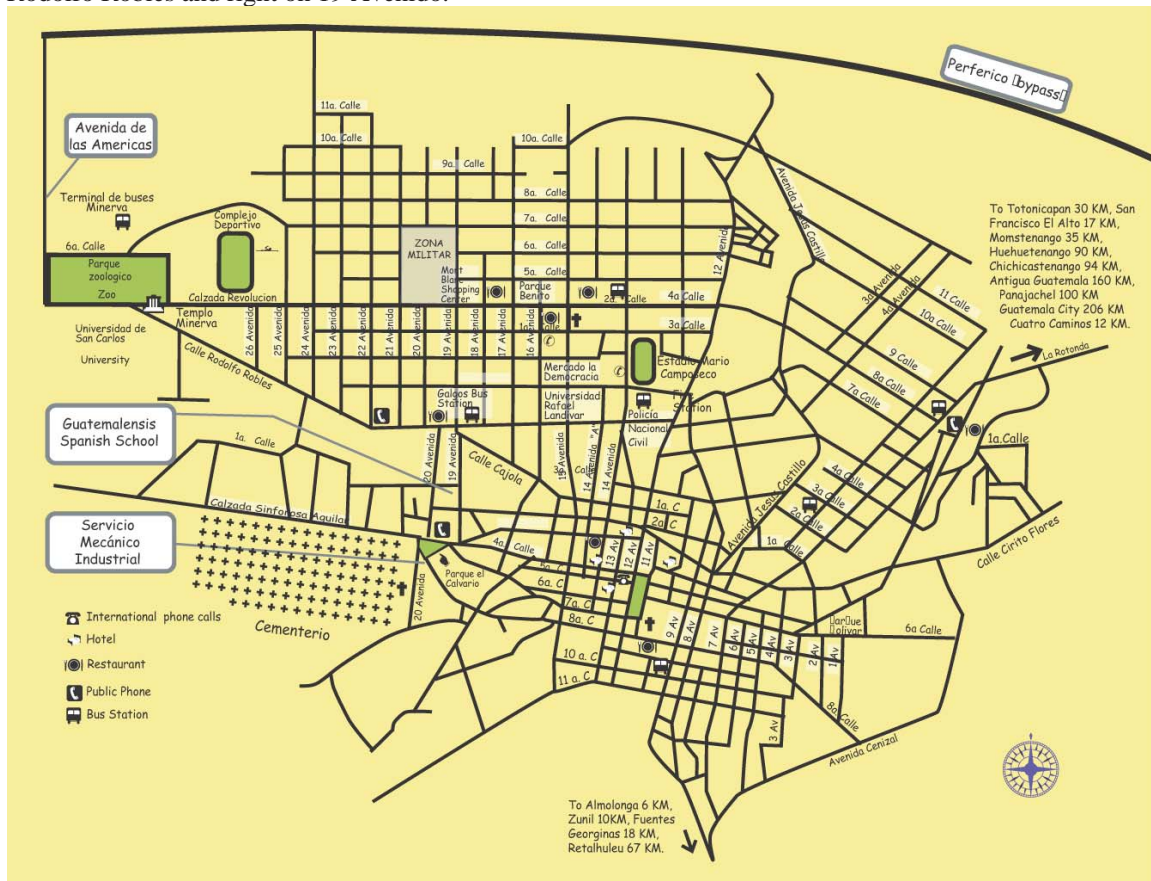


Figure 7 Quetzaltenango

Quetzaltenango (Zunil) - Fuentes Georginas is a hot springs resort above the town of Zunil, just south of Quetzaltenango (Xela). To get there you take the road from Xela to Cuatros Caminos and just a few miles out of town take the fork to the right for Cantel, Zunil, and Retalhuleu. Just before you reach Zunil there is a sign for "Aqua Georginas" and a fork to the left climbing a mountain. It is a narrow mountain road with terrific views and steep dropoffs. Meeting other traffic is an adventure. We were fine in our 22' Class C but I wouldn't try it in anything bigger. At the top you will find the hot springs "resort".

Admission is \$11 (2/06) and you can park in their parking lot. There are also basic cabanas. The attraction is the view, and the warm springs. Take your bathing suit. There is a basic restaurant open until 7:00 PM. Recent input (see updates) suggests it might be best to avoid this on weekends!

More on Fuentes Georginas, Guatemala [Courtesy of Rus Krause-Kathleen Khauss 7/06] We arrived at Fuentes Georginas just at dark on a Friday night. The gate was closed but they agreed to let us in for the night although they said we had to leave in the morning because they would have a lot of people coming on Saturday. It cost 60 Q for the 2 of us and camping. In the morning we took another quick dip which lasted longer than we intended because we met Nora and several Spanish students from your school in Xela and had a lot of fun visiting with them. When we got back to the rig the parking lot was completely full and there was not even space for a camper of our size to turn around. Luckily we were pointed in the right direction and as we left we encountered more and more cars coming up the narrow one-lane road. The hot springs really gets crowded on weekends and we would recommend large vehicles only attempt it on week days.

Los Encuentros - Corazon del Bosque [L, M10+, W, E limited]. (N14°47.680' W91°15.324'). It is on the Inter-American Highway, CA1, km 145, about eight miles west of the Solola turnoff. It can be reached in five hours from the border at La Mesilla, or in about three hours from AutoMariscos to the south. This is a private eco-tourism development consisting of a large parking area in the woods in front of a restaurant and administrative office. There's a swimming pool ("baptism pool") next to the parking area. There is also a large soccer field. A tent camping site is a half-mile down a dirt road, and there are many miles of hiking trails into the forest. You will receive a guide handout with bird identification. What interested us was the large parking area which would be ideal for RVs. A Peace Corps volunteer (Christina Martin - mobile +502-5541-3467) is responsible for developing tourism there. She is most interested in adding the amenities that would make it attractive to RVs. There is already ample attractive parking for rigs of all sizes. The cost is Q10 (about \$1.25) per night in 2006. "Potable" water is available (never believe that "potable" means drinking water, see Water Treatment), and electricity for Q30 (\$3.75) per hour. They say they will install a dump! There are hot showers. Corazon del Bosque is right on the Inter-American Highway close to Lake Atitlan and Chichicastenango. Taxis and public transportation are easy to these locations. A tow vehicle would also be handy to visit the other interesting parts of the highlands from here. The place is secure and guarded. Considering the difficulty in reaching Lake Atitlan, especially for big rigs (see below), we would recommend making this your first stop in Guatemala if you enter from La Mesilla.



Los Encuentros , Car park of Hotel Tikal (N14.854610 W91.149840) [Stephan Stewart, Silk Route Club]

Panajachel on Lake Atitlan has two camping sites: Hotel Vision Azul and Hotel Tzanjuyu (N 18:39 W 88:25). Vision Azul is where we stayed in 2003, Tzanjuyu in 2006. Vision Azul doesn't have direct hookups but the campsite is right on the water. Electricity was available behind the pool bar. Bring a long 15 amp extension chord. Tzanjuyu has electricity and water near the vehicle, and one grungy dump site. You are a little more removed from the beach, but walking to town is much easier than at Vision Azul. We vote it a toss up. To get to Vision Azul you need to descend the steep road from Solola to the gas station at the beginning of Panajachel. Use this as a turnaround and go back up the hill 1/2 mile to the entrance to the hotel. The entrance to Tzanjuyu is a sharp turn to the right just before this gas station. There is a sign advertising "trailer park". It seems Vision Azul was damaged in floods in 2005 and is not desirable now. See more about Tzanjuyu below.

Getting to Panajachel. Lake Atitlan is my favorite camping place in Central America (Harriet seems to prefer Trujillo, Honduras). The only problem is getting there. The main road through Solola requires maneuvering in very tight quarters to get through the village. In our 22' Class C we make it, but

sometimes have to jog to get around the corners. The route is not well signposted. I think you could do it in a 26' rig but larger may be impossible. A back way exists that is steep and winding, but we know at least one 38' Class A that came this way. I believe towed fifth wheels have also come this way. The back route goes from the inter-American highway to Godinèz (accent on the last syllable). Take the Godinez turnoff or come from Patzun (depending on your approach direction). **Either way into Panajachel requires steep descents and good brakes!**

Comment on Panajachel and Corazon del Bosque [Liesbet Collaert 7/06] The next obstacle was Solola. We decided to take the easy paved road to Panajachel, instead of the unknown thinner red lines on the map. It was easy to get through, since there were signs everywhere. If you doubt and don't see a blue and white sign with the town's name on it, look on the buildings and there might be a yellow sign pointing towards PANA. The market was basically gone, since we were late, and that might have helped. But know, that buses drive through this town also. Actually if you plan day trips to surrounding areas, we find it easier to take a bus to Solola first and change there, instead of waiting for the right direct bus in Panajachel.

It was already 6 pm when we arrived at the lake. We had missed the views because of mist and clouds. We had great expectations of the place and planned to stay for at least a month. The first place we checked out was Hotel Tzanjuyu. The manager asked \$13 a night with electricity. We got shocked, not being used to pay that much for camping. We drove to Vision Azul. The guy there said they didn't allow camping now, because it was too wet. Hearing that we had 4WD, he showed us around anyway. Run down place, lower than basic bathrooms, empty pool, cold showers, a foot high grass, muddy grounds, garbage everywhere. \$ 9.50 a night with electricity. For that night, since it was late, we were going to check out the free camping on the other side of the river. It took a while and some frustration to "get" close. The river had washed away roads, a lot of people were hanging around. Not an option. Back to Tzanjuyu to bargain him down to \$9.50 a night. Not accepted. Back to Vision Azul and staying in a swampy garbage dump with a lot of mosquitoes for the night. Our extension cord didn't reach the outlet. Fireworks stressed the dogs, who didn't eat nor drink anymore. We were so tired, and so disappointed.

Next day was Sunday. Since we planned doing all the sights as soon as possible, in case we would leave the area, we had to go to Chichicastenango for the market. I was flying home and could take souvenirs! But first we were checking out another camping possibility, all by public transportation. This one is called Corazan del Bosque, at km 145 along the main highway (CA1). You mention the place on your website (see [link](#)) and it is indeed very nice. The price is \$3.50 a person a night. There is water and an outlet, showers and toilets. The showers need to be fixed at the moment. A lot of shade, a river and hiking trails make for a great doggy place, too. We liked it a lot and keep it as an alternative for Panajachel. After visiting Chichi, we went over to Hotel Tzanjuyu once again and got them (another manager) down to \$9.50 a night, without electricity. Then we moved there and felt happy and relieved. Another camper pulled up, from Austria. Neighbours again, after six weeks without any other campers! The grounds are partly mowed, there is water and electricity if needed, the climate is awesome and town has a lot to offer. The view is unbelievable and we are glad to experience the beauty of this area. A lot of people walk by, though, but I believe it is safe enough. Somebody is "around" all day and night. We might stay here for a while after all...

Tecpan Area. The area around Tecpan on the Pan-American Highway (especially between Km 87 - 88) has several nice restaurants with large parking lots and tourist attractions which would make a good place to camp. Be sure to ask permission from the restaurant owner/manager and buy a meal in their establishment! The Rincon Suisse Restaurant at Km 94 is also a possibility.

Chichicastenango {19}- Gasolinera (N 14 56.978 W 91 6.247) Take highway from Los Encuentros to Chichi. Turn right on 7th Ave. Shell Gas station is between 6th and 7th street, next to Hotel Santo Tomás.

Chichicastenango, Parqueo (N14 56.664 W091 06.576). [Rus Krause-Kathleen Krauss 12/06] We had a wonderful stay for 2 nights in the parqueo of a Saserdote Mayan family, Diego and Blanca Estela,

their kids and grandkids. When we got to Chichi late Saturday afternoon the man at the Shell station said we couldn't stay there. It was too busy and crowded and we'd never be able to get out on market day. He suggested that we try a parqueo down the street that was "mas tranquilo". It did turn out to be much quieter, plus we met a wonderful local family. Diego also acted as our guide up to the sacred site of Pascal Abaj, interpreting the ceremonies that were taking place there and later taking us to see the effigy of Santo Tomas. The parqueo is completely fenced and secure, and is conveniently located a few blocks from the market. There is a bathroom and shower for a small fee but we never used them so I can't comment on the condition. To get there continue down the same street the Shell station is on (7 Avenida), past the Hotel Santo Tomas about 2 or 3 blocks and look for a black gate on your left about the middle of the last block before you come to the end of the street. A hand painted sign says parking or parqueo. That's the entrance. If it's closed, holler or bang on the gate and someone will come. These people are interested in having RVers stay. They have had several before us and had good experiences with all, plus Diego had to have a serious surgery 2 years ago and can't do the kind of work he used to, so they are struggling to hold onto their land. It cost 100 Quetzals a night. Don't be confused by the sign at the end of the street for another parqueo, it's not the one. If you can't find it, ask for Diego Canil, he is well known in town. Telephone: 77562419 or cell: 55524059



Figure 8 The Highlands of Guatemala

Fuentes Georginas (Camping)	N14°44.904' W91°28.596'
Corazon del Bosque (Camping)	N14°47.680' W91°15.324'
San Simon Xecul (Interesting site)	N14°54.28' W91°29.073'
Solola Turnoff ITMB	N14°51.060' W91°9.934'
Panajachel - Hotel Tzanjanyu (Camping)	N14°44.236' W91°10.018'
Panajachel - Hotel Vision Azul (Camping)	N14°44.936' W91°9.866'
Los Encuentros ITMB	N14°51.457' W91°9.536'
Godinez Turnoff	N14°42.517' W91°6.159'
Tecpan Guate. (km 87 -88)	N14°45.695' W90°58.681'
Godinez ITMB	N14°42.517' W91°6.159'
Antigua Turnoff ITMB	N14°36.755' W90°39.934'
Sta. Lucia Milpas Altas - Florencia Park (camping)	N14°34.000' W90°41.000'

Barcenos Turnoff ITMB	N14°34.967' W90°39.536'
CA9 Intersection ITMB	N14°30.795' W90°42.318'
AUTO MARISCOS (Camping)	N14°26.022' W91°11.148'
Z-Gas Propane West of Escuintla	N14°16.530' W90°47.874'

Table 2 Highlands Waypoints

(Note: "ITMB" means I determined the waypoint by scaling from a map. Accuracy is probably about 0.2 miles. User beware)

Antigua Guatemala. Antigua is THE place to go in Guatemala if you are a tourist. Unfortunately it is not set up for RVs, especially big ones. The roads are narrow and there are bollards to keep large vehicles out of the center of town. We are aware of three decent places to camp as shown on the map to the left. The Parqueo across from the market has security and even the possibility of electricity (see comments in updates). We stayed in Manchèn Park (14°33'52.72"N 90°44'7.33"W, 6a Ave Norte and Calle del Manchen) during Semana Santa in 2006. It was close to the action and free. There is no security, however. Although we had no problems, a group of campers staying here in July, '06, had one camper broken into and another had a dent. Others have stayed at the Texaco Gas station (14°33'26.83"N 90°43'45.88"W, corner of 4a Calle Oriente and 1a Ave Sur). There is a sign for an RV park on Calle de Chipilapa (East Side) but when we investigated we found an unfavorable location behind a house which wasn't easy to get to. They said there was a dump, but it turned out to be a drainage ditch. An alternative is to stay in the regional park called Florencia, just outside the village of Santa Lucia Milpas Altas (N14:34 W90:41). Coming from Antigua, the park is on the right (east) side of the highway, about 8.9km from the Hwy 10 terminus at the edge of Antigua. The park is pleasant but not close to the interesting sights (or sites) in Antigua. The park is hard to spot going southbound on the divided highway.

Antigua Guatemala – Santa Lucia Milpas Alta – Florencia Park (N14:34 W 90:41) See above comments.

Antigua Guatemala - Hotel Jorge, 4a. Avenida Sur, Calle del Conquistador No. 13, Tel/Fax: 832-3132) (Plaxton). Plaxtons also stayed at the Hotel Santa Lucia. Hotel La Real Plaza, 9a Calle, Pte #40, Tel 832-2239, email operasa@itelgua.com. Experimental Botanical Garden “Valhalla”. Email exvalhalla@yahoo.com and their website is www.exvalhalla.org. El Rosario at 5a.Avenida Sur final No. 36. and Hotel Antigua at 8a Calle Pte 1. It is possible to get to both of these places without going through the main town and they are near each other. Call these places in Antigua before you go, and you might have to rent a room.

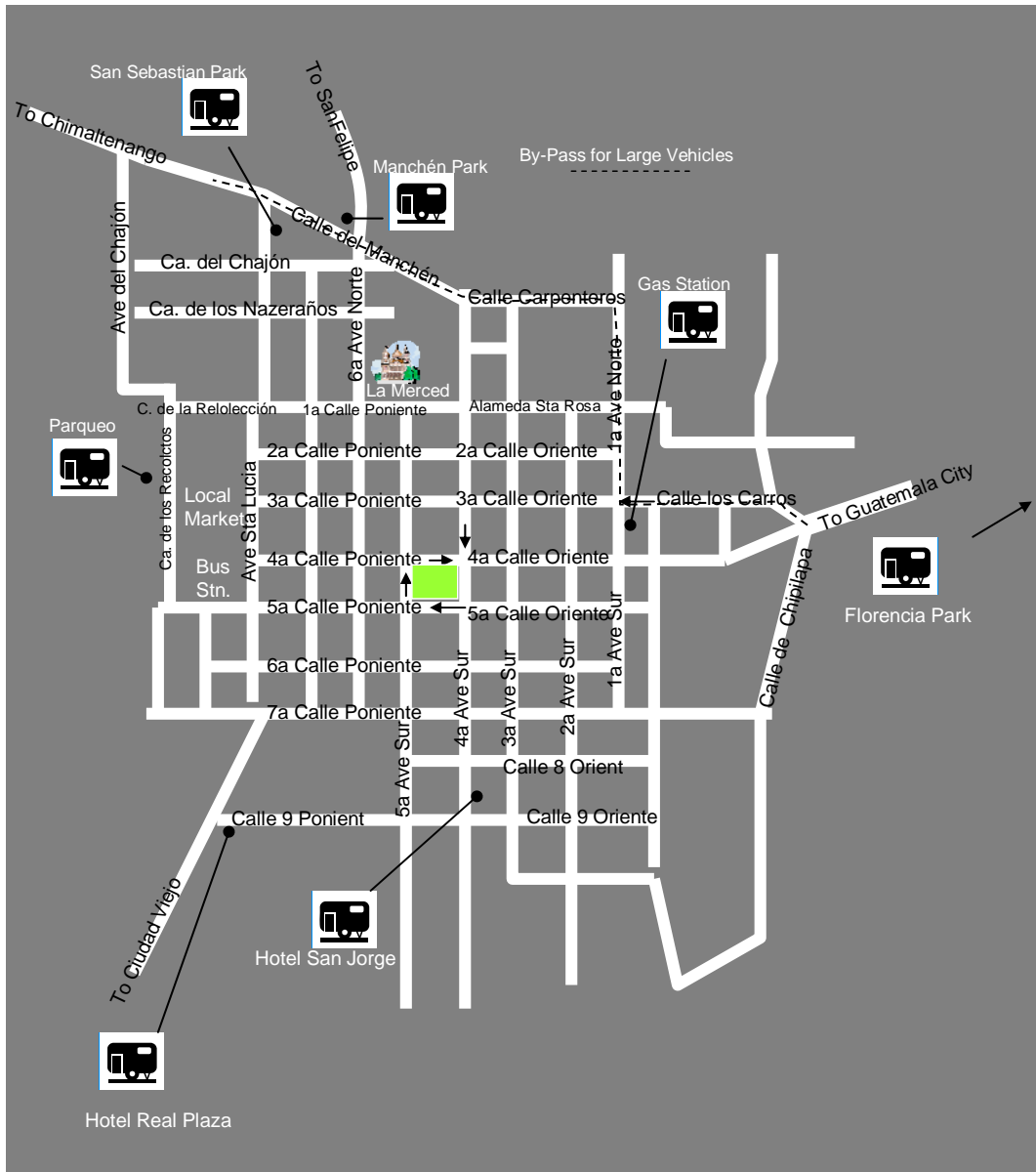


Figure 9 Antigua Guatemala Camping Places

Visiting Antigua from Amatitlan [From Liesbet Collaert 8/06]

The following day, we took a bus to Escuintla, and then to Antigua, to check camping possibilities. This trip took 1,5 to 2 hours each way. A little long. At the visitor center near the main square (parque), people are friendly and helpful. They gave us a decent map of town, and a couple of “options” to camp. The first (and best) one we checked, was the new parking lot of Hotel Antigua (I believe). This was a roomy, grassy, quiet, safe lot in the middle of town, but... the entrance arch was too low for an RV. A pity. We never checked on the price.

Then we found the Real Plaza Hotel, on the edge of town, but definitely in walking distance. They allow RV’s to park in their small front parking lot, but the woman would have to ask the manager for a price. People have stayed there. Since it was all concrete, small and in front of a fancy hotel, we figured it wasn’t the place for two dogs. Later, we found the back parking lot, near the restaurant of this hotel. The vigilante told us we could park overnight there for Q30 (\$4). We would fit in the lot, but not under the only tree

(shade). The restaurant has toilets, but the grassy area and the pool are too neat for them to allow dogs on it, we assume. Anyway, this was an affordable possibility!

Next, we checked out the “main” parking lot at the edge of town, near the bus station, and next to a hardware store. This is where most of the RV’s stay while visiting Antigua. Price: Q100, or \$13,5!!! No facilities, but you probably can finagle water, and maybe electricity if you have a long cord with you. The parking lot seems pleasant with a lot of trees and you can park away from traffic noise. It’s also safe, and in walking distance to town, although when night falls, the visitor center recommends taking a taxi back, for about \$4.

Then we also heard about two places out of town, which we were going to check out later. Probably nicer for the dogs and we could take a bus to Antigua, we thought. With this information, we returned to La Red Trailer Park. The next day, we drove through Guatemala City (to get a small refund at the airport), then through Antigua, out toward Escuintla, turned right before the cemetery, to find Valhalla (Centro De Macademias). To our big disappointment, they didn’t allow camping anymore, because of safety reasons. They had been having a lot of break-ins lately and couldn’t assure our safety, because nobody was there at night. The manager recommended even to not camp anywhere in Guatemala... That, after I read all the awful Guatemala info on the website of the US State Department, when I was at home, the week before (my mistake)!

So, we drove back through Antigua, out the other way, to Finca Florencia Parque Ecologico, about 10 km out of town, downhill, and only visible on this side of the divided highway. It’s possible to get there from the other (toward Antigua) side, but you have to know where to turn left, in a little congested town-like area. I wish now I’d written down the km marker. Maybe it’s on their website.

We decided to stay in this park for a couple of nights. They charge Q30 (\$4) a person. There are clean toilets and cold showers, and water faucets everywhere. Lots of grass and hiking trails, but noisy, next to the highway. Great view of a volcano, and busy in the weekend. I took advantage of the visiting Guatemalan city folks on Sunday, to sell some Belgian chocolate and waffles! We parked at the first camping area, but couldn’t get very level. If you have those automatic jacks, it wouldn’t be a problem. There’s also a huge camping area in the back of the park, but the tree branches were too low for us. It would be possible to take a bus into Antigua (not far away), but the walk to the other side of the highway is long.

We decided to check our camping options in the town again, to visit Pacaya volcano (has to happen early in the morning, or late in the afternoon, which means you won’t be back before dark) and see more of Antigua. We drove around the center and found another RV at a little park! Nearby that spot, we discovered Menchen Park, a little quieter and better for the dogs, where we all moved to. We couldn’t find it the previous time we took our vehicle into town. This is free and close to the center. It became our base for the next two days. We also got company of two (!) other RV’s, again with young people and a dog on board. It was a great and unique social experience, but we wouldn’t recommend people to stay here anymore. We felt safe, because there were two (first night) and four (second night) RV’s parked next to each other. That didn’t help however. The Class C of Aaron and Amy got broken into (shattered passenger window and stolen CD face plate), and our camper got run into (big dent), while we were away. So far for the “pristine” condition of our “need to sell again after the trip” camper!

Antigua, Guatemala - Parqueo [Courtesy of Rus Krause-Kathleen Khauss 7/06] (14°33'36.46"N 90°44'26.22"W) We when we arrived in Antigua we parked on one of the larger streets and walked into the centro to the tourist center where we got directions to a few places where we might be able to camp. The only one that really worked for us was the large and tree-lined Parqueo (parking lot) on Av de la Recoleccion, across from the bus terminal and market. It is actually pretty and pleasant there, situated next to a very impressive ruins, and it seemed safe. It’s gated and the attendant and his family live and work there. There is also a possibility of an electrical connection, as we saw one camper running a cord from the keeper’s dwelling, but we didn’t inquire about it ourselves. The cost is 50 Quetzales for the day or 100 Q for the day and night. No dump, possible water, though we didn’t ask.

Guatemala City - Airport (N14°35.4' W090°31.9') If you are picking up or dropping off someone at the Guatemala City Airport there is a convenient place to camp directly across from the main terminal. To reach it, take the arrivals ("LLEGADOS") turnoff and pull in at the second Parqueo (simply signposted "Parqueo"). The first parking lot is day use only. Overnight parking is Q50. (4/06)

Next to the parking lot, we found a little "restaurant" with delicious food for little money. We had our cheapest meal there: \$2 for two small meals with a shared soda. [Liesbet Collaert 8/06]

Guatemala City, Mercedes Benz Garage (14.600750, W90.552803) [Stephan Stewart, Silk Route Club]

By-pass Guatemala City Most Central American capital cities are difficult to drive through and it's easy to get lost. Avoid driving through if you can, but if you must, consider hiring a local guide. Thor Jansen gave us a useful [by-pass route](#) for Guatemala City. Let us know of other by-pass routes you find. Send info to Updates@brindlepress.com.

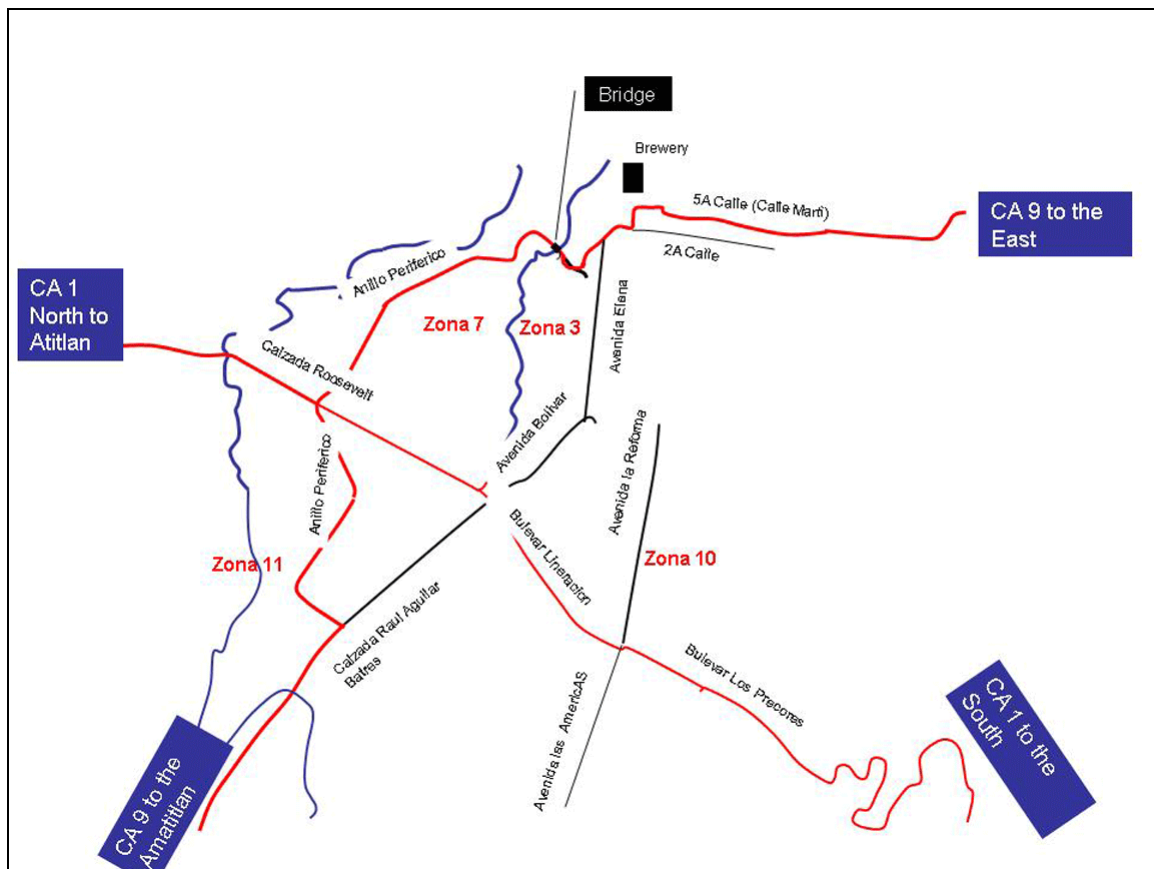


Figure 10 By-Pass Guatemala City CA-1 to Ca-9 East

1. Pan-American Highway from the north
2. Pass turnoff to Mixco/Lomas de Portugal in suburbs (watch for signs)
3. Continue on Calzada Roosevelt 5.5 km (3.3 m). This is a major road past offices, etc. (there is a [Hiper Pia](#) here to do your shopping).
4. Look for Anillo Periferico, next to 31A Avenida.
5. Go under the Periferico bridge that passes over Calzada Roosevelt
6. Just past bridge, on right, is Hiperpaiz, a major discount store a la Wal Mart. Stop and shop!
7. Get on the Periferico heading east. Entrance is behind Hiperpaiz
8. Continue on the Periferico 4.5 km (2.8 m).

9. Go over river on large bridge
10. Take the second exit immediately after the bridge.
11. Go under the road and continue east (still called the Periferico, but smaller road)
12. 0.8 km (.5 m) jog to right on 2A Calle
13. 200 meters, turn sharp left at fire station (following road)
14. 250 meters, large brewery (Cervezaria) in front of you, jog sharp right on 6A calle,
15. 300 meters (3 clocks) major intersection bear right then left to jog onto 5A Calle Continue on 5A Calle (Calle Marti) to the east. This becomes CA 9, the highway to Puerto Barrios

Table 3 Direction on Bypassing Guatemala City from the North

These directions are for coming on CA1 from the north (i.e from Lake Atitlan or Antigua) and leaving on CA 9 to the east (i.e. towards Puerto Barrios). See note below for doing this in reverse. If you want to go to the Airport, or continue south on CA 1, you do not take the Periferico (step 5). Instead, you continue straight. If you follow the main road you will come to the airport turnoff. Continuing south you will be on CA 1 towards Oratorio. To head west towards Amatillo and Escuintla you can take the Periferico to the west. Better yet, to avoid driving in Guatemala City altogether take the Antigua turnoff shown in Figure 8 and follow the Barcenos turnoff indicated there. You can also access Escuintla through Antigua. In this case refer to Figure 9. Take Calle 7a to catch the road to Ciudad Viejo then on to Escuintla.

Comment on Bypassing Guatemala City [Liesbet Collaert 7/06] We tried to follow the [by-pass instructions](#) in reverse, after trying to write this down the previous day. We misinterpreted the “jog to right” with turn to the right, so after we got into the city, there was no way of knowing where to go to the right. We took a right turn a few times, only to realize that it wasn’t working and got back on track. The by-pass is practically one big road that you follow all the way through, until you get out on the other side, on a highway. It was not that difficult, once you know not to really turn onto other roads. Just follow traffic and trucks. When you get down to the Hiper Paiz (this is where the Anillo Periferico crosses the Pan-American Highway- ed.), you have to get to the other side of the road to drive west.

Guatemala Coastal Route CA2

Frontera El Carmen - Hotel Real Pacifico (N14°55'00.8", W092°05'38.6"). <http://www.hotelrealpacifico.com>. It should be easily possible to reach this location in one day via the Pacific route from Tuxtla Gutierrez or Puerto Arista in Mexico (the nearest listings in "Mexican Camping" by the Churches). The official address is Kilometre 272 Panamericana, around 5 miles from border on a T-intersection to Malcatan. between Frontera El Carmen and Malcatan. We were very welcomed at this newly built hotel, the english speaking night manager told us that they actually had planned their backyard for use by campers! It's a large grassed area away from the road right next to a bubbling river, so it's fairly quiet. You get to use their lovely large pool and poolside bathroom (toilet and cold shower), and at the time of our stay they were building a large palapa at the campsite which has provisions for power outlets. Free (locked) WiFi is available, too. We would like to encourage people to check this place out! The paved driveway is a little steep and has a few overhanging branches, but it's simply nice to see such a beautiful place willing to open up for campers... We were the first to use this place and paid Q100, but we also told the manager that we found it just a little too much... [Yasha Langford & Juergen Klein]

Retalhuleu - Hotel-Restaurant Ocosito (N 14:33.91' W 91:41.2' – check this). Boulevard Centenario, Canton Recuerdo, Oc., Apart.647. This Hotel-Restaurant along the coastal highway allowed RV parking several years ago, but we have not visited recently. It might be a possible caravan stop, but most people will continue on to Auto Mariscos. Overflow parking available at neighboring gas station.

Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, Guatemala [Courtesy of Rus Krause-Kathleen Khauss 7/06] (N14 22.876 W091 01.008 Cost \$0) We stopped here to see the large stone heads and other figures carved by the

Pipil people around 500 to 700 AD. These had been discovered in the sugar cane plantations and a wonderful collection is on display at the Museo El Baul at the Ingenio (sugar refinery) El Baul headquarters. We got lost going through town but were rescued and lead all the way to the gate by a couple of very friendly tourist police on a motorcycle. The museo is free of charge but it is on the grounds of the refinery which has been closed down for about 3 years, and the property is locked and guarded. If you ask to see the museo they will let you in and direct you to "las piedras". We also asked them if we could camp there for the night because it was late afternoon, we got a positive response so we found a fine, level spot next to the museo. About 10 minutes later another guard came up and apologetically told us that he didn't have the authority to give us permission to stay there but that we could park just outside the gate and we'd be watched over by their armed guard. We moved to the spot they suggested and were given a tour of the hydroelectric plant that powered the refinery by the guard, Victor. It was built in 1914 and still operates, but is not used at present. We chatted a while with the other guards and then went inside to cook and eat our dinner. Just as we finished two other men came over and one who had authority told us we should move inside, we'd be safer and the police wouldn't bother us. We weren't eager to move again but they insisted we'd be safer inside and so we did, and slept well listening to the rain outside. In the morning Victor gave us an extensive tour of the whole refinery including the living quarters of the workers. They had everything, market, church and jail. Seeing all the old equipment and learning the details of the process of refining sugar turned out to be far more interesting than seeing the stone carvings. Victor knew a lot about local plants and animals although this was all related to us in Spanish and we didn't get it all. He refused to take a tip, saying it was his job.

We wanted to go see several large stone heads in the cane fields nearby where the Mayans still pray, light candles, and offer sacrifices but all the guards warned us that it wasn't safe to drive alone into the middle of the cane fields. We don't know if that was true or not but we decided to skip these and head on toward the highway.

Cotzumalguapa - Esso station just off the highway (N 14:20 W 91:01 Elev 1306'). [Courtesy Judy Space].

Amatitlan - Auto Mariscos [L, M10+, W, E, D] (N14 26.04 W90 39.30). (Fee is Q60 per person, about \$8.00). This is South of Guatemala City on the road towards Escuintla (CA9) between **Amatitlán** and **Palín** at km marker 33.5. Telephone +502-330479. It is a very comfortable setup with the concrete pads and hookups, but the noise of the traffic makes it less than a perfect campsite. Also, to get anywhere without your rig or a tow car you need to take a "Chicken Bus" (Camineta) to the next town, Amatitlan, to get a taxi. They're not able to reliably call taxis for you. Fare to Antigua is Q300 (\$40) and about 45 minutes. On the good side, there is a great wave pool and other swimming pools to cool off in. La Red RV Park next to Automariscos is a cheaper alternative, see below. It is a little run down but they have hookups. Caravans camping at Automariscos arrange for bus transportation to the interesting sites: Antigua, Lake Atitlan, Chichicastenango. If you're in a self directed caravan hopefully there will be enough tow vehicles to make it to these sites (which are also reachable from Corazon del Bosque). Another alternative is to arrange for a rental car or van from Guatemala City. It is easy to get buses into the city from in front of Automariscos.

Amatitlan – La Red Trailer Park [Liesbet Collaert 8/06] Around Antigua, we did some research. First, we stayed in La Red Trailer Park, this is next to Automariscos, at km 33,5 on CA 9, but cheaper. Automariscos looks way cleaner and nicer, but they charge Q60 (\$8) per person, after bargaining, while La Red charges Q40 (\$5,5) per person. A noticeable difference. The pool was green (too chilly to swim anyway), and the showers were cold (we used our own), but the toilets were usable and they have full hook-ups and level spots! There's a vigilante all day and night and the people are very friendly. They even cut some low hanging branches, so we could park on the one grassy spot. Way nicer than the dirt pits, in this rainy weather.

Monterrico, Guatemala [Courtesy of Rus Krause-Kathleen Khauss 7/06] We had trouble finding a place to camp in Monterrico as the hotels there have a policy of not allowing people to sleep in their parking lots in their vehicles, and most didn't have room for us to park anyway. After asking 4 hotels where people who said "no", somebody at Johnny's Place directed us to a local guide named Selso who's brother, Francisco lived about 3 blocks from the beach and had room for us to park in their front yard. He

asked for 50 Q (\$6.25) and we didn't bargain but probably could have paid less if we were on a tight budget. They had a large family, and were friendly and helpful but gave us our space. They let us fill with water which was messy and sprayed water all over their yard, because the hose had no connector to join with ours but they just laughed and turned the pump on and off when we asked until we got it working better. The next morning we went out on a boat at dawn to tour the estuary with Selso as our guide. There is a Nature Reserve in town that protects and aides 4 kinds of turtles, caimen, and other local endangered animals. The beach is clean with black sand, but the Pacific Ocean is quite rough for swimming. It's a peaceful, enjoyable little village in a lovely natural setting. PS. The Hotel San Gregorio had a large parking lot that would have been fine for us to camp in but it was against their policy and we couldn't change their minds. We could have stayed in an air conditioned room there for \$300 Q. It was pretty with a pool and courtyard but we didn't stay. Maybe if enough people in campers ask they will realize they can make a little more money from their parking lot.

[Courtesy Frank and Ann Cartwright, www.nextmillionmiles.com] We visited Monterrico by taking the 1 car ferry from Larlna. This was great fun but don't recommend it for a rig over 27 ft or a rig with low clearance. We didn't find a hotel, or restaurant to camp in Monterrico, but landed up paying a local \$5.00 to park in their yard. Certainly a different experience! Lots of loose pigs and stray dogs. Only stayed 1 night. Sunset over the Pacific was spectacular.

Iztapa, Casa Viejo. This is about seven miles east of Puerto San Jose on the Pacific Coast. Casa Viejo is a fishing resort (www.releaseguatemala.com), but I met the owner, Chris Sheeder (capchris@yahoo.com, +502-5916-3148), at an Escapees rally and he said there was a dump at the marina that RVerS could use. I can not vouch for this nor for camping possibilities from personal experience, however.

Taxisco, Guazacapan Turicentro El Eden just east of Taxisco, Km. 113 (14° 40'77"N 90°23'53.37"W). Pool and sports facilities, eight bungalows. A good place to stop close to the El Salvador border. (Courtesy Judy Space)

Eastern Guatemala .. from Belize, CA13

Laguna Yaxja. [L, M10+] (17° 3'55.24"N, 89°23'37.82"W) This is the site of Guatemala Survivor on CBS in 2005. The turnoff is 33 miles west of Melchor de Mencos, km marker 28, then about 7 miles north on a passable dirt track during the dry season. \$5. **Comments:** Large grassy field on Laguna Yaxja with toilets and *palapa* with pit fireplaces. Restoration of the ruins is in progress. When the road is improved, it will rival its neighbor Tikal. If you have a pet this is a great alternative to camping at Tikal.

El Remate- Tikal Ruins (1) [L, M10+, **No Pets**] (N 17° 13' 25.73", W 89° 37' 47.30"). On right just after Visitors Center. \$7.00 **Comments:** Large grassy field with thatched roof, cement floor *palapas*. Unisex bathroom and showers. Very quiet at night. Easy walk to tour the ruins and visit the museums. There is one small store and several restaurants.

El Remate Tikal (2) [From Liesbet Collaert 6/06] El Remate, south of Tikal (where you parked and left Brindle for the day) was our first stop. We only wished we could take the dogs to the campground in the National Park We spent three hours, searching the area for electricity strong, enough for AC to leave the dogs. It was very hot, still. None of the hotels in town had a parking lot that could handle our RV (lot under the building, low hanging cables, too steep of a path, no parking at all...). The electricity in other places was not strong enough for our AC, the Biotopo was already closed, and at one hotel our AC worked, but we would have to park along a narrow dirt road and the price was pretty steep. The first night we parked next to a guest house, but it was really too hot without the AC to leave the dogs, so the next morning we moved to our only other option, Hostal Hermano Pedro or something like that, in town. No shower, no toilet, no space around the camper, but... working AC for the dogs. \$ 7 for the night. We left directly for Tikal, which was a great visit. Something was funky with the time, though, and only the next

day, we found out that Guatemala has daylight savings for the first time in history!

El Cruce , Lago Peten Itza, By the lake side. [Stephen Stewart, Silk Route Club] (N 16.997695 W 89.704795) Just off dirt road. Picnic tables by water.

Flores, by lake just over bridge. Dirt road by shore. (N16.930188 W89.889712) [Stephen Stewart, Silk Route Club]

Santa Elena - Cuevas Actun Can {89} (N16 54.206 W89 53.704). \$6.50. From the south go to Santa Elena. Pass the Tikal turnoff, and airport, and keep right at the Texaco station where the road becomes one way (this is *la calle*). At the causeway to Flores, turn left on 6a Ave and take it about 3/4 mile past the market and microwave towers to the end. Turn left about .2 miles, turn right at the electricity generating plant and go another 0.6 miles to the site. **Comments:** The caves are a tour opportunity. They close at 5:00PM but you can park overnight. Carlos, the manager, is from California and speaks English. Bring a flashlight. Tikal is a 1-1/2 hour drive from here.

Santa Elena – Airport Texaco. Free secure camping.

Poptun - Finca Ixobal [L, W, E, M?] (N16:18.558 W89:24.868) The resort is 2 km off the main road, CA 13. Turnoff near Km 376 marker. It's about 3 hrs north of Rio Dulce and 1-1/2 hours south of **Santa Elena**. Cost about \$3 per person. Buffet dinner for \$4.50 and many tours offered. This is a wonderful place to spend some time. It has everything, from good restaurant, to social atmosphere, ping pong table, internet, activities, big roomy fields, clean bathrooms, pond and pool bar. Everything is on the honor system, every party has a sheet in a file to keep track. They charge \$3 per person and electricity (not enough for AC, but you don't need it here) is another \$1.50.

Rio Dulce - Planeta Rio (previously Hotel Ensenada) [L, M?] (15°39'21.07"N 88°59'46.92"W) This is a major resort hotel on the south side of the bridge. This campsite is used by caravans and is suitable for large rigs. (3/05)

Rio Dulce. Bruno's Hotel and Restaurant (N15:39.573 W89:00.122). \$6.50. Brunos is under the north end of the bridge over the river. There is a small slip road on the east side of the bridge where the north end of the bridge joins the town. Northbound, make a U-turn immediately over the bridge onto the slip road. About 50 yds. down you can pass under the bridge to reach a gated entrance for Bruno's. The clearance at this signposted underpass is too low for most RVs! Instead, continue about 300 yards towards the water where the bridge is higher off the ground, and backtrack. **Comments:** Bruno's is a hangout for the yachting crowd. For more on Rio Dulce see <http://www.mayaparadise.com/index.htm>

Comment on Brunos Rio Dulce [Liesbet Collaert 7/06]

Bruno's in Rio Dulce, you guys know. A convenient place with very friendly managers and a tempting restaurant. To save money, you go into town and eat meals for \$1,5. The mojito's and bloody mary's are irresistible, though! We joke about the fact that thanks to our savings on eating on the street, we got to splurge on cocktails, which cost more than our dinners... It was still \$6,5 a night, and \$3,5 extra for the use of AC. Our boat tour to Livingston was hardly a "tour". They forgot to pick us up, an hour later we managed to get on the boat, having missed half of the sights. We had to change boats because of an engine problem and later on, lost more time because of another engine problem. No commentary anywhere and Livingston was nothing special. The beaches were awful and it was extremely hot. We did like the trip through the canyon and along the jungle edges. We enjoyed getting a feel about how the people live in these little communities along the Rio Dulce. The price was \$22 per person, expensive.

Guatemala - Honduras Border at Corinto [Kathe Kirkebride and Colleen Regan 5/05] Kathe and Colleen were able to enter Honduras at Corinto south of Puerto Barrios. This saves a day for those coming through Belize to Honduras who previously had to drive to El Florido and Copan to enter Honduras. The road to the border in Guatemala was a "nice paved road". The road into Honduras was described as a "not too terrible" dirt road with some pretty terrible bridges. They made it with their 38' Class A and other heavy trucks made it. This road is under construction and according to a Pan American web site is

receiving money from a Central American fund to improve infrastructure between Guatemala and Honduras. It should be improving. We would appreciate reports from others taking this route.

Rio Hondo – Hotel Nuevo Pasabien. We camped in the town of Rio Hondo at the Hotel Nuevo Pasabien, they have a real large pool with multiple water slides. This hotel is not set up for camping but they allowed us to park in their large parking lot with water and electricity near by. A little expensive at \$15.00, but convenient. [Courtesy Frank and Anne Cartwright, www.nextmillionmiles.com]

Esquipulas, Next to Basilica {36} [L, M10+] (N14 33.668 W89 21.562). Take the left fork at the approach into the town. Follow signs to Pollo Campero, next to Basilica. There are two huge grass parking lots near the Pollos Comperos restaurant for pilgrims that flock on special days, January 14 is the large pilgrimage (avoid this and Easter week!). Adventure Caravans uses these lots when they come through. There is a small charge. This is on the road, CA10, from Guatemala to El Salvador. You can make this a base from which to go to Honduras or to El Salvador. It is a days drive south of Rio Dulce (or a long day from Finca Ixobal). It is a half day to Copan Ruins in Honduras. or less than a day to San Salvador.

Central Guatemala

Coban, Parque Nacional Las Victorias (N15.475003 W90.382827) \$3 PP [Liesbet Collaert 6/06] We planned on following the northern route above the lake. After reading up about that and getting a taste for the road on our bus trip to Agua Caliente (a nice side trip from Rio Dulce, as is Castillo de San Felipe), we decided to take the paved, but longer route on the south side of Lago Izabal. A good place to camp in Coban is Parque Nacional Las Victorias. It's mentioned in Lonely Planet and you can walk to town from it. You park on a level parking area at the end of the road into the park and there are cold showers and toilets. There's also a water faucet and we saw an outlet in the toilet building. The grassy area is nice for the dogs. Price \$3 a person. The nicest thing was the climate! For the first time since very long, we didn't need a fan and used our comforter, just with outside air... Wonderful! To get to the park, you take the main road into town, past the huge western shopping mall, with a Paiz supermarket, bend towards the left and follow until you reach 11a Av. Turn left and you end up at the park entrance.

We planned on visiting the caves of Lanquin (and camp there) and Semuc Champey, the next day. We got an early start, managed to get out of town and into the next one, only to get confronted with the only bridge over the river, with an arch mentioning 3,5 m maximum height. We measured ourselves: 11 feet. (See below for more on this).

Coban, Esso gas station (N 15.47159 W 90.38874) [Kathe Kirkebride and Colleen Regan 2005]. We stayed for three nights. It wasn't the most lovely of accommodations, but it was safe and we had room to set up the satellite dish.

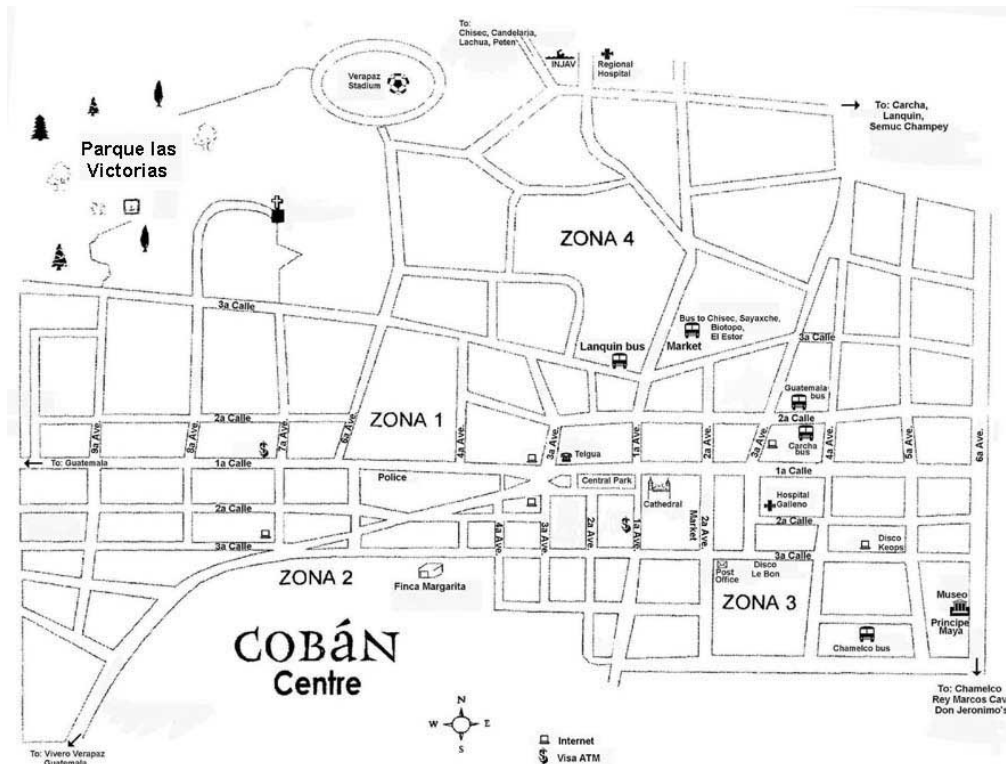


Figure 11 Coban, Guatemala. Camping at Parque las Victorias. (www.cobanav.net)

San Pedro Carchá, Gasolinera Cuatro Caminos/Balneario Las Islas (N 15 28.164 W 90 18.307). San Pedro is 6 km east of Coban. We were headed towards the Balneario Las Islas (mentioned in Lonely Planet). It is on the southern edge of San Pedro on a river and appeared to be a great place to camp. We were discouraged by the security people there, however, because it was deserted at night and there would be no security. If we had not been by ourselves we might have stayed there. There is plenty of room for several rigs. We opted for the secure gasoline station close by.

Semuc Champey and Grutas de Lanquin. (www.semucchampey.com) The bridge Liesbet is talking about above is in San Pedro Cachá, 6 km east of Coban. We crossed under this bridge in our 22 ft Coachmen, nominal height 11.5 ft. This is the only way to reach Semuc Champey from Coban unless you drive north from Coban towards Chisec. Lanquin and Semuc Champey are worth visiting. There is a campground next to the Grutas Lanquin called Guayaja (www.guayajaonline.com). A large field with an overhead "canopy tour" wire. The owner said they were adding RV facilities in 2006. Semuc Champey is best visited by car or van as the road is very rough and narrow. We did it Semana Santa week which was a nightmare in our Class C. Other times of the year would be ok. Camping by the river at Semuc is lovely.



Figure 12 Low Bridge between Coban and Lanquin at San Pedro Cachá.

Coban – Chisec. We passed several eco-tourism centers about 15 miles north of Coban (km 244 of CA 14). We did not stop but it would be worth checking camping opportunities here. La Catarata, (N 15 35.935 W 90 23.62) and Eco-Centro Santanos (N 15 36.204 W 90 24.272).

Chisec, B'OMB'IL PEK Gasolinera (N 15 49.039 W 90 17.481). Water is available.

Around Chisec, Parque Nacional Laguna Lachua and Finca Chipantun. Chisec has several attractions in the vicinity. Lonely Planet mentions camping at these locations. From Chisec head north on CA 14 about 6 km and turn west towards Rubelsanto. The turnoff is at (N 15 53.091, W 90 16.192). We have not explored this area and would appreciate reports!

Baja Verapaz, Biotopo del Quetzal/Biotopin Restaurant. [Liesbet Collaert 6/06] We went shopping in paradise (in Coban .. our first full size supermarket since Mexico) and drove back South. We stopped at [Biotopo del Quetzal](http://www.thegringosguide.com/Salama/BiotopoHistory.htm) (www.thegringosguide.com/Salama/BiotopoHistory.htm), km 161, along CA 14. Entrance fee to the nature park is \$3 a person and you can camp there for another \$1.50 a person on their lot. There are toilets, but no showers. They do have two nice swimming holes. Don't forget it is pretty chilly here. The parking area has no plants or grass at all and pets are not allowed in the park, so camping there was not attractive for us. Instead, we asked the Biotopin Restaurant across the street for permission to park overnight. That was granted, we only had to consume a meal in their restaurant, which closes at 5 pm. We spoiled ourselves with a nice breakfast (\$ 3 each) the next morning and everybody was happy. There are toilets, a little lawn and nice walking trails in the forest. You can walk down to the river to a swimming hole (the dogs loved it), see a couple of waterfalls and basically see similar things than the Biotopo, but for free.

El Salvador



San Miguel. Shell Gasolinera. (N13:30.462 W88:9.185) (tip for guard suggested). On CA7 from El Amatillo (not the Pan-American Highway). This is a better road from the border. The gas station is on the east side of town, between km 140 and 141, on the south side of the road, Ruta Militar. Comments: The station has electric hookups in the back where you park. Water is available near the lube station. There is a concrete sewer cover in the back which can be slid to the side for dumping. The owner said we could also dump into the toilets. Showers are available.

San Miguel, Metrocenter in San Miguel would make a suitable campsite.

San Salvador. Sheritan Hotel El Presidente (13°41'29.34"N 89°14'26.59"W) \$1 parking plus tips. Hotel changes ownership occasionally, it was a Marriot on our first visit. Turn north on Ave. Revolucion off the Pan-American Highway just after the turnoff to Autopista Sur (coming from the south/west). Continue straight at the roundabout (traffic circle) for Blvd del Hipodromo. Covered parking is opposite hotel. Comments: We stayed here twice, in 2003 and 2006. Others have also stayed here and were welcome. There is electricity if you ask.

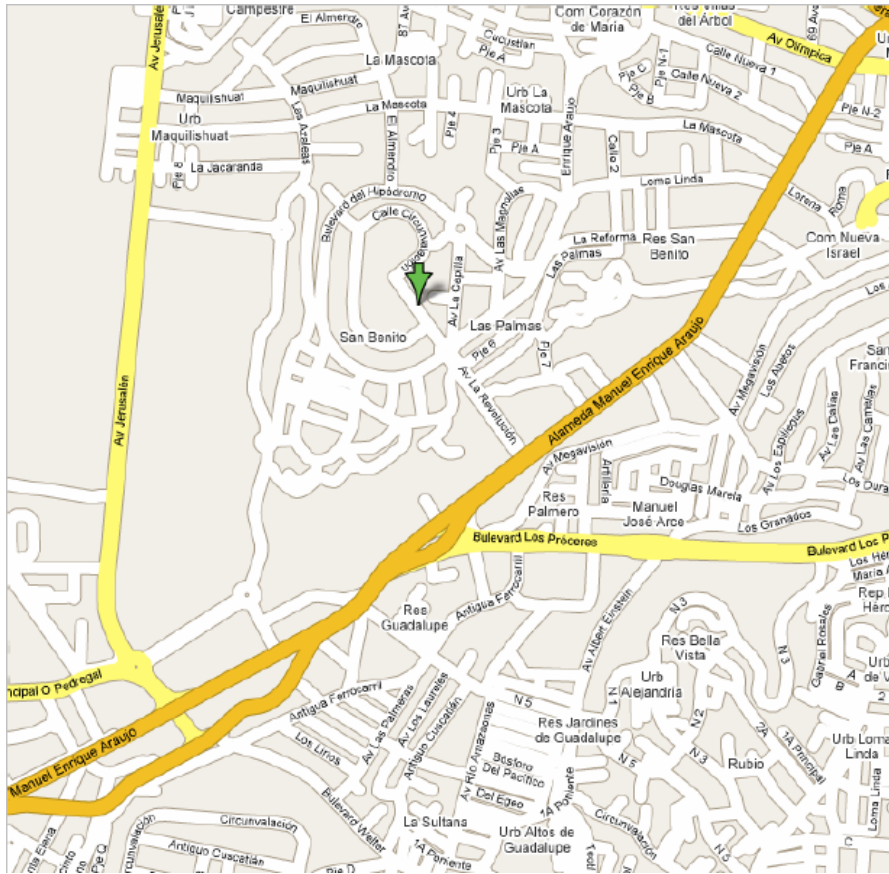


Figure 13 Sheritan El Presidente, El Salvador (Courtesy Google Maps)

Santa Ana. Centro Escolar Madre del Salvador. (N13:59.373 W89:32.834) \$2 Contribution. 23 Ave Sur between 7th and 5th Calle Oriente, near the Turicentro Sihuatehuacan. From Parque Libertad, in the center of town, take Libertad Oriente eastward. Turn right on 23rd Ave Sur (this is two blocks west of the turicentro, look for telephone kiosk on the southeast corner). Go three blocks. Church and school are on the left where the road splits into two one-way streets.

Other Sites: The Turicentro might let you stay if you arrive before closing.

Hotel y Restaurante Montevista, 6 miles south of Frontera Anguita, north of Metepan. (N14:21.933 W89:26.960) has a big lot.

Other Sites in El Salvador courtesy of Kathe Kirkbride and Colleen Regan. San Miguel "...at another Shell Gas Station (N13:29 W88:28) for \$2/night."

Playa El Espino on the Pacific Coast: "...we were shown a place to park under a palapa for \$5 for the day. This fee also included chairs and a hammock hanging under another palapa right on the beach."

Santiago de Maria on either side of the Parque Central (N 13:29 W 88:28 Elev 2181').

San Vicente at a Puma Gas Station on CA-1 (N13:41 W88:46) "...where they had a large area where we could park and gave us permission to stay the night. It was big enough that a largish caravan could fit; they were very welcoming of us and had a security guard 24 hours a day."

La Libertad. Rio Mar Recreational Center. (13 28.964 N 89 16.961 W) [Kathe Kirkebride and Colleen Regan] "...found an absolutely delightful place to camp at a private recreation center just east of town less

than 2 miles. It has two swimming pools, a restaurant, lots of palapas, difficult access to a rugged beach, and beautiful palm and almond treed grounds. We are being charged \$5/night per rig and think it is a bargain. Talking them into allowing us to stay after they close at 5:00 pm was another fine example of persuasive communication as they were definitely not open to the idea when Colleen and I first approached them. After 5:00 we have the place to ourselves.” (Update 2006) We stayed in this place We too had to get special permission to stay after closing. The mosquitos were particularly bad (we're told they are only there January - March), but it is a nice place with a nice pool. Room for several rigs.

Playa Costa del Sol, 30 miles east of La Libertad, Hotel Tesoro Beach “...lends itself to large RV caravans with tall rigs. Colleen talked to the receptionist there who said that RVs could stay there and use the resort; ...the cost would be \$15/day/rig. The beach is beautiful, clean, and has good boogie boarding.”

George Baines

Playa Espino, go to end of paved road, turn left go down narrow lane nearly to end, nice places to stay, with room for any sized rig, busses turn here. Pit toilets, water. Great beach good beach break, great sunsets. Watch out for Semana Santa! [Ed. note... we turned right at the beach and found a nice area with a palapa where the owner allowed us to camp, but it was very tight and we damaged our awning getting out. Sounds like going left is the best choice here! Thanks George.]

Playa Sanzal. Roots, new campground for surfers, good sized rigs will fit. New Bathrooms, water, power maybe. Classic point break to right on beach another local surf spot to left (Boca). \$3 PP. On road to Perquin (eastern mountains) Hotel Ocatal \$5 pp. pool. showers, restaurant.

Llano del Muerto (Balneario) 20min. off main rd. \$2 pp. Showers, pool, water. Great area near Rio Negro.

Atlantis Aquatic Park, near San Salvador airport, on road to beach. Waterworld meets Disneyland! The manager here went out of his way to set us up for the night. This is not an RV place but a major Balneario/entertainment center. They rent airconditioned cabins, first class, have many pools great restaurants, water slides etc. This is a great place to stay and meet someone coming in by air. 20 min. to airport.

Cerro Verde (outside Sonsonate) \$10 per rig, lots of room, at 6000 ft to cool off at night. Toilets, botanic garden, great views.

Parque Aquatico Apuzunga, south of Metapan, in mountains in western El Salvador. Another baneario, owner is Raul Sanabria, speaks better English than he admits, great water park around natural spring on a big river (rafting) recreation area, restaurants, toilets, showers, swimming. Any size rig, little hard to get into, but well signed. \$25 for two rigs (6 people) included full use of park!

Rus Krause-Kathleen Krauss

Playa	El	Espino,	El	Salvador
N13	10.256		W088	17.426

Although we could have stayed at any number of places along the beach in El Espino, we chose one called Cabanas La Brisa del Mar and had pleasant stay in a small grassy parqueo edged by a few palapas sheltering hammocks that look out on a clean beach stretching for miles. There are bathrooms available, but we used our own. The fee was \$8. To get there turn left at the beachfront road when you get to El Espino and drive until you see their hand painted sign. The family that runs the place lives there but nicely gave us our privacy. In the morning we chatted and got to witness their struggle to keep the sea from taking their land, shoveling sand every morning to repack the wall they've each built to slow erosion.

Parque	Nacional	Cerro	Verde,	El	Salvador
N13	49.599	W089	37.460	altitude:	6602 feet

This is a good place to camp for spectacular views of volcanos and of the crater lake Coatepeque, with beautiful gardens, a children's playground and treehouse, and a nice hike around an ancient crater that has been reclaimed by the jungle. The fee was \$10 and we filled with water. There is no dump or electricity, the bathrooms are clean, though without showers. There are other good hikes available in the park. In the morning we met a string of young guides who take people to the Crater Izalco and other more strenuous destinations

Perquin Area, El Salvador (8/06)

From Liesbet Collaert

In one day, we drove all the way from Lago de Coatepeque, to Perquin, in the North East of the country, with it's historical and interesting guerrilla past. The best place to camp in Perquin is near the Museo de la Revolucion, past the town center. We wouldn't recommend large RV's to drive here. We managed OK (with some double point turns in town) with our 24 foot truck camper. The small parking lot at the museum is free and safe (vigilante at night), while the parking area across the street is larger, more comfortable, but less safe. People are allowed to park overnight there, but the owner doesn't want to take responsibility for your belongings, since there is no guard at night. He charges \$1 for the vehicle and \$1 for each person to stay on the lot. We stayed here, because another big group of Salvadorians decided to camp under the big palapa that night, which made the owner stay there too. You can get level here, and there is a nice and short walk to the top of the hill. The museum is across the street. The parking lot (El Manzanal) has two entrances. The first, and easiest one is right on top of a steep, paved hill, past the center of town. To get here, you drive through town and turn left at the end of the street. Keep going, until you see the first sign (parqueo El Manzanal) on your right. This is a not too steep, rocky dirt driveway. Once on the lot, there is a plenty of room. The other entrance, a little further down the road, across from the museum is very steep. Clearance is never a problem. We did check out the El Mozote and Rio Sapo area (only recommended in truck campers), but there were no interesting places to spend the night. We ended up in a Shell fuel station near San Miguel.

From Liesbet Collaert

We checked out Lago de Coatepeque. All the land, but one grimy boat launch, is privately owned. We did find two camping possibilities, though. The nicest one is the parking lot of Hotel/Restaurant Torremolinos (no lake view). You follow the dirt road along the lake for about two kilometers. If you eat there, you can use their facilities and park for free. There are clean toilets, cold showers, swimming pools and access to the lake, through the restaurant (no problem with dogs). Between the building and the lake is a huge grassy area. If you don't eat there, they will charge \$5 a night. At 6 am life starts, with the noises of barking dogs and selling vendors.

If you order anything on the menu, make sure you ask it "without cheese", unless you're fond of the crumbly, moldy tasting Salvadorian cheese on everything you eat... This is, according to travel guides, the best restaurant in town. We didn't like it a lot and it's pricey.

The other restaurant, where you can camp, is called Rancho Alegre. It's not very level and muddy. They charge \$1 a person per night, and there are cold showers, toilets and lake view. Be prepared to wait a long time before you get served in this restaurant.

Camping in Cerro Verde - Now Open! (8/06)

From Liesbet Collaert

[Ed Note - on our trip in April Cerro Verde was closed due to volcanic activity - J & H.] Our first night we spent in Cerro Verde National Park. They allowed the dogs only in the parking lot, and charged us \$10 for camping, 69 cents for parking (!), and also wanted to charge us entry for the park, but we denied paying, since it was about closing time by then. The entrance and parking fees are cheap, but camping is outrageous, with barely any facilities. The time goes back one hour, compared to Guatemala (that honours

for the first time in history, daylight savings). The parking lot is a good and safe place to camp, with toilets, and three vigilantes, but we felt overcharged and left first thing, the next morning. It was too misty to do any hikes, but supposedly there is a nice nature trail starting from the lot. Entrance fee per person is \$0,80.

Guatemala - El Salvador Border on CA-8 (8/06)

From Liesbet Collaert

We decided to take the Southern route out of Antigua, towards Escuintla. At the split, you follow Autopista Escuintla, to avoid the city center. Then follow the signs to Puerto Quetzal, until a (small) sign on your right points to the left (somehow get in the left lane), saying "Frontera El Salvador". If you missed the turn (like us), there will be a paved "retorno" after about five minutes. CA2 is a good road with little traffic. It brings you to the coast of El Salvador, but we were not interested in that. We took the connecting road (16) to CA8, to get into the country through another border. This road through the mountains is paved, but very slow. It brings you through Chiquimulilla, which is a bit tricky. When you approach town, veer to the left (straight is a one-way street), and then right at the end. Keep driving until you see a sign for route 16 on a building to your right, turn there. After a couple of blocks you see a gas station on your right, keep driving straight, and you're out of town. Don't miss the sign for route 16, or you end up in the narrow and stressful Mercado, like us! Friendly people will help you through...

CA8 is a good road to the border of Valle Nuevo. We highly recommend this border crossing into El Salvador. After you shake off the guides and money changers, the check-out process is very easy and doesn't take a lot of time. Just walk in and around the only building. You don't need an exit stamp for Guatemala, but do need to check the car (SAT office) and dogs (agricultura) out. No fees. Then, you drive over the bridge into El Salvador. The town here is called Las Chinamas.

And here is the big news: you don't need to check in anymore when you arrive overland! Since June 2006, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua joined an organization, called CA4. You get 90 days at the border with Belize, Mexico or Costa Rica, and are free to travel in the CA4 zone for that period of time. Apparently, you can only get extensions at those borders as well. We don't know yet whether that's good or bad news. The obvious good news is, that you don't have to pay the \$10 entrance fee anymore, the bad news: no more stamps of these countries in our passports. We also hope that this fact is known well enough among all the police forces at check-ups...

Las Chinamas is very easy and quiet! The dogs were no problem. The guy in charge didn't seem to know what to do and just put an entry stamp on the USDA forms and made a copy of them. No time limit was given. For the car, we needed to fill in a paper with all kinds of questions (in Spanish) about the vehicle, they accepted copies of Mark's passport and the title, and checked the VIN number on the car. 60 days maximum stay. And that was that. The whole crossing took about an hour and didn't cost us anything, on either side! Technically we could stay in the country until our visa (received in Guatemala) expired.

Frank & Anne Cartwright (www.NextMillionMiles.com) camped just outside Cerro Verde National Park at Crystal Hacienda. (Their web site has other useful information on Central American camping.)

Playa Costa del Sol (Updated 3/06)

(East of the San Salvador Airport off of CA-2, the Littoral Highway)

The Costa del Sol is the major commercial beach area in El Salvador. Virtually all the beach front is privately owned and the opportunity to camp right on the beach is limited (see options below).

Hotel Tesoro Beach (N13:19.355, W88:57.097)

We reported in 99 Days to Panama and earlier on this site that the Tesoro Beach Hotel would let RVs stay in the large lot next to the hotel for \$15/rig/night. When we went there in March, 2006, we were told that they no longer "provided this service". They did, however, allow us to camp there for two nights. It is a

beautiful location especially with access to their pools and a nice beach. We have heard that the owner allows RVs to stay there as long as it doesn't interfere with local business, especially around holidays (e.g. Samana Santa). Caravans used to stay here. If you carry our book and show them the info they should let you stay. Don't try entering the hotel under their portal entrance ways. There is an open entrance to the field next to the hotel beyond the eastern most portal.

Bahia del Sol (N13:17.893, W88:53.664).

Next to this 5-star resort is a private beach club with a large parking area. It is used by caravans and they gave us permission to camp if we ate in their restaurant.

By the Sea at the Tesoro Beach Hotel

Playa De Metalío (New March, 2006)

Restaurante El Viejo Pescador (N13:37.434, W89:52.654)

Owner: Daño Guadrón

Turnoff CA-2 at the pedestrian overpass at km. 90 (about six miles west of Acajutla), about one hour from the border at La Hachadura. Head towards beach on paved road which becomes a dirt and gravel road. Bear left at the beach and continue for about 1.5 miles to this restaurant. Ask to park on the beach next to the restaurant, or they will let you park in the fenced confines of the restaurant which they will tell you is more secure.

We found this place in the dark after crossing the border late. It seems the only place to camp along this stretch of beach. The owner (Daño) was most welcoming and their food was great, however the neighborhood is a little run down, not like the upper scale areas of Costa Del Sol. Yet this is one of the few opportunities to park right on the beach. Suitable for small rigs.

Next to Restaurante El Viejo Pescador, Playa Metalío

La Libertad (New March, 2006)

"El Indio" Campground (N13:29.661, W89:23.029)

This is down a narrow road at km. 57 on CA-2, about four miles west of La Libertad. Take the road marked "El Tronco Beach" and the campsite is behind the green door near the end of the street. Ask anyone for "El Indio". It is only suitable for small rigs due to the narrow turn into the camping area.

This is primarily a tent camping area but there is plenty of parking for small rigs. "El Indio" is actually Ozzy Reyes Cindio (+503-7877-4461) who is upgrading this place with a kitchen and baños. He was installing a septic system when we were there. I provided him info on a dump station, and he might add one in the near future. There is electricity available and water, but it is saline. He is a Salvadoran surfer turned entrepreneur and wants to make this work. He speaks a little English.

Ahuachapan. Geo Thermal Field (13.914762 N 89.815207 W) [Stephan Stewart, Silk Route Club]

We just parked in the trees.

Suchitoto. On lower terrace by lake (13.946247 N 89.016698 W) [Stephan Stewart, Silk Route Club]

Cost about \$2 per day. By boats. Road very steep but OK.

Volcano Izalco Park Camp Area (13.832925 N 89.629053 W) [Stephan Stewart, Silk Route Club] Off CA12. Very rough road for last 1.5km. 4x4 only? \$0.70 per person.

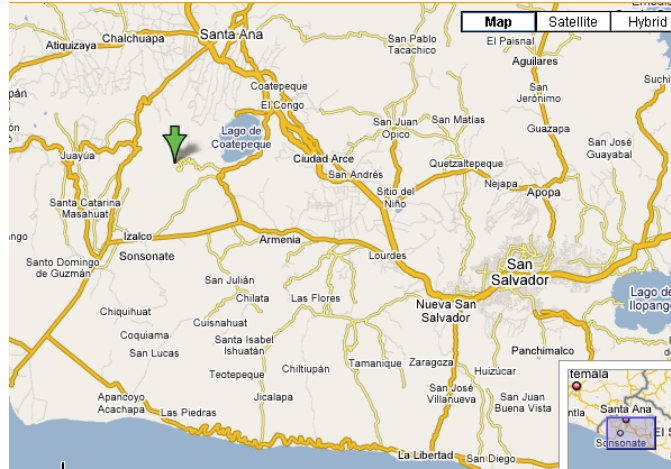


Figure 14 Izalco Volcano

Appendices

Hiperpaiz

<http://www.hiperpaiz.com/ubicaciondetiendas.htm>

Guatemala

Oficinas Centrales

Dirección: 12 calle 1-28 zona 9, Edificio El Mol, Guatemala 01009
Telefono: (502) 2485-5500 Servicio al Cliente: (502) 2485-5555

Hiper Paiz Bosques de San Nicolás

Dirección: 41 Ave. 3-10 Z. 4 Mixco C.C. Bosques de San Nicolás
PBX: 2485-5700
Fax: 2485-5701

Hiper Paiz Xela

Dirección: Ave. Las Américas, C.C. Pradera Zona 3, Quetzaltenango
Teléfono: 7767-4399, 7767-6090
Fax: 7767-6067

Hiper Paiz Roosevelt

Dirección: Calzada Roosevelt 26-95 zona 11
PBX: 2384-5800
Fax: 2384-5801
Hiper Paiz Express: Tel. 2384-5858

Hiper Paiz Villa Nueva

Dirección: Km 17.5 Carretera al Pacifico Villa Nueva
PBX: 6685-7400
Fax: 6685-7401
Hiper Paiz Express: Tel. 6685-7474

Hiper Paiz Puerta Parada

Dirección: KM. 15.5 Carretera a El Salvador, Santa Catarina Pinula
PBX: 6685-4400
Fax: 6685-4401
Hiper Paiz Express: Tel. 6685-4444

Hiper Paiz del Norte

Dirección: KM. 4.5 Carretera al atlántico, Zona 17
PBX: 2285-1500
Fax: 2285-1501
Hiper Paiz Express: Tel. 2285 1515 express.hiperdn@lafragua.com.gt

El Salvador

Hiper Paiz Boulevard del Ejército, El Salvador

Hiper Paiz, Blvd. del Ejército Nacional, Km. 4 1/2 Soyapango

Teléfono: 2275-7300

Fax: 2275-7310

Horario: de Lunes a sábado de 8:00am a 10:00pm y Domingos de 8:00am a 9:00pm

Hiper Paiz Las Cascadas

Entre calle Chiltiupán y Carretera a Santa Tecla

Teléfono: 2236-7200

Fax: 2236-7250