Traveling to a new place is exciting, but it is often difficult to find the best meals or sights to see. Wouldn’t it be great if a friend could let you in on the secrets of how to get the most out of Antigua? Those of us who live in Antigua decided we’d share some of our favorite spots to eat, drink, and hang out, with the hope that it’ll make your stay in Guatemala that much more enjoyable.

**ANDY’S FAVES** *(he’s a vegetarian, so all of his faves have options for those that don’t eat meat)*:

- **EL FARO:** $ You’ll find Andy at one of the many locations often! Good mexican food for a good price.
- **CASA SANTO TOMAS**: $$ Delicious food that’s more upscale, but still reasonably priced.
- **RAINBOW CAFE**: $$ Check out their evening schedules as there’s usually something fun going on each night, such as open mic events. Good food, casual atmosphere and lots of happenings.
- **EL TENEDOR DEL CERRO**: $$ This restaurant is part of the 5-star hotel Santo Domingo (see below about visiting the ruins) but is situated on a hill outside of Antigua and overlooks the valley. The hotel has a free shuttle to the restaurant. The best deal in town for an amazing breakfast buffet! They also have a canopy tour (zipline) that offers a very cool way to do superman.
- **EPICURE**: $$$ It’s not often that we get to go out for an expensive meal, but when we do, we choose Epicure.

**MINDY’S FAVES** *(she’s not quite a vegetarian, but doesn’t eat beef or pork)*:

- **TAQUERIA DONA LUPITA**: $ It’s like they've put a taco truck inside a building, but don’t be fooled. Good food at great prices. Her favorite are the chicken tacos at 3xQ15!
- **CASA DE LA SOPAS**: $$ If you’re looking for some traditional Guatemalan food, this is a great spot to get it. They offer pepian (Guatemala’s national dish), jocon and many other local favorites.
- **EL PUNTO**: $$ Wood fired pizzas and handmade pastas. ‘Nuf said.
- **POR QUE NO**: $$ One of her absolute faves! The owners are lovely and the place itself is a little corner bar with a lofted space where you need to use a rope to assist your climb. The curry shrimp is to die for.
- **ORIGAMI**: $$ Delicious Korean fusion food made right in front of you with locally grown, organic food. A must-try is their homemade ginger ale!
- **CACTUS TACOS**: $$ Amazing, amazing, amazing. Everything is amazing. The burritos will give you the most bang for your buck.

**JANE’S FAVES** *(also a vegetarian)*:

- **SAMSARA**: $$ Comfortable atmosphere to just sit and relax. They serve a lot of foods that are normally difficult to find in Guatemala, such as quinoa. Also, a great place to get loose leaf teas. If you have a specific ailment, just talk with the owner, Cristian, and he’ll be able to direct you to the right tea to get you back on the Antigua streets.
- **PITAYA**: $$ While it’s only open for lunch, it’s a delicious option for fresh wraps and salads. They also have a wide selection of smoothies with supplements.
- **LA VACA FELIZ**: $$ At the time of this writing, it is the only all vegan/vegetarian restaurant in town. Delicious food and cookies!
- **TARTINES**: $$$ When she has the opportunity to splurge, this is one of her favorites. If you’re looking to have a romantic evening, this is a good choice.
- **FUSION**: $$$ They can do unbelievable things with food.

If you’re looking for a place to hang out in the nice weather and either look at the volcanoes and/or the sunset, here’s where you should head:

- **CAFE SKY**: $$ Good drinks and food, especially the nachos.
- **KAFKA**: $$ Great terrace upstairs, and now with Mynor’s bar that serves exclusively home-brewed beer

* Sells and/or serves De la Gente coffee.
If you’re looking for a way to give back while having a good meal, check out KIDS RESTAURANT:

KIDS Restaurant is the only restaurant completely run by kids (under supervision, of course)! This project was developed by T.E.S.S. Unlimited in order to help kids learn English, work and social skills, and to work together as a team. Every penny earned in profit is used to fund educational and culinary field trips for the children. The kids involved are part of a special educational project, they take classes every week to improve their English, and they also take a theory class to help them understand the process of working and running the restaurant. www.kidsrestaurant.org

COFFEE

When you’re jonesin’ for some joe, look no further than this guide! Our recommendations are based on small, local shops that are close to what you’d find in the US or Canada. Sorry, not sorry, there’s no Starbucks to be found in Antigua! You’re in Guatemala, enjoy some of the regional coffees harvested with love in this country.

EL REFUGIO: Comfortable living room kind of sitting areas in the back. (Closed on Sundays)

ESPRESSARTE*: Delicious coffees from smallholder farmers around Guatemala. The coffeeshop is set up to help the small farmers!

FAT CAT: One of the baristas has competed in world championships. Great coffee, made exactly how you like it. It’s evident that the owner is passionate about coffee, and takes the time to prepare each cup.

ESTUDIO: Great coffee, and now serving some local, organic smoothies and food too.

BOHEME: Great atmosphere pairs wonderfully with fantastic pastries and coffee drinks.

* Sells and/or serves De la Gente coffee.

THINGS TO DO/SEE

We realize that TripAdvisor is a great site to find information on what to do in town, heck, we rely on the site to help us promote our tours, but we also keep a running list of things to do when our friends and families come to visit us. Here’s what we do:

DE LA GENTE TOURS: Of course, it’s a must-do for any of our friends and families. Choose tours ranging from our coffee tour to iron-working to pepian workshops.

CENTRAL PARK: A must see for any visiting foreigner. A hub of activity at all hours, you can walk around or just sit on one of the many benches and take in the beauty and culture of Guatemala.

CATHEDRAL: You can see the ‘new’ part, but don’t forget to see the ruins behind the church too.

ARCH STREET: Probably the most photographed street in Guatemala (and maybe Central America). If you walk north toward the end of the avenue and look south, you can get a great photo of the arch and Volcan Agua. There are tons of souvenir shops and restaurants on this busy street. On the weekends, it’s closed down to vehicles making it a pleasant street to slowly stroll.

LA MERCED: Church and amazing ruins. The church is still functioning and is one of the busiest in Antigua. Mass is usually at 6 pm (other times available too) if you’re interested in attending.

CERRO DE LA CRUZ: Hike a short distance up and get a breathtaking view of Antigua.

TANQUE UNION (PUBLIC PILAS): Get a taste of Guatemalan history and culture with the public pilas (wash basins used by women to clean clothes).

RIDE A CHICKEN BUS! There are some small towns nearby that are super easy to get to. The bus “station” is at public market. Just ask for the bus you need (e.g. bus to Pastores) and they’ll direct you to the right one. To get to these towns that are nearby, it’s usually only 2-3Q each direction.

THE MARKET: We’re not talking about the artisans market, but rather the market where Guatemalans and locals shop for, well, everything - from food to underwear to hardware. It’s a bit daunting, but well worth it. While it is open every day of the week, full-on market days are Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. We highly recommend going early in the morning (6:30 am) in order to see it as vendors set up. If you’re lucky, you’ll even see the goat herders wandering around yelling, “leche” (milk).
THINGS TO DO/SEE, continued...

**RUINS:** There are a boat load of ruins to see and you could spend a full day (or more) just seeing them.
Here’s our list in priority order (with the assumption that you’ve see the ruins at the Cathedral):
Santo Domingo
Santa Clara
San Francisco (church and ruins)
La Recolección
San Jeronimo
Capuchinas

If you want to explore a little further outside of Antigua, we recommend the following:

**EL PILAR:** It’s a little oasis that many locals don’t even know about. It’s outside of Santa Ana, just a short distance from Antigua (easy to get there via taxi or tuk tuk). On a hot day, their cool spring-fed pools can’t be beat. There are also many hiking trails that offer the most stunning views.

**EARTH LODGE:** an avocado farm, restaurant and hotel that boasts things like treehouses for rooms, is a great way to spend time just relaxing.

**VALHALLA MACADAMIA NUT FARM:** located in San Miguel Duenas, it’s easy to grab a chicken bus to get there. We recommend going for breakfast/brunch and having some of their delicious macadamia nut pancakes with blueberry sauce and macadamia nut butter. Out of this world!

**PASTORES:** It’s a small town not far from Antigua that is all about leather - boots, shoes, jackets, belts, etc. If you’re here for about a week, you can have them make exactly what you want - just bring in a photo or discuss your idea with them. They’re artists!

If you want to explore even further away from Antigua and have some time on your hands, we recommend the following. Also, note that there are travel agencies all over Antigua that are much cheaper to book through than doing it online prior to getting here. Guatemalans don’t tend to book too far in advance, so walking into a travel agency when you get here and booking your activities for the week (or month) that you’re here won’t be a problem.

**SEMUC CHAMPEY:** Great tours walking you through beautiful caves, rivers, and wildlife. The usual trip is for 3 days (1 day to get there, 1 day doing amazing activities and another day back to Antigua). Don’t let the travel turn you off though because it’s often one of the things that people enjoy the most.

**LAKE ATITLAN:** The most famous lake in Guatemala, the area is full of things to do with beautiful views and lots of shopping. The lake is dotted with small villages, each with a different vibe - so check out multiple villages, if possible. It’s easiest to get to Panajachel (Pana) via a shuttle (collectiva) and then take a public boat to whichever small village you’ve chosen to stay in. All of the travel agencies in Antigua offer shuttles to Pana. It’s usually best to take the morning shuttle because the lake can be really choppy in the afternoon, making for a rather uncomfortable ride.

**THE BEACH:** While Guatemala stretches to both the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts, it’s much easier to get to the Pacific coast from Antigua. Good towns to consider are Monterrico or El Paredon. There are amazing black sand beaches. If you’re here during turtle season, you can spend some time collecting eggs on the beaches during the night, or if they’ve hatched, you can release one into the ocean! Any travel agency in town will offer shuttles to Monterrico. To get to El Paredon, it’s usually best to talk to the hostel you’ve chosen and book transportation through them.

**CHICHICASTENANGO:** A well-known market town that is a popular destination for visitors. Head out there on a market day to browse intricately woven textiles.
THINGS TO DO/SEE, continued…

CLIMB PACAYA OR SOME OTHER VOLCANO. Pacaya can be done in half a day, including transportation from Antigua. There's no excuse not to climb an active volcano!

TIKAL: Beautiful ruins surrounded by beautiful nature. There’s an option to fly there (much quicker, but of course, more expensive) or you can catch a bus (12 hours overnight, but more affordable). If you’re going this far, you should go to Flores while you’re there.

RIO DULCE/LIVINGSTON: Beautiful river ideal for boating. Livingston is also known for their Garifuna population - the only place in Guatemala.

WHERE TO BUY SOUVENIRS

There are a number of artisan markets throughout town, one very large one near the market and another just off of Central Park. At these types of markets, you are encouraged to haggle on the price. If you’re like me and just like to browse and not haggle, head to NIM PO'T or CASA DE LOS GIGANTES. The prices are fair and the goods are of quality. There’s also a cleverly hidden shop on Arch street (#13) that sells goods that support some non-profits in town - highly recommend it.

SPANISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

If you’d like to learn Spanish while you’re in Guatemala, Antigua is the place to do it! There are schools on nearly every corner so it can be difficult to decide where to go. Here are our recommendations:

CAMBIO SPANISH SCHOOL: This school is linked to Ninos de Guatemala, an NGO contributing to a better future for the children of Guatemala through education. The school donates 100% of the proceeds from your lessons directly to the NGO.

CHRISTIAN SPANISH ACADEMY (CSA): Their method provides flexibility which enables them to provide you with a customized education. Their program style adapts to you and your specific needs. They also have specific programs, such as business, medical, veterinary and more.

NIGHTLIFE

CAFE NO SE: This quaint pub has an addictive character and charm. The best nights to go are from Friday to Sunday, where you are bound to encounter intimate live music. Don’t forget to try the illegal Mezcal.

POR Q NO: For a very local hangout, check out this little corner pub. Get there early if you want to be inside because space is limited, but it’s no less fun when the crowd is spilling out the door.

RED ZEBRA*: If you are in a group, check out their Pub Quiz for themed trivia. Winners can take home cash, or opt to give the rest of the crowd a free drink. Wednesdays at 8pm [but find them on Facebook to make sure it’s happening].

RAINBOW CAFE*: Take part in Open Mic Night, or watch safely from the sidelines. Music, poetry, comedy and more. Wednesdays @ 8pm. They also have NGO nights every Tuesday night at 5:30 pm.

RED, WHITE AND BREW: Best spot for a handcrafted specialty beer, which you will discover is an anomaly in Antigua. Sit at the bar and enjoy a few pints while conversing with the brewmaster. It’s located inside Kafka.

MONOLOCO: If you have a hankering for some US sports, check out this place - you’ll feel right at home with their menu offerings as well.

THE SNUG: It sounds just like it’s name, so get ready to meet whoever is next to you because the forced proximity forces everyone to be the best of friends by the end of the night.

If you want to listen to live music, there’s at least one bar every night that will have you covered! The easiest way to find out who’s playing where is to pick up a FREE copy of Que Pasa magazine which is available in most tourist locations around town. They’ll also have a list of places that have either a happy hour or a ladies night.

Want to learn how to salsa, dance salsa or just watch their amazing moves?

LA SALA is the place to be on Sunday nights. Free lessons start at 8 pm and the dance floor lights up with salseros afterwards.

LA SIN VENTURA has live salsa music and dancing on Tuesday nights - the party usually gets started around 9:30 pm or later

LAS PALMAS has a live band and salsa dancing on Friday nights. It’s a small and intimate, but fun experience.