ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

TRAVEL

Guatemala Journey Among the Ixil Maya
Susanna Badgley Place
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978-0-9884876-0-4
Five Stars (out of Five)

Departing from commercial travel guides that promote typical approaches to tourism, this book ventures into the heritage and history of Guatemala for perceptive travelers.

An uncommon guidebook for the backpacking humanitarian, ecotourist, or cultural traveler who appreciates learning new traditions and savors encounters off the beaten path, *Guatemala Journey Among the Ixil Maya* is both perceptive in its selections and sensitive in its acknowledgment of the area's remaining challenges.

Susanna Badgley Place—past Peace Corps member, experienced nonprofit worker, and traveler to Guatemala since 2004—draws from a wealth of memories to celebrate the Ixil Maya of Chajul, Nebaj, and Cotzal, three municipalities of Guatemala. Tucked in the northwestern mountains, these Ixil Mayan communities welcome increasing engagement with visitors. Through the author's vibrant account of her own excursions, byways and towns emerge as transitional locales poised between efforts to sustain heritage and increase economic opportunities.

Guatemala Journey notably departs from commercial travel guides. Contextualizing the region with a solid, compact history spanning pre-Hispanic times through Spanish colonialism, civil war, and modern times, the author considers the effects of the past. This respectful approach deemphasizes the touristic, sometimes consumptive view of travel and encourages extended immersion in the area, as well as open dialogue to discover local concerns. As a result, the focus lies in outdoor markets, explorations of crafts, schools, and agricultural development initiatives—all of which provide a useful means for learning about the Ixil Maya in ways that transcend the tourist-as-voyeur approach to travel.

To venture farther afield, the book implies, is to extend goodwill, and it is a beautifully delivered message. In one particularly well-drawn section, the author recalls spearheading a successful effort among weavers to teach apprentices older, often richly emblematic designs.

Personal anecdotes and tips further round out the impression that travel for the author is as much about forging relationships as it is about broadening experiences.

Smart typographical choices and a neutral palette complement dozens of color photographs. Chapters unfold in lucid descriptions that reveal everyday activities while avoiding idyllic portraits. The legacy of colonial brutality and Guatemala's civil war, which included genocide against the Ixil Maya, is not paved over. The text provides essential background for understanding sites of former violence; plazas and churches become more meaningful than mere architectural curiosities. The inclusion of multiple voices, from volunteers to Ixil Maya elders, further deepens the account of a people determined to recover. Highlights include an interview with a teacher of Ixil Maya language and culture, as well as glimpses of a coffee cooperative, among other projects. This rich guidebook is an invaluable introduction to one of Guatemala's lesser-known treasures.

Karen Rigby