

Ancient Antigua

◆ BY MAY F. McELRAVY ◆

FOUNTAINS and flowers, ancient ruins, market-bound Indians in distinctive costumes, tranquility and crystal-clear air give Antigua, a gem-like city in the Guatemala highlands, its rich patina.

In addition, there are hand-hewn *rejas* (wooden cages on deep-set windows) to fascinate you. Half-closed brass hands or shaggy lion knockers cling to carved doors weathered by wind and rain since the days when the Knights of St. James ruled Antigua.

Crests, bearing seventeenth century dates, designate some of the peach and pale green stucco houses which loll against each other along cobblestone streets.

Even if you only have a few days in this historic city, take time to

linger before an open portal and listen to the fountain trilling songs in one of the few restored, flower-filled patios.

You'll feel the symbolism created by the constant flow of clear water from the shapely breasts of the maiden figures on the Breast Fountain in the Plaza. Viewed through its mist from the double pillared arcade of the Governor's Palace, it seems to denote the sustenance of life, come earthquakes, floods or conquests.

As you admire the plaster lace on the façade of Santa Cabrini Church across the way, you ponder its resplendent past. A barefoot Indian woman pauses at the door to cover her head with her cotton *rebosa* before she enters. Against the sun-

drenched wall other Indian women, sitting on their feet, nurse babies while they wait for tourists.

What an array of unfamiliar fruits, breads and cakes appear when they uncover their baskets!

No doubt your guide, for sanitary reasons, will stay your urge to buy by selecting five or six brightly colored whole egg shells from a basket. When he breaks one on the black hair of the Wisconsin girl in your party, confetti showers out like sequins. "These are cascarones," he says. "The Indians do this on fiesta days. It's the way they express happiness."

ONE is not in Antigua long before he discovers that not much rubble has been removed since that fatal two minutes in 1773 when a second earthquake destroyed 30,000 of its large buildings.

Roofless churches, piles of debris, and barren patios not only token the violence of that shock but make it seem realistic. Some colonial ruins have been reconstructed by Ladinos (Spanish and Indian), others by Americans who find living in this legend-filled community not only easy but inexpensive and inspiring.

If you want to paint ruins while you are in Antigua, you can find your composition among forty fallen churches, convents and monasteries. But if it's a volcano you wish to put on canvas, you should climb the worn stone steps at the rear of the once magnificent San Francisco

Cathedral and let a crumbling arch frame wrinkled Antigua for you.

As you make your way back to these steps you'll find that a blue sky has replaced its famous inlaid, tortoise-shell dome. Where once gleamed the golden altars, long since carried on the backs of Indians to Guatemala City, empty recesses gather dust.

In chapel niches, headless, armless statues lean against torn walls. High overhead where time has loosened a keystone, a bird feeds its young while begrimed Ladino urchins emerge through an opening in the floor. "Penny, penny," they plead, showing that too generous Americans have passed here before.

One look down the dark hole discloses stone steps. The sound of children's voices lets you know that this once holy ground has become a gamin's playground.

If the wonders of destruction tire you, there are Maya arts and crafts, tied up with the origin of man on the Western Hemisphere to interest you. Thursday and Sunday are market days in Antigua, conducted by Indians who hold fast to the ways of their ancestors. In this market you will find the superior clay fruit and terra cotta figures used throughout the Republic in Christmas Nacimientos.

There are shops here filled with dye-fast, story-telling, handmade clothing for both men and women which you'll want to buy to take home.

And, one can spend hours watching the candlemaker turn his wooden wheel round and round above a vat of melted tallow so that wicks, hanging vertically on nails which are spaced around the wheel, can pick up tallow on each revolution.

Such things as tablecloths and yardage you should buy from the foot-loom weavers.

An open shed in a dirt courtyard, protected from the weather by a tile roof, is their factory. At the rear of the yard a man dips hanks of white cotton thread into pots of aniline dyes. When he gets true colors, he wrings out the excess dye and hangs the bunches on a line to dry. Close by, a small boy sits and winds finished thread by hand on spools for the loom.

Time seems to be the gift of the foot-loom weavers as, with skilled fingers, they set up a loom or lift the strands of the warp and thread in the woof.

Back and forth a shuttle moves rhythmically while below a pair of feet dance across wooden treadles. And, as the visitor watches, zigzag lines of mountains, waves of lakes, squat figures of domestic animals, families of Indians like the ones often seen trekking along dusty highland roads, parade across the cloth.

FOUR MILES beyond Antigua, at the end of a drive through lanes of coffee trees you come to the village of San Antonia Caliente where there is a stick loom in every house.

These hand weavers excel all others in the Republic. They welcome you with smiles and if you wish to take pictures they trot out to a *petate* — mat made of rushes — fold their legs under them as they sit down and take up a loom. One end is fastened to a tree. The other is hooked to a wide belt of woven rope or leather fastened around the waist.

Often a sleeping infant is tied in a carrying cloth on the weaver's back as she works. Stick weavers using silk thread make the colorful *huipiles* one sees. With motions as rapid as a hummingbird in motion, her fingers guide a thorn stick and woof thread in and out of the warp. Forward then back, she rocks her body to get the right tension, then beats firmness into the design with a flat stick, pointed at both ends and worn to polished smoothness. When the *huipile* is finished, it will be covered with flowers, birds and sunsets that look like fine embroidery.

Since all the streets have both names and pictorial design, it is easy to go about Antigua while your guide takes his daily siesta, instead of writing postal cards as he suggests you do.

You'll want to visit the reconstructed Poponoe house to which you'll be admitted by Maria, maid of long service. She'll let you in through a small door which is part of the wide carriage gate that is flush with the street. Your guide finds you there and takes you to Sebastian's, the potter.

There, the first person you see is a misshapen, barefoot pigmy Indian man sweeping a bougainvillia-draped dirt courtyard. Down goes his broom. He trots into an open shed and seizes a clumsy wooden bar attached to a huge vat filled with lumps of clay and water. Round and round he turns the heavy vat to show the tourists how slip is made.

"Gracias," he murmurs gratefully when you press some coins into his calloused hand and move on to watch Sebastian, who works under a crude shelter near his wood-burning kiln.

"Why do you spend your time turning out little bowls?" you have your guide ask him in Spanish, amazed that skill like his should be wasted on such trifles.

He shrugs his shoulder and replies: "I must make what sells in the market."

SUNDAY is a day to remember in Antigua.

It begins early with the clanging offertory of many church bells. You get up and stand at your window. Black-clad women, dark shawls drawn closely over their heads, move silently along the street on their way to mass.

"What a discordant clatter all those bells must make when the earth trembles here!" you think as

you dress and go out in the garden.

Behind its poinsettia-flanked walls, you forget you are in an ancient city veined with lava flows. You watch fingers of sunlight reach down and touch orchids growing on the boles of royal palms.

Tomas, a house boy, comes out and puts a gaudy macaw on his perch near a shower of bougainvillia. Another boy gathers geranium blossoms to decorate papaya melon for breakfast. And around a bower of Cup of Gold, the Coban Indian waitresses glide into view. What a picture they make in their white butterfly blouses belted into their ankle-length skirts with a wide, handwoven band. Two thick black braids of hair, intertwined with wide ribbons that end with their braids in huge butterfly bows, hang to their waists. Silver wedding chains gleam at their throats.

These lovely Coban girls, in bare feet, tapped the mahogany floor in the lounge last night to alluring marimba music played by Maderos di mi Tierra (Woods of the Land) players in the Mating Dance.

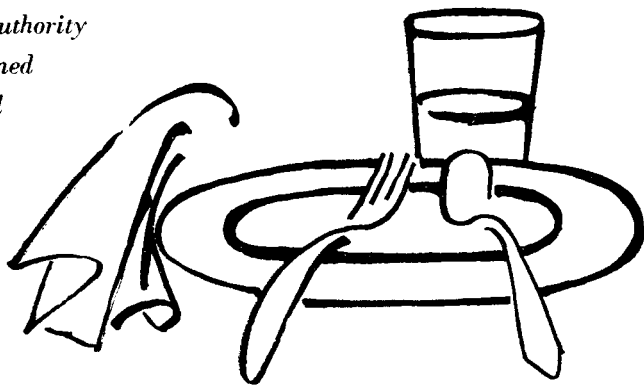
No wonder Antigua remains in the memory of the tourist as a gem whose facets are round-topped, lavender Jacaranda trees, flowers and perfume, friendly Indians and Ladinos, timeless notations and majestic volcanoes.



I Don't Like The **MODERN KITCHEN**

*A famous food authority
claims old-fashioned
kitchens produced
better cooks*

By
**HARRY
BOTSFORD**



THE modern kitchen has all of the charm of a well-kept funeral home. Every time I am trapped in one of these cute adjuncts to modern living, I become acutely aware of why the average American housewife produces such abominable food in a trifle less than a jiffy.

Antiseptic as a hospital operating room, the modern kitchen has about the same appeal to a downright cook who takes an honest pride in preparing victuals. The corners are rounded; the floor is tile; the walls are impervious to moisture; the lady of the house can stand in the middle of the compact premises, stretch forth an arm and reach everything she needs for what she considers a good meal.

The genius of American engineers

and manufacturers has been devoted to making life easy for the housewife, and nowhere is it more visible than here, for the premises are filled with dinguses designed to save time for the pampered soul, and to save her steps and the expenditure of a fraction of an ounce of energy. Muscular effort is something to be avoided at all costs. The kitchen has become a place where time is saved, not where good food is cooked.

Behold the pressure cooker, a gimmick in which it is possible to cook a lamb stew or a chicken in a matter of a few minutes. Cunningly conceived, it has probably ruined more food than Army cooks in a couple of wars. True, the steam pressure turns out food that is unquestionably tender. But the flavor