

Antigua

Friday, Feb. 21, 2020 by Rob Bowyer

Antigua Guatemala has been designated an UNESCO world heritage site. I can see why. It is very much what you'd expect to encounter in a 500 year old Colonial Spanish city. I gather that Antigua translates roughly as 'Old Guatemala' and the city has the ancient feeling of old bones. But in my pale green eyes everything is new and I am, as I stand upon black hewed cobblestone trying to avoid motorcycles and cars gawking at this new world around me, mesmerized by it's beauty. I think I have fallen in love with a place.

At some point on this working vacation though the love will tarnish and fade as love sometimes can. Warts and faults appear on our beloved and we see things differently. Or do we ultimately see things as they really are? Influenced by our own biases and personalities of course. But the initial flush of love is thrilling and so I jump right in. Like a crow or magpie I am sometimes infatuated by shiny new things and I am drawn to pick them up and keep them to myself.

Our hotel has a strong Spanish flavour as does everything in Antigua. The individual rooms of the Posada La Merced surround a lush garden courtyard which is open to a sky so blue it hurts the eyes. A little fountain trickles water. Plants familiar and unfamiliar hang everywhere from thick wooden rafters stained dark with time. There is a bench to sit and wonder. I am green with envy, not so much for this exact place but that there are places in this world that are warm year round, where one can have a courtyard open to the blue skies above, where the rains can fall in and wash away the dust of time, where one can nurture and tend their own private Garden of Eden and let the days slowly pass in the care of something that feeds and nurtures the soul.

Not to disparage upon myself and give the world the wrong impression but I do have my own Garden of Eden complete with my own Eve and a lovely community that supports and connects. I suppose the difference is my courtyard is seasonal. And it is not enclosed by walls of tile and stone but of trees and fields, and the tending of gardens in the warm summer months give way to the tending of banked fires that glow through the window of an airtight stove during the long snow crusted winters. It is not so bad, these changing seasons, it is just different, though right now I am jealous that a builder can build a house without considering the need to account for a biting cold that lasts for months and for the underlying earth that will heave with frost when winter sets in. I will, at this time, conveniently ignore the ever present threat that earthquakes could topple this city of dreams and turn stone to rubble at any moment for the sake of love at first sight.

Antigua has about forty five thousand people, similar to the size of Ontario's Belleville. The entire city is surrounded by mountains so I feel like I'm a tiny child sitting in the bottom of an immense bathtub as I look up at these towering peaks. The mountains are no so much mountains as they are volcanoes, most of them dormant, but some of them occasionally fart out smoke and lava.

The day is early so once we are settled in I am too excited to sit still. Probably the first thing that anyone does when arriving at a new place is explore. This I believe is to get one's bearings and to learn what is where. For Catherine it is textiles and museums. For me it is Espresso Cafe's and more Espresso Cafe's.

I won't bore you with a detailed account of walking through the city but I will say it is a fantastic city to walk and walk and walk some more. One caveat though, the sidewalks are narrow and uneven. The cobblestone roads are narrow and uneven. And, I'm fairly sure of this, pedestrians don't necessarily have the right of way. Caution to you who visit. Watch your step. Heads up. Eyes down.