This is Atitlan Lake in Guatemala. You have to cross the lake to get to our destination, San Juan. The lake is an ancient collapsed volcano and there are smaller volcanoes all around the perimeter of the lake.

This is our group above the town of San Juan. Behind us is the volcano of San Pedro. It rises to 10,000 feet and only the most adventurous visitors undertake the day-long climb. Most groups that visit San Juan eventually climb up to this cross to take a picture. That is why they have a little booth at the bottom of the trail, to charge admission to the tourists!

We worked in a small school called Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn). They asked us to provide a morning of music lessons and science experiments for the children. Timothy did a great job teaching basic rhythms and they had a lot of fun singing their do re mis.

Greg and Nazlah taught an interesting lesson about air pressure and the pressure under the earth that causes volcanoes. They used three experiments and various examples to demonstrate how pressure works. The students have very little exposure to science experiments, so it was a very interesting class for them.
They asked us to paint the wall that surrounds the school playground using their school colors. Helping them with this sort of labor frees up the staff of the school to focus on education rather than maintenance.

We learned about ancient forms of weaving that are still used by the Mayan people. The women make beautiful fabrics that are made into every sort of product for tourists and for export. In these pictures Nazlah is learning to use the backstrap loom and Jackie is learning how to pull thread from a handful of cotton.

We learned about how coffee is grown, picked, processed and packaged for sale. Most of the families in San Juan have someone working in the coffee fields. Coffee is planted underneath all of the forested area around the town and on every hillside. The machine above is what separates the coffee bean from the red fruit. The white coffee beans are then dried and roasted.
Guatemala is filled with children! Half the people in Guatemala are under the age of 21.

We did all sorts of activities with the kids such as making balloon animals, sewing hair bows, jumping rope, and playing on the playground.

We were invited to the wedding of Gloria, our cook for the week. She was so excited to have us present at the ceremony. The day before, we helped to wash the banana leaves that would serve as the wraps for the tamales. After the wedding, a reception was held at Gloria’s home. She served the tamales and Pepian, a traditional dish of chicken in a dark red gravy - delicious!

The Catholic wedding was very similar to what you would expect in the US. In this picture, you can see the traditional hand-woven clothing worn by the indigenous Mayan people.

One cool thing that happened during the ceremony was the arrival of the hummingbird that was eating from all of the flower arrangements in the church.
Above the town of San Juan is this oddly shaped ridge that has the very obvious resemblance to a human nose. The Mayans have referred to this peak as “the nose” for hundreds of years. If you are an ambitious climber, you can get to the peak in about 3 hours. Half of our group climbed to the top. The picture below shows the view from the nose.

On our day of departure we took this picture at our hotel, Estrella Del Lago (Star of the Lake). It has been under construction for at least the past 15 years! It is very basic, has great views, and costs $4 per night.

On our way back to Guatemala City we stopped at Iximche, an ancient Mayan ruin from the late post-classic period (1200-1539). We learned about the Mayan families that ruled the region, their various temples of the sun, moon and wind, and their extensive use of symbolic numbers.