

GUATEMALA ON FILM

Here are five commercially available films to give a sense of Guatemalan history and culture.

Encanto, a 2021 film from Disney, can give children a sense of Latin American culture. A reviewer writes, *"As a component of many Latin American books, magic realism has been a key component of the Latin literary writing style since the 20th century. The genre depicts the real world with added ethereal touches of magia and fantasía. Much like Márquez's books, the film draws upon this literary tool to paint a picture so vivid you can't look away. 'Magical realism, an inspiration for our film, is tied to real emotions, real events and it's thoughtful and layered,' said director Byron Howard in a press release. 'It's not just an easy answer to your problems, it's actually a reflection of the experiences you have every day whether you're enjoying success or struggling.' ... The film goes beyond the individual magical powers of each character and emphasizes that their powers are meant to serve the community around them. The movie also made sure to show off the incredible cultural diversity within Colombia and Latin America's population which is filled with people hailing from Indigenous, African and European backgrounds.'* [People](#)

These next two are documentaries.

La Camioneta, a 2012 film, is available on Amazon Prime Video. Suitable for all ages—except for a small amount of cussing. A low-key story. A reviewer writes, *"... 'La Camioneta' boasts an odd, not entirely promising premise, entirely concerned as it is with tracking a decommissioned American school bus from the auction floor to its refurbishment as a Guatemalan public-transport vehicle... the film wrings an almost bizarre amount of political, humanistic and spiritual substance out of this limited frame... (the filmmaker) seems to realize how much more powerfully minor epiphanies can register when they aren't spelled out, and appropriately, the film contains no narration or explanatory onscreen text. It simply tells the story of the bus and those whose lives it crosses, leaving all exegesis up to the viewer."* [Variety](#)

Rigoberta Menchu, Daughter of the Maya, a 2016 film, is available from Amazon Prime. It doesn't pretty up the story any. A reviewer writes, *"The film is the story of Rigoberta Menchu, a poor girl born in a remote mountainous region of Guatemala torn apart by civil war and her determination to gain justice for her people. ... Rigoberta Menchu: Daughter of the Maya tells an intelligent and involving story about a woman who is likely one of the lesser known Nobel Peace Prize recipients. Both tragic and triumphant, Rigoberta Menchu: Daughter of the Maya... doesn't hesitate to tell the darkest aspects of the story yet also balances that with the hope and inspiration planted by Menchu. In most ways, the film is a rather straightforward documentary weaving together interviews, archival footage,*

clips and informational pieces. ... Menchu's story largely takes place during the Guatemalan civil war. Her entire family brutally slaughtered, she somehow survived an attack in her home village when the vast majority were killed. Working with a church organization, she turned her tragedy into a 10-year exile raising support for her people while staying away from Guatemala. She educated the UN about the atrocities that had occurred. The end results of her work are astounding, a more than worthy Nobel Peace Prize recipient whose story deserves to share the limelight with the prize's more visible recipients." [The Independent Critic](#)

These next two films express the destructive experiences of war and genocide by situating them in narrative. Each of them is good story, not easy, but worth your time.

La Llorona, a 2019 Guatemalan horror film, is available on Amazon Prime. In Latin America, horror films can be a form of social and historical critique. This isn't the kind of horror film with rains of maggots and zombies emerging from closets — the horror here lies in remembering and re-experiencing events from the civil war. A reviewer writes, “*La Llorona*” is filled with bewitching imagery and tension, even if it’s less full of surprises and jump scares than other horror movies. Bustamante uses the old haunted tale not to scare us, but to force his audience to reflect on the ways they are complicit in oppression. We may not have committed grave crimes like the general, but each of the other family members represents a varying degree of complicity, from Carmen’s outright bigotry to Sara’s insensitive questions. While racial and class tensions have been a common theme in many Latin American movies... Bustamante’s thriller couches a harsher critique of the treatment of indigenous people and how those in power view them. [RogerEbert.com](#)

Nuestras Madres [Our Mothers] is available on HBO Max with English or Spanish subtitles; look for a toggle between the two when you select the movie. Verbal descriptions of rape and murder. A reviewer writes, “Winner of the *Caméra d'Or* (Cannes Film Festival, 2019) this beautifully rendered drama weaves a tale taking us from the dark past to a personal search for the truth. Set in 2018 Guatemala, we meet Ernesto, a young forensic anthropologist tasked with identifying missing victims of the country’s 36-year civil war. As witnesses of the genocide of over 200,000 indigenous people, the Mayan women of Guatemala act as a bridge between the past and present through their memories and become essential voices in the fight for justice in a country struggling with how to provide accountability. While documenting the account of an elder Mayan woman searching for the remains of her husband, Ernesto believes he might have found a lead that will guide him to his own father, a guerrillero who went missing during the war.” [Human Rights Watch](#)

