

About Asociación Maya Weaving Cooperative

We have been working with Asociación Maya, a cooperative of 180 backstrap loom weavers in five rural communities in the highlands of Sololá, Guatemala, for 20 years. The weavers are Maya women widowed by the genocide, and their daughters. The weavers work at home. Twenty full-time employees of the co-op work at the co-op's workshop in the city of Sololá, where they wind skeins of yarn, warp, do quality control, sew and administer the co-op. The co-op sells their weavings to buyers in North and South America and Europe, and is always looking for new customers. The weavers earn four to six times more weaving for the co-op than weaving for the local market, thus allowing them to have money for food and to send their children to school. Many have gained leadership skills by serving on the co-op's owner-elected board of directors. Backstrap loom weaving is the traditional labor-intensive form of weaving for Maya women in Guatemala and is used to create their traditional hand-woven and -embroidered blouses (*huipiles*). Having a well-paying market for backstrap-woven weavings helps keep this important cultural tradition alive.

Skeins of bamboo thread made from organically-grown bamboo fiber in China* are hand-dyed in four to six colors, in small batches. All these colors appear in the fringes and in a unique jaspe pattern throughout the scarf. (Each scarf is unique!) The yarn for each scarf is then warped on a warping board. Warps and skeins for wefts are transported to the villages where the weavers live and are distributed by board members. The weaver puts the warp on a backstrap loom, attaches one end of the loom to a tree or their house, and the other to a strap going around her waist. She hand-weaves the scarf, stopping from time to time to cook, care for her children, do other work or relax. She then hand-knots the fringes. A member of the board of directors from that community picks up the weavings and takes them to the main workshop, where the scarf is hand-washed and fabric softener added during the rinse. The weaving then dries in the sun. The fringes are then finished, full quality control is done, and the scarf is packed to send to A Thread of Hope Guatemalan Fair Trade!

* Bamboo thread is not manufactured in Guatemala. For that matter, virtually no thread is manufactured in Guatemala. The vast majority of cotton thread also comes from far away—India. (The most arable land in Guatemala is used for export crops such as pineapples, bananas, and African palm oil for biofuels. Severe maldistribution of arable land in Guatemala is a significant problem, with one impact being the 4th highest rate of child malnutrition in the world.)

Product Care

Hand wash in cold water with mild soap such as shampoo, and rinse with fabric softener. Hang to dry. Iron as needed, using rayon setting. If your scarf is open-weave, be careful not to get the tip of the iron caught in the weaving.

See more of the co-op's products, including scarves, shawls, ponchos, handbags, wallets, glasses cases and more, at athreadofhope.coop!

Fair Trade Principles:

Create Opportunities for Disadvantaged Producers • Long-term Transparent and Accountable Relationships • Capacity Building • Promote Fair Trade • Pay Promptly and Fairly • Support Safe Working Conditions • Gender Equity, Freedom of Association, No Discrimination • Ensure Children's Rights • Cultivate Environmental Stewardship • Respect Cultural Identity



Lake Atitlan, surrounded by three volcanos, visible from Asociación Maya and its communities.



Maria warps a scarf on a warping board. The warp is the vertical threads.



The skeins of bamboo yarn are hand-dyed in small batches using AZO-free dye approved by Europe.



The weaver works at home on her backstrap loom.



The yarn is hung to dry before being warped.



Some co-op members at an annual meeting of the co-op.