

Ollie Booker has traveled to the Mayan heartland in Guatemala for over 30 years. She first visited Guatemala in 1988 after completing volunteer work with a medical team in Honduras. Once Ollie arrived in the Guatemala Highlands she was totally captivated with the beauty of the Mayan handcraft, particularly the intricately embroidered *huipiles* (blouses) worn with such style by the Mayan women.

The *huipil* is considered an everyday wear garment with the more intricate, decorative versions reserved for ceremonial events. Each *huipil* is one-of-a-kind with the design and color palette marking the weaver's home place. Typically woven on a back-strap loom a *huipil* may take months to complete. Thus began Ollie's lasting love affair with Guatemala. Now each year is a special pilgrimage for Ollie, an opportunity to deepen her knowledge of the Maya culture while expanding her network of artisan contacts across the region.



In San Juan La Laguna, on Lake Atitlán, Ollie visits the many weaving cooperatives that line the main street above the harbor. San Juan is known for its exceptional weavers. From scarfs and shawls in a rainbow of colors, to breathtaking blankets and bedspreads in vibrant hues in natural dyes, handwork abounds for the discriminating eye of Ollie Booker who insists on premium quality for her customers.



In Santa Catarina Palopó, another lakeside village, Ollie conducts business with the Ajpuz family. Magdalena, the matriarch of the family, weaves finely detailed belts and priest stoles. She also repurposes *huipil* fabrics for use as purses. Magdalena's son, Juan, a talented artist, paints custom greeting cards with a Mayan flair. He also helps Ollie with critical liaison work including shipping arrangements to the United States. Ollie met Magdalena's other son, Jesus, when he was still a student in Panajachel selling greeting cards on the street for extra family income. Jesus, fluent in English, now accompanies Ollie and her assistants to translate in areas where only the local Maya dialect is spoken.



In Panajachel, thanks to her long standing business with a fabric vendor, Ollie has access to the family's 'private stash' in Chichicastengo where stacks of rainbow colored fabrics tower to the ceiling. Once inside the storeroom Louisa risks the climb to the top to pull their best-of-the-best for Ollie to consider.



To the north, in the mountain communities of Nebaj and Chujul, by early morning the market places come alive with mothers and daughters arm and arm dressed in their colorful crimson wraps (*cortes*). Ollie now buys the special *cortes* material—light-weight, finely woven, soft and silky—from a local family in Nebaj. With its amazing feel and drape, Ollie uses the fabric for many of her new creations. Oftentimes, in Nebaj and Chajul, Ollie is also invited to private homes, away from the frenzy of the local markets, to look at handmade *huipiles*.

Juan Raxtun, a master tailor based in Panajachel, was one of the first artisans Ollie encountered on her buying trips to Guatemala. Now each year at the end of her stay, Ollie and her helpers arrive at Juan's tailor shop loaded with the fabrics she has hand selected in marketplaces across the region.

Ollie's all season unisex tunic shirts, available on this website, are just one example of her long standing collaboration with Juan. These premium quality cotton shirts are made from the same fabrics used by the Maya women for their wraps (*cortes*).

Now with the added skills of Ciriaco, Juan's nephew, a master tailor who is also based in Panajachel, Ollie's designer huipil jackets have now been elevated to a new level.



With his strong sense of design Ciriaco transforms a *huipil* into a one-of-a-kind jacket playing with the pattern, then adding his own novel embellishments, like the Maya women's headwrap materials he repurposes for use as trim pieces.



All of the items sold by Ollie's Gifts and Imports are handmade by her many artisan friends in Guatemala. If you see an item that you **MUST** have, but it is not in your size, or you would like to alter it a bit, please let us know.

Most of the items sold here on Ollie's website are unique, custom pieces. Although we cannot guarantee that any particular item can be duplicated exactly, Ollie can arrange for a very similar item to be made to your specifications.

When you experience one of Ollie's products firsthand expect to be transformed. The textures and colors alone will utterly amaze you. Then, as with many of her loyal customers, you too will understand while Ollie has returned to the land of the Maya year after year.

