



2017 Mission Trip Planning Guide

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR YOUR TRIP!

SHANNON@MISSIONGUATEMALA.COM



SCHEDULING YOUR TRIP

The best way to contact us to schedule your trip is through email. You can send an email to shannon@missionguatemala.com or info@missionguatemala.com.

Please be sure to include a telephone number when you correspond with us!

HOW YOU WILL COMMUNICATE WITH US

After your team is scheduled, you will communicate with us through Basecamp. Basecamp is a web-based project management tool that allows key staff people in our organization to know what is going on with your trip. Within Basecamp you will have a special place to discuss your trip with our staff, a checklist of items you need to complete with deadlines, and important documents. With over 40 groups a year visiting Mission Guatemala, this helps us ensure your trip is as smooth as possible. There is a video on our website that explains how easy it is to use Basecamp.

PAYMENT OF TEAM FEES

For payment of team fees, **PLEASE WAIT TO BE INVOICED**. Please send all payments to:

Mission Guatemala
PO Box 1073
Princeton, IN 47670

This address will also be on your invoice along with a remittance slip. The invoice/remittance slip process helps us to be certain your payment is properly accounted for in our system.

TEAM COSTS

Team costs are based on the ideal team size of 15-20 people. Please contact us if you have a small or very large group

Construction/Work Teams

For teams arriving after January 1, 2016 the cost per person is \$655 for in country costs PLUS a \$2,000 or more per team donation towards your construction project for materials and Mission Guatemala operations.

For teams arriving after January 1, 2018 the cost per person is \$675 for in country costs PLUS \$2,000 or more per team donation towards your construction project for materials and Mission Guatemala operations.

We have found that we can buy enough construction materials for \$2,000 that will keep most teams busy for a week. This is based on a typical Saturday arrival with

Sunday departure (9 days and 8 nights in Guatemala). If you plan on having a Bible School element as part of your project, you should plan on bringing all needed items.

Medical Teams

Please contact us about team costs and requirements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN TEAM COSTS?

Everything you will need during your stay in Guatemala is covered in your in country cost.

- All advance coordination and planning for your arrival
- A host to be with you during your entire stay
- Pick up at the airport
- Transportation to Panajachel
- 8 nights lodging (double or triple occupancy) at our Mission House (the River House)
- Most meals (meals begin with dinner on arrival day)
- All taxes, tips and gratuities
- Snacks and purified water for on the worksite
- Transportation to and from your worksite
- Guatemalan construction workers to help construct Guatemalan-style
- Any translators that will be needed

AIR TRAVEL TO AND FROM GUATEMALA IS NOT INCLUDED. Team members will be responsible for their incidental expenses.

AIR TRAVEL HELP

We have had a number of teams tell us that they have used and been extremely pleased with using Educational Opportunities *Mission Travel Department* for booking their airfare. If you would like to consider using Educational Opportunities you can visit their website at <http://www.eo.travelwithus.com/find-a-trip/missions> or call them at 1-800-235-8795.

POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL COSTS

There will be a **\$50 per person charge for an overnight at a safe hotel** in Guatemala City and meals on your own if you have a late arrival or early departure. Try to schedule your flights to arrive before 3:00 pm and to depart after 11:00 a.m. to avoid this cost. **\$125 extra van transport to airport.** This would be the charge for any van trips to the airport for people not arriving or leaving with the rest of the team.

SCHEDULING YOUR FLIGHT ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Please try to schedule your flight arrival before 3:00 p.m. and your departure for after 11:00 a.m. The reason for this is the distance from the airport to the town of Panajachel which is where you will be staying. Depending on traffic, this can easily be a 3 to 4-hour drive. If you have a late in the day arrival or early morning departure, we must have you spend the night in Guatemala City. There is an additional charge for this and you will be responsible for your own meals.

YOU MUST TRAVEL TO GUATEMALA AS A GROUP/TEAM!

You should travel together as a group. People arriving on different flights have a much greater potential for complications. Mission Guatemala is not equipped to make multiple airport trips. Unless otherwise arranged and agreed upon, teams will arrive and depart at the same time. Additional airport pick ups and drop offs will have an additional fee. This must be arranged well in advance of your travel.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Because we must make deposits and order supplies, we ask that your total payment be made at least 15 days before you travel. **However, please do not make any payments until your group has been invoiced!**

You will be emailed an invoice. All payments should be sent to:

Mission Guatemala
PO Box 1073
Princeton, IN 47670

Please send each payment in one check instead of a check from each team member.

WHEN TO COME

Guatemala is known as the land of eternal spring. That means, for the most part, the weather is spring-like year round. The average high temperature is 77 degrees and the average low is 55 degrees.

Guatemala really has two seasons... dry and rainy. Generally speaking, Guatemala has a dry period without rain from October through April. May to September tends to be the rainy season.

"Rainy season" does not mean, however, that it rains all day long. On a typical day, there is sunshine in the morning before the clouds begin to appear in the afternoon

and it rains for an hour or two. The rain is often followed by a few more hours of sunshine and during the night more rain is likely.

It does happen occasionally that it rains all day long, but that is actually quite rare. On the other hand, it also happens that it does not rain at all for two or three days.

TYPICAL ITINERARY

This itinerary may need to be adjusted depending on your flight arrival and departure times or for a variety of other reasons. This is just an example of a typical week.

Saturday

- Arrive at Aurora Airport in Guatemala City and travel to Panajachel (This is a 3 hour journey)
- Check in at The River House and relax from the day's travel or explore Panajachel on your own
- Dinner

Sunday

- Breakfast together
- Morning devotions led by a group member
- A fun activity to get to know the culture
- Dinner together

Monday to Friday

- Breakfast together
- Morning devotions led by a group member
- Travel to work site with lunch at work site
- Leave worksite for the River House (typically between 4 pm and 5 pm)
- Dinner together
- Evenings are on your own. We can *try* to arrange some special programs if you like.

Saturday

- This is a free day. We will plan a fun activity for your last full day in country.
- Evening gathering with closing reflection on the week.

Sunday

Travel to Aurora Airport in Guatemala City for departure. You should arrive at the airport at least 2 ½ hours before your departure.

PREPARING FOR A TRIP TO GUATEMALA

Conditions are fairly primitive, and even simple things can be difficult and frustrating. Be prepared to be flexible! Patience is also a virtue here.

Lodging will be at our mission house in Panajachel, which we call The River House. Purified drinking water will be provided for the team at The River House and work sites.

The highlands of Guatemala are stunningly beautiful, and the weather is usually cool and sunny year-round in the Highlands. Be prepared for heat and rain, however. The people of Guatemala are very friendly and welcoming, but we must be careful to observe their cultural boundaries.

Take some time to familiarize yourself with some of the cultural and social differences in rural Guatemala.

IMMUNIZATIONS

You should check with your doctor to see what he or she recommends. You can also consult the Center for Disease Control travel website. Currently it is at this url: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/guatemala>

As of the publishing of this Mission Trip Planning Guide, the CDC recommends:

Routine Vaccines - Make sure you are up-to-date on routine vaccines before every trip. These vaccines include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot.

Hepatitis A - CDC recommends this vaccine because you can get hepatitis A through contaminated food or water in Guatemala, regardless of where you are eating or staying.

Typhoid - You can get typhoid through contaminated food or water in Guatemala. CDC recommends this vaccine for most travelers, especially if you are staying with friends or relatives, visiting smaller cities or rural areas, or if you are an adventurous eater.

Malaria is not a concern since you will be at an altitude over 5,000 feet.

OTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Make sure you have a valid passport (**one that won't expire within 6 months**).

Pack enough in your carry-on so you can survive a few days without your checked luggage in case you arrive but your luggage does not (see important restrictions).

Learn a little Spanish! It makes the trip a lot more fun.

PACKING LIST

There is a suggested packing list at the end of the Mission Trip Planning Guide that you can photocopy and give to your team.

We suggest packing enough for a week. It is difficult to do laundry especially in the rainy season. Clothes dryers are not available.

Packing Guidelines

- Store nothing of value in the external pockets of your luggage. Bury small, portable valuables deep in the luggage (i.e., your Leatherman multi-tool, etc.) so that opportunistic baggage handlers cannot easily extract them.
- Weigh your luggage before leaving home -- each piece may not exceed 50 pounds. The airlines are getting stricter about this, and may make you repack your bag in front of 50 impatient strangers if you exceed the limit.
- Pack enough in your carry-on so that you can survive for a night without your checked luggage. This strategy pays off when checked luggage is lost by the airline.
- Remember the 3-1-1 rule for your Carry-On luggage:
 - ✓ Each bottle containing liquid must be three ounces or less.
 - ✓ All bottles containing liquid must be able to fit in one quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag.
 - ✓ Each passenger is allowed one bag; it must be removed from the carry-on and placed separately on the security conveyor.
 - ✓ There are no restrictions on liquids in your checked luggage, so if in doubt, pack them there. See the TSA website for more details on current carry-on restrictions.
- Liquids bought in the Duty-Free shops in the Guatemala City airport can be brought carried-on to the flight departing that airport. When you pick up your checked luggage at your first stop in the U.S. (i.e., Dallas, Houston, Atlanta) you will need to pack any liquids in your checked luggage before clearing customs. You will not be allowed to carry on any liquids of more than 3 ounces on the subsequent flight.

Packing Hint!

We have not had any issues with our teams over the past several years. However, Guatemala customs can be difficult with teams bringing items for donation into the country. We would like to recommend that teams mix donation items in with their personal clothes and belongings and then separate them once they arrive in Guatemala. This will facilitate getting through customs.

LAUNDRY

Please plan on packing enough clothes for the week to avoid doing laundry. There is generally not enough free time during the week to do a load of laundry. Also, dryers are usually not available like they are in the USA. Getting clothes dried during rainy season is difficult. Most people can easily pack enough clothes for the week.

ENTERING GUATEMALA /IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS

Entering Guatemala is fairly easy. You will be issued a combination Immigration/Customs form on the plane. (Please see an example of this form in the back of this guide) Make sure you complete this form on the plane before landing. This means you will need a pen on the plane to do this. Please write "Panajachel, Sololá" as your destination address. For the purpose of your travel, please check the box for "Tourism".

This is a two-part form. The first part will be used for clearing immigration. This is your first stop after landing where they will scan your passport and take the top portion of your completed form. They will give you back the bottom portion of the form to be used in clearing Guatemala customs.

After clearing immigration, you will enter the area where you can claim your luggage. **It is not unusual for airline security to ask to see your baggage claim sticker to make sure it matches the checked bag tag on your luggage.** When you check your luggage in the United States with your airline, make sure you keep your luggage claim tag in a safe place. This will also help in locating your luggage should it be delayed by the airline.

After you have left the baggage claim area you will clear customs. You will need the second part of your form for this. Present it to the customs agent. The agent may designate that you go to a line to have your baggage x-rayed or they may point you towards the exit. This is usually a fast and easy process. It isn't common, but sometimes, overzealous customs agents will spot humanitarian aid groups and stop them and try to assess a tax on items they are bringing into the country.

We suggest:

- Packing your suitcases in the manner suggested above in the packing hint.
- Your group not travel wearing team t-shirts to identify you as a group.
- Do not try to have your group go through customs at the same time but mix up with other people when going through customs.
- You can meet up with the rest of your group outside the airport building in the barricaded area where our representative will be waiting for you.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON PASSPORTS

If you don't have a valid passport, you will need to get started immediately on applying for one. Passport processing takes 10 to 12 weeks. We recommend getting your passport at least 6 months prior to your trip, though, to minimize possible complications. Because you will be issued a 90-day visa when you enter the country, it is important that your passport not expire during that time. The Guatemala immigration agent could refuse to issue you the visa to enter the country if your passport expires within those 90 days. Make sure your passport is good for at least 6 months after your trip to Guatemala.

COMMUNICATING BACK HOME

The easiest way to communicate to family and friends back in the United States is over the Internet. The River House has Wi-Fi service available. You will be able to connect to it and send email or social media messages back to the United States. Please keep in mind that Internet in Guatemala is generally slow and large photos may not upload very easily.

You can check with your cellphone carrier to see if they offer a short-term plan for travel abroad.

INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

As a team leader, you will need to be responsible for making sure everyone on your team has proper insurance coverage. Through our relationship with the North Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church Volunteers in Mission office, you can acquire accident and medical insurance for each member of your team. Currently, this is a minimal additional cost per person.

Complete information can be found here: <http://umvimncj.org/NCJVIM/Forms.html>

For more information, contact Tammy Kuntz at umvimncj.coor@gmail.com

CULTURAL ISSUES

STANDARD OF LIVING The standard of living in Guatemala is among the lowest in Central America and even perhaps the Western Hemisphere. At least 60% of the country survives on less than \$2 per day. Unemployment is high, and poor nutrition and health care is common.

DRESS Dressing inappropriately is one of the easiest ways to offend our hosts. The people of Guatemala are very conservative in dress. You will notice that no one in rural Guatemala wears shorts unless they are playing in a soccer game. We need to dress and act accordingly.

Avoid tight and exposing clothing, and clothes that categorizes you as tourists (shorts, loud shirts, fanny packs, etc.). Loose, comfortable clothing works well, along with some sturdy shoes. As well, conspicuous displays of wealth will gain you unwanted attention. Dress down, and leave expensive watches and jewelry at home.

PHOTOGRAPHY The colorful dress of the indigenous Maya may tempt you to photograph them, but you should always ask first. Adults are especially sensitive to being photographed. At the work site and the orphanage almost everyone will be happy to be photographed, especially the children. Save your film for them!

At the same time, remember that the trip is not a photo safari but a chance to interact closely with new friends. Be sure to put away the camera occasionally so that you can be completely present.

Unless someone asks you to take their photo, ask them before doing so!

CHILDREN It is not recommended to photograph or interact closely with children outside the work site. This has recently caused problems between tour groups and local populations. Per the U.S. State Department: "Avoid close contact with children, including taking their photographs, in rural areas with predominantly indigenous populations. Such contact can be viewed with deep alarm, and may provoke panic and violence."

FOOD & WATER The staple diet in the highlands consists of beans, rice, and corn tortillas. The largest meal of the day is lunch, which is usually served hot. Dinner is often eaten late in the evening.

At The River House we will eat food that is substantially better than that of the local population. Still, portions may be smaller than what you are used to, so you may want to bring some snacks. Food at The River House is prepared sanitarly, and only purified water is used.

Never eat unpackaged food from street vendors.

Never drink tap water. Any drinking water that does not come out of a sealed bottle should be viewed with suspicion. When ordering in restaurants, specify "agua pura" for purified water, and it should be delivered in an unopened bottle. Don't drink beverages with ice unless you know the water used is purified. Don't brush your teeth with tap water. The Center for Disease Control has more resources on this subject.

SANITATION Always wash your hands before eating. If water is not available, you should use alcohol-based wipes or antibacterial gel. This is especially important after participating in Bible School activities with small children!

You should never put toilet paper into any toilet in Guatemala. Use the trashcan next to the toilet to deposit toilet paper or any other things that you need to dispose of.

BEHAVIOR Overall, we are striving to present a responsible and caring image as representatives of the Christian Church in America. To that end, we must do our best to live according to the local standards of conduct.

In the rural areas of Guatemala drinking in moderation is not the norm; either one drinks to excess or not at all. Tobacco use is virtually unknown in the rural areas, and most local evangelical churches prohibit smoking. It is important for us as Christian representatives of the United States to set an appropriate example. For these reasons alcoholic beverages and tobacco may not be used during the working portion of the trip. We should also refrain from casual conversation about drugs and alcohol.

Team members should not use profanity, as it may be the only English our Guatemalan hosts may be familiar with. They will not be impressed.

In Guatemala, as elsewhere, "please" and "thank you" ("por favor" and "gracias") go a long way. A smile helps as well.

We must remember to show respect at all times. Be sure not to make jokes at the expense of the local food, accommodations, practices, or people.

SAFETY Rural Guatemala is a fairly safe place as long as commonsense precautions are observed:

- Travel during daylight hours in groups.
- Be extremely alert when crossing streets on foot. Drivers will not slow down for a careless pedestrian.

- Watch your luggage closely, especially in Guatemala City and Antigua. Fanny packs are a favorite target of thieves, and are not recommended.
- Avoid wearing jewelry and expensive-looking watches.
- Don't display large amounts of cash in the open.
- In the marketplaces, pickpockets are common and quite good. Keep your wallet close to the body, under your clothes. As a rule, don't bring anything into the market you would mind losing.

ELECTRICITY Guatemala is on the same current as the U.S., and they use the same 2-prong outlets we do. 3-prong outlets are not generally available, however. If your device has a 3-prong cord, you should bring a simple 3-prong to 2-prong adaptor. Otherwise you'll be forced to rip off the ground prong when you get to Guatemala!

MONEY The local currency in Guatemala is the quetzal (pronounced "ket-zall"). The exchange rate is roughly \$1 to 7.5 quetzales. We will arrange for you a place to exchange money where you will get a fair rate. There are ATMs in Panajachel, which are fairly dependable as well. Let your bank know you are traveling to Guatemala and you plan on using the ATM so your card will not be blocked by the Fraud Department at your bank. Don't count on being able to use a credit card to make purchases.

Generally, U.S. currency is quicker and easier to exchange than traveler's cheques. Dollar bills can be used as tips in Panajachel in lieu of quetzales. If you do bring U.S. currency, make sure that there absolutely no tears in the bills and no extraneous marks. A torn bill is almost impossible to exchange in Guatemala.

GIFTS TO LOCALS Any giving must be done with extreme care. Please do not give away anything (i.e., clothing, shoes, watches, etc.) to individuals, even if they request them. When bringing items to Guatemala specifically for donation, make sure they are useful and in excellent condition. If in doubt, ask our staff.

Please do not make promises to local people concerning your return to Guatemala, help for their families, or anything else. They remember these promises, and notice if they are not fulfilled. Our goal is to build trust, and even well intentioned promises can detract from that when broken.

STAFF TIPPING/GIFT GIVING Many teams want to leave gratuities for the staff they see during the week. While this is a nice gesture, it can end up causing a variety of problems for Mission Guatemala. If you desire to leave a monetary gift for our staff, we request that you leave the gratuity with Dave Burns on our staff and he will distribute the gift to all of our staff. There are many people you never meet who

work behind the scenes to make sure your week runs smoothly. We believe it is fair to everyone involved to share your gift with them proportionate to their involvement.

ONE LAST BUT IMPORTANT THING... Although medical help, construction, and Bible school are the tangible goals of the trip, the really crucial tasks are interacting with the local people, sharing our faith as well as our resources. As Americans we tend to get single-mindedly focused on the work. Remember to step back and slow down. Life has a different pace in Guatemala.

DOS AND DON'TS FOR MISSIONERS¹

DO:

- Observe local customs about shaking hands (sometimes it is done on entering and on leaving), kissing on one or both cheeks (women: giving "abrazos" (hugs)). If in doubt, ask your host to explain what is proper.
- Eat what is offered, and do not ask or hint for anything not offered. (Luke 10:8)
- In most cultures, you should take time for polite conversation before talking "business."
- If any gift giving is done, do it discreetly and not ostentatiously. Ask your host what to do about giving to beggars, and follow that advice.
- Be aware that in some cultures people maintain a closer distance when engaged in conversation than we North Americans do.
- Be aware that in some countries, toilet paper may not be put in the toilet but must be put in the wastebasket. Ask if you are not sure. A stopped-up toilet is very unpleasant to deal with.
- Learn as much of the local language as you can, and use it every chance you get.
- Be prepared for worship services that are very different from those you are accustomed to -- either more formal or much less formal, even charismatic/Pentecostal.
- Be prepared to give your personal testimony, to pray aloud, and possibly to preach.
- Smile!

DON'T

- Don't take pictures of anything military unless your host says it's okay.
- Don't waste water. Use it sparingly for showering, bathing, laundry, etc. Don't waste food. Take what you want, eat what you take. If you are being served, it is permissible to say "just a little, please," or "no more, thank you." Don't eat raw vegetables or unpeeled fruit unless they have been washed in water treated with chlorine or iodine.
- Don't drink untreated water unless you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the water is safe for North Americans to drink (not just safe for people who live there all the time). Bottled water is available be potent enough to guard against giardia as well as common bacteria. Don't use ice, unless you know it is made with pure water.

¹ From the Mission Volunteers Program Area General Board of Global Ministries United Methodist Church

CODE OF ETHICS FOR VISITORS TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES²

- Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of your host country
- Be sensitively aware of the feelings of other people, preventing what might be offensive behavior on your part. This applies very much to photography.
- Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.
- Realize that often the people in the country you visit have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; this does not make them inferior, only different.
- Instead of looking for that "beach paradise," discover the enrichment of seeing a different way of life through other eyes.
- Acquaint yourself with local customs – people will be happy to help you.
- Instead of the Western practice of knowing all the answers, cultivate the habit of listening.
- Remember that you are only one of the thousands of tourists visiting this country and so do not expect special privileges.
- If you really want the experience to be "a home away from home," it is foolish to waste money on travelling.
- When you are shopping, remember that the "bargain" you obtain was only possible because of the low wages paid to the maker.
- Do not make promises to people in your host country, unless you are certain you can carry them through.
- Spend time reflecting on your daily experiences in an attempt to deepen your understanding. It has been said that what enriches you may rob and violate others.

BIBLE STUDY

If your team would like to have a Bible study to use, we have one available for download on our website. It is called *Preparing for the Journey*.

² From the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism

YOUR MISSION TRIP AND TAX DEDUCTIONS

The following information is from IRS Publication 526

Travel

Generally, you can claim a charitable contribution deduction for travel expenses necessarily incurred while you are away from home performing services for a charitable organization only **if there is no significant element of personal pleasure, recreation, or vacation in the travel**. This applies whether you pay the expenses directly or indirectly. You are paying the expenses indirectly if you make a payment to the charitable organization and the organization pays for your travel expenses.

The deduction for travel expenses will not be denied simply because you enjoy providing services to the charitable organization. Even if you enjoy the trip, you can take a charitable contribution deduction for your travel expenses if you are on duty in a genuine and substantial sense throughout the trip. However, if you have only nominal duties, or if for significant parts of the trip you do not have any duties, you cannot deduct your travel expenses.

Deductible Travel Expenses

These include:

- Air, rail, and bus transportation
- Out-of-pocket expenses for your car
- Taxi fares or other costs of transportation between the airport or station and your hotel
- Lodging costs
- Cost of meals

Because these travel expenses are not business-related, they are not subject to the same limits as business related expenses.

Mission Trips as a Tax Deduction

You should consult with your personal tax accountant. The following are best practices based on the information available, but not guaranteed as IRS requirements and allowances to be considered a tax deduction:

- Payments for mission trip expenses and/or contributions for material/supply needs for a mission trip should be made payable to a

church or non-profit 501(c) 3 organization.

- Donations for an individual, other than self, should be made payable to a church or non-profit 501(c) 3 organization.
- Receipts indicating general expenses (food, toiletries, medications, etc.) needed in association with a mission trip should be kept.
- **Any monies paid for mission trip expenses not paid to a church or non-profit 501(c) 3 organization should have a letter indicating participation.**