

2018

MISSION TRIP PLANNING GUIDE

EVERY THING YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR YOUR TRIP!

TEAMS@MISSIONGUATEMALA.COM

mission Guatemala

A letter from our Director



Hola, and greetings from Guatemala!

Since Mission Guatemala was founded in the fall of 2010, we have had the opportunity to welcome over 250 teams to share in our goal of "doing all the good we can" here in Guatemala! Thanks to these wonderful groups of volunteers, we have had the opportunity to construct bathrooms for under-resourced rural schools, as well as build classrooms, kitchens, playgrounds, basketball courts, multi-purpose buildings, and other facilities that serve the families and communities of the San Andrés Semetabaj and the surrounding areas.

In this Team Planning Guide, we have worked to include all the information you will need as you prepare and plan for a mission trip with us. And once you arrive in country, we will do our best to ensure that all logistics and support are taken care of, so that your team can focus on loving, serving, and building relationships with our brothers and sisters here in Guatemala.

If you have questions about any aspect of a mission trip with us, please do not hesitate to ask us. We look forward to having you be a part of Mission Guatemala's story!

Executive Director
Mission Guatemala

1. PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Choosing your week. You can see available dates and find one that works for your group at **missionguatemala.com/calendar**. To schedule and confirm a mission trip, please email us at **teams@missionguatemala.com**.

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

Keeping in touch. Once you've confirmed your dates with us via email, we will begin communicating with you through Basecamp. Basecamp is a simple online project management system that provides you with a place to plan and discuss your trip with our staff, a checklist of items with deadlines you will need to complete, as well as other important information. With over 40 groups a year serving with Mission Guatemala, using Basecamp helps us keep everything organized and ensures your trip is as smooth as possible.

There is a video on our website that shows how easy it is to use Basecamp! (missionguatemala.com/mission-trips/trip-resources)

Team cost. Cost per-person is $675 for in country costs PLUS a team donation of $2,000 or more towards your construction project. This team donation will help cover expenses for materials and Mission Guatemala operations over the entirety of the construction project.

PLEASE NOTE: Team costs are based on a typical Saturday arrival with Sunday departure (9 days and 8 nights in Guatemala), and an average team size of 10-20 people. Please let us know in advance if you will have a very small or very large group.

What's included? Everything you will need during your stay in Guatemala is covered as part of 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 and transportation to Panajachel
- 8 nights lodging (double or triple occupancy) at the River House (our mission house)
- All meals, beginning with dinner on arrival day (for teams with standard schedules)
- All taxes, tips and gratuities
- Transportation to and from your work site each day
- Guatemalan construction foremen to help oversee and instruct construction
- Translators for the week

Note: Airfare to and from Guatemala is not included

Payment. After your trip is confirmed, you will receive an invoice along with a remittance slip. Please mail this slip along with your team payment to help us be certain your payment is properly accounted for in our system.

We ask that you send your full team payment in one check instead of a check from each team member, and that your total payment be made at least one month before you travel. Also, please do not send any payments before your group has been invoiced!

We know that unexpected changes to travel plans can occur, and when necessary, we can issue refunds for the per-person costs for team members who are unable to travel. However, in the case of cancellations made within 2 weeks of a team's travel date, there will be a $50 per-person charge.

Children's activities. If you would like to have a Vacation Bible School or other children's activities be a part of your week, please let us know beforehand. Though it may not always be possible, we will do our best to arrange this.

If we are able to organize these activities, we would ask that you plan on bringing all needed items.

2. PREPARING AND PACKING

Traveling to Guatemala. **You should plan to travel together as a group.** Since teams arriving on different flights have a much greater potential for complications, unless otherwise arranged and agreed upon in advance with us, teams should arrive and depart together. Multiple airport pick-ups and drop-offs will have an additional fee.

Please try to schedule your flight arrival in Guatemala before 3:00 p.m. and your departure after 11:00 a.m. Depending on traffic, the trip from the airport to the town of Panajachel, where the River House is located, can easily be a 3 to 4 hour drive, so, if you have a late afternoon arrival, or an early morning departure, you will need to spend a night in Guatemala City. There is an additional charge for this and you will be responsible for your own meals.

Possible additional costs.

- If you have a late arrival or early departure, there will be a **$50 per-person fee for an overnight stay at a quality hotel** in Guatemala City, and meals will be on your own.
- For a private shuttle to or from the airport for persons not arriving or leaving with the rest of the team, there will be a **$125 transportation fee.**

Note: We have had a number of teams tell us that they have found the travel agency Educational Opportunities helpful in booking their airfare. For more information, you can visit their website at **www.eo.travelwithus.com/find-a-trip/missions** or email them at **missions@travelwithus.com**

Bible Study. If your team would like to have a Bible study to use in preparation for your trip or during your week with us, we have two available for download on our website under "Team Resources".

- *Preparing for the Journey*, written by Reverend R. G. Lyons
- *Mission Guatemala In-Country Daily Devotional*, compiled by Rev. Rodney Frieden with contributions from the UMC clergy

Note: During your week with us, we don't prepare or organize devotions for your group, but instead leave those to the direction and planning of each team leader.

Packing guidelines.

- Do not store anything of value in the external pockets of your luggage. Pack small, portable valuables (i.e., your Leather-man multi-tool, etc.) deep in your luggage to limit the possibility of them being lost or stolen.
- Check your airline's restrictions on luggage weight, and weigh your luggage before leaving home. Airlines are getting stricter about weight limits, and may make you repack your bag or pay an additional cost if you exceed the limit.
- We recommend that you pack essential items such as medications and basic clothing items in your carry-on. This will be helpful in the unlikely situation that your checked bag is lost by the airline.
- Remember the 3-1-1 rule concerning liquids in your carry-on luggage.
- There are few 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 purchased in the Duty-Free shops in the Guatemala City airport can be carried onto the departing flight. However, when you pick up your checked luggage at your first stop in the United States, you will need to pack any liquids into 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.
- We recommend that teams mix donation items in with their personal clothes and belongings and then separate them once they arrive in Guatemala. This can help teams avoid issues clearing customs as they enter Guatemala. (See "Immigration and Customs")
- Please plan on packing enough clothes for the entire week in order to avoid doing laundry. There is generally not enough free time during the week to wash clothes.

Immunizations. Check with your doctor to see what he or she recommends. You can also consult the Center for Disease Control travel website: **wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/guatemala**

As of the publishing of this Mission Trip Planning Guide, the CDC recommends the following immunizations:
- **Routine Vaccines**
- **Hepatitis A**
- **Typhoid**

Malaria is not a concern since you will be at an altitude above 4,921 feet (5,000 meters).

Insurance considerations. Since most US insurance plans offer limited coverage outside the US, we strongly recommend that teams purchase travel insurance for each of their members. While travel insurance is readily available from a variety of providers, many teams have had a good experience purchasing accident and medical travel insurance through the North Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church Volunteers in Mission office. Currently, this is a minimal additional cost per person, and teams do not need to be affiliated with the United Methodist Church to purchase coverage.

For more information, contact Tammy Kuntz at **umvimncj.coor@gmail.com**
Complete information can be found here: **http://umvimncj.org/NCJVIM/Forms.html**

Important notes on passports. If you don't have a valid passport, you should get started applying for one as soon as possible. Passport processing usually takes 10 to 12 weeks, but we recommend beginning the application process at least 6 months prior to your trip to minimize potential complications.

It is also important that you check your passport expiration date before you travel. Since you will be issued a 90-day visa when you enter the country, it is important that your passport not expire within 90 days of your travel date. The Guatemala immigration agent could refuse to issue you the visa to enter the country if your passport expires **before** 90 days, even if you plan to return to the United States before that date.

3. ONCE YOU ARRIVE

Immigration and customs. Entering Guatemala is fairly easy. During the flight, you will be issued a combination Immigration/Customs form. Make sure you complete this form before landing. On the form, please write "Panajachel, Sololá" as your destination address, and check the "Tourism" box in the section "Purpose for Travel." (We will provide an example of this completed form in Basecamp.)

This Immigration/Customs form has two parts. The top page will be used for clearing immigration, which will be your first stop after landing. After the immigration agent scans your passport, they will take the top portion of your

completed form, leaving the bottom portion of the form for you to use later as you clear Guatemala customs.

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

After you have left the baggage claim area, you will clear customs. At this point, you will need the second page of your form to present to the customs agent. After clearing customs, you may be randomly selected to have your baggage x-rayed. If not, you will be directed towards the exit. Though clearing immigration and getting your luggage can sometimes be a little bit of a lengthly process, it's normally relatively easy.

Customs agents may sometimes attempt to spot humanitarian aid groups and stop them in hope of assessing a tax on items they are bringing into the country.

To help avoid this, we suggest the following:

- That your team not travel wearing identical t-shirts identifying you as a group.
- That large amounts of donated items are not packed all together in one place. Instead, spread donated items among team members and mix them in with personal belongings.
- That your team members not attempt to all go through the same customs line together. Instead, have members line up in different lines. (You will meet up with the rest of your group as soon as you clear customs.)

Weather. Guatemala is often called "the land of eternal spring" since, for much of the year, the average high temperature is 77 degrees and the average low is 55 degrees. Guatemala has only two main seasons: dry and rainy. Guatemala generally goes without rain from October through April, while from May to September it often rains every day. "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 midday, and it typically rains sporadically from early afternoon on into the evenings.

Housing information. Lodging will be at our mission house in Panajachel, which is known as the River House or Casa del Rio. The River House has reliable wireless internet and on-demand hot water, and is divided into separate apartments that provide a variety of rooming options. Each team leader will have the opportunity to provide input on the rooming options that will work best for their group.

Communicating back home. The River House has wireless internet, so during your stay you will be able to easily communicate with family and friends back home. (Please keep in mind that Internet speeds in Guatemala are generally slower than the United States.) You can also check with your cellphone carrier to see if they offer a short-term plan for travel abroad.

Typical itinerary. We may adjust this itinerary depending on your flight arrival and departure times, or for a variety of other reasons. This is just a general example of a typical week.

SATURDAY

- Arrive at Aurora Airport in Guatemala City and travel to Panajachel (This is a 3-4 hour journey)
- Check in at the River House and relax from the day's travel
- Dinner

SUNDAY
- Breakfast
- Brief overview and history of Mission Guatemala
- A cultural activity, which will include lunch
- Dinner

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
- Breakfast
- Travel to work site, with lunch midday
- Leave work site for the River House (typically around 4:30 or 5 pm)
- Dinner
- Evenings are on your own. We can arrange for teams to go into town if they desire.

SATURDAY
- We will plan an activity for your last full day in country.
- Dinner, with announcements and closing reflections on the week.

SUNDAY
- Travel to Aurora Airport in Guatemala City. We will schedule your departure time from the River House to ensure that you will arrive at the airport 3 hours before your departure time.

4. IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

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 limited health care is common.

Dress. The indigenous people in the rural communities of Guatemala are normally conservative in their dress, wearing modest shirts and blouses, and not wearing shorts unless they are playing a sport. Since dressing inappropriately is one of the easiest ways to offend our hosts, we should dress according to local standards, not wearing shorts on the work site, and avoiding any tight or revealing clothing. Additionally, given the history of military aggression and violence in the rural areas of Guatemala, we should refrain from wearing camouflage clothing or carrying items with an overt military appearance or significance.

Conspicuous displays of wealth are also disrespectful and could gain you unwanted attention, so dress simply and leave expensive watches and jewelry at home.

Photography. Unless someone asks you to take their photo, you should always ask permission before doing so! The beautiful smiles and colorful traditional dress of the indigenous Mayan people is eye-catching and may be exciting to photograph, but you should always ask first. Many adults are especially sensitive to being photographed.

Please also remember that the trip is not a photo safari, but a chance to interact and get to know new friends. Be sure to put away the camera occasionally so that you can be completely present.

Food & Water. NEVER eat unpackaged food from street vendors, or unwashed and unpeeled fruit or vegetables. Vegetables and fruits should always be disinfected or peeled before eating.

NEVER drink tap water. (We will always provide purified water at the River House and on the work site.) When ordering in restaurants, specify "agua pura" for purified water. Don't drink beverages with ice unless you

know the water used is purified. You should also always brush your teeth with purified water.

Sanitation. Other than at The River House, you should never put toilet paper into any toilet in Guatemala. Use the trashcan next to the toilet to deposit toilet paper. Even at the River House, please DO NOT flush wipes or sanitary products, even if they say they are flushable!

Always wash your hands before eating. If water is not available, you should use alcohol-based wipes or antibacterial gel.

Code of conduct. We are striving to present a responsible, caring image as respectful visitors from a foreign country. To that end, we must do our best to conduct ourselves in an appropriate and respectful way.

In the rural areas of Guatemala, drinking in moderation is unfortunately not the norm; if a person drinks at all, it is often to excess. Tobacco use is virtually unknown in the rural areas, and most local evangelical churches prohibit smoking and drinking. For all these reasons, alcoholic beverages and tobacco may not be used on the work site or in the rural community areas where we will be working during the day. At the work-site, team members should also refrain from using profanity or having conversation about drugs or alcohol.

In Guatemala, we must remember to show respect at all times. Here, as elsewhere, "please" and "thank you" ("por favor" and "gracias") go a long way. Be sure not to make jokes or speak disparagingly about the local food, accommodations, practices, or people.

Safety. Rural Guatemala is a generally safe place as long as common sense precautions are observed:

- Watch your luggage closely, especially in Guatemala City.
- Be extremely alert for cars, bicycles or other vehicles when crossing or walking on streets.
- Don't openly display large amounts of cash.
- In the marketplaces, pickpockets are common and quite skilled. Keep your wallet in a secure pocket or under your clothes.
- Carry your backpack on the front of your body when walking in crowded spaces.

Electricity. Guatemala is on the same electrical current as the United States, and uses the same outlets. However, 3-prong outlets are sometimes not available, so if you are bringing a device with a 3-prong cord, you should also bring a simple 3-prong to 2-prong adapter, just in case.

Money. The local currency in Guatemala is the quetzal (pronounced "ket-záll"). The exchange rate is currently approximately $1 to 7.2 quetzales.

There have recently been changes in the way banks here in Guatemala handle currency exchanges between US dollars and quetzales. In local banks, the exchange limit has been lowered to $120 per adult per week, and minors are no longer allowed to exchange money in Guatemala. Given these new rules, we are now recommending that teams talk with their local banks about exchanging money in the US before arriving in Guatemala. Most US banks can handle these requests in a couple of days.

The ATMs in Panajachel also provide a fairly dependable method for getting local currency. Let your bank know if you plan on using your ATM card in Guatemala to help ensure that you won't have any issues.

An increasing number of local stores and restaurants do accept credit cards, but you should not count on always being able to use a credit card to make purchases.

If it is necessary for you to exchange money in-country, we can help arrange a time and place for you to do this. Please make sure that any US currency you bring has absolutely no tears in the bills and no extraneous marks. A torn or damaged bill is almost impossible to exchange in Guatemala.

Tipping and gift-giving policy. Though it is not expected or required, some teams may want to leave gratuities for the workers or staff that they get to know during the week. While this is a kind gesture, if it is not done properly it can cause a variety of problems for Mission Guatemala. Since there are many members of our staff who teams may not meet during their week with us, but who play an integral part in the programs and services that Mission Guatemala provides, we believe it is only fair that any gift is shared with our staff as a whole. As such, if you desire to leave a gratuity for our staff, we request that you leave it with Dave Burns, Mission Guatemala's Director, and he will distribute it to all of our staff.

In general, during your week in Guatemala, gift-giving must be done with extreme care. Please do not give away anything (i.e., clothing, shoes, watches, etc.) to members of the local community or of our staff without talking to us first.

Your mission trip and tax deductions.

Note: The following information is provided for informational purposes only and should not be relied on as tax advice. Please always consult with your personal tax accountant.

Mission Trips as 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 nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization should have a letter indicating participation.**

Travel *(from IRS Publication 526, Charitable Contributions.)*

Generally, you can only claim a charitable contribution deduction for travel expenses necessarily incurred while you are away from home performing services for a charitable organization 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 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.

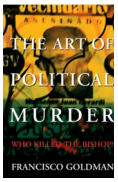
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Guatemala and its indigenous Mayan residents have a difficult and painful history shaped by conquest and colonization, beginning with the arrival of Spanish invaders in 1524 and continuing through to the torture, abuse, and genocide during the 35-year civil war that stretched from 1953 to 1996. To truly appreciate the reality of life in the Mayan communities where Mission Guatemala works, it is vitally important that we do our best to understand the history that they have lived. These books are a good place to start.

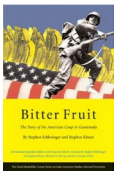
Books about Guatemala. (All book descriptions are excerpted from **goodreads.com**)



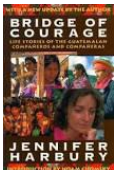
Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala
By Daniel Wilkinson
Silence on the Mountain is a virtuoso work of reporting and a masterfully plotted narrative tracing the history of Guatemala's thirty-six-year internal war, a conflict that claimed the lives of some 200,000 people, the vast majority of whom died (or were "disappeared") at the hands of the U.S.-backed military government.



The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?
By Fransisco Goldman
Bishop Juan Gerardi, Guatemala's leading human rights activist, was bludgeoned to death in his garage on a Sunday night in 1998, two days after the presentation of a groundbreaking church-sponsored report implicating the military in the murders and disappearances of some two hundred thousand civilians. Realizing that it could not rely on police investigators or the legal system to solve the murder, the church formed its own investigative team, a group of secular young men in their twenties who called themselves Los Intocables (the Untouchables). Known in Guatemala as "The Crime of the Century," the Bishop Gerardi murder case, with its unexpectedly outlandish scenarios and sensational developments, confounded observers and generated extraordinary controversy.



Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala
By Stephen C. Schlesinger, and Stephen Kinzer
Bitter Fruit is a comprehensive and insightful account of the CIA operation to overthrow the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954. First published in 1982, this book has become a classic, a textbook case of the relationship between the United States and the Third World.



Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Companeros & Companeras
By Jennifer K. Harbury, Noam Chomsky
"A book not only for those interested in Guatemala, but for those who want to know what makes people give up everything and fight for justice everywhere."–Margaret Randall



Love in a Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story
By By Henri J.M. Nouwen
This is Henri Nouwen's personal account of a pilgrimage to Santiago Atitlan, a Mayan town in the highlands of Guatemala. It was there that an American priest, Father Stanley Rother, was murdered by a death squad in the parish where he served.