

# PREPARING FOR A WORK 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 a comfortable hotel. Potable water will be provided for the team at the hotel 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.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:**

\*Make sure you have a valid passport (one that won't expire within 6 months) and that I (Rusty) has a copy of it.

\*Current Immunizations for Tetanus and Hepatitis A are recommended.

\*Malaria is not a concern -- we'll be at an altitude over 5,000 feet.

## **WEATHER END OF JULY**

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.

## **ENTERING GUATEMALA**

Entering Guatemala is fairly easy. You will clear immigration. Then, you will enter the area where you can claim your luggage and proceed to customs (we will stay in our travel teams).

## **COMMUNICATING BACK HOME**

Although it may be tempting, we ask that everyone leave their cell phones at the hotel or better yet, leave them here in Oklahoma. All team leaders will have cell phones. U.S. cell phone companies do work in Antigua, but there may be additional charges. Please check on your particular phone plan before going on our trip. The time to communicate with folks at home will be at the hotel. There is WiFi in the hotel. We will be reporting to the church with any updates as needed. Sooo...take a break from your phone and treat yourself to a phone free week. You'll thank me later 😊.

# 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. Nancy and Josue have mentioned that shorts are fine, but we just need to stay conservative with that suggestion. Time doing home visits is better accomplished with pants, so keep that in mind. But balance that with a hot soccer game at any moment. Again stay flexible.

**IMPORTANT:** 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, but not grungy and leave expensive watches and jewelry at home.

**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 hotel in Antigua we will eat food that is substantially better than that of the local population. Still, people's preferences differ, so if you think you are of the picky sort, you may want to bring some snacks...up to you. Food at the hotel in Antigua is incredible and 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, 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 trash can 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 our great God and Savior. To that end, we must do our best to live according to the local standards of conduct. 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, pick-pockets 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.
- (BTW, this is not a Guatemala issue, this is just a common sense traveling anywhere suggestion)

**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 8 Quetzales. You can change money at the hotel or at banks in Antigua. There are ATMs in Antigua which are fairly dependable as well.

**ONE LAST THING...** Although home improvement/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 time and love. 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.

## **CODE OF ETHICS FOR VISITORS TO THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES**

- \* 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.
- \* When you are shopping, remember that the "bargain" you obtain was only possible because of the low wages paid to the maker.