



GSG Missions, Inc.

Serving The Least of These!

PO BOX 2912, GRAIN VALLEY, MO 64029 / 816-622-2560 / WWW.GODSAIDGO.ORG / SERVE@GODSAIDGO.ORG

Travel Information and Tips for your trip to Guatemala

Short-term missions offer churches and groups the chance to provide aid to ministries and communities in need while also sharing their faith and Guatemala is an excellent destination. Missions generally last several days to several weeks which means that travelers should pack carefully and thoroughly (there is a comprehensive suggested packing list in the guide to help you know what you might want to bring). Consider both the work you are planning on doing and cultural issues specific to the country.

International Travel

Always seek pre-travel advice before an international trip. Even if you've already traveled to the destination previously, be aware that prevailing health and social conditions change rapidly. Research the country you will be visiting: the culture, history, medical practices, religions, etc. The more informed you are, the better prepared you can be.

COVID-19

As of January 10, 2022, Passengers who are neither Guatemalan citizens nor Guatemalan residents will be required to present **both** of the following:

- For all travelers aged 12 and over: Evidence of receiving a complete two dose COVID-19 vaccination course (or one dose for Johnson & Johnson), with the final dose being administered at least two weeks before beginning your trip to Guatemala; and
- For all travelers aged 10 and over: Proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR or antigen test from a certified lab conducted no more than three (3) days prior to check in at the airport or arrival at the land border.

Note: If someone has a medical contraindication that makes it impossible to vaccinate against COVID-19, s/he should provide a medical certificate of the relevant condition.

Immunizations

Make sure you have all basic immunizations. Be sure your tetanus booster is current within the last 10 years. TB is prevalent in some areas of Guatemala. Screening before and after your trip is recommended. Consult the CDC for current travel recommendations.

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Travel Insurance

Devise a contingency plan for emergency medical care during travel in the event of accidental injury or serious illness. Travelers' Insurance can be obtained before departure and is highly recommended. You may be expected to pay for care "upfront" and then submit a claim for reimbursement.

Documents and IDs

All U.S. citizens are required to possess a valid passport to enter and exit Guatemala. In addition, the U.S. State Department recommends carrying a photocopy of your passports because passport theft is fairly common. To be extra safe, make multiple copies and leave one at home with someone who can email it to you in an emergency. The immigration/visa form is a simple form that will be handed to you during your flight that arrives in Guatemala. They can be easily filled out on the plane, so bring a pen to use.

Personal and Medical

If you take prescription medication, carry it in the original bottle and in your carry-on to minimize problems going through customs. If you pack cold medicine, make sure it doesn't contain the drug pseudoephedrine: It is illegal in Guatemala and you can be arrested for its possession.

Before Your Travel

Before you leave, get plenty of rest! You have a big trip ahead of you.

Teamwork Makes A Dream Work

The major factors that affect how well a trip runs have to do with the competency of the leader and the willingness of the team to follow. When traveling as a team, we must be ever mindful of timeliness. When a meeting time is given, you must be there ON TIME!

Your First Day of Travel

Always plan ahead and think "early". When you are traveling with a group, sometimes the unexpected can happen and you may need extra time to get to your airport of departure. This will be an international flight and it is recommended that you check with your airline for their suggested time of arrival to the airport before your flight's departure. Some airports are very busy and knowing ahead of time what you can expect when you arrive can make the difference between a comfortable start to your trip or a missed first flight. It is very important, that you keep track of your checked luggage receipt that the gate representative will give you for your bags. This will be needed when you collect your bags upon arrival.

Arriving In Guatemala

When arriving in Guatemala, you will be required to go through customs and immigration. Have your passport and Immigration /visa form (filled out on the airplane) ready to hand to the Immigration Officer. When going through customs and immigration, answer questions briefly and do not volunteer any information. This is not the time to make jokes either. Stay calm, brief, and pleasant, then move along. Conduct yourself maturely and professionally. Remember, you are representing yourself, your team, our ministry, and your country.

Accommodations

Accommodations provided will be safe and clean. Be quick to adapt, and thankful for what you have. Listen closely to any special instructions regarding facilities and obey what you are told. Discard the toilet tissue in the trashcan rather than in the toilet.

Food & Water

Take appropriate dietary precautions. Safe food will be provided for you during the trip. Although it may be different than you are used to, try your best to eat it and be thankful. Avoid raw or uncooked foods, especially meat, seafood, and salads. Also, avoid foods sold by street vendors. Be sure milk, cheese, and other dairy products have been pasteurized. Select fruits and vegetables with thick skins that you can wash or peel yourself (oranges, bananas, avocados, etc.)

Do not drink the tap water! Unfiltered water is a potential source of illness. Bottled or filtered water will be available to you.

Transportation

Protect yourself from accidental injury due to motor vehicle transportation. Safe transportation will be provided. Please use it!

Interpretation

You may work with an interpreter. Speak in 1-2 sentences at a time. Give opportunity for the interpreter to translate before starting another sentence. Avoid the usage of slang and colloquial expressions. Don't talk too fast! For medical teams: always talk to the patient, not the interpreter. Always keep your focus on the people and the interpreter will join in with you.

Picture Taking

You will want to take plenty of pictures and video. Do NOT take pictures or video of military or police personnel or facilities. If there is a question about the appropriateness of taking photos or video, check with your team leader. Medical teams: Always ask permission of the patients or their guardians before taking their picture.

Local Currency

Unless you want to exchange your money to the local currency (Quetzales) at the airport at a much lower exchange rate, it is not recommended to bring cash. ATMs here accept most foreign credit/debit cards. We suggest that you use your card to get Quetzales. Please contact your card issuer to confirm your card will be accepted here in Guatemala.

For Medical Teams

You will be provided a list of available medications, what they can be used for, and the dosage. The “pharmacy” will pre-package them in appropriate amounts for dispensing. We all do a little of everything, so you can expect to assess, diagnose, and prescribe. Don’t hesitate to ask the Director or one of the other RN’s if you have questions. We move fast. There are other volunteers who will facilitate and support each nurse.

Other Important Information to Remember While Here

1. Do not walk barefoot outdoors, except poolside, if applicable. Wearing appropriate footwear can prevent infection from parasites, fungi, insect bites, and other injuries. Avoid sandals and flip-flops if at all possible.
2. Always pay close attention to what is going on around you. Listen closely to instructions.
3. Never go anywhere alone.
4. It is not wise to give money to beggars and never try to pet the street dogs.
5. If you are having any kind of medical difficulty, tell your team leader immediately.
6. A short-term mission trip is not a time to begin or cultivate romantic relationships. This includes relationships with fellow team members, as well as the nationals.

Packing Guide

Luggage:

LUGGAGE LIMIT: Generally, checked bag must be a combined length, width, and height of 106 inches, provided that no bag exceeds 62 inches in length and weighs 50 pounds or less; a carry-on bag with a total combined length, width and height of 45 inches. Please check with your airline on the cost of your first and second checked bag. Bag charges differ from airline and fare.

LUGGAGE TAGS: Be sure to place an easily identifiable nametag on your luggage.

Visit <https://www.tsa.gov/travel> for more information about prohibited items and guidelines regarding carry-on luggage.

Clothing:

TYPE OF CLOTHING TO PACK: In the upper elevations of Guatemala, the weather will be very mild. Expect high temperatures around 80 and overnight lows in the 50's. In the lower elevations, you can expect high temperatures around 95 and overnight lows in the 70's.

Sturdy/closed shoes and scrubs for medical personnel on clinic days. Pants, jeans and modest shorts (below the knees) and short sleeve shirts. Raincoat or poncho would be good during the rainy season (May – October) and a jacket or sweatshirt may be necessary.

Miscellaneous:

OTHER HANDY ITEMS TO PACK: Flashlight, umbrella, wet wipes and/or hand sanitizer, sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat, Chap Stick, insect repellent, bath soap, wash cloth and bath towel, tissue packs for toilet paper, travel alarm clock, and a journal for taking daily notes or thoughts.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: BP cuff, stethoscope, pulse oximeter, no touch thermometer, glucose measuring device with plenty of supplies, and otoscope. Some equipment will be available for sharing.

ELECTRICITY: The electricity in Guatemala is 110 volts which is the same as the United States.

DOCUMENTS: Keep up with your passport! You will need your passport at the airports, so be sure to keep it available while traveling. If you should lose a document, IMMEDIATELY inform the project coordinator or team leader. Make three copies of your passport picture page, carry one in your luggage and keep another copy on your person, separated from your passport. You can leave the third one at home. MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: You must bring a copy of your current medical license.

JEWELRY: Jewelry is acceptable, but large, flashy jewelry may leave wrong impressions. Leave diamonds and other treasures safely at home. With jewelry or any other possessions, if it will break your heart to come home without it, don't take it.

GIFTS: Gift giving and exchanging is a common thing in Guatemala and conveys friendship and gratitude. It is a good idea for your group to bring down some gifts from the United States. They do not have to be much but can really mean a lot to the folks down here.

Some examples are:

- Something from your church—You will want to take a gift to be presented to any church in which you might work. A gift that the members of your team can sign, such as a plaque or non-language item, is always appropriate.
- Personal Gifts—You will make new acquaintances and will want to present them with a gift that you brought from the USA. Some examples:
 - MEN: Click pens, bookmarks, notepads, neckties, baseball caps, etc.
 - WOMEN: Scarves, potholders, handmade items such as bookmarks, lapel broaches, hair barrettes, windsocks with beautiful colors, etc.
 - CHILDREN: Suckers/candy, balls, balloons, small toys, toothbrush, etc.

I'm Home-Now What?

Coming back from a trip of this kind and getting back into your “regular” life can be a very unique experience. Some people jump right back in where they left off, while others have difficulty with this. Neither of these experiences is necessarily right or wrong. The difficulty you may have in returning home is commonly called “reverse culture shock.” In many cases, it can be more of a “shock” to come home than it was to leave. If you have challenges, understand that you are not alone! When you get home, reflect on the goals for the trip and see if they were accomplished. Make sure the success of the trip is not stolen from you now that you are home. You just experienced a very impacting time - spirit, soul, and body. You have expanded your view of the world. You have had the opportunity to see life from a new perspective. Through this experience you may be more appreciative of what you have or less tolerant of those who don't realize how blessed they are. How you integrate this into your life will determine the full impact of this experience.