



TEAM HANDBOOK

Triage Trip to Rural Areas
in
Guatemala

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WELCOME

Project HANDS would like to welcome you to our team and thank you for choosing to work with us. We hope that you have a rewarding experience in Guatemala and return full of memories of the warm smiles of the people you meet.

This Handbook has been prepared to give you a little background to Guatemala and this mission, and we hope it is useful to you in preparing for the trip. We recommend that you read it so as to familiarize yourself prior to departure and also to bring it along for reference during the trip.

For triage trips we work closely with Partner for Surgery who organizes the locations and ground component of the trips. Closer to departure you will receive information from them as to the area in which you will be working and the locations of the clinics.

Prior to departure we will have a meeting so that you can meet your fellow team mates and to answer any questions that you have so you are completely comfortable with the trip and understand the expectations. The date and location will be sent to you.

We look forward to meeting you and working together, and once again thank for joining the team.



AN INTRODUCTION

Who We Are

If you witness a fall, shouldn't you offer your hand?

The scales of the world are unbalanced. While many live with more than they need, others fight to survive on an unthinkable amount of nothing.

Project HANDS is a group of people who want to do their part in rebalancing these scales. Our goal is to provide healthcare, education and other support to those who, by chance of birth, have lives less fortunate than our own.



We are a Canadian-based, non-profit organization and are currently working among the indigenous Maya in the rural regions of Guatemala. This is where our mission begins, but our aim is to spread our work worldwide and in doing so offer a hand to anyone who reaches for it.

Guatemala is a country which has minimal healthcare and where many have never seen a doctor, cannot afford to educate their children, and live in the most impoverished conditions.

Through our projects we aim to create sustainable changes. We work *with* Guatemalans not *for* them. We work not to change them but to nurture their own change. We believe this concept is key. Only when we help make lasting changes can we see the scales begin to tip. The steps maybe small at first but they add up, and when we see smiles appear where before there was emptiness, we know we have succeeded and then it is time to move on and offer our hand to somebody else.

"You give little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." Kahil Gibran

Constitution

- 1) To promote improvement in health, education and living conditions of the impoverished peoples of Guatemala.
- 2) To organize teams of volunteer healthcare and education professionals and support staff to travel to Guatemala (at their own expense) to provide health and educational services.
- 3) To collect by donation the funds, equipment and supplies to provide these services and arrange for their transport to Guatemala.
- 4) To work in collaboration with the Canadian Embassy staff in Guatemala, the Guatemalan Government, and other non-government organizations to identify locations and needs for which the society can provide assistance.
- 5) To provide similar or related services as determined by the membership.
- 6) To carry on without purpose of gain for its members and any profits or other accretions to the organization shall be used solely to promote its objectives.

Protocol

In going on this trip you are not only representing Project HANDS, but your country. Please take a moment to read through the expectations we have of our team members.

- To remember we are guests in another country
- To be caring, respectful, and polite.
- To be sensitive to cultural differences
- To collaborate with and be respectful to team members, local staff, helpers
- To be professional in all dealings with patients and to maintain western standards of medical care as much as possible.
- To be willing to make do with what is available.
- To be friendly, cheerful, positive, cooperative, flexible and adaptable

For the successful outcome of a mission it is crucial for participants to work together as a team, so please make sure you are comfortable collaborating with others.

Please understand that our systems and procedures have been laid down based on experience from past trips, and although the reasons for some of them may not be immediately obvious to you changing them mid trip unbalances the team.

Although all food provided is “gringo safe” but it may not have the same variety as you are used to so please be willing to accommodate any restrictions that occur.

Showers may be temperamental and accommodation outside of Antigua may be simple so please make sure you are comfortable with these limitations.

Please also take a look at ETIQUETTE AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY further in the handbook.

Why Guatemala?

Guatemala is a developing country in Central America bordering Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador, and with both Pacific and Caribbean coastlines. The country covers an area of 109,000 square kilometers of mountainous forest highlands, lowland jungle and tropical coastline.

60% of Guatemala's eleven million people are Ladino (of mixed Amerindian-Spanish blood), and 45-60% (depending on what stats you read) are indigenous Maya. 60% of the population speak Spanish and the remainder use twenty-one (or is it twenty three, I can never remember) assorted Mayan dialects. The largest linguistic group is K'iche', with over a million K'iche' speakers (also sometimes spelt Quiche). So far the diversity of dialects has not posed our volunteers any problems as we have the help of excellent local translators.

Guatemala emerged from a 36-year civil war in 1996, which left an estimated 150,000 dead, 40,000 disappeared, 440 indigenous villages razed to the ground, and more than a million people uprooted, forced to seek refuge in other departments of the country or in neighboring countries. The great majority of the victims were Mayans, whose plight was unknown until the 1983 publication of *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, the autobiography a young Maya woman whose father, mother and brother were killed by the military during the civil war. On 29 December 1996, peace was signed between the rebels and the government, and a series of peace accords were established. Unfortunately the lack of significant financial support and political will behind brings into question their full implementation.



Guatemala is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. A recent UN report shows 60% of the population lives in poverty (<US\$2 per day) and 27% in extreme poverty (US\$1 per day). Of the indigenous population 93% live in poverty and 91% in extreme poverty. 65% of the population lives in rural areas, 85% of which live in communities of less than 500 people. The Mayan people have the highest mortality and malnutrition rates. Recently released World Health Organization figures show that 67.3% of the Mayan population suffers from chronic malnutrition, as opposed to 34.1% of the ladino or mixed population. Only 8% of the indigenous population has access to regular healthcare, and an estimated 21,000 communities in different regions of Guatemala do not have access to Department of Health services.

For those interested in some statistics the following figures from the Pan American Health Organization and UNICEF illustrates the problems faced in Guatemala:

	Guatemala	Canada
per capita GNP in \$US	1660.00	19320.00
Income ratio - top 20% vs bottom 20%	30x	5.2x
per capita National Health spending	56.00	2110.00
physicians per 10,000 population	9.3	22.9
births attended by trained personnel	35%	99.40%
infant mortality per 1,000 live births	45	5.3
maternal mortality per 100,00	190	4

Apart from poverty, the Mayan population has suffered extreme marginalization and discrimination. Since the Spanish Conquest in 1524, the Mayans have been progressively deprived of their lands and forced to work as tied laborers or day laborers. Lands worked for generations have been taken from villagers leaving them with small, hardly viable, parcels of land. This has been used to justify paying starvation wages and communities live in miserable conditions without access to drinking water, electricity, schools or health services. The years of civil unrest, and the total lack of infrastructure, have inhibited the process of community development and assisted in maintaining the legacy of submission, marginalization and isolation of indigenous people.



Since the official end of the civil war, the Government has undertaken a program of institutional modernization including healthcare, however, in the rural areas, and particularly among the indigenous population, access to the facilities is extremely limited. At US\$56.00 per person the spending on healthcare is extremely limited and lives have not improved significantly. Although government hospitals do exist (largely built with US aid) there is no money to run them. They have virtually no supplies and equipment, staff is limited as is emergency care and elective surgery is virtually non-existent. Most Guatemalan doctors are from wealthy families and do not want to work away from Guatemala City so although there are medical schools in the country the graduates do not frequently serve the rural areas.

What we do in Guatemala is a drop in an ocean of need. We cannot change the country, but we can change the lives of our patients by giving them back their health. We can also share our knowledge with the local medical providers with whom we work with the hope that little by little change will occur. And anyway who are we to judge if a man, woman or child should live in ill health and pain.

THE TRIP

Our Itinerary

This is an outline of our itinerary as some details may need to change.

- **Friday:** early morning depart Vancouver. Late evening arrival in Guatemala City. Transfer to hotel in Antigua.
- **Saturday:** free day in Antigua. Antigua is colourful, colonial city with plenty of character. There are lots of ruins of churches and convents, shops and restaurants, a local market and craft stalls.
- **Sunday:** drive to the rural area where the team will be working (usually 4-6 hours drive)
- **Monday:** clinic day
- **Tuesday:** clinic day
- **Wednesday:** cultural day (this may be a different day).
- **Thursday:** clinic day
- **Friday:** clinic day
- **Saturday:** drive back to Antigua, free afternoon and update of supplies/meds inventory (if necessary). Farewell dinner – courtesy of Partner for Surgery.

CLINIC DAY SCHEDULE :

The times are approximate and depend on the distance needed to travel to each clinic and the amount of patients that turn up.

- 06.00 - breakfast
- 06.30 - drive to location of the day and set up the clinic.
- 08.00 -12.00 - patient consults
- 00.12 -12.30 - lunch
- 13.00 -17.00 - patient consults
- 17.00 - pack up and drive back to hotel
- 19.00 - dinner followed by free time

CULTURAL DAY:

The cultural day is organized by PFS. Depending on where you are this may involve a hike, or visit to a hot spring or it could involve a visit to the homes of some of our past patients.

Our Accommodation

1. ANTIGUA:

The accommodation in Antigua is arranged by Partner for Surgery. It is usually in Posada Hermano Pedro

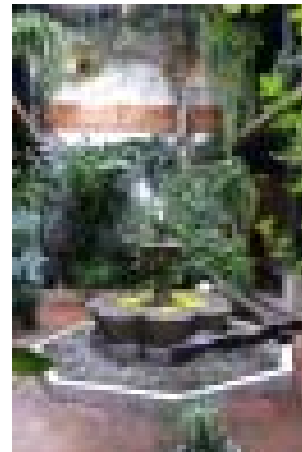
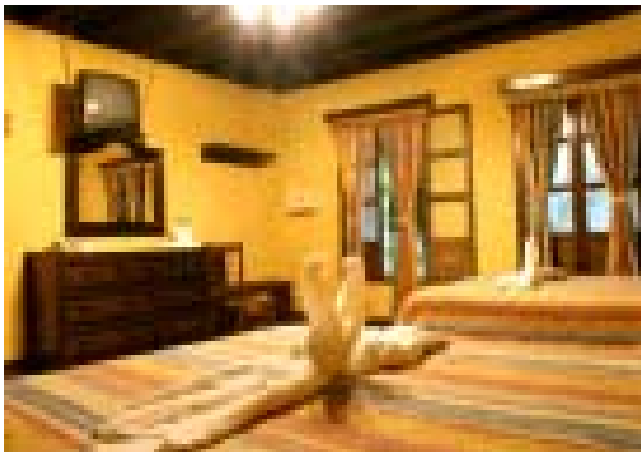
The hotel is conveniently located one block north/east of the main square and is within walking distance of any place you may wish to visit.

The building used to be the home of Dona Leonor, the daughter Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish conquistador who conquered Guatemala, and was converted to a hotel a century ago.

Rooms are on two floors with windows onto two internal courtyards. Accommodation is in double rooms with en suite bathrooms and breakfast is served at the hotel.

For more information about Antigua we have provided a section further in the Handbook along with a map.

Posada Hermano Pedro, 3rd Calle Oriente #3. Tel: (502) 7832 3926/2089/2140
www.hotelposadahermanopedro



2. RURAL AREAS:

Accommodation in the rural areas is organized by Partner for Surgery and they do their best to find suitable lodgings but in outlying rural areas there often is little choice. You may be staying in small local hotels with double rooms or lodges/retreats with dorms. There are likely to be some kind of showers but water may not be hot.

You may be in one base location and fan out to the clinic locations from there, or you may move to different places every night. Breakfast and dinners are likely to be in the

hotel/retreat or a suitable local restaurant. Lunches are usually sandwiches but may be a gringo safe dish provided by local helpers.

Our Transportation:

The ground transportation in Guatemala is also organized by Partner for Surgery who drives us to the clinic locations in their minivan.

The areas where we work are usually in Baja/Alta Verapaz or Quiche, both of which are about 6 hours drive from Antigua. The daily commute on clinic days can be anything from half an hour up to two hours. Sometimes there may also be a short walk at the other end. Roads to the smaller communities may be unpaved and at certain times of the year may be very muddy.

PfS also arranges airport pick up and drop off for the team.

Our Team

Team Structure: This may vary but is usually 3 physicians (1 gynecologist, 1 pediatrician, 1 general practitioner), 1-2 nurses, and possibly 1 non-medical person and/or 1 translator. Partner for Surgery will provide additional translators (Spanish/English and indigenous) and will also have their own staff on hand.

Team Coordinator and Medical Director: One of the doctors on the team is appointed the Medical Director of the team and is responsible for all medical decisions. One of the team is appointed as the Team Coordinator and is responsible for the team and the supplies.

Our Affiliates

Our work in Guatemala brings us in contact with other NGOs, organizations and local people without whom what we do would not be possible. On the triage trip you will be working with some of the staff of Partner for Surgery.



PARTNER FOR SURGERY (PFS): PFS is a US based NGO and has two Guatemalan arms: **COMPANERO EN SALUD (CenS)** and **ACCOCIACION COMPANERO PARA CIRUGIA (ACPC)**. For simplicity we will be referring to all activities of these three organizations as PFS. PFS uses a network of local managers and staff (*gerentes*) from the same communities as the patients and thus gains their trust. They bring patients to the triage sites where they are seen by our medical staff and if surgery is required PFS staff will schedule the patient with the next Project HANDS or other volunteer surgical team. At the appointed time of surgery the gerentes bring the patients from their homes to the location where they will have their surgery and stay with them until it is time to take them back home. They are a vital link between us and the patients and also provide a level of security and familiarity at a time of fear and uncertainty These dedicated men and women speak the local indigenous languages and Spanish but rarely English. They are very caring, helpful and modest. They are so discrete you may not even know who they are so ask for them to be pointed out. You will also meet Daniel Cable, Victor Yat and probably Frank Peterson (Co-founder and President of PFS) and his wife Linda Peterson, and Joanne Wessels.

Our Patients

Our target demographic is the poorest segment of society, however, in Guatemala healthcare is minimal and many people live without any access to medical care.



Most likely you will be working in the departments of Baja and Alta Verapaz or Quiche all of which are about five to six hours drive from Antigua. Most of the people you will be seeing will be Mayans who live in extremely poor and live in very primitive conditions and may have walked for hours to get to the clinic. Some will have been living with horrendous medical conditions for years. Many only speak the local Mayan language (of which there are 23! – don't worry you will usually only have to deal with one or two at a time and you will have translators) and many, especially women, have never left their communities.

Without the trust that the gerentes have established, these patients would not come to a clinic run by foreigners (or any clinic for that matter). They are often marginalized and are usually very naïve about health care and so it is necessary to present information as simply and respectfully as possible. They may also be influenced by cultural and

superstitious beliefs which may at times be a little difficult to unravel and for which the local translators are particularly helpful.

Where We Work

The triage clinics are held in whatever buildings are available. Sometimes we are able to use space in local health centres or hospitals, other times we may be in a school or a church hall where it may be necessary to create examination cubicles with sheets. PFS tries to find locations with running water and electricity but this is not always possible.

If you are working in the lowlands of Alta Verapaz it might be very hot and humid, while in the highlands of Quiche it could be quite cold, especially in the evenings and early mornings.

You may also find yourself working just about anywhere as we may be asked to see patients who cannot come to the clinic.



PREPARING YOURSELF FOR THE TRIP

Some Things to Know

Flights: We hope you understand that we are only able to arrange flights and airport transfers for participants flying from Vancouver on the dates of the main team.

Trip participants flying from other locations and on different dates will have to arrange their own flights and airport transfers.

If you can coordinate your flight arrival/departure with the main team schedule we will have transport for you to/from the airport. If this is not possible you will need to arrange your own airport transfers and meet the group at the hotel in Antigua. We can provide the name of our local travel agent and she can arrange this for you (the cost is approx \$30USD one way and is not included).

For those booking their own flights please forward details of your itinerary to the Trip Coordinator.

Ground Package: The complete ground package is organized for you so you don't have to worry about anything.

The ground package consists of all accommodation, meals (excluding one lunch and dinner in Antigua) and airport transfers if you are flying with the main team.

The ground package does not include spending money, meals in Antigua (as mentioned above), extra nights outside of the trip dates or airport transfers that are outside of the main team.

Documentation: Passport – must be valid for at least six months after the expected return date (if your passport has to be renewed please indicate this on your form and forward new details when available).

Visa - if you do not hold a Canadian passport please check whether you need a visa for Guatemala or the US (we usually fly through the US). Canadian and US passport holders do not need visas.

Travel insurance: All team members must have travel insurance with adequate coverage for medical emergencies (including air evacuation). If you did not fill this information in on the Registration Form please make sure to provide it to us along with contact details for your insurer.

Professional Registration and Resume: Medical personnel must provide a copy of current professional registration and a short Resume (Resume not required for those who have been on a previous HANDS team).

Vaccinations: Please ask at your local Travel Clinic for current recommendations (they usually include Tetanus, Hep A and B but you will only need malaria if you are traveling to the coast or Tikal). Those with delicate digestive systems may wish to consider Dukarol

– an oral E.coli vaccine (not available in the US). Some vaccinations need to be given several weeks in advance so please make sure you leave yourself plenty of time.

Luggage allowance: Each participant traveling from Vancouver needs to transport 1-2 bins of supplies even if your travel arrangements are outside of the main team. Thus personal luggage is limited to your carry on.

Packing Suggestions

Antigua is at 5000ft and the clinic is at similar elevation. Days are usually sunny and warm but evenings can be cool. Nights in the highlands can be very cold. Attire is casual but not scruffy. Err on the side of conservative clothing if you are not sure. Both medical and non-medical team members will be wearing scrubs in the clinic so you don't need a lot of clothes.

Dress Code: Guatemala is a country where religious feelings run deep and revealing dress is considered offensive to both men and women. Most of the Guatemalans we are here to serve are very conservative in dress and attitude.

Suggested things to bring:

- Warm sweater/fleece, jeans/pants, t-shirts (everyone will get a HANDS t-shirt)
- Thermal underwear - especially for night staff
- Sheets and pillowcase (only for trips to San Juan)
- Waterproof jacket - especially if you are going to travel to Tikal
- Comfortable shoes - Antigua is all cobbled streets
- Hats for balding heads – you are at elevation and closer to the equator
- Flashlight/headlamp and extra batteries
- Spare glasses, contact lenses, sun glasses
- Money belt/fanny pack to carry your valuables
- Spanish English Dictionary/Spanish Medical Dictionary
- Stethoscope (medical staff).
- Toiletries, shampoo, hand sanitizer etc
- Hairdryer (power is 110 volts like in North America)
- Ear plugs – cockerels and dogs can be a nuisance at night. So can snoring room-mates.
- Hot water bottle. A personal great friend of mine in Guatemala.
- Suggested meds: Pepto Bismol, Immodium (loperimide), Cipro, acetaminophen/ibuprofen, B 12, acidophilus, electrolytes
- Passport (and a photocopy) and Travel Insurance
- Bank card and pin number (see Getting Money in Guatemala)
- Camera, spare memory card, charger, batteries, etc
- Laptop if you want your own computer. There are lots of internet cafes in Antigua.

Cell phones: The cheapest option is to purchase a cell phone and a phone card in Guatemala for about \$30 (this includes 100 mins of local air time, or about 80 mins for calls to Canada/US. International texting does not work). Additional phone cards are available everywhere.

If you have a multi-band phone check with your provider if it will work in Guatemala, but this is very expensive. Phone calls can also be made from the hotel in Antigua using a calling card and Canada Direct code. Cost depends on your plan.

Fundraising and Supplies

Fundraising: Project HANDS has to raise approx \$3,000 per triage trip. This pays for meds and supplies, translators, local staff, local transportation, patient costs, etc.

If each participant could raise \$200 we would have \$1000. If each person could raise \$300 we would have \$1500.....If you can help with fundraising it would greatly help. 100% of all monies donated go directly to the projects.

Project HANDS is a registered charity and we can issue tax receipts for all donations. Donations can be made on line at www.projecthands.org or cheques can be sent to:

Project HANDS Society
PO Box 62,
Lions Bay, BC
V0N 2E0

Please ask your donors to mention that the donation is being made on your behalf so we can let you know how your fundraising is going

Project HANDS membership: \$25 of the trip cost is for your Project HANDS membership. These are the only monies used for the administrative costs of the organization. Membership gives voting rights at the AGM and thus the opportunity to influence the direction of the organization. Trip participants also receive a Project HANDS t-shirt

Supplies: All the medications, disposable items and instruments that we need are taken to Guatemala with the team in red bins (see luggage allowance above). Most of these are donated but we do need to purchase some of them. If you are able to assist with the collection of supplies please let us know. Once again many hands make light work.



ONCE YOU ARE IN GUATEMALA

Health and Safety

Most of these are simply safety measures practiced by sensible travellers, however, please remember that we are depending on you to stay healthy. If you like to live/eat dangerously please leave it for another trip.

Drinking Water:

- This may be really obvious but DON'T DRINK TAP WATER !!!!!
- Only drink bottled water or Agua Pura (purified water)
- Avoid ice cubes unless you know they have been made of Agua Pura
- WASH TEETH WITH BOTTLED WATER.

Stay Healthy:

- Avoid purchasing food from roadside stands and street vendors (this may be tempting but please do not do it even if it is cooked). Many have come unstuck this way.
- Either peel raw fruit and vegetables, or wash with bottled water.
- Be careful of salads and dishes with raw vegetable unless you know they have been washed in Agua Pura.
- Be careful of dairy products unless you know the milk has been pasteurized.
- Do not eat raw meat or raw seafood.

Money:

- Be discreet with money. Carry small bills in a separate pocket from larger bills so you're not flashing lots of money around unnecessarily.
- Some people like a money belt.

Jewellery and valuables:

- Leave all jewellery/expensive watches at home.

Passports:

- Make photocopies of your passport and birth certificate, pack them in different bags. Do not carry the original with you. This is probably excessive protection, but purses and bags do periodically get stolen while travelling on buses or on the streets.

On the Streets:

- We have never had any safety problems while in Guatemala, however, it is advisable to be sensible:
- When out in the evenings walk with at least one other person.
- Stay in lighted areas and walk in the middle of the street as opposed to dark alleys or doorways.
- In the unlikely event that you are involved in a robbery, do not resist and calmly hand over your valuables. Please report any problems to us.
- If you are taking a taxi in Antigua, it should be yellow with numbers printed on the side (approved by the government).

- Refrain from picking up children or showing more than polite interest in them in public places (kidnapping children by foreigners is a real fear for some Guatemalans).

Unsafe places:

- The cross on the hill just north of Antigua is not safe. Robberies do occur there. If you want to go to the cross the Tourist Police can provide escorts.
- The cemetery in Antigua is also not safe.
- After dark, avoid going alone to monuments, ruins, and isolated places.
- It is not advisable to walk to or around San Juan Sacatpequez.

Etiquette and Cultural Sensitivity

Flexibility and an Open Mind

One of the most important things is to have a flexible attitude and an open mind. The pace in Guatemala is different and more relaxed than our rushed, time-conscious one in the west (a suggestion is to wear a rubber band on the wrist to remind you of this). Guatemalans do not judge themselves according to the speed with which tasks are done. This can be a bit frustrating if we try and do things at our North American pace, but is also a very enlightening and enjoyable difference if you go along with it.



Mayans are quiet people

Mayans are very gentle and quiet people in comparison to most North Americans (who have the reputation of being loud and boisterous). When walking down the street or going out to a restaurant, bear in mind that you may talk more than anyone else around you. While this may not be offensive, it is something to keep in mind.

Many Guatemalans understand more English than they speak. An unintentional joke or comment in English may be misunderstood or taken personally.

Drunkenness is unacceptable in Guatemala, as is making advances to local women, and is detrimental to our reputation. .

Greeting Guatemalans

When meeting or passing someone in the street or at work, a friendly greeting is customary.

Buenos Dias (until noon), *Buenos Tardes* (noon until 6.00 pm) or *Buenos Noches* (6pm until midnight) are always appropriate. *Hola* is a less formal greeting at any time of the day, and *Adios* is good-bye.

A firm handshake is always correct and polite when meeting someone for the first time, when greeting someone to start a day's work, and when finishing a day's work, or leaving a location for some time.

If you want to introduce yourself try: *Me llamo....*(pronounced *yamo*)

Taking pictures

Guatemalans (except perhaps children) are much more sensitive to having their pictures taken than we are. It is respectful to ask permission before taking a picture of an individual. They may agree or they may ask for payment (1Q is customary) in exchange for the picture. Never take a picture of Guatemalan military.

If you take a picture of a Guatemalan and tell them that you will send them a copy of the picture, please do it. They take you at your word and will be eagerly waiting for the picture. Since they have no way of getting pictures of themselves, the few pictures they do have are very precious.

Handing out candy and toys

This issue of gifts is a difficult one as if you give out one gift you can be sure the whole village will follow.

We do not recommend that you give gifts or candy or money to anyone. If they ask just say: *No lo tengo* (I don't have it).

Handing out gifts sets a difficult precedent in that Guatemalans already see North Americans as people with unlimited wealth who come simply to offer gifts.

HANDS will be giving gifts to the helpers at the clinic so you do not need to do this.

Street vendors

In Antigua especially vendors may approach you on the street.

If you are not interested in purchasing something, the best approach is to say a firm *No, gracias* and keep walking. Sometimes you may have to repeat this a few times.

If you stop, be prepared to negotiate and to buy something, or be courteous in your refusal.

Haggling is customary but be respectful during the process, and remember that both parties must be happy with the outcome.

Different, not better or worse

Indigenous Guatemalans are very skilled and strong and do most tasks by hand (you may see people manually washing clothes, mixing concrete, hauling wood and carrying wardrobes and concrete blocks on their backs). Many North Americans are quick to think the Guatemalan way of doing things by hand is inferior. Try to be open-minded and not assume that one way of doing things is necessarily superior to another

way; it is just different. Anytime you are working alongside a Guatemalan, and you see a more efficient way of doing something, please talk to a bilingual staff person before you make a suggestion. Sometimes, what you meant as a suggestion is taken by a Guatemalan as an order.

Getting Money in Guatemala

The Guatemalan currency is the Quetzal, although many tourist-oriented items, such as sightseeing trips, are quoted in US dollars. Exchange rate at time of writing is approximately :

CAD\$1 = approx 6.9 GTQ

US \$1 = approx 8 GTQ

The easiest and most practical way to obtain cash is by using your bank card in a bank machine, although not all machines work with all cards. If one doesn't work just look for another one.

It is possible to exchange money for Quetzales at Dallas and Houston airports

Should you wish to obtain Quetzals before departure you need to order them at the bank at least 10 days in advance.

Should you wish to use travelers cheques they must be in US dollars, however, line-ups at banks can be very long (one or two hours at a time) so changing them can be a pain. Most hotels can change travellers cheques at a slightly lower rate.

Visa/M/C are accepted in some place but anything paid for with a credit card is automatically subject to a 10% government tax.



AROUND GUATEMALA

La Antigua Guatemala

We will be in Antigua at the start and end of our trip and it is the place where you will have the most free time so we have given you some information to help you as you wander around. It is beautiful Spanish colonial city but it is nothing like the rest of Guatemala.

La Antigua Guatemala, as it is officially called, has a population of about 30,000 and is forty-five kilometres west of Guatemala City. It sits at an elevation of 1530 metres surrounded by three volcanoes Agua, Acatenango and Fuego. Fuego is still active and the plume of smoke and glow of lava are constant reminders of the geological activity that has affected the city from its beginnings.



The first things that hit travellers to Antigua are the cobbles the walled streets, the numerous ruins of churches and convents, and the colour of the textiles and indigenous people's clothes. The colour continues in the markets where Mayan women from the surrounding villages wear brightly embroidered *huipiles* and carry their babies on their backs in vibrant woven shawls called *tzuts*. Textiles fill the shops and hang on the walls. In the courtyards flowers blossom throughout the year and out on the streets sprays of bougainvillea drape over walls. Almost every block has the romantic ruins of a church or convent destroyed by the earthquakes that have plagued Antigua, and in the background loom the volcanoes - on a clear day the conical shape of Vulcan Agua rises above the city and on many nights a ribbon of golden lava slithers down from the summit of Vulcan Fuego.

La Antigua is a small city covering ten by ten blocks, with approximately four houses in each. Primarily due to its bizarre history, the city remains very much like it was in the 18th century. As with typical Spanish towns, all the houses face internal courtyards with

the street side of their walls finished in stucco. Carved wooden gates and windows with wrought iron grilles pierce the walls. One of the great pleasures of walking around Antigua's streets is peering through these gates and finding gardens, cinemas, internet cafes, Spanish language schools, laundries, craft shops, restaurants and cafes hidden discretely behind the colonial walls.

Antigua's Past:

The city of La Antigua Guatemala dates back to 1543 when it became the Spaniard's third capital after Santiago de Guatemala was destroyed by a mudslide. Upon its inception the city received the name of its two predecessors and became the third la Ciudad de Santiago de Caballeros de Guatemala, a name it retained until 1774. Barely twenty years after its birth the new capital suffered the first of several earthquakes which have plagued it for centuries. Each time the earthquakes hit, the city rebuilt.



Following the 1773 earthquakes the Captain General used the earthquakes as an excuse to relocate the capital. He chose a new location in the Valley of La Ermita for the country's fourth post-conquest capital, and gave it the name La Nueva Guatemala de la Asuncion (Guatemala City). In 1774 he order the old capital to be abandoned and from then onwards it became known as La Antigua Guatemala (the Ancient Guatemala). Today it is more commonly known as La Antigua, or simply Antigua.

Ironically it was the much-hated edict to abandon the city that saved it. For nearly four years after the proclamation the population resisted the order to move. Finally in 1777 the government declared the city would be levelled the following year. For the next few years mules carried gates, windows, beams, statues, pictures, altars, tiles, furniture, ornaments, artwork and anything else that could be moved was taken across the mountains to La Nueva Guatemala. Private homes were stripped to furnish buildings in the new capital. All the churches were ravaged of their paintings statues, altars and windows. The Captain General even wanted to dismantle his palace and move it, but fortunately the mules could not carry the first load and the plan was abandoned.

The old capital was not leveled but it became a ruin. The fine houses and churches stood empty and bare. Holes gaped where carved wooden gates and ornate shutters once hid secrets within. Around the central plaza the ruins of the palace, city hall and

cathedral looked onto weed-infested cobbles and a dry fountain. Nothing of value remained. Only a few poor stayed, living in crude mud and thatch huts

For fifty years the city wore its tattered coat, but with the introduction of coffee to the area around 1830 everything changed once again. By then the government had lost interest in the abandoned city and people had begun to move back and renovate the old houses. The request to rebuild the city according to original plans was denied, but work went on nevertheless and by the end of the 19th century the Cathedral, City Hall Palace, Palace of the Captains General, La Merced Church and the Santa Catalina Arch had been restored, and new life flooded into the old colonial streets.

With the arrival of the 20th century concerns rose that some of the colonial structures were being destroyed. One of those damaged was the fountain in the middle of the plaza, which had the heads of its four mermaids chopped off and thrown away. A handful of people became alarmed at the destruction and began working for the protection of the city. In 1944 Antigua became one of the first colonial cities in Latin America to become a national monument, and in 1965, the General Assembly of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History declared it a Monumental City of the Americas. In 1979 the city received the ultimate acclaim when UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site.



Getting Around Antigua:

The town is laid out on a rectilinear grid system which fans out from the main plaza. Avenidas run north (norte) to south (sur) and Calles runs west (poniente) to east (oriente), but this probably doesn't help very much as there aren't many street names. It is easier to navigate by landmarks and just remember the hill with the cross is to the north, Agua (the Mount Fuji shaped volcano) is to the south and the cathedral is on the east side of the main square.

What to do in Antigua:

Antigua is nothing like the rest of Guatemala. It is also a Mecca for tourists and those coming to learn Spanish, and many rich Guatemalans have their weekend homes there. The best way to see it is just to wander around. There are lots of great photo opportunities with plenty of churches, romantic ruins, courtyards, a pila (still used) and

the backdrop of the volcanoes. The market and craft market are interesting as is the bus station with all the painted chicken buses .

Some minor museums can be found upstairs in the city hall (colonnaded building on north side of square).

Neither the cross on the hill to the north of Antigua nor the cemetery are safe places to visit. If you do want to go there the Tourist Police can provide escorts.

Shopping:

There is lots of shopping in Antigua be it in shops or at the craft market or market. Most of the street vendors have been moved to the artisan's market but you might still find some around. It is customary to haggle at the markets and with street vendors but not in the shops.

Market (Mercado) – lots of local colour

Artisan's Market (Mercado de Artisanas) – local textiles, crafts etc

Women's Cooperative - lots of fascinating arts and crafts for a fixed price if you don't like haggling.

Supermarket (Supermercado) – if you want to buy food or a cell phone this is the place.

Travel Agents:

Sinfronteras (ask for Lorena Marroquin and mention you are with Project HANDS) 5a Ave Norte 15a, Antigua. Phone: (502) 7720 4400, www.sinfront.com Lorena's email is lorena@sinfront.com She speaks excellent English

This is the travel agent that we use while we are in Guatemala. They can organize airport transfers, trips around Guatemala and flights on to other Latin American destinations. The office is just off the main square on the road with the arch.

Internet Cafés:

Plenty of these everywhere. We recommend:

Conexion – 4a Calle Oriente #14 (next door to Hotel Aurora and through the courtyard of La Fuente). They have wired inside or wireless if you want to sit in the café around the courtyard..

Restaurants:

- Dona Luisa – 4a Calle Oriente No. 12 – good for breakfast or lunch, great bakery attached, try the scrumptious banana bread.
- Café Condesa – excellent for breakfast or lunch, now serves dinner. West side of the main square.
- Fernando's - 7a Avenida Norte, No. 43. - Serves Breakfast and lunch (empanadas and sandwiches). Debbie's favourite for the hospitality. A bit out of the way.
- Café La Fuente – 4 Calle Oriente (off main square). Nice courtyard. Vegetarian. Internet café in same courtyard.
- El Sabor del Tiempo – 5a Avenida Norte (on arch road on the left) - Great bruschettas for lunch.
- Frida's – 5a Ave Norte #25 – (past the arch on left, opposite the Women's Cooperative). Good Mexican food, good prices, a busy place that is a favorite for many.
- La Escudilla – 4a Avenida Norte 4 (off the main square) – mixed menu including typical Guatemalan food. Good prices.
- Las Palmas – 6a Avenida Sur, (one block west of square, in block behind Café Condesa). Courtyard and reasonable food. Good prices.

- La Fonda del la Calle Real – 5a Avenida Norte # 12 – (off main square on arch road, two restaurants of the same name opposite each other), good typical Guatemalan food, popular among the locals.
- Tre Fratelli – 6a Calle Poniente # 30 – good Italian food, nice atmosphere, good prices.
- La Antigua Vineria – 5a Ave Sur #34-A (next to Hotel Antigua) – Italian laid back.
- Los Cubanos – 4a Calle Oriente, (off main square) live Cuban music some nights.
- Meson Panza Verde – 5a Avenida Sur # 19 – Up scale, nice atmosphere, good food. Expensive.
- La Casserole – 1 Ave Norte (round the corner from Hotel Santo Domingo). Elegant, excellent French cuisine, pretty patio setting. Expensive.
- El Sereno – 4a Ave Norte # 16. International cuisine leaning towards French. Lovely colonial setting with many rooms and roof top terrace. Claims to be Antigua's most exclusive restaurant. Expensive.
- Hotel Casa Santo Domingo – 3a Calle Oriente # 28. Wonderfully luxurious hotel and restaurant built in the ruins of and old convent. Expensive but worth the experience.
- Welten – 4 Calle Oriente # 21. International cuisine. Number of rooms around a covered patio with a pond. Expensive.

Other Places to Visit

Guatemala is a beautiful country with an abundance of colourful crafts and markets, mountain, jungle and coastal scenery, and some spectacular Mayan ruins. Sinfronteras and most other travel agents in Antigua can arrange trips to the following places (see Antigua - Travel Agents):

Tikal: magnificent Mayan ruins in the jungle of northern Guatemala. Towering pyramids rising out of a jungle canopy. An extremely atmospheric place. A MUST for first time visitors. Best done in a two day trip from Antigua.



Monterrico: small fishing village on the Pacific Coast. Tropical and lazy with a few rustic cabins with thatched roofs right on the beach. Boat tours to a coastal nature reserve with mangrove swamps and breeding grounds for the endangered leatherback and ridely turtles.

Rio Dulce and Lago de Izabal: The Rio Dulce flows through tropical jungle scenery as it connects Lago de Izabal, Guatemala's largest lake, to the Caribbean coast. Boat trips on the river can take travellers as far as quirky Livingstone, with its black Guatemalans and Garifana culture, on the coast. From there your boatman can take you to the Seven Altars hot-spring further up the coast

Lago de Atitlan: a beautiful volcanic lake nestled between a ring of volcanoes. Several small towns and villages lie around its shores. The largest, Panajachel, is not particularly interesting but it is a jumping off point to taking boat trips round the lake. The most popular destination is the traditional village of Santiago Atitlan, where the cigarette-smoking and rum-drinking god Maximon is still worshipped. Other boats stop at smaller, more villages some of which cannot be reached by road. Some still retain their original character whereas others are more heavily influenced by tourists. Try staying at Casa del Mundo in El Jaibalito for spectacular views and a peaceful beautiful setting.



Chichicastenango: small town in the highlands famous for its huge biweekly market (Thurs and Sun). If you are lucky you may see one of the religious parades that melds Christian beliefs with those of the traditional Mayan beliefs.



Grutas de Lanquin caves and Semuc-Champey: North of Coban, visit the caves at Lanquin (bring a flashlight) and soak in the hot-springs at Semuc Champey.

Copan: Copan lies just across the border in Honduras and is one of the most important Mayan ruins. Very different to Tikal. Great museum explaining the ruins.

Quirigia Quirigia also has Mayan ruins, which are known for their intricately carved stelae. Much smaller site but again interesting

READING SUGGESTIONS

Guatemala. Lonely Planet.

Belize, Guatemala & Yucatan: La Ruta Maya. Lonely Planet.

I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala. Rigoberta Menchu's story reflects the experiences common to many Indian communities in Latin America today and recounts the hardships they faced during the civil war.

Time Among the Maya. Ronald Wright. The author travels through jungles and mountains to explore the ancient roots of the Maya, their recent troubles, and prospects for survival.

The Heart of the Sky: Travels Among the Maya. Peter Canby. Seeking to understand the secrets of Mayas' survival, Peter Canby discovers their genius at remaining virtually undetected by the outside world.

Sweet Waist of America. Anthony Daniels. The author's travels in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The Mayan Prophecies. Andrew Gilvert and Maurice Cotterell. Lost in the jungles of Central America are the remains of the Maya. The authors ask who were the Maya, where did they come from and what message, if any did they leave?

Bird of Life, Bird of Death; a Naturalists Journey through a land of political turmoil. Jonathan Maslow. The author travels in Guatemala to find the resplendent quetzal (bird of life). He finds the quetzal is increasingly endangered while the *zopilote* (vulture), the 'bird of death', flourishes.

The Blood of Guatemala; A History of Race and Nation. Greg Grandin. In the wake of the civil war a vibrant pan-Mayan movement has emerged to challenge Ladino (non-indigenous) notions of citizenship and national identity. Focusing on Mayan elites in the community of Quetzaltenango, Paul Grandin shows how their efforts to maintain authority and secure power over the indigenous population played a crucial role in the formation of the nation.

Antigua Guatemala: the City and its Heritage. Elizabeth Bell. The author has been a resident of Antigua for thirty years. With an emphasis on cultural tourism, she conducts tours around Antigua, has developed slide presentations about the city, Only available in Antigua.

A Beauty That Hurts. Life And Death in Guatemala. George Lovell. A good overview of Guatemala and its problems.

HANDBOOK ADDENDUM

In the weeks prior to departure Partner for Surgery will be providing more information about the specific locations in which you will be working. This will be forwarded to you.



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