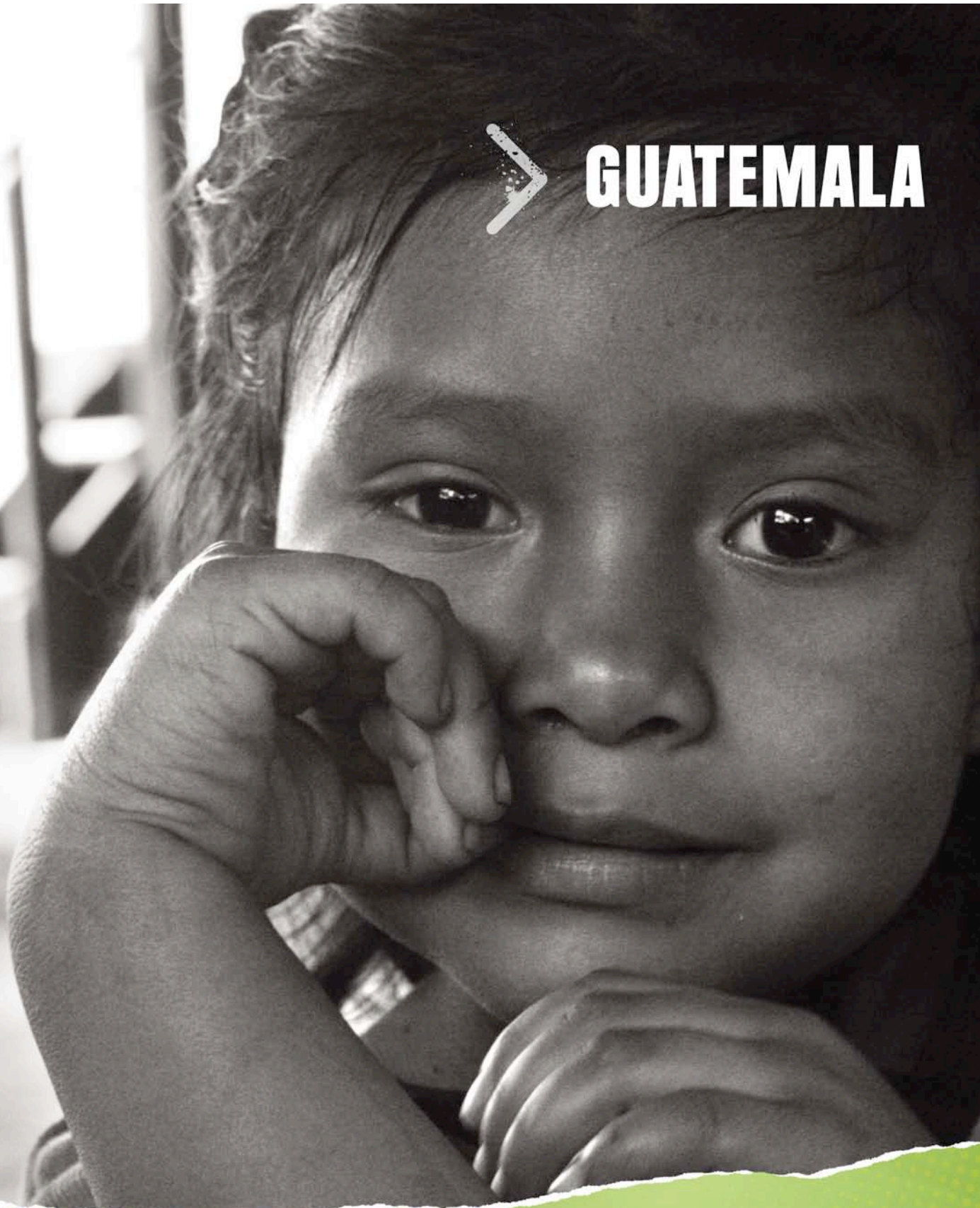




GUATEMALA



HANDBOOK
SOCIAL VOLUNTEERING in GUATEMALA



Learn and discover the world !

GUATEMALA



More than 300 million people in the world speak Spanish. It is spoken in countries in Europe, Asia, America and Africa. In Guatemala we can, in collaboration with an international language school in Antigua, organise individual Spanish lessons and voluntary work. As you learn the language, you get a unique knowledge of the Guatemalan culture and way of life. The voluntary work can, amongst other things, consist of work for the local Red Cross, on smaller projects in the villages or with street children, physically and/or mentally handicapped. The programme gives you a unique opportunity to visit the Latin American continent, and the months in Guatemala are a good beginning for a later trip in the neighbouring countries.

The country :

Guatemala is a very beautiful and fertile country. The northern border is Mexico, with El Salvador and Honduras to the south. The country has also natural borders, the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Caribbean sea to the east. The countryside is very charming and varied. In the highlands there are impressive volcanoes, clear lakes and large forest and mountain areas. In the lowlands there are beautiful sandy beaches and large jungle areas, with a wealth of animal and plant life. Guatemala has central America's highest and most active volcanoes and the most impressive Maya ruins. It is the country with largest Indian population, divided into 22 tribes. Each group speaks their own language. The youngsters especially master the Spanish language completely, whilst the older inhabitants, or the Indians that dwell in remote villages have difficulties with Spanish. The majority of the Maya Indians still dress in the traditional styles, with colourful, homespun costumes. Each tribe has its own characteristic costume, weaving technique and special embroidery. With its spontaneous beauty, fertility and interesting Indian culture Guatemala attracts many young travellers and tourists.

Below the surface :

Below the surface of "the eternal spring" hides a harsh reality. The majority of the inhabitants live in deep poverty and are often unable to realise their basic needs. In 1990 the child mortality rate was 54 percent, and illiteracy 45 percent. Apart from the major social problems, the Indian population has experienced a powerful political oppression. Through the years, one military dictator has taken the place of the other, with a violent oppression of the Indian people to follow. In protest against the dictator, and in attempt to overthrow the regime, the first guerrilla group was formed in 1960. The guerrillas wanted the Indian population in the country areas to support them, and they had some success. In 1982 the guerrillas obtained some power, and controlled a large part of the rural districts. A systematic oppression by the military was started in order to crush the opposition. Whole villages were burned and large massacres took place. Over a period of two years 40.000 people were killed, 420 villages were removed from the map and 250.000 fled to, amongst other places, Mexico. 1 million were made refugees in their own country. The conditions today are somewhat quieter. A civil government runs the country in a formal democratic system, and fighting between the military and the guerrillas is on a much smaller scale. A large number of refugees have returned from Mexico to plough their fields and start a new life in their native country. They hope for peace and economic improvement

Safety :

The troubles and the country's harsh history should not prevent you from visiting Guatemala. Generally speaking Guatemala is a safe place to visit and travel in. The local population is incredibly friendly and hospitable. As long as you do not get involved with politics, there's no reason to be nervous. Guatemala is Central America's most favoured and popular destination.

Please note the school has a safety box where you can leave your flight tickets and other valuable items if you wish to do so. This would be the safest solution to avoid losing your flight tickets. The school also propose a storage room where you can leave your luggage if you're travelling after the end of your program.



Antigua :



The school you attend, lies in Antigua; a very charming town with approx. 28.000 inhabitants. Antigua is the Spaniards old capital, founded in 1542. The town lies 1500 meters above sea level in a beautiful green valley, about 45 kilometres from Guatemala City. Cobblestone streets, impressive churches, palaces and colonial buildings, of which many are run down due to the lack of maintenance, make the town unique in Central America. Three volcanoes surround the town, and on clear days, there is a fantastic view from every street corner. The climate is very pleasant. It is usually 20-25oc in daytime with the temperature falling in the late in evening.

Restored colonial buildings are used to house, as amongst other things, cafes and restaurants. They are impressive buildings with massive wooden pillars which support large balconies and contain cosy patios with a richness of flowers and plants. You can sit here for several hours, over a cup of coffee, enjoying the atmosphere, observing people, writing a letter or reading a good book.

In the centre of town you'll find the large cobblestone colonial square where people from surrounding villages daily sell their textiles, rugs and similar items. The Sunday market in the square is a orgy of colours. Apart from spun fabrics in all colours and patterns, almost everything is sold. From brushes, toiletpaper, exotic herbs, vegetables, fruits and flowers to chickens, fried rice and candy. These days the traffic is banned from the square to give room the merchants.

Entertainment :

Because of the unique architecture, the pleasant climate and the growing number of language schools, there are a lot of visitors to Antigua. This means more possibilities than usual for entertainment. There are places to dance, cosy cafes where travellers meet, there are cinemas etc. If you grow tired of brown beans and corn tortillas, there are international eating places, where everything from large fruitsalads with muesli and yoghurt, to fondue and beef bourgignon, with a French cheese desert and a glass of red wine is served. You will be able to meet locals here as well as other foreigners, and for a moment discuss other things than Spanish verbs or the political situation. The big market place is situated in the western part of the town. Here you can buy everything from toothbrushes to pigtails for very little money. Especially on Sundays this market is very lively and colourful and if you take good care of your money, you can become a part of this fantastic atmosphere.



Seasons :

Winter : June – October : Rain season / Summer : November - May : Dry season.

The temperature depends on where you are in the country. In the coastal areas in the El Petén province it is warm the whole year round, 25-35oc. In the highlands, during the rain season the temperature at night can fall to freezing point. During the daytime the temperature is normally 15-25oc.

Day trips from Antigua :

There are many different places to go from Antigua. You can go on day or weekend trips to the surrounding villages, or visit one of the big markets where the Maya Indians sell their traditional woven textiles. A few hours bus ride from Antigua will take you to Lago Atitlán, one of the world's most beautiful lakes, surrounded by three volcanoes. A visit to one of the traditional villages on the shores of the lake, is a wonderful experience.

The transport system is generally efficient and very cheap. The busses run all the time but are not in top condition. They are always crowded, not only with people, but with products for the market, including animals – but it is a good place to come in contact with people.

The school :

The school was founded in 1992, with the principles of using its experience and guaranteeing completely professional teaching techniques for individuals and organisations. The school is located in Antigua.

The staff consists of a group of teachers who previously have served in the Peace Corps as Spanish teachers. They are well qualified and have taken specific university courses for teaching Spanish as a second language. They are professional teachers with years of experience in a variety of contexts. Appropriate techniques are used for individual learning styles with one-teacher to one-student. The atmosphere at the school is international with students from all parts of the world. Please note your host family will take you to the school on the first day of classes in order to show you the best way to get there.

The lessons :

Teaching is on an individual basis "one teacher – one pupil". The individual teaching makes it possible to teach exactly according to your needs, you learn the language at your own speed, and you can actively form the lessons content.

On the first school day, the teacher will test your knowledge of the Spanish language in order to make sure your lessons will be at the right level. The school offers Spanish lessons at all levels. The daily course duration is 4 hours, from 08:00 to 12:00 or from 14:00 to 18:00, with a coffeebreak. The school will also give a tour orientation on the first Monday of your classes.

In this way you are ensured highly intensive lessons. This is of course demanding – you cannot hide if you haven't done your homework! Individual teaching also gives the opportunity if it is relevant for the day's syllabus, for a spontaneous trip to a museum, a village or somewhere similar. There will be emphasis on the spoken language.

The teachers are used to teaching Spanish to foreigners and they are dynamic and motivated. Some evenings or afternoon during the week films are shown at the school.

Note : in case of misunderstanding or personality clash with your teacher, let the school know. They will be able to give you another teacher for your lessons.

Accommodation :

Your accommodation is with a host family during the language classes and, depending on the project you're placed in, during the volunteer work. You'll receive three meals a day, Monday – Saturday. Living with the family is a unique chance for you to practice your Spanish and you will get an idea of a Guatemalan family's daily life. Some families have more than one student living in their house. The families are all approved by the school direction. The Guatemalan host families are not to be considered as "exchange student families". You are not supposed to help the family in the house, you are a paying guest. All families have students living in for an extra income.



Volunteering work programme

To take part in the volunteering work programme, you must be at least 18 years old. This work demands **flexibility, maturity, initiative and drive**. The school staff will organize your volunteer placement before your arrival in a SAFE place to work. As you have decided to volunteer, you have to respect your engagements and be there on time. This is not a game for the associations. Show responsibility in the job. They are expecting you and are thankful for your voluntary work. Starting a new job is always difficult and maybe not very demanding in the beginning, as you may think that you don't speak enough Spanish or that nothing works out as planned. But you have to give it time, be patient, and try to involve yourself. Say YES to all responsibilities and chores given to you. If you're an open minded person, you can give a lot of yourself to those people who need it. In return, you'll receive love, experience and friendship forever.

The list below describes the volunteer projects you may choose from. On the application form, we ask you to state three projects you would like to work with. Our partner in Guatemala will try to place you in one of these projects although this can't be guaranteed as it depends from the needs of the local associations. After arrival in Guatemala you will have the possibility to visit the working place, while you follow the language course.

>> List of Volunteer Work Projects

1. Hogar Comunitarios, many locations in and around Antigua

Description: Day care centre for very poor children whose parents have alcohol problems or are single parents. On average, there are 20 children per project from 0 to 6 years old. Usually the centre is in another family's home. Although there will be at least one other woman to help you with the children, most of the activities will have to come from your own initiative! Realise that most of these projects are relatively poor, so the circumstances you will be working in are not always as clean as you are used to.

Activities: Working as assistant teacher for kindergarten children, help with the duties of the house and organise educational and recreational activities such as: singing songs, drawing pictures, dancing, help with serving food etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: 8.30 am – 1.00 pm

Capacity: Depending on the amount of children one or two volunteers per project.

Locations: Jogotenango, 3 kilometers from Antigua

Santa Lucia Milpas Altas, 15 kilometers from Antigua

Santo Tomas Milpas Altas, 17 kilometers from Antigua

Magdalena Milpas Altas, 19 kilometers from Antigua



San Lucas, 20 kilometers from Antigua

Ciudad Vieja, 5 kilometers from Antigua

It is possible to live in all these towns or in Antigua. Except for Ciudad Vieja, where living in Antigua is the only possibility.

2. Guarderia Infantil – Antigua

Description: Day care centre for market children and children with single parents. There are about 40-50 children varying from 0 till 6 years old. There are three different groups of classes with special teachers because some of the children need special education. The building is well kept and facilities are reasonably well. The project is in Antigua.

Activities: Helping with the babies, working as assistant teacher, organising sports and activities for the kindergarten children, etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: 8.00 - 1.00 p.m.

Capacity: On average one or two volunteers at the same time.

3. Obras Sociales del Hermano Pedro - Antigua

Description: The hospital is a big public place with 500 patients. The hospital depends on donations from organizations in and outside the country. It is an organisation of youngsters and adults that have dedicated themselves to help persons who come from families with few means, who do not have the time or skills to take care of their ill ones. Some of them are abandoned, some are old or ill people, who need to rest and can not stay in a hospital or at home, because they don't have any resources. People who need help or special care come here from all over Guatemala. It is possible to work at the different areas of the hospital:

- Centre for recovering from malnutrition : Here they care for children with different degrees of malnutrition.

- Places for mentally and/or physically handicapped children : Here they care for children with Down syndrome, quadriplegic, hidrocefalia,...the children receive attention from medics, psychologists, pediatricians etc.

- Places for elder men/women : Here they take care of old men and women that have no place to go. Some of them also suffer from different diseases common in elder people.

- Places for babies and little children who are recovering from an operation or other health problems : Here they take care of babies with all kinds of illnesses and children who suffer from a child disease or need an operation, for example cleft lip.

Activities: Depending on the area where you are working in, you can play and cuddle with the children, go for a walk etc. Other possibilities are to help feeding, bathing etc. When working with the handicapped children, you can give them physiotherapy and speech therapy, stimulate them by singing, simply giving them attention, care and love. The elder men and women mostly need personal care and attention, etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: 8.00 am – 1.00 pm. It is also possible to work in the afternoons.

Capacity: It is possible for many volunteers to work here at the same time, because in the hospital there is room for about 500 people, the more help, the better.

4. Nino Obrero – Antigua

The overall goal is to increase the level of formal education of children in the Sacatepéquez region.

Description: School Nino Obrero was established to help children whose parents are poor and do not easily permit that their children go to school. They have to help the family to provide for food or work with them at the camp. At this school there are about 60 children. Children stay at school from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm. Besides the school, there is also a training center where the children learn to design, create and sell handicrafts, which helps to support them and their families, as well as the program. Here they also get training in practical skills and experience in cooperative work.

Activities: Volunteers can work as assistant teachers and help organise sports or other recreational activities. If you like you can help them out with homework in the afternoons.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate/high intermediate

Schedule: 8.00 am- 1.00 pm, it is possible to work in the afternoons too.

Capacity: This is a project with at least 5 volunteers. Each volunteer will be working with 6 children on average.

Others: A \$25 fee it is required to work at Nino Obrera.

5. Red Cross – Coban

Description: In this project there are three areas where volunteers can participate. The health area, the area of Human Development and the Chaca program created after Mitch.

Activities: Volunteers can participate in caring for children, woman's health, general health, attention to emergencies, rehabilitation and construction of what was damaged during the storm, social projects, etc.

Minimum: 2 months



Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: Flexible

Requirements: This project is especially suitable for people with experience in this field.

Location: Coban is located about 5 hours drive from Antigua.

6. TPS Project

Objective: Technology for Health, known as TPS is a non-profit and non-partisan development association. TPS offers institutions and organized community services in; capacitating classes, technical assistance, information exchange, research and development in appropriate technology, tools to support local economics, public health and Mayan cultural awareness and community organization.

Description: Appropriate technologies are low tech devices that increase the level of public and environmental health while maintaining a sustainable profile. For example; TPS teaches communities the construction of efficient wood burning stoves. These stoves decrease the amount of firewood burned and also eliminate inhaled firewood smoke previously produced from open fires. Efficient stoves increase the public health of the family by reducing inhaled smoke and also decrease community deforestation through less firewood use.

Activities: Volunteers assist local staff in teaching how to affect the following: dry latrines, efficient wood burning stoves, solar ovens, traditional natural medicine, food conservation, water pumps and water storage, alternative living products and organic and sustainable agriculture.

Spanish level: High intermediate level.

Schedule: Full day's work.

Capacity: 5 volunteers

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and go by bus to the project every day, they have to pay for their transportation which costs Q4.00.

7. Cedin – El Tejar, Chimaltenango

Description: Montessori-oriented education program for 30 children. The children are from 2 till 6 years old.

Activities: Show the children how to wash themselves, teaching English and teaching songs, do little music experiments/concerts. They are planning to work with a baby group too and each Thursday a women group. During this time they will talk about first aid, what to do in emergencies etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: The centre is open from 7.30 am till 5.00 pm, so it is possible to help out all day.



Capacity: 1-3 volunteers at the same time

Location: Chimaltenango is located about 17 kilometres from Antigua.

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and go by bus to the project every day, they have to pay for their transportation which costs Q4.00.

8. Bendicion de Dios Project

Objective: Due to poverty, the children in this village have limited access to education and have to work from the time they are small.

Our objective is simply to use education to break the chains of poverty. We believe that the process and results of the life of each individual is to grow and better themselves daily in order to be productive. To educate the woman to raise their level of living. Provide clothing, food, health and education.

Description: This project is located in Alotenango, Sacaptepequez. It was establish to break the chains of poverty and ignorance and to better of quality of life through education and support to the families. Julio Cesar initiated this project entirely on his own without any outside financial help. Now this project is supported by donations and help from volunteers. The foundation works according to the so-called SKH (school-kitchen-home) plan. This includes the expansion and improvement of the existing school to improve the quality of education, the building of a kitchen to enable the children to benefit from nutritious meals, and the improvement of the children's living conditions at home.

The center has a capacity for about 120 children.

Activities: Volunteers will mainly be working as assistant teachers and participating in educational and recreational activities with the children.

Spanish level: High-intermediate Spanish level.

Schedule: From 8:00 a.m. through 1:00 p.m. or from 1 :00 p.m. through 5:00 p.m.

Capacity: 10 volunteers (5 in the mornign and 5 in the afternoon)

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and travel every day to the project; they have to pay for their transportation which cost Q3.00.

9. Nuestros Ahijados de Dios – Antigua

Objectives : The Asociación Nuestros Ahijados (ANA) was founded by Patrick Atkinson in 1991. They care for and educate needy children, women, and families in Guatemala.

Description: Located on the edge of Antigua, the project is housed in a widely acclaimed community development center, called "The Dreamer Center". The Dreamer center houses the school, the clinic, the offices and the Salon Walsh. The Atkinson Family Clinic provides free medical services to poor families and children. In addition to having a full time medical doctor, the clinic also retains the services of a full time psychologist. The Walsh Salon, provides meeting space for a variety of both in-house and community events.

On the second floor is a small administrative center. Eventually, a part of the ground floor will house a modern kitchen to cook the more than 200 meals served to children every day during the school week. **Activities:** Volunteers work in a variety of areas including education, construction, health care, technology support, and family development. Specific assignments will be made according to the skills and interests of the volunteer, as well as his or her Spanish language ability.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: Flexible

Capacity : 10 volunteers

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and walk every day to the project. If they want they can take the bus which costs Q1.50.

10. Albergue del Hermano Pedro – San Gaspar Vivar

Description: This is a home for physically and mentally ill children and a few adults. In total about 70 children who are all in wheelchairs. The helpers are in charge of the daily running and there is also a nurse, a doctor, a dentist and physiotherapists The home is extremely well kept and clean, with a nice green garden.

Activities: The volunteers can work with the helpers and the physiotherapists. With the helpers volunteers take care of the children, feed, bath, and make their beds. When working in the physiotherapy area volunteers work together with three physiotherapists of the home and help to repair broken wheelchairs among other things.

Minimum: 2 months.

Spanish: Intermediate.

Schedule: 8 am – 13.00pm

Location: 3 kilometres from Antigua.

Others: Usually only for people with education in this field.

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and go by bus to the project every day, the bus costs Q.3.00.

11. Puesto de Salud – different locations around Antigua

Description: A health centre for the community. The centre is free for the poor people and there is one doctor working here.

Activities: They accept nurses or medical students. Your tasks can be, educate people about different subjects, such as hygiene, health, nutrition etc, give medicine, weight babies, measure temperature, etc.

Minimum: 1 months.

Spanish: High intermediate.

Schedule: 8.00-13.00 pm.

Locations: Santa Tomas, Santa Lucia, San Lucas, Magdalena Milpas Altas

12. Casa Hogar para Ninos - Xela

Description: An orphanage with about 40 children which receive financial help from the church. The orphanage is run by a woman.

Activities: Volunteers help to dress and feed the children, look after the babies, house duties, help with homework and organise activities and play with the children.

Minimum: 8 weeks.

Spanish: Intermediate.

Schedule: Flexible.

Location: Xela, Quetzaltenango.

13. ARCAS Animal Rescue Centre- Peten

Description: ARCAS is a wild animal rescue and rehabilitation centre for the wild animals from the Maya Biosphere Reserve. All animals that come to the centre must pass through quarantine first. After this they are transferred to the rehabilitation area where they are held individual or in groups. There is an animal hospital on the premises for the sick or injured animals. They try to reintroduce all the animals back into the Mayan Biosphere Reserve, however due to the fact that many animals become imprinted on their human nurses or never receive training that a wild animal would, many of the animals may never be released in the wild.

Activities: The work consists of cage cleaning, food preparation, monitoring the health of the animals. In addition to these tasks volunteers will often be asked to perform extra duties such as construction of cages or extra buildings, trail maintenance, gathering wild food for the animals, research into the wild diets of the animals.

Minimum: 2/3 weeks.

Spanish: Intermediate.

Schedule: Flexible.

Location: 18 kilometres from Flores – Peten, in the north of Guatemala

Others: The costs for this project are higher, you will have to pay \$140 extra, on top of your program costs each week!! Participants will live in the project in a house for volunteers, it includes accommodation and three meals a day from Monday to Saturday.



14. ARCAS Sea Turtle Conservation – Hawaii

Description: In 1993, ARCAS initiated its conservation activities in the Hawaii area primarily as a response to threats to leatherback and olive ridley turtle populations by local egg collectors. Despite their endangered status, virtually all turtle nests are harvested and the eggs sold to restaurants or market. Turtle eggs are popular in Guatemala as an aphrodisiac; clearly not a basic need given a population growth rate of nearly 3%. In this program ARCAS solicits donations of the turtle eggs from local collectors and then reburies the eggs in protected hatcheries. After an incubation period of roughly 45 days, the hatchlings are released into the sea.

Activities: During the egg-laying season (June-October) volunteers spend nights walking the beach in search of nesting turtles, once found they collect the eggs and bury them in the hatchery. Once the eggs begin hatching (mid July-December), volunteers assist in releasing the hatchlings and excavating the nests to determine the hatchlings success rate.

Minimum: 2/3 weeks.

Spanish: Intermediate.

Schedule: Flexible.

Location: Hawaii is located 8 kilometres East of Montericco on the West Coast of Guatemala.

Participants will live in the project in a house for volunteers, it just includes accommodation. Each participant must buy and prepare their own food, which is not included in the fee price. There is a basic equipped kitchen for the use of volunteers (stove, refrigerator, microware and dishes).

Volunteer fee: \$75 a week

15. Ministerio de Jesus - Pastores

Objectives: The objective of the project is to improve the English skills of the children and offer them planned activities to keep them occupied.

History : This project was founded in the year 1994. Because the government does not do that much for children in need, Doña Carmen and Don Edgar felt the need to help them in their own way. Therefore they started their own children's daycare center. In 2004, because the amount of children kept growing, Carmen and Edgar decided to work with volunteers. Since then the project kept growing. But even now, with the volunteers, the whole family (Carmen, Edgar and their 6 children) puts all its energy and money in the project to help the children.

Description: Most of the children in this project come from poor families who are living in bad situations. Niños de Jesus has 3 locations where you can work: Pastores, El Barrio and San Luisito.

Pastores: Here you will work in the house of the family where they have made a little classroom for the children. In the morning you have the opportunity to work with the younger children. These children are between 4 and 9 years old. You can play with them and teach them things like the alphabet and the numbers. In the afternoon you can help the children with their homework, teach English and play games.

El Barrio: Here you will work in a little classroom in the garden of a family. In El Barrio you can only work in the afternoon with the older children. Here you can also help the children with their homework, teach English and other things. There are about 40 children, ages 13 and older.



San Luisito: Here the newest school was built in March 2007. It has 3 little classrooms and is also located in a garden of a family.

Activities: The main tasks are helping the children with their homework, teaching them basic knowledge, entertaining them and playing with them. Volunteers can teach them the alphabet, the numbers, counting, writing, mathematics, geography, bible stories etc. The children also have to learn basic social skills.

Spanish level: Intermediate level of Spanish

Schedule: From 2:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Capacity: 4 volunteers in Pastores, 4 volunteers in el Barrio, and 4 volunteers in San Luisito.

16 . Jardin de Amor - Antigua

Objectives: Due to poverty, the children in this village have limited access to education and have to work from the time they are small. This program has been set up with the idea of breaking through the chains of poverty and ignorance and bettering the quality of life by offering education and support to the families. Its four main goals are: education, food & hygiene, medical care and involving the parents and the local community into the development of the projects.

Description: The project was started by Julio García without any outside financial help. Now the project is supported by donations and help from volunteers. The center has a capacity for about 70 children. The project provides the children education (different subjects), meals, and the improvement of the children's living conditions at home.

Activities: In the morning, volunteers will mainly be working as assistant teachers. They work alone or together with another volunteer in a classroom, but there is always a teacher who can help. In the afternoon, they can help the children with their homework, teach English and participate in educational and recreational activities with the children.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: 8:00 am – 12:30 pm and in the afternoons from 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Location: Santa María de Jesús, Sacatepéquez, 7 kilometers from Antigua

Capacity: 4 volunteers

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and go by bus to the project every day, the bus costs Q.3.50.

17. Los Patojos – Antigua

Objective: Los Patojos (“The Little Ones”) believes in bettering Guatemala by forming proactive and conscious leaders who are aware of the problematic state of affairs within the country. They believe that, through intelligent and creative leadership, Guatemala will be able to find and create a brighter future.



Description: Los Patojos provides free education to underprivileged children (aged 8-18) in Jocotenango, who deserve the opportunity to create safer, healthier and happier lives. The school supplements the existing education with extracurricular activities and skill development. Awareness and opportunity are broadened through language courses, health classes, art, music, and the development of communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving. The students come to the project from 2-5 in the afternoon every weekday. The project also offers free English classes to adults.

Activities: To take an active role at the school, you will have to work for a minimum of 4 weeks. In that case you will have an array of opportunities. You can jump in and assist in teaching classes, create your own classes, design a program to implement, organize community events, assist in fundraising, head ongoing documentation, translation, etc. There are also tasks that need to be completed every day in order for the school to function: cooking, helping to maintain the garden, building new classrooms or revamping existing ones, assisting with translation, etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: From 2.00 pm – 5.00 pm

Location: Jocotenango, about 2.5 kilometers from Antigua.

Capacity: 5 volunteers

Participants will live in Antigua and go by bus every day to the project. The transportation to Jocotenango costs Q1.50.

18. Escuela Fe Y Esperanza

Description: School Fe y Esperanza started its work in 2005 with the objective of providing the poorest children with an integral education to offer them hope for a better future. It is a non-governmental and non-profit organization that serves children with few economic resources from the marginal areas of Antigua, Jocotenango and surrounding villages. They offer pre-primary and primary school, food, clothing, health, reinforcement, training and recreational and sports activities. The goal is to educate the children and give them work training and experience, to avoid them spending a lot of time on the streets.

In the morning, the children have school and in the afternoon, they get reinforcement, drawing, painting, learn English, computation, and practice sports. They also receive a complete and balanced lunch and a cup of atole, biscuits, cereals and/or fruit every morning.

Activities: In the morning, you can work here as an assistant teacher, correcting tasks, checking notebooks, helping children who have problems with mathematics, geography, science, etc. In the afternoon, you can teach English, make decorations with recycled material, draw, paint, dance, sing, give school reinforcement or organize other educational activities.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: You can work either in the morning (from 8.00 am – 12.00 noon), in the afternoon (from 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm) or the whole day.

Capacity: 8 volunteers

Location: San Felipe de Jesús, 2 kilometers from Antigua.

Participants will live in Antigua with a host family and go by bus to the project every day, they have to pay for their transportation which costs Q1.50; if they want they can walk every day to the project.

19. Hogar Temporal – Xela

Objectives: Their goal is to add the integral protection of childhood and youth to the agenda of civil organizations and to execute, promote and coordinate efforts and initiatives in favor of the most vulnerable children and young people of Guatemala.

Description: The home is an orphanage with about 65 children. There are also 7 babies and 10 special children. The orphanage has different departments, all of which can use volunteers at some time. There is an administration department, an education department where they work with the boys in the morning, from 8 am to 12 noon, and with the girls in the afternoon, from 2 to 4 pm. In these classes the children make their homework, practice or do other activities with the teachers. There is also occupational therapy from 8 am to 4 pm where the children do handwork. The little ones have early stimulation classes from 7 am to 3 pm and there is also special education from 2 to 4 pm. The supervisors take care of the children, help them with bathing, control their hygiene and also offer them recreation.

Activities: Every volunteer is connected to a member of the permanent staff in a department and works on the basis of a work plan. Every week there is also a meeting with all the volunteers. The volunteers can help out in the different departments, where necessary. They can give English classes to the children, help out during the weekends when the children go to church, help with activities like singing, music, drawing, painting, etc. They can also help with the realization of different projects, collect money or things to realize projects or other necessities. Sometimes you can also help the volunteer coordinator find new volunteers, for example in volunteer work fairs, by bringing leaflets to Spanish schools, etc.

Minimum: 4 weeks

Spanish: Intermediate

Schedule: From 8 to 12 am and/or from 2 to 4 pm, flexible.

Capacity: 4 volunteers

Location: 4ta. Av. 3-45 Zona 1, Quetzaltenango

Participants will live in Xela with a host family.

ACCOMMODATION :

You will be accommodated with local host families and receive full board, except on Sunday. In the cases where the projects take place in Antigua, Guatemala City or in the nearby villages, you may continue to stay with your host family. Otherwise the school will find another host family for you or you will be accommodated in the project itself.

Additional note :

As much as we would like to have Guatemala to live up to European standards, we have to warn that the employers do not prepare your arrival by organising a weekly work schedule or other special instructions. You will need to show initiative!

FINAL NOTE :

During your stay, you will encounter two kinds of volunteers : participants who are really willing to help, to take initiatives, to invest their time, to live difficult situations... and volunteers who behave like tourists and only want to give help when it pleases them...

If you really want to gain something from this volunteering program, you will need to belong to the first category. If you want to be really integrated in a volunteering project, you will need to work for this project for the whole duration of your stay! It's not after 15 days, that everybody will trust you. Trust is something you will have to earn over time!!!

You will also need to show initiative and good will. The persons working full time in volunteering projects are understaffed, overworked and they need all their time for their children. They don't have a lot of time to spend on you. On the contrary they are expecting you to help them in their tasks.

THEREFORE, YOU NEED TO BE WILLING TO WORK ON YOUR OWN, UNDER LITTLE SUPERVISION. This is how you will gain the respect of the staff and the children!!!

The rules of the program :

IN THE SCHOOL :

1. You have to be on time at school (08:00 am).
2. Respect your teacher.
3. There is no possibility to interrupt your course for any other reason than being ill. You have to finish your Spanish course period as planned.
4. Speak Spanish with all people, no matter if they are from the same country as you are. At the school, only Spanish is allowed.
5. Don't come to school under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
6. If you can't come to school one day, please warn your teacher.
7. If you are going to travel for a few days, the teacher won't reschedule the lessons.

IN THE FAMILY :

1. Clean your room.
2. Be on time for meals (if you are not going to eat with the family, let them know).
3. Don't bring strangers into the house without asking for permission.
4. Show consideration and do not come home under the influence of alcohol.
5. Drugs are illegal in Guatemala.
6. If you want to leave the family for any reason (travel, live with friends...) remember you have paid for your stay and there will be no refunds.

IN THE VOLUNTARY WORK :

1. Accepting a job means showing up and participating.
2. Be there on time.
3. If you are ill, call the school, so they can call your job to let them know.
4. If you really don't want to work, just say it and don't promise to do it.



5. There are different rules from project to project.

6. It is not allowed to find projects on your own. Only the school's projects are accepted because of safety regulations.

7. If you go to work without the school's help, the school can not be held responsible for anything happening to you. If this working place should be outside Antigua, the school will not be responsible for your accomodation and will not pay for this.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS :

1. Don't just trust every one you talk with. They may seem kind but maybe they are not.

2. If you take a bag with important things (credit card, money, passport...) with you, be careful, your "friends" may not be real friends.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Before you depart :

It's a big challenge to live and work in a poor Latin American country. It demands courage, some experience and the ability to adapt. It can be overwhelming, especially in the beginning, to have to adjust to completely new conditions, communicate in a foreign language etc. Things are not as you are used to, the climate, the food, the atmosphere – everything is different. During your work you will be faced daily with a harsh social reality and experience things very differently than a tourist would.

To take part in the work programme, maturity, flexibility, independence and the desire to do social work are demanded. At the same time it gives you the opportunity to do some meaningful work, and not do mention - an experience for life.

Arrival :

Upon arrival at Guatemala City airport, you pass customs and take your luggage. Outside the airport the driver of the language school will wait for you. He has a sign with your name on it. He will drive you to your accommodation address. If this person is not there when you arrive, wait for about half an hour. If nobody is coming please call the driver, Leonel Garcia, on the following phone number : + 502 5928 5809. You should also call the same number if there is a delay in your flight so the school can organize a delayed pick up.

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU NEED TO ARRIVE IN GUATEMALA CITY ON SUNDAY AS THE CLASSES START ON MONDAY. THE ORIENTATION IS ALWAYS GIVEN ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF THE CLASSES.

IF YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR FLIGHT TICKETS, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND YOU TO TAKE A FLIGHT WITH IBERIA AS THEY ARE MORE FLEXIBLE ON THE RETURN DATE THAN AMERICAN AIRLINE COMPANIES. IF YOU TAKE A FLIGHT TICKET WITH AN AMERICAN AIRLINE COMPANY, IT'S LIKELY THEY WILL NOT LET YOU DEPART WITH A RETURN DATE EXCEEDING 3 MONTHS FROM THE DEPARTURE DATE. THIS IS NOT THE CASE WITH IBERIA.

The next day of your arrival, your host family will show you the way to school. If ever you shouldn't be happy with your accommodation and hostfamily, or should you want to change accommodation because of distance etc. please contact the direction at school. Even though students seldomly wish to change hostfamily, your opinion is appreciated and the school direction prefers to hear from you in time.

Visa and work permit :

Upon entry to Guatemala you'll receive a three month tourist Visa. If you wish to stay longer you can extend your visa in Guatemala.(costs 100 Quetzales). The administration at school will explain how and where to get a new stamp. As your work is unpaid and your stay is regarded as a cultural exchange, it is not necessary to apply for a work permit.

E-mail :

There are several internet cafes in Antigua and prices are low. some 4 to 7 quetzales for 30 minutes. It's probably the best way to get in touch with your natural parents as it is rather difficult to call from Guatemala. Please note that you WILL NOT be allowed to use your host family's phone (if they have one). Also, all the international phone cards don't work in Guatemala. Most of our former participants asked their natural parents to contact them from Belgium at specific times. This seems to be the only real working method!

Vaccinations :

Entry to Guatemala is not subject to vaccination requirements, but it is recommended to get a vaccination against tyfus, tetanus and liver infection and to take malaria tablets. If you wish to travel to other Latin American countries before or after your stay, it may be necessary to take other vaccinations, for example yellow fever, Hepatitis A and B... Note that vaccinations should begin about 3 weeks before your departure.

Clothing :

The Indian women dress in traditional costumes, while the general population, the so called "latinos" dress in more modern way. Poverty does not prevent the men from wearing well-pressed trousers and a clean white shirt. The women usually wear dresses. Short dresses and hot-pants should be crossed off a girls packing list. Light dresses, skirts are preferable. Advice to young men – take the patched Levi's with you – not the torn ones.

What I need to take with me :

If you intend to work with children, you could for example take some used toys, games or something similar you can imagine the children will like. It's always a good idea to take a picture of you family and friends, where you live and so on.

Travel expenses :

Travel expenses are not included in the price. It is obligatory to book a return ticket. The Guatemalan customers will refuse your entry into the country if you do not have a return ticket. The return flight does not necessarily have to be from Guatemala. It may just as well be a return from the USA or Mexico. **Please note that you will be required to pay a tax upon your departure from the country. This tax amounted to 30 USD but it can vary from year to year.**

You can use a Visa card in many banks and shops in Antigua and if your Maestro is activated you can use it as well (the use of Eurocard and American Express is more difficult). Have you planned trips and excursions to other parts of the country, we advise you to take travel checks or USA dollars.

Food :

The Indians population in Antigua sell delicious and good looking food, but in many cases this food causes stomach problems. Your hostfamily prepares 3 meals a day for you, fresh and healthy food. You can of course without problem eat and drink in coffeshops etc. In case of stomach problems, the school director is authorised to give medical advices. The host families can contact him 24 hours a day.

Going out :

If you plan to eat in town, remember to warn your hostfamily, even though there are no refunds for missed meals. If you don't sleep "at home", it is also important to warn the hostfamily. It is not allowed to have (boy or girl) friends over for the night. In all cases it's a good idea to respect the Guatemalan mentality and culture.

Holidays :

During your language course you cannot interrupt your tuition. It's possible to plan a holiday between course and job start, if you inform the school direction during the special preparational sessions. Absence from your volunteer job, without warning, can jeopardize your job.

The language school organizes afternoon activities (for exemple video's with background information on Guatemalan society). Remember to look at the bulletin board at the office. Some activities depend on the number of participants. If you plan an excursion on your own, ask the secretary or director for advice. Antigua is called the Guatemalan Oasis. Many people visit this town and therefore there are many buses from and to Antigua. On the marketplace the typical colored buses leave for many destinations.

Laundry :

Laundry is not included in the family service. Around Antigua, you can find several laundries. They are not expensive. But if you wish to wash your clothes by hand, it is possible to do it in the house, the only thing you have to do is buy soap (a bag of powdered soap is approx. Q 2.50).

Some advice for your homestay with a Guatemalan family

Host families :

Your host family plays an important role in your stay in Guatemala. They will teach you a lot about the country's traditions, culture and society. They will allow you to get a close look into the daily life of Guatemala. The food, the language and lifestyle are different from the Belgian way of life, and you will get a lot of experiences by sharing their way of life. Antigua is in many ways an international town, because of the fact that many young people come to learn Spanish and experience the surroundings of this beautiful country. The town is called the Oasis of Guatemala because life is not as hectic as in Guatemala city and because there is no pollution and less crime.

The host families are used to have foreign students in their house and know what it means to meet people from other cultures. They have received a special training from the school coordinator to avoid mentality clashes and to realize what it means to meet persons from different cultures. On the other hand, this means that you should also try to respect their way of living. For example, heavy drinking is not well considered in Guatemala. Very often, the host families will host more than one student. This is sometimes a good solution for girls as it is not wise to go out alone in the evening. These host families are not to be compared with families in the USA or other countries which host exchange students. The people in Guatemala are poor. You pay for your food and your accommodation. This payment is an extra income for the families. They are not supposed to entertain you or keep you busy but still this is a great opportunity to communicate with local people.

Host families are all as different as the students are, but generally spoken they are middle class families, of which one or more family members work. Most families have TV, radio and other modern equipment, but only a few of them have a telephone. Some families are what we call typical central American families, where up to four generations live in the same house. It's very common in Guatemala that children don't leave their parents' house before they raise a family themselves. It would be considered a disrespect to their parents to leave them before.

Family members, coming from other parts of the country will always be welcome - it would be very unnatural to have them staying at a hotel! At the same time it's very normal that grandparents live with their children and participate actively in the family life, prepare food, take care of the children or help in another way. Sometimes "servants" also live with the family and participate in daily life. All together, family life is very important in the Guatemalan society - economically, socially and culturally spoken, and there's a tight bond between family members. It's not unusual that a host mother with a high level of education decides to stay at home as a housewife as soon as she has children. Children are most important for them.

Guatemalan people are relaxed, very friendly and open minded. They are interested in the foreign students and their background. Don't forget that if you show interest for your host family, they will show their interest for you! A smile is always met with a smile. If you don't show your interest, your host family will think you prefer a more distant relationship and will not impose itself.

It's a good idea to bring along pictures from your family and your friends, so your host family can imagine what your life looks like abroad. Don't bring along expensive gifts as they would feel embarrassed, but you are welcome to bring along something typical of Belgium to the family. If they have small children, something to play with.

Most Guatemalan families are Catholics, which means that they have another attitude towards sexuality and relations between men and women. Girls should not dress too provocative. It's better to leave hotpants, tight jeans etc. at home.

Apart from this, the style of dressing in Guatemala is very informal, except on special occasions like parties, holidays... where they really dress up. At Easter time, for example, small children are dressed like princesses and princes. Boys have more freedom than girls as the macho ideas still are very much alive! It is typically the father who earns the money and who is the head of the family but, in reality, the mother often takes the big decisions for the family. Notions as politeness and respect for other people and their properties are very important to them.

You will probably be shocked while seeing the poor population. Remember that the school is an idealistic school. The humanitarian work you will perform is most welcome to this part of society. The school directly invests money in some of the projects for children. They pay wages for a teacher at the institution. The school director is a Godfather for a humanitarian school, maintains and improves the buildings. Therefore, apart from the fact that your help is welcome, you also indirectly support the Guatemalan institutions which try to improve educational possibilities for children.

The school is very international. Students from all over the world attend Spanish classes. This means that you probably will meet American, Japanese, Canadian students... The teachers don't use English when teaching Spanish. Be aware of the fact they don't speak French or Dutch. You should therefore take your dictionary with you.

In order to avoid misunderstanding which could occur due to linguistic and cultural differences, you should try to be aware of the following:

- Remember that you are a part of the family, not a simple hotel guest. It's natural that you keep your room tidy, make up your own bed, and help to clean the table after a meal. It's possible that the hostfamily will laugh when boys do so, but it's worth a try.
- Tell your hostfamily if there's anything you cannot eat or drink. Like people in China who eat rice, the Guatemalan population is fond of beans. The host families have been told that Europeans are not too fond of them but you may expect beans once in a while.
- If you have planned to eat in town, and will return late, remember to inform the family in time.
- Ask the family when it suits them best you take a shower... if you have to share facilities with the other family members who will have to be on time at work.
- Ask your host family if they accept you take friends home! If you are given a key of the house, you should never give this key to anybody else.
- Never use the host family telephone. The postal system does function... It takes about 10-14 days for an airmail letter to arrive to destination. Family and friends should not send any valuable objects by mail, unless it is absolutely necessary. They should then use an express delivery company. Use the school as a postal address, if not it takes a lot longer. We advise all participants to have an Email address before they leave Europe. A hotmail address doesn't cost anything and will save you a lot of money. There are several hotmail possibilities in Antigua and, should you travel around after your stay in Guatemala, you can get your mail wherever you are.



If any misunderstandings should occur between you and your host family, although we don't expect this to happen, you should talk with them about it - it can be a minor linguistic misunderstanding, easy to solve.

If this is not the case, it is very important that you contact the school to enable them to arrange another accommodation for you. Don't wait until the end of your stay, when you will be asked if you have been happy, to contact the school if you have a problem. Remember that you are a paying guest and the representatives of the school will be sorry if you talk to them too late. They prefer to have people leaving Guatemala with happy memories.

Finally the most important: remember that you are in a foreign country to learn its language and its culture. Enjoy your stay, get as much experience as you can. Be open minded, kind and interested in your host family daily life. This way you can be sure that your stay will be a success- linguistically and culturally speaking. You will return home with experiences for the rest of your life and friends forever.



Special note for Study & volunteer participants:

Important : This note only applies to students taking part in the Study and volunteer program (combining a semester in an American High School with a volunteer program.)

THE HOST FAMILY :

In the USA, you have been hosted by a non-paid volunteer family. They have included you has a full member of the family. **Please realize that this may be different in Guatemala.** Families are paid to host as they would not be able to do it for free. Also it is often a good way for the families to receive an additional income which will help in their family budget. So while you may feel welcome by your Guatemalan family, this may not be always like a “second family”.

THE DEPARTURE DATES :

While we will do our best to respect your preferred departure date, please note it will not be always possible due to the availability on the program and flights tickets. In such cases, we will try to find a date as close as possible to your wishes. You will receive a list of departure dates during your High School program. **Departures are always on a Sunday.**



Some experiences of past participants

Santa Catarina :

Two girls tell of their experiences in a small village, where they took part in a vaccination program: *“We took part in a vaccination campaign in a small village close to Antigua. The campaign was arranged by the medical health clinic in the village and was repeated at regular intervals. We were taking some of the work load from two of the Guatemalan nurses, who went from house to house in the village. The nurses gave the children vaccinations, while we completed the health reports and gave information about colera.*

We also distributed general information material about health and hygiene. The work took a couple of weeks. Our being there meant that there were more time to speak to the inhabitants of the village, also the quality of the treatment was increased. In some cases the mothers objected to their children being vaccinated. It was then necessary to explain to them how important the vaccinations were, and the children’s right to a good health.

The increased contact to the people meant that the medical health campaign produced better results than previously obtained.

The campaign was a big success, and it was a great experience to take part in it. We have obtained a really good idea of the activities in the area of medical health and at the same time have obtained unique knowledge of the way of life in the small Guatemalan villages”.

Chimaltenango :

A Canadian girl tells of a morning at a center for single mothers.

“I worked at a center for children with various problems - Centro de Bienestar Social - and took part in, amongst other things, painting a playroom. There was a nursery school where the parents paid 3 quetzales (about 15 Bef) for a month. The children get 3 meals a day. One morning when I was about to start work, there was a small boy, missing. The leaders were surprised that he was not there. They explained that it may have been because the mother did not want his 4 years old brother and 2 years old sister to come to the center. They asked if I would go with them to the mother’s home and speak to her about it. I said, of course yes.

We went through the poor quarter, where lots of rubbish laid in the street. In the house we found the small boy and his small brother and sister. They were very dirty and only half dressed. The little girl had diarrhoea. The mother was not there. We went into the room. On the floor of stamped clay there were some old pots and two hard maiz tortillas. There was no furniture, only two wooden beds, in which there were some old clothes that served as mattresses. We decided to dress the children and take them with us to the center. It was a hard job finding some clean clothes for them. On the way out with the three children, we met their neighbour. He told us that the mother often did not come home before ten o'clock in the evening. The children were left by themselves all day without anything to eat. Each night he heard the children begin to cry, when their mother came home”.

Guatemala from A-Z :



Guatemala is a magical place. If you're into the Maya, the mountains, the markets or a million other things, you're bound to be captivated. People come and they stay. Or they leave and return. There's almost too much going on here, and even the shortest trip takes you completely different places, with new challenges and surprises. Students of Spanish flock to Antigua a gorgeous town nestled between three volcanoes, while those travelers seeking more off-the-beaten-track destinations might head to lesser known places like Lago de Izabal or Nebaj, a Maya village hidden in a remote fold of the Cuchumatanes mountains. And sooner or later, just about everyone ends up in the Highlands – Lago de Atitlán being an irresistible drawcard...

Guatemala's Maya heritage is everywhere. El Petén's remote archaeological sites are unmissable; the fascinating town of Chichicastenango adheres to pre-Hispanic beliefs and rituals even now. Santa Lucia on the other hand, provides a glimpse into the mysterious Pipil culture, with some interesting carved stone heads and relief scenes to be found in fields and *fincas* (plantations) around town.

Sure, Guatemala's got its problems (most visible in its sprawling capital, Guatemala City, but it isn't the scary place you fear it is. Travel here, once dangerous and uncomfortable, is now characterized by ease – you can do pretty much whatever you want, and will only be limited by your imagination.

FAST FACTS ABOUT GUATEMALA

- **Area** : 108,890 sq km (smaller than the US state of [Louisiana](#), a bit bigger than [England](#))
- **ATMs** : Plentiful
- **Budget** : US\$15-30 per day
- **Capital** : [Guatemala City](#)
- **Costs** : Budget hotel in [Guatemala City](#) US\$10, bottle of beer US\$2, 3hr bus ride US\$3, set lunch US\$3
- **Country code** : 502
- **Electricity** : 115V to 125V, 60 Hz; US-type plugs
- **Famous for** : Maya sites
- **Head of state** : President Álvaro Colom
- **Languages** : Spanish, Maya
- **Money** : US\$1 = Q7.90 (quetzals); US dollars readily accepted
- **Phrases** : *De huevos* (cool), *papichulo* (handsome man), *Chapin* (Guatemalan)
- **Population** : 13.1 million
- **Traveler's checks** : Cashed at major banks (ATMs are easier)
- **Visas** : North American and most EU citizens need only a valid passport

Antigua : After a violent eruption of the Agua volcano, that destroyed the former capital Ciudad Veija, Antigua was founded in 1543. Its name was: La Muy Noble y Muy Leal Ciudad de Santiago de los Caballeros de Goathemala. But after the eruption in 1773, the capital was moved to the valley where Guatemala City lies now, and Antigua got it's name – as the old Guatemala. Antigua is the only town in the country that preserved it's small colonial houses, it's simple infrastructure and cobblestone streets. The town shows old ruins, palaces and churches everywhere, and each of these buildings has it's own history. The surroundings of Antigua add to it's astonishing beauty as well. No less than three volcanoes look over the city. Antigua's heart is Parque Central. The beautiful park is situated between cathedrals and two old palaces and is the colourful, lively frame for street traders, shoe shining boys, catch penny shows and doomsday preachers. Besides being the ultimate meeting point, the park also is a quiet place where you can read a book, write postcards or just lean back and observe the coloured crowd of people passing by. The town has many small restaurants, bars, cinemas and discos and despite the extensive tourism, there still are a lot of places where only local people come. The large market place is in the west side of town. Here you can buy everything from toothbrushes to pig's tails for very little money. Especially on Sunday this market place is very lively and colourful. Watch out for your money though.

Beaches : Guatemala has natural borders to both the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean. Only three hours drive from Antigua you can find the beaches of Monterrico and Puerto San Jose. Beaches in Guatemala are black, the sand originate from the surrounding volcanoes. Take along your sandals as the sand can be burning hot. Montericco is far more peaceful and beautiful than Puerto San Jose. Livingston, ant the river Rio Dulce are situated in the North. The lifestyle here is Caribbean, people talk English and a large part of the population is black. We recommend you sail down the river and visit the small villages and the jungle.

Chicos malos : is the name for young guys in Antigua, abusing generosity and inclination for adventure. Use you common sense when they contact you. Host families normally do not accept that you invite Guatemalan friends into their home. Ask for permission first, and listen to the schools and families good advice

Developing country : Just like every poor country Guatemala has a high crime rate. That's why it is important that you take care and use common sense. If you bear this in mind there's no reason to worry. Don't carry a lot of cash and leave expensive jewellery at home. Don't leave your drink on a table and return afterwards. Just as in Europe drugs are a problem in Guatemala between young people and at discos

Excursions : The school organises almost every day excursions to coffee- and nut farms, indian villages, and museums round about Antigua. You pay only the transportation and entrance fees. These excursions are a unique chance to get behind the facades and discover every day life or industry in Guatemala. From time to time trips to the volcanoes Pacaya or Monterrico beach are organised. Besides the interesting cultural aspects, these trips give you the opportunity to learn to know the other students and teachers. Some afternoons, videos are shown at school. Visiting voluntary working places is also organised, which enables you to see where you want to work, and make a final decision with the co-ordinator.

Electricity : You cannot use devices bought in Europe, unless you have a transformer, which can be bought in Antigua.

Food. Tortillas, guacamole, frijoles (black or brown beans), salsa picante, moshe and platanos (fried beans) are some of the specialities you are bound to eat in Guatemala. Besides these dishes the country has a large supply of vegetables and fruit which you definitely will taste at your host families table. Chicken is a regular dish – meat is not that common. Should you get tired of beans, Antigua offers a large scale of restaurants, where you even can get a Double Whopper, or Thai shrimps in lime sauce.

Guatemala City : the capital, has 2,7 million inhabitants. Houses are low because of the danger of earthquakes. Although some zones are not safe for tourists, the town is worth visiting, thanks to the chaotic market places where you can buy everything from key rings to turkeys or showy Americanised supermarkets where prices are like in Europe. The three major earthquakes in 1917, 1918 and 1976 destroyed a lot of the town, but if you can stand the heat, pollution and traffic noise, there are some exciting museums, parks and historical buildings worthwhile seeing. Most people prefer to stay out of the capital.

Host families : All the families hosting students are affiliated to the school. Many families host more than one student. Hosting students means a supplement to the families income. Even though you will get information about your host family before you arrive in Guatemala and probably are tempted to buy some gifts for their children, it is better to wait until you know them. Families may feel embarrassed as you are a paying guest in their house. You can always later, during your stay buy a gift. It is important that you respect your host families private life. Regarding girl or boy friends visiting you in your room, you will have to ask your host family if they accept. Usually they do not mind, as long as they are foreigners. Remember to warn in advance if you do not sleep at home, they might get worried. Never give the house key to anybody else! If ever a problem should arise between you and your host family, talk about it with the co-ordinator at school in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Jungle : It takes 12 hours to get to Tikal by bus from Antigua, only one hour from Guatemala by plane. Tikal is the historical Maya town. In the middle of the jungle suddenly appear the overwhelming pyramids, which you still can climb. The park opens at 5 o'clock in the morning. It is a wonderful and unforgettable experience to sit on the top of the highest pyramid, admiring the jungle below and see the sun rising over the treetops. The jungle around you is filled with noises from howlers, toucans, budgerigars and parrots. We strongly advice you take a guide, as the temples hide a tremendous amount of stories and mysterious ornamentation's. Tikal was the centre of the Maya world some thousand years ago. Reconstruction and preservation of the pyramids is still going on.



Luggage : You should include the following items in your luggage :

- Insurance Card and Passport
- Copy of your insurance policy, your plane ticket and your passport (to leave behind with family members)
- Visa card
- Dictionary and travel guide
- Paper and pen for school
- Insect repellent
- Bathing suit, in case you have time to go to the beach.
- Sleeping bag and warm clothes, if you want to climb a volcano.
- Sandals, walking shoes
- Raincoat, in case you are in Guatemala during rain season.
- Something for the children in the institutions. (Toys, teddy bears, dinky toys, games etc).
- Pictures of your friends and family in Europe
- Some US dollars for the first days

Lago Atitlan : Surrounded by several volcanoes the lake Atitlan is situated in the middle of mountains, about three hours from Antigua. The lake itself is a collapsed volcano, and histories tell that there is no bottom.

Marketsplaces : About two and a half hours by bus from Antigua you will find the big market town Chichicastenango. Every Thursday and Sunday these towns are filled by hundreds of traders, coming from the small villages nearby. They leave their homes early in the morning in order to take to town and sell their vegetables, fruit, kitchen tools, and hand woven textiles. Using your trading skills you can buy hammocks, blankets, skirts, ceramics and masks' for very little money.

Nightlife : Everywhere in Antigua you can find cosy colonial buildings, housing bars pub's dancing places or restaurants. Most places are open during the whole week, and "happy hour" is a well known concept in town. A Cuba Libre – rum and coke – costs about 4 quetzales but remember you have to get up early for school next day. There are places almost exclusively attended by tourists, and there are places where mostly local visitors come. In these last places your chances to learn Salsa and Merenque are best. All bar's close at 01.00 because of "La ley seca" – the dry law.

Ordinary courtesy : Politeness is the keyword between Guatemalans. They seldom use the word "tu"– usually say "usted". Women kiss each other on the cheek when they meet, men shake hands. You should of course treat your host family with respect. They are very tolerant towards foreigners. From experience they know that you are in a foreign country and do not speak Spanish that well, and need to learn the habits and rules of the house.



Population : The Guatemalan population is composed of many ethnic groups. Usually divided in three types: The Mayans, the Ladinoes and the foreign elite, that has lived in Guatemala for generations without mixing with the other inhabitants. More than 10 million people live in Guatemala. The Mayans are mostly occupied with agriculture, or as street traders, while the Ladinoes often are shopkeepers, mechanics or bus drivers. The foreign elite owns hotels, or occupy higher positions. These are the people who can afford longer educations. The average percent of illiteracy is 30 percent. This is an enormous problem in the entire country. The transportation, school uniforms and books, fees etc. often exceed the monthly income of a whole family. Illiteracy is highest in the central part of the country, called Alta Verapaz – which also is the part where most Indian people live. The average here is 58 percent.

Infant mortality rate is 48 per thousand, and the average lifetime is 66 years. (all figures are from 1999). In Guatemala City 54 percent live in poverty, while Alta and Baja Verapaz have a 91 percent. Highest rates are though in the North-western part of the country with a 94 percent. People living in the surroundings of Antigua (that is to say Chimaltenango, Sacatepequez and Escuintla) have a rate of 76 percent. 36 percent have no access to running water, 36 percent have no electricity or telephone, which is considered a luxury here. Especially women and even more Indian women are victims of poverty. How much poverty you will see depends on your working area as a volunteer. Watching children without shoes, or beggars in the street can make a strong impression, as you may meet the same children later that day, at the institution you are working for.

Panajachel : is the town where all the tourists gather. That's why it is called "Gringotenango". If you get tired of listening to travel stories, you can sail in a boat from Panajachel to the surrounding small villages. There are small cosy hotels.

Quetzal : Guatemala's currency is called Quetzal, named after the national bird, a little long tailed red and green bird. It is very seldom but can be seen with some luck early in the mornings in Tikal or in the Quetzal region in Coban. "Cents" are called Centavos. It is possible to pay with US Dollars, travellers checks and credit cards in some shops. Several banks in Antigua accept Visa cards. (Master is not always accepted in banks).

Even though Guatemala is a developing country you will surely be surprised about prices in supermarkets and shops, especially in Antigua. If you choose to go shopping on the markets places you can save a lot of money buying fruit, tin food, and clothes etc. It requires some trading skills, but it is usually easier to discuss those prices than items like souvenirs.

Hotel prices vary a lot. There are cosy hotels for 50 quetzales (double room) and hotels with the same quality for 200 quetzales. Hereby a list mentioning price levels for several items. (Updated May 2000.)

- Avocado (aguacate) 1,0 q. p.
- Cucumber (pepino) 1,0 q. p.
- Oranges (naranjas) 2,5 q. for 5 p.
- Pineapple (Piña) 7,0 q. p.
- Bananas 5,0 q. for 12 p.
- Peaches (melocoton) 1 0,0 q. for 3 p.
- Mango 5,0 q. for 12 p.
- Melon. 3,0 q. p.
- Watermelon (sandia) 4,0-8,0 q. p.
- Shirt 20,0-25,0 q
- Sandals 40,0 q
- Jeans 50,0 q
- Sanitary towel, 15 pieces 21,0 q.
- Orange juice, 1 litre 4,5 q.
- Coca cola, 2 litre 7,95 q.
- Potato Chips, small - big 1,95- 12,0 q.
- Toilet paper , 12 rolls 10,95 q.
- Detergent, 250 gr. 2,45 q.
- Stamp 4 q.
- 30 min. Internet connection 4 q. – 7 q.

Respect : In order to respect the population that wears traditional costumes you should not wear those clothes. Indian women coming to Antigua every day to sell their articles usually wear the traditional costumes, showing which town they come from. Only few Indian men still wear their traditional clothes, mostly in towns like Panajachel and Chichicastenango, or Todos Santos. Very short skirts or shorts can be fine to wear on the beach, but do not dress with such clothes in Antigua or other towns. Both in respect to the population, but also for your own sake, as it is not funny for girls to hear whistling all the time.

Semana Santa : Inspired by Spanish culture, Easter absolutely is the most important Holy season. Even before the Holy week, processions are organised every Sunday through town. People carry statues of a crucified Jesus. Easter is a must, although you get tired of seeing thousands of tourists. Prices go up during this week, it is impossible to find a hotel room, or tables at restaurants. Maundy Thursday is the most important day, as the whole town is up during the night, in order to create the colourful "alfombras" – carpets made of sawdust, flowers and food. The town is buzzing of activities until early in the morning, when the first processions leave from the different churches in town.

Shuttle : A shuttle is an alternative form of transport, arranged by small travel agencies. Shuttles are organised to the airport and all kinds of tourist areas. These shuttles may cost 8 times as much as the public busses, but can save you from many dusty hours in a warm and overcrowded bus.

Transport : The bus system seems unstructured and confusing, especially in the capital. But busses always show up, even in the smallest villages and drive regularly. The bus drivers have been told not to take too many passengers and they try to stick to this new rule.

Before the bus drivers had to crawl over people in order to collect the money. Don't expect though that this rule is respected, busses are still very crowded. It is a very special experience to take a "camioneta" – or "chickenbus", you certainly get close to the population. Often three persons take a seat meant for two and nobody is offended. Taxis in Antigua are substantially more expensive than in Guatemala city. Remember always to agree on a price BEFORE you get in and take care of the so called pirate taxis. The officially recognised ones have a clear sign in the window with the drivers name and picture on it. It sometimes is better to travel with a shuttle, depending on the time of the day and destination.

Tuition : You will have your own teacher at school. It is not allowed to interrupt your lessons. You can plan excursions or trips during weekends. Long lasting excursions are to be planned after your Spanish lessons, and before starting to work, or after your working period.

Voluntary work : The school is directly involved with humanitarian work in Guatemala. This way we join efforts with the participants of the language- and voluntary work programme, to improve the living conditions for the poorest people of the society. The direct sponsoring of children, or financial support to certain institutions is co-ordinated through the direction of projects in Guatemala. The different projects and working places need volunteers that are committed and can take the initiative to help. This means that you will have to organise yourself activities for children. There will be no scheme or working schedule waiting for you, as you would expect in Europe. You will have to be prepared to work but most of all – to take the children to your heart!

Visa : Arriving at Guatemala City airport you will get a stamp in your passport. This visa stamp is for three months. If you intend to stay longer you will have to take into Guatemala City in order to get a new permit. (Costs approx. 100 quetzales). Opening a migration office in Antigua has been planned a long time ago, but has not been realised yet. Another possibility is to travel to surrounding countries for some days. Upon re-entry, you get a new stamp for another 3 months.

Weather : The climate is quite unstable, depending on your location in the country. Especially in the higher regions where temperature can vary from 30 degrees during day time to 5 degrees during the night. Coastal areas and lowlands are extremely damp and warm during dry season. During rainy season, which lasts from May to September sun shines usually to 16.00 o'clock in the afternoon. Then heavy rain fall changes the streets into small rivers. December and January are the coldest months, March and April are the warmest.

