

# **Life Builders International**

## **SHORT TERM VOLUNTEER MISSION GUIDE**

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### **WHO WE ARE:**

We are a non-denominational Spirit filled evangelical ministry. That means we are open to the Holy Spirit working in our lives through miracles and healing; and sharing about Jesus is a very important aspect to our ministry.

### **WHAT WE DO:**

We are a flying ministry that ministers to the places that we fly to and our neighborhood. Life Builders opens new ministries and helps edify existing ones. In 2005 we began a feeding center in a rural area that reaches out to the widows in that area. We assist the widows with food, fire wood (which they use to cook) and in 2016 Life Builders began an egg program. Life Builders also preaches, teaches, does evangelism, runs children's programs, prays for the sick, and also helps other missionaries with transportation and housing.

### **Essential for trip:**

- **Get a [Passport](#) (USA)** Usually apply at the post office unless you need to expedite.
- **Fill out [mission trip application](#).** Liability waiver that you have read the volunteer mission guide and application must be signed for each person coming. If you do not have a form ask your group leader or it can be downloaded from our web page. Applications are due 6 months before your departure. All youth under 18 must have parent or guardian sign.
- **Buy your flight tickets.** Sounds logical, I know, but some folks wait to purchase tickets and, in the end, find out that their preferred travel dates are not available. 5 months prior to departure. You can either buy through internet or through our travel agent. If you start with our travel agent continue to work with her. If you find it cheaper on internet tell her. She can buy that ticket as well. We have a reduced rate with her of only \$10 per ticket. [EMAIL](#) her or number is [1\(815\)969-8123](#). Her name is carol with ABC Christian Travel. When you call have dates, names as appeared on passports, and date of birth of each person in your party. She can reserve good deals for 24 hours without a commitment to buy. She prays thought each groups ticket and always comes up with the best deals for God's glory.
- **Pay your [mission trip fees](#)** by internet \$575 first week and \$280 each week after. Send fees 3 months prior to departure. We realize that when you come on this trip between airplane ticket and mission trip fees, you are investing over a thousand dollars for us to purchase supplies for your mission trip, pay someone to organize your trip, food, housing, transportation etc. Only \$200 of those fees go toward the projects you are doing or see happening. Your fees go toward taking care of you and the projects while you are here. Many times, we are actually putting more

resources in your trip than what is actually received for your mission trip. We are in need of thousands of dollars to transform this world. You may consider being a monthly partner. One-year commitments have different more economical system since you help us maintain and grow the mission and taking care of our teams.

- **Buy [travel insurance](#).** Life Builders has no insurance to cover you. As one cannot anticipate the future, travel insurance is recommended to cover any unanticipated travel costs – lost bags, cancelled flights, medical issues, etc. Our travel agent offers trip insurance as three levels. Airplane ticket, mission trip fees, and or medical accidents. It is between \$25-\$75.

**Call your credit to make a trip plan/ debit card company to confirm that your card can be used internationally and at ATM machines.** You make a trip plan with the exact dates you will be in the country. All expenses of your trip are included in your mission trip fees, but some have wanted to bless the mission with resources or have wanted to buy nick knacks. Going to the bank takes a long time, but using a cash machine is instant. Make sure you have your four-digit pin.

#### **TRAVELING TIPS:**

1. **Pack bags at 48 lbs.** If over 50 lbs., Airlines charge up \$100 per bag when you go over by 1 pound. On most airlines you can bring one 48-pound bag for \$25 and the second for \$40. As bag allowances change according to airline, be sure to check on-line what your airline permits. Usually you can have one carry on bag that is smaller plus a personal item such as a purse, briefcase, backpack, attaché case or computer bag. Spirit airlines does not give even carry on bags, but will allow a personal item which is a backpack. In order to keep our prices, the bare bones minimum we expect each group bring items to help the mission especially the items that we ordered and have mailed to you.
2. If not sure what you can legally bring and want to know how to secure your luggage try looking it up on the [Transport Safety Administration](#) web page and put all tools or sharp objects in your check in luggage and not your carry on.

#### **CLOTHING:**

1. We recommend you use pants and only wear shorts at the Mission Base. **Do not wear shorts.** Even walking down, the street wearing shorts can be seen as unusual. Guatemalans perceive wearing shorts as you in the States would see someone walking around without a shirt. If you're going to church or shopping do not to wear shorts Skirts that are knee length or longer are acceptable. Cropped tops should be avoided.
2. We recommend you bring enough clothes for your stay with us. We suggest that you bring clothes and supplies that are presentable, but also prepare to work. Pack dark Kacky pants or dark blue, or since it is not as easily soiled. Some short sleeve button down shirts as well as a Jacket since at the feeding center it is very cold in the mornings. You are seen as more important than the president of their country since you represent Christ. Please plan on bringing a suitcase to bless the mission. This keeps our Mission Base supplied with tools for ministry opportunities and outreaches. If nothing is sent to you look for items that could be used for outreaches. Our biggest shortage is Spanish Bibles. There are just so many needs that you cannot imagine. Nights get chilly here so you'll want a sweatshirt or very light jacket especially out at the feeding center.
3. Please **cover any tattoos.** In our neighborhood, the tattoo marks what gang you are from, and if they do not recognize the gang it puts our family at risk.

4. **Do not wear clothes with holes in it.** Guatemalans see you as ambassadors for the Lord Jesus. In this culture there is no middle class so being presentable is an important cultural value to them. In the United States we have a cultural value of being different or an individual. It is still a cultural value. Please respect what they value. We are not here to change the culture unless it goes against God's word.
  
5. Don't forget to **bring pajamas** and slippers. Many just use tshirt and shorts for bedtime. Not all rooms have a private bathroom, so some of you will have to walk down the hall to use the bathroom.
  
6. **Do not wear any crosses.** Guatemalans believe that you are in violation of one of the 10 commandments when you wear a cross. They have reason as to why this is wrong. The Bible says, in Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.<sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,<sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." They believe that people use the cross as a lucky charm, which is wrong which they see as idolatry as well. They are trying to keep Christianity pure.

#### **MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **No shots or vaccines are needed** if you stay with us in Guatemala City. Even if someone scrapes himself with a nail you can get the tetanus shot here for just \$3.00. There's a medical clinic on the back side of our mission base.
  
2. If you're under any medical treatment or you need any special medicine we suggest you **bring medicine with you**. They may not have the medicine that you are prescribed. Put your medicine in your carryon in case your luggage gets delayed or lost. We can provide you medicine if you get sick during your stay with us. We try our best to make an all-inclusive mission trip that provides everything you will need for your stay with us. If you get diarrhea, we need a stool sample to determine what is affecting you. Doctors in the states do not know the types of bacteria here with the most common way to cure.
  
3. Do not bring medicine for random things you think you will get sick. We can get medicine for any sickness at a fraction of the cost which is included in your trip.

#### **Documents:**

Passports / copy of passports / driver's license / flight itinerary / medical info / copy of document numbers (credit cards, license, passports...).

#### **PACKING LIST FOR ONE WEEK:** Packing List for Guatemala

**Important:** We request that you try to pack all of your personal clothing and affects in your carry-on bag. There are two reasons for this. First, luggage will frequently get lost on its way to Guatemala and show up several days later or not at all. Second, we like to use the crewmembers' baggage allowances for donations and supplies. The baggage allowance you donate can bring the children much-needed donations (shoes, clothing, etc.). The use of your baggage allowance is greatly

appreciated!

Things to pack for 1-week mission trips: Please bring clothes that you don't mind getting dirty or ruined because we WILL be working hard. Think safety, too! (sturdy shoes, etc).

Since the airlines now charge each way of travel for bags, you can even consider leaving your clothes and suitcase behind as an additional donation! You can also fill up your carryon with remembrances of the trip.

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**Clothing:** 5 Jeans, pants, or capris, 5 to 8 short-sleeved button down shirts for daytime, 3 Long-sleeved shirts, 3, or 1 Rain jacket or poncho, Underwear  Bra(women)  Socks  Warm pajamas (some of the locations feel cold and damp in the evening, and the hotels typically do not have heat), shoes both for ministering and working , and a swim suit that can double as shorts for sleeping in.

There may be more limits to carry-on baggage based on available space and additional restrictions on certain flights.

## **SECURITY CHECK CARRY-ON RESTRICTIONS**

### **Make Your Trip Better Using 3-1-1**

(From the TSA website: [www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm) ) **3 –1–1 for carry-ons**

3-ounce bottles or less; 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin.

**One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring.** 3 oz. container size is a security measure.

**Consolidate** bottles into one bag and X-ray separately to speed screening. **Be prepared.** Each time TSA searches a carry-on it slows down the line. Practicing 3-1-1 will ensure a faster and easier checkpoint experience. **3-1-1 is for short trips.** If in doubt, put your liquids in checked luggage.

**Declare larger liquids.** Prescription medications, baby formula, and milk are allowed in quantities exceeding three ounces and are not required to be in the zip-top bag. Declare these items for inspection at the checkpoint.

**Come early and be patient.** Heavy travel volumes and the enhanced security process may mean longer lines at security checkpoints.

**Filling out customs & immigration forms on the plane (airline staff will give them to you):**

- Be sure to complete EVERY question. Here are answers to some of the questions:  
Flight Number: Put your airline name and flight number here. Type of Passport: —check “ORD” (which means ORDINARY passport) Reason for Travel: TOURIST

Place you will be staying in Guatemala: Everyone can use Life Builders International (don’t need address, just mission name).

**\*\*REMEMBER TO SIGN THE CUSTOMS FORM AT THE BOTTOM. YOU DO NOT NEED TO ITEMIZE CONTENTS OF BAGS--JUST SIGN FORM AND REPORT NOTHING TO DECLARE. READ BACK OF FORM SO YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT YOU DO NOT NEED TO DECLARE ANYTHING.**

***At airport: Immigration***

- You will need to show your passport and the immigration paper you are given on the plane.

***Baggage Claim***

- Collect your checked bags. Free luggage carts are available.
- Put your bags and personal items on it cart **and proceed “with confidence”** to customs.

***Customs***

- **IF** customs stops you, this is what you say. You can either claim that it is personal where there is no taxes or you can say it is for a kids, or widows program. **Most important—ALL DONATIONS ARE USED ITEMS—NOT NEW.** This is the reason we take everything out of its new package otherwise they believe that you are bringing it for resale. **You are allowed a value of \$500 for items or donations** beyond personal item. Personal items are never charge importation taxes. Don’t let the customs’ workers bully you. All of our packed bags have less than a \$500 value per person; so don’t allow them to trick you into paying a tax. Remind them, if necessary, that it is illegal for them to tax you when you are carrying under a \$500 value of items, and that all of your items are NOT for re-sale. Because sometimes they say you are bringing a lot total of resources for the group and try to charge taxes as a group. There is no taxes when each person brings under \$500 per person beyond personal items. Do not have group suitcases. Each person be responsible for your suitcase and the suitcase you are bringing with ministry supplies.

After clearing customs, proceed with confidence outside of the airport. Regroup just outside of the doors in the blocked off area and wait to leave airport parking lot with the group. **Do not wait for your group inside, but pass through customs and regroup outside the airport.** Be prepared for what awaits outside of the airport. Many taxi drivers will be eager to offer you their services. You may be bombarded by people offering to carry your luggage, shine your shoes, exchange US coins for dollars, and sell you just about every widget and

gadget that exists. At first you may find it hard to say "no". Even though they might be good people, with good intentions, there are always those looking for the right opportunity to take advantage of you. Someone wanting to exchange US coins for dollars may take all your dollars if they see what is in your wallet. Normally such things do not occur however there is always the exception and you don't want to be it! Just use your common sense, remember you are a guest in their country, and enjoy every minute of it!

### *Food and Staying Healthy*

*Drink only bottled water! If you drink the tap water, even if the hotel says it is purified, you may find yourself sicker than you have ever been before. We have purified water for you.*

*Only eat fruits that have a peel. Examples of what to eat include: watermelon, papaya, bananas, etc. Examples of what not to eat include: lettuce, strawberries, grapes, tomatoes. If it can be peeled or washed thoroughly, you are most likely ok to eat it.*

*Porous fruit such as strawberries are hard to wash and most likely will cause you to become very ill. HOWEVER, just because a food is on the "ok to eat" list, does not mean you can eat it anywhere it is sold. For example, don't buy already slices watermelon from the lady that sells it on the bus or on the corner even though it looks fresh. It is not worth the chance of getting sick. All food that is offered to you in the hotel is safe for you to eat. Stick with the restaurants on our approved list, and you will be fine. Be sure to order your drink with no ice in the restaurants.*

*Do not eat food from street vendors. Only eat at restaurants named on the list enclosed in this packet.*

### **GUATEMALAN CULTURE:**

*Get ready to be flexible! Guatemala doesn't run on the tight time schedule we are used to in the United States. Use your waiting time to get to know your teammates better, journal or practice some Spanish phrases. "Rather than assuming that Guatemalans are irresponsible slackers, it is important to remember that, for most of them, time consciousness is simply not a top priority."*

Guatemala is the politest country in the Americas. Everything is prefaced with please, thank you, if you could, if you are able, if it is possible. Be respectful of their culture and values.

1. When eating with Guatemalans we say "buen provecho" (good appetite) and the others respond "Gracias" (thank you). The first person leaving the table is expected to say "buen provecho" and all the others say Gracias. Should you enter a room and people are eating you say "buen provecho" and they respond with "Gracias".
2. Guatemalan's are friendly but we suggest you only greet those that you know, such as neighbors or other contacts that arise during your stay.
3. When you greet someone, some people may want to shake hands with you. It is typical in our neighborhood to shake hands of both men and women. Among the poor neighborhoods you just shake hands, but some people in other areas will probably greet you and kiss your cheek especially if you are dressed up. You do not actually kiss women, but you put your

cheek on theirs and make a kiss sound. If you're a man you must never greet another man by kissing his cheek, only shake his hand.

4. When entering an elevator or office Guatemalans usually say "Buenos días" (Good morning), "Buenas tardes" (Good afternoon), "Buenas noches" (Good evening/Good night).

*Dress Code* Guatemala City and other large cities are more Westernized and casual, but modesty is still important and shorts are not recommended. Rural villages are more conservative and you will often see the Maya in the traditional indigenous dress (*traje*). "Traditional clothing connects the Maya to their past and is also a major part of their present-day identity. It is the most visible manifestation of the Mayan philosophy and belief system. Each design is associated with a particular village, and more than 150 Guatemalan towns are documented as having distinctly different *traje*." Culture Smart: Guatemala

### **Be Accepting of Ways That Are Different Than Yours**

*Value the Guatemalan Culture. Do not fall into the tendency to think, "I'm going to help these poor, needy people." We are going to Guatemala to share our time, love and resources with our brothers and sisters. The people we serve persevere in the face of extreme hardships. They are champions, and they should be treated as such. The only difference between them and us is our easy access to resources. We must always be sensitive to our posture and our attitude so that when we do offer our resources, others feel the love, respect and dignity they are entitled to.*

*Keep a sweet and honest spirit:*

*Find ways to identify with people you meet – accept customs and ways of doing things that are different than yours. Learn a few phrases in Spanish. Greet people with appropriate polite greetings. The locals will appreciate the effort.*

*We are not on this trip to impose our American culture on the Guatemala people. In the book "I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman In Guatemala", Rigoberta speaks of the Maya people resisting or rejecting the advantages that could result from adopting techniques of other cultures. One example she gave was her refusal to use a mill to grind her corn. The mill would make her work much easier, but it would destroy the traditional way of life for her people. By continuing to do things the traditional way, they are able to preserve the Mayan culture and proclaim their ethnic individuality.*

*Cultural awareness is more than realizing a culture is different than yours – it is learning to value that culture.*

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves." Philippians 2:3

## **Culture Shock:**

*Culture shock can come from small things like not having access to internet or your morning newspaper, to remembering to use bottled water to brush your teeth and ordering your sodas with no ice. But you may also get stressed or anxious about what you are seeing and experiencing in Guatemala, such as witnessing the poverty, seeing the street children, and meeting children who are faced with a difficult future. Animal lovers may be distraught at seeing the fate and conditions faced by street dogs. Anytime we are taken out of our “normal” it can be stressful.*

*“We need to continually remind ourselves that on such a short trip we will seldom correctly perceive or completely comprehend everything we see and experience.”*

## **Working Together**

*“How good it is when brothers live together in unity.” Psalm 133:1*

*In Steven Covey’s book “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” he tells us that “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing”. All too often we let lesser things obscure our vision.*

*“Working together is hard. We often have to be willing to lay aside our pride and individualistic mindsets and concentrate on what’s best for the team. It means making personal sacrifices because we are responsible to each other.”*

~ Guidebook to the Road Less Traveled

*Every decision we make affects the life of the team. Examples: If one person needs to stop to make a pit stop, the entire team and vehicle have to stop. Try your best to be part of the team which includes going to the bathroom when others are going so we do not have to make a special stop just for you. If one person decides not to forgive another, the whole team feels the tension. We need to be patient with each other.*

*Share ideas, power, expertise, and the floor. You are our partner in ministry. Work with enthusiasm. Think big. Be “me for others” centered rather than “me for me” centered.*

*Respect your fellow crewmembers. Everyone brings gifts and strengths to the group. We can learn from each other, so share ideas and expertise, and keep your eyes and ears open to see what you can learn from others, your team members and the Guatemalan people as well. Keep in mind the American way may not be the best way. Keep in mind that we are all from different backgrounds and religious denominations. When we treat each other as we want to be treated – we can’t help but be united.*

## Survival Spanish for Guatemala Mission Trips

- **Learn some basic Spanish** Try these online sources: or purchase a small travel book (Lonely Planet) for “Latin American” Spanish. There are both [paid resources](#) and [Free Resources](#)

### Pronunciation

A = similar to A in father E = similar to A in date I=similarities E in O = similar to O in low U

= similar to U in flu H = always silent J = similar H in hospital

### FUN THINGS TO DO:

We usually have a “free day” and these are some of the fun things that we can enjoy doing in Guatemala:

- There’s a pizza place that sells pizza by the meter (about 3’) and cooks it on a wood fire place
- Pollo Campero has 5 different ice cream cone flavors
- Chocolate covered bananas in the neighborhood
- Handicraft markets near the airport and in zone 1
- At night we can go on our roof top and share some hot chocolate/coffee and sweet bread. The bakery is across the street.
- Antigua Guatemala is an antiquated town that has kept old style traditions and has large handicraft markets

### FOOD:

Life Builders international is preparing 3 meals, but we suggest that you read the following advice to make your stay more comfortable. Everything is included in your mission trip, so don’t be bashful if you are thirsty or need a snack just say something.

- Avoid eating sidewalk vendor’s food (fruit, hot dogs, tacos, ice cream or “ceviche” which is a meal made with sea food and vegetables). Also avoid lettuce, we use spinach leaves in our salads and have never gotten sick. If they do not have a sink and a refrigerator, do not eat there.
- If you have any specific diet needs or food preferences please email us one month in advance at [Jason@lifebuildersinternational.org](mailto:Jason@lifebuildersinternational.org), and we will do our best to accommodate you. Once you are here it is too late.

### Water:

1. **Drink ONLY purified water.** In Spanish you must ask for “Agua Pura.”
2. Brush your teeth with purified water, too!
3. How to get purified water while outside the Mission Base: Buy bottled water or ask in the restaurant “Puede darme agua pura.”

## **TIPS FOR YOUR SAFETY:**

1. Don't walk on the streets at night unless approved and never by yourself. We recommend you not wear any jewelry when you go out on the street because this catches the thieves' attention and there's a higher risk of you getting robbed.
- Beware of dogs in the streets, don't touch them or try to play with them as they are unlikely to have been vaccinated and may carry disease such as rabies. Dogs are known for biting, so stay away from them.
- Bring your smart phone as a camera, be careful while using it on the street because this might draw the attention of thieves.
- Don't carry excess cash. We have 3 small safes at the Mission Base for passports and cash. Before we go out to the village decide what you want to bring with you and what you want left back at the mission base. There are hand crafts at the village where our feeding center is located and it would be good to bring some quetzals for buying nick nacks.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION:**

1. Money: Either Jason or Tressa will go to the bank and exchange your dollars for Quetzales the first day you are here. \$1 = Q7 approximately. Do not exchange at the airport since it is a private company and they give a terrible exchange rate. It looks like a bank, but it is not. Only exchange at real banks or at our mission base. For your information past guests have spent between \$40 and \$120 buying gifts and souvenirs at the market, but that is your decision. All mission trips are all inclusive, but for those that have extra after they buy their gifts, we appreciate any donations. Also we have a fundraiser selling coffee for \$10 per bag.
2. Shower: **Please conserve showering time** since water and electric are very expensive especially if we go over the limit allowed by the company. When we go over they charge us double for all that goes beyond normal usage. As well as when there is a large group half should shower the night before so the heater has a chance to reheat.
3. Bathroom: All **toilet paper is deposited in the trash can** next to or near the toilet. The plumbing in Guatemala cannot handle any paper. Gas stations and restaurants that you are eating in have free bathrooms. You have to pay for the use of any public bathroom, usually Q1 or Q2 Quetzales which is their money system. Just let us know if you have to go to the bathroom so we can set you up with a coin.

Try to maintain a positive servant attitude. You are not coming on vacation, but we will make sure it is an enjoyable mission experience! Please do not complain about the food, the living situations, or the bathrooms. We know that being away from home and not having all your comforts can be hard, but remember that God uses our circumstances to mold our characters. Be ready to receive everything that He has planned for you on this mission trip and to share with others what He has done in your life. Be prepared to do things that you do not necessarily want to do. You are here to serve God and the mission with our needs. Please **do not come with your own agenda**. It really takes away from the direction that God has given our mission.

## Tax Deductions

Many people have asked if their **mission trip is tax deductible**. Yes. Your mission the trip is tax deductible. That is why when someone sends in their mission trip fees you get a tax-deductible receipt. The Internal Revenue Code states, "No deduction shall be allowed under [charitable contributions] for traveling expenses (including amounts expended for meals and lodging) while away from home, whether paid directly or by reimbursement, unless there is no significant element of personal pleasure, recreation, or vacation in such travel." So, remember you are not in vacation, but are coming to help us out. This provision has several requirements. First, the term "away from home" has the same meaning as it does for business travel. That is, one must travel overnight away from their "tax home" while rendering charitable, volunteer services. One's tax home is generally where one works and lives. Next, we must examine whether the trip contains significant characteristics that make the trip comparable to a pleasure trip. Believe me even though your trip is a lot of work, it will be the most impact event in your life. In adding this provision to the Code, the Senate Committee observed that travel expenses remain deductible though the individual receives substantial pleasure from serving others through charitable works. In other words, the pleasure one receives from ministry will not preclude a deduction. You will receive pleasure from making a transformational difference that is not a problem with the IRS.

**You are responsible for your own insurance.** We do not carry insurance for you. Ministering in third world countries has risks. We have  
[http://www.travelguard.com/agentlink.asp?ta\\_arc=05809064&pcode=PAA&agencyemail=qoabc@goabctravel.com](http://www.travelguard.com/agentlink.asp?ta_arc=05809064&pcode=PAA&agencyemail=qoabc@goabctravel.com)

## Trip preparation and learning about Guatemala:

You have decided to travel to Guatemala! For some families, this is the first time and for others it is a return visit. Traveling to a different country – any country – can be stressful as you are traveling "outside your comfort zone". Depending on your added activities (if any), you may be feeling more anxious, excited, nervous, unsure, scared, happy, etc. Add that to the stress of organizing your life to leave home, packing, and worrying about your pets!

Your time in Guatemala will be memorable, meaningful and enjoyable. Savor your time and experiences here and don't sweat the small stuff – that is my job; taking care of your travel details to ensure a stress-free itinerary!

My drivers are prompt, courteous and safe. Vehicles have seat belts and carry insurance. I am here and accessible anytime you have a question or need some advice or information. I can coordinate any or all of your additional services while in Guatemala. Please make sure your non-traveling family members and friends have my phone numbers and email addresses as an emergency contact. Before you go, educate yourself about the culture, economics, politics, and history of Guatemala. There are many Guatemala-specific resources definitely worth exploring in depth. The internet is full of information and all major travel books have information and additional website links. Note, there is no definitive source of information, nor is everything you read true and up to date. Use all information sources to educate yourself but Guatemala is a growing and dynamic Country and Culture and your experiences will be unique.

## Making Your Travel Arrangements

### Travel Documents:

**Every traveler needs a valid passport.** Sign the face page of your passport before leaving home, pack a photocopy in your checked luggage and leave a copy at home. I will also ask you to scan your passport so I have a copy in case of emergency as well. For extra security while here, lock your passport in the hotel safe and carry a photocopy with you with your driver's license.

**\*\*\* Passports should not expire any less than 6 months from your travel dates.**

The Guatemalan government currently does not require Canadian or US citizens staying fewer than 90 days to obtain visas, but your passport will be stamped and your stay is not to exceed 90 days.

### Weather:

If your travels only take you to Guatemala City, Antigua and Pana, you'll easily understand why Guatemala's official motto is "The Land of Eternal Spring". Temperatures are generally in the 70s/80's during the day and the 50s/60's at night depending on the season. These areas are at 5000 feet in elevation and above. Temperatures are more extreme, however, in other areas of the country (like Tikal and the coastal areas which are lower in altitude). Guatemala's normal rainy season spans from mid-May through mid-October, so if you travel during that time you will want to bring a rain poncho, an umbrella, and an extra pair of shoes. The rains are often torrential late in the afternoon or evening, but day are warm and sunny. Regardless of the season, you'll want to bring a jacket or sweater for the cool evenings and early mornings.

### Staying Healthy While Here

Montezuma's Revenge(diarrhea) is very common among tourists. Whatever name you give it, diarrhea is the last thing you want on this special trip. Guatemalan cuisine is delicious and interesting; take a little care, and you can enjoy some unique dining experiences during your trip. Your stomach may not used to the spices and condiments used in Guatemala.

**DRINK WATER** as flights dehydrate and the feeding center is at 5200 feet in altitude. You are working hard, sweat hard, and you must drink hard. Be very cautious of getting enough fluids.

In general, experts suggest eating foods that have been cooked and fruits that have been washed with purified water and/or peeled. Fresh lettuce salads may or may not be safe to eat, as some cooks wash fruits and vegetables in a solution that kills harmful surface bacteria, but not all take such care. Some restaurants will indicate on the menu if they follow these food-safe procedures. If in doubt, pass on anything that's uncooked. Ice is made with purified water. We recommend peeled fruits and cooked vegetables are safely prepared. Lettuce on a hamburger or salads with are should be removed. I would stay away from "street" food (prepared or sold on the street) and as with anything, use your intuition about how something feels. It is normal to have some gas and or stomach rumbles as your system is not used to the cuisine here.

ALWAYS drink purified water.

The section on "Water" below has more information about staying healthy. Be sure to consider your personal health history and vulnerabilities when making food and beverage choices and make sure you have health insurance coverage while in Guatemala though temporary coverage. If you are taking any medication, bring enough to see you through the entire trip and carry it in its original container. It's not a bad idea to carry an extra prescription, too, should you lose or misplace your medication. Some contact lens solutions are not readily available, so plan ahead if you have a specific type you use. Bring the usual "just in case" items you normally pack when traveling. Most over-the-counter medicines used in the USA / Canada are available in Guatemala at a fraction of the cost.

**NOTE: Guatemala can be damp and/or dusty. Contact lenses may be more irritating and/or seasonal allergies or asthma issues may be more pronounced. Please plan accordingly.**

#### **Water:**

Drink only bottled water and beverages which are readily available throughout the country. Either avoid using ice or confirm that it was made with purified water before drinking iced beverages. Purified water is generically referred to as "Agua Salvavidas", as that is the brand name of the major purified water distributor. It is like asking for a "Kleenex" when you are referring to a tissue!

"Is this pure water?" translates to "¿Es agua pura?" or "¿Es agua salvavidas?"

"Was the ice made with pure water?" translates to "¿Se hizo el hielo con agua salvavidas?" Make sure you brush your teeth with purified water and keep your mouth closed in the shower! Again, DRINK PLENTY OF WATER as you are at high altitude while in Guatemala.

#### **More (!) Important Info**

##### **Money:**

The **Quetzal (Q)** – named for Guatemala's rare and beautiful national bird – is divided into 100 Centavos. There are coins and paper bills in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 "Quetzales". Exchange rates vary, but usually about 7 "Q's" to 1 U.S. dollar. Our mission exchanges quetzals at a rate of Q7 to the dollar. Let us know how much your group will be exchanging before you arrive so we have enough to exchange for you. Always good to break a larger bill when possible as many vendors and small places cannot make much change. Banking by ATM is the easiest way to get currency in Guatemala because you don't have to exchange U.S. dollars for Quetzales; simply insert your debit or credit card and withdraw cash in Quetzales. ATM machines can be used if your card has the PLUS or CIRRUS designation on the back. Please note that many credit card companies add a surcharge for purchases made outside the country ("foreign exchange fee"). This can be added to an ATM withdrawal, as well as to a credit card purchase.

##### **Check with your bank in advance to make sure you know what their rates are and that they know to expect charges from Guatemala!**

Purchases are made in Quetzales, which your bank converts to dollars, then back to Quetzales for the merchant so items purchased with a credit card are usually a bit costlier than the stated price. Many merchants add an extra 10% credit card fee to cover processing. Check with the merchant before you use your card. At a restaurant, the tip ("propina") of 10% is usually added so don't get confused! **VISA is more widely accepted** than MasterCard. U.S. dollars are widely accepted in the major cities as well, so it is not crucial that you enter the country (even after hours) with Quetzales. Drivers, bell boys, hotel staff, etc. will happily accept tips in dollars. **U.S. Dollars must be new, crisp, free of rips, tears or marks.** Smaller denominations are best.

Guatemalan banks are usually open from 8:30 or 9:00am to 5:00 or 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturdays. Some banks in Antigua and Panajachel are open Sunday as well. Hours vary from bank to bank. There are ATM machines everywhere. Banks may charge a small fee to change your dollars. Go to the customer service desk with your passport to change dollars or travelers checks before exchanging at the teller window. Note some banks require 2 pieces of ID to take out a cash advance or use your debit card at the teller window if you do not want to use an ATM. Bring your driver's license with you!

##### **Phone Calls, Internet And Skype:**

International phone calls from the mission base are permitted. Lines 1&2 are for local calls which

we pay for an average amount \$.10 per minute and lines 3&4 are for calling the USA which are unlimited. We have an Internet phone that works as a land line that is unlimited. A computer and/or Wi-Fi is provided in the entire mission base and internet cafes are abundant throughout Guatemala when we are out in villages. Many internet cafes now offer SKYPE. All Guatemala phone numbers have eight digits. To dial Guatemala from Canada or the USA, dial 011+ 502 + the eight-digit number. To dial Canada or the USA from Guatemala, dial 001+ area code + seven-digit number. For those that want a phone to borrow it can be arranged. It does cost us Q\$.13 per minute. Since everything is included, try to use moderately or send in a donation later on. We try very hard to make sure everything is included in your mission trip. Some U.S. or Canadian-based cell phones can be used internationally once activated for international calls. Contact your carrier to see if your cell phone can be used from Guatemala, the per-minute call rate, and what you need to do to activate it. Receiving local or long distance calls on these phones are free.

I can pre-purchase time on a phone for you and let you know the phone number in advance so you tell your family and friends.

### **Photography:**

We suggest you **bring your smart phone** with you to take video. They are easy to conceal and bring with you at all times. Your trip will be remembered and this is one way to show that you experienced in the trip. Guatemala has beautiful landscapes and you can see the Pacaya Volcano and the Agua volcano from our rooftop! Guatemala is not dangerous, but has a thievery culture so always watch your stuff. You will forever keep and look at the pictures you take, so try to capture the many parts of Guatemala as much as possible. Please exercise courtesy when photographing Guatemalans, particularly the Mayan People. Although they are resplendent in their colorful traditional dress, Guatemalans are people just like you who are going about their daily lives.

They do not like to be pointed at or talked about and taking photos should be with respect and courtesy. I have found the best way is put your camera on maximum zoom and just quick take the photo. The more you make a big deal of the photo, the more embarrassed they get.

### **Restrooms:**

- Some restrooms may not be as sanitary as what you are used to, even in nicer hotels and restaurants. Some gas stations are free to go to the bathroom or the restaurant where you are eating. Everything is included in your trip, so when you need to go. Just ask one of our team leaders where the bathroom is and ask if they charge. It usually costs Q1 or Q2. When using public restrooms, you may be in the care of a bathroom attendant, so be sure to have Q1 or Q2 ready to compensate them for their service.
- 

Be aware that for reasons of water conservation and antiquated plumbing, **used toilet paper is disposed of in a wastebasket, rather than in the toilet**. This is for both pee and poo. When you enter the stall, you will see the wastebasket containing crumpled toilet paper, and you'll know the protocol! It's also helpful to carry some tissues and wet wipes when you're out and about. "Where is the bathroom, please?" translates to "¿Disculpe, donde es el baño por favor?" And ALWAYS say "Gracias".

### **General Safety:**

When it comes to safety, being in Guatemala City is similar to being in New York, Los Angeles, any major city in the USA or Canada; there are certain areas best left unvisited, especially at night. Prepare by reading the safety-related information in your favorite travel books. The US State department has a pretty scary advisory. I would not create an itinerary or suggest activities that would be unsafe or risky. Though I can never guarantee 100% safety anywhere in the world, an itinerary I create with you will follow safe and prudent travel guidelines. Whenever and wherever you are traveling, most importantly use common sense! Play it safe by leaving your jewelry at home.

Do not walk around with electronics or a computer. Keep your iPod, passport, extra credit cards and extra cash in our mission base safe or when traveling with your smart phone for picture keep in your front pocket. Do not bring anything that you are not prepared to lose. At times things get stolen. It is only stuff, but this trip will be your greatest life experience. There is no need to carry around your passport or tons of credit cards. Only take with you what you do not mind “giving as a non-tax-deductible donation” ... to the thieves.

In a depressed economy, pick pockets are very common for both tourists and locals. Have a good photocopy of your passport kept in your suitcase. If you feel you need a “real” photo ID, carry your driver’s license.

Also note that it is very common to see heavily armed security guards in Guatemala. They are everywhere, so try not to be alarmed. Where there are guards it is safe.

### **Shopping:**

Prices are fixed in larger stores but bargaining is expected in the tourist markets and most craft stores. We will go with you to help you negotiate. Private vendors selling antique textiles and Guatemalan handicrafts can sometimes be found in the hotels, the courtyards off the main streets, and on church steps, but most are located in either the town’s “official” market or in areas where there are many vendors together (many selling the same items).

### **Time Zone:**

Guatemala is in the Central Time Zone but does not use daylight savings time in the summer.

### **Electrical Current:**

Electrical current (120 volts, 60 Hz), flat-pronged plug and sockets are the same as in the USA and Canada. Note that most plug sockets are 2 pronged. If you have something with 3 prongs you will need to bring a small rubber adaptor.

### **Your Flight:**

Most flights into Guatemala City connect through the Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Atlanta, or Miami, so the last leg of your journey will likely be less than three hours long.

While descending into Guatemala City you may feel some turbulence due to the mountains. Guatemala City is a large area sprawling with a variety of different buildings and terrain. If you arrive in the daytime, you will see modern high rise building and small hovels precariously built on steep slopes of the canyons. You might have a view of the double-humped volcano, Pacaya, or the huge Lake Amatitlan, both just outside Guatemala City.

Be sure to complete all customs and immigration forms distributed by the flight attendants before deplaning and make sure they are easily available with your passport and baggage tickets.

## **Arrival Into La Aurora Airport, Guatemala City:**

When you land, you will taxi to one of several gates. Upon deplaning, you'll walk down a long hallway toward immigration and customs. You will pass what looks like a bank if you want exchange any money BUT they give a very poor exchange rate. Our mission gives a better rate than the private company. First, you'll enter an immigration line, so have your immigration form ready, along with your passport. After the agent stamps your passport, you'll move toward the baggage claim area. It is very common to see armed security guards in Guatemala, so do not be alarmed.

Claim your bags from one of the 2 baggage carousels. Luggage carts are available for \$2 and they take dollars. If you have more than two bags use porters (baggage handlers). If you do not want them to assist you with your bags and if you do not want to tip them, politely say "no gracias". Once you've collected your bags, exit the baggage claim area either by passing a uniformed person who will collect your customs declaration or by moving through a baggage inspection line. When ready, head for the exit door and expect that your baggage will not be searched. You are allowed \$500 of merchandise besides personal items. There is no taxes on items you are bringing for the mission. They do try to collect taxes that people bring for resale. So take everything out of original package and wrap with clothes.

If you need help with your baggage, ask one of the many porters for assistance. He will remove your bags from the carousel, load them onto a cart, and escort you the short distance to the airport exit. There is a restroom inside the airport before you exit – transport to mission base is 3 minutes.

At the airport's glass exit doors, you will see a large crowd of people waiting for passengers. We cannot go inside so you must wait outside for us to see you. **Our driver will have a small sign with Life Builders International on it, so just patiently scan the crowd and locate him or her.** Be aware that once you go through the large, glass exit doors, you cannot re-enter the airport. Again, there is usually a lot of activity just outside the airport exit since everyone who is awaiting someone's arrival must stand outside to greet his or her loved one. It can be disconcerting to be in a racial minority and/or in a foreign country surrounded by people who don't speak your language, but know that you are safe! Should you not see your driver for \$1 you can borrow any porters telephone. There is a coffee/snack shop and more bathrooms outside the terminal on your left side if you need water, a snack or other services before your transport to the mission base. Travel from the airport to your hotel in Antigua is approximately 1 hour +/- depending on traffic.

## **Cultural Differences**

You will be confronted with many differences while visiting Guatemala. Most North Americans find these very frustrating. **Below are some helpful hints.**

- \* Please say thank you ("gracias") for almost everything; otherwise you'll be impolite.
- \* Timing? There is not such a thing as timing in Guatemala (or Latin America in general). We even have our own time, the "hora chapina", which means 20-30 minutes later than the time you agreed. If you are an "always on time" person you will need to be flexible a little and not lose your mind. They will come... not on time; and always with an excuse... but they will come!
- \* Latinos are very warm and will try to make you feel at home. Be careful with this, though with unknown men on the streets. A "no hablo español" will help you to get out of uncomfortable situations.
- \* Men are rude sometimes and they will yell "compliments" or whistle to you (women) on the streets. Do not turn and pay attention to them. They do that to almost every woman they see.
- \* The word "love" is very strong for us. In English you "love" pizza, "love" listening to music or the color green.... In Spanish "to love" – "amar" is very intimate and not to be used for

things. "I like"

– "me gusta" is the appropriate phrase to use. Try not to say I love you (te amo) to people (especially from the opposite sex) or you can be misunderstood. "Te cariño" – "I care for you" is more appropriate.

\* Sometimes it is not **what** you say, but the **way** you say something that matters – body language says more than words, Food! It's different! (with the exception of fast food stuff). Guatemalan food is very

seasoned (salty, sweet or spicy at times). Whenever you finish your meal, someone will say one of these two things: "muchas gracias" or "buen provecho" (boo-ehn pro-vey-cho). The first one means "thank you very much" and is said by the people as they finish their meal. It doesn't matter if it is the wait staff, owner or the guest. The second one means something like "I hope it serves you well" and even though it started as the answer to the first one, it can be used either way. So, if you are told "muchas gracias," answer "buen provecho" and vice versa... always with a smile!

\*\*\* **Do not flush the toilet paper** or anything else down the toilets. Use the garbage basket. Why? It seems that if you throw it in the toilet, it will get plugged and make a flood because of the way the water pipes are built. \*\*\* This includes 5-star hotels and establishments too!

## **Etiquette**

### **Why And What Is "Etiquette"?**

Your trip to Guatemala is an opportunity to learn about another culture, including the fact that there are wonderful people everywhere who share our same hopes, fears and dreams. This is what unites us as human beings, after all! Take the opportunity not only to learn as much about Guatemala as you can but to sit back, observe and experience the sights, sounds, smells and tastes.

### **You are ambassadors for your country and for those who will come after you!**

Remember that others will follow you in the journey Guatemala. Leave the people you meet with a favorable impression of North Americans so as not to make things more difficult for those who follow. Be gracious. Lower your voice. Have patience. Be flexible. Have fun !

#### **Please Do!..**

- • Remember that you are a visitor and guest in their country, and behave accordingly.  
Show respect for the people and the culture. And no, not everyone knows or speaks English !!!
- • Learn about Guatemala before you travel.
- • Listen to the advice of your guide or hosts.
- • Show an interest in Guatemala's customs and culture and try to adapt to them or at least respect them.
- • Graciously accept food, drink, and gifts when they're offered. You do not have to eat or drink, but graciously accept and say "gracias".
- • When there is a setback, remember that with patience and persistence it will pass.
- • Make apologies for mistakes you may make. See Spanish suggestions below.
- • Learn some Spanish before you travel, and use it. Your efforts will be appreciated.
- • Bring a phrase book and dictionary with you and try to learn more of the language while you are there. "Pardon me" or "Excuse me" translates to "Perdon." You can use it if you bump into someone, need to get a clerk's attention, correct something, or ask that something be repeated. "I'm sorry" translates to "Lo siento," a broader term used to show empathy and compassion.
- When you pass someone on the street, say "buenos dias" or "buenas tardes" (if afternoon). It is amazing to see the smile and return greetings you receive !

### **Please Don't...**

- ...Be impatient, inconsiderate, loud, noisy, belligerent, demanding, or argumentative.
- ...Overuse alcohol.
- ...Put yourself on a time schedule and/or set deadlines that your hosts or guests either cannot meet or will are not inclined to meet (if applicable).
- ...Try to "buy" your way to faster service.
- ...Seek or expect to find your culture in the foreign country.
- ...Be afraid to socialize within the framework of a different culture and customs.
- ...Make demands or expect others to cater to you.
- ...Indulge in heated or argumentative political conversation with people in your host country.
- ...Expect a foreign bureaucracy to work any more efficiently or swiftly than yours.
- ...Complain about or criticize different customs, attitudes, political events, or social conditions.
- ...Be afraid to ask questions, but phrase them carefully and respectfully.
- ...Take offense if you are treated rudely or brusquely. Stay calm, and not respond in kind.
- ...Videotape or take pictures of adults or especially children without their permission.

### **Being Patient and Flexible:**

Be patient and courteous at all times. Keep in mind that Latin Americans tend to be more relaxed about time than North Americans, so "7 pm." might mean "sometime tonight."

Latin Americans are not as tied to schedules as many of us are, so meeting times arranged by your hosts may be approximate. All services I arrange (transports, tours, meals, etc) are REALLY at set times!

If you are asked to return or have an appointment, ask me and depending on the context, I can advise you is it is the "hora chapina" or real time...

- A tip of @ Q10. or \$1. per bag for an airport or hotel porter is appropriate – Be gracious and show that you appreciated the efforts of the cleaning staff that took care of you during your stay as well as any favorite wait staff in the restaurants. Remember we pay them to take care of you. It is there job. So, do not give staff serving you because we pay them to. When you have a successful trip, it is because the mission thought of everything you need tips.

### **Using Courteous Language:**

- The Guatemalan people are courteous, gracious, and accommodating. It is considered proper to say "buenos dias," "buenas tardes," and "buenas noches" for "good morning," "good afternoon," and "good evening," rather than the familiar "hola." "Buenas tardes" is used from about 12noon to 7pm or so.
- Remember to say por favor (please), gracias (thank-you), de nada (you're welcome), and perdon (excuse me).
- Learn a few phrases in Spanish, such as "¿Disculpe, donde esta el baño?" ("Where is the bathroom please?") and "La cuenta, por favor" (Check please – at a restaurant). Again, you can sit at a restaurant for hours until YOU politely ask for the check. It is not customary to shoo customers away even if there is a line. Meal times are culturally an important time for people and you are welcome to sit as long as you want until you are ready to leave,  
ie: YOU have to ask for the bill "la cuenta por favor".

## **Personal Safety Issues And International Travel**

Guatemala is a country with significant poverty issues which is seen in many developing countries. As such, simple pick pocketing is common. I make every attempt possible to keep you safe during your time here by creating an appropriate itinerary and avoiding areas and activities which I feel may be questionable or dangerous.

Here are some general guidelines: (**note, some sound extreme and are not meant to scare you – just to give an alternative point of reference. These are tips I use when visiting the USA!)**.

1. Do not make obvious displays of large amounts of cash or expensive items (jewelry, cameras, electronic devises, etc.)
2. Carry only the things you will need with you for that day or that time period.
3. Walk in groups of two or more when possible.
4. If you are returning from a restaurant in the evening / after dark, take a taxi or “tuk-tuk”.
5. Be aware of the people around you.
6. Watch for the following activities that may indicate a pick-pocket plan: Someone jostles you more than the situation indicates someone points to something spilled on your clothing Something is dropped close to you to distract your attention
7. Bring two copies of your passport with you (notarized as being authentic copies of the original, if possible), and carry a copy – instead of your passport – with a drivers license for photo ID.
8. Keep wallets, pocketbooks, backpacks, etc., in front of you and close to your body or locked in our safe at the mission base.
9. Store money and credit cards in different locations, and carry only what you need.
10. Do not take pictures of children or nationals except with permission.
11. Follow the information given in the Health Information section of this info packet.
12. Relax and enjoy – vigilance is better than paranoia.

## **Packing Recommendations**

The following items are suggested to be included in packing for the trip.

### **Clothing:**

Jeans / Capri and /or khaki pants / t-shirts / dress shirt (optional) / bathing suit / shorts (no more than 2" above the knee) / pajamas / socks / underwear / sneakers or flat soled shoes / Sandals / flip flops (for showers or pools) / Rain jacket or poncho (May to Oct) / hat / sunglasses.

### **What to Pack**

Casual, conservative clothing is both proper and practical. Guatemalan women usually wear skirts and dress pants, and men wear long trousers. Think “business casual”, but comfortable. Capri pants, jeans and skirts are common. Shorts are worn, though it is recommended to be of modest length and limited to Panajachel and hotel pools. Comfortable FLAT shoes are a must. Athletic shoes / sneakers are even better than shoes. Sandals can be worn, but are less practical.

Most local women do not wear sleeveless blouses or dresses. While it is okay to wear such clothing, bring along a sweater or shawl to cover your shoulders when in public, especially if entering a church or visiting a local family. Life Builders does both work and spiritual so have clothes for both. Sunscreen is a must for out at the feeding center.

A travel guide book, Latin American Spanish phrase book and a small Spanish-English dictionary will be well used!

Choose smaller editions that can fit into your shirt pocket or purse. Rips, stains, tears are nor accepted at banks and not appreciated as a form of tip or payment.

Finally, you may want to consider packing bathroom essentials, a shirt, a pair of socks, a pair of underwear, and your camera or smart phone for taking pictures in a carry-on bag in case your

luggage is delayed upon arrival.

Dress conservatively. You will see many a short-short and crop tops, but err on the side of caution and respect. Dress for the weather, but be respectful. Carry a light sweater as it is cool especially at the feeding center at night. May through mid –October is our rainy season with usual late day / evening rains. So be rain proof in your light jacket during that time. An umbrella and shoes that can dry quickly (or extra shoes) will serve you well! As beautiful as it is, it is considered culturally offensive to dress either yourself or any children traveling with you in traditional Mayan clothing / “traje”.

**Misc. Items:**

Flashlight /camera with extra memory cards and battery (+ your cords!) / Laptop or other computing device (hotels have computers for your use and Wi-Fi) / travel clock / back pack or day pack / water bottle / I-Pod/CD player w/ extra batteries or charger (good for transports and in your hotel, but don't walk around town plugged in!) / sunglasses

**Personal Items/Toiletries:**

Sunscreen /shampoo/conditioner / insect spray with DEET /toothbrush / toothpaste /deodorant/ your prescription medicines (in original bottles) / feminine products / sunglasses/ hair dryers etc. – (plug sockets have 2 prongs. Bring an adaptor if you have an item with 3 prongs) / wet wipes or no-rinse hand sanitizer (like Purell) / tissues and/or travel packs of toilet paper / pens and paper for notes.

Having Said All That... Pack Light.

You can also easily purchase items when here!