

FROM:

**INTERCULTURAL
ENCOUNTERS**



RE:

TRAVEL INFORMATION FOR GUATEMALA

Dear Participants in CEDEPCA's Intercultural Encounters Program,

On behalf of CEDEPCA, we would like to convey our pleasure in your decision to participate in a program designed to put you in touch with the Guatemalan people and to give you a look at the Guatemalan reality.

During the last thirty-seven years, hundreds of U.S. and Canadian participants have encountered Central America through our immersion program. Few have come through the experience unchanged. You can expect to be confronted with the violence and repression of the powerful, yet challenged by the hope and creative energy of the poor and powerless. You may be struck by both the similarities and the differences between Central and North America. You may find yourself struggling with issues of justice or the historical role of the U.S. government in the region. You may sense the presence of the Holy Spirit very vividly during your trip. You may begin to rethink and "re-feel" your faith in light of your contact with the Guatemalan people. Many participants have spoken of their experience in terms of "conversion" and "new commitment" to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They have expressed this in acts of love and justice in their own communities when they have returned home. Perhaps the same may happen to you...

The amount of time you invest in preparing for the trip will be proportional to the value of your participation in the actual event. Take time to participate in your group's orientation process. Read at least one book on Guatemala. Try to learn some Spanish words and phrases if you don't already know some. Think prayerfully about the people you will meet on this trip and for your ability to learn from new perspectives and experiences. Ask your congregation or community to have a commissioning service for you before you leave. Share the plans for your trip with one or more friends and ask them to covenant with you to pray for you daily during your time in Central America.

There are other practical matters to handle as you prepare for your trip. In order to help with those, we have compiled the following travel information. Please read the material carefully. If you have any questions, please check with your group facilitator.

The CEDEPCA team looks forward to seeing you in Guatemala.

Hasta Pronto,

**Nancy Carrera –Esvin Sirin
Intercultural Encounters Team**

Overall Preparation Information

DOCUMENTATION:

A valid passport is needed for travel in Central America. If you already have a passport, check to be sure that it will be valid for at least six months beyond the dates of your trip. If you do not have a passport, you should apply for one as soon as possible. Start early; it can take 6-8 weeks to receive your passport.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html>

When you receive your new passport, be sure to SIGN IT at the appropriate place, thereby validating it. Then make a photocopy of the first several pages of your passport. Bring this copy with you on the trip, though separate from your passport. In case your passport was to be lost or stolen, application for a new passport would be facilitated by having this copy on hand.

For U.S. citizens, tourist cards and visas are no longer required by the Guatemalan government. The only legal document needed is a validated passport. For visitors from other countries, please check the requirements with a Guatemalan Consulate in your country or a local travel agency.

The group leader will need to have a photocopy of each person's passport on them, as well as basic health information of each participant, such as blood type and any medications they take regularly.

More information is available at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/checklist.html>

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Groups will be lodged in double occupancy rooms in modest hotels or pensions. Linens are provided, but you may want to bring along an extra hand towel. Laundry services are available on occasion; otherwise, light clothing can be washed by hand and hung out to dry.

HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is important that travelers are in good physical and mental health when traveling to Guatemala. Culture shock and intense daily schedules cause strain on even those in top physical condition. All travelers must fill out the Traveler Background document and indicate known health conditions, so that in case of severe illness or injury, we are able to communicate your health history with medical staff. Excellent medical care, including safe blood supply, is available in Guatemala.

We ask that potential group leaders and participants take the following information into consideration.

- Many of the places we visit in Guatemala, including Guatemala City, the highlands (Quetzaltenango) and Antigua, are at high altitude (5,000-10,000 ft).
- Heat and high humidity can be extreme in communities near sea level.
- Participants with mobility-related issues should be aware that climbing in and out of buses and/or boats will be necessary; almost all buildings and hotels will have uneven or steep stairs that cannot be avoided; streets and sidewalks are uneven and not in good repair. Also, sitting on buses for extended periods combined with high altitude causes some people's legs and feet to swell.

- To guard the experience and safety of the entire group, please reconsider coming if you cannot walk unassisted on uneven and/or steep terrain for one-half mile.

COVID-19:

Although the CDC and the Guatemalan government do not currently require proof of negative COVID tests or vaccination records, CEDEPCA is still requiring that any traveler showing COVID or cold symptoms tests negative for COVID-19 (self-administered tests are acceptable) **within 24 hours of departure from the U.S.** We ask that you postpone your trip to Guatemala if you test positive for COVID-19. We want to guard the health and safety of all parties involved, including the people we will be visiting in rural communities who have limited access to care.

We encourage the use of masks, especially in indoor public spaces and on the bus, by those who show signs of respiratory illness.

VACCINATIONS:

CEDEPCA requires that all travelers be fully vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19. Please contact our team to request an exception.

It is also *recommended* that you are up-to-date on the following vaccinations:

- Seasonal influenza
- hepatitis A (Havrix: 2-3 shots, 30 days apart)
- diphtheria/tetanus
- typhoid
- polio

Though cholera is present in Guatemala, the danger of you becoming infected is minimal. The vaccine is not recommended because of its limited effectiveness. Good hygienic procedures are the best way to avoid the disease, especially washing hands with soap and water several times a day.

Some visitors suffer from diarrhea or nausea caused by bacteria to which their bodies are not accustomed. For minor cases, Pepto-Bismol or Acidophilus are recommended. Medications such as Immodium, Lomotil and preventive antibiotics are discouraged, but sometimes are useful for long bus rides.

RISKS RELATED TO INSECTS:

Use DEET insect repellant and wear permethrin-treated clothing to prevent bites from disease-carrying mosquitoes, flies, and ticks. Use of repellant should provide sufficient protection against malaria should your group travel to the Pacific lowlands or Petén; however, if you wish to take further preventive steps, please consult your doctor.

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/zika-virus-guatemala>

Another proactive step for preventing insect and mosquito bites is to treat your clothes with Permethrin prior to traveling. This is in addition to using repellent, as some insects bite people right through their clothing (rendering long pants and long sleeved shirts relatively useless).

GIFT-GIVING:

Seeing poverty in Guatemala may produce a desire to give generously to whomever is near and in need. However, gift-giving can create problems for those who receive a gift as well as for those who do not. Therefore, it is preferable to not give gifts to individuals during your trip. Your presence and interest in the people themselves are important gifts that can be offered to those with whom you come in contact. Many aid organizations consider the increase in begging to be due to tourists distributing gifts indiscriminately in some areas. Also, many village elders see a loss of their people's dignity when their children start asking visitors for things.

One meaningful gift idea is to take a group photo before leaving the USA and to make copies of it which could be distributed to groups you visit. Another idea is for the group to make a Thank-You Card or Sign which could be left with each of the churches or organizations with whom you will be meeting.

If your group desires to make a cash or in-kind donation to one of the local institutions or churches that we visit, please speak with your group facilitator and they will work with you on finding the best way to do so. Please advise CEDEPCA prior to your trip if you plan on bringing any donation. We believe that it is best to make an institution-to-institution donation, which can be done through CEDEPCA, who will forward the gift through the appropriate channels to your chosen project. This allows for institutional accountability on all sides.

MONEY EXCHANGE:

Guatemala's artisans are some of the most talented in the world, and you will most likely have the opportunity to purchase Guatemalan goods to take home. Favorite items are scarves, vests, sweaters, placemats, blankets, liturgical stoles, handbags, and leather items.

Unless you are a BIG spender, some amount between US \$150-250 should easily cover your shopping needs. This amounts to 1,200 to 2,000 Guatemala Quetzales.

The best and easiest places to exchange your cash into Guatemalan *Quetzales* are:

1. **Your local AAA (if you are a member) or local bank**
2. **At your international departure airport (LAX, Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Washington DC, etc.)**
3. **At the Guatemalan airport, prior to going through baggage claim, immigration & customs.** U.S. cash to be exchanged **MUST** be new or in excellent condition: No ink stains, marks, writing, tears, wrinkles, or staple holes.
4. **ATMs:** It is possible to use US debit cards and credit cards at ATMs (*Cajeros*) in Guatemala. Up to Q2,000 per day (approximately \$260, plus up to \$10 in fees) may be withdrawn from an ATM. You will need to know your PIN, even for a credit card. Be sure to notify your bank or credit card company **BEFORE TRAVELING** if you plan to do this in Guatemala. Otherwise, the fraud prevention mechanisms may freeze use of your card.

If you have the option, ask for Q100 in small bills.

Traveler's checks are no longer accepted in Guatemala. Additionally, small bills of US \$5, \$10, \$20 dollars will no longer be exchanged inside Guatemala.

SECURITY CONCERNS:

The US State Department regularly posts travel warnings for Guatemala, principally due to a high level of street crime. For safety tips and further information on Guatemala, you can visit:

<https://gt.usembassy.gov/travel-advisory-guatemala/>

<https://gt.usembassy.gov/improvements-safety-security-information/>

We at CEDEPCA understand that there are safety concerns about visiting Guatemala. While nothing in life can be guaranteed 100%, please be assured that we will take every possible precaution to ensure that your group has a safe and enjoyable trip. Know that your group will always be accompanied by two group facilitators (or more for larger groups) and that we use private transportation with companies we trust. Please feel free to be in contact with your trip coordinator if you have any specific concerns or questions. It may help to give participants the opportunity to voice their fears at a pre-trip orientation session to foster a supportive environment.

ARRIVAL AT THE GUATEMALA AIRPORT:

- 1) The Guatemalan government is now requiring that every traveler fill out the following *digital* “traveler’s declaration” form within 24 hours of boarding your flight to Guatemala, as well as within 24 hours of flying out of Guatemala:

<https://farm2.sat.gob.gt/declaDelViajeroGt-web/pages/public/declaracionJuradaDelViajero.html>

Filling out this form ahead of time will greatly facilitate a smooth arrival at the Guatemala airport!

When you click on the link, you will be given the choice to select “Spanish” or “English.” A few potentially confusing parts of the form: 1) After sharing and confirming your email address, you will be asked if your document is Guatemalan; this means your *passport*, so if you have a U.S. Passport, the answer is NO. 2) On your trip into Guatemala, check *Entry*; on your trip out of Guatemala, check *Exit*. The arrival or departure customs is “La Aurora.” 3) The reason for your travel is Tourism. 4) When asked for the quantity of luggage *not* traveling with you, the number is 0 (zero). 5) When asked for your foreseen address, use, “CEDEPCA, Guatemala City.” (Not necessary for the customs form, but for your information, the **address of CEDEPCA** is: **8ª Avenida 7-57, Zona 2, Guatemala; Phone number 502-2254-1093**). 5) The “Date of Entry/Exit” is the date of your flight.

After filling out the form, you will receive a QR code which you will show the customs agent in Guatemala. If you use your phone, you will receive the code as a photo (to be used offline). If you use your computer, you will need to print the QR code and bring the paper with you.

- 2) If you need help getting the group’s luggage to the airport door, carts are available at a cost of \$2. Outside the door, carts must be given to a porter or you must carry your own luggage. Always stay close and keep an eye on your bags. Each person should help to load their own luggage onto the bus which CEDEPCA will have rented for your trip. (Hint: baggage may have to go on TOP of the bus, therefore 2 lighter bags are far better than 1 heavy one.)
- 3) Order of stops at the airport:
 - Bank kiosk (change ALL personal spending money, remember to ask for some small bills in *quetzales*)
 - Immigration (passport check)

- Pick up checked baggage (BE SURE you have your baggage claim tickets for any checked luggage to match with your luggage tag)
- Pass customs inspectors
- Out the door together with other members of your group, then onto the bus (see #4 next)

4) A CEDEPCA team member will be waiting for you at the airport with a sign that has our CEDEPCA logo:



CEDEPCA If you have any questions or run into any problems (like lost baggage), the CEDEPCA team member will be there to help.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

In case of family emergency, messages can be left at the following numbers:

- Weekdays CEDEPCA phone PBX: 011-502-2254-1093
- E-mail: nancyc@cedepca.org, esirin@cedepca.org
- Cell phones: Nancy Carrera: 011-502-5709-8340, Esvin Sirin: 011-502-5559-1594, Judith Castañeda: 011-502-5709-9912

(If you call from a U.S. number you should dial 011 then the country code: 502 and then the number)

Time zones: U.S. Central Standard time = Central American time. When the U.S. is on Daylight Savings time, Rocky Mountain time = Central American time.

PRE-TRIP ORIENTATION

Generally, the more a group prepares itself ahead of time (reading, group processing, reflection, etc.), the more rewarding the actual experience. It is very important to have the group meet together for orientation sessions several times before the trip. It is also helpful to encourage, if not require, participants to do some pre-trip reading on their own.

We will also be sending out a few more documents that should be helpful. These should either be copied and distributed to every member of the group OR incorporated into materials of your own, ones specifically applicable to your group.

Group reflections are an important part of processing information that is learned throughout your group's intercultural week in Guatemala. We invite you to consider leading a daily conversation with your group, using either the [Daily Reflection Guide](#) published by CEDEPCA, or your own daily devotional/reflection materials. Let us know how we can assist you in this process.

WHAT TO BRING:

The first rule is to **PACK LIGHTLY!** Your bags should be of a manageable size and weight so that **you** yourself can be responsible for handling them. The best idea is to bring only carry-on luggage to avoid the frustrations of late or lost items. If you do check luggage, you should still plan on carrying with you important items such as a change of clothes, toothbrush, prescription medicines, phone/camera, etc. in the event your checked luggage were lost or delayed. *Additionally, please bring a refillable, reusable water bottle.*

Daytime weather is warm (70-80's; 90's only on the Pacific lowlands), but nights are cool to chilly (Guatemala City 50's, highlands/Quetzaltenango 30-40's). The layered look (e.g. long-sleeve + t-shirt + sweater or sweatshirt) will be helpful for changes in temperature. Trips to the highlands will require some WARM clothing. However, weather in coastal regions and Cahabón is HOT and HUMID.

Casual, but neat, wash-and-wear apparel is appropriate--the kind that can pick up dust and dirt and not show it. Comfortable and sturdy walking shoes are a must. One skirt or pair of dress slacks is important if the group will be attending worship or having a formal visit in an office. Capris for women work quite well. If your trip falls during the rainy season (April-October), you will need a lightweight raincoat, poncho and/or collapsible umbrella. Work groups only may need work clothes, rubber boots and/or work gloves.

A small backpack or bag with a lock on the zipper comes in handy to carry items during the day or on an overnight trip.

Items to Bring in Addition to Clothing:

- Cell phone for camera & for digital traveler declaration form. Wifi in most hotels will make possible occasional communication with home.
- Reusable water bottle
- Toiletries
- Prescription meds (Bring the generic name of any prescription medicine, including dosage.)
- Medication such as Dramamine for motion sickness
- Pepto Bismol tablets and Acidophilus (opt.)
- Small flashlight (light on phone is o.k.)
- Spanish/English dictionary
- Notebook and pens
- Bible
- Moist towelettes & small pack of kleenex
- Small First aid kit
- Feminine hygiene products
- A mask to wear in case of respiratory symptoms
- Insect repellent – bug wipes are best
- Warm sweater &/or rain jacket
- Swimsuit
- Sunscreen
- Sun hat, visor or scarf, and sunglasses
- Quick energy snack foods
- Wash cloth
- Ear plugs
- Glasses for contact users or solution and an extra pair of contacts
- Work gloves/clothes (for work groups)
- Flip-flops for use in the shower (optional)

What NOT to Bring: Please avoid using t-shirts or other clothing that have slogans or commercial advertising. Avoid faded or torn jeans as well as outfits that wrinkle easily. Shorts are appropriate only at the hotel or playing soccer. WE STRONGLY ADVISE LEAVING AT HOME EXTRA ELECTRONIC DEVICES SUCH AS IPODS and IPADS, as well as EXPENSIVE JEWELRY.