

### Refuge International Code of Conduct

It is imperative that you read and understand our Code of Conduct policy (separate document) prior to joining us in Guatemala. Infractions will result in you being sent home at your own expense.

### HEALTH & HYGIENE ISSUES

**Food & Water:** Tap water is NOT SAFE for drinking or brushing your teeth anywhere in Guatemala. We will have purified water available throughout our trip and our food prepared by a local team (or restaurants) who understand safe food-prep practices. While fresh fruits and vegetables are readily available, it is best to eat only that which has a thick peel protecting the inner fruit such as bananas, papaya, watermelon, etc. Local produce can be eaten, but only after being cleansed by the kitchen staff. It is inadvisable to eat food for sale in open-air markets or from street vendors. Carrying hand sanitizer or Clorox wipes is a good health precaution as you travel in Guatemala.

#### Guidelines from the CDC:

Unclean food and water can cause traveler's diarrhea and other diseases. Travelers to developing countries are especially at risk. Reduce your risk by sticking to safe food and water habits.

#### Food

##### Eat:

- Food that is cooked and served hot
- Hard-cooked eggs
- Fruits and vegetables, you have washed in clean water or peeled yourself
- Pasteurized dairy products

##### Don't Eat:

- Food served at room temperature
- Food from street vendors
- Raw or soft-cooked (runny) eggs
- Raw or undercooked (rare) meat or fish
- Unwashed or unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables
- Condiments (such as salsa) made with fresh ingredients
- Salads
- Flavored ice or popsicles
- Unpasteurized dairy products
- "Bush meat" (wild game, monkeys, bats, etc.)

#### Beverages

##### Drink:

- Water, sodas, or sports drinks that are bottled and sealed (carbonated is safer)
- Water that has been purified/disinfected (boiled, filtered, treated)
- Ice made with bottled or purified water
- Hot coffee or tea
- Pasteurized milk

##### Don't Drink:

- Tap or unfiltered well water
- Fountain drinks
- Ice made with tap or unfiltered well water
- Drinks made with tap or unfiltered well water (such as reconstituted juice)
- Unpasteurized milk

## **Bathing and Swimming**

Unclean water can also make you sick if you swallow or inhale it while bathing, showering, or swimming. Try not to get any water in your nose or mouth.

**Malaria, Chikungunya, Dengue, and Zika:** The Peten is a low-lying region (elevation: 210 meters) and is considered tropical rainforest. Precautions should be taken to avoid mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue, chikungunya, zika and malaria. **Malarial Prophylaxis** is recommended for Guatemalan regions below 1,500 meters altitude. A mosquito repellent containing DEET should be used. You may also consider spraying your clothing with Permethrin, which should be done at home prior to packing for the trip.

**Typhoid Fever:** CDC recommends that travelers to Guatemala receive Typhoid vaccination.

**Tetanus Immunization:** Please be current with your tetanus booster. No cholera immunization is necessary at this time.

**Hepatitis A Immunization:** The series are recommended for everyone. Hepatitis A is transmitted through contaminated food and water.

**Hepatitis B Immunization:** This is also recommended for anyone likely to come in contact with blood or body fluids.

**Traveler's Diarrhea:** Note that there are no recommendations for prophylaxis for traveler's diarrhea other than watching what you eat and drink. However, some sources recommend taking 2 Pepto Bismol tablets 4 times a day, while others recommend prophylactic antibiotics. For concerns, please contact your personal physician regarding this issue. Certainly if anyone becomes ill, we will provide care in the clinic.

**Hygiene: Nowhere in Guatemala can toilet paper be flushed down the toilet.** The septic systems are not capable of handling it and it will back up right away. **Always dispose of toilet tissue in the waste paper basket next to the toilet.**

## **PACKING**

### **Clothing**

Refuge International medical mission t-shirts will be distributed prior to the trip and must be worn while traveling in the airport.

During clinic/hospital hours, all volunteers wear scrubs. **We do not have a supply of scrubs to loan out in the Petén (like we do in other locations) so please be sure to pack your own!** After clinic hours (back at our hotel) casual attire is acceptable (or just continue wearing your scrubs!).

### **Luggage**

ONE carry-on, which must meet airline specifications, such as small roller, backpack, or small duffel is allowed. (Check with your airline for carry-on requirements). When going through security, travelers are only permitted one carry-on and ONE personal "bag", such as tote bag, purse or laptop case. **All personal items that you will need for the week can be packed in your carry-on if you adhere to the essential packing list below and forgo non-essential items. You will be surprised how simply you can live!**

**One checked bag** will be reserved for medical supplies, which are essential to our trip. Depending on your location and itinerary, we will deliver a Refuge International medical bag to you before checking in for your flight. If you decide to take an additional personal bag besides your carry-on, you will be responsible for any additional charges associated with a second checked bag. If you are charged an airline fee for the medical bag you are carrying for Refuge International, please keep your receipt and we will reimburse you for this expense.

## Personal Packing List

Be sure that your liquid items all fit in one, quart-size Ziploc bag for carry-on purposes.

**Clinicians: Please bring your own otoscopes and stethoscopes.**

**Anesthesia Providers: Please bring your own laryngoscope.**

- Scrubs
- Mosquito Repellant (with DEET)
- Passport and color copy of your passport photo page
- Under-garments and pajamas
- Toiletries: Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.
- Personal medications
- Closed-toe shoes for hospital/clinic
- Shower shoes/flip flops
- Long-sleeved shirt (if you are cold-natured, to wear under scrubs)
- Casual-wear outfits for travel to and from Guatemala and optional Tikal excursion
- Reusable water bottle and travel coffee mug
- Camera/Smartphone
- Small flashlight/headlamp
- Earplugs (*howler monkeys – or your snoring roommate – can be LOUD at night*) ☺
- Optional:
  - Rain jacket or poncho
  - Individually-wrapped snacks – this is just in case you need something specific or extra to supplement your diet.

PLEASE DO NOT WEAR ANY EXPENSIVE JEWELRY IN GUATEMALA.

It might make you, or the group, a target for thievery.

### Optional: Items for local residents

**If you are not asked to bring a Refuge International checked medical bag, please consider collecting these hygiene items and pack your own checked bag of supplies.**

These are good items to bring: Toothbrushes, toothpaste, bath and hand soap, shampoo, lotion, Chapstick, small body powder (ie Gold Bond type), small jars of Vaseline and washcloths.

Refuge International also supports indigenous schools in Guatemala. These schools are very remote and get very little government attention. Their need for supplies and financial support is very acute. Should you feel the desire to help with education, these school supplies are always very much in need: pencils, crayons, markers, tape, paper, construction paper, children's scissors, children's book in Spanish, flash cards, and rulers; also playground items such as balls. If you have something else that you think would be appropriate, please ask! (*We kindly ask that candy and balloons not be handed out to children.*)

## MONEY

The Quetzal is the currency of Guatemala. The exchange rate is about 7.0 - 7.5 Quetzals to one US dollar. Refuge International can exchange small amounts of up to \$5/person. You will need to bring money for personal expenses during travel to/from Guatemala. There are banks/ATMs in Flores to get local currency. You will not be able to use US dollars (small bills and even \$20 bills are difficult to use). Guatemalan currency is very hard to exchange once outside Guatemala, so bring home only as much as you want to keep as souvenirs of your trip. (**IMPORTANT NOTE:** your US dollars MUST BE clean, unmarked, unfolded and unturned. Think "fresh off the press"; this is no joke as Guatemalans will refuse a bill that has the slightest mark on it because their banks will not honor the bill.)

## **HOUSING**

In the Petén, the group stays at Gucumatz Lakeside Inn, a casual, family-run hotel (shared rooms). The hotel is owned and operated by Moya Stenton, President of the Tikal-Petén Rotary Club and we work with Moya to coordinate the village clinic initiatives. Refuge International will provide transportation to/from the Belize airport, hotel, hospital and village clinics.

## **MEALS**

Breakfast and dinner will be at the hotel and lunches will either be pack lunches (village clinic team) and/or provided at the hospital (surgical team). The team will meet at 7:00am for breakfast and the morning meeting.

## **Dietary Restrictions**

Basic food restrictions can be accommodated on trip: gluten-free is not a problem in this country as they use little gluten in their cooking and vegetarian options are available. Please inform the team leader of food allergies so that we can advise our cooking staff. If you have other restrictions, please let me know in advance of arrival and we will try our best to accommodate (but you may need to bring your own food options, depending on your needs).

## **CLIMATE**

The temperatures can range from upper-60s at night to mid-90s during the day, with a possibility of rain. Bring light pajamas, a light jacket or sweater for early mornings or evenings and rain gear.

## **CONDUCT**

We will be working with local staff and residents who reside in the Petén region. We will refrain from any conduct that might be viewed as immoral to the local people. While in the Petén, the group will abide by the following:

- Please refrain from public displays of affection
- No profanity
- No open use of tobacco (we will point you to a discreet smoking location, if needed)

## **SAFETY**

Although we do feel the areas to which we travel are safe, you should use the same sensible precautions you would in any city:

- Do not go out alone at night.
- Always secure your wallet or purse. (*Under-clothing money carriers can be found at a variety of retailers like Target, Walmart or Amazon.com.*)
- Discreet use of your cell phone in public places (cell phones are the item most commonly stolen from travelers).
- Do not wear flashy or expensive jewelry.
- Always keep your passport locked in a hotel safe.
- Ask your team leader if you have any questions about safety issues.

Poverty is rampant in Guatemala, so the less you advertise affluence the less likely you are to attract unwanted attention. Do not do things to call attention to yourself or to your group.

## **TIKAL EXCURSION** *(optional)*

You will have the opportunity to visit Tikal national park on the last day of our mission week. Tikal is one of the preeminent Mayan civilization centers and a wonderful site of ruins to explore. The cost to visit Tikal is not included in your trip fee but we are happy to coordinate the visit. Please let the Team Leader know, prior to your arrival in country, if you are interested in the Tikal excursion and information will be provided to you.

## **MISSION TRIP POLICIES**

1. Participants are registered for the trip after we have received the following:
  - a. Refuge International Application
  - b. Signed Waiver
  - c. \$200 deposit

2. Medical licensure copies are also required, but may be sent at a later date. If not available at the time of application.
3. Participants must be at least 16 years or older (those under 18-years-old must be accompanied by an adult).

The mission trip volunteer fee includes:

- Round-trip ground transportation (as a group) from the Belize City airport (BZE) to our hotel.
- Shared rooming at Gucumatz Lakeside Inn
- Meals
- Transportation to/from service sites
- In-country travel insurance
- Language translation staff
- Medical supplies and medications used during our service week
- Your Medical Mission T-shirt

You will need money for snacks, tipping (10% to waiters, \$1 a bag for luggage) and the optional excursion to Tikal national park.

## Flights

You are responsible for your flights and airfare. The Team Leader will share out designated flight arrival/departure times and you will need to book your travel plans accordingly.

**Do not make flight reservations on other flights unless you have cleared this with the Team Leader!! Other flights may make it impossible for you to join the team as transportation to the Flores area is arranged on a group basis.**

Anytime someone flies, there are some basics you should know. Airlines can “overbook” based on statistics that not everyone shows up for their scheduled flights. If a flight you are on is overbooked, the airlines usually will ask for “volunteers”, those people who will take a voucher for a trip in the future and wait until the next flight (PLEASE do NOT volunteer to take a later flight!). If the need for seats are not met this way, there is a policy on who will be “bumped.” If you happen to be bumped, the airline will let you know what your next flight will be plus what they will do for you such as meal and lodging vouchers. **Call the Refuge International office immediately with your new arrival information. We need to know as soon as possible if you are bumped from your flight!!**

“Missed connections” happen when there is a delay, which can be caused by weather, flight crew, security, a gate not available when the plane arrives, all sorts of uncontrollable events. If this happens, AND the missed connection is due to the airline adversity, they will take care of your meals and a place to stay until the next flight. If it is NOT the airline’s responsibility, such as weather, they will help you find a place to stay but will not pay for it. **Allow money for contingencies.**

“Cancelled flights” are usually created by weather or mechanical repairs to the plane. If a flight is cancelled, the counter agents or the 800# of your airline will try to “reroute” you to your destination. If they cannot get you on a flight, if it is something that is the airline’s responsibility, such as a mechanical, they will usually provide lodging and meal vouchers. If it is weather or something out of their control, like a security issue, they will help to find lodging but will not pay for it. **Allow extra money, clothes, medicine, etc for travel contingencies.**

## **EMERGENCY NUMBERS** (Keep with you and give to your loved ones)

Refuge International, US office	903-234-8660 (during normal business hours)
Executive Director, Ginia Northcutt	903-237-9652 (nights and weekends)
Director of Guatemala, Kimberly Johnson	011-502-4493-0447 (Guatemala)

Messages will be frequently checked during trips. Many US wireless carriers have service in Guatemala. Check with your carrier for availability and international rates.

## **GUATEMALA AND THE PEOPLE**

Guatemala is the most populous of the seven Central American republics, with over 13.5 million inhabitants. There are basically two ethnic groups in Guatemala: the mestizos or Ladinos who are people of Spanish heritage, while the majority are people of Mayan descent. Repressive regimes, social conflict between the poorer Mayans and the better-off Ladinos and outside intervention resulted in a civil war that lasted over 36 years, killed over 200,000 people and left more than 50,000 people “missing”. In 1996, a peace agreement was reached and the slow rebuilding of a civil society began.

Today, the per capita income of the people is less than \$1,200 per year, literacy rates are very low, infant mortality is high, access to medical care is limited and there is NO CLEAN WATER in the country. Our part in the rebuilding of the Guatemalan society lies within these issues. We believe that everyone has the right to clean water and medical care. Our goal is to help the people of Guatemala achieve these rights through sustainable medical care and water programs.

The poverty in Guatemala is obvious, and you will want to help. The workers who live there best distribute gifts for children in the schools. Children will approach you begging in the street, or with items for sale, and you will find it hard to resist. Buying from them fosters the begging problem, and encourages them not to be enrolled in school. The best approach is not to make eye contact: be firm, refuse the first time and walk away. Instead, buy goods from an adult vendor in a market.

Guatemalan vendors expect you to do a little bargaining as part of the social exchange of the purchase. The first price offered is not the actual price for the item. “Haggling” is as much a part of the selling process as the “pitch” is in the US. Expect it and take part in it; it’s part of the fun of the experience.

It is inconsiderate to photograph the Guatemalan people without asking their permission first. Please ask their permission before taking a picture of anyone. Remember that many places we consider public, such as porches, courtyards, or the steps of a church are considered private. We encourage you to take as many photos as you like to document your time and experience as a Refuge International volunteer.

Making a small attempt at communicating with the residents of Guatemala will go a long way. While Spanish is widely spoken, there are dozens of indigenous languages spoken in the countryside. Still, “Buenos días”, “gracias”, and “por favor” are gracious gestures of a guest in their country.

The people of Guatemala have a rich, diverse cultural and historical heritage, thousands of years in the making. Many guidebooks have brief histories of the area that will help you understand a little bit more about the country. If you have time, read the book by Rigoberta Minchu, an indigenous Mayan woman who tells the story of her life during the civil war. The more you learn about the country, the more you will understand the reasons for our being there. We also recommend reading “Bitter Fruit” and watching Living On 1\$ A Day (currently available on Netflix).

## **OTHER FAQs**

### **Emergency**

In case of an emergency, please have your family contact the Refuge International office or Refuge International Executive Director, Ginia Northcutt, at the numbers listed above. Please let your family know that you are in a remote area and will check-in when able.

### **Laundry**

There is no laundry service available except for emergencies.

### **Electricity**

It is the same as we have in the States.

### **Internet**

There is WiFi at our hotel (but not at the hospital or clinic sites). Be sure leave your family with the Refuge International office/emergency numbers listed above in the event they must get in touch with you.

*Updated: 10/2019kj*