

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.

YO'O GUATEMALA: HELPING US BRING MEDICAL CARE TO PURULHA

[Yo'o Guatemala](#) is a non-profit organization founded by Brenda Itzé Lemus Gordillo, a dynamic Guatemalan passionate about education and blazing paths toward a better future for country-side communities like Purulhá. Yo'o Guatemala programs focus on community development, education and literacy, health and nutrition, and life skills developments.

Purulhá

In Q'eqchi (just one of the Mayan languages spoken in this region), Purulhá means "boiling water" and is a region that suffered greatly during the 36-year armed conflict that stunted Guatemala's development. During that conflict, Brenda's father, Bernardo Lemus, a prominent economist, was assassinated by state forces. Decades after the peace agreements were signed, Brenda and her siblings petitioned the government to build an institute in Purulhá in honor of their father as a place where local youth could finish high school without having to leave town. The government offered 200 books but nothing else. The family decided to accept the books and made an agreement with the local municipality for a space to build a library. From that day forward, Brenda began building upon the library's inventory, collecting school supplies and launched a tutoring program for kids who were learning in Spanish while their parents only spoke Q'eqchi. It wasn't long before the library staff saw the nutrition needs of their students. How can a child learn if their belly is empty? Nutrition and meal programs were soon introduced. The library quickly became "a convergence center, where the children solved almost all the needs they had."

Yo'o, in Q'eqchi, mean's "let's go." Education programs now include scholarships, tutor programs, school supplies assistance (in exchange for eco-bricks the children make by collecting trash in their community). They offer lunch programs and nutrition support for impoverished families. Refuge International has been supporting their nutrition program with vitamins for children and older adults. Diplomas, workshops and conferences centered on community leadership are offered to their students. There is an on-site residency program, in agreement with parents, for kids to stay during the week so that they can attend school. Since our vitamin support began, people have knocked on Brenda's front door asking her to "call the doctors" about a sick family member and Refuge International volunteers have provided telehealth support as much as possible but there's so much more we can do. It's time to take our teams to Purulhá.

HEALTH & HYGIENE ISSUES

Food & Water: Tap water is NOT SAFE for drinking or brushing your teeth anywhere in Guatemala. While at the clinic, local staff will prepare our meals. Safe food and water are a top priority. 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, oranges, 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" (monkeys, bats, or other wild game)

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. In most areas, tap water is not safe for brushing your teeth, and you should use bottled water.

Hygiene

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

COVID-19 Guidelines

COVID-19 vaccination is not required for participation in a Refuge International medical mission.

However, we are committed to minimizing the risk of exposure/ transmission of COVID-19 to our volunteers and to our patients. Therefore, we request that should you experience a significant exposure to COVID-19 (1) within 7 days of travel or develop symptoms consistent with a COVID-19 infection within 10 days of travel to Guatemala, please adhere to the CDC guidelines for isolation and testing; (2) If you test positive under the CDC protocol, please notify the team leader and the Refuge International office and cancel your participation.

Refuge International is relying on your integrity and personal sense of responsibility with respect to this policy. If you become COVID-19 positive during the mission, Refuge International will not be financially responsible for your healthcare nor the expense of quarantine.

- (1) Greater than fifteen-minute exposure to a COVID-19 positive patient in a closed indoor environment (eg. party, airport) or in a congested outdoor environment (eg. concert, sporting event).
- (2) CDC website: What to do if you were exposed to COVID-19 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/ifyou-were-exposed.html>

Travel Immunizations

Always refer to the most recent CDC guidelines for recommended travel immunizations. You can access the information for recommended vaccines and Guatemala-specific travel medications on the [CDC website](#).

COVID-19: The CDC recommends a COVID-19 vaccine for all international travelers.

Malaria, Chikungunya, Dengue, and Zika: While mosquito borne diseases are not common in Purulhá (1570m elevation), there have been occasional reports of dengue, chikungunya, zika, and very rarely malaria.

Malarial Prophylaxis – is not routinely recommended. A mosquito repellent containing DEET should be used. You may also choose to spray 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.

Cholera Immunization: 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: Please refer to the CDC's website for traveler's diarrhea. You will 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 a team member becomes ill, we will provide care in the clinic.

Motion Sickness: We have a long journey by small (private) bus between the airport and the hilly Verapaces region. If you suffer from motion sickness, please be sure to bring medication with you!

PACKING

Clothing

Refuge International medical mission t-shirts will be distributed prior to the trip and must be worn for arrival into Guatemala. These shirts help us to identify each other, as well as assist us getting through customs in Guatemala.

During clinic hours, all volunteers wear scrubs. As this is a new service site for us, we do NOT yet have a supply of scrubs to loan out while on trip. **PLEASE BE SURE TO PACK YOUR OWN SCRUBS!** 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 should be reserved for medical supplies which are essential to our trip. Depending on your location and itinerary, we will delivery 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 (note that the reimbursement amount is based on the charge for a “first” checked-bag).

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 otoscope and stethoscope.

- Scrubs
- Mosquito Repellant (with DEET)
- Passport and color copy of your passport photo page
- Underwear and pajamas
 - In January, a warm hat/beanie and heating pad are also great to have for sleeping.
- Toiletries: Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.
- Personal medications
- Closed-toe shoes for clinic; sandals/flip flops for hotel use
- Sweater or jacket (*wear this on the plane to save packing space*)
- Washcloth or scrubbie (*most hotels in Guatemala do not offer washcloths*)
- Good rain jacket or poncho (*just always good to have when traveling*)
- Long-sleeved shirts / underlayers (*particularly for the January trip!*)
- Casual-wear outfits for Antigua and travel home from Guatemala
- Reusable water bottle and travel coffee mug
- Camera/Smartphone
- Small flashlight/headlamp
- Book or magazine
- Earplugs
- Optional:
 - Personal snacks – *you will be fed very well throughout the trip; this is just in case you need something specific or extra.*

PLEASE DO NOT WEAR ANY EXPENSIVE JEWELRY IN GUATEMALA.
It might make you, or the group, a target for thieves.

HELPFUL ITEMS TO PACK AND DONATE

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

Personal Hygiene Items

These are good items to bring to the clinic: Toothbrushes, toothpaste, body and hand soap (non-scented), shampoo, body lotion, Chapstick, body powder (Gold Bond type; small containers) and washcloths. All items will be given out in clinic by the attending clinicians or pharmacy. **Nothing is to be given out in the courtyard to avoid crowding and unfair distribution.**

Education Supplies

Yo’o, our partnering organization in the Purulhá effort, operates several education and day care programs for local children. Should you like to help support their education initiatives here is a list of common school supplies that are always needed: pencils, crayons, spiral notebooks, markers, tape, construction paper, children’s scissors, children’s book in Spanish, flash cards, and rulers and backpacks.

MONEY

The Quetzal is the currency of Guatemala. The exchange rate is about 7.5 – 7.75 Quetzals to one US dollar. Refuge International can exchange small amounts of up to \$20/volunteer.

In Purulhá

Outside of the occasional soda or personal item expense, you will not need money as all meals and lodging are included in your mission volunteer fee.

In Antigua

- You will need to bring money for meals and shopping while in Antigua. There are banks in Antigua, but you will find vendors in the market (and most stores) will accept US currency (in pristine condition). Bring small bills and you will not have to exchange money. Meals can range from \$5-\$30 a person in Antigua, depending on the restaurant. Many stores and restaurants will also accept Visa or MasterCard credit cards.
- Guatemalan textiles are incredible and inexpensive and make great souvenirs or gifts to take home. It is possible to spend a lot of money shopping here! Guatemalan currency is very hard to exchange once outside Guatemala, so don't get more than you really need.
- You will need \$15 - \$40 (USD) cash for the airport shuttle from Antigua at the end of the week (depends on total number of passengers)
- **(IMPORTANT NOTE: your US dollars MUST BE clean, unmarked, unfolded and untornd. 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 Purulhá, the group will stay at Posada Montaña Del Quetzal, a casual, family-run hotel (shared rooms). The hotel is nestled in the cloud forest with lush gardens. Rooms are simple but comfortably furnished for your stay. Refuge International will provide transportation to/from the Guatemala airport, hotel, clinic site and to Antigua at the end of the service week.

MEALS

Breakfast will be served at the hotel in a private dining room starting at 6:30am. Lunch and dinner will be coordinated by Sembrando Futuros, a community service partner organization of Yo'o. They will be focused on training local women in proper food preparation for future Refuge International teams so that we can help support the local economy in addition to our healthcare service. All meals will be a set menu.

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 us know in advance and we will try our best to accommodate you (but you may need to bring your own food options, depending on your needs).

CLIMATE

Purulhá has a temperate climate with temperatures ranging from low 50s to mid 70s. Nights and early mornings can feel quite damp and cool as the region is in a cloud forest. The rainy season in Guatemala runs from June through September and sudden, heavy afternoon showers are common. The dry (and COLD) season runs October through April. The temperature in January can dip into the low 40s during the day and freezing overnight. Pack accordingly!!

CONDUCT

We will be working with local residents and staff who reside in Purulhá. Many from Yo'o, our partner organization, and some from the local municipality and Center of Health. We will refrain from any conduct that might be viewed as immoral or disrespectful to the local people. We expect all volunteers to conduct themselves in a professional manner:

- Please refrain from public displays of affection
- No profanity, yelling or shouting
- No open use of tobacco (we point you to a discreet smoking location, if necessary)
- No alcohol consumption

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 (particularly in Antigua):

- 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 display affluence the less likely you are to attract unwanted attention. Do not do things to call attention to yourself or to your group.

ANTIGUA

We will arrive Friday afternoon in the beautiful colonial city of Antigua. Once you arrive, your meals will be at your own expense as well as your shuttle to the airport (breakfast is included with your room at our hotel). The cost of the airport shuttle ranges \$15-\$40 (depending on number of people). Shuttle arrangements will be coordinated by your team leader. If you are staying an additional night at the hotel in Antigua, there is an additional cost of \$75 (non-refundable and arrangements must be made in advance).

MISSION TRIP FEE & EXPENSES

The volunteer trip fee includes:

- Bus transportation (private) from the airport to Purulhá hotel (lunch provided)
- In-country travel insurance
- Shared rooming at Posada Montaña Del Quetzal
- Daily transportation between the hotel and clinic site
- Meals (three meals daily) in Purulhá
- Language translation staff
- Medical supplies and medications used during our service week (*the most significant portion of the mission expenses!*)
- Bus transportation (private) from Purulhá to Antigua at the end of the week
- 1-night hotel lodging in Antigua (breakfast included)
- Your Medical Mission T-shirt

You will need money for snacks, tipping (10% to waiters, \$1 a bag for luggage), meals in Antigua, your shuttle from Antigua to the airport and travel contingencies.

Flights

You are responsible for booking your flights and airfare. Your team leader will send 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 Purulhá is arranged on a group basis. Individual transfers will be provided only as a personal expense.

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.**

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the transportation logistics and distance to Purulhá if you arrive later than the group we may be unable to accommodate separate transportation to the clinic. Therefore, it is imperative that you communicate with the team leader or executive director as soon as you are aware of any travel delays.

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 & WhatsApp)
	214-695-3531 (US & WhatsApp)

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 16 million residents. There are basically two ethnic groups in Guatemala: the mestizos (or Ladinos) who are people of Spanish heritage, and the remaining majority who 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. Our local partners who live in the areas we serve are the best folks to 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 but do so in a culturally respectful manner.

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. We also recommend reading "*Bitter Fruit*" and watching "*Living On \$1 A Day*" (currently available on Netflix). The more you learn about the country, the more you will understand the reasons for our being here.

OTHER FAQs

Emergency

In case of an emergency, please have your family contact the Refuge International office or Ginia Northcutt, Refuge International Executive Director, 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 voltage/outlets as we have in the United States.

Noise

Hotel rooms are provided on a shared-occupancy basis. If you are a light sleeper, please consider bringing earplugs in the event your roommate(s) snore. 😊

Internet

There is WiFi at our hotel but not at the clinic site. Be sure to leave the Refuge International contact numbers listed above with your family in the event they must get in touch with you.

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