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. While at the clinic, we have a local team that will prepare our food. 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, 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. In most areas, tap water is not safe for brushing your teeth, and you should use bottled water. People who are elderly or have weakened immune systems might want to stay away from areas where there is a lot of steam and water vapor that can be inhaled, such as showers and hot tubs.

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 San Raymundo (1565m elevation), there have been occasional reports of dengue, chikungunya, zika, and very rarely malaria.

Malarial Prophylaxis – is not routinely recommended. A mosquito repellant 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. 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.

PACKING

Clothing

Refuge International medical mission t-shirts will be distributed on the trip.

During clinic hours, all volunteers wear scrubs. There are scrubs to borrow at the clinic in San Raymundo, or you may bring your own with you. After clinic hours, most people continue to wear their scrubs, but if you choose to change, attire is casual, jeans, etc. No short-shorts are worn in the clinic, even after hours. Elsewhere in the country, out of respect for the local people and their culture, the following guidelines for dress are suggested. For all: no exposed armpits or thighs, no tight clothing. Slacks, jeans, casual shirts or t-shirts are fine for men. For women, clothing should be loose, skirts- below knees, pants baggy. If traveling in February or October, bring a light jacket or sweater; the weather can be cool, especially in the mornings and evenings.

Luggage

ONE carry-on, which must meet airline specifications, such as small rollerbag, 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 while on trip!

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.

Because you will have limited personal packing space, these items will be provided for you at the clinic:

- *One towel*
- *All bedding*
- *Scrubs (3 sets)*

Personal Packing List

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

Clinicians: Please bring your own otoscope and stethoscope.

- Mosquito Repellant (with DEET)
- Passport and color copy of your passport photo page
- Underwear and pajamas
- Toiletries: Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.
- Personal medications
- Closed-toe shoes for clinic/hospital use
- Sweater or jacket (wear this on the plane to save packing space)
- Washcloth or scrubbie *(most hotels in Guatemala do not offer washcloths)*
- Shower shoes/flip flops
- Good rain jacket or poncho
- Long-sleeved shirt (if you are cold-natured, to wear under scrubs)
- 2-3 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:
  - 2 or 3 sets of scrubs – if you do not want to wear those provided by the clinic

- Personal snacks or supplemental food needs – you will be fed very well on 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.

Optional: Items for local residents
These are good items to bring to the clinic: Toothbrushes, toothpaste, bath and hand soap (non-scented), shampoo, lotion, Chapstick, small jars (personal size) of Vaseline and washcloths. All items will be given out in clinic by the attending clinicians or in pre-op/post-op or pharmacy. **Nothing is to be given outside the hospital or in the courtyard.**

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

Refuge International supports indigenous schools in Guatemala. These schools are very remote and get very little 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, spiral notebooks, markers, tape, 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!

The hygiene and school items listed above are great gifts to bring. We ask that you not bring a lot of candy as it can do more dental and nutritional damage than you might think.

MONEY

The Quetzal is the currency of Guatemala. The exchange rate is usually around 7.5 Quetzals to one US dollar. Most volunteers don't spend any money while in San Raymundo. Refuge International can exchange small amounts of up to $10/person. 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 untorn. 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

The team will be housed in either dormitories or double rooms while on the San Raymundo hospital campus. The dorms are divided into men's and women's spaces with separate bathing and toilet facilities for each. The dorms are not heated or air-conditioned but we do provide light blankets (or fans) to keep you comfortable. If you are a light sleeper, bring good earplugs! The facility does have hot showers and flush toilets. Short showers are a courtesy so everyone should be able to get warm water.

MEALS

Meals are served in the common dining facility. Our local kitchen staff prepares all meals and the menu varies with a touch of local flare.

The team will meet at 6:30-7:00am for breakfast and the morning meeting. Lunch is served from 11:30am - 1:00pm and the team will eat in shifts (to ensure patient care is uninterrupted). Dinner will begin after clinic with most of the team eating together, usually around 7:00pm.

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 kitchen team. If you have other restrictions, please let us know in advance of arrival and we will try our best to make accommodations (but you may need to bring your own food options, depending on your specific needs).

CLIMATE

The temperatures can range from upper 40's at night to around 80F, with a possibility of rain. Bring warm pajamas, a light jacket or sweater for early mornings or evenings (February & October only) and light rain gear.

CONDUCT

We will be working with local residents who reside in/around San Raymundo. We will refrain from any conduct that might be viewed as immoral to the local people. While at the clinic the following rules are suggested:

- Absolutely no alcoholic beverages
- Please refrain from public displays of affection
- No profanity
- No open use of tobacco (we have a discreet smoking location)

ASOCIACION MÉDICA QUIRÚRGICA DE SAN RAYMUNDO

The Asociacion Medica Quirurgica de San Raymundo was established to oversee the activities of the hospital. The committee members live in the San Raymundo area and are working hard at making the hospital a fully functioning charity hospital. Many will be working with us in the clinic as well as joining the team for meals in the dining room. They are amazing people with incredible stories so please take the time to get to know them. The committee members are as follows:

Ramiro Cojon, MD – *President*; Dr. Cojon is a local physician in San Raymundo and medical sponsor of our group.
Eugenio Nij – *Vice President*; Local pastor.
Joy Gring – *Treasurer*; Joy is a missionary and nurse from the US. She runs a school in San Raymundo and also works with Dr. Cojon.
Liliana Camey – *Secretary*; Liliana is the Director of a local, public school in the village of Estancia Vieja (just outside of San Raymundo).
Mara Camey – *Hospital Coordinator*; Mara is a teacher at a local, public school and sister to Liliana and runs the hospital admin office during our mission week.
Isaias Chamale – *Committee Member*
Gerardo Chamale – *Committee Member*
Antonio Chamale – *Committee Member*
Bildad Hernández – *Committee Member*
Eladio García – *Committee Member*

SAFETY

At the end of the trip we will be spending time in the city of Antigua. Although we do feel this city is 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.

ANTIGUA

We will arrive Friday morning 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 the number of people sharing a shuttle time). 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).

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.

MISSION TRIP FEES & EXPENSES

The mission trip volunteer fee includes:

- Bus transportation (private) from the airport to the clinic in San Raymundo
- In-country travel insurance
- Lodging and Meals in San Raymundo
- Local Translators
- Medical supplies and medications used during our service week (*the most significant portion of the mission expenses!*)
- Bus transportation (private) from San Raymundo clinic to Antigua at the end of the week
- 1-night hotel lodging in Antigua (breakfast included)
- Your Medical Mission T-shirt

Flights

You are responsible for booking your flights and airfare. For each mission trip there are designated team flights. You can find the information on our website or contact the Refuge International office. If your travel itinerary necessitates a special trip to pick you up, or drop you off at the airport, you will need to pay the additional costs associated with special transportation arrangements.

Do not make flight reservations on other flights unless you have cleared this with the Team Leader!!

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.**

GUATEMALAN CONTINGENCIES

If you decide to arrive in Guatemala before the team arrives or if you find yourself stranded because of a cancelled or delayed flight, be aware that Guatemala City is considered a dangerous city. Consider choosing a hotel near the airport that offers shuttle services. Some hotels we have used in the past are:

Hotel Casa Veranda Guatemala 011-502-2411-4100

Barceló Hotel Guatemala City	011-502-2378-4000
Hilton Garden Inn Guatemala City	011-502-2423-0909

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

Refuge International, US office Executive Director, Renea Schott 936-675-3307
Guatemala, Alex Morales 903-921-3515
Guatemala, Abby Giron 903-921-3520

GUATEMALA AND THE PEOPLE

Guatemala is the most populous of the seven Central American republics, with just over 15 million inhabitants. There are 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 still 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. It's helpful to understand that 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. It should be a fun part 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.

OTHER FAQs

Emergency

In case of an emergency, please have your family contact Renea Schott, Refuge International Executive Director, at the numbers listed above. It's best to 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. The facility has to keep up with the hospital's linens.

Electricity

It is the same as we have in the states. There are not a huge number of outlets in the sleeping area so if you want to recharge a phone or sleep with a CPAP, you might want to bring an extension cord/multi plug.

Noise
Lodging is 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 in San Raymundo. If you need to be connected during our mission week, please be sure to check with your US phone carrier regarding an international data/phone plan.

Updated: 08/2026rs