



Porch de Salomon
Short-term Team and Individual Volunteer Guidelines
August 2022

porchgregory@gmail.com, www.porchdesalomon.org and on 

Note: 1) Every team leader must confirm to Porch, at least one day before arrival, that each team member has health insurance which applies in Guatemala.

2) Porch mirrors the Guatemalan government Covid 19 protocol for entering Guatemala and the USA government protocol for exiting Guatemala. Please check those in advance of your trip. Also, please have a mask in your carry-on luggage for travel. You may have to wear a mask in the Guatemalan airport and a few locations in Panajachel.

Best **team size** is from 15 to 25- but we welcome smaller (or larger) groups as well!

15 (fifteen) is a good general **minimum age** (with exceptions for a specific youth team or special family circumstances). However, we have had families bring young children down to serve with them and it worked out well.

The most important thing to bring, apart from your current **passport**, is a flexible attitude (things change daily here) and a spirit of openness to new experiences, people and culture. Third-world schedules are typically more relaxed than American ones. Please see our "Attitudes Packing List."

"One of the keys in life is to be able to adjust and be flexible."

Joe Restic, Harvard Coach, 1971-93

We ask that visitors put aside as many **personal preferences** as possible during visits here. Staying in a room not quite up to American standards, eating different food, not being as electronically "plugged in" (communication-wise), and such can be good for the soul. While we encourage reasonable constructive feedback and ideas, we have found that team members who indulge personal preferences during their short stays here put unnecessary stress on team leaders, their team, and our local Porch workers.

Considerable effort, strategic thought, and planning goes into our team schedules. We ask that our teams and volunteers review their schedule and abide by it unless they receive express permission to deviate.

Tools, except specialty tools and electronics, are available for reasonable prices here. Please only bring specialty tools and/or your favorite hammer, trowel, etc. and two pairs of work gloves; a pair for you and a pair to give away. Please contact us if you can bring quality (even used) construction power tools down; they are very helpful.

The People We Serve

Guatemala's colorful *indigenous* peoples are descendants of the ancient Mayans. 23 different native tongues are spoken; you will most likely encounter the beautiful sound of Kaq'Chikel and Tzu 'zuhil. Many of these people also speak Spanish as a second language.

The *Ladino* Guatemalans are largely descendants of the Spanish conquerors of this area. They are much more modern in their lifestyle and have a general history of oppressing the indigenous.

Guatemala's civil war (1961-1996) damaged a considerable portion of the country's infrastructure. Grinding poverty, ignorance and poor living conditions are common. These breed theft, human and child exploitation and violence.

Expatriate/gringos- see "Evangelism/witnessing" section below

Team Projects depend, in part, on its members' knowledge, skills and abilities; we try to tailor the trip, at least somewhat, to fit that. We should work together with your team leader to assess what the team brings in terms of knowledge, skill and abilities as well as their yearnings.

Note: we may try to blend the projects so that team members get a flavor for construction, indigenous children or medical/dental to see where their deeper passions lie.

Team fees include money for funding our projects. We ask that our individual volunteers (non-team) donate a minimum of \$250 to Porch for help with our projects (please let us know, in advance, if this presents a problem).

***Please do not independently commit to or fund a project here without our advance consent.

Exemplar projects include:

Construction:

1. Complete, quality home construction, with exertion level options ranging from light-duty to heavy duty. The house won't be "start to finish" in one week; average build time is nine weeks. Construction methods are simple and mostly "by hand" (even mixing concrete). We work under the supervision of a local foreman so construction experience and skills are not required.
2. Tin roof, adobe (mud brick) wall replacements or house renovation.
3. Construct wooden beds and furnish with mattress or foam. Many of the people here sleep on concrete or the ground.
4. Concrete floor pouring in homes, churches, and classrooms.
5. Construct simple bathrooms, sinks, or bedrooms.
6. Installing family clean water filter systems or *Ecoplancha* efficient, vented woodstoves.

Children's/youth ministry

We have opportunity for Bible school, crafts, music as well as health/hygiene training and a great need for children's therapists, especially for speech/communication therapists (longer term volunteers). Please ask for our Bible school guidelines if you have folks who are passionate about helping lead.

Medical- clinics by doctors, nurses, or physician assistants. Please request a copy of our "how to do clinic" information if you're interested in doing such. There is an additional, per-day clinic fee, which covers medicine purchases, hiring a local physician, translators and such.

Dental clinics- primarily extractions. We provide references and, when needed, a bit of specialized training.

English Language Learning teaching

We can teach locals ELL for free to improve their job prospects.

Café Hotel California (formerly Solomon's Porch Café)

We welcome cafe/live music/presence at our café facility. Also, we encourage our volunteers to hang out and develop dialogue with the expats, tourists, locals, and youth who visit.

In addition to being our primary ministry "presence" in Pana (including our weekly worship gathering and humanitarian relief center), "The Porch" also hosts or co-hosts cultural events (lectures, cinema), community and school fundraisers, and live music (including rock 'n roll, reggae, or blues music, and dancing). Our live music and cultural exchange help break down misconceptions and allows us to gain the confidence of dubious pre-believers; often more ministry flows from these relationships. This would not occur if we operated the cafe as a squeaky clean, "Christian" establishment. Sometimes it's complicated and even messy but we believe God often works best in "messes." *Without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for a large harvest. Proverbs 14:4* We welcome your questions and invite dialogue on this part of our mission.

Team Reflection Times and Plan for the Day

We strongly encourage some preparation and depth to the work day morning devotional/prayer/daily spiritual de-brief times. Team members can really connect to their maker, each other, and maybe themselves during that time. Teams design and lead that time and we offer suggestions.

The best time for focused group sharing and prayer is in the morning, before the team embarks on the day's work (about 20 minutes).

Porch is a progressive, "portal" ministry; since 2005 we have strived to be some of Panajachel's "go to" Christ-followers. We often have folks present for the morning devotionals who are not Christ-followers (for example, certain translators, team members, curious visitors, or volunteers). Therefore, we insist that the morning devotionals NOT be sermons, fundamentalist, exclusive, condemning, "culture-war" or politically charged, and such. Please contact me porchgregory@gmail.com if you would like further dialogue on this. It's also great when the devotionals are tailored and contextual to our setting and the visiting team's experiences during their week. Thank you.

***Each team member should be present and attentive, immediately after the sharing/prayer time, so that a local Porch leader can verbally present the "plan of the day," and answer pressing questions, before the day's work begins (about 10 minutes).

Evangelism/witnessing

Panajachel (*toptenz.net's #4 hippie travel destination worldwide*) and the Lake Atitlan basin attract many counter-culture minded, mysticism-oriented, hedonistic or rugged-individual types who are typically "turned off" to Christianity and Christians. They often see the numerous local Spanish-speaking congregations as loud nuisances. These gringos view "missionaries" with suspicion too; we rarely refer to ourselves as such. We strive for relationships and pray that God will then provide an opportunity to share good news and encouragement when our friend is ready...

A total team "project" will be demonstrating that followers of Christ are "normal," interesting, kind, fun, non-pushy, service-minded people to the expats and tourists who will be watching the team as it moves about Panajachel. Three examples:

- * Tract ministry is prohibited; most of the expats have seen them (and those of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses) and they are not effective.
- * While understated team shirts will be cool, "evangelism by what we wear" (e.g. message T-shirts) is discouraged as it sets up an immediate barrier to many. Further, we strongly urge teams to not look like teams (rather, appear to be groups of three or four) when clearing immigration/customs at the Guate City airport.
- * Toting a large Bible, attempting first-meeting conversion, or conversations laced with "Christian lingo" will reinforce the stereotypical views of believers.

Take some time to better understand the local scene, and the locals, before you begin to boldly "take a stand." This was Paul's approach, in ancient Athens, in Acts 17. We also recommend you avoid serious or pointed political discussions; many folks here are fairly "anti-American."

Please contact Greg if you'd like additional information or references to helpful resources. We welcome and encourage dialogue on all this!

Money

Guate's currency is the "quetzale" (named after famous bird)- exchange rate is usually around 7.3 quetzales to \$1 US.

It is difficult to negotiate traveler's checks. Team leaders may bring some U.S. cash but team fees should be mailed to Porch de Salomon, PO Box 10509, Tallahassee FL 32302-2509 at least two weeks before your trip.

Team members should also bring and exchange dollars here for incidentals. Cash in U.S. accounts can usually be accessed via debit/check card (at ATM or in Guate banks) but may be limited to \$100 (or less) per day. We recommend that team members notify their bank, in advance, of their travel plans. American credit cards are accepted at some establishments but are not useful for accessing cash.

Clean, untorn, unmarked \$100 bills are the easiest to exchange.

In the event it is not already included in your ticket purchase price, everyone should have money to pay Guatemala's exit tax as they depart the airport, currently at Q20 (or \$3).

Personal Safety and security

Don't flash your cash. Watch out for pick-pockets, especially on market days. A money belt or equivalent is a good idea. Leave your Rolex, diamonds, and gold in the states.

Pana is one of the safer towns in Guatemala (which, unfortunately, can be a dangerous country). However, don't venture out alone, or away from the main streets, without express permission from us, especially at night.

Lock your doors. **Do not** allow locals (even those associated with Porch) in your room (or visit their room); unfortunately, even folks you think you can trust may steal from you or make you uncomfortable in such situations.

Stay with the group, especially outside Pana.

Anything you leave unattended in a public or semi-public place is subject to be stolen.

Take care in your interactions with children to avoid giving any impression of possible abduction of them.

Please see the U.S. Consular Sheet at

<https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/guatemala.html> for their serious

safety warnings and "nitty-gritty" safety position. We will generally follow their suggestions.

We strongly encourage you to enroll with the U.S. Embassy or consulate through the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) website <https://step.state.gov/> . By enrolling, you will receive the Embassy's most recent security and safety updates during your trip. This also allows for better emergency contact.

Insurance

Each team member must purchase international, short-term health insurance before arriving (which includes coverage for Covid 19). Note: this is not airline "trip insurance." Sorry, but our ministry will not be responsible for visitor or volunteers' medical costs, quarantine, evacuation, or the like.

Our recommended agency contact is:

Tracy Winters (tracy@gninsurance.com) www.gninsurance.com for international, short-term health insurance.

Clothing

An overview: try to personally travel light (a good lesson for many of us Americans) by bringing your clothes and personal effects in your carry-on (also great if some of the clothes, etc. can be left here—but not sizes larger than L or shoes larger than 10). That allows use of most of checked baggage for ministry material, medicine, donated children's clothes, etc. Pana is also a great place to buy inexpensive, fun "typical" clothes.

Inexpensive laundry services are readily available near Hotel California; you need not bring many clothes. Please do not use the Hotel California's washer or dryer; both are reserved for our hotel linens and towels.

Guatemala is the "land of eternal spring" and temperatures are warm (80 degree F max in day) and cool (60's at night- bring a sweater or light jacket) year round. **Rainy season is May to October** and it usually rains some every day; prepare for that (although you can buy inexpensive ponchos here). Gore-tex shoes or low boots are great. November thru April are dry and dusty- good hats and sun protection are needed year round. Either season-- bring a **bathing suit** for a dive into the lake!

We encourage reasonably modest (but not square) attire, especially when we visit the indigenous villages. Sleeveless is fine but no spaghetti straps/halters/tube tops, etc. please. Also, better to leave midriff-bearing tops and gravity-defying (super low cut) bell bottoms at home.

Shorts are OK, but please, **no short-shorts (*hot pants*), micro-mini skirts, or overly-revealing leggings**. Provocative clothing on American girls and women reinforces the stereotype of loose morals and sexual-thrill seeking while they are visiting Guatemala; that is, that they are ready for "action" here.

Transportation and Flight basics

Panajachel is about four hours by car from the nearest airport; Guatemala City. Public shuttle costs from the airport to Pana (or vice versa), one-way, are about \$30 per person. Private shuttle costs are \$125 for one shuttle van. If needed, we prefer to arrange these for you.

*Please schedule arriving and departing flights (into and out of Guate City) for **mid-day**, if possible, to avoid night travel or the additional expense of a night in the city.

* Individual volunteers: Some airlines will not allow you to board the plane for Guatemala unless your return ticket is within the 90-day visa "window." Please work this out with your respective airline or contact us, well in advance of your travel, if you can't.

* We recommend that our teams not look like teams to avoid hassles and delay at the Guatemala airport customs. Instead, try to look like family or tourist groups of two or three (that do not know the others). It is better to not wear group or matching shirts.

Telecommunications and emergency contact numbers

For emergency calls to team from states: Dial 011 502 then:
Hilda Mux Son 5850 8629, Noe Benjamin Perez 5945 1313, Café Hotel
California/Hotel California 7762 0793, 0364

Wifi is available at the cafe and the Hotel California.

Team members are free to use social media or blogs (including pics) to update their folks back home as their visit progresses. **We request that they mention/"brand" Porch de Salomon as this is done.**

Locomotion ("Everybody's doing a brand new...")

Our work here often involves substantial amounts of walking, sometimes on the moderately steep terrain surrounding Lake Atitlan. Bring good walking shoes or hiking boots and get yourself in shape for our treks.

Let us know, in advance, if this presents a problem and we'll seek to accommodate you.

Housing

In late 2012, after seven years of building (50 houses and more) and giving it all away, we looked for a way to harness the \$15,000/plus our teams paid in hotel rent (plus our facility rent, \$8000 annually) to purchase a ministry facility. We sought to be good stewards with this money, with an eye to the ministry's future. We were able to purchase (with a loan) *Hotel San Sebastian* (where our teams stayed previously) and have placed our café on the first floor.

Renamed "*Hotel California*" (www.hotelcaliforniapana.com), the hotel's 12 rooms, all with a private hot-water bathroom, are where we house as many of our teamers as is reasonably possible. With the exception of couples, we seek to use triple and quadruple occupancy to maximize team rent. Thanks for your understanding and flexibility in helping us utilize this essential part of our ministry.

We place "overflow" teamers (when there are too many for our rooms) in a comparable, safe, nearby local hotel.

Electrical devices you may bring will generally not require an adapter.

Health and Hygiene

Don't drink the tap water here- we will drink and use bottled water. Watch out for two places where this is easy to forget- brushing your teeth/rinsing your brush (use only "agua pura" bottled water for both) and in the shower.

Keep your refillable bottle of "agua pura" with you! Get in the habit of drinking plenty of it here; our mile-high altitude takes it out of a body! Some of our illness here has been dehydration related.

Bring hand sanitizer and use it.

Don't eat street vendor food or drinks. Fruit and vegetables must be disinfected before eating. Please try to not waste food or order more than you can eat.

While we recommend, you let us know, well in advance, if you have a serious food allergy, we cannot take responsibility for managing that, or ensuring the ingredients of food/meals. Of course, we will cooperate, as best we can. Folks with such should bring down epinephrine (or equivalent) syringes, etc. and keep one at hand. They should be proactive at every meal and should bring some packaged, safe food (they are able to purchase more at the local "gringo grocery store.")

Please also let us know, well in advance, if you are a strict vegetarian/vegan or have special dietary requirements (but leave strident or militant attitudes at home, please). Our staff, and the restaurants we visit, will cooperate with you, as best they can, but you must be proactive, flexible, and gracious.

Toilet paper is generally available - but **do not** flush it down the toilet anywhere. It's a good idea to have some with you at all times.

Non-Covid 19 vaccinations: As per the State Department's Guatemala webpage: *Not required, but we recommend vaccinations against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies, and typhoid. Influenza, yellow fever, tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations should also be up to date.*

For other recommended health requirements contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for international travelers at 877-fyi-trip or on the internet at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/guatemala>

Our area is **not** one for malaria/mosquitoes. However, we have ankle-biting flies; insect repellent is advisable.

Photography

Please ask for and receive permission before taking photographs of individuals or groups.

Please read this article and be sensitive to “selfie,” “white-savior,” and “poverty porn” issues:

[Volunteering Abroad? Read This Before You Post That Selfie](#)

Digital or film photos can be developed in Panajachel at reasonable prices, if you wish. The gift of a photograph can be especially meaningful to the indigenous folk here--many have none.

We tastefully use candid photographs of team members, taken by our guides or other team members, in our newsletter, slide shows, and social media. Please contact Greg directly (porchgregory@gmail.com) if you do not consent to such use.

Gifts

Indiscriminate gift-giving to the indigenous or locals can create problems- jealousy, envy, strife, etc. Please check with your team leader and Porch for permission and suggestions before you give gifts.

Please do **not** pull out or show gifts of any kind in a medical clinic, Bible school or indigenous village setting without having previously cleared the “give away” plan with a local Porch leader.

Please let us know if anyone associated with Porch asks you for anything; we prohibit this.

Tipping

Most team members graciously want to show their appreciation for the dedicated service of our Porch staff (hotel, café, guides, translators, foremen, builders) by leaving a tip or “love offering” at visit’s end. We love this spirit! \$20/Q150 per team member (less than \$3 per day) is our recommended minimum (more is fine, of course!).

The team tip treasurer pools the tip money and gives this to Greg, Rachael, or Mirna (our facility manager/comptroller) for equitable distribution. This way, we know “who’s getting what” and can see that the distribution matches effort, cooperation, and need.

This tip is not shared with the local musicians who perform for our teams. Consequently, we encourage our team members to tip these folks as they feel led.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs

We host "dry" teams/volunteers and teams/volunteers that aren't. With considerable experience, we find that teams which allow adult members to drink moderately and responsibly, if **they choose to**, fit in better in the Panajachel culture than some teams with a "no alcohol" policy. Such policies may also discourage potential team members who use vacation time (and money) to serve in Panajachel or who are exploring whether following Christ might work for them. We welcome dialogue on this!

We do prohibit excessive or abusive alcohol consumption by our visitors.

While we do not encourage tobacco use, it is not prohibited outside.

Please—no illegal drug involvement, or drunkenness-- period. Likewise, we will tolerate no "prescription" drug abuse (*note*: drugs, e.g. codeine, are available without a prescription here).

Café Hotel California note: After starting in 2005 with a "no alcohol" policy (which created barriers in the community), we took a flexible approach by allowing customers to bring beer or wine into the cinema, restaurant, or live music night. This reduced barriers but also created other problems. Consequently, we decided to serve wine, beer, and such at our cafe (in addition to our coffee and food service). This compromise was reached after considerable discussion, prayer, and testing. It has helped our dialogue with, and removed barriers in, the community while maintaining the integrity of our facility and mission. There was no simple solution here; we are open to your comments or questions.