

# **International Healthcare Program – Guatemala**

**Provided by True North Missions and Synergy Medical Education  
Alliance**

## International Healthcare

### Guatemala

#### Background

Cultural diversity and increased awareness of the appropriate use of scarce resources are essential core values in today's healthcare provider. Providing care to those individuals who represent some of the world's most medically, politically, and economically disadvantaged people, can help develop these core values in today's healthcare worker. First hand exposure to the interplay between public health and primary healthcare balanced against cultural, political, and economic factors can have an immeasurable influence on developing these characteristics.

#### Learning objectives:

Appreciate cost effective approaches to diagnosis and treatment under sometimes severe resource constraints.

Practice healthcare in a setting that requires dependence on history and physical examination skills, with limited laboratory access, choice of medicine or hospital facilities.

Demonstrate effective inter-cultural team building skills in working with existing providers including physicians, nurses, and community health workers in country.

Demonstrate a willingness to accept an interdisciplinary approach to health care issues in local communities.

Demonstrate an understanding of the delivery of health care in a multicultural region of the world and gain an understanding of the political, cultural, and historical context that impacts that healthcare.

Understand and appreciate the uniqueness and value of providing Humanitarian care on an international level.



Here are some brief guidelines and information about our medical and dental trips to Rio Dulce, Guatemala. Please contact us if you have any questions.

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## **Rio Dulce**

The Rio Dulce is a beautiful river flowing from Lake Isabel to the Gulf of Honduras. Most of the villages we will visit are on its banks or up small tributaries. These villages are very isolated some without electricity or roads.

## **Health & Hygiene Issues**

**Food & Water-** Tap water is NOT SAFE for drinking or brushing your teeth anywhere in Guatemala. Bottled water is always available. Showering is fine, as long as you do not open your mouth. While at the clinic, local volunteers will prepare our food. Safe food and water are a top priority. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be brought in from the areas around Rio Dulce and Puerto Barrios, but be aware that it is best to eat only after being cleansed. It is inadvisable to eat food for sale in open air markets or from street vendors. Carrying hand sanitizer or Clorox wipes may prove a healthy precaution.

**Tetanus Immunization-** please be current with your tetanus booster.

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

**Hepatitis B Immunization-** recommended for anyone likely to come in contact with blood and body fluids.

**Malarial Prophylaxis-** recommended for everyone. A mosquito repellent containing DEET should be used. You will also need to spray your clothing and a mosquito net with Permethrin (Exofficio Buzzoff clothing has repellent in it). You can do this prior to packing for the trip. Please check with your physician for a malarial prophylaxis prescription.



**Traveler's Diarrhea-** Please refer to the CDC's website for travelers. 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 speak to taking two Pepto Bismol tablets four 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 is it advisable to flush toilet paper 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 that you will find near toilets. In Sarstun, you will find that the outhouses are located over the river. Until changes are made, you might find it helpful to carry wipes with you and carry soiled paper out with you in a plastic bag. (This applies to shipboard also).

**Travel Conditions-** Travel conditions can be quite strenuous. Long waits, rough car and boat rides and long work hours should be expected. If you have any conditions such as pregnancy, heart problems, back problems, or any chronic health conditions, please consult your physician before signing up for this trip. Please advise ship's captain of any health issues that might compromise your activities.

## Clothing

Clothing with Insect Repellent and Sunscreen is available and is very effective (Exofficio makes this kind of clothing – 800-644-7303)

During clinic hours, all clinic volunteers wear scrub tops and bottoms. If you do not have scrubs or can not afford them, please contact us, and we will arrange to get some for you. We have had success borrowing scrubs from our local hospitals and returning them after the trip. After clinic hours attire is casual. The weather is HOT and HUMID. Shorts are advisable throughout the coastal areas. Do not forget the bug spray and sunscreen.

## Luggage

**Luggage must be soft, pliable, and foldable**

**ONE carry-on** which must meet airline specifications is allowed. Backpacks count as carry-ons even for ladies. **ONE checked suitcase weighing less than 50 pounds, no greater than 62 inches tall is allowed.** Your 2<sup>nd</sup> checked bag will have medications and supplies for the clinic that which will be given to you by the organizers.

Be sure any **medications you need** are in your carry-on. Remember, no sharp objects in carry-ons.

Luggage tags and same color ribbon will be distributed for each bag prior to trip.

## Packing List

### Carry-on Essentials

There have been times when luggage did not arrive on time, so make sure to pack these essentials in your carry-on.

Take 2 extra PASSPORT size photos' and copy of PASSPORT

Money

1 set of scrubs and 1 pair shorts

2-3 pairs of underwear

Toiletries

Camera/film (film should not be carried in your suitcase)

Personal medications

Stethoscope- medical care workers

Otoscope- medical providers

### Suitcase (One/Personal)

**SHOES: you will need to wear shoes at all times ... remember you will be getting in and out of the boat and your feet may get wet ... water shoes can be useful. We strongly recommend CROCS as they can be used in the clinics and also for the boat.**

Sunscreen

Bug Spray

Towel

Washcloths

Small Flashlight

Boat shoes

Water shoes

Shower shoes

Hiking boots (optional)

Reading/Recreational material

Bathing suit

Snorkel and mask

Light back pack

Earplugs

Wet-wipes

Underwear

5-6 pair of scrubs

2-3 shirts

2 pairs shorts (modest)

Water bottle

Rain Coat (lightweight)

Hand sanitizer

## Money

The Quetzal is the currency of Guatemala. The exchange rate is about eight Quetzals to one US dollar. There are banks at the airport which will exchange some of your money upon arrival. You will need to bring money for meals outside of Sarstun.

## Housing

Volunteers will live on the boat in a double occupancy, “bunking” arrangement. You will need to bring your own twin sheets (not fitted) and if you are a light sleeper, bring good earplugs!

## Climate

The temperatures can range from hot to hot, with a possibility of rain. A light jacket may be needed for late or early boat rides; otherwise the weather is hot and humid. Do not forget shorts, bug spray and sunscreen.

## Safety

Sarstun and Livingston are some of the places we will be staying during our trip. Although we do feel these places to be safe, you should use the same sensible precautions you would in any city:

- Do not go out alone
- Secure your wallet or purse- purses and fanny packs are discouraged  
Recommended wallet-like items worn under the clothing (found at Target)
- Do not wear jewelry
- Always carry your passport or lock it in the hotel safe
- Ask a 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.

## Conduct

We have a code of conduct for each volunteer, please sign and return.

We will be working with local residents in Sarstun. We will refrain from any conduct that might be viewed as immoral to the local people.

## **Guatemala and the People**

Guatemala is the most populous of the seven Central American Republics, with over 13.5 million inhabitants. A 36 year civil war resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 indigenous people and let more than 50,000 people “missing”. In 1996, the Peace Accords were signed with the hope of a better Guatemala. However, infrastructures to assure the basic needs of all Guatemalans are still not in place.

Today, the per capita income of the people is less than \$1200 per year, literacy rates are less than 50%, 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. Gifts for children in the schools are best distributed by the workers who live there. 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. The best approach is to not 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 what is expected to be paid for the item. “Haggling” is as much part of the selling process as the “pitch” is here in the US. Expect it and take part in it; it is 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 True North volunteer. Making a small attempt at communicating with the residents of Guatemala will go a long way. While Spanish is spoken widely, there are dozens of indigenous languages spoken in the countryside. Still, Buenos dias, 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 you will be going to, the more you will understand the reasons for our being there.

## **Missions Trip Policies**

1. Participants are registered for the trip after we have received the following:
  - \_\_signed code of conduct
  - \_\_signed waiver form
  - \_\_signed shipboard rules
  - \_\_photocopy of passport
  - \_\_photocopy of current medical license
2. Participants must be at least 16 years or older to participate unless approved by True North and Synergy Medical.

### ***Emergency Guatemalan Numbers***

***Please give these numbers to your family but ask that they call you only in case of a true emergency.***

***Dr. Alan Barber's                      Guatemalan Cell Phone Number  
011 502 4518 3616***

***The ship has a Guatemalan cell phone for emergencies.  
This number will be provided before each trip.***

## International Medical Plans

Travel	1 800 228 9792
Global Underwriters Agency	<a href="http://www.globalunderwriters.com">www.globalunderwriters.com</a>
Bootsnall Travel	1 866 549 7614
Intern Medical Group	800-641-4614

There are many more and the agency writing the plane tickets will have some also.

My insurance last year for two weeks was \$70.00

A friend (general surgeon) recently broke his hip in a bad fall and needed to be air evacuated to the US from Belize. The cost was \$18,000.00



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(supplier of sunscreen and bug repellent clothing)