



el centro

PRE-TRIP MANUAL

SERVE.

GROW.

IMPACT.

## WE ARE SO EXCITED!

We are so excited that you are coming with us to Guatemala! For some of you, this will be your first experience outside of the country. For others, you may be excited to return to a familiar place and allow God to work mightily in you and through you! Whether this is new for you or not, please **read over this pre-trip manual carefully** and then **sign the agreement at the end**. That tells us that you have read this manual, understand it to the best of your ability, and are committed to live it out as far as it depends on you.

In this manual, you will find just about everything you need to know for this trip. It is written out for you to learn as much as you can and be as prepared as possible to join our amazing God in what He is doing around the world! We want to give you every opportunity to get outside of your comfort zone and reach the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ so that you can take what you learn back home and share Him wherever you live life every day.

Please note that El Centro Ministries is not a Christian tour group. Our main goal is not to give everyone a good time or an exciting cross-cultural experience, although we do hope to make your experience as pleasant and exciting as possible. Our primary concern, however, is to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the **BEST** way to approach a missions trip is to **let go of what you know** and **expect God to do great things!** Chances are, you will have many new experiences, and God will certainly work mightily in you and through you! Get ready for an adventure of a lifetime!

-El Centro Missions Staff



## WHO WE ARE

The world is desperate for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Lord has chosen to use His people to declare the truth of who He is to the nations. El Centro Ministries is a Christ-centered missions organization. We provide safe and affordable short-term missions trips in Guatemala City, Guatemala (for teams as well as individuals). Also, high school students and young adults who feel called to missions are invited to serve alongside of us for an extended stay in our Immerse program or as Missionary Associates. Through short-term and long-term mission trips, our goal is to provide opportunities to bring the Gospel of Jesus to deeply hurting areas of Guatemala City through VBS, evangelism, community outreaches, school assemblies, church services, testimonies, home visits, sports, and more!

## OUR MISSION

SERVE.



Whether you get to share your testimony, renovate a building, or distribute food to the homeless, you will have many opportunities to learn what it really means to serve as Christ did and how to apply the heart of servanthood with everyone around you.

GROW.

When we get out of our comfort zones, we are challenged to grow spiritually more than ever before! No matter what you are doing, our desire is for you to grow closer to God. We want to see God work in your life as you are stretched and used by Him.



IMPACT.



When you give of your time, energy and resources to build the Kingdom of God, people's lives can be transformed—not just here and now, but for eternity. God wants to use you to make an impact in the lives of others that lasts forever!

## Preparing YOU for this missions trip...

*Before we tell you what to put in your suitcase, we want to help you to get in the right mindset and "heartset" for this trip. Traveling overseas and experiencing a new culture can be overwhelming. Therefore, we want to do what we can to help you prepare for this trip spiritually, mentally, as well as physically.*

**1. Be in God's word and in prayer!** God wants to use us in incredible ways, and He wants to move through us in everything we do. Prayer and personal devotion is a great way to align your heart and mind with His and let Him prepare you to join Him in His work anywhere in the world.

Commit to being in God's word (even if it's a few minutes a day). God's word is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). Through it, God will reveal Himself to you, teach you new things, and speak to you specifically. He may even lead you to scripture to share with somebody while you are on the trip. God's word is powerful!

Commit to Prayer. Talk to God about the trip. Tell Him what you're thinking, feeling, etc. Ask God to prepare you for this trip (spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and financially). If you are traveling with a team, pray for your team members and leaders as well. Also, pray for the children and people of the communities and churches you are going to meet, as well as the missionaries, their families, and the El Centro staff that will be working with you.

**2. Always jump in and SERVE.** Be *purposeful* about serving others. It is not about you. Always be looking for opportunities to serve the people around you with love and a sincere heart. Serve the people we are ministering to, serve the missionaries and others we are partnered with, and serve each other. The less you focus on you, the more you will see God at work.

**3. Be open to learn from the people around you.** Latin American People have an incredible loving kindness that sets them apart from other people around the world. It is part of their culture! It is humbling to feel the love that they extend to us. So be open; there is so much to learn from them!

**4. Be respectful of everyone you meet.** *DO NOT* in any way consider yourself superior to anyone because you are from North America. It is easy to think through the filter of pity because, generally speaking, people in third world countries are "less fortunate." However, they are real people who need Jesus just as much as we do. Many of them are full of joy and are perfectly content with their lives, so keep this in mind *especially* when you are speaking to people.

**5. Be ready to share the Gospel.** Sharing the Gospel sounds intimidating, and can be challenging for most of us. It is usually uncomfortable, and we don't know how people are going to react. But Jesus tells us to tell the world about Him (Mark 16:15). You never know who you might meet that *will* respond to Jesus, so it is important to be ready (1 Peter 3:15). We will be giving you a basic outline of the Gospel with some scripture references to help you know what to say, and we will walk through it with you when you get here.

**6. Be ready to share your testimony.** Jesus wants to use your story. If you are alive, and Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, you have a story to tell! Your testimony is powerful, and it will relate to all kinds of people. God wants to use your story to bring people to Himself and to bless others' lives! How cool is that? We will be giving you a quick outline of how to prepare/share your testimony. And don't worry, we will walk through this together too.

**7. Be a team player.** This trip is not about you. Put the needs and well-being of others before your own and WORK TOGETHER. The entire team will benefit throughout this trip when you dive in and embrace your role in the big picture with a positive attitude. Willingly work towards the greater good of the whole rather than your own best interest.

# GENERAL INFO

## Requirements

- **Everyone must have their own passport.** Please make 3 legible color copies of each (one for home records, one to be submitted with your trip registration, and one for your team leader to keep on them as precaution).
- **Everyone must fill out and sign a El Centro Ministries registration form and Liability Release form for each trip.** (If you have come on a previous trip, we will need you to fill out both forms again for this trip).
- **Shots/Vaccinations:** Always consult your physician about recommended shots for traveling to Guatemala. They will be able to provide you the best advice on what you need based upon your medical history. We strongly recommend at least having an updated Tetanus shot and Hepatitis A vaccine.
- **All funds for your group must be submitted no later than 6 weeks prior to your trip so that we can make all the proper arrangements for your stay with us.**

## Currency Exchange & Spending Money

The currency in Guatemala is the Guatemalan Quetzal (QGuat).  
The rate can vary from day to day or place to place.

- **Cash**
  - We will provide you an opportunity to exchange \$U.S. for QGuat, but it is not required. You can exchange in the airport. However, they charge high fees to make the exchange, and we do not recommend it.
  - Smaller bills (\$1, \$5, \$10) are better than \$20 bills or higher.
  - Bring un-torn, unmarked bills. Generally, U.S. coins will not be accepted.
  - Some places will accept US dollars, some places will not. Therefore, we recommend exchanging at least a little bit if you plan on buying anything.
  - Some U.S. banks will let you pre-order Quetzales in the States where you can pick it up or have it mailed before your trip.
- **Debit/Credit cards.**
  - The use of debit/credit cards is accepted in some places, but not all.
  - You will get the best exchange rate by using a card, but be aware of any fees that your bank, an ATM, or credit card company may charge you.
  - There are ATMs in the airport. You may or may not have access to an ATM elsewhere depending on the location.
  - Check with your credit card company to see if yours will work in Guatemala.
  - Don't forget to notify your bank/credit card company that you are leaving the country. Otherwise, they may see your activity as suspicious and freeze your card/account.
- **How much should I bring?** As far as spending money goes, you don't need a lot. You may have to pay for food on the way to or at the airport depending on your group. Also, there will be an opportunity for you to buy snacks and souvenirs sometime while you are with us. However, that is completely optional.
- **Avoid travelers checks because they are difficult to cash.**

# FACTS ABOUT GUATEMALA

- The country of Guatemala is located in Central America and shares a border with Mexico (west), Belize (north east), Honduras (south east), and El Salvador (south east).
  - Guatemala's climate is tropical. There are really only two seasons: rainy and dry. The coastal regions of the country are very hot and humid, but in the more mountainous areas of Guatemala, it is cooler and less humid (though still relatively warm year-round).
  - Guatemala is rich in culture that is reflective of its Mayan and Spanish European history. Today, the western culture has influenced Guatemalan society to some degree, however, you will definitely notice and experience Guatemala's diverse heritage while you are there! Much of this is preserved through its unique foods, festivals, traditional clothing and way of life!
    - The official language of Guatemala is Latin-American Spanish. There are different dialects and accents throughout the country (much like English in America). There are also approximately 23 Amerindian languages recognized and spoken by nearly 40% of the population. Those languages include Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca.
- Agricultural products and exports as well as other major industries include: sugarcane, corn, bananas, coffee, beans, cardamom, cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, textiles and clothing, furniture, petroleum, metals, rubber, and of course tourism!
- The currency is the Guatemalan Quetzal, and the exchange rate is about Q7.5 to \$1U.S. (although this number can fluctuate almost daily). The Quetzal is named after a type of bird that is a symbol of freedom because it will not live in captivity (meaning it will die if kept in a cage/confinement). Its symbol is also on the Guatemalan flag, currency, and national documents.
- Guatemala is the most populous country in Central America with an estimated population of approximately 15 million people.
- Guatemala is a young country. About 5 million are from 0-14 years of age, and nearly 3.5 million are from 15-24 years of age. That counts for 60% of the population!
- From 1960-1996 Guatemala suffered from a tragic civil war, leaving over 200,000 people dead or missing.



- Guatemala has high rates of crime, alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual and physical abuse against children, domestic violence against women, and high rates of political and judicial corruption.
- Poverty in Guatemala is overwhelming. Despite low unemployment rates (appx. 3%), more than 54% of the population is below the poverty line.
- The main religion in Guatemala is Roman Catholicism, and Christianity is growing. Some Guatemalans still follow traditional Mayan beliefs.
- Many churches in Guatemala are very conservative (no makeup for women, women cannot wear pants –only skirts and dresses, no soccer for men, etc.), while the secular culture is more liberal. However, many churches are pulling away from legalism.

# WHEN IN GUATEMALA

*Here are some tips to help you to better understand and interact with the culture of Guatemala:*

- **DO NOT flush toilet paper** - use the trash cans. Plumbing in Guatemala is not the same as in the States, and there will be issues if you flush toilet paper.
- **DO NOT eat or drink anything that we do not provide or approve of.** NEVER drink tap water especially. If we go out to eat and you order steak, it must be well-done. (Also, a good rule of thumb is to avoid fresh fruits and vegetables that may have been washed in tap water)
- **Keep in mind that many things that are acceptable in the US are not acceptable to those of other cultures.**
- **Never make fun of anyone or anything.** You will be in a totally different culture which means people will look, dress, talk, think, and live radically different than you may be used to.
- **Be aware of your body language.** Keep hand signals and gestures to a minimum (even jokingly) because things that go unnoticed in the US, may actually be offensive in the places you will visit. We will inform you of these more specifically when you arrive.
- **Girls with girls, guys with guys.** In general, because sometimes being nice and extra friendly can be taken as being flirtatious, it is usually best for girls to focus on relating to other girls and guys with guys.
- **DO NOT sign autographs.** Not only is it a safety concern, but also we are not celebrities. We are there to glorify Christ and point people to Him - not ourselves.
- **Avoid saying, "Wow, I like that!" to someone about something they have/make.** That can also communicate to them that you would like to have it. Therefore, you may end up with a gift. Just be careful how you say things. If you are given a gift, know that they *want* to give it to you. Giving gifts is a way they show love and affection. Also, it is expected that you find way to return the favor. (Example: a kid gives you a picture that he colored, therefore, color a picture for him in return.)
- **DO NOT discipline children.** Scolding children is a private affair between the parent/authority and the child. If something happens that needs attention, please bring it to the El Centro Staff or missionaries present. We will take it from there.
- **Avoid talking about finances/money.** For example: how much it cost to come/money you had to fundraise, how much money people make in the US compared to Guatemala, the price of things in Guatemala compared to the US, and especially how much money you have/brought with you. Also, do not refer to US dollars as "real money."
- **When talking to nationals about your life or experience in Guatemala, be positive.** Always be honest about your life and experiences, but don't complain. Be positive! We want to represent Christ, and we want to be careful not to offend them.
- **Do not pet or play with dogs on the streets or in people's homes** (unless we specifically tell you they are safe). You never know where they have been or if they have any diseases, parasites, etc. Just simply ignore them.
- **Guatemalan culture is very relational, relaxed, and friendly.** Embrace the culture. The people are amazing! Please do not be rude and reject the kindness that they are showing you!
- **Guatemalans love to worship God!** They can be very expressive in their worship to God, which may be different than you are used to. While we are at church especially, don't be afraid to join them. We are there to worship our amazing God together.
- **Even if you do not know Spanish, build relationships with the people!** They appreciate the effort. Even with the children, you do not need to know Spanish to connect with them. They will love the fact that you are loving them and playing with them!
- **Traffic in Guatemala can be crazy!** If taking pictures on the road, it is best to keep your arms and hands inside of the vehicle we are traveling in. Not only is this safe, but it will also reduce the risk of your camera

## WHEN IN GUATEMALA CONT...

- **Guatemalans are community focused and family-oriented.** For example: Food for one group means food for everyone who shows up. Food and even personal items such as tools or a washing machine are shared too, no matter who purchased them because it makes the extra person part of the family.
- **Conversations in Guatemala are private.** Wait at a distance, or signal you are approaching. Never butt in. Also, never pass between two people when they are.
- **Say “con permiso” when going through a crowd.**
- **To a Guatemalan, any car going into town means he/she has a ride.**
- **Guatemalans look at time differently.** They are usually late for an appointment. Don't get frustrated.
- **Visiting is important to a Guatemalan.** Upon seeing someone on the way to an event they must stop and chat even if it makes them quite late to the event. That also means that your visit to Guatemala and with the people is very significant and special to them.
- **Do not talk about politics.** Some Guatemalans may ask your opinion regarding recent US political events. Always respond with grace and compassion. Do not tell anyone who you voted for or endorse any candidate/party/political figure. We do not want to offend our brothers and sisters in Christ or stir up controversy. Here is how to respond:
  1. If you are asked about politics, let the individual know that we are a country in need of prayer, and that we trust the sovereignty of God in all things.
  2. If you are directly asked who you voted for or support, respond by saying that you would like to keep who you voted for between you and the Lord (whether you actually voted or not).
  3. Do not appear apathetic or express indifference about this subject; Guatemalans have fought vigorously for voting rights (as many have done for ours). Taking this privilege for granted could be a distraction or cause offense.



## SAFETY & SECURITY

- **Always follow the instructions of anyone who is in charge.** Although the places within the countries we visit are reasonably safe, there are certain safety precautions that need to be taken, especially when in a foreign country. You may not always understand *why* you have to do something, but do it anyway.
- **NEVER give out your personal information** (address, phone #, e-mail, facebook, twitter, etc.). This is for your safety and protection. Also, do not give autographs for the same reason.
- **Make sure your wallet/purse is subtle.** Carrying a typical purse or wallet alone is not usually the best. You don't want to draw attention to it or risk it falling out of your pocket. Some alternatives are a travel wallet that you can wear under your clothes, a passport carrier that hangs around your neck, small drawstring book-bag, etc. We often use normal-size book-bags. Carrying them on the front of you is also safest.
- **Avoid big or expensive-looking jewelry.** If you want to wear jewelry, keep it small and subtle. NO GOLD or anything flashy.
- **Never show all your cash.**
- **Leave all personal electronics in discreet place in hotel/room.**
- **Never go anywhere alone - adults too!**
- **Stay where the Missionaries/El Centro Staff bring you.** Don't go wandering off or get distracted and lag behind. Keep up with the group and stay on site within the perimeters and boundaries that we give you. They are there for your safety.
- **No matter where we are, be aware of your surroundings and look out for one another.**
- **Do not give money to anyone.** If you want to give anything, talk to an El Centro staff member first.

## HEALTH & HYGIENE

- **Do your best to take care of yourself and be healthy!**
- **Wash your hands frequently, and use hand sanitizer when you can't.**
- **DO NOT flush toilet paper** - use the trash cans. Plumbing in Guatemala is not the same as in the States, and there will be issues if you flush toilet paper.
- **Everyone is required to shower (quickly-5min) once a day.**
- **Drink water throughout the day.** It is hot, and we will be busy which means it is very important for everyone to stay hydrated even when you don't feel thirsty.
- **Wash your water bottles with soap and water every day.**
- **DO NOT drink tap water** (or ice from the tap). Drink ONLY what is approved by the Forerunner staff and missionaries. It is safe to shower, but not safe to drink. When brushing your teeth, use the water from your water bottle.
- **DO NOT eat or drink anything that we do not provide or approve of.** If we go out to eat and you order steak, it must be well-done. Also, a good rule of thumb is to avoid fresh fruits and vegetable that may have been washed in tap water.

## FIRST AID

- **If you don't feel well, get sick, or are hurt, please let us know immediately.** We want to make sure that we do everything that we can to get you well and feeling better.
- **Don't take diarrhea medicine unless you really are sick.** It is not safe to use as a preventative.
- **Keep your team leaders informed of any and all medications** that you take (even if it is just some Tylenol for a headache).

## HOTEL ETIQUETTE

- **Guys should NEVER be in girls rooms, and girls should NEVER be in guys rooms.**
- **Quiet time/lights out:** We will establish a quiet time and lights out time each day. We are intentional about establishing this because it is important that everyone gets adequate rest for the days ahead. We want to be ready and alert so that we can give God our best day-to-day.
- **Clean up after yourself.** Don't leave a mess behind you when you leave for the day. Make your bed, wipe off the sink, hang up your towel, etc. We represent Christ 24-7, and we want to continue to serve those around us, even when we are back from a ministry site.
- **Do not leave money or valuables in plain sight.** Tuck it away in your suitcase.
- **No excessive yelling or noise in or around the hotel/house.** Be mindful that people live their daily lives next door and down the street.
- **Do not leave or wander away from the hotel/house at any time.**

## JOB ASSIGNMENTS

Throughout the week, we will assign different jobs to everybody. That may include emptying the trash, washing dishes, carrying a ministry bag, taking pictures, etc. We work as a team and **serve one another as we serve the people of Guatemala**. Take ownership and go for it! Let God teach you more about Himself and about servanthood even through a simple job or task.

## GENERAL CONDUCT

- **Be flexible.** Things can and will change on the fly. Be open and ready for anything!
- **Be a open and willing to learn.**
- **Be accountable and responsible for your actions.**
- **Be prepared.**
- **Be on time for everything.** Time is viewed in a different way to Guatemalans than it is to us. However, time is valuable, and we never want to waste anybody's time.
- **Be aware of your noise level.** Whether you are in public or at the hotel, please do not yell to one another or carry on in a way that draws attention to you or the entire group.
- **Clean up after yourself.**
- **Conserve energy.** (Quick showers, turn off lights, fans, AC units, etc. when you leave the room. Hot water/electric supply and energy is not the same as the U.S. This will help keep costs low and make sure we are all *able to use these things.*)
- **Respect and honor leadership.**
- **Be kind to everyone.** Laugh *with* others, never *at* them. All people have value, period.
- **Always be supportive of your teammates and team leaders.**
- **DO NOT give out your personal information to anyone.**
- **DO NOT be isolated.**
- **DO NOT be isolated with another person.**
- **Always be willing to serve those around you.**
- **Be sensitive to the culture.**
- **Take initiative and go the extra mile.**
- **Keep a genuine smile on your face :) Don't wait for people to smile at you first. Greet them with a smile!**
- **When frustrated, tune into what God may be saying to you.**
- **Actively look for where God is working and then join Him in it!**

# ELECTRONICS, MEDIA, & SOCIAL MEDIA

## Wifi:

Wifi will not be available for everyone's use. There might be access to wifi for TEAM LEADERS ONLY depending on the location.

## No Watching T.V.:

Depending on where you are staying, there may be a T.V. in your room. If that is the case, please leave it off. Guatemalan television is not the same as it is in the states, and it is not censored in the same way that it is back home. You have a limited time to be in the country of Guatemala, and we don't want you to waste it by watching T.V.

## Personal Electronic Devices (cell phones, ipods, tablets, etc.):

- BRING AT YOUR OWN RISK! We recommend that you leave these things at home. However, we get it if you want them for the plane-ride down. If that is the case, please use on the plane/traveling ONLY.
- While you are with us, please leave your devices in your rooms in a discreet place. Not only can they be a distraction throughout the day, but it is also a safety hazard to walk around with your iPod and/or tablet like we do in the states.
- Cell phones are *extremely expensive* to use overseas, and they can be a big distraction. We ask that you leave yours at home or turn it in to your team leader until the end of the trip. We have access to phones that you will call home from to let your parent/guardians know that you arrived and are safe. (If you are a trip leader or you are 18+ years old and would like to bring your phone to use, you may use it at your own expense).

## Pictures/Video:

- We know how tempting it is to want to take pictures of everything. However, you must keep in mind that you are not part of a tourist group or on vacation. We will do our best to tell you when it is a good time to take pictures and when it is not. In the meantime, follow these guidelines. If you aren't sure, please ask.
- Many times we will be entering people's homes and property. Think about how you would feel if a bunch of strangers showed up at your door and started taking pictures of your house, family, etc. Please refrain when this is the case (unless you are invited to take pictures).
- When taking pictures of people or with people, always ask.
- Don't pass your camera off to a kid and let them use it. It could break, or you could go home without a camera. If they ask to use it, politely tell them no.
- The El Centro staff will also be taking pictures throughout the week and will make them available to your team when your trip is over.
- During ministry times, we will assign someone from your team to be a photographer/videographer. We want everyone to be focused on people and ministry NOT pictures!

## Social Media:

- Ok... right now, before you move on, find El Centro on all your favorite social media networks, and FOLLOW US!
- You may "friend request" or "follow" El Centro staff as well as the missionaries we are working with.
- There may be other people that you directly work with and connect to while you are here that you may wish to stay in contact with. If that is the case, please ask an El Centro member before giving out your personal information or finding them on a social media network. This is for your safety as well as the safety of the ministry.
- If you decide to post any pictures or videos online, remember that you represent more than just yourself and your experience. First of all, you represent Christ. You also represent your church/youth group, El Centro Ministries, and the Guatemalan church and ministries.

**Greetings In the Church:**

- Greet as many people as possible before the service begins and say goodbye in the same manner.
- Women to women & men to women - friendly "cheek to cheek" kiss on the cheek. It's not weird, awkward, or flirty. It's part of the culture. IMPORTANT: MEN DO NOT GREET MEN LIKE THIS!
- Men to men - handshake or hug (depends on the person).
- Children/youth - fist-bump, high-five, or a hug works too.

**Greetings Outside the Church:**

- Try to connect with as many people as possible before the service/outreach/etc. begins.
- Verbal greeting with a handshake is best. Avoid strong handshakes (it's a sign of egotism).
- Acknowledge people when walking by.

- **Make God your first priority!** Be sure to *make time for your personal relationship with God*. Do this as much as you can before you leave for the trip, but also while you are on the trip. Things will get busy during the week. You will be tired, but do not neglect your time with the Lord. We all need to be focused on Him in order to follow Him throughout the day.
- **Ministry is 100% of the time.** It's not God's time and then my time. You are a living testimony 24/7 and constantly represent Christ, your group, El Centro Ministries, etc.
- **One-on-ones and small groups is always to be girls with girls and guys with guys.**
- **Have fresh breath.** It's never fun to have someone with stinky breath praying for you! Mints are better than gum. Chewing gum can be a distraction, and there isn't always a place to put it when you are done with it.
- **Praying for people.** When you are praying for people pray for them as if they can understand your English. Never underestimate the tone of your voice and the love that you show. That says more than you may think! There may or may not be someone there to translate your prayer. If not, you can ask a translator to come and pray with you, or you can just pray in English for somebody.
- **Greet/connect with as many people as you can!** Ministry happens best when we connect and build relationships!
- **When talking/praying with a translator,** always look and talk to the person you are talking to/praying for—not at the translator. (We will give you more helpful hints about this if you are sharing your testimony or preaching.)

**Clothes (see dress code for specifics):**

- Enough clothes for the number of days and nights of your trip + a few extras just in case
- Clothes for church
- Light jacket and/or hoodies *(It can get cool at night, and sometimes it's rainy.)*
- Closed-toe shoes *(We recommend bringing more than one pair.)*
- Flip flops for the shower

**Other:**

- Toiletries *(soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, extra hair-ties/ bobby-pins, and anything else you'll need)*
- Bath towels *(Depending on where you stay, towels are provided by the hotel. We will let your team leader know if this is the case.)*
- Medications *(Tylenol, Imodium, cough drops, etc. + anything personal you will need such as an inhaler)*
- Sun Block *(Everyone must wear it, even if you don't typically burn. The sun is intense, and the days are hot.)*
- Bug Spray
- Anti-Itch Cream *(for bug bites, esp.)*
- Hand Sanitizer
- Bible
- Notepad/journal
- Pens/pencils
- Swim Suit/trunks *(see dress code)*
- Beach Towel *(bath towels may be provided at the hotel)*
- Water Bottle** or Camel Back *(This is a MUST-HAVE. We will provide purified water, but you will need something to put it in. Remember: it is not safe to drink from the tap or water fountains.)*
- Umbrella and/or jacket that you can wear in the rain
- Spending Money *(shopping for souvenirs, snacks, etc.)*

**Packing Tips!**

- 1.)** We have found it helpful to pack things in ziplock bags that can potentially burst open and make a mess. It helps keep everything organized and dry. It doesn't hurt to bring a few extra ziplocks as well; they are very useful.
- 2.)** If your team is bringing ministry supplies, you can bring luggage specifically designated for that, or you can spread it out among the team members suitcases. If you spread it out, make sure everyone leaves enough room!
- 3.)** Pack only what you really need and can carry on your own. You will be responsible for your own luggage.
- 4.)** Always follow the luggage guidelines of the airline you are using as well as the TSA guidelines. We have found it best for everyone to have **one** checked bag, **one** carry-on, and **one** personal bag (such as a purse or backpack, etc.)
- 5.)** Attach a ribbon, bandanna, or colored duct tape to your suitcase so that it is easy to identify.
- 6.)** Make sure you leave some room in your suitcase or back pack for souvenirs!!!

### Optional/Recommended:

- Camera and batteries/memory cards/charger (We will designate photographers during ministry times, and we will let you know when taking personal photos is welcome and appropriate.)
- Multi-Tool (This MUST be in your checked luggage, it cannot be in your carry on.)
- Rain poncho
- Battery-powered alarm clock
- Flashlight
- Extra batteries if needed
- Vitamins
- Hand soap for public bathrooms (A small container or bar is good enough.)
- Wet-wipes (These are great when you don't have running water to wash your hands before a meal or time to take a shower before a service.)
- Febreze
- Dryer Sheets (Helps to keep things smelling clean!)
- Snacks (Always good to have when you get hungry on the plane or when we get back to the mission house/hotel and you need a little something to hold you over until the next meal.)
- Hat
- Spanish English Dictionary
- Spending money (Small bills are best for shopping—\$10, \$5, and \$1 bills. Make sure they are nice, no rips or tears. They may not accept it. They don't usually accept U.S. coins either.)
- Especially if you are staying more than one week, it is helpful to bring a laundry bag or even a separate trash bag for dirty clothes/laundry to keep your clean clothes clean.
- Wrist watch (Make sure it's not flashy or expensive looking.)
- I-pods/I-pads/laptops/tablets/etc. (*For travel time only*. You will not be allowed to use them while you are with us. Use your spare time to connect with the rest of the team. Also, be aware that the risk of it getting broken or stolen is greater there than in the States.)

### DO NOT BRING:

- Cell Phone (If you are 18+ or are a team leader, you may bring your cell phone and use at your own expense.)
- Valuable/valuable-looking jewelry/watches
- Hair dryers, straighteners, curling irons, etc.
- Bandanas (*these are often associated with gang activity*)
- Anything that you couldn't live without if it were to get broken or stolen
- Anything that could be considered a weapon
- Illegal drugs, cigarettes, lighters, or anything else along those lines

# DRESS CODE

The **PURPOSE** of this dress code is to **REMOVE DISTRACTIONS** so that everyone can **FOCUS ON GOD** and what He wants to do in our lives. We have these guidelines in place essentially so that we don't become a distraction or a stumbling block to the people we are ministering to or even to each other.

## Every Day

- Most days you are able to wear jeans/capris/shorts + shirt.
- All shirts/dresses must have sleeves.
- All shorts must be close to the knee or below.
- Please wear a belt to keep everything on and together.
- Always wear closed-toe shoes (except when told otherwise).
- No body piercing (except small earrings on women because earrings on men is not considered masculine in this culture. Please be prepared to remove any piercings temporarily).
- Tattoos may have to be covered because in some areas, they represent gang activity. (Band-aids or ace bandages work great!)
- Depending on location, bandanas represent gang activity as well. Please do not wear them.
- No expensive or even expensive-looking necklaces, bracelets, earrings, or watches.
- No obscene writing or offensive graphics/labels on clothes.
- All clothes must be modest and promote a sense of Christ-likeness.
- Please **DO NOT** wear skin-tight clothing, low-cut shirts, short shorts or skirts, sagging pants, leggings, or sweat pants.
- Make sure that your sleeping attire is modest and appropriate as well.
- Ladies: skirts/dresses must extend **PAST** your knees or longer. While wearing skirts, please wear a pair of shorts underneath (leggings would be appropriate here as well). If your skirt needs a slip in addition, please wear one!
- Be ready to make any adjustments to your appearance by the El Centro Staff/Missionaries at any time. If we ask you to change and you do not have what we are asking for, we will give you something to wear.

## During Ministry/Church Services

**NOTE: Not all locations require us to "dress up" for ministry/church services.  
If they do, here is the proper dress-code for that:**

- **GIRLS** - Please wear either a dress or a collared/nice shirt with a skirt **PAST** the knees. Occasionally, it is acceptable for women to wear nice jeans and a modest top to church. We will let you know beforehand if that is the case.
- **GUYS** - please wear long pants, khakis or nice jeans (clean, no holes or rips), and a collared shirt (polo or button-down). Occasionally, it is appropriate for guys to wear shorts to church. We will let you know beforehand if that is the case. If you are preaching, be prepared to wear a tie (depending on the church).
- You will be given an El Centro T-shirt that you will be wearing during some ministry times. We will tell you when you need to wear it. The shirt is yours to keep, so write your name in it. We will be washing them for you throughout the week so that they can be fresh for you to wear when you need it.

## During Construction Projects

**NOTE: All clothes in this category should be ok for you to paint in and/or get dirty.**

- T-shirt
- Jeans, capris, or shorts (shorts must be close to the knee or below)
- Closed-toe shoes (preferably sneakers)

## During Free Time/Fun Activities

- You may wear normal, every-day clothes that abide by the "Every Day" section of this dress code.
- Swimsuits - guys: normal swim trunks; no speedos, please!  
girls: one-piece bathing suit; no tankinis, monokinis, or bikinis.

# GIFTS & DONATIONS

**If you want to bring items to donate or if you want to leave anything of yours behind, talk to a El Centro staff member. We will donate clothes and other items to the ministries in Guatemala so that they can be given to those in need or be used within the ministry itself.**

**Here is a list of some items that you can donate:**

- clothes
- shoes
- unused/barely used toiletries
- toys: stuffed animals, coloring books, crayons, toy cars, and other small toys for boys and girls
- school supplies (student and teacher): pencils, notebooks, pens, paper, back-packs, glue sticks, etc.
- dum-dums/lollipops
- bubbles/bubble wands
- sidewalk chalk
- towels
- bed-sheets
- sewing machines
- sewing materials (thread, needles, etc.)
- baby/nursery supplies: bottles, pacifiers, formula, diapers, baby clothes/shoes, diaper rash cream, baby powder, baby shampoo, etc.
- medicine/first aid supplies
- peanut butter
- English books, curriculum, practice workbooks, learning DVDs, etc.
- DVD family friendly movies (for students learning ESL)
- sports equipment (kickballs, soccer balls, basketballs, footballs, jump ropes, frisbees, etc.)

**Monetary gifts are also acceptable. Here is how you can give a tax-deductable gift:**

1. **PAY PAL:** Visit [www.elcentrogt.com](http://www.elcentrogt.com), go to the drop down menu and click the “donate” button.
2. **CHECK:** Please make all checks payable to El Centro Ministries.

**Send to:**

El Centro Ministries  
P.O. Box 291  
Lincoln University, PA 19352

*\*If you would like your donation to go towards a specific part of the ministry, please let us know!*

**Please Note:**

\*All donations are tax deductible.\*

\*If there is an item that you would like to donate that is not listed, please talk to a El Centro staff member.\*

\*Please do not give junk. We will gladly accept hand-me-downs and used items. However, we will not pass on anything that is broken, dirty, or tattered. When giving donated items, think of it as if you were the one receiving it. Thank you!\*





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SERVE.

GROW.

IMPACT.

[www.elcentrogt.com](http://www.elcentrogt.com)

P.O. Box 291 Lincoln University, PA 19352

U.S. Phone: 610-742-2732

US Email (Theresa OConnor): taoconnor524@gmail.com

Contact us at any time with comments, questions, or concerns.

Also, find us on your favorite social media network to follow any news updates, pictures, and videos that we post!

# CONDUCT AGREEMENT

**We are so excited that you are coming on a missions trip with us! Whether this is your first time out of the country or not, it is important that you commit to approaching this trip with a prepared heart, mind, and attitude in addition to a packed suitcase. At El Centro Ministries, we are committed to high moral standards and excellence in ministry. Please note that failure to follow these guidelines and regulations will result in disciplinary action and possibly being sent home at your own expense (or that of your parent/guardian).**

**Below is the conduct agreement. This basically sums up the heart of the guidelines laid out previously for you and gives you an opportunity to agree to follow them.**

As a participant with El Centro Ministries,

- I will respect the authority of the team leaders, staff members, and missionaries and abide by their decisions/instructions while on this mission trip
- I will not use tobacco, drink alcoholic beverages, or use any illegal substances at any time during this mission trip
- I will adhere to the dress code established for the trip
- I will not bring any prohibited items listed in the packing list
- I will not complain or use obscene language or insensitive humor
- I will not engage in romantic/dating relationships or activities while on this trip
- I will be respectful of the people, culture, language, customs, and accommodations of Guatemala
- I commit to attend all scheduled pre-trip meetings planned by my trip leader
- I commit to meet all deadlines for paperwork and payments
- I commit to prepare mentally, spiritually, and physically for this trip
- I commit to being open, flexible, and understanding
- I commit to being a team player
- I commit to personal health and hygiene
- I commit to promoting unity and safety among everyone
- I commit to go as a servant and representative of Jesus Christ and adopt that attitude when dealing with my fellow team members and people I meet on the trip
- I understand that dismissal from the missions trip (whether voluntary or disciplinary) does not guarantee that I will be refunded any payments that have already been submitted and may also require additional funds, such as an early flight home in the event of needing to be sent home before the trip ends.

By signing below, I affirm that I have read and agree to abide by the above commitments. I also affirm that I have read the pre-trip manual and understand it to the best of my ability. I am committed to live it out as far as it depends on me, and I am willing to be held accountable in all areas.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
(if participant is under 18)

Signature of Trip Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_