T: 1-800-985-4852
E: info@realgap.com
P: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

Guatemala Community Outreach

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Guatemala Community Outreach **Trip Code:** GUCO **Duration:**

Trip Highlights

- Help improve the quality of life of some of Guatemala's poorest families
- Live in the beautiful & incredible setting of Antigua - nestled between three volcanoes
- Experience life in a typical Guatemalan community
- Help educate and improve health

Overview

The Guatemala Community Outreach project is one of our most successful community development programmes - a direct result of the fantastic efforts and achievements of volunteers who have helped change lives.

This project is perfect for anyone looking to travel to Central America and work in Guatemala whilst experiencing life in a typical Guatemalan community with volunteers from around the world. On this project you will work to help improve the quality of life of some of Guatemala's poorest families.

Destination Info

The name Guatemala comes from the Mayan for 'many trees'. It is the most populated country in Central America and is bordered by the Pacific, the Caribbean, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize.

Antigua's setting is simply gorgeous, nestled between three volcanoes: Agua (3766m), Fuego (3763m) and Acatenango (3976m), and its streets– with flowers bursting from the local brickwork, and pastel facades under dark red, terracotta roofs – offer endless photo opportunities at every turn. Antigua is cold after sunset, especially between September and March, so bring warm clothes, a sleeping bag or a blanket.

Itinerary

Established in 2002, this project is set in different locations in and around Antigua (such as Jocotenango, San Felipe de Jesús, Alotenango, Santa María de Jesus, Santa Ana, etc.) The aim of the project is to provide free schooling and health education for children and to develop educational and recreational facilities for the community, so that all children can enjoy their childhood free from responsibilities and pressures created by society.

The average family wage in the towns is 30 Quetzals per day (about $4). This must stretch to feed families with around six to eight children. Malnutrition, unemployment and limited education are common problems faced by disadvantaged communities in Guatemala. Many families in this town have little or no money available for education, nutrition and basic housing. The community spirit and attitude towards volunteers is very warm and welcoming.

Although public schools in Guatemala do not charge a fee, children must have a uniform and the family must provide all school materials. Many families cannot afford these costs, leaving the majority of children with a very basic education and no option but to work from a very young age. Many are burdened with heavy responsibilities early in life and have little time to enjoy their childhood.

A Guatemalan teacher, with the intention to set up classes for children who couldn’t afford to attend school, founded the project. With exceptional support from volunteers the project is now run by a team of Guatemalan teachers, who provide free primary education to all children in the community, ranging from five to 18 years. Volunteers continue to play a fundamental role in the success of this programme, helping to shape the future of children and their families through education and ongoing community support.

Guatemala Community Outreach

Your role as a volunteer varies according to your interests and is very flexible to change when you are on the project.

You will be able to become involved in a number of aspects such as:

Education
There are a number of activities and projects that need volunteer assistance. One of the main roles is helping educate and support the children in classes such as mathematics, physical education, handicraft, English and computing.

Health
The project helps children and their families with dental care and also provides vitamins and food. This means that every day, the children receive nutritious food and drinks, such as carrot juice, a banana, an orange or a ham sandwich. Each morning and afternoon the children brush their teeth under the guidance of volunteers and they are provided with vitamin supplements.
In addition, the project does social work with the families of the children. The centre tries to create an awareness of how important education is for the youth of Guatemala.

Please note: itineraries and activities are subject to change.

Accommodation

For the duration of the project, you'll live with one of our typical Guatemalan families. All families have been personally visited by staff, this ensures that all homes meet an excellent standard for a comfortable stay. All families tend to speak Spanish most of the time, (to help you get the most from your time in Guatemala) however, these is always at least one person who can speak English to ensure you can communicate well.

Programme Services and Facilities

As you are staying in Antigua, you will not be short of any of the facilities that you will need. There are plenty of bar, restaurant and cafe options for a night out with your new mates, as well as useful options like banks and grocery stores for extra supplies. You can even wander about and soak up a little history while you're at it.

Internet

Antigua has a range of Internet cafes that you will be able to visit to check your e-mail. As Antigua is a pretty small city, you'll be able to walk easily from your host family's house.

Telephone

Calls are pretty cheap from Internet cafes in Antigua, so think about getting an International phone card. Your host family may have a phone on which they can receive international calls, but please respect the family and make sure that you are not on the phone too long.

The international dialling code for Guatemala is +502. To place an outgoing, direct dialled international call, dial +44 for the UK followed by the telephone number. For example to call Real Gap dial +44 1892 516164.

If your mobile phone is unlikely to work in Guatemala, it is possible to purchase one out there for around $15 if you wish to do so.

Laundry

There are launderette facilities within easy reach of your accommodation and will cost you no more than a couple of dollars.

Electricity

You will be able to use the sockets in your host family's house to charge your camera and use for any electrical equipment that you may have.

Meals

Your family will provide you with two meals a day (breakfast and dinner). All families are more than happy to cook any dishes that you'd like (within reason!) and many families can accommodate special dietary requirements for vegetarians and vegans. Please note that meals are not provided on Sundays.

What's Included

- Host family accommodation
- Two meals a day (except Sundays)
- Airport transfers
- Orientation upon arrival
- Full support and assistance from your co-ordinator
- 24 hour support number and contact for emergencies

What's Not Included

- All flights
- Personal Travel Insurance
- Visas
- Lunches

Is This Trip For You?

You may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. However, you will still have the full support of your in-country team and those at the project. If you are looking for a group volunteering experience we have plenty of options for you to consider.

Additional Information

Orientation

On arrival at the project you will have a brief orientation. This will include being shown around the project site, being introduced to the project co-ordinator and staff, a health and safety briefing and an introduction to your tasks while on the project.

Throughout your stay in Guatemala you will have the support and guidance of our co-ordinator and team. You will be provided with competent assistance and help with any questions or advice you may need during your stay.

In addition you will have access to a 24-hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to.

What to Pack

Please note that this kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore you may not need all of the listed items on your travels. In addition it is worth noting that you can buy lots of the below in Guatemala and at a very cheap price and there will be opportunities for you to shop in local markets and towns.

Personal Admin

- Passport, insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money
- Proof of inoculations (please speak to your GP about necessary immunisations)
- Guidebook on country - recommended Lonely Planet or Footprints

General

- Camera / Film / Batteries
- Notebook and pen / diary
- Torch / Extra Batteries
- Sunglasses
- Pocket-knife (comes in handy for general use)
- Water bottle - at least one litre
- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use
- A three-season Sleeping bag (especially useful when on weekend excursions)
- Mosquito Net
- Personal enjoyment - books, cards, music, to enjoy with your fellow volunteers etc.
- Personal hygiene items (deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrush etc)
- Spanish dictionary, verb book etc

Clothing

- Hat
- Comfortable walking shoes
- A pair of thick socks for walking
- Sandals
- Waterproof Jacket
- Fleece/pullover (for cool evenings)
- Long trousers
- Warmer clothing for winter
- Swimwear
- Towel

Medical Kit

- Personal Medication
- First Aid Kit (e.g. Antihistamines, Anti- diarrhoea tablets, headache tablets)
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito and insect repellent

Possible gifts for your host family

Please do not spend a lot of money on these gifts. They are simply polite tokens to thank your host family for their services. Possible gifts could include:

- Items typical of your home country such as biscuits, cakes, English tea etc.
- Photo frame or small ornament
- Something for the kitchen…tea-towels, utensils
- Nice toiletries

Minimum Age

The minimum age to participate is 18 years and there is no maximum age.

Minimum Numbers

There are no minimum numbers on the trip.

Please note: you may be the only volunteer at your chosen project at any one time. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact us

Flights

Your flight to Guatemala should arrive at Guatemala City Airport on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

Please note: If you are flying to Guatemala via the USA you will need to obtain Travel Authorisation by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) no later than 72 hours before departure. This is compulsory and will cost USD$14 to register. To register, please visit: www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

FAQs

1. **What level of Spanish do I need to take part ?**
   Basic level is fine

2. **Do I need teaching experience?**
   No you do not require any teaching experience.

3. **What happens when there are school holidays?**
   Volunteers take part in summer schools or other teaching activities during holidays.

4. **Do I get time off for extra activities?**
   Yes, every evening and you will generally have weekends to yourself.

5. **Do I need to take a sleeping bag?**
   No, you don't need to take one as all bedding is provided.

6. **Do I need to take a mosquito net?**
   No, this is not necessary, unless you feel that you really want to take one.

7. **Will there be a safety deposit box/safe?**
   Yes, there will be one available for you.

8. **Can I share a room with my girlfriend/boyfriend?**
   Couples can stay together and share a room at the home-stay accommodation.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

In Guatemala the currency is the Quetzal (GTQ; symbol Q), which is subdivided into 100 Centavos. Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 Centavos and 1 Quetzal. Notes come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Quetzals.

The US Dollar is also accepted as an official currency and Euros are increasingly easy to change at central banks. The best credit cards to take are American Express, Visa or MasterCard which are accepted by larger business and at ATMs (cajeros automáticos) in all but the smallest towns.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant $3.36
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) $2.72
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $0.84
Water (0.33 litre bottle) $1.21

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

For stays of up to 90 days, citizens of the European Union, the USA, Australia and New Zealand are not required to hold a visa when visiting for tourist purposes only. All other nationalities should consult their nearest Guatemala Embassy or High Commission.

Cultural Considerations

Greetings

Pleasantries are taken seriously in Guatemala, as many native Guatemalans are raised to greet strangers formally. It is simply polite to always say “Buenos Días” upon entering a building or when meeting somebody, and to say “con permiso” when leaving or passing someone.

You should address people in the polite “usted” form, and show additional respect for older people. If you know the person then it is customary to shake hands or kiss in greetings. Any kind of conversation is usually preceded by small talk, and being able to speak at least basic Spanish will get you a long way with the locals and demonstrate your keenness to fit in.

Saying “no”

A Latino always wants to help you and it’s considered impolite to say ‘no’ or ‘I don’t know’. Whatever you ask, always expect to get an answer, even if it is not correct. The best thing to do is to ask three different people the same questions and if you always get the same answer it’s probably right!

Taboos

Latinos are not used to discussing ‘sensitive’ subjects with strangers (a stranger is anyone who is not family or they haven’t known for ten years). Only discuss religion, politics and money with your teacher (or if the other person brings it up in conversation and you feel comfortable with this). Although nosiness is common, certain subjects are taboo, for example: abortion, casual sex, social politics, etc. Listen first to get used to the norms.

Social Hierarchy

The family is hugely important to Guatemalans. It is common for three generations of families to be living together under the same roof. It is a way to increase the household income and to help one another. As you would expect, older people are treated with great respect. Women are traditionally responsible for bringing up the children, although this has begun to change in recent years. Men are still very proud of their machismo and view whistling at women as a compliment. Ladies, take it in your stride. You may be subjected to catcalls and the best way to deal with these is simply to ignore them! Dress more formally than you would normally or even wear a wedding ring and talk about your husband (unfortunately men tend to have more respect for your husband than they do for you.)

Religion

The dominant religions in Guatemala are Catholicism, Pentecostal and Mayan- Christianity infusions.

Clothing

It is important to remember, especially for female travellers, that the kinds of clothes you feel comfortable wearing in your own country may not be an acceptable form of dress in Latin America. Short skirts for example, will invite unwanted attention. Just use your common sense and adapt your style in accordance with your surroundings.

On certain projects, you should avoid wearing shorts, flip-flops, tank tops, and so on. Cover up for your own safety, and in respect of the local culture and customs.

With the warm climate and humidity, we advise that you pack a selection of lightweight layerable clothing. As the evenings can get quite cool, a jumper or jacket is advisable. Always bear in mind the activities you will be doing when you are packing, both at the project and socially.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Guatemala, and readily available. However, please respect other volunteers. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact on your volunteer work during the week. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated at the project.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Guatemala. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Guatemala has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, are ILLEGAL. Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Tipping

It is customary to tip 10% in restaurants and hotels generally add 10% tourist tax on top of the Value Added Tax.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Crime is endemic throughout Guatemala and particularly bad in certain areas, which we advise you avoid. As crime is mostly gang related, it tends to be focused on businessmen and residents rather than tourists, but, of course, it is still better to be safe than sorry.

Petty crime is more of a problem for tourists, so keep an eye on your things, especially in crowded and particularly tourist-orientated areas.

Violent crime is on the increase in Guatemala, so it is advisable to not drive at night, especially on the highways between tourist destinations e.g. from the airport into Guatemala City, from Flores to Tikal, as tourists have been intercepted en route to their destinations. Particularly in Guatemala City you should be extra vigilant if you are going out after dark. Woman travellers should especially take care. Here is a general list of precautions:

Avoid walking alone, especially at night
Avoid driving at night
Don't carry all your valuables
Make sure your luggage is locked when you are travelling on buses and so on
Walking trails around/ to Lago de Atitlan and Volcan Agua are notorious spots for robberies against tourists. Get on an organised tour or go in a big group if you want to walk in these places.

This information is not supposed to scare you or put you off, it is just to make sure that you are informed and can take the appropriate precautions where necessary.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief. To avoid this it is advised that you withdraw cash inside the bank at the counter. You will need your passport and driving licence and they will direct you to the teller to obtain your funds. It is more time consuming than using the ATM, but is the most secure way of withdrawing money.

Food & Drink

Guatemala is not a country famous for its gastronomic delights and in the more touristy areas you will be able to find all the regulars - Italian, American, Asian and so on. Traditionally lunch is the big meal of the day and most eateries offer a two or three-course offer at a lower price. Dinner prices tend to be a bit more expensive. Breakfast Guatemalan style features tortillas, eggs and beans but if this doesn't appeal you will be able to find something a little more suitable in the tourist areas!

Proper Guatemalan food is Mayan Cuisine, which features maize, in the form of tortillas and beans rather a lot. Other than Mayan, there is also latino food, which has a slightly more Western edge to it; meat stews and meat

broths tend to be really tasty. Look out for typical Caribbean food on the east coast.

You should not drink tap water (including ice) unless it's boiled or bottled. Remember, most fruit juices are made with un-boiled water.

Be careful around dairy products and milk. Hamburger meat is not always safe. Make sure that uncooked vegetables are cleaned with purified water or peeled. Be careful with seafood and avoid undercooked meat. Remember, it's always better to be safe than sorry.

Remember to let us know before you depart if you have any special dietary requirements.

Drinks

All the normal soft drinks are available and popular throughout Guatemala. The locals also drink a flavoured water drink called 'Refresco', if you felt that way inclined. Decent coffee may be quite difficult to come across, but is becoming easier to find in the tourist resorts. Try a Licuado, a fruit drink made from milk or water (be careful with the water one!) for something a bit different.

Alcohol-wise, bypass the Guatemalan wine for a cheap bottle of the Chilean variety. Unless you want to get plastered, avoid the aguardiente, a local and lethal sugarcane spirit. Rum could be a satisfactory alternative. Beer is widely available and there is a small range to choose from.

Public Holidays

To view a list of the public holidays for Guatemala, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/guatemala/

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. Many schools, government offices, stores and banks are closed on National Holidays. Please note that there may be slight date variations for some of the holidays each year and that the list is not exhaustive.

Weather

Guatemala's climate remains warm and pleasant for most of the year. The Pacific and the Caribbean coast both get quite hot and humid, with a cool sea breeze to stop things from getting too balmy. The rainy season falls between May and October with most of the showers occurring in the afternoons. Altitude controls the climate somewhat, meaning that the low-lying jungle areas are hot and humid all year round, whereas the higher areas including Antigua and Guatemala City have a more comfortable climate that gets cooler at night.

Time

Guatemalan time is six hours behind GMT.

Electricity

In Guatemala the electric system is 120 Volts and frequency 60 Hertz. If your device does not accept this voltage

you will need to bring a converter.

Outlets in Guatemala generally accept 3 types of plug:

Flat blade plug

Two parallel flat pins with ground pin

V-shaped flat prongs

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

Phone: 1-800-985-4852
Email: info@realgap.com
Post: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960
Web: www.realgap.com