



TOUR

Handbook



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WELCOME

Cooperative for Education's tours offer a unique opportunity to see our vital educational programs firsthand, while also experiencing the beauty and culture of Guatemala. **You will leave with incredible memories and the chance to change lives—including your own!**

Trips are open to anyone who is interested in connecting with CoEd's work. Whether you are a solo traveler or with a group, all are welcome. For information on the specifics of each type of tour that we offer, please reach out to Tours@coeduc.org.

We can't wait to see you in Guatemala!

The CoEd Team

INTRO TO GUATEMALA

THE COUNTRY

Nickname: The land of eternal spring

Name origin: meaning "Land of many trees"

Area: 42,042 square miles (about the size of Ohio)

Exports: Coffee, sugar, bananas, cotton, beef, cardamom, and non-traditional crops like cauliflower, snow peas, strawberries, exotic flowers and ferns.

Topography: Guatemala's topography is very diverse and includes tropical rainforests, mountains, valleys, 37 volcanoes, lowland forests, and beaches. Guatemala is situated on three tectonic plates – it's not uncommon to feel a tremor while visiting!

Climate: In the highlands, temperatures average 50–70°F. The northern and western regions are much warmer year-round. The dry season is from November to April, and the rainy season is from May to October.



THE PEOPLE

Population: 18.4 million, the most populous country in Central America

Ethnicity: About 41% Indigenous Maya, 56% Ladino (of mixed or European descent), 3% other groups

Languages: Spanish, 21 Mayan languages, and two languages spoken by non-Mayan groups on the coast

Religion: 45% Catholic, 45% Protestant

EDUCATION

1 out of 3: Number of Indigenous Guatemalans who are illiterate

48%: High school enrollment rate in Guatemala

4.8 years: The average educational level of an Indigenous adult
122 out of 195: Guatemala's ranking in quality of the educational system

ECONOMY

79%: Percentage of Indigenous children and youth living below Guatemala's poverty line

\$3–\$6: The average daily earnings of a rural Guatemalan family

Inequality: Guatemala has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth in the world. 2.5% of landowners hold 65% of the arable land; 88% of the farms make up only 16% of the farmland. Agriculture is the single largest employer in Guatemala; approximately one-third of the workforce is employed in agriculture.



TOUR PAYMENT

WHAT'S COVERED

We handle most of the details for your trip, so you can focus on connecting with locals, making new friends, and experiencing Guatemala in a meaningful way.

- Lodging for the duration of the tour
- Ground transportation to and from the airport and hotel
- Ground transportation during the tour
- Security escorts on tours with multiple overnight locations. Please see the safety section for more information.
- Meals and water: almost all meals are eaten with the group and pre-ordered ahead of time. It's very important to communicate any dietary needs in your application. Since tap water is unsafe for drinking, we provide purified water that you can fill up your reusable water bottle with, in addition to the purified water provided by the hotels.
- Interpreters. CoEd staff and/or volunteers will provide interpretation throughout the trip.
- The opportunity to meet the student(s) you sponsor through the Rise Youth Development Program, including their transportation to the activity. (See Information for Rise Sponsors)
- Helping Hands Tour: supplies and materials for the painting project, including two t-shirts to wear while painting.
- A unique, unforgettable experience!

WHAT'S NOT COVERED

The items below you will need to take care of yourself:

- Roundtrip airfare between your home airport and Guatemala City, Guatemala (GUA: La Aurora International Airport). Prices vary by season, region, and other factors, though we consider \$700-800 a decent price. Please do not attempt to fly standby.
- Immunizations as recommended by physician (costs vary)
- Travel insurance or travel health insurance (costs vary)
- 1-2 meals on your own during the tour, plus airport/travel day meals and snacks.
- Alcoholic beverages and soda. Most meals provided by CoEd will include a typical Guatemalan drink, such as limonada, juice, or agua de jamaica.
- Tips for baggage handlers, housekeeping, airport shuttle drivers, non-CoEd guides, and security and bus drivers.
 - We will collect cash tips (in quetzales, please) for security and bus drivers at the end of the trip. We recommend Q.150-250 for security and bus drivers (depending on the duration of the tour), plus additional small bills for other tips.
- Any personal expenses such as souvenirs, shopping, optional tour experiences (these vary by tour), activities outside of the tour itinerary, etc.

Note on money: There are several methods to exchange your home currency into Guatemalan quetzales:

- Through your local bank prior to your trip. They will need to order the quetzales, so allow at least a few days.
- Upon arrival in the Guatemala City airport: there is a yellow 5B ATM before you pass through immigration.
- After arrival in Antigua: the hotels often have ATMs.



HEALTH & MOBILITY

We want all participants to have a fulfilling experience, so it's important to consider your health status before joining us.

- Participants must be able to walk for one half mile on hilly and uneven terrain, such as dirt paths and cobblestone streets, and have good balance.
- Participants must be able to climb and descend stairs. Many hotels, restaurants, schools, and other buildings in Guatemala do not have elevators.
- All tours include traveling by bus daily, sometimes for up to 4 hours a day, including on windy, mountainous, and sometimes unpaved roads, which can cause motion sickness. There are no bathrooms available on the vehicles, though bathroom stops are provided on longer drives.
- Overnight locations vary by tour but generally range from 5,000–8,000 feet above sea level, and we sometimes visit locations during the day at higher altitudes. Most travelers adjust easily, but it's important to be aware of potential sensitivities or interactions with medications you take. Please consult with your doctor.

IMMUNIZATIONS AND MEDICAL NEEDS

- Immunizations: [See here](#) for the recommended immunizations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). For these and all medical recommendations, consult your physician, and remember that some immunizations need 4–6 weeks to take effect.
- Traveler's diarrhea is the most common ailment. [Read more](#) about how to prevent traveler's diarrhea and consider bringing medications such as loperamide, Pepto-Bismol, and/or an antibiotic prescribed by your physician.
- Mosquito-borne diseases are present in Guatemala; Dengue is the most common and most cases occur May–December. You can take precautions to prevent bug bites, such as using repellent with DEET or picaridin, and wearing long pants and sleeves. (Note: We will be traveling primarily above altitudes of 5,000 feet, so most travelers do not need anti-malarial medication.)



STAYING HEALTHY IN GUATEMALA

- Wash your hands before meals and avoid contaminating yourself by putting your fingers in your mouth, on your food, or on the mouth of your water bottle.
- Drink only purified or bottled water (purified water will be provided by CoEd or easily purchased along the way) and drink plenty of it to stay hydrated. We ask that you bring a refillable water bottle to use throughout the week.
- Do not use ice cubes in any beverages (except at CoEd-approved restaurants).
- Don't eat salads, raw vegetables, or cold dishes made with vegetables (except at CoEd-approved restaurants).
- Only eat fruits that have thick skins that you can peel yourself (except at CoEd-approved restaurants).
- Don't eat street vendor foods.
- If you buy a beverage in a bottle or can, clean and dry the area that will be touching your mouth before drinking.
- Only brush your teeth with purified water.
- Close your mouth in the shower.
- Pack enough prescription medicine (in the original container) to last the entire trip.
- If you take more than two prescribed medicines, a narcotic, or you need to carry needles and syringes for health reasons, have your physician describe in writing your medical condition.



SAFETY

CoEd has been operating tours in Guatemala since 1998, and none of our volunteers have ever been a victim of a serious crime. However, traveling in Guatemala, as with all international travel, is not without risk. To better understand these risks, CoEd requires all travelers to read the [U.S. State Department's consular information sheet](#) and any relevant public announcements concerning Guatemala.

These advisories give valuable information and suggest precautions for visitors but can be difficult to put into context. Consider that millions of tourists visit Guatemala each year, and historically, less than 1% of travelers have reported being involved in serious crimes to the US Embassy. We consider traveling to Guatemala comparable to that of spending time in major U.S. cities and we encourage travelers to exercise the same precautions as you would in places like New York City, Los Angeles, or Chicago.

CoEd and its staff make every reasonable effort to ensure the safety of its tours, including:

- Guiding the tours with veteran staff members, with years of experience working and traveling in Guatemala
- Traveling in multi-vehicle caravans
- Including a private security firm escort for trips with multiple overnight locations
- Maintaining updated lists of local high-quality doctors and hospitals specific to the itinerary
- Fielding extra personnel and vehicles, so that one driver and one vehicle could be dispatched for a medical issue
- Arranging airlifts from rural Guatemala in the unlikely case of serious injury
- Trip volunteers can also lessen their own chances of being targets of crime by:
 - Being aware of your surroundings.
 - Avoiding carrying large sums of cash.
 - Leaving valuables (jewelry, watches, electronics) at home.
 - Keeping wallets and purses to the front of your body.
 - Staying in groups during free time.
 - Not walking around after dark.
 - Following the safety recommendations of staff.

Overall, we believe that your experience in Guatemala will be a positive and memorable one, as it has been for over 1,000 visitors to our projects who have come before you.



PACKING

Due to limited space, we permit each traveler one medium bag (~25" suitcase).

CLOTHING

We suggest that you dress casually but conservatively. Generally, Guatemalans don't wear shorts (unless during athletic activity), tank tops, short dresses, or short skirts. When we are visiting the schools, please do not wear revealing clothing, nice jewelry, leggings, t-shirts with large commercial graphics or statements (especially those referring to alcohol), casual shorts, or flip flop sandals.

The weather in Guatemala is generally spring-like and either dry and dusty (in February) or sometimes rainy (July and October), with 70–75°F days and 60°F evenings. In higher altitudes, such as Quetzaltenango and Tecpán, it can get chilly. Please pack layers and be prepared for lodging without heat or air conditioning.

The list below is a general guideline—quantities and types of clothing will vary by tour length and activities.

- ☐ Long pants (khakis/chinos are preferred over jeans for school visits)
- ☐ Blouses or polos (for school visits)
- ☐ Knee-length shorts for tourism days
- ☐ Short sleeve casual shirts
- ☐ Nicer outfit for final dinner (optional)
- ☐ Pajamas (warm if lodging at higher altitudes)
- ☐ Sweatshirt or sweater
- ☐ Warm jacket (especially for February tours)
- ☐ Rain jacket
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes
- ☐ Sandals (optional)
- ☐ Hat to block sun
- ☐ Bathing suit (optional)
- ☐ Painting clothes (Helping Hands only)

INFORMATION, DOCUMENTS, & MONEY

- ☐ Passport + copy of your passport, which is essential if needed to replace your passport
- ☐ Driver's license
- ☐ Flight itinerary/information
- ☐ Debit card (for using ATMs)
- ☐ Credit card (accepted at most businesses)
- ☐ Money (see note in What's Not Covered)
- ☐ Google Translate app

HEALTH & SAFETY (see Health & Mobility for more info)

- ☐ Reusable water bottle
- ☐ Sunblock
- ☐ Motion sickness medication (if needed)
- ☐ Treatment for traveler's diarrhea
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Insect repellant
- ☐ Electrolyte powder or tablets
- ☐ Well-fitting, high-quality masks in case of respiratory illness
- ☐ COVID-19 Rapid self-test

OTHER

- ☐ Small daypack or waist pack
- ☐ 3-to-2 prong adapter (if needed for your devices)
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Snacks (granola bars, nuts, etc)
- ☐ Earplugs
- ☐ Reusable shopping bag

Note: See the next page for Donations/Gift Policy if you're packing items intended to be given out.



GIFT GIVING POLICY

Rather than handing out money or goods, we encourage you to build relationships and connect with those you'll meet on the trip. Cash gifts given directly to students, teachers, or others you meet on your trip are strictly prohibited, and we ask that you do not hand out items such as candy or toys to children. Instead, we recommend bringing items that facilitate interaction with the children, such as bubbles, stickers, handstamps, etc. or showing them photos from your life (family, pets, snow!).

Monetary donations to CoEd are greatly preferred because supply costs are lower in-country and it enables CoEd to be more efficient with staff time. CoEd spends up to \$5 per student to purchase school supply kits and up to \$90 per 100 students to purchase sports equipment that are delivered during tours.

[Click here to donate!](#)

See the next page for information regarding gifts for sponsored Rise students.





INFORMATION FOR RISE SPONSORS

All CoEd tours provide you the opportunity to visit the Rise Youth Development Program student(s) who you sponsor. It is a great way to not only foster a relationship with the student(s), but to see the impact of your sponsorship first-hand.

You may also visit with Rise students you sponsored who graduated within the past three years. If you wish to visit with a student you sponsored who graduated more than three years ago, we request a \$100 contribution to offset the expenses of adding additional student(s). To allow time for planning, you must submit this request in your tour application.

If you would like to visit with a student who you do not personally sponsor, such as a student who is sponsored by a friend, family member, or club, we request a \$100 contribution to offset the expenses associated with adding additional student(s) whose sponsors are not in attendance. To allow time for planning, you must submit this request in your tour application.

Sponsoring a student's education is the best gift a donor can give. While additional gifts are well-intended, they can create challenges for CoEd's beneficiaries and others around them—including, but not limited to, inequity between students and families, risk of theft, and additional work for our staff.

We kindly ask that any gifts for students be small, personal, and easy to share.

Examples of acceptable gifts for students when on tour include:

- Postcard from your hometown
- A handwritten card or letter of encouragement
- Photo of yourself and/or family

TRAVELING AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF COED



As a trip participant, you will be representing Cooperative for Education and your country of origin. CoEd has a very strong and positive reputation in Guatemala, which we have worked hard to earn and would like very much to maintain.

We expect all participants to behave in ways that are consistent with our organization's values. This includes creating an inclusive environment that is free from harassment of any kind for our staff, students, teachers, tour participants and anyone else that we meet along the way. Using language or behavior that is prejudiced, disrespectful, sexual in nature, and/or that could be experienced as a form of harassment will not be tolerated. Anyone found to be in violation of this policy is subject to removal from the tour and/or will not be welcome on future trips with CoEd.

SMOKING & DRINKING

Smoking and drinking must be handled sensitively due to cultural differences. Volunteers should refrain from discussing drinking or joking about having a beer after school visits—even in English—as it sets a bad example. We also strongly prefer that you refrain from smoking at or near the schools.

TAKING PHOTOS

All our trips include 1-2 staff assigned as photographers. We compile the photos and make them available to all travelers after the trip. You are also welcome to take your own photos during the trip, with a few guidelines in mind:

- Focus on connection, first. Always remember to interact with a person before taking their picture out of respect. It is also important to move from behind the camera & interact with parents, students, and others at activities.
- Before snapping a photo, ask yourself how you would feel if the roles were reversed. How would you feel if strangers were taking photos of your child without your permission? How would you feel if a photo of you randomly showed up on a stranger's social media?
- Please do not promise to send photos. You are not permitted to exchange personal contact information with students. Additionally, there is no functional postal system, and staff will not be able to deliver photos for you.

FLEXIBILITY & OPEN-MINDEDNESS

As with all international travel, things happen, and we may experience things that we're not used to at home. People sometimes run late, things break down, roads close without notice, and some hotels are more "rustic" than others. We've learned that when something doesn't happen the way we expect, it's best to look for the gift in whatever is occurring in the moment. We've had some of our best adventures, insights, and memories born out of "inconvenient" moments!



WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE SCHOOLS

Traveling to Guatemala with CoEd will give you a unique opportunity to see our projects. Each of your visits will be a little different and may include one or more of the following activities.

CEREMONY

You may be given the opportunity to perform tasks at school visits. The visits typically include:

- The National Anthem and welcome from the principal
- Dedicatory words from: a student, CoEd staff member, and/or tour volunteer (something simple and short, thanking them for welcoming us to their community)
- Presentation of plaque(s) by a tour volunteer to teachers of the school
- The symbolic presentation of the textbooks or other resources (The actual textbook distribution is done by our program team)
- Presentation of sports equipment or other gifts to a school representative by a tour volunteer

PERFORMANCES

The students often take time to entertain the visitors by performing traditional Mayan songs and dances (folkloricos), or other poems and skits. Feel free to take pictures or video!

DEMONSTRATIONS

Students and/or teachers at Spark and Technology schools will often invite volunteers into the classroom to see a demonstration of what they are learning. This is a great opportunity to interact with the students.

CONVIVENCIA: FREE TIME & PLAY

When we have time, we will also spend time with the students through play. Even with limited Spanish, you can interact with the kids!

- Bring handstamps, stickers, or small bottles of bubbles to play with and hand out to the kids at primary schools.
- Play sports with the equipment we deliver, including frisbees, basketball, soccer, and football.
- “You Learn/They Learn”: Point to something, identify it in English, and have the students say it in Spanish and/or their Indigenous language.
- Bring a sketchpad and draw pictures for students to keep.

As a tour volunteer, you are representing CoEd and all the stakeholders who have helped to bring the program to this school. As such, you can expect to receive gratitude and enthusiasm from the students and community.



BASIC SPANISH

You may find it helpful to have a basic understanding of the Spanish language, as you will be meeting many students, teachers and parents with very little, if any, English language abilities. Your cultural experience with them will be even more meaningful if you can exchange the most basic greetings.

Common Phrases

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Sí | Yes |
| No | No |
| No hablo español. | I don't speak Spanish. |
| ¿Habla inglés? | Do you speak English? |
| No entiendo | I don't understand |
| Mucho gusto. | Pleased to meet you. |
| ¿Cómo se dice..? | How do you say...? |
| ¿Cuánto cuesta? | How much does it cost? |
| Por favor | Please |
| Gracias | Thank you |
| De nada | You're welcome |
| Bien, gracias | Fine, thank you |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Buenos días | Good morning |
| Buenas tardes | Good afternoon/ evening |
| Buenas noches | Good night |
| Hola | Hello |
| Adios | Goodbye |
| ¿Cómo se llama? | What is your name? |
| Me llamo... | My name is... |
| Disculpe | Excuse me (get attention) |
| Con permiso | Excuse me (going through crowds or leaving a room) |
| Lo siento | Sorry (for a mistake) |
| ¿Dónde está...? | Where is...? |
| La cuenta, por favor. | Check, please |



Basic Vocabulary

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| el hotel | the hotel | el baño | the bathroom |
| el proyecto | the project | damas/mujeres | ladies/women |
| el restaurante | the restaurant | caballeros/ hombres | gentlemen/ men |

School Vocabulary

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| estudiante | student | libro | book |
| maestro/a, profesor/a | teacher | lápiz | pencil |
| escuela | school (primary) | pluma, lapicero | pen |
| colegio, instituto | school (middle or high) | silla | chair |
| | | pelota | ball |

Family Vocabulary

| | | | |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|
| madre/padre | mother/father | brother/sister | hermano/a |
| hijo/a | son/daughter | spouse | esposo/a |
| niño/a | child | friend | amigo/a |
| bebe | baby | | |

Painting Vocabulary (for Helping Hands)

| | | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| brocha | brush | trapo | rag |
| rodillo | roller | palangana | small bowl (for paint) |
| pintura | paint | escalera | ladder |
| pintar | to paint | pared | wall |



RECOMMENDED READING, WATCHING, & LISTENING

BOOKS

- Guatemala: Never Again!. The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala.
- *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer
- *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal and Forgetting in Guatemala* by Daniel Wilkinson
- *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* by Rigoberta Menchú
- *Doing Good...Says Who?* by Connie Newton and Fran Early

TV

- Guatemala, Heart of the Mayan World
- World Eats Bread: Tortillas in Guatemala (Season 1: Episode 3)
- La Camioneta: The Journey of One American School Bus

PODCASTS

- Stuff You Should Know: SYSK's Guatemalan Adventure, Parts 1 & 2



TRAVELER TESTIMONIALS

"**Every day was well-planned** and a great mix of educational activities with the students and sightseeing. The hotels were amazing and the food was very good!"

—Snapshot Tour Participant

"I'm in the Rotary club and recently one of the presidents of Rotary International named CoEd as a **model development organization**. I have been encouraging other members of our club to go to Guatemala with CoEd to see how development projects should function."

—GLP Tour Participant



"We spent an amazing week painting a grade school alongside first graders and witnessing firsthand the success of the Spark Reading Program, which trains teachers in how to teach reading and provides books for students to read.... **The trip was beautifully run and I learned so much about Guatemala's history, culture, and current challenges!**"

—Helping Hands Tour Participant



"We were so impressed by the work Cooperative for Education is doing in Guatemala. Their impact is obvious, and their work is strategic, personal, and deeply sensitive to the needs of the communities they serve. The trip we attended was a **great blend of education, cultural experience, and service.**"

—Custom Tour Participant



HOW TO SIGN UP

To sign up for a tour, you will need to submit an application and a non-refundable \$350 deposit to secure your spot. The remainder of your balance will be due one month before you travel. You will receive email confirmation that your application and deposit have been accepted.

Be sure to check out our [Tours FAQ](#) or email us at Tours@coeduc.org if you have any additional questions.

We look forward to seeing you in Guatemala!