

San Lucas Mission Visiting Group Orientation Packet

Thank you for your interest in visiting our Mission. In this document you will find important information for your stay. Please feel free to visit www.sanlucasmision.org or contact Terri Wong [terriw.sanlucasmision@gmail.com] if you have any additional questions after reading this packet.

The San Lucas Mission

San Lucas Tolimán is located on Lake Atitlán, which is about 3 hours by car (but only 68 miles west) from Guatemala City. In 1963, the Bishop of the New Ulm, MN diocese sent Fr. Greg Schaffer to serve as a priest in San Lucas. Upon arriving, Fr. Greg found people living in corn stalk homes with thatched roofs and the town lacked paved roads, electricity, and plumbing. There was no local healthcare and due to extreme poverty, one out of every two children died from malnutrition. Education was limited, with only one school which enrolled just 100 students. With the recognition and appreciation for the rich Maya culture and the heartfelt understanding that God's love is for all, Fr. Greg began efforts at the San Lucas Mission responding to the expressed felt need of the people. Fr. Greg drew upon Christian Social Teaching to guide efforts in the integral human development of our people and community.

Since then, the Mission has grown tremendously and is now overseen by the Friends of San Lucas, a non-profit organization, created to carry on Fr. Greg's legacy after his death in 2012. The Friends of San Lucas is a bridge connecting the people of San Lucas with friends and supporters from the United States. This avenue of solidarity provides funding to keep the Mission projects going. The Mission continues to respond to the expressed felt needs of the people of San Lucas Tolimán while upholding the Christian Social Teaching that Fr. Greg weaved through all his decisions and practices.

The Mission's Role

Beginning with recognition and appreciation for the Mayan culture, the San Lucas Mission attempts to respond to the expressed felt needs of the people. The Mission draws on the Christian Social Teaching to promote a healthy community that can be achieved only if its members give attention to those marginalized and living in poverty. Our purpose is to address both the immediate effects of poverty and their root causes. We promote the dignity, self-respect, and development of the people through a variety of projects including housing construction, coffee production, education, stove construction, clinical care, and health promotion.

The 4 Pillars of Christian Social Teaching:

- 1. Dignity of the Human Person:* Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society. This principle is grounded in the idea that each person is made in the image of God.
- 2. The Common Good:* How we organize our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment to the common good.
- 3. Solidarity:* We must work alongside the people to learn and respect the moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of all cultures.
- 4. Subsidiarity:* The principle of subsidiarity holds that in our efforts to work with another culture, we must begin from where the people are, at all times safeguarding their efforts to address the situation of poverty in which they live.

Your Role as a Short Term Volunteer

The Mission's way of service is focused primarily on learning and solidarity. We recognize that our physical labor is helpful in advancing projects but in the end, all of our efforts are part of a greater educational experience and an opportunity to build relationships. The empowerment of the local community and the sustainability of the projects are possible only through a relationship of equality between Guatemalan and North American counterparts.

At the San Lucas Mission, volunteers foster this spirit of service. Once visitors have left San Lucas, they should be able to communicate the Mission philosophy as well as what they have personally learned to their family and friends, serving as ambassadors for the principles of Christian Social Teaching and, more broadly, social justice.

Here are some examples of projects that you may get a chance to work on during your stay:

CONSTRUCTION: The need for dignified housing in San Lucas and surrounding communities is constant. Each year, the Mission builds concrete block houses. Each house is 540 square feet, has a concrete floor and includes a fuel-efficient stove. Using outside contractors and volunteer help we build about one house a month.

STOVE PROJECT: Traditionally, Maya families cooked over an open fire in the middle of their home. This was an inefficient use of wood, increased respiratory disease and was a burn risk for small children. In 1993, the Mission began a fuel-efficient wood-burning stove project and since then we have built thousands of stoves, constantly improving and refining the design.

CHARITY: Since 2015, the Mission's Charity With Dignity program has focused on serving the elderly, disabled, widows and others identified as having the greatest need. This program provides monthly cash and food assistance and builds wood homes with stoves and concrete floors.

COFFEE: In 1992, Fr. Greg began the Juan Ana coffee program. Each year we buy from small producers, paying more than the market price for a higher quality product. The coffee is dried, roasted and packaged in San Lucas and shipped to the United States where it is sold across the country. Coffee is available online at sanlucasmision.org

HEALTHCARE: We believe that quality healthcare is a basic human right. The Mission has a locally-led clinic with services that include: emergency care, x-ray, maternity care and a pharmacy. We also sponsor a Health Promoter program, which works in the communities focusing on child nutrition and diabetes care. Visiting groups from the United States provide additional care in the communities and the clinic. All services are affordable and no one is turned away due to an inability to pay.

WOMEN'S CENTER: In 2011, the Mission dedicated the Women's Center, a program devoted to improving the lives of women from San Lucas and the surrounding communities. The Women's Center has classes in weaving, sewing and cooking as well as workshops on self-esteem, women's health, prenatal care, nutrition, women's rights and gender equality. In addition to providing a safe place for women to collaborate and share ideas, the Women's Center has: a play area for children; a medicinal, fruit and vegetable garden; and a chicken coop. Subsidized transportation is provided for women who come from other communities. There is a store for the women to sell their products and the women retain all proceeds.

You can expect to work on several different projects in San Lucas or the surrounding communities. In general, the Long Term Volunteers will tell your group leader what the work assignment will be for the

next day during dinner, the night before. All groups will get a variety of assignments, but we ask you to remain flexible because the demand for work at different projects always changes.

Here is a rough schedule of volunteer life at the Mission:

	Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00am	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast (8:30)
9:00am-12:00pm	Working at projects	Morning activity: Hike or Soccer	Boat Tour
12:30pm	Lunch	Lunch	(no lunch at the Mission)
2:00pm-4:00pm	Light work, cultural activity or talk with a local	Free time	Return from tour at approx. 3pm
6:00pm	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner

In addition to these activities, you will participate in a tour of all of the Mission’s projects, see a documentary about Fr. Greg and the San Lucas Mission, and your group will take a “Living Class” where you’ll learn about local history and get a taste for daily life in San Lucas. There also may be other opportunities to listen to short presentations from members of the community.

Expectations

As volunteers you should also be aware of your role as representatives of the Mission here in San Lucas. All of our work is built on a foundation of solidarity and mutual respect. Out of respect for the community, we ask that you follow some guidelines for dress and behavior:

- **Dress Code:** Remember, what is appropriate clothing in the U.S. may not be appropriate in San Lucas. All visitors and volunteers are expected to dress and act appropriately and be sensitive to the culture around them. Both men and women should plan to wear shirts with sleeves- bare shoulders and tank tops should be avoided. Short are also not common in San Lucas. If you choose to wear shorts, they must be at least knee length (i.e. longer basketball shorts). Leggings and tight fitting yoga pants should also be avoided.



- **Curfew:** The Mission asks groups to be back in their hotels by 9pm for safety purposes.

- Drinking: The Mission observes the drinking age in the United States which is 21. We ask that visitors 21 and over drink responsibly and be a good example to other visitors and to the San Lucas community.

Health & Safety:

- The faucet water in San Lucas is not safe to drink. Do not brush your teeth with tap water and keep your mouth closed while taking a shower. Purified water is available at the Mission during mealtimes and throughout the day. Please plan to bring a reusable water bottle or two to use throughout your time in San Lucas.
- San Lucas is a safe place but we recommend visitors don't walk around alone. Always walk in groups of at least two.
- You are responsible for keeping your things safe. Don't leave things lying around in the biblioteca or at worksites. Also, do not show valuables or large amounts of cash when walking around town.
- Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. In the U.S. we are used to working under the assumption that everything is safe. Here, that is not always the case. Be aware and alert. While we try to ensure everyone's safety, we are still in a developing country. Know that if it doesn't feel safe to you, you don't have to do it.

Preparing for Your Visit

Before coming to San Lucas, visit a travel doctor and make sure you are up-to-date on your vaccinations. Tetanus and Hepatitis A are especially important. While we are not in a high-risk area for malaria some groups choose to bring anti-malarials. And if you will be visiting Tikal or other tropical areas you will definitely want to use them. Ciprofloxacin, (an antibiotic to treat travelers' diarrhea), is also useful to bring.

To help with the packing process, we have compiled a packing list that can be found [HERE](#).

Please read the following two articles before arriving in San Lucas:

- ["The Cost of Short Term Missions"](#) by JoAnn Van Engen
- ["Rethinking Volunteerism in America"](#) by Gavin Leonard

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the cost of my stay? We do recommend a **\$40 per day/per person** minimum donation (suggested rate as of January 1, 2016) to cover your basic expenses while you are with us. We do depend on donations for all the work that we do to keep the mission running without interruption, so please consider if there are other ways you can help. A list of projects that are in need of being funded is available. Please **send your donation to our Eagan office three weeks prior** to your departure for San Lucas.

When and where can I change money? How much money should I change?

You can bring personal checks and exchange them for Quetzales at the mission. Checks should be made out to: **Mision San Lucas Toliman** (Please note Mision is spelled with one "s"). Checks are limited \$100 per day. So you may want or need additional checks. Another option is to go to your local bank with international ties and exchange some cash for quetzales prior to your trip to Guatemala.

The amount of money you need depends on how much you want to buy and how often you plan on eating out. Most visitors will want some money to buy souvenirs. Around \$100 should be enough to cover some souvenirs (bags, weavings, jewelry, coffee, etc.), and eating a meal or so outside the mission. But it will vary on what you want to buy.

What do I do if a member of my group falls ill?

Please notify the long-term volunteer coordinator or a long-term volunteer if you have any illness that lasts longer than one day. A lot of people experience a gastrointestinal “adjustment” period during their visit. If you experience travelers’ diarrhea, we recommend **NOT** taking Immodium or Pepto Bismol until you have been assured that you do not have amoebas. If the gastrointestinal illness lasts longer than 24 hours or becomes more severe (intense cramping, nausea, or vomiting), please notify the long-term volunteer coordinator or the long-term volunteers. Our clinic is well equipped to diagnose and treat these issues quickly and effectively.

Is San Lucas safe?

San Lucas is a relatively safe and welcoming community, but use common sense. Acts of violence, particularly directed towards foreigners, are extremely rare. We ask that visitors walk in pairs and that you do not wander around alone, especially at night. Don’t leave your purse or backpack unattended. Please be back at your hotel by 9:00 p.m.

Where can I store my valuables? Can I get into the safe to retrieve valuables throughout the week?

We have a safe where we securely store passports. The hotels where we lodge our groups are trusted business partners, so your belongings should be safe in your locked room.

Is there a telephone and internet at the Mission?

There is a phone at the Mission that you can use to make international calls. Office hours are from 9 am until 7 pm, unless in the case of an emergency. The cost is 2Q/ minute for calls to the US. The Mission has internet access but it is very slow. We ask groups to limit use to before and after meals, saving mealtimes to converse with other visitors. There are several internet cafes in town, and some of the hotels have internet.

Can I bring donations?

There has been a substantial change with how the Mission receives donations. Please contact Terri Wong before making any plans to bring donations, for the Mission has limited space for storage of items.

Can a member of my group work in the school or clinic during our stay?

Work at the clinic and school is very limited. We have been asked by the community to keep the frequency of visitors passing through to a minimal basis, so that confidentiality and quality of services can be ensured. For closer interaction or collaboration with the clinic and surrounding communities, please contact the Friends of San Lucas.

Where can I purchase souvenirs?

The Mission sells t-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee, honey, books, CDs, and DVDs in the Mission office through the volunteer coordinator. Souvenirs, like Guatemala’s famous textiles, can be found at the Women’s Center, around town and in the market. We ask that you avoid purchasing from people selling souvenirs in front of the church or on Mission property and that you also spread your business around town. If you have any problems with local vendors, please let the volunteer coordinator know.

Can I go for a run or walk in the morning or evening?

We recommend that people avoid running and going for walks alone during their stay, especially at dawn and at dusk/night. There have been problems with dogs in the past. If you choose to exercise, please do not go alone. There are also two gyms in town where you can pay a small fee to use the exercise equipment.

Who are the long-term volunteers and is it possible for me to become a long-term volunteer?

Long-term volunteers are selected in a competitive three-part application process. For more information on the volunteer program or to apply, visit www.sanlucasmission.org.

How can I donate to the Mission, and which projects can I support?

100% of our funding comes from donations. The greatest need is to cover the costs of salaries, maintenance and operating costs for the mission projects, etc., which is vital to keeping the mission running smoothly. We also have specific needs that come up each month.

You can support the Mission and our projects by donating to the “Friends of San Lucas” (you will be given an envelope at the end of your visit to mail your donation when you return home) or you can donate online at www.sanlucasmision.org. See the Fundraising list attached for more specific needs.

How can I stay involved and up-to-date on the Mission’s efforts?

Toward the end of your stay the volunteer coordinator will debrief you on how to stay involved. We encourage you to keep in touch and remain involved once your trip is over. Our hope is that your first visit won’t be your last, and that this is just the beginning of a journey of learning and solidarity with the people of San Lucas. To stay up-to-date on what’s happening in San Lucas, you can subscribe to our electronic newsletter by signing up at www.sanlucasmision.org. We also are on Facebook (Friends of San Lucas) and Instagram (Friendsofsanlucas).

I don’t know anything about Guatemala! Do you have any suggestions on what to read before I visit?

Guatemala has a rich cultural heritage, but also a violent past. The following resources about Guatemala’s recent history are some possible books you can investigate if you choose to know more:

[CIA World Factbook: Guatemala](#)- Find basic information about the geography, economy, government, etc.

[BBC Timeline](#)- A chronology of key events in Guatemalan History from 1524 to present

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

Culture and Customs of Guatemala:(Culture and Customs of Latin America and the Caribbean) by Maureen E. Shea

I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, by Rigoberta Menchu