



Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala

Hola!

Welcome to our Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala.

While no person or book or website can give a new traveler to Guatemala a full understanding of its culture, we believe that this Handbook will go a long way in preparing you for your trip and the living experience there.

We have spent years revising this Handbook, based on the experiences of our volunteers and staff who have spent significant time in Guatemala. They have all contributed their unique insights and advice to the information in this Handbook.

Although there is some overlap, our Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala does not try to duplicate all of the general travel information you will find in published guide books such as Lonely Planet or the Moon Handbook for Guatemala.

Our main focus in the Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala is on travel information that is specifically relevant to a volunteer like yourself who will serve others in Guatemala and become a member of the local community.

We encourage you to share the Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala with your family and friends and anyone else interested in your trip to Guatemala. We also recommend taking a copy with you on your trip.

As always, if you have any questions about the Volunteer Handbook for Guatemala or any other issues or concerns, please get in touch with us.

Regards,
Scott Burke

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott P. Ble".

Founder & Director
Cosmic Volunteers
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA

BEFORE YOU GO

To Do List

Required

- Sign-Up Form
- Resume
- Book Flights
- Questionnaire
- Passport ID page scan
- Participant Contract
- Confirm emergency contact info
- Any dietary / medical info we should know?
- Program Fee

Optional

- Travel Insurance Policy
- Vaccinations
- Permission Letter for Minors
- **Register with State Dept (<https://step.state.gov/step>)**

Passport

In order to enter Guatemala, you must have a passport that is valid for at least the next six months.

Visa

A visa is not required for a stay of up to 90 days.

Health Preparation

Guatemala does not require any vaccinations in order to enter the country. However we strongly recommend that participants consult with a travel doctor at least two months before arrival. The doctor should provide you with information about immunizations and advice on how to stay healthy while traveling. For online travelers health information, a decent place to start is the Centers For Disease Control at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/Guatemala.aspx>.

Insurance

We strongly suggest you have a policy in place to cover any medical expenses. You may already have coverage from your insurance back home – call them and ask. Cosmic Volunteers does not provide health insurance to participants. Our staff has used [HCC](#) for all of our travel insurance policies the last 14 years (we get no kick-backs). We usually get 50k of coverage for about \$40. There are other reputable companies that offer coverage at reasonable rates such as Travel Guard (www.travelguard.com).

Photocopy Important Documents

Before you leave home:

- 1) Scan and email these documents to yourself + family.
- 2) Print hard copy of all documents and put in your carry-on bag.

- Passport ID page
- Flight Itinerary
- Credit/Debit card(s)
- Medical / Travel Insurance policy
- Prescription medicine(s)
- Contact info for coordinators and family back home
- Power-of-Attorney (if you have one)

Passport Care

When flying, always carry your passport on your person and not your bags.

Consider putting your passport in a Ziploc baggie at all times, to protect it from sweat / dirt / humidity / spilled drinks.

You do not need to carry your passport to your volunteer job each day.

However, when you travel overnight to different towns in Guatemala, please carry your passport with you (again - on your person).

Contact Information

Before you leave home, we will send you the mobile numbers of your Coordinators in Guatemala and the US. **They will be your 24 hour contacts during your program.** Please carry their contact numbers on your person (not your bags) while en-route to and in Guatemala.

Packing List

Don't forget Passport – Don't over-pack – Keep valuables in your carry-on bag

Carry On Plane

- Passport
- Printed Flight Itinerary
- Cell Phone (+ charger)
- \$100-\$150 Cash plus Credit/Debit card(s)
- Medical / Travel Insurance policy
- Prescription medicine(s)
- Electronics (camera, laptop/tablet) + chargers
- Contact info of coordinators + family back home

Checked Baggage

- Pants (4-5 yoga pants / khakis / capris)
- Skirt/dresses (2)
- Shorts (2)
- Short-sleeve shirts (7-8)
- Long-sleeve shirts (2-3)
- Underwear (7)
- Socks (7)
- Sweatshirt / Hoodie / Windbreaker (1)
- Sneakers (1)
- Sandals / flip-flops (1)
- Sleepwear (covers legs and arms)
- Hat (for sun) + sunscreen
- Bath towel (small)
- Hand sanitizer
- Over-the-counter medicines for pain relief, fever, diarrhea
- All normal toiletries (soap, shampoo, makeup etc)
- All bedding / pillows will be provided
- Don't bring adapters for electric outlets – buy them for \$1 in Guatemala

Other Packing Tips

Theft can be a problem on flights to destinations like Guatemala, so do not pack anything valuable in your checked luggage. Pack valuables in a carry-on bag such as a laptop, camera, cash, jewelry, gifts etc.

Do not over-pack. Except for some prescription medicine, you can buy anything in Guatemala that you forget or leave home on purpose, including toiletries, clothes, electronics, etc.

Luggage:

- Bags seem to get really roughed up on these international flights.
- Instead of new / nice luggage, consider buying a cheap suitcase at a thrift store (especially harder-type suitcase that will protect your stuff).
- Use a small backpack as a carry-on (for laptop, any electronics, a few toiletries).
- Careful with huge backpacks – for your back's sake.
- Duffel bags are too soft and things tend to get broken inside.

What NOT to bring:

- Plug adapter for **electrical devices**. Guatemala's outlets are the same as those in USA. However even if you do need an adapter for some older outlets there – buy the adapter in Guatemala because it will be very inexpensive (\$2-\$3) and will definitely work there.
- **Items for donation to orphanages**. Better to donate cash (via their websites). You can also buy items cheaply in Guatemala.

Traveling to Guatemala

Getaway Day

- **Before you leave home, make sure you have your passport!**
- Make sure to bring any prescription medicines.
- Everything else can be replaced easily: clothes, toiletries, etc.

Check-in at airport

- Arrive at the airport at least 3 hours before your flight.
- Assume the airline will be strict with luggage weight rules.

Keep Away Germs on the Flight(s)

The air circulating on airplanes is actually very clean and sanitary (despite public perception). But you still must take steps to avoid germs that might lead to cold or flu. The reasons? The dry air plus the germs from fellow passengers. Some tips:

- Drink lots of water (nasal membranes need to be moist to work well)
- Use saline nasal spray (ditto)
- Use hand sanitizer
- Wipe down trays and seat handles (with hand sanitizer or anti-bacterial wipe)
- Increase the ventilation at your seat (to avoid saliva droplets from sneezing, coughing and conversation from passengers).

Passing Time on the Flight

- The obvious: sleeping, reading, movies, music, writing, drawing.
- Stay awake and sleep according to the time zone in your destination, in order to adjust more quickly to the time zone there.
- Walk around and exercise your calf muscles every hour in order to prevent [DVT](#).
- Talk to fellow passengers. Perhaps you'll make a new friend, and maybe learn about your destination – especially if they are a local returning home.
- Look out the window! You are 30,000 feet above the earth! Isn't it amazing to see the clouds, stars, the moon, even other planes from this perspective? You're traveling perhaps half-way around the world in less than 24 hours. These things were unfathomable to humans not even a century ago. Consider yourself very fortunate.
- Take photos – some of you, some out the window, maybe even a new friend. You might not realize it now, but in 5, 10, 20+ years these photos will become part of your memories of this special trip.

ARRIVING IN GUATEMALA

This section describes the normal schedule and activities for volunteers arriving in Guatemala. Your actual schedule might vary slightly from what is described below, depending on your arrival day and time as well as your volunteer location.

Our local Coordinator will meet you at the airport in Guatemala City, then travel with you to Antigua to drop you off at your host family. Depending on your arrival time, they will start your orientation and tour of Antigua either the same day or meet you early the next morning at your host family.

Arriving at the Airport in Guatemala City

- When your plane lands in Guatemala City, you will be directed inside the airport's main building.
- You will be directed to the **Immigration counters**. Have your passport and disembarkation card ready (you receive the card during the flight).
- After the Immigration officer stamps your passport, walk to **baggage claim**. Grab your luggage, then walk through the **Customs** lines.
- Before you exit the airport, the staff might ask you to show your **luggage tags** given to you by the airport check-in staff before you boarded your flight.
- There are sometimes **big crowds** waiting outside the airport exit door. The scene can look chaotic and intimidating. Try to look calm (even if you're not).

Emergency: If You Do Not Meet Our Coordinator at the Airport

Although this has never happened: There might be an extremely unusual situation where you do not meet our Program Coordinator at the airport. In this situation, speak to an airport staff person and ask for help in making a telephone call to our Program Coordinator in Guatemala. If you cannot reach the Program Coordinator in Guatemala, call Cosmic Volunteers' Coordinator in the US 24 hours, Scott Burke. He will arrange as quickly as possible for another Coordinator to pick you up at the airport, or he will direct you to take a taxi on your own to a hotel. (We will reimburse you for all costs: transport, hotel, phone, food.)

Introduction to Guatemala

On your first full day in Antigua, one of our Program Coordinators will pick you up from your host family and provide you with an **Introduction to Guatemala**. The Program Coordinator taking you around town to see life on the streets. This normally includes visits to local markets and cultural sites. They will also go over the major points in this Volunteer Handbook to make sure that you understand about staying healthy, safety, street smarts, living with your host family, the volunteer work, contact information, etc.

We also recommend that you take care of any practical errands such as:

- Buying a mobile phone / SIM card / phone credit
- Exchanging money / travelers checks
- Using an ATM machine
- Buying electrical adapters
- Buy any toiletries
- Buying a small flashlight

Enjoy the Scenery!

Starting with your ride from the airport in Guatemala City with your Coordinator, your road travel in Guatemala can really provide you with an unparalleled insight into the people, the sights, sounds, and smells(!) of Guatemala – all from the relatively insulated environment of your vehicle. So watch, listen, smile, ask questions, and just try to soak it in.

As Verge Magazine has written:

"Fifteen minutes on a bus usually teaches you more about a country's social, political, and economic conditions than three hours studying a guidebook."

Jet Lag

If you are flying across multiple time zones to reach Guatemala, keep in mind that you may experience “jet lag” because your travel is disrupting your body’s circadian rhythm.

Symptoms often include insomnia, waking early, excessive sleepiness, headaches, irritability, digestive problems like constipation or diarrhea, muscle aches, and difficulty concentrating. Younger travelers and female travelers are more susceptible to jet lag, while some travelers are not affected much.

As a general guideline, the recovery rate from jet lag is one day per time zone traveled. So if you live in London (6 hours ahead of Guatemala), it could take you one week to recover from the jet lag.

To recover from jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight
- Try to sleep on the plane if it's nighttime in Guatemala
- Adjust to the local day/night schedule immediately
- Try not to sleep until nighttime in Guatemala, no matter how tired you are
- Exercise daily (during daylight hours, especially early morning)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

WHILE IN GUATEMALA**Do's and Don't for Guatemala**

- **Don't drink tap water; only bottled water**
- **We strongly recommend that you have a cell phone in Guatemala**
- **No jewelry, cash or expensive electronics in public**
- **Teens: You must be supervised at all times – by either our staff or host family**
- **Do not use ATM's around Central Park area due to electronic fraud**
- **Bring a rain jacket and small umbrella – it rains almost daily in Antigua**
- Don't wear tight or revealing clothes
- Always carry cell phone
- Don't isolate yourself (via ear buds, sunglasses, talking only to peers etc)
- Don't worry about mistakes when speaking Spanish
- Use only ATM's inside upscale hotels like Porta Hotel Antigua
- At any non-hotel ATM's: watch for pickpockets
- Be aware that sexism and harassment are prevalent
- Use your own toiletries
- No swimming under any circumstances
- Wash your hands frequently (bring hand sanitizer)
- Keep your room tidy and clean up after yourself
- Always ask before taking photo/video of someone
- Speak softly – shouting and talking loud is impolite
- No riding on chicken buses
- Vehicles always have right of way
- Don't ignore symptoms like headache, diarrhea, not sleeping
- Fight jet lag with water, exercise, and adjusting to local time immediately
- Always carry contact information on paper for our staff and your peers
- All illnesses, incidents, & accidents **MUST** be reported immediately to a group leader
- Wash your hands frequently (bring hand sanitizer)
- Use bug spray at night to avoid mosquito bites

If you are ever lost / separated from our group

Do not panic. If you have a cell phone, call a group leader. If not, walk into the nearest shop and ask to use a phone to call a group leader. Never admit to strangers that you're alone / lost. Smile and act calm.

Avoid Injuries

As a pedestrian, you must be very cautious, especially at night:

- Vehicles always have the right of way
- Assume that vehicles will not stop for you
- Streets often have no lighting, so stay out of the road at night as much as possible since drivers might not see you
- Jogging can be very dangerous due to traffic and uneven surfaces

Insects

There is a very small risk of malaria in some rural areas, and some volunteers do take malaria medication. Check with your travel doctor to determine if you should be taking preventative medicines of any kind. We recommend using insect repellent, long-sleeved clothing, and mosquito nets to avoid mosquito bites in some of the rural areas.

Culture Shock

The first 24-48 hours in Guatemala are critical in your cultural adjustment, so please try not to make any negative judgments about Guatemala during this period. You are likely to feel tired, hot and sweaty, and somewhat overwhelmed by the new sights, sounds, etiquette, etc.

*** Expect the unexpected at all times ***

The best way to handle any culture shock is to have an open mind and relaxed attitude.

In the past 14 years of running these programs, we have seen the following take place with so many of our volunteers, that we include this in our handbooks to give you a heads-up:

- First few days: Volunteers don't like that host country and cannot wait to go home.
- By end of first week: They find the country tolerable, maybe even pleasant.
- Rest of stay: They fall in love with the country's culture and people.
- End of stay: They wish they could stay longer and often shed tears upon leaving.

All of this can drive foreigners crazy, especially when they first arrive. Hopefully, you will eventually find, as myself and hundreds of other volunteers have, that Antigua (and Guatemala overall) is one of the friendliest, safest places to travel anywhere in the world, where you can make some lifelong friendships while helping out Guatemalans through your volunteer work.

Antigua

Antigua is not very large, with a population of about 34,000. The streets are cobblestone and there are very narrow sidewalks, often with window boxes protruding into the sidewalk, and there are beautiful churches and ruins. It is very easy and fairly quick to walk anywhere in town. As in most Guatemalan cities, Antigua has numbered Avenues going north (*norte*) to south (*sur*) and numbered Calles going east (*poniente*) to west (*oriente*). In Antigua, Volcán Agua is always to the south, so it's easy to orientate yourself.

Food

There also are lots of places to eat out in Antigua. You can get a breakfast dish for \$2.00 to \$4 called *tipico* that consists of eggs, black beans, tortillas, and a piece of fried plantain. There is also great yogurt and granola. Lunches and dinners can be as inexpensive as \$3 to \$7 (EUR2 to 5). Guatemalan food is not spicy like Mexican food and there isn't too much variety in the local food. A typical local lunch or dinner will be chicken pepian with rice and maybe a vegetable like squash, beans with sausage and rice, or a bowl of beef soup with vegetables, all served with tortillas and maybe part of an avocado or some papaya. There are also bars, pizza, McDonalds, local fried chicken outlets, etc.

Climate

Antigua has a pleasant climate year-round, due to its higher elevation. The rainy season is between May and November. Daytime temperatures are typically in the 70s F. Nighttime temps are usually 55-65 F.

Dress Code

- Do not wear tight or revealing clothes.
- Khaki pants / capris and t-shirts / long-sleeve top are fine.
- Closed-toe sneaker / shoes are best for volunteering.
- If working on house building project – buy rubber boots locally or use old pair of sneakers that you don't mind getting muddy.
- You will see tourists and locals breaking these rules, but you are a volunteer / "insider" so the rules are different for you (if you want to be respectful, which of course you!).

Living With Your Host Family

One of the most rewarding, challenging, and meaningful experiences of your time in Guatemala is likely to be the time you spend living with your host family. You are encouraged to cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing. Be sensitive to the feelings of others and enjoy the company of people with different life experiences! Here are few more tips to help you prepare for your Guatemalan living experience.

- Don't hesitate to request help and advice from your host family! No question is too small or silly!
- You'll have 3 meals a day from Monday – Saturday. On Sunday we will all eat together at restaurants in town.
- Sheets, pillow, and cover will be provided by the family.
- Use your own toiletries (you can buy more in Antigua).
- No overnight guests (unless your family visits from home).
- Daytime visitors – please get family's permission.
- No consumption of alcohol or illicit drugs.
- Keep your room tidy.
- Don't ask to borrow money from the family.
- Don't use the family's computer without permission.
- Take laundry to a laundromat; or ask the host family to arrange for laundromat for door-to-door service (for an extra fee).
- Electricity in Guatemala is particularly expensive, so please avoid excessive use of electric appliances, and turn off the lights when leaving your room or the bathroom.
- Do not leave the water running when it is not necessary.
- Keep items of value, such as cameras, cash, and passport locked in your luggage.
- You will use your own toiletries and towels.
- Practice your Spanish!! Your family will absolutely love to help you practice your Spanish, especially the children. Don't feel shy – they will totally appreciate your willingness to learn and speak their language.
- Take your laundry to a laundromat; or ask the host family to arrange for laundromat for door-to-door service (for an extra fee).

Photos / Video / Electronics

- Always ask before taking a photo or video of someone.
- Be careful when wielding your cameras in public because of theft. The worst place for a camera abroad is usually around your neck, as it's visible and easy to snatch from you.
- When flying or on a bus: always pack electronic equipment in your carry-on bag (laptop, cameras, mp3 player etc) so they are always in-sight.
- **Back-up your photos and videos** regularly – even on a daily basis if possible! Transfer them to a laptop, smart phone, pen drive – anything so that you have backups in case your cell phone / camera is lost/stolen/damaged.

Traveler's Diarrhea

This is the most common illness suffered by travelers to Guatemala. It's usually caused by bacteria in the food or water you consume, and usually occurs within the first week of travel. You must be extra cautious about food and water.

If you are ill or injured in any way

Our staff will escort you 24 hours to the nearest medical facility for treatment. We will also immediately call your family back home to inform them of the situation. Most insurance plans require you to pay up-front for all of your medical care, then submit forms later to get reimbursed by the insurance company. So when you walk into a clinic, have cash and/or credit cards with you so that you can pay.

Learn some basics about Guatemala

- President: Otto Pérez Molina (2012 –)
- Population is 15 million
- Life expectancy is 70 years
- Religions: Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs
- Languages: Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, and Xinca)
- Literacy Rate: 69%

Local Greetings

- Man to Man: hand shakes with eye contact, with slaps on back for friends and family.
- Woman to Woman: hand shakes with eye contact, with kiss on cheek for friends and family.
- Man and Woman: hand shakes with eye contact, with kiss on cheek for friends and family.
- “Mucho Gusto” is often said when meeting someone for the first time.
- Handshakes are often limp; do not crush anyone's hand!

Do Not Swim in Guatemala

The reason is that drowning is the second leading cause of injury and death for travelers abroad, next to road accidents. This comes as a surprise to many, because the western media tends to focus on terrorism, political strife, and infectious diseases as the most likely dangers for travelers abroad. As tempting as it might be, the ocean currents in Guatemala are too strong, unpredictable and dangerous.

General Knowledge and Etiquette

- Most Guatemalans (about 60%) are of indigenous origin. There is also a sizable “Mestizo” population of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent.
- Personal space: generally, most locals are comfortable being an arms-length away. Women tend to touch each other during conversations, but men usually do not (with either sex).
- Use the “usted” form when talking to strangers / elders / authority.
- Maintaining eye contact is important during conversations.
- Time is a fluid concept to Guatemalans, so do not feel bad if people show up late for parties, meetings or other functions.
- Timetables for flights and buses however are mostly adhered to.
- The culture is a “macho” one, with men dominant in most ways, with women expected to do things like cooking and cleaning.
- Women visitors will usually experience “catcalls” and other annoying “flirting” from local men.
- Lunch is considered the main meal of the day, and will probably include black beans, tortillas or meat, and fruit and vegetables.
- Corn is king in Guatemala, along with black beans, eggs, and rice.
- Coffee is very popular, although much of the quality / strong beans are exported, leaving locals with usually a weaker cup.
- There is a huge variety of tropical fruit available, so please try them.
- Never give white flowers, because they are reserved for funerals.
- Try to address people with titles: Doctor, Professor, Senora, Senor, Senorita.
- Speaking softly is considered polite; shouting / being loud is rude.
- It's usually not a good idea to talk about politics or crime in Guatemala.
- Good topics for conversation include the culture, geography etc.
- Always engage in social conversation before talking “business”.
- Avoid hand gestures as much as you can. For example, the “thumbs-up” sign is considered obscene there!
- It is considered extremely rude to be excessively drunk in public.
- It is OK for a woman to dine alone, but do not go alone to local bars and clubs.
- Same-sex relationships are not illegal but are taboo.

Money

The **quetzal** (ket-sahl, abbreviated to Q) is Guatemala's currency. The exchange rate is typically at around Q8 = US\$1. The quetzal is divided into 100 centavos.

Guatemala is mostly a cash-based society, so **expect to pay cash for everything**.

We recommend that you **bring from home at least \$100 USD** (or equivalent currency) in cash. Do not bring bills larger than \$20, because money exchangers might consider them to be counterfeit (there's only a small chance of this, but it's one less hassle you can easily avoid).

Before leaving home for Guatemala:

Alert your bank(s) and credit card company(s) about your travel plans. Many financial institutions have security blocks in place for security reasons for transactions taking place outside your home country. Make sure you tell them **in advance** the dates and countries for your trip.

While in Guatemala, the best way to get cash is to use an **ATM machine**. ATM's dispense money in quetzals. There are ATM's in most towns even in rural areas.

In Antigua, do not use the ATM's that surround the Central Park. These machines have a consistent history of outsiders capturing your bank details then stealing funds electronically. Instead, use the ATM's located inside upscale hotels like Porta Hotel.

You can also safely exchange cash in Antigua in person at banks. You must have your actual passport with you, not a photocopy. The banks in Antigua are usually open Mon-Fri 9am-6pm. For security reasons, it is best to go to the bank with a local (like our Coordinator).

Consider getting from home a **Visa TravelMoney Card**. It is a prepaid card that allows you to withdraw cash from ATMs worldwide. You can also use the card for purchases like a debit card. If you lose the card, simply call them to report it, at no loss to you. (This is a great replacement for old-school travelers checks.)

For **spending money** during your trip, count on spending \$5-\$10 per day. The actual amount can vary considerably, depending on factors such as:

- How often you buy meals outside your host family
- Whether you buy / use a mobile phone
- Extra sightseeing you choose to do
- Shopping for clothes, toiletries, souvenirs

If you need **fast cash from home**, your family can send you instant cash using services like Moneygram (www.moneygram.com) or Western Union (www.westernunion.com), with Moneygram by far the cheaper option. If you do not need the money in a timely manner, have your family back home make a deposit at your bank account or Visa TravelMoney card, then you can withdraw the money in cash using your ATM card.

Phones

We strongly recommend that you have a cell phone in Guatemala.

The best option in the experience of past volunteers is to buy a basic local cell phone your first day in Guatemala. The basic models cost \$20 (talk and text only) and provide you with a local number. **Incoming calls are free – including incoming international calls. To make calls / send texts: you buy credit for the phone (in shops everywhere).**

You can also bring your own cell from home. But check with your carrier before leaving home if the phone will work in Guatemala and what the roaming costs will be. The roaming rates can be as high as \$3 per minute talk. If your phone from home is “**unlocked**” and is a **GSM phone**, you can buy a **SIM card in Guatemala for about \$8 USD**, so you can use the phone with a local Guatemala telephone number

Do not rely on text messages as a means of communicating, whether local or international, because they often do not go through. If you want to communicate with home, voice calls are the only reliable way.

Family and Friends Calling You from Home

Your folks back home will be able to call you either on your local cell phone or your cell phone from home. We strongly recommend that your family back home use Skype to call your cell (they would buy credit with Skype). The connections are much clearer this way, and it's usually slightly cheaper than calling from landline phones.

Internet

The host families have WIFI and you are welcome to use it. There are also Internet cafes with WIFI. Please consider creating a new email address (Gmail or Yahoo) to be used only during your trip. The reason is security - since you'll be using public computers during your stay, you don't want anyone gaining access to your true personal email account. This may sound a bit paranoid, but it does happen to international travelers.

For Women Travelers

As a female visitor in Guatemala, you are likely to experience unwanted attention from men. The sexual attention will usually amount to “come-ons” and inappropriate comments. Very rarely will there be inappropriate touching or actual assault.

Keep in mind that you are not at home and that different rules apply. Women generally play a submissive role to men in Guatemala. A woman who acts like a man will not be respected. Men you meet may misinterpret your appearance, body language, or simple presence as invitations to approach you. Even a smile to a stranger may be misunderstood. You will need to modify your behavior in order to avoid unwanted attention.

Here are some tips on avoiding unwanted attention:

- Do not wear skimpy clothes
- Some women wear a “wedding ring and say they are married
- Never admit that you’re traveling alone. Tell people that your boyfriend or husband will be along shortly to join you
- Steer the conversation in another direction by asking questions – about local culture, politics, news
- Use humor to diffuse the situation
- If the man persists, be very direct and firmly tell him to stop, and be specific
- Walk in a group at night
- If you go to nightclubs, go with a group of friends
- Do not go to a secluded area or hotel/apartment with a man you do not know well

Returning Home

When you return home from your trip, the “reverse culture shock” can be just as significant as the culture shock when you arrived in Guatemala.

- Returning home is often not a predictable process and can be more stressful than you anticipate.
- You might find yourself different than you were before you left home.
- You might feel like a “stranger” even among friends and family.
- You might get frustrated because it is difficult for others to know what your experiences have meant to you and how you might have changed.
- You may need significant time to return to your old roles and relationships.
- Be aware that things at home may have changed while you were away, both in the society and among friends and family. Even if you have heard about these events, the impact at home may not have been obvious.
- Your friends and family might notice that you have different patterns of behavior, speech, or new attitudes.
- Strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. You might be missing overseas friends, a stimulating environment, the feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedoms or responsibilities, or special privileges.

Some strategies for coping with returning home:

- Make contact with other volunteers who have successfully gone through the experience of returning home from abroad. This can help you through a difficult period of re-adaptation.
- Maintain personal and professional contacts with friends and institutions in Guatemala.
- Write and reflect about your experiences in a journal. This can be private or can be shared with friends, family, or the world (via a blog).
- Tell others your stories, show them your photos and videos.
- On a medical note: If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness up to one year after returning from Guatemala, seek immediate medical care and tell them you were in Guatemala.

AND FINALLY . . .

The following was written by a seasoned world traveler and friend of Cosmic Volunteers. We have always found it inspiring.

Make the most of every moment. Explore side streets. Take miracle walks. Perform random acts of kindness: buy fruit and share it, give flowers, pass out pens, coins and other useful and interesting things. Say hello. Smile. Take pictures. Share them. Learn about the depth of poverty. Count your blessings. Refuse to take things for granted. Give presents carefully. Play with everything. Share your toys. Blow bubbles. Spread laughter. Be kind to animals. Offer to help. Clean up your own mess without being asked. Clean up someone else's mess too. Ask questions. Answer questions. Collect addresses of people you meet. Send them postcards and email from home. Be aware that you are foreign and exotic. Hold babies. Giggle with children. Listen to old people. Be brave. Invite a dangerous stranger to dinner. Pay the bill. Learn to say thank you in the local language. Sing out loud, songs you sang as a child and songs children will teach you. Try something totally new. Don't just sight-see – sight-think. Donate energy. Spend time. Give hugs. Be thoughtful about donating, spending, and giving money. Support good work done by local people, buy a man a bike, pay a child's school tuition, offer a mother seed money and supplies to start a small business out of her home. Teach. Learn. Explore your own cultural perspective. Be subjectively aware. Touch the world. Allow the world to touch you. Come home safely . . . And remember, a true gift of seeing the world is to return where you started and see your place for the first time.