



WORK EXPERIENCE: CARE ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA



With majestic volcanoes rising out of lush green rainforest, highland villages steeped in tradition and vibrant, spirited people, Guatemala put quite simply is a magical destination!

A natural paradise that ranks at the pinnacle of biological diversity for Central America, this 'Land of Eternal Spring' plays host to 19 ecosystems and a staggering array of flora and fauna, set amidst mountainous forest highlands, jungle plains and glistening volcanic beaches.

The unique geology of Guatemala also includes a tremendous system of above-ground and subterranean caves, which the indigenous Maya believe serve as mystical portals between our world and the underworld. Rising between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, Guatemala covers an area just slightly smaller than England where rich coffee, cacao, fruit and sugar cane grow in abundance.



Brilliantly coloured weavings and textiles abound at the endless array of raucous fiestas and bustling market stalls, hinting at the magnificent human tapestry of living cultures which colours daily Guatemalan life and captivates even the most worldly of travellers. Guatemala is also famous for its kaleidoscopic buses!



For many, Guatemala's rich and often turbulent history is another enticing aspect of visiting the country. Characterised by the rivalry and struggle between the indigenous Maya and colonising Europeans, this sometimes harmonious but often violent relationship is deeply rooted in the country's history and still plays a role in modern day politics.

Guatemala was the centre of the great Mayan civilisation from about 300 to 900 A.D. From the crumbling ancient ruins of this lost civilisation to the colonial architecture of the cobble-stoned villages, history oozes from every pore of Guatemala's towns and cities, hinting at an infinitely complex past which continues resonate into the present as different cultures mingle in this fascinating melting pot of humanity.

In the wildly beautiful Central highlands, the indigenous Mayan Indian culture still dominates, whereas in the sprawling metropolis of Guatemala

City you are likely to see a colourful population of Ladinos, descendents of Europeans and Indians, African immigrants and the predominantly Hispanic European minority.

Beautiful **Antigua**, where all of our placements are based, is arguably the most picturesque and certainly one of the oldest cities in Central America, characterised by a mellow, yet distinctly international feel. The local residents of Antigua are warmly referred to as Green bellies or *panza verde* due to the abundance of avocados that grow in the region.

Antigua's splendour is protected by three giant guardian volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango, providing a stunning setting which attracts thousands of visitors every year. Antigua is one of the most popular places in Central America to learn Spanish so you are bound to meet lots of other students and travellers!

As for **things to do** with your spare time, whether you're an adventure-mad extreme sports enthusiast or a nature-loving bird-watcher, Guatemala's awesome unspoilt natural habitat will have something for you. The extraordinary terrain around the volcanoes and caves provides the perfect setting for **mountaineering** and **caving** (spelunking) whereas the fast-moving rivers are ideal for **boating**, **white-water rafting** and **windsurfing**, with Lake Atitlán also popular for **diving**.

Besides this you can also find ample opportunity to go **mountain biking**, bathe in **hot springs** surrounded by lush green jungle, or indulge your passion for nature in one of the country's national parks - you might even catch a glimpse of the resplendent quetzal, Guatemala's national bird.

Doing a placement in Guatemala will give you a chance to immerse yourself in this fascinating culture and to explore one of the world's most naturally diverse and beautiful lands. Whether you are doing a teaching placement or learning Spanish, amazing Guatemala is bound to leave a lasting impression!

ABOUT THE CARE CENTRE

The centre looks after children and adults in various conditions who all need higher care than they could or would receive at home. The organization is run by youngsters and adults who have dedicated themselves to helping others.

People arrive at the organization from all walks of life... From families with few means at their disposal, who with the best will in the world do not have the time or the skills required to take care of their loved ones. Some arrive at the centre after being abandoned by their families... Others have simply grown old and require more assistance than their families can provide. Some are sick or are simply patients requiring rest and are unable to stay in a normal hospital.

The centre is based in an absolutely beautiful traditional Guatemalan building in Antigua.



Areas of the Hospital... What are they and how do they work?

Center For Recovering From Malnutrition

With the help of the volunteers the centre cares for children with varying degrees of malnutrition. The centre also cares for children who are waiting for operations for childhood diseases. The centre is also devoted to work caring and treating children suffering from cleft palates. The children need to be given medicine for stomach problems, receive check-ups and to receive the kind of stimulation that any young child needs to develop their motor skills and cognition. The centre also provides education to the mothers teaching them how to care for their child's needs.

Centre For Handicapped Children

Care is provided for children with Down's syndrome, quadriplegics, hydrophiliacs, spina bifida and cerebral palsy, and asphyxias perinatal. The children receive attention from medics, Psychologists, paediatrics, physiotherapists, neurologists, and specially trained teachers at the school. Volunteers help to stimulate the children to help with their development.

These children need lots of care and love they receive physiotherapy, speech therapy, stimulation, play, daily care, and through the help of everyone involved they get to experience constant interaction and movement. Wheelchairs amongst other things are provided to keep them mobile as much as possible. .

"Mente Sana" - for Adults and "Special" Youngsters

They take care of men and women with permanent incapacity, both physical and mental; the frequent diagnostics is setback in mental development, following convulsive syndrome, aggressive behaviour and schizophrenia. Most of the patients need round the clock care.

Centre for "Incapable People"

This works just the same as 'Mente Sana', in that they take care of men and women with permanent incapacity, both physical and mental; the frequent diagnostics is setback in mental development, following convulsive syndrome, aggressivity and schizophrenia. Most of the patients need round the clock care.

Centre for Elderly Men

Here the men suffer from conditions and afflictions commonly found in men of an older age. They suffer from a range of dysfunctions they need the same love, care and attention as anyone else. They are provided with activities to keep their minds strong and active amongst other things.

Centre for Elderly Women

Primarily the centre works to accommodate women in their later years who don't have anywhere to live. They may also suffer from conditions and afflictions commonly found in old age. They are provided the same love,

care and attention as anyone else. Again activities are organised to keep their minds strong and active amongst other things.

Recovery Area

Here they take care for all kinds of general illnesses. Patients are provided with care and treatments necessary for their condition to ensure that they are spirited back to full health as soon as possible.

The Education Centre

Special School

The school teaches the children who live in the hospital. They give them the education directly suited to their level of understanding, providing the materials necessary for the lessons and of course bringing bucket loads of dedication. The school is very aware of making the lessons fun and interactive and ensuring that they have fun while they learn. Being stuck in a hospital isn't much fun for anyone so the school makes sure that they know how to show them a good time as well teaching them.

Kindergarten

Just like any other crèche/kindergarten they take care of the younger children who are too young to go to school. Many of the children's mothers go to work in the market.

Manual Work & Craft School

All kinds of crafts work is taught here at the centre. It really is fabulous to see. Everything that's made is sold to bring in funding.

ABOUT YOUR WORK

As the centre deals with a large variety of ailments and has many 'areas', you will need to be extremely flexible in the work that you do. You could be playing with, changing and feeding babies one day, helping elderly men another day and teaching English to the staff on another day. You must be comfortable with assisting in any of the areas listed above, and also in any other activities the centre requires of you – the list above is by no means exhaustive. You must be prepared to get your hands dirty and have your patience tried and your heartstrings tugged. This is an excellent project which volunteers really enjoy, but isn't always an easy ride, so come prepared!

It's also very important to use your initiative on this project. You should ask questions, ask for work if you feel like you're at a loose end and generally make yourself helpful in any way you can. The staff at the centre are very busy and the volunteers can't always be their top priority, so you'll need to be prepared to put yourself forward for tasks and be inquisitive about everything you do. If you can do this, you'll get far more out of your project – you get out what you put in.

YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

You will need to have a good level of Spanish, at least A-Level or equivalent to participate in this project. As medical terminology is likely to be used at the centre, it is also highly recommended that you take some extra specific Spanish lessons before starting your project, even if you're already confident in general Spanish. APPE can arrange these specific lessons, where you'll learn medical terminology, which will not only be useful to you on the project but perhaps also in your future career.

If you have a low level of Spanish or no Spanish at all, you are still welcome to come on the project, but it is a requirement that you spend some time learning Spanish with APPE before starting work at Comities of Obras Sociales del Hermano Pedro. It usually takes between 4-8 weeks to reach the required standard of Spanish. If you were comfortable with languages at school and feel confident about languages in general, you should be at the lower end of the scale.

It is also possible to arrange Spanish lessons for you during your volunteering if you have a lower level of Spanish but would like to brush up on your skills. Please speak to your Project Co-Ordinator about your level of Spanish so that we can discuss the option that's best for you.

You also need to have an interest/qualification or some knowledge about care work to take part in this project, as the work is quite specific and can sometimes be quite trying. No formal qualifications are required, but you must either be studying a related subject, qualified in a related subject or intending to peruse a related subject as a career or as study. Please talk to us about acceptance criteria, as we can usually be very flexible if your intent is there.

SUPPORT

We provide each volunteer with a *Teaching Suggestions Guide* which will be invaluable in helping you to structure a lesson and will give you lots of ideas for topics and materials to use in your classes. Our support staff in Guatemala are excellent and there is a 24 hour emergency international telephone line direct to the Head Office.

You'll also receive lots of help from the very friendly and helpful staff at your school, who are professional teachers, in structuring your lessons and general assistance in teaching. Whatever teaching experience you've had in the past, even if it's the first time you are standing up in front of a class, as a Travellers volunteer everyone will know that you are there simply to give whatever help you can – that's the whole point of volunteering through our organisation.

ON YOUR ARRIVAL IN GUATEMALA

You will fly into Guatemala City Airport where you will be met by Mr Leonel Garcia, a member of Travellers staff. Leonel will introduce you to the area and escort you directly to your homestay accommodation. The next day you will be met at your accommodation and taken to the site of your placement. Our staff on the ground will ensure that you are given a full induction and orientation around the town of Antigua.



Travellers General Manager in Guatemala is Ms Lilian Santizo (right), who lives just outside Antigua. Lilian will oversee your placement and be on hand for help, advice and support throughout.

ACCOMMODATION & FOOD



Accommodation with host families means that Travellers volunteers get to eat, sleep, work, socialise and generally live like a Guatemalan. Local family homestays enable you to fully experience the local culture *from the inside*. Many of our volunteers remain friends with their host families long after they leave Guatemala and in some cases they return to the country later especially to visit their family.

Some homestays are more like small hotels, which can accommodate between 1 and 10 volunteers at any one time. Many offer the option of single or shared rooms, and generally houses within the same town are in close proximity with each other.

The accommodation is comfortable, with a 'western-style' bathroom (usually shared with the family).

For the more independently-minded traveller, we also work with families who will ensure that your needs are taken care of whilst leaving you free to come and go as you please. Please let your Project Coordinator know your preferences, and we will make sure that you are placed in the most suitable accommodation.

All of your meals will be provided from Monday to Saturday, leaving you free to sample local eateries on Sundays. Expect to develop a taste for corn tortillas, tostadas and tacos in plentiful supply! Although it could be said that the emphasis with Guatemalan food is more nutritional than culinary, western and international dishes are also easily available in Antigua.

Although Guatemalans are big on eating meat, we can easily cater for vegetarians as long as we know in advance.

THE NEXT STEP

If you wish to join us on one of our exciting projects then please fill in either an online application form at our website (www.travellersworldwide.com) or one that is attached to our brochure. Once you have booked and confirmed your place we will send you detailed pack information regarding your placement and country.

I do hope you join us and please do call or email if you have any questions at all about this or any of our other projects – 01903 502595 or email info@travellersworldwide.com

If you would like to know more about Guatemala in general, or about any of our other projects, please visit our website at www.travellersworldwide.com

TRAVELLERS WORLDWIDE

7 Mulberry Close

Ferring

West Sussex, BN12 5HY

Tel: +44 (0)1903 502595

Fax: +44 (0)1903 500364

Email: info@travellersworldwide.com

