



SOS Sending Out Servants

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MISSION TRIPS

The purpose of this document is to give the viewer information on commonly asked questions to those thinking about going on a mission trip. It would fill an information gap for those unable to attend Information Meetings.

REASONS TO GO

In 1998 Sending Out Servants (SOS) began sending teams to the mountainous area of Quiché, Guatemala as a Ministry of Presence to the indigenous Maya communities who were beginning the long process of recovering from a 36 year long civil war which left them physically, emotionally, psychologically, economically and spiritually devastated. Throughout the years, SOS missionaries concur that what they received during their encounter with the Maya was much greater than what they gave.

You too, may want to take advantage of this life changing opportunity which offers you some of the following opportunities:

- To attain a new level of understanding of the social, economic and spiritual implications of life that exists in 90% of the world
- To be a part of God's work to unify His Mystical Body thru the sharing of your talents, skills and presence to the Maya.
- To be open to a spiritual transformation that comes in living out the Gospel message of love.
- To see the world a little more as it is and as God sees it.
- To see where God lives and acts in the lives of others who have few material possessions
- To immerse yourself in an ancient indigenous culture and learn from them..
- To have a cross cultural faith sharing exchange with your faith family living miles away.
- To grow in appreciation and sensitivity to people of other cultures.
- To bring hope to those who live in generational poverty.
- To view your culture from another prospective.
- To learn what it means that " no one is so poor they have nothing to give and no one is so rich that they have nothing to receive."

SOS's goal is to provide a positive, quality experience for you and your teammates as well as for the Maya we encounter.



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There are some key factors that will insure a mutually positive experience:

- Commitment to the mandatory Team Formation Meetings which integrates vital cultural and spiritual aspects into your mission experience.
- Being well prepared for your role in the mission activity.
- Respect for the goals and direction from your team leaders and the Maya and their leaders.

SOS INTRODUCTION

Who we are...

We are Sending Out Servants, (SOS), an independent 501 (c) (3) non-profit Catholic lay mission organization based in Houston, Texas, called to serve as a Ministry of Presence among the indigenous Maya in the mountainous Quiché area of Guatemala.

Founded in 1998 by Ernest and Connie Braren and Rev. Thomas Ponzini, it was established as a vehicle through which men, women and youth over sixteen years of age could put their faith into action in the context of a seven to eight day foreign mission experience. SOS is endorsed by both, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and the Diocese of Quiché, Guatemala.

Through frequent visits and cross cultural exchanges with the Maya, SOS focuses first on developing a long-term relationship of mutual trust and respect within the communities. This is fostered by consistent visits to the Maya communities. Flowing from this foundation, SOS listens and responds to the expressed needs of the Maya in a manner that will empower and improve the short and long term quality of their lives. This is accomplished through diverse SOS Assistance Programs.

SOS has both Home and Travel Teams comprised of men, women and youth over sixteen years of age who have a strong desire to put their faith into action.

Home Team members put their faith into action by sharing their talents, God given skills and resources by: giving vital prayer support for the traveling teams, helping with administrative and team formation needs, supporting SOS Assistance Programs to assist Maya men, women and children and Maya communities in areas such as educational scholarship programs for Maya children, teachers' salary support, computer labs, chimney stoves.

Travel Team members put their faith into action by participating in a seven to eight day mission whereby they can enter into a Maya community for a cross, cultural, mutual exchange in areas such as: customs and traditions, family and faith challenges for children and adults, disease prevention etc. or they can participate in a Vision Clinic mission to test the impoverished for visual acuity, dispense eye glasses, accompany frightened patients throughout their cataract surgery experience.



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As a result of their short term mission experiences, most team members return home:

- with a new appreciation and sensitivity to people of other cultures.
- with an internal shift in how they view their culture, values, family life, material possessions.
- with a new understanding of the power of 'presence' i.e. 'being with' another and the disabling power of 'presents' i.e. 'doing for' or giving out hand outs.
- seeing how God lives and acts in the lives of others who have little material possessions but an abundance of faith and happiness.
- strengthened by their teammates and peers who seek also to please God and live the Gospel message of Love in their life.

We hope you will prayerfully consider 'putting out into the deep' - taking a leap of faith and join one of the SOS mission trips.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel & Luggage

- Mode of travel to Guatemala is via Continental Airlines. Flight arrangements are scheduled by SOS personnel who will secure Group Reservations for the team.
- If using Continental One Pass miles to offset your mission costs, you will be flying independent of the Group Reservation. Therefore, you need to inform the Mission Coordinator as soon as possible so your Group Seating Reservation can be released without penalty to you before the air carrier's deadline. Additionally, you will need to make your flight arrangements to and from Guatemala to coincide with the team flight times.
- If you live out of state, you will be responsible to make your connecting flight arrangements to Houston Intercontinental Airport so as to be on the same flight as the main team leaving for Guatemala. Costs of connecting flights would be an additional cost to a team member.
- Flight schedules, payment deadlines and terms/conditions of the airline will be provided to you by your team formation coordinator well in advance of the first team formation meeting.
- Mode of travel from Guatemala City airport to the place of lodging in Santa Cruz del Quiché is via Mini Buses or vans. It is approximately a four hour drive involving one short stop.
- Daily mode of travel from the place of team lodging in Santa Cruz del Quiché, to the



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mission site is via mini buses.

- Team members are required to pack most of their personal belongings in one carry-on-bag and back pack. This allows the checked luggage space to be used for mission activity supplies and donations. Airline security requires all liquids (3 oz. each or less) to be put in a quart sized plastic bag and be ready to access to show security attendants as you go through security screening areas both in Houston and Guatemalan airports.
- If just before actually boarding the plane, you are told your carry on has to be checked in, you will be responsible to get it off the turntable at the Guatemalan airport. It is helpful if beforehand you put some type of obvious ID on your suitcase so it can be easily identified.
- During Formation Meetings, your team leaders will be updating you on any changes in airline flight schedules and providing your family members with emergency contact information.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

- Costs of the mission trip fall into two categories: Fixed and unfixed expenditures. Fixed Expenditures include: team member emergency travel insurance, hotels, meals, ground transportation, airport exit taxes and tips. Fixed expenditures currently range between \$500 to \$600 per person. Unfixed expenditures cover airfare, airline and airport taxes and are subject to last minute fluctuations. Flight costs can range anywhere between \$550 to \$750 per person. SOS personnel constantly monitor flight rates so as to secure the lowest fare for the team.
- If using Continental One Pass miles, you can offset the unfixed expenditure
- The Mission Coordinators will send you the due dates for trip payments. Please honor these payment deadlines unless other arrangements have been made with the Coordinators. An Extended Payment Plan is available if needed.
- The total amount paid to SOS, a 501 3c non-profit organization, is a TAX-DEDUCTIBLE contribution. For your tax purposes, you will receive a letter from SOS by January indicating the amount of your contribution.
- In some circumstances, subsidies might be available to offset a portion of the mission trip costs or fund raising strategy ideas offered.

Additional expenses not included:

- Passport and immunization expenses if applicable.
- Cancellation penalty imposed by airline if you cancel your trip after ticketing deadline.



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- Team members are asked to pack in their airplane carry-on their personal five day supply of sweet or salty items to add to the sandwich provided them daily.
- Spending money for shopping and souvenirs: average spent is \$50 - \$100. Money will be exchanged for Guatemalan currency (Quetzales) at the Guatemala airport or as soon as travel schedule permits.
- Spending money for your meals if you go over announced mission budget.
- Non-emergency need to return home.
- All expenses incurred due to loss of your passport.
- Medical expenses incurred if necessary to seek non- emergency medical attention while on mission. SOS travel insurance only covers Emergency situations.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY IMMIGRATION

U.S. Passport or Visa is required and must be valid for at least 6 months prior to the date of departure from the U.S. to Guatemala.

Parental Consent Form

Youth under 18 years of age, traveling without BOTH parents must have a signed and Notarized Authorization from their parents to travel with the SOS team. This document must include permission by parents for the child to leave the United States without their parent and designate the team leader to act on behalf of their parents in case of emergency or sickness/accident.

This Form is available from SOS Mission Coordinators.

INITIAL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY SOS FOR INQUIRER'S

- Inquirers' and those discerning whether to join one of the SOS mission teams, should submit the Pre-Application Form indicating area of mission interest.
- Submitting the Pre-Application does not obligate you or SOS in any way nor does SOS share your personal contact information with other entities.
- By submitting the Pre-Application Form, Inquirer's will receive notices of Information Meetings and mission updates to help them further discern if one of the mission trips is for them.



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DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR NEW TEAM MEMBERS TRAVELING

If you decide you definitely want to go on one of the upcoming SOS missions; several forms **MUST** be completed and returned to SOS **before** you can be officially placed on the:

- **Preliminary Air Carrier Group Reservation List** and the
- **Preliminary Team Roster List**

Those Forms to be completed and returned are:

- The Contact, Interest, Information Form,
- SOS Trip Application Form
- What Am I Committing To?
- Covenant with God, my Teammates and Leaders.

Upon receiving these documents, you will be contacted to arrange an Interview with Mission Coordinators to meet one another and answer your questions.

Based on space availability and skills needed to execute the mission activity you will be advised of placement on the Final Team Roster.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What will we eat and drink?

- Only purified sealed bottled water is safe to drink in Guatemala. Team members will have access to purified water throughout the mission trip. Soft drinks are available at dinnertime.
- Safe, nutritious and delicious breakfasts and dinners are prepared at a trusted local restaurant in Santa Cruz del Quiché where team lodges. Team members are given sack lunches to take to mission site.
- In Antigua, meals are taken at restaurants.

Where will we sleep?

- Team members stay in Hotels and share a room with one or two other teammates. Each room has a bathroom with sink and shower that usually has hot water.



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Daily Schedule

- Keeping in mind that plans always change, a typical schedule would involve rising by 6:00 am, walking a few blocks for breakfast, boarding vans for a 40 minute ride to the mission site in the country, returning at 4:00 pm to the Hotel, walking a few blocks for dinner, returning to the Hotel to prepare for the next days mission activity, celebrating Mass/ reflection time and retiring by 10:00 pm.
- A more detailed Daily Schedule is given to you during team formation

Electronics and communication

- Bringing cell phones, iPads, iPods, iPhones, laptop computers, etc. with you on mission are strongly discouraged not only because they will hinder you and your teammates to fully enter into the mission experience but also because they could be stolen. They definitely may not be brought to the mission site.
- Upon arriving in Guatemala, all of the above electronics are prohibited from being used. Your team leader will have an SOS cell phone for logistic and emergency purposes. When necessary, team members can briefly use the SOS cell phone at a designated place and time of the day.
- Safe Arrival Notification: Your team leader will place a call to the phone tree volunteer in the States to inform them of the teams' safe arrival. The volunteer will then contact the person you designated on your Safe Arrival Contact Form of your safe arrival.
- Please inform your family and friends that you are asked to not call or communicate with them so as to more fully enter into the mission experience. In the event of a family emergency, your family members will be given a schedule of your location along with emergency numbers to contact you if needed.

HEALTH INFORMATION

Missioners traveling to Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala, and visiting rural areas, will be at an elevation of approximately 6500 ft. with limited access to immediate emergency medical attention.

Although —regarding immunizations— nothing is required by Guatemalan or U.S. governments, SOS recommends that missioners take the necessary precautions to prevent contracting viral, bacterial or parasitic transmitted diseases which commonly occur in areas of poor hygiene via contaminated food and water.

SOS makes the following preventative recommendations:

- If you are currently under a doctor's care or if you suspect that the trip might impact your



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health negatively in any way, consult your personal physician to determine what he/she recommends for your personal health needs.

- Inform your physician that you will be at an elevation of 6500 ft, walking on inclines sometimes, and not near to immediate emergency treatment.
- Be sure you have received a **Tetanus and Diphtheria booster (TD)** within the past ten years. If not, you will need a booster.
- **Hepatitis A Vaccine** – Hepatitis A virus is transmitted via a fecal-oral route which missionaries could be exposed to via contaminated food and water or close contact with infected individuals. The incubation period is one month. The hepatitis A vaccine requires 1 injection at least 1 month *prior* to travel to ensure protection and a booster 1 year later. This vaccine is permanent.
- **Traveler's Diarrhea** is a common illness caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites. It is usually a self-limited illness lasting several days.

Preventative measures...

Food and Liquids

AVOID foods that have not been cooked, fruit you have not peeled yourselves, liquid that has not been boiled or prepared with purified water (including ice), undercooked meat and seafood, salads or raw vegetables and dairy products.

Medicine

Do not take antibiotics *to prevent* traveler's diarrhea. Pepto Bismol can be taken prophylactically (2 tablets four times a day)

Treatment

Imodium (antidiarrheal): 2 mg.: 4 mg. initially, then 2 mg. orally after each loose stool, to a maximum of 16 mg. per day. Do not use if having fever or bloody stools. Limit your diet to clear liquids, soups, and toast. Ciprofloxacin (Cipro): 500 mg. twice daily for 3 days

Team Leaders will have first-aid supplies available in case of minor cuts, abrasions etc. Although a government hospital is located near the place of lodging (usually not near the mission site) in case of emergencies one cannot depend upon specific medications or treatment to be readily available. So be sure to bring any prescribed medications you must take regularly or that you prefer and pack it in your carry-on luggage.

General Comments

Individuals with certain health conditions may be at greater risk when exposed to high elevations, dusty and musty environments and areas where there could be contaminated food and water. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you discuss all the above possibilities with your health care physician before committing to a mission trip.



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INSURANCE

All SOS travel team members are provided with short-term International Travel Medical *Emergency* Insurance coverage. Since this is limited to medical emergencies, you are advised to check with your U.S. health care insurance plan to determine if non-emergency medical care outside the United States is included in your medical insurance plan.

Your team leaders will carry a synopsis copy of the SOS Coverage plan with the name of the underwriter and a brief description of the benefits and coverage.

For medical non-emergencies or accidents while traveling out of the U.S. during your trip that lead you to seek medical attention, you will need to follow the protocols dictated by your U.S. health care insurance plan which might include paying the medical providers at the time of service and following up with your insurance company upon returning home.

It is very important that you notify your team leaders early on if experiencing a health problem.

SOS is not responsible for loss suffered due to illness, accident, injury or theft occurring at any time in relationship to your mission trip. This includes expenses incurred due to a lost or stolen passport. SOS will assist you however in dealing with these situations.

PROHIBITED CONDUCT

From the time you board the plane to Guatemala to the time you disembark the returning airplane to the U.S. the following conduct is prohibited:

- Smoking or smokeless tobacco of any kind
- Alcohol consumption (even if flying first class).
- Illegal drugs.
- Tattoos must be covered at all times and body piercing rings removed. Women may wear inexpensive pierced earrings.
- Fancy nails, colored nail polish, wearing of expensive jewelry including wedding rings, watches, clothes.
- Visitation among team members in each others room in the Hotel.
- Leaving the Hotel without permission of the Team Leader
- Going anywhere without a “buddy”.
- Talking about the civil war conflict with the locals or mission hosts.



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- Loud voices, horsing around, cursing, profanity or behavior that would draw attention and negatively reflect upon all the missionaries and the mission organization.
- Gossiping about team members, leaders, the Maya and their customs.
- Leaving trash/paper anywhere.
- Putting any type of paper product in the commode beginning with arrival at Guatemala airport to time of boarding the return flight.
- Eating food from street vendors.
- Giving anything away to the locals or Maya without firsts clearing with the team leaders.
- Bringing cell phones, iPads, iPhones, iPods , computer, etc. to mission site.
- Exchanging e-mail, phone numbers with locals.
- Disregarding dress protocols.

CLIMATE & DRESS

Climate...

Vision Clinic missions take place during the spring (Guatemalan wintertime) in mountainous region at approximately 6,500' elevation. Temperatures can range from 45° to 70° —with possibility of rain.

Faith Sharing Missions take place during the summer (Guatemalan springtime and rainy season) in mountainous region at approximately 6,500' elevation. Temperatures range from 50° to 80° —with frequent daily rain, mostly at night.

Dress Codes

SOS Dress Codes for both Vision Missioners and Faith Sharing Missioners teams strive to: reflect Christian values of modesty; to blend with the Maya, so as to not stand out; to not introduce western ways of dress or adornment.

Vision Clinic Missioners Dress Code

- **Air/Travel Clothes:**
Women can wear loose fitting blue jeans or slacks with a loose fitting modest neckline blouse (no low riders or bare midriff).

Men can wear blue jeans and a shirt or T-Shirt without advertisement. No sleeveless T-shirts.



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- **At clinic setting:**
Women can wear complete set of scrubs or mid calf skirt, dress/jumper and loose fitting blouse.

Men can wear complete set of scrubs or combination of blue jeans with a scrub top.
- **At restaurant in Quiché:**
Women Clinic Clothes or mid calf skirt, dress/jumper and loose fitting blouse

Men Can wear Clinic Clothes or blue jeans and a shirt or sleeved T-Shirt without advertisement.
- **For Sunday Mass:**
Women to wear casual mid calf skirt, dresses/ jumper with loose fitting, modest neckline blouse.

Men to wear blue jeans or casual slacks with a sleeved shirt. Casual slacks preferred .
- **Antigua [post mission site]:**
Same dress code as Air/Travel Clothes. Women can wear capri pants. Recommend shoes with good ankle support to maneuver cobblestone roads.

In hotel only: Warm ups or casual wear permitted.
- **Prohibited:**
For both men and women: Shorts,, Bermuda length shorts, culottes, sleeveless attire, midriff exposed or low riders, or clothes displaying secular or western images or advertisements such as beer, cigarettes, sexual or other suggestive images etc.

Faith Sharing Missioners Dress Code

- **Air/Travel Clothes:**
same as for Vision Clinic Missioners
- **At Mission Sites, Home Visits and Sunday Mass:**
Women: to wear casual mid calf skirt, dresses/ jumper with loose fitting, modest neckline blouse.

Men: to wear blue jeans or casual slacks with a sleeved shirt. Casual slacks for church preferred.



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- **At Restaurant in Quiché:**
Women: Same as Mission Site clothes - no jeans, slacks or warm ups.

Men: Same as Mission Site clothes
- **Antigua [post mission site]:**
Same dress code as Vision Missioners for Antigua.
- **Prohibited anytime, anywhere while on mission.**
For both men and women: Shorts, sleeveless attire, midriff exposed or low riders, clothes displaying secular or western images or advertisements such as beer, cigarettes, sexual or suggestive images etc. No spaghetti straps, or halter-top type dresses, or shirts.
- **In hotel only:**
Warm ups or casual wear permitted.