

From Houses to Homes

De Casas a Hogares • Guatemala

We are thrilled that you have chosen to volunteer with our organization!

This guide will provide you with information about your volunteer week with From Houses to Homes in Guatemala, as well as tips for making your adventure easy, safe, and fun.

Enjoy!

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Antigua Office

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Local Resources

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Overview

The volunteer opportunity is structured so that our volunteers can build an entire house for an impoverished Guatemalan family, from start to finish, in just 5 days.

We build Monday through Friday in communities surrounding the city of Antigua, where you will stay while volunteering with us.

The simple yet impactful house measures 13 x 19 feet and is made of cinder blocks, equipped with a door, window, and concrete floor. This house is a significant improvement from the cornstalk shack the majority of the families we work with reside in.

Our project encompasses a wide range of tasks, ensuring that there is something suitable for everyone to contribute. We only request that you contribute to the best of your ability. Children have a particularly enjoyable time participating in both the building process and engaging with the local children on the worksite. We have welcomed volunteers aged 5 to 85 years old, demonstrating that this opportunity is open to individuals of all ages.



Volunteer Donation

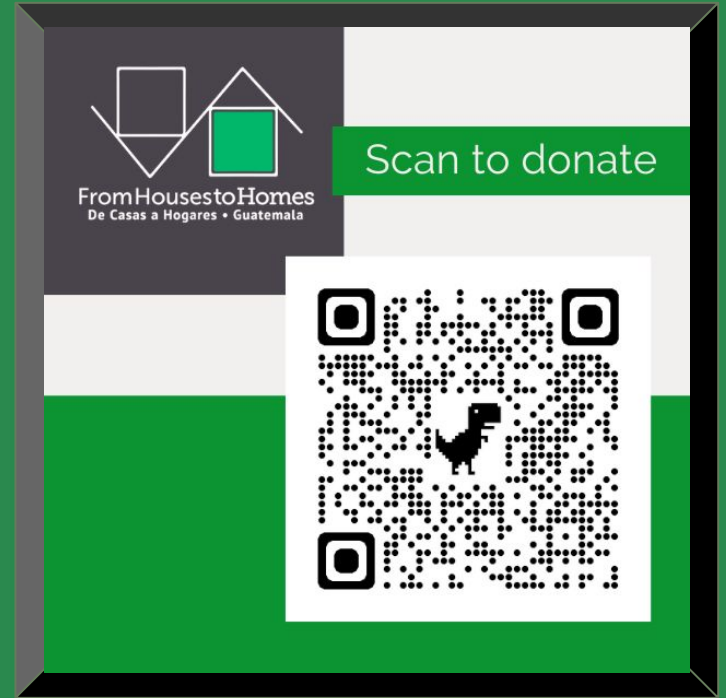
From Houses to Homes relies on the support of our volunteers to carry out our vital work. Therefore, all volunteers aged 13 and over must make a **\$500 volunteer donation** (*\$600 effective January 1st, 2024*). An adult must accompany all volunteers under the age of 18.

Mail checks to:

FHTH - Guatemala, PO Box 85, Mt. Tabor, NJ 07878 or pay online at www.fromhousetohomes.org and click DONATE.

Waiver

You will receive a separate email with an [electronic waiver](#) that must be signed before travel. *Minors must have a parent or legal guardian sign for them.*



Travel, Accommodations and Transportation to Antigua

You are responsible for all travel, accommodations and meals costs.

Please complete the *mandatory electronic traveler declaration immigration form* for entry to or departure from Guatemala at least 24 hours before your trip. *Physical single declaration forms are no longer valid.* You can access the form by clicking [here](#).

You fly into Guatemala City, to Aurora airport. We provide transportation to and from the airport. Upon exiting the airport, a driver will be waiting for you with a sign that says “FROM HOUSES TO HOMES”. If your driver is not present upon your exit, please give them a 10-15 minute grace period. If the driver is still not there, please text Judy Baker @972-214-1119, and she will take immediate action to locate the driver.

For those traveling independently, inform your driver of the name and address of your hotel. *Never accept unsolicited rides outside the airport.*

In Antigua, you have a variety of accommodation options to suit your preferences. From hostels and hotels to rental homes and condominiums, there are ample choices available. Another option is staying with a host family. Similarly, when it comes to dining, Antigua offers a range of restaurants catering to different price points, ensuring there is something to meet everyone’s needs.

Currency Exchange



Guatemala's currency is called Quetzales (pronounced: ket-za-lays), also referred to as “Q” for short.

The exchange rate is around Q7.50- 7.80 to \$1 USD.

Exchange a minimal amount at the airport if necessary, as rates are higher there.

ATM’s are located all around Antigua and preferred by most volunteers. You can also exchange hard currency at local banks.

Most businesses take American credit cards. Some will take U.S. dollars, but the exchange rates may be less favorable.



Safety in Guatemala

Just as in certain cities in the US, there are areas to avoid in Guatemala. With that said, Antigua is considered one of the safest cities in Guatemala. *However, it's essential to be careful and diligent wherever you are.*

Travel tips:

- Always be aware of your surroundings, especially at night
- Avoid walking alone at night on empty and poorly lit streets. You can find taxis in the Central Park and Uber is also safe and an inexpensive mode of transportation
- Avoid carrying large sums of cash
- Bring a color copy of your passport and keep it separate from the original
- Use reputable travel agencies to book leisure travel around the country
- Respect the local culture and customs, as you would in any foreign country

Health Care Considerations

Check with your MD about necessary immunizations. *We recommend an updated tetanus shot.*

Check how your health insurance works outside the US. Some travelers purchase travel insurance as part of their Guatemala travel planning. There are insurance plans available that cover theft, loss, or medical problems.

House Building Information

Volunteers are driven to and from the worksite by our staff in a pick-up truck. Most building sites are within 30-40 minutes of Antigua. The workday ends at approximately 4pm.

You will build under the supervision of masons employed by the organization. While some of them are proficient in English, most speak only a little. They are very eager to practice, offering you an excellent opportunity to improve your Spanish skills.

The building schedule is as follows:

- **Monday:** Dig the foundation, mix the mortar, pour and lay a row of blocks.
- **Tuesday/Wednesday:** Build 6 rows of blocks each day.
- **Thursday:** Shorter build day, allowing all volunteers to visit Escuela Kemna'oj, the school built and operated by From Houses to Homes. When you return to the worksite, the task for the day will be to pour the floor.
- **Friday:** While volunteers paint the inside and outside of the home with bright colors chosen by the homeowners, our masons install the door, window and roof. A dedication ceremony will be held at the end of the day and volunteers will present the key to the family's new home.



Notes about the Worksite

Lunch: You must bring lunch to the worksite each day. Pre-made sandwiches are available at several restaurants around Central Park, such as **Café Condesa** and **Sabe Rico**. Alternately, you can also make your lunch. **La Bodegona** is a grocery store located about three blocks away from the park. If you stay with a host family, they may pack you a lunch. *Avoid eating raw vegetables.*

Water: We provide purified water at the worksite so *bring a reusable water bottle. Do not drink any water offered by the family as it is most likely contaminated.*

Ice Cream: Ice cream carts or trucks are a common sight around the building sites, but we advise against buying from them as the *ice cream is made from unfiltered water.*

Note: The family you are building for may offer to prepare you a meal or offer you a drink. *Please be careful of what you eat and only drink the water we provide.* You can purchase sealed bottled water at local stores. If you have any hesitations, ask one of the masons if it is something you can eat. That said, our volunteers often enjoy a meal with the family on the last day.

Many volunteers ask what they can bring to the family. Children love coloring books, crayons, balls, frisbees, and bubbles and nearly everything else!

There are crucial items that families desperately need and cannot afford to purchase. These items are:

- **Groceries:** \$30/month or \$360/year
- **Water Filter:** \$35
- **Pila (sink):** \$50
- **Stove:** \$185.
- **Bunk bed:** \$250

What to Pack

- Work Clothes (T-shirts, comfortable pants, things you're willing to get dirty)
- Closed-toe shoes
- Sweater/rain jacket
- Hat for sun protection
- Sunglasses
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunscreen
- Small backpack to carry everything in
- Travel toilet paper for the worksite (*please note toilet paper does not get flushed; this is a critical septic issue.*)
- Disinfectant Wipes/Hand-Sanitizer
- ***Waterproof working gloves are essential!***



You can have your laundry done during your stay. There are numerous wash/dry/fold laundries in Antigua.

Guatemala is known for its “eternal spring” climate. While it may be warm or hot during the day, the temperature drops at night. The rainy season in Guatemala runs from May to October, so we advise bringing a raincoat or poncho. ***Dress is very casual in Antigua.***

Tourism in Antigua

Antigua is a beautiful, walkable city filled with historical and cultural treasures, surrounded by stunning volcanoes and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, which you can explore before, during, or after your volunteer experience.

Many volunteers usually come from Saturday to Saturday as it gives them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Antigua. It also allows for a free day to participate in excursions such as climbing a volcano, visiting Lake Atitlan, touring a coffee plantation, or going zip-lining, among many other great tourist activities.

Your travel schedule is up to you; however, we recommend completing the entire build because it is such a beautiful experience.



Here are a few of many sights there are to visit:

- **Arco de Santa Catalina/Santa Catalina's Arch**
Antigua's icon, the arch dates back to the 17th century
- **Cerro de la Cruz (viewpoint):** Within walking distance from Antigua, this is a quick option to spend some time enjoying the beautiful views.
- **Mercados de Artesanías/Handicraft Markets (main and El Carmen):** Find products and crafts made by people from all over Guatemala at both of these markets.

Churches and Convents

- Catedral San Jose (San Jose Cathedral)
- Convento de Santa Clara (Santa Clara Convent)
- Iglesia y Convento de San Francisco (St. Francis Church & Convent)
- Convento de Capuchinas (Capuchinas Convent)
- Iglesia y Convento La Merced (La Merced Church & Convent)
- AECID Cultural Center & Compañía de Jesús: Once a college and temple of the Jesuits, it is now run by the Spanish Agency for International Development and Cooperation (AECID), hosting regular cultural and educational activities.
- Convento de San Jeronimo (Saint Jeronimo Cloister)
- Convento de la Recolección (Recollet Convent)



Museums

- **Museo Nacional de Arte de Guatemala - MUNAG**: This fabulous museum, with its new addition opened in 2022, is centrally located in the Palacio de los Capitanes. It offers free audio tours in English and covers prehispanic, colonial and republican eras.
- **Museos Casa Santo Domingo**: This hotel, where once the temple and convent of Santo Domingo and Santo Tomás Aquino School were located, houses beautiful gardens and six museums: a colonial museum, archeology museum, museum of pre-Columbian art and modern glass, silver museum, and pharmacy museum.
- **Santo Domingo del Cerro**: Museums, galleries, restaurants and canopy.
- **Museo de Arte Colonial/Colonial Art Museum**: With great architectural beauty, used to be the home of the San Carlos de Borromeo University, this museum houses art of the XVI-XVII centuries. Across from the Cathedral.
- **Casa Popenoe**: Restored colonial casa-museo (*by appointment only*)



Rural Tourism

Finca La Azotea

- Cultural Center
- Fabulous coffee museum with tours
- Horseback riding
- Restaurants

Finca Filadelfia

- Coffee plantation tour
- Zip line, hiking, mountain biking
- Restaurant, hotel

Carmona Trails

- Mountain bike, hiking trails
- Restaurant

Valhalla

- Macadamia nut plantation tour
- Restaurant

Caoba Farms

- Organic, sustainable farm
- Restaurant



Recreational Excursions

- **Volcan Pacaya (one day trip):** An active volcano, approximately 90 minutes away from Antigua. You can hike up the slopes of Pacaya in 90 minutes to reach the top.
- **Volcan Acatenango (two day trip):** One of the three volcanoes surrounding Antigua, offering stunning views and the opportunity to witness the eruption of nearby Volcán de Fuego. You can spend the night at base camp.
- **Lake Atitlán (two day trip):** Beautiful lake with clear water surrounded by three volcanoes and colorful Mayan villages.
- **Chichicastenango (one or two day trip):** Located in the highlands of Guatemala, this vibrant and culturally rich town is renowned for its famous open-air market. Visitors can immerse themselves in the colorful tapestry of indigenous culture and experience the lively atmosphere of the market. You can combine it with the trip to Lake Atitlan.



Past volunteers recommend the following guides to help you plan your trips:.

- **Etnica Travel** (Tell Pablo Martínez you are volunteering with FHTH)
- **Elizabeth Bell Tours**
- **O.X. Outdoor Excursions**
- **INGUAT National Tourism Agency**
visitguatemala.com Casa del Turista
(5a. Calle oriente #11, Antigua)

Additional Information

Electricity: Outlets are the same in Guatemala as they are in the United States. No need to pack adapters.

Clinics: There are many healthcare facilities and pharmacies located around Antigua. If you encounter any health issues on the worksite, please let the FHTH builders working with you know as soon as possible. They can make arrangements for transportation to the most appropriate facility.

- **VitalMed:** A group of healthcare professionals available 24 hours a day. You may visit in person, receive a visit at your hotel, or contact them through chat on their [website](#).
Address: Road to Ciudad Vieja #80, Antigua.
Phone: +502-2339-9210.
- **Hermano Pedro Hospital:** Private medical facility in Antigua.
Address: Avenida La Recolección #4, Calle de Recoletos, Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala.
Phone: +502 7832 1190

There are additional hospitals in Guatemala City, approximately 1-hour drive from Antigua.

Thank You!

We are delighted to have you volunteering with us.

Please reach out to Judy Baker judybaker@fromhousestohomes.org with any further questions, or for more information and updates visit our [website](#).



Social Media

Please follow us on social media and feel free to share your photos and tag us



@fhthguatemala



fromhousestohomesguatemala4577



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