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## **MEXICO VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

### **Introduction**

This Handbook was written to provide you with useful information regarding your participation in an Amizade sponsored program. It answers many of the frequently asked questions by previous participants. We encourage your feedback on how it can be improved for future participants. Please read this entire handbook carefully and contact our office if you have any questions.

### **Amizade's Mission & Vision**

Amizade encourages intercultural exploration and understanding through community-driven service-learning courses and volunteer programs. Amizade imagines a world in which all people have the opportunity to explore and grow, realize their ability to make change, and embrace their responsibility to build a better world.

### **Amizade's Commitment**

At the heart of Amizade is the sincere belief that intercultural understanding & the development of global citizens is essential to our increasingly connected global world. We are committed to providing you with an intercultural experience that allows you to make concrete contributions to a community resulting in a deeper understanding of your role in the global community.

### **Approach to Service**

#### **Ethic of Service**

Amizade strives to promote an "ethic of service" on all our programs. This means that we envision the entire experience as one of service to our fellow human beings. There will be scheduled time for completing service projects on each program but we also encourage you to carry your ethic of service with you throughout the program. You can do this by volunteering to help with food preparation, cleaning, or various other daily tasks.

As guests in the host community, Amizade volunteers are encouraged to act respectfully in all community interactions. The global service experience provides a unique opportunity to learn from the traditions, beliefs, and customs of a new community. Since most Amizade volunteers come from outside of the community, they are often seen as "ambassadors" representing their countries and are able to use this opportunity to share positively about their culture. At the same time, volunteers have the unique opportunity of experiencing another culture while taking the time to absorb and respect new world views.

#### **Volunteer Opportunities**

While in Mexico, volunteer program types will vary. A customized volunteer program will be arranged specifically for your group. Please refer to your program sheet for more detailed information about your volunteer program.

## **The On-Site Experience**

### **Amizade Staff**

Amizade programs are staffed by a variety of motivated, trained people. We encourage you to get to know the staff members that will be coordinating your volunteer program. Any concerns or questions during the in-country experience should be directed to the appropriate Amizade staff.

### **Site Director**

The site director is the primary program contact responsible for coordinating volunteers. The site director is responsible for coordination of logistics such as greeting volunteers, arranging housing and meals and setting up cultural experiences with local community members. Coordination also involves setting up the service project, arranging transportation to and from various locations, partnering with local masons and builders, procuring building supplies, and any other related planning.



### **On-Site Orientation**

Upon arrival in Mexico, Amizade will hold a program orientation for all volunteers. Many issues such as health, safety, and security will be addressed as well as site logistics, standard procedures, and other important information that will benefit each volunteer to know.

### **Group Living**

Amizade programs generally have a strong core element built around group living. For many people, living, volunteering, studying, completing projects, and spending leisure time in a group may be new. Therefore we ask all Amizade volunteers to approach group interaction with flexibility, openness, and constructive communication. We strive to respect each other's space and needs while also supporting each other to achieve personal goals on the program.

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility on behalf of the participants is the most important element on an Amizade program. Itineraries may change at the last minute in order to meet current community needs or participate in unexpected opportunities for recreational, educational, or cultural exploration. Many aspects of traveling are unpredictable and time-consuming, so be prepared to enjoy the unexpected surprises and embrace the opportunities they provide!

### **Housing**

All volunteer groups will be staying at the Amar Inn, a locally owned and operated family business. There volunteers will be provided with towels and bedding. There is also a safe available at the Inn for secure storage of passports, etc.

### **Meals**

Eating abroad is an adventure of new tastes, smells, and meals! Since you are living as part of the community, you will have the opportunity to try genuine local dishes. You may be eating the same or similar food regularly if that is the local custom. Typical meals include tortillas, eggs, rice, beans, cooked vegetables, fresh fish, chicken, or pork and tropical fruits like papaya, mango, oranges, and bananas.

Breakfast and Dinner will be prepared and served at the Amar Inn. Lunches may be eaten at a local restaurant or prepared by the Amar Inn and carried to the worksite. Please refer to your specific program sheet to see your meal schedule.

### **Note to Vegetarians**

Vegetarianism is not very common in Mexico. On the contrary, fish and meat are highly prized and offered to a guest as a way of showing a family's hospitality. Realistically, vegetarians in a homestay can expect to eat cereals, eggs, rice, beans, cooked vegetables, fried plantains, and fruit like oranges or bananas. Amizade will make every effort to provide vegetarian options, but sometimes they will need to be supplemented with further protein and vitamins. We encourage vegetarians to bring healthy snacks

and vitamins with them. Please indicate your dietary needs and restrictions on your Amizade Medical Form so we can best prepare for you.

### **Transportation on Site**

Transportation will be arranged by Amizade for the duration of the program. Any travel that is not included in the itinerary will be the responsibility of the volunteers. Taxi's are available at an affordable rate.

### **Laundry**

There are several laundries in Puerto Morelos, self-service and drop off services that cost \$ 1 for 2 lbs. (clothes are washed together in one load). Small quantities of detergent are available in local groceries. We encourage volunteers to bring light, easily washable clothing.

### **Climate and Weather**

Puerto Morelos is in the Caribbean sub-tropics, with warm weather year-round. The daytime average temperature in Puerto Morelos is in the low 80s. The region benefits from cooling ocean breezes and intermittent showers during the rainy seasons, running generally from May through October. The hurricane season runs from June through November.

### **Cultural and Recreational Activities**

Volunteering in Puerto Morelos puts volunteers in the heart of a fascinating, beautiful community where recreational and cultural activities abound. Volunteers are often invited to cultural events such as community functions, weddings, funerals, and other local celebrations.

The Casa de la Cultura, an Amizade service partner, offers classes including yoga, Pilates, guitar, painting, and ceramics, and sponsors concerts in the plaza.

Within a short distance, volunteers have access to many other exciting recreational activities. There is the possibility to snorkel in the Great Mayan Reef, to visit the Jungle, beautiful botanical gardens or even ancient Mayan Ruins. Many volunteers opt to take a day trip to the Cenotes which are fresh water pools that were created over thousands of years ago when a meteor struck the Yucatan peninsula. Each of the 4 cenotes located in the area are unique and offer a different variety of activities from simply swimming in the cool, clear water to bicycle tours, zip lines, nature walks, and observation towers.



Please note that payments for recreational activities, unless indicated on the itinerary, are the responsibility of the individual volunteers. Amizade staff will be happy to provide volunteers with information about possible recreational activities as well as transportation if it is necessary.

### **Culture and History**

Welcome to the Center of the World, the Yucatan peninsula considered by the Mayans as their own sub-continent. According to the Mayan holy book the "Chilam Balam of Chumayel," this territory was first established by the Itzáes, who arrived from the south in the year 435 and founded Syancan Bakhhalal. The Mayan villages in what is today called Quintana Roo were originally part of the indigenous Confederation of Mayapán. The ruling chieftains on the Yucatan Peninsula were: Ekab, Chanac Ha, Tazes and Cupules to the north and center; Cochuah and Chetumal in the south. Gonzalo Guerrero and Jeronimo de Aguilar were the first Hispanics to make contact with the natives of the Eastern region of the Yucatan Peninsula. Sole survivors of shipwrecked Spanish expeditions, they were taken into captivity by Nachancán, the Mayan cacique of Chetumal. These men would father the first Mexicans, the first euro-indio, Hispanic-Mayan mix or *mestizos*.

Later Spanish expeditions failed in their attempt to settle the eastern Mayan region. In 1527 Francisco de Montejo arrived on Cozumel, and tried to colonize villages. Like his predecessors, he also had to retreat because of native hostility. Later, Alonso Dávila arrived in Tulum and Bakhhalal. Davila founded Villa Real, today called Chetumal, but had to abandon it due to continued attacks from the Mayans. In 1545 the Spaniards managed to overcome the chieftain of Bakhhalal. They renamed it the Villa of Salamanca de

Bacalar. Up to 1639 the Mayans of Quintana Roo had yet to be conquered. They continued a constant rebellion always retreating to the forest interior to regroup. It was here that they founded the famous Chan Santa Cruz, capital of the Mayan people's struggle, which never has been conquered.

Another Mayan rebellion exploded in Tepich. This civil war between classes was called the *Caste War*. In 1848 Mayan rebels devastated Bacalar. This war would last more than 50 years until 1901. The issues surrounding this uprising have never been fully addressed, and the restlessness and rebellion continue to the present day. The government has never obtained complete control of the natives of the eastern peninsula. These Mayans have fought continuously for the restitution of their land and to establish their own government. Indigenous heroes to this cause were Venancio Pec, Jacinto Pat, Cecilio Chi.

In 1901, the federal army managed to occupy Bacalar and Chan Santa Cruz, but the natives once again fled into the forest. Othón P. Blanco, with his peacemaking attempts, managed to approach the Mayans. He finally cajoled them into recognizing the Republic's government.

Several factors that led to the division of the Yucatan were the government's inability to control rebels and the loss of Mexican territory to Guatemala and Belize. The Mayan revolt essentially forced the creation of the Federal Territory of Quintana Roo. The Yucatan peninsula was finally divided by decree on the 16 of January 1902. This political maneuver appropriated 50,843 square kilometers on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula and called it the Territory of Quintana Roo.

Quintana Roo included all the territory that had formerly remained under Mayan control. In the "Porfiriato," as the presidency of Porfirio Diaz was called, the new territory fell under control of families who had enormous land holdings. Upon the victory of the Revolution, President Madero dismissed the "porfirista" authorities in the territory and released political prisoners.

In 1913, Quintana Roo was again annexed to the Yucatan. This provoked the rebellion of Abel Ortiz Argumedo in 1915. This action fired more indigenous opposition, and caused the territory of Quintana Roo to be recovered again in 1915. Then, the commander of the peninsular army, General Salvador Alvarado, traveled to the troubled town of Santa Cruz de Bravo where battles continued between the natives and federal soldiers. The General withdrew the troops and returned the besieged lands to the Mayans. Although their lands had been returned, the mistrusting Mayans destroyed all communication routes to the rest of the peninsula. Again in 1931, due to the federal government's economic difficulties, the state of Quintana Roo was again dissolved and its territory divided between the two states of Yucatan and Campeche. On the 11th of January, 1935, the federal government under General Cardenas, in response to the direction of Jose Marrufo Hernandez, re-established the territory of Quintana Roo with its former 1902 boundaries. Previously, the territory had been reachable primarily by sea. Under the revolutionary government new lines of communication developed: airports, radio stations, telephones and telegraph. These developments united Quintana Roo with the rest of the republic. Electrical, educational and health services multiplied, thus improving the lives of the inhabitants of Quintana Roo. Finally, in 1976, the people of the Territory realized their demands, and Quintana Roo was declared a Free and Sovereign State of the Mexican Republic.



## **Preparing for Your Program**

### **Transportation to Site**

Participants will fly in and out of the Cancun Airport. An Amizade staff person will meet you at the airport to transport you to the program site. All volunteers are required to arrive on or before the scheduled program start date and depart on or after the scheduled finish date.

### **Travel Documents**

The following information is for US citizens going abroad. If you are a non-US citizen, you must check with the consulate in your country regarding travel documents including passport and visa requirements.

The Government of Mexico requires that all U.S. citizens present proof of citizenship and photo identification for entry into Mexico. The U.S. Embassy requires that U.S. citizens entering Mexico possess a valid U.S. passport.

Please visit the following website for information on the entry requirements for US Citizens traveling abroad: <http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html>

### **Mexican Tourist Visa**

Foreigners entering Mexico will be issued a temporary tourist visa identified in Mexico as an FM-T. The visa will be valid for the number of days stamped on it upon entry. U.S. citizens are allowed to stay up to six months on this type of visa. Mexican law requires that this visa accompany your travel document throughout your stay in the country.

Visa forms are distributed during your flight to Mexico. You must complete the form and present it along with your travel documents when passing through immigration. When you complete this form, copy your name and any other information exactly as it appears on your travel document. Then store the visa with your travel document in preparation for your arrival.

When you pass through immigration upon your arrival, you will be asked the purpose of your visit and the length of your stay. If you are staying for 30 days or longer, inform the agent at this time. Be prepared to show your return ticket and departure information if necessary in order to secure the number of days you need.

If you are issued a visa for 30 days only, and your departure is on day 31, then you will be required extend your visa. This means you will pay anywhere from \$20 to \$40 to for an extension either at the airport or at Immigration in Cancun. If there is any chance that you may want to extend your stay in Mexico after your Amizade program, then try to secure a visa for the entire length of your stay. You will spend additional money plus an entire morning doing this. An expired visa at the airport means more red tape upon departure. You will still have to pay to validate the visa before you can leave. The same applies to lost visas.



Please be prepared in case of losing your wallet, passport, or other travel documents. Bring copies of all your important travel documents and monetary documents, especially your passport, and store one set of copies in your luggage while leaving another set of copies with your emergency contact at home.

## **Health & Safety**

### **General Notes**

- Traveling often affects one's health so it is imperative that all volunteers are in good physical condition.
- Typical travel ailments include stomach upsets and diarrhea, bug bites, jet lag, minor cuts, scrapes, bruises, and sunburn. Please feel free to bring travel-sized portions of over the counter medicines such as headache medicine, stomach medicines, sun block, bug spray, band-aids, etc.
- An on-site Amizade staff member will have a first aid kit.
- Check with your medical physician regarding further information about healthy travel abroad.

### **Immunizations**

Participants in Amizade programs are solely responsible for receiving immunizations. Amizade defers all recommendations to the current recommendations and requirements from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All participants are expected to consult the CDC for required and recommended immunizations for the country or countries they will be visiting for their Amizade program. See your doctor at least 4–6 weeks before your trip to allow time for immunizations to take effect.

The following information was taken from the CDC website, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), on July 26, 2006. Please check the website for up to date information.

**Recommended Vaccinations:**

- [Hepatitis A](#) or immune globulin (IG). Transmission of hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.
- [Hepatitis B](#), especially if you might be exposed to blood or body fluids (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, or be exposed through medical treatment. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11–12 years who did not receive the series as infants.
- [Malaria](#): if you are traveling to a malaria-risk area in this region, see your health care provider for a prescription antimalarial drug. For details concerning risk and preventive medications, see [Malaria Information for Travelers to Central America and Mexico](#).
- [Rabies](#), if you might have extensive unprotected outdoor exposure in rural areas, such as might occur during camping, hiking, or bicycling, or engaging in certain occupational activities.
- [Typhoid](#) vaccine. Typhoid fever can be contracted through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected. Large outbreaks are most often related to fecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors
- [Yellow fever](#), for travelers to endemic areas in Panama
- As needed, booster doses for [tetanus-diphtheria](#) and [measles](#).

**For more information:**

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Rd.  
Atlanta, GA 30333 USA  
(404) 639-3311 (404) 639-3312 (TTY)

Public Inquiries 1-404-639-3534 and 1-800-311-3435  
National Immunization Hotline (English) 1-800-232-2522  
National Immunization Hotline (Spanish) 1-800-232-0233  
Traveler's Health 1-877-394-8747

Traveler's Health Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>  
Email form: <http://www.cdc.gov/netinfo.htm>

**Prescription Medicines**

If you have prescription medicines, bring them in the original prescription bottles with your name on them and bring an ample supply for the duration of your program. In some countries, certain medicines are not as readily available.

**The Best Medicine is “Preventative Medicine”**

Throughout the program, please rest, drink plenty of water, and take care to avoid overexposure to the sun. While on the program, let the Amizade staff know if you have any concerns about your health and contact them immediately if you experience a health emergency.

**Amizade Medical and Insurance Form**

All volunteers are required to complete and submit the Amizade Medical and Insurance Form prior to participation. It is imperative that you complete this form as comprehensively as possible so Amizade staff can best address medical situations on site. On this form you will also list your immunization record. Please consult with your physician regarding your healthy participation in the service work and activities for your program and recommended immunizations.

It is the responsibility of every Amizade participant to make sure that they have adequate medical coverage for the duration of any Amizade program.

### **Safety**

As a volunteer in the community you will have local companions and friends. Volunteers should observe and imitate local customs regarding safety. Regardless of where you are it is best to travel in pairs, especially at night. We highly recommend taking a taxi after dark. Be cautious with your money and make sure you store it in a safe place or money belt.

Trust your instincts. If you do not feel safe in a situation or someone's behavior is making you uncomfortable, get out of the situation immediately. Firmly say "no" to any invitation you do not want and turn away. Ignore persistent overtures.

### **Money Matters**

#### **Currency Converter**

For the latest conversion rate for your country, please visit [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

#### **Spending Money**

Please bring some spending money to use for costs beyond those covered by the Amizade fee.

Mexico's currency is the Mexican Peso. There are one hundred Mexican *Centavos* (cents) to every Peso. Small coins are minted in denominations of 10, 20 and 50 *centavos*. Larger coins are in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10 and 20 pesos. Notes are printed in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 Pesos. The most commonly used Peso notes are 20, 50, 100, and 200.

Small Change/Notes in Mexico. Getting change always seems to be a perennial problem in Mexico. Try to save coins and small notes to use with independent traders. Spend larger denomination notes in big stores. Save smaller notes for taxis, local buses, and small purchases where the traders often don't have the available float to hand. About the Notes: The 20 (blue) and 50 Peso (pink) notes are slightly smaller than the 100 (orange), 200 (green) and 500 Peso notes, which are all the same size.

ATM's are available in Cancun and Puerto Morelos. It is very important to inform your bank that you will be using your card to withdrawal money while in Mexico. This will avoid the bank from issuing a "hold" on your card which prevents one from withdrawing money. Ask your bank or credit card service for the toll-free numbers to use from Mexico in order to cancel any of these cards. Keep these phone numbers together with your bankcard information in your room so it will not be lost. Stolen credit cards can be used within an hour of being taken, so it is important that volunteers have the necessary information on hand and do not have to rely on someone abroad who may not be reachable for hours. If you choose to bring traveler's checks, please keep in mind that they require photo identification, bank of issue information, and 2 signatures when you cash them. You will need to cash traveler's checks at Money Exchanges or banks.

### **Packing List**

#### **PLEASE PACK LIGHTLY!**

You should bring a maximum of two bags. Ideally, this includes one medium-sized suitcase/duffel bag and a smaller daypack for daily activities. You should be able to carry your luggage comfortably by yourself. Rolling luggage does not always work effectively in developing countries. Please use your best judgment regarding valuables. Amizade does not recommend that volunteers bring expensive jewelry, electronics, laptops, etc. Amizade is not reliable for lost or stolen articles.

**Recommended Packing List:** (Please keep in mind that if you are on an individual placement, you will not need to bring work clothes for the construction site)

- Documents: passport, airline tickets, personal health insurance information, and ATM/credit cards.
- Cash or traveler's checks and money belt or wallet
- Water bottle
- Notebook or journal and pens
- Travel alarm clock
- Watch
- Camera and film
- Knapsack or book bag
- Towel and Wash cloth (small towels dry faster in the humid tropical climate)
- Toiletries – just the basics such as toothbrush, toothpaste, travel-sized shampoo, deodorant, and soap.
- Prescriptions in original bottles (be sure to bring enough for the entire program!)
- Over-the-counter medications (headache, stomach, band-aids, anti-itch cream)
- Clothing - comfortable clothes for warm weather
  - T-shirts or 100% cotton tank tops
  - At least two pairs of pants
  - Shorts
  - One nice outfit
  - Socks and underwear
  - Pajamas
  - One long sleeve shirt, sweatshirt, or jacket (winter months mostly)
  - Bathing suit, sarong, swim trunks
- Shower shoes or flip-flops for bath and beach
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Lightweight, hooded rain cape
- Sun protection: bandanas, hat, sunglasses and sun block
- Flashlight, batteries, charger (preferably rechargeable as there is no recycling here)
- Insect repellent containing DEET (if you use natural repellents, be sure to bring a supply for long term stays as they will need to be applied frequently in order to be effective)

### **Gifts**

You may choose to bring small gifts or thank you cards for community members. Photographs are generally appreciated around the world so feel free to collect addresses and mail pictures back if possible.

## **While You Are Away**

### **Culture Shock**

Culture shock is a term used to describe the emotional upset that may occur when a person travels to a new culture. When experiencing culture shock, people sometimes feel unsure about what is appropriate in the new culture, confused about how to manage daily tasks (such as banking or telephoning), frustrated with managing language and cultural barriers and generally vulnerable. This experience is normal and affects people at different times throughout a cultural immersion program. Remember to rest, eat and take care of your physical and emotional needs in order to function at your best!

### **Drug Use**

Amizade in no way encourages the use of, or purchase of drugs while visiting any of our sites. As an organization, our primary concern is that of safety for our volunteers. For this reason, we adhere to a drug-free policy for all of our programs. We ask that all volunteers please respect this as a rule of Amizade. Failure to comply with this rule is grounds for removal from the program.

## **Contacting Home**

Phone cards can be purchased at several stores at a cost of 30, 50, or 100 pesos and will work at the public phones. You can also use ATT or other calling cards, but be sure you have the access numbers specifically for Mexico.

## **AMIZADE CONTACT INFORMATION**

If someone from home needs to contact a volunteer with an emergency message, they can phone the Amizade US office to relay a message.

- **Amizade US Office Phone:** 304-293-6049. This phone line is staffed 8 am – 4:30 pm EST from Monday - Friday.
  - Have the person leave:
    - Their name
    - Your name
    - Their phone number
    - The message to be relayed
- **Amizade Emergency Phone #:** 412-853-4032. This phone line is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during volunteer programs.

To call the United States from Mexico, dial 00-1-area code-local number. For instance, if you were to call Amizade from Mexico, you would dial 00-1-304-293-6049.

## **Returning Home**

### **Reverse Culture Shock**

Many participants find that they encounter difficulties when transitioning home. Volunteers will be happy to return home and visit with family and friends but after the initial reunions take place, they often find that they experience problems when trying to communicate the experience they had abroad. Many people feel alienated, knowing that they have grown while many of those around them remain the same. It may help to connect with others who have had similar travel experiences, as they understand the need to talk about the experience in greater detail.