

The following information is a list of frequently asked questions provided by ERD to groups planning to travel to El Salvador. Although it is country specific, some of the questions are applicable to other countries. Also, at the end of the document is a good list for individuals to consider when planning and packing for their trip. Please note that, although ERD has discontinued its trips to El Salvador, much of the information is still current as of 2008.

Solidarity El Salvador

General Information

El Salvador is a small, developing country in Central America that shares borders with Guatemala to the west and Honduras to the east. ERD sends volunteers to El Salvador to work in its national reconstruction effort which is a response to the 2001 earthquakes. Volunteers stay at the diocesan guest house in the capital of San Salvador and travel to work and visit sites from there. Some travel could be as long as 3 hours one way. You will arrive into El Salvador via the international airport in San Salvador (airport code SAL.)

El Salvador is tropical with a rainy season that lasts from May to October. It will rain most nights during this time, but rarely does it rain all day. The dry season, from November to April, leaves the country dusty. This could affect people with respiratory problems. The average temperature is about 88 degrees Fahrenheit year-round.

The Anglican/Episcopal Church of El Salvador has about 20,000 members in 12 churches and several missions. The church works with communities to improve their well-being. The mission of the church is to follow the path of Jesus with love and tenderness, to continue solidarity with marginalized members of society, and to provide a commitment of faith, hope, and love. The church has many programs providing health care, earthquake reconstruction, schools, theological education, and human rights. The priority of the church is to plant and cultivate a culture of peace and justice through Jesus Christ.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do volunteers do in El Salvador?

The bulk of a volunteer's time is spent working in one of ERD's projects. Most volunteer groups perform work related to the building of the ERD-funded housing communities. The work is non-technical in nature and if it requires training, it will be provided at the work site. Most work is somewhat physically strenuous (clearing brush, excavation, leveling, etc...) Tasks are assigned by the Salvadoran project staff when the volunteer group arrives according to the needs of the projects and safety and logistical considerations. For this reason, ERD does not offer groups a choice of the work they will do. We ask that you put yourself at the disposition of the needs of the projects.

There are also planned recreational activities including a trip to the beach and to the craft market.

2. How does this help?

Principally, you will be building relationships with members of the Salvadoran Episcopal community. You will meet and work with Salvadorans and will get to know a little bit about the problems facing El Salvador and the poor in other countries in general. Volunteers will learn from a limited cross-cultural exchange (ERD volunteer trips are not a full cultural immersion.) Visitors also help the local economy by bringing in tourism revenue. More than anything, having North Americans visit El Salvador brings faces to go with the funds that ERD provides. The fact that donors care enough to visit brings hope to the people ERD serves.

To a lesser extent, volunteer and beneficiary labor comprises a significant portion of the enormous amount of labor that goes into ERD projects in El Salvador. Your gift of your time will help us economize on labor and reach more people given our finite economic resources.

3. What are the accommodations like?

You will stay at either or both of the diocesan residences located at San Juan Evangelista Church in San Salvador and at the El Maizal ERD project site. Accommodations will be divided into separate facilities for men and women with a common meeting/dining area. Accommodations are basic with bunk beds and cold showers. Episcopal Church rules require adult and youth volunteers to be lodged in separate rooms. We appreciate and rely on your attention to this guideline for your protection.

4. How do I arrange the pilgrimage?

The first thing you need to do is to identify the people who will compose your group. You need a minimum of five people in your group but no more than twelve. Talk to your group members and decide when you are able to make a one-week trip. Contact ERD's volunteer coordinator at 1-800-334-7626 ext. 6105 to schedule your trip. In order to schedule your trip, ERD requires a \$200 per group non-refundable deposit that should be sent to Episcopal Relief and Development- Volunteer Coordinator, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017. Your group will need to arrange air transportation.

5. What is the minimum age?

The minimum age for volunteers unaccompanied by a parent is 14. Groups must have at least 1 adult chaperone per 5 minors (youths.)

6. What is the group size?

The maximum is 12 and the minimum is 5 people in a group. We cannot accept groups that are larger than 12 or smaller than 5 because of cost-effectiveness and accommodations.

7. Is there a maximum age for volunteers?

There is no maximum age, however please be advised that volunteer work is physical in nature, and some of the travel includes arduous drives on bumpy, dusty roads.

8. What is the cost of the program?

The breakdown of costs is as follows:

- 1) A \$200/group non-refundable deposit is due to ERD (send your deposit to: *Episcopal Relief and Development- Volunteer Coordinator, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017*) at time of trip scheduling. This money will go to support the activities of the El Salvador Program's volunteer coordinator whose work helps make your experience in El Salvador a productive one. It is not included in the expenses that you will pay in El Salvador.
- 2) Volunteers must arrange and purchase their own air transportation. Round-trip flights cost about \$600 (or closer to \$700 in the summer peak travel season) to San Salvador.
- 3) In El Salvador volunteers pay \$40 per volunteer per day (including both arrival and departure days...8 days for most groups) to the Diocese of El Salvador. This covers your local transportation, meals, lodging, and water. Volunteers may choose to pay this expense by check (personal, business, or bank) or in cash, as a group or individually (make checks payable to "The Anglican/Episcopal Diocese of El Salvador.")
- 4) We recommend about \$150 per volunteer in additional spending money while in country. For U.S. passport holders, there is a \$10 fee upon your arrival for your visa, and a \$30 exit tax. If you have other than a U.S. passport, please call a Salvadoran consulate to find out what visa rules apply to you.
- 5) We also highly recommend you consider obtaining travel insurance since most U.S. health insurance plans will not cover treatment abroad or medical evacuation. Coverage can cost as little as \$6/day and typically includes a death and dismemberment benefit, luggage loss protection, and most importantly medical evacuation to your home country in the case of an emergency. You may be able to obtain coverage through Church Pension Group at 1-800-223-6602. Also try www.insuremytrip.com on the internet.

Please note that only the initial trip deposit is paid to ERD.

9. What currency is used in El Salvador?

As of 2001, the official currency of El Salvador is the US Dollar, so no currency exchange is necessary when traveling to the country. ERD recommends bringing cash in denominations of no greater than \$20 because often merchants are suspicious of large bills and/or do not have change for them.

10. How will I communicate in El Salvador?

The language of El Salvador is Spanish. Groups are received by and accompanied during the week by an interpreter.

11. What kind of food will be served?

Food will be prepared for you at you lodging. You will be served a simple Salvadoran breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The meals are Salvadoran cuisine prepared by staff trained to cook for delicate North American stomachs. If you decide to eat

out for any meal, please let the staff know a day in advance so that they may plan ahead. Boxed lunches are available for days when volunteers are not at the lodging during lunch time.

12. Will we have the opportunity to worship?

Yes. We recommend getting together before your trip to pray together and meet as a group. ERD recommends that volunteers hold a group meeting every day to reflect on what they've experienced. ERD will provide you with a copy of an example Compline service. There may also be opportunities to attend Eucharist or other worship services and bible meetings in the Salvadoran community. Some volunteers choose not to participate in worship.

13. Can we drink the water?

NO! You will be provided with purified water both at your lodging and at your work site. We recommend that you use it to brush your teeth as well. Please do not give away your water. The people you will meet have their own source of water. We cannot provide water for all of El Salvador.

14. Should we bring our own bed linens and towels?

No, they will be provided for you.

15. Should we bring our own toiletries?

Yes. Note: El Salvador uses 110V 60Hz electricity just as in the US, so you can bring and use electrical appliances (ie blow-dryer, electric shaver, etc...) You should be aware however that power outages are frequent.

16. ¿Que hora es?

El Salvador is on Central Standard Time during North American Daylight Savings time and on Mountain Standard Time the rest of the year.

17. What do I need upon arrival in El Salvador?

US passport holders must have a valid passport. US passport holders will pay \$10 for their tourist visa in the immigration area. If anyone in your group has other than a U.S. passport, they should call a Salvadoran consulate and follow their instructions for obtaining a visa prior to travel. If you do not already have a passport, allow plenty of time to obtain one before the trip as that process can take as long as 4 months. ERD requires that you send us copies of all group members' passports and suggests you carry **a copy of** your passport as well. Passport theft is a danger. Report a lost or stolen passport immediately. After going through customs, you will be met at the airport by a church employee with your group leader's name.

18. Do I need any immunizations?

We recommend that you follow the Center for Disease Control's advice. They recommend vaccinations for diphtheria/tetanus, Hepatitis A and B, typhoid, rabies, and malarial prophylaxis. Depending on your physician's advice and health insurance, these may cost up to \$300.

19. Can we bring donations?

Consider making your gifts to El Salvador through ERD instead of directly. ERD's professional staff works hard to determine the best way to help the people of El Salvador. We focus our efforts on social and economic development, and pride ourselves on managing your donations in the most efficient manner possible. ERD provides the best value and most trustworthy destination for your donation.

The Diocese of El Salvador does accept certain kinds of in-kind donations including school supplies, children's books, and over-the-counter medicines. Medicines should be sealed and accompanied by a letter from your group or church stating that they are a donation for the church. All donations should include an inventory, and should be given to the Salvadoran program staff. Please provide an inventory copy to the ERD office as well. **Please do not give gifts of any kind directly to individuals in or around ERD projects.**

20. Where do I send my paperwork?

You will send your non-refundable deposit (due at time of initial trip scheduling,) passport copies, registration forms, and your deposit check to:

Volunteer Coordinator
Episcopal Relief and Development
815 Second Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017

The deposit is \$200 per group. This money will go to the El Salvador program. It will not be applied to your expenses, which you will pay directly to the church in El Salvador. The deposit to ERD guarantees your agreed-upon trip dates.

21. What should I pack?

NOTE: CLOTHES SHOULD BE COOL AND LOOSE FITTING

There are cultural considerations related to dress. Salvadorans do not wear shorts except when recreating. Women wearing shorts or tight-fitting and/or revealing clothing in public might receive unwanted attention. Salvadoran men wear long pants and women wear either pants or a skirt. Following their example is a good way to avoid possibly uncomfortable situations and to show respect for and humility in their culture.

Suggested packing list:

Boots or sneakers (that are sturdy and water repellent)
Work gloves
Light pants for evening wear.
T-shirts/long sleeve shirts
Lightweight skirt or sundresses for evening wear.
Tank tops (beware that the sun in the tropics is very intense. Use lots of sunscreen).
Sweat socks
Underwear
Bathing suit
Hat with broad brim. (Baseball caps do not protect your ears and neck)

Sweat band/bandana
Work Gloves
Rain suit/Poncho
Water bottle (Plastic disposable water bottles available at stores)
Combination type padlock (for lockers in San Salvador)
Sun Glasses with UV protection (Tropical sunshine can injure your eyes)
Medications (with copy of prescriptions)
Immodium AD/Pepto Bismol/Cipro (pill form)
Alcohol wipes
Liquid hand wash with disinfectant
Sunscreen SPF 35
Bug repellent with at least 33% DEET
Band Aids (continued on reverse)
Bacitracin/Neosporin or other antibiotic ointment
Small flashlight with extra batteries
Shower shoes
Camera & film & spare batteries (film is expensive)
Regular toiletries
Bar soap
Tylenol/Aspirin