



UPAVIM VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

The following is some practical information we hope will be useful to you as you prepare for your time at UPAVIM.

History of UPAVIM

UPAVIM (Unidas Para Vivir Mejor – United for a Better Life) is located in an impoverished community called La Esperanza located on the outskirts of Guatemala City. The mission of UPAVIM is to empower the women of the community by providing fair wages to support their families and access to services that help improve their quality of life.

The slums of Guatemala City arose as squatter settlements during the civil war of the 1980s when thousands of people fled persecution in the countryside and crowded the city. At that time people built shacks out of cardboard or metal sheets and they lived without electricity, sewage, or running water. La Esperanza is now officially recognized by the government and has many more services than it did before such as frequent public transportation and improved infrastructure. Though there have been many advancements, our community continues to suffer from many challenges including gang violence, discrimination against women, domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, child abuse, illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition, insufficient health services, and a lack of suitable schools. La Esperanza has been designated a 'red zone' by the Guatemalan government, signifying a high level of violence and threat from gang activity. La Esperanza is surrounded by several other neighborhoods that suffer from similar problems, but we are just a short bus ride away from modern stores and a major highway (Aguilar Batres) in Guatemala City with easy access to the rest of the capital city.

UPAVIM was initiated in 1988, partnering with a Sister Parish group from Minnesota, USA. The partnership began with the development of a growth-monitoring program to target child malnutrition. A clinic was then started to better address the community's health needs. Soon after, the women of UPAVIM began to create handmade crafts to sell for income, as well as to generate funds for community programs. As the craft program grew, the women began to organize a childcare program as their work hours increased. Over the past 30 years, UPAVIM has grown from the small growth-monitoring program to a women's cooperative employing about 75 local women who make handmade Fair-Trade products sold around the world. The proceeds from these sales fund the women's salaries, UPAVIM's medical clinic, and UPAVIM's school, which includes a daycare, Montessori pre-school, and elementary school (K-6th). In addition, UPAVIM manages the first public

library in the neighborhood, scholarship program for local children, offers free English classes and tutoring, and runs a bakery and soy factory to provide fresh and affordable goods to the community. With these efforts UPAVIM continues to create positive change in the lives of the women in the cooperative and the community as a whole.

Getting in Touch with UPAVIM

The easiest way to get in touch with the UPAVIM women or volunteers if you are in Guatemala is to give them a call. This is the UPAVIM office number: (502) 2479-9061. If you call between 7:30AM and 5:00PM, our office staff will pick up. If you call before 7:30AM or after 5:00PM, one of the current UPAVIM volunteers will pick up. If you need to speak with someone in English, this would be the best time to call. If you are outside of Guatemala you can reach us by email (angela.upavim@gmail.com) and/or Skype (UPAVIM). The US-based Volunteer Coordinator can also assist you before you arrive (volunteerupavim@gmail.com).

Work Expectations

Most volunteers come to work in the school's English Program or the tutoring program (Reforzimiento or Reforz for short). If volunteers come to UPAVIM with special skills or experience (medical, marketing, design, computing, business, construction etc.), they can sometimes be placed within other programs according to their interests and abilities. Volunteers are expected to work 40 hours per week equivalent to the work hours of the cooperative employees. During the school vacation (November and December), volunteers may choose to travel home or in the region, continue to work in their program area or help put on a vacation literacy program for elementary students and youth in the community. We will be sending you a list of volunteer expectations you will need to agree to. Volunteers are accountable to the Guatemalan woman in charge of their program, to the committee that oversees that program, to the on-site Volunteer Coordinator, and to the Volunteer Advisor on the board. We also request that volunteers send a monthly update of the project they are working on to the Volunteer Advisor on the UPAVIM board as a record for future volunteers.

Volunteers are encouraged to share their special skills and interests by starting up additional clubs, hosting workshops, organizing excursions, sponsoring special events etc. Past volunteers have organized trips to Volcano Pacaya, coached soccer teams, opened up the building to youth break dance crews, sponsored community health fairs and curated local art exhibits. Keep in mind you must always receive permission from the appropriate committee before starting any new program. We also ask you to try to fundraise for any special programs you hope to put on if you will need additional funding.

Working at a cooperative has its rewards and challenges. It will take time to learn how things work here at UPAVIM. Volunteers come with great ideas and lots of energy, but we always want to make sure that any projects that are started or changes that are made are something the women want and will be sustainable after the volunteer goes home. We

don't want to unintentionally create problems! This can be avoided by always seeking the input and advice of the women of UPAVIM.

Each volunteer is expected to work respectfully and professionally with all other volunteers and with the women of UPAVIM. Sometimes cultural differences make it a challenge to work at UPAVIM but it is important to see these differences as learning experiences. There are lots of right ways to do things and you will have lots of opportunities to practice being patient and flexible with the women of UPAVIM, the children you work with, and with fellow volunteers. UPAVIM is fortunate enough to have volunteers from many different countries and of many different ages. There is always something to learn from and appreciate about each volunteer. Living at UPAVIM in close quarters provides a wonderful opportunity to develop deep friendships that will last far beyond your time living in Guatemala.

Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Policy

The culture of alcohol and tobacco use in La Esperanza is very different than what most volunteers are accustomed to. It is important to be respectful and sensitive to the values of the community. Alcohol and tobacco use are widely associated with gang activities and domestic violence. Thus, it is prohibited for volunteers to drink and smoke in the community. With that being said, volunteers are able to consume alcohol and tobacco in moderation while they are up on the roof in the volunteer living area. Beer and cigarettes are easily accessible and may be purchased in the community. It is important to be discreet when purchasing these items though, as your Guatemalan coworkers and students will certainly be near by. It is not acceptable to consume any illegal drugs while at UPAVIM or anywhere in the community. Doing so will result in your dismissal from UPAVIM.

Tattoo and Piercing Policy

While tattoos and piercing are prevalent in many cultures they are not in La Esperanza and have a stigma similar to that of alcohol and drug use. The vast majority of people with tattoos and/or piercings are either in, or associated with, a gang in the community. The women of UPAVIM understand that tattoos do not have the same stigma for volunteers but tattoos should still remain covered during work hours, especially when working with children.

Passport and Visa

Let us know when you buy your tickets and we will be sure to meet you at the airport either in a taxi from the community or in the cooperative's van.

You will need a current passport to enter Guatemala. Most travelers from North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe receive a free visa upon entering the country, but make sure to check with your embassy before coming. The visa will cover a 90-day period. After the first 90 days you can apply for an extension for an additional 90-day period in the

immigration office downtown (\$15USD).

After the next 90 days you will have to leave the C4 district (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua) for at least 24 hours. Volunteers typically go to Mexico or Belize for a short trip. Upon return you will receive a new tourist visa (for free) and may begin the process again.

Money

The safest and most efficient way to bring money into Guatemala is through ATM cards (debit cards). There are a variety of banks and ATM machines a short bus ride away. You should not rely on credit cards as they are accepted sporadically. If you are coming from the US, it is advisable to bring a small amount of US dollars.

Health

You may need to get certain vaccinations before you arrive. Because requirements change occasionally, we suggest you check the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov/>) for recommendations regarding travel in Guatemala. While there is no risk of malaria here in Guatemala City (due to the elevation), you may need preventative medication if you plan on traveling to other regions of the country, including the coast and Peten. Chloroquine tablets for malaria protection can generally be bought here much cheaper than in your country. Also, while we do not have too many bugs in the city, it is recommended that you bring a bug spray with DEET. Sunscreen is also recommended. There is an affordable medical clinic, pharmacy, and laboratory on the second floor of UPAVIM (<http://www.upavim.org/english/medical.htm>) that is available to the community and volunteers. Most medicine you will need can be bought here, but if there is something specific you like to take for colds or stomach problems, bring it with you.

For serious illnesses and emergencies we generally use Hospital Sanatorio Hermano Pedro located in Zone 1. They're a fully equipped community hospital with a 24-hour emergency room. The costs are reasonable, with a consultation and medical tests costing between \$15-\$25USD. Guatemala City is somewhat of a hub for medicine in Central America and there are many great doctors and hospitals available.

UPAVIM does not provide health insurance, and we recommend purchasing it before coming or checking with your current insurance provider to ensure you are covered abroad. Medex Assist (<http://www.medexassist.com/>) is a trusted company that has been used by previous volunteers.

Communication at UPAVIM

An intermediate level of Spanish is necessary to survive independently at UPAVIM and in La Esperanza. At a minimum, English teachers need a high enough level of Spanish to comfortably manage their class, communicate with the Guatemalan teachers of the school,

the parents and to report to the school's director. Reforzamiento, crafts department and administrative volunteers should have a high level of Spanish to work effectively. Volunteers need to be able to understand what is being said to them and communicate effectively.

If you do not have a conversational level of Spanish, you should attend language school *before* starting to volunteer at UPAVIM. You cannot simultaneously volunteer at UPAVIM and attend language school. Guatemala has some of the best and most affordable Spanish schools in the world. There are good language schools in Antigua, San Pedro la Laguna, and Quetzaltenango (all wonderful places to spend a few weeks). Some people may just want to attend for a week as a refresher at the beginning of their experience, while others may want to attend for a few weeks to a few months. www.guatemala365.com provides a good overview of available schools in Guatemala. While attending school you can either live with a host family or in a nearby hostel.

Personal Communication

There is a phone located on the roof that you may use, but you are required to pay for any charges you may accrue. Cell phones may also be purchased for around \$20USD. There are many kiosks and outlets nearby where you may purchase a cell phone and minutes (saldo). Cell phone providers include Tigo, Claro and Movistar. If you have an unlocked cell phone, sim cards are also available for purchase.

Wi-Fi access is provided on the roof of UPAVIM, but be forewarned that it is sometimes unreliable. We do recommend bringing a laptop if you have one. Internet dongles can be purchased and recharged in the same manner as cell phones. We do ask that each volunteer contribute between \$2-5/month (depending on how many volunteers there are) to help cover the cost of Internet at the cooperative. Many people keep in contact with friends and family via video chat (Skype, Google, etc.). Please note that the Internet may sometimes run slowly. To ensure better connectivity for all volunteers, please disconnect any and all devices when you're not accessing the Internet and only connect one device at a time.

Housing

Volunteers can live free of charge in the volunteer housing located on UPAVIM's roof. Each room has a set of bunk beds, a table and a chest of drawers. There is a shared kitchen, bathroom, pila and a lovely garden. The kitchen is equipped with a stove, oven, microwave, toaster oven, coffee maker, blender, and refrigerator. You will be provided with a basket for your personal food items. There is no washer or dryer at UPAVIM. You are welcome to utilize the pila for hand washing your clothing, or to arrange to pay someone to do it for you (about 10Q a load). The roof has a wonderful view of the community, Guatemala city, and the volcanoes that surround the city.

Community Living

Community living can be one of the best parts of your experience at UPAVIM, but it takes dedication and commitment to make it work. A large part of your downtime will be spent with other volunteers. You will be surrounded by people who care about lots of the things you do and will be your partners/companions/co-conspirators in projects and adventures during your time here. Your community is what you make it. Guard it, invest in it, nurture it and it will be your safe place, your support and your inspiration.

All UPAVIM volunteers are expected to be active members of the volunteer community. This means you will be responsible for sharing in chores and cooking and will help to establish the culture and rules of your community. Once rules are agreed to, you will be expected to abide by them. There are many different ways to arrange community life and no system works for every group. You will collectively have to decide on a cleaning and cooking schedule as well as establish how you will handle common expenses. In general, each volunteer contributes into a common pot of money to help pay for toilet paper, gas, and other necessities.

Volunteers receive free breakfast and lunch from the cooperative kitchen Monday-Friday. Beyond that, each volunteer is then responsible for purchasing food for breakfast and weekend meals (typically an additional 100Q/week depending on what you like to eat). Weeknight dinners will depend on each volunteer and the volunteer group. One way that has worked is to have volunteers cook dinner communally every night. Another way, is for each volunteer to take care of his or her own dinner. We do like to have at least one community dinner per week for everyone to get together and catch up with one another. Volunteers take turns or together prepare and cook a meal, or we go out to buy local food nearby. Community dinners typically cost 10-15Q.

Weekend trips typically cost between 300-500 Q, but this depends a lot on where you go and how you like to travel. Hostels cost between 50-75 Q and meals are anywhere between 10-75Q.

There always should be an on-site Volunteer Coordinator that is serving as a long-term volunteer in a program area. This person will help facilitate community life, oversee community living responsibilities (chores, cooking, common money), oversee volunteer work responsibilities, and help orient new volunteers. There is also a coordinator from UPAVIM who will work alongside the Volunteer Coordinator to keep communication open between volunteers, the women of UPAVIM and the community of La Esperanza. Volunteers are expected to be actively engaged in community life, which includes a weekly meeting with the on-site coordinator and a monthly meeting with both coordinators.

Safety

UPAVIM is located in a volatile community where gang violence is not uncommon. Shootings and threats are an everyday reality for the families of La Esperanza. Volunteers

have never been directly targeted but are still encouraged to avoid certain areas and to return home before dark or 9pm at the latest. Respecting the wishes of the women of UPAVIM, volunteers should not return to the community past this hour. If volunteers are out past this hour on the weekend they need to stay in a hostel or with a friend. The price of a taxi from the city to La Esperanza is around the same price as a nightly rate in a hostel/hotel.

The women are eager to keep you safe and are happy to tour you around the neighborhood, giving detailed accounts of the safe and unsafe areas. Once you become acquainted with the neighborhood, you'll have no problem walking around, getting to know the community and taking care of business during the daytime. The UPAVIM building is secure, equipped with security surveillance, gates and barbed wire fencing.

Valuables

We recommend not bringing anything of value unless it is absolutely necessary. Your rooms are fairly secure if you remember to keep them locked. Do not bring expensive jewelry. You can bring nice cameras and computers, but remember you are doing so at your own risk. There is a safe in the main office that you may use to store your passport and other important papers if you like. Don't forget to bring a copy of your passport.

Travel

It is relatively easy and affordable to travel around Guatemala, and there is no shortage of beautiful and exciting places to visit. Short-term volunteers (<4 months) are encouraged to travel at the beginning or end of their stay here. Long-term volunteers are encouraged to take off a week every 3 to 6 months for travel and relaxation. However, such trips must be scheduled and approved by your program coordinator. Volunteers are always free to take weekend trips around Guatemala.

Exercise

Generally speaking, running alone in the community is not encouraged, but you can always run with a friend and get an excellent workout running up and down the three flights of stairs! Volunteer-led exercise classes have been held in the past. If you have any exercise DVDs you like, please bring them. Everyone loves a new challenge.

Weather and Clothing

It's springtime in Guatemala City all year round! During the day it is pleasant and warm (21°-26° C; 70°-80° F). During the evening and night it is cooler, especially in January and February when it can get down to 10°-12° C; 50°-55° F. Guatemala has a rainy and dry season. The rainy season begins in May and lasts until October. Although the weather in Guatemala is beautiful, you will occasionally find UPAVIM volunteers in hats, scarves and/or wool sweaters. We suggest that you bring clothing that you can layer.

We generally encourage people to dress so they are comfortable. Teachers may want to dress a bit more formally in the classroom. We do ask you not to wear any clothing that promotes alcohol or drug use. We also advise that women avoid bringing clothing that may be considered immodest (short shorts, shirts that show a lot of cleavage/midriff). This is recommended to avoid unwanted attention in the neighborhood and to not offend the women (many of whom are more conservative in their dress). We also advise everyone not to bring all white or all black sneakers (especially Adidas brand) as these are worn by the local gangs.

Packing Suggestions

Apart from the basics (underwear, shirts, pants and shoes) you don't actually need that much to live at UPAVIM, and it's a good thing because you only have two dresser drawers and one bookshelf to store your stuff. In general, we suggest that you pack light. Just about anything that you may need (soap, first aid supplies, clothes etc.) can be purchased here in the community or a short bus ride away. However, here are some packing tips that might be useful to you:

- * Driver's license or ID card
- * Two color copies of your passport
- * A small backpack or bag for weekend trips
- * Flashlight
- * Water Bottle
- * Money belt
- * Personal travel guide to Guatemala or any other region where you might like to travel (guides are available in our library, but are generally outdated)
- * Sheets/towels/hand towels/washcloths (if you would like to use your own)
- * Laptops/headphones

Other items that are difficult to find in the community that you might choose to bring according to personal needs and wants include:

- * Tampons
- * Flip flops (if you have big feet!)
- * Contact solution
- * Something to do in the evening (books, games)
- * Any special medications you need or prefer to use
- * Any special foods or products that you enjoy like teas, cheese, chocolate, health food products, spices, sunscreen, face wash
- * Kitchen items you don't want to go without (sharp knives etc.)

If you plan to work on any special projects in the community (health projects, sports programs, after school clubs) we suggest that you bring along any materials that you will need from home. You can find just about anything in Guatemala City, however, medical

supplies, sports equipment, books, etc., can be quite expensive.

If you still have some space in your bag and time to look for donations, UPAVIM is always in need of children's books for its library, pens, pencils, crayons, scissors and other school supplies for its after school tutoring program. We will be sharing a wish list of things to bring created by current volunteers pertaining to volunteer living and to various programs at UPAVIM. We also may send a bag to you to bring down for the craft program if there are things we need to transport urgently. We will contact you about this once we know your flight schedule.

If you have any questions, logistical concerns or worries, please don't hesitate to contact us. We would also be happy to put you in touch with past volunteers so that you can learn more about their time at UPAVIM. Thank you so much for your interest in our organization! We look forward to meeting you soon!

Saludos,

UPAVIM Volunteers

Updated: June 2018