Aggie Alumni Guatemala Expedition - Aug 14 - 22, 2021

**The Culture**

- Guatemala is called the land of eternal spring and boasts a warm, tropical climate. The name Guatemala actually means "land of the trees" in the Maya-Toltec language. Guatemala is the poorest country in Central America.
- The official language of Guatemala is Spanish, but 21 distinct Mayan languages as well as several non-Mayan languages are also spoken here, particularly in the rural areas.
- Guatemala is known for its steep volcanoes, vast rainforests, and ancient Mayan sites. It is also home to the world famous Lake Atitlan.
- Guatemala invented the first ever chocolate, instant coffee, and blue denim. The Mayans were the first civilization to use the number 0.

**The Projects**

The Aggie Alumni expedition will include at least one village-driven building project in which everyone is welcome to participate. The project is generally a school, clinic, or water system and is directed by local masons and foremen using local materials. Other areas of focus include training programs centered around business development, education, and healthcare. We strive to adapt each training to the individual needs of each community.

**The Experience**

Family Humanitarian participants will work side-by-side with villagers throughout the day enjoying cultural events in the process. Both camp-like accommodations with running water, electricity, cold showers, and common eating areas and Hotel/Guest House accommodations can be anticipated. There will also be opportunities to explore local caves and pristine waterfalls.
**Tentative Itinerary & Logistics**

*Proof of a negative covid test is required to travel to Guatemala and back to the US. Everyone is required to get their own test at home prior to leaving, and FH will arrange for everyone to have a covid test on the final day of the expedition prior to returning home.*

**Saturday, Aug. 14th** – Arrive in Guatemala City (GUA) in time to attend a 6:00pm orientation/dinner at the Hotel Barcelo. The Hotel will have instructions to pick you up at the airport upon arrival. Exit the airport terminal and look for a white van marked “Barcelo”. If the van is not there immediately, it will arrive shortly as it does a constant loop between the airport and the Hotel. Upon arrival at the Hotel Barcelo, feel free to check-in to your room, take a nap, use the pool, etc. until it is time for the orientation/dinner – just ask the front desk for directions to the ballroom where the Family Humanitarian event is being held. Doors open at 6:00pm, dinner is served at 6:30pm, and a brief orientation will start around 7:00pm.

**Sunday, Aug. 15th** – Buffet breakfast is served in the restaurant after which we will load charter buses and start the approximate 8 hour drive to the Polochic region where we will serve for the week. We will stop for lunch halfway and will unload the charter buses and re-load onto smaller buses that can more easily navigate the rest of the non-paved, mountainous roads. Upon arrival in the village, we will unload, have dinner, and get settled.

**Monday, Aug. 16th – Friday, Aug. 20th** – This is the heart of the expedition where you will spend each day engaged in various humanitarian projects. Breakfast will be followed by a short instructional period letting you know the agenda for the day and we will depart to worksites, stopping for a lunch-break mid-day. Upon returning in the evening, we will have dinner together as a group with a short devotional and time for sharing the events of the day. The rest of the evening will be spent in cultural presentations, free-time with the group, showering, etc. Wednesday or Thursday will be a rest/cultural day where you will have options to engage in various activities (hiking to a waterfall, exploring caves, etc.) We will also have the opportunity to learn how to make tortillas (and possibly share dessert) with a local village family in their home on Friday evening.

**Saturday, Aug. 21st** – After breakfast and a closing devotional, we will load buses to return to Guatemala City with a lunch-stop mid-way. Upon arrival at the Hotel Barcelo, there will be COVID TESTING (results back in about 6 hours), a buffet dinner, and closing slideshow. The best part will be the warm showers and comfortable beds!! Plan your return flight any time on Sunday August 22nd or later.
**Accommodations**

Accommodations at the Hotel Barcelo are similar to a 4-star Hilton or Marriott. There are a couple of full-service restaurants, a gym, spa, and beautiful pool and hot tub. Reservations for additional nights can be made per the instructions that were previously sent out.

Accommodations in the village will be in a municipal building. We will sleep on ground pads/air mattresses and sleeping bags on a concrete floor. You may bring a tent to put up indoors if you wish to do so for privacy (just make sure it doesn’t have to be staked into the ground). It is anticipated that electricity will be available as will flushing toilets and COLD showers. Please be aware that although you can flush the toilets, you can NOT flush the toilet paper. Food in the village is quite good and will be cooked to US standards. A typical breakfast meal includes eggs or pancakes and fruit, and a typical lunch or dinner includes chicken, rice, beans, fruit, and tortillas/rolls.

**Potential Projects**

1) **Water Filters** – Teach village families how to install, maintain, and use life-saving water filters in their homes. These water filters will provide the most basic necessity of clean water for 10-20 years, will improve health, and save lives. As part of our water filter program, we will also be teaching about the importance of clean water and proper sanitation through handwashing and will be gathering health data.

2) **Garden Boxes** – Work hand in hand with Guatemalan families building garden boxes. These are families who, with our learn and earn model, have previously earned them. These garden boxes provide a sustainable source of much needed nutrition for the highly malnourished population in Guatemala.

3) **Desks** – Build and/or refurbish desks for a local school in need. We will likely be communicating needs for tools in the event you have some to bring with you. This project might also include the installation of a false ceiling for a school we previously constructed that is being finished up.

4) **Building Projects** - These can include medical clinics, schools, etc. as selected by our in-country director and the villages.

**Travel Tips**

- No VISA is required for Guatemala. They will simply stamp the VISA into your passport when you go through immigration upon arrival at the Guatemala City airport.

- Negative Covid Tests are required to travel to and from Guatemala. FH will arrange for a covid testing station to be set up at the Barcelo on the evening of August 21st. Each expeditioner will be required to pay for this test (approximately $100/person)