Frequently Asked Questions

How long should the trip last?

 We suggest a week, especially if it is an adult trip. That seems to make it easier for people to schedule time off from jobs and arrange child care. We can do longer trips if needed.

What would the team do?

 Usually it´s a mixture of medical clinics, work projects, and ministry times that allows the team to impact the lives of hundreds of people. Also usually a project will pop up at just the last minute that seems to have been designed for that particular team. Just as important to us, the team spends time with God and is ministered to about the love of God for them, so it´s a process of receiving and soaking in God´s love and giving it away. We´ve found that to make huge impacts in the lives of the people who come here.

What particular skills are needed?

 Again, our emphasis is on experiencing and releasing the love of God to others, and not a lot of skills are needed to do that. We do make use of the talents of the team, but we´ve found that simply sharing the love of God with the people of El Salvador meets a deep need, both in the giver and the receiver.

Where will we stay and will we get sick?

 We did a lot of trips before we moved here, and came to the conclusion that it´s better to go home healthy, happy and wanting to return as opposed to being grateful for having survived. Due to that, you will stay in a clean, safe hotel with air-conditioning and hot showers. You will be fed tasty, nourishing meals and may even gain a pound or two. We´ll make sure you´re provided with ample supplies of purified water and travel in air-conditioned vans. We will also schedule rest periods into your trip which we urge you to take advantage of. If you drink and eat only what we provide, you shouldn´t have any stomach issues. Pollution here in the city is pretty bad and upper respiratory infections are common.

How safe is El Salvador?

 There is a higher level of violence here than in the States. It seems to be mostly gang-on-gang, and criminals preying on the weak. We have lived here for over 7 years and have had only one incident where a thief stole Judy´s cell phone while walking one of the kids home from school. I travel all over the city and the country and have never been threatened or afraid for my safety. We have learned that if you listen to the people who live here, do what they say, pray and be careful you´ll be ok. We are very careful about where we minister with teams. There are places we go without fear or incident but out of caution we don´t take teams there. We have never had an incident involving one of our teams and we take your safety very seriously. We can´t guarantee your safety here but neither could we guarantee your safety in Dallas or L.A. if we were hosting trips there.

Do we have to take shots before we come?

 The U.S. State Department doesn´t recommend any pre-trip medications. You will need a passport. Allow a 6 week period to get one unless you want to pay an expedite fee (bribe) to get it in a few days.

What type of currency is used in El Salvador?

The U.S. dollar has been the official currency of El Salvador since 2001. Few places will accept anything larger than a $20 bill, so we suggest nothing larger than that. When you go into a small store they may not have change even for a $20.

What type of clothing should I bring?

 The climate is warm, but not excessively hot unless we´re working in the lower elevations. Not many people here wear shorts, for instance some government buildings won´t let you in wearing shorts and flip-flops. It´s partly a modesty issue, and partly common sense. What is covered by clothing is usually not bitten by mosquitos and they are pretty bad here. We suggest jeans and t-shirts for clinics and work projects, but shorts are ok for free times. Just bring mosquito repellent because they love gringo blood. Wear comfortable, sensible shoes that protect your feet. Flip-flops are ok for the hotel but a lot of the places we go they´re not wise to wear. Maria, our cook, will do laundry for you during the week...we just ask that you tip her at the end of the trip. For church services we´re laid back. Nice shirt and jeans for guys, pants ok for ladies also.

How much extra money should I bring?

 Our package deal covers pretty much everything while you are in country. You will need to pay for a $10 visa you buy as you enter the country and a $27.14 exit tax that you pay as you leave. Most of the time the exit tax is covered in the price of your ticket, but I encourage you to be sure of that before you buy those extra souvenirs. It should tell you on your ticket. We will try to get you somewhere to do shopping before you leave to buy souvenirs and presents. We will feed you meals in our home, but if the team wants to go out to eat, that´s fine, just give us a little notice and understand the meal is on you. We ask the teams to tip Maria at the end of the week for laundry, and sometimes the teams tip the interpreters. We leave that up to you. So based on this information, hopefully this helps you to decide what amount you need to bring with you.

**Stuff to bring on your trip**

1. If you like big fluffy pillows, bring one. The hotel pillows are adequate, but not fluffy. The same goes for big fluffy towels, the hotel towels are made for smaller latin people.

2. Bring no bills larger than a $20. Few stores, even in big shopping malls, accept $50 or $100 bills. In smaller communities, even a $20 bill freaks the owners out. Stores don’t keep a lot of change or cash on hand.
**Do not** bring checks or travelers checks, the bank here will sit on your check for 30 days before it clears. Only banks accept travelers checks here, businesses do not.

3. Leave your expensive jewelry at home. Probably nothing is going to happen to it, but it may impress someone so much that they may decide to make you an offer you can’t refuse.

4. A roll of toilet paper is a good thing to have in your backpack at all times. As we do projects outside the city, bathroom options decrease and not many come equipped with toilet paper.

5. Try to fit your clothing in one suitcase. International travel allows you two suitcases, but if your team is bringing supplies, your second suitcase becomes free airline freight. Also check with your airline for weight and size restrictions on your bags. They vary from carrier to carrier, and change periodically. Our cook, Maria, will do your laundry for you, we just ask that you tip her at the end of the week. Also bring a change of clothes in your carry on just in case your bags get here after you do.  ***Update- Check with your airline on their baggage policies, not everyone is allowing two free bags on international flights anymore.***

6. Wear comfortable shoes. Flip flops may be wonderful in a carpeted world, but where we are going, you can injure your feet, or maybe even step in something you didn’t mean to. Flip flops will be great for the hotel, but out in the field I strongly suggest comfortable footwear.

7. Not many people wear shorts here. For some, especially in the rural areas, it is a modesty issue, and there are certain government buildings you can’t enter wearing shorts. It also has a common sense aspect. Mosquitos love to bite bare skin, (especially gringo skin, in my opinion) so pants deny them the opportunity to feast on your bare legs. Also bring your favorite mosquito repellent.

8. For projects, wearing scrubs, jeans, casual dress is perfect. The temperature during the day runs in the low 80’s to low 90’s. From June to October it will rain almost daily to cool things off. If we are working in the mountains in the evening it may cool off enough to merit long sleeves.

9. You will have purified water available at all times so if you drink only what we give you, or if you buy a bottled soft drink in a sealed container you should be ok. We rarely have people come down with stomach problems on their trips here. You will need a Nalgene type water bottle, and it helps to put your name on it somewhere. Drinking water out of the tap is a luxury only a few countries in the world enjoy and for us gringos, El Salvador isn’t a place we can drink out of the tap. In the city you can use tap water to brush your teeth but outside the city even that is not a good idea.

10. Be careful with your expensive camcorders, cameras, Ipods and mp3 players. The hotel is very honest, we’ve never had anything stolen there, but if losing your equipment would be devastating, it may be best to leave it at home.

11. We have a Vonage internet phone available so that you can let family back home know you’re ok, but we ask that you don’t call daily or talk for more than 5 minutes when you do. That way people trying to contact us can get through. You can give this number, 903-484-9287 to your family or friends, but please have them call only if an emergency needs your attention on the other end.
12. We will serve you tasty, nutritious meals three times a day, but it’s still a good idea to bring your favorite snack stuff to munch on. If you’re on a high-carb, or no-carb, or tofu only diet, we ask that for a week you sacrifice and enjoy what is offered. It makes it a lot easier on us to make the same meal for everyone. We can also go out to eat at restaurants if you like but everyone will be responsible for their meal.

13. For church services, casual attire is ok. In our youth church, Ruta 3:16, jeans and tattoos are the norm, but in the more conservative churches we work with, jeans or dockers for the guys and skirts for the ladies is a good idea.

14. At the immigration desk when you arrive at the airport, you will pay $10 for a tourist visa. No one at this desk will speak English, so if you don’t speak or understand Spanish, just nod your head, smile and give them $10. You will also give them the form you filled out on the plane, and on that form it asks for the address you’re staying at. Please write in: Good Luck Hotel, Avenida Sisimiles, San Salvador. They won’t let you in if that line is left blank.

15. When you leave the country you will pay an exit tax of $27.14. This is included most of the time in your airline ticket price. Make sure this is the case before you spend your last dollar on souvenirs the night before you leave. Everyone at the airline counter when you leave speaks English.

**Cultural stuff and common sense stuff**

1. The best way to stay out of harm’s way while you are here is to listen to the people who live here and do what they tell you. We’ve learned that lessson and we’ve been safe for the 7 years we’ve lived here.

2. People here don’t point with their fingers. It is actually rude to do so. They point with their mouth. The first time you see it, it looks like someone is blowing a kiss at you, but they’re not. So take a look around to see what they’re drawing your attention to.

3. As we drive around the country you will see people doing things a lot differently than you are used to seeing. A normal first reaction is to laugh and remark at how crazy it is for someone to do that. But remember, we will have a team of translators with us most of the time, and after a while the message to them is that we think their country is crazy. It’s not, it’s actually a wonderful country. Also we’ve learned that if you stop and watch what they’re doing, and take into account the resources they have to do it with, you usually realize that although what they’re doing is different from our experiences, given what they have to do it with, it makes a lot of sense.

4. With the exception of outhouses and you will meet some of those, you can’t flush your toilet paper in the toilet. If you do so it will probably stop up the plumbing somewhere and make life hard. There will be a trash can in the bathroom for your toilet paper. Outhouses are a different story.

5. We call ourselves Americans. But the people from here consider themselves to be Americans as well, just from Central America. We are called norte americanos, North Americans or gringos.

6. We gringos have lived our lives in a country where the economy and all the marketing that goes with it is based on the premise that we should have what we want, the way we want it, when we want it or we should be upset to the point that we do something about it. Here people tend to live with dreams of what they want, and many have plans to obtain those things, but for the most part in the meantime they enjoy life and what they have. That has been one of the hardest barriers for us to break through here, but when you do life gets a lot more relaxed. For the time you’re here, you will live comfortably, a lot more comfortably than the people you will be helping, but at the same time you will be without a lot of what makes life enjoyable in the states. So while you are here enjoy what you’ve got and anything you miss you’ll get when you get back.

7. Making a trip here is a big event, understandably so, and we all want to document it with photos. However, be considerate of the people we’re working with and take their photos only with permission. Check with us or your translator to see if it a good time to take a picture. But at the same time take a lot of pictures to remember your trip with.

8. People here, no matter how poor, are generous. As you help them, some will want to give you something in return. It is rude not to accept. If it is food however, ask one of us or your interpreter if it is safe to eat or drink before doing so. Food items that may make you sick could make the interpreter very happy if they ate them instead so I bet that they would graciously help you out.

9. Using hand sanitizer is a good way to protect yourself from germs. But also be discreet about how and when you do so, being careful not to offend someone by making them feel you don’t want to touch them.

10. Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken. We will take care of all the logistics and planning for your trip, and we’ve done it enough to usually do it well. But plans change, schedules change, people don’t show up, electricity doesn’t work, traffic jams or gridlock make it impossible to get where you want to go, etc. Sometimes nothing here happens easily but the people here understand that and adjust to what is at hand. So for the week you’re here prepare yourself to work with what we’ve got and not what we wish we had or planned to have. That doesn’t happen much but when it does it gives you a much better appreciation of what life is really like here.

11. People for the most part here are friendly. When someone enters a room he personally greets everyone and when he leaves he personally says goodbye to each person. When we have time to do so, I encourage you to talk with people. Get to know the interpreters, and with the help of the interpreters, also talk to the people we are ministering to or interacting with. We think the biggest treasure of El Salvador is the people, and you’ll enjoy getting to know them.

12. Expect to be overwhelmed by the needs you see in people’s lives here. There’s no getting around it. However as compassion and generosity move in you, be careful what you promise to do to help. If you make commitments to help someone once you return to the states, please follow it through. I say that because unfortunately many people that visit here are moved by the needs they see and out of a good heart make offers to help that once they return home they are unable to keep. That happens more than it should. It’d be better not to make the offer than to not honor it. In the areas we work in we are trying to build long term relationships so our credibility is at stake as well.

13. The sun is El Salvador is more direct as we are closer to the equator. Use sunscreen, wear a hat, and try to stand in the shade as much as possible. Don’t shave your heads to make a statement about your trip. (This actually happened) It looks weird and bald heads get burnt very quickly.

14. Your coming here is a big deal. It costs a lot of money to do so, and it also cost you at least a week out of your life. That’s a big deal. Most people here understand what you’ve done and are grateful. What impresses them even more is if you return. Our goal is to build long term relationships in communities by coming back year after year. We believe these type of relationships open up doors of trust and confidence that enable us to impact them with the love of God in a deeper way. If you are impacted by what happens on your trip here, consider making it a habit to return again and again.

**Example of form letter for raising support**

Dear Friends and Family,

This summer I have an opportunity to go with Turning Pointe School of Dance to El Salvador on a mission trip, June 6th through June 12th. Yes, that’s right, a dance team mission trip. We will be working with Amazing Love Missions, (www.almissions.com) missionaries who have lived in El Salvador and worked with the young people there for the last 8 years. We will be ministering through dance, drama and our testimonies in the schools of El Salvador to thousands of children. We will also be doing dance clinics in churches and working in a home for abandoned children.

 God has opened a door for me to use my gift to share His love with the children of El Salvador. I believe that this will be a great eye opening experience for me also to see how other people live and how fortunate our lives are here. I am really looking forward to all that God has in store for us on this trip.

 My trips costs are $1,200 so I am asking for your help in making this trip possible. If you could help me either by financial support or by prayer, I would appreciate it very much. If you would like to donate, please make checks out to: **Amazing Love Missions** and please do not put my name in the memo line (attach a separate note). For me, this is an opportunity to give a week of my life to Jesus for Him to take me out of my comfort zone and work through me to touch others with His great love. Thanks for helping make this possible.

Yours truly,

Note to parents: you’ll want to include a self addressed envelope with each letter (stamped is even better)…the address they can send it to is: **Amazing Love Missions PO Box 49635 Colo Spgs, CO 80949**.