

Cristosal Global School: In-Country Orientation Overview

SAFETY

- The security situation in the country is critical. It is different than it was even 5 years ago.
- Don't worry—we have never had a serious incident and we will be with people who know what is safe and what is not—relax and enjoy.
- Do not be flashy with jewelry, iPods, digital cameras or cash-wads. Lock up your valuables – passport, credit cards, etc. – in the safe.
- Only take money you need for the day.
- Please always carry emergency information with you.
- You should not leave the guesthouse after dark unless planned.
- You should not leave the guesthouse alone – always go with a buddy, and please let your Cristosal guide know before doing so (i.e., to go on a walk in the morning or after lunch, etc.)
- IF anything were to happen, please do not resist.
- Cars: Pedestrians do not have right-of-way. Cars and buses may not stop for you. Please be extremely cautious and aware when crossing streets.

HEALTH

- **HYDRATE.** You need to carry a water bottle with you at all times.
- Do not drink faucet water unless it has been boiled. Ask your Cristosal guide about ice and fruit drinks in restaurants. (Everything from the Guesthouse is fine.) Coffee and tea safe because they have been boiled. In the countryside, no fruit juice unless bottled.
- Drink **LOTS OF WATER.** Extra if you drink coffee or soda to balance it out. You are sweating more than you realize and therefore you need to drink far more than normal.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water.
- **HYDRATE.**
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FOOD

- Fruits and veggies should be peeled or cooked.
- Guest house food is fine.
- No cheese or milk in countryside—it's not pasteurized.
- Try stuff when you can—it's part of the experience to eat new foods!
- Getting sick is very common. Please tell us if you start to feel bad or have symptoms (diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, etc). It is important that we know about this so we can get you the right medicine-- these sicknesses aren't especially serious, but they do need treatment, as our bodies aren't naturally protected against the types of bacteria here. Contrary to US medical belief, Cipro and Immodium are *not* always good for you!
- If you are on prescription medications and have any troubles related to them during the time of the trip, please let us know. Please continue to take the meds for the duration of the prescribed time-- don't stop treatment because you are not at home, please.

BUGS and CLIMATE

- Especially in the countryside, bring bug spray and use it.
- Don't freak out if you get bitten — happens every day!

TOILET PAPER

- Always goes in the trashcan you will find near each toilet.
- Try to remember to carry a little with you at all times. Many restrooms do not have toilet paper.

PUNCTUALITY and FLEXIBILITY

- To respect other members of the group, we need to all arrive to events on time so the group is not stuck in the hot bus waiting for you.
- Keep in mind that Salvadorans have a different interpretation of time, and we may wait a few minutes for a meeting to start at times. It's all part of the experience.

POLITICS and POLITICAL FREEDOM

- Many Salvadorans speak fluent English. We should keep this in mind not only with any random commentary we may have in public spaces, but even more so when discussing politics. Remember that though El Salvador is no longer in an active war, this is still not a completely politically open country — much violence still surrounds the subject. When discussing sensitive subjects, please be aware of your surroundings, and perhaps limit such discussions to your guesthouse or appropriate meeting spaces.

GROUP

- We are members of a group this week. This is a unique opportunity to share an intense experience with others and get to know them.
- Please respect others' thoughts and opinions. Especially in reflection spaces, we encourage you to participate as fully and respectfully as possible. Reflection is an important aspect of processing your short time in El Salvador.
- Time alone is good but please let someone know if you are separating from the group and only do so when appropriate. Do not leave the guesthouse alone ever.
- If you have time between events and would like to leave the guesthouse, please observe the following safety guidelines: do not go alone, take a taxi if the distance is not walkable, do not go out after dark, arrive on time to the next activity on the itinerary.

ETIQUETTE

- When speaking through an interpreter, you are still speaking to the Salvadoran. Talk directly to her or him. Ideally the translator doesn't exist in the conversation.
- Someone will be delegated to make formal introductions at the beginning and end of meetings.
- Ask permission before taking photos! Don't let your camera get between you and your experience!

GIFTS and PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Many people wish to respond to the experience of seeing the hardships of their hosts by offering gifts, be they clothing, household goods, medications or even cash. While we perfectly understand the emotional motivation and good intentions in this response, we kindly ask that you not provide any gifts, donations or loans on a personal basis to the Salvadorans you may meet during or after your participation in our programs.

A generous gift to your host family or community will feel very positive in the short term, but will undermine growth and development in the long term and can create conflict within the community or an expectation of continued aid that cannot be met. We ask that you not establish personal charitable relationships after your visit with any individual or family, as these relationships can be harmful to our accompaniment of the community. The realities and relationships in the communities are more complex than you can perceive on a short visit and often involved complicated power dynamics. If you like the work you see during your visit, we ask that you support the programs and work already being done by professional Salvadorans in the field who can navigate these complexities.

DRESS

- Please dress relatively conservatively, especially for women. (We hate to target you, women, but this is the sexist reality here.)
- Cat-calls to women on road: ignore it. It exacerbates the situation to react. We understand that this is very difficult, and we wish it weren't the reality here.

MONEY

- The delegation fee covers the following things while you are here with us: water, lodging, transport to related activities, coordination and interpretation, 3 daily meals (including in rural communities), and occasional snacks.
- Common expenses that are not covered: medicine, alcohol with/without meals, artisan crafts, extra snacks.

SPANISH

- Try it out! Salvadorans love and are appreciative of people who try to use what little language skills they have – this is the place to practice!
- In communities, please be patient with your interpreter. She can only be in one place and one conversation at a time!
- If you are a Spanish speaker, we welcome whatever way you'd like to contribute your language ability to make the experience more fulfilling for your group. During a meeting, please do not interrupt to correct the interpreter unless the error is egregious and changes the core meaning of the message being expressed. We welcome you to approach the translator after the meeting to talk if you'd like.

YOUR ROLE

First and foremost, a course through the Global School is an opportunity to learn about new realities and to critically analyze human rights and development issues, and we encourage you to come with an open mind and willingness to engage in new experiences. Participants should have an open mind to new people and realities, and a little bit of flexibility and a sense of humor. The more open and engaged you are in this experience, the more you will get out of it.

While in El Salvador, you may be confronted with levels of poverty and injustice that you have not seen before. This can be difficult to deal with. We ask that you reach out to other group members to process and reflect on this experience. You may also experience radical differences in customs and culture, and we ask that you handle these respectfully. When in doubt, and if you need to talk, please approach your Course Facilitator. Additionally, please keep in mind Cristosal's rights-based approach as you interact with local communities, as well as our specific gift guidelines.

As in any foreign country, we ask that you respect local laws (including regarding drugs and alcohol) and respect local customs. It is illegal for foreigners to get involved, directly or indirectly, in Salvadoran politics. We ask visitors to respect this for the good of all future visitors. This not only means direct participation in the political process, but things as simple as wearing a political party's shirt or hat.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Foundation Cristosal's rights-based approach to development means that our community partners are owners in their own processes of development. **We do not hand out solutions; we build them collectively with our partners.** We work with communities to strengthen leaders in their own capacities that enable them to organize and make changes in their communities, independent of continued aid. **We ask that you commit to this process** and respect this approach in our communities by engaging the Salvadorans you meet as equals. This means entering into communities with an attitude of humility and respect for the hard work that community members have already done, and a willingness to first listen and educate yourself about the issues and possible solutions. This means not offering charity or solutions to problems you encounter in the communities, rather supporting the work that is being done by our professional staff and by the community members themselves.

We do not do things for community members that they could and should do for themselves. Your course through the Cristosal Global School will not include service projects, manual labor or work. We believe that the most effective and empowering way you can contribute to building better communities is by supporting the processes already in progress in the communities you visit and participate fully in the educational experience through the Cristosal Global School.

BE GENTLE

- It's **OKAY** to be uncomfortable – with poverty and injustice as well as the heat and mosquitoes.
- **BE gentle with yourself and with others.** If we allow it, this can be a deeply meaningful and transformative experience.
- Please be in communication with Cristosal staff about what you need and how you are. We want to make your experience as fulfilling as possible and will do everything we can to ensure that.
- Please tell us if you are uncomfortable, not feeling well, in need of a bathroom break, etc. We are here to facilitate a learning environment that is as comfortable as possible.