



# ODIM Volunteer team

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Who/ What is ODIM?**

ODIM stands for the Organization for the Development of the Indigenous Maya. We are a small group of local and foreign staff working at the grassroots level in the villages of San Juan La Laguna, San Pablo La Laguna. We have been working in these villages since 2005 with the recovery effort after the devastation of Hurricane Stan. Since then, our programs have evolved from disaster recovery to programs focused on education and health. By helping to meet the necessities of education and health, our work enables the people in our villages to strive for a positive future for themselves and their children.

Our main projects are our two community health clinics, our dental clinic, and extensive health education programs. We also have a small scholarship program, which provides scholarships for 15 primary and secondary students.

We are a very small organization. Currently, we made up of four long-term foreign staff members working alongside local staff and health promoters.

### **What does a typical week volunteering with ODIM look like?**

Typically volunteer teams (medical and construction) work with us for 5 days, and usually include a couple days on either end for travel and free days to relax and see other parts of the country.

If possible, we like for teams to arrive in San Juan the Saturday or Sunday before the work week starts in order to have a chance to get to know the town and culture, and to meet as a team before the week starts to talk about how clinic days will look, specifics about the local culture, and (for medical teams) to talk a bit about common diseases which you will see.

We usually work Monday through Friday. For medical teams we spend a couple of those days in our clinic here in San Juan, then a day in a more rural village on the other side of the mountain, and then two days in San Pablo. For construction teams we spend the work days working alongside local construction workers building houses for families in San Pablo. Sometimes other projects for repair, maintenance, and upgrading of our clinic are possible as well. Below is a sample itinerary to give you an idea of a typical week working with ODIM.

### **Sample Itinerary - ODIM**

#### **Saturday**

Arrive to Guatemala City – Met at airport by Volunteer Coordinator with transportation  
Head to Panajachel (about 3 ½ hours)  
Take boat from Panajachel to San Juan La Laguna (30 minutes)  
Check in an Hotel La Estrella in San Juan  
Dinner at Petrona's

#### **Sunday**

8am – Breakfast with Petrona  
Morning Free Time  
12pm - Lunch with Petrona  
1pm – Cultural Activities in San Juan - tours, painting, coffee tour, weaving demo  
5pm- Orientation followed by dinner at Petrona's

#### **Monday**

6:30am - breakfast (departure 7:30am)  
8:00 am-4pm - Medical Jornada in San Juan or construction in San Pablo (lunch break at 12pm)  
6:30pm - dinner

#### **Tuesday**

6:30am - breakfast (departure 7:30am)  
8am-4pm - Medical Jornada in San Juan or construction in San Pablo (lunch break at 12pm)  
6:30pm - dinner

#### **Wednesday**

6:30am - breakfast (departure 7:00am)  
8am-4pm - Medical Jornada in aldea of San Juan or construction in San Pablo (lunch break at 12pm)  
6:30pm - dinner

#### **Thursday**

6:30am - breakfast (departure 7:30am)  
8am-4pm - Medical Jornada in San Pablo or construction in San Pablo (lunch break at 12pm)  
6:30pm - dinner

#### **Friday**

6:30am - breakfast (departure 7:30am)  
8am-12pm - Medical Jornada in San Pablo or construction in San Pablo  
12:30pm – Dinner at Petrona's  
1:30pm – Boat to Panajachel  
2:30pm – Panajachel to Antigua  
5:30pm – Arrive in Antigua/Check in at Posada La Merced  
6:30pm – Dinner as group

**Saturday**

Breakfast at Fernando's

Free day in Antigua

6:30pm – Dinner together as group

**Sunday**

Breakfast together as a group

Leave on shuttle for airport in Guatemala City

**What are the costs associated with a trip with ODIM?**

For each team, we will create a budget that is specific to your trip. ODIM includes in the budget the associated costs for travel, lodging and food throughout the week. Additionally, we ask for a donation that varies depending on whether your group is a medical or construction team. For medical teams, the suggested donation is \$5000 of donated medications or funds to buy medications for our pharmacies (this can be a combination of in-kind and cash donations). Due to the lack of quality control in Guatemala for medications, our pharmacies are stocked by US-made medications brought by our medical teams. Patient surveys have shown that this is one of our patients' favorite aspects of our clinics. For construction teams, we ask a donation of \$325 per each member of the team. This donation covers the cost of building materials and the salary of the local crew that works with the team during the week. All funds are handled by the volunteer coordinator, who pays for all team expenses when you are in-country, so team members don't need to worry about managing money throughout their week and can focus on their work and enjoying the beautiful country of Guatemala. *For most teams, total cost per person will be in the range of \$900-\$1,200 (not including airfare), with the donation portion of the cost being tax-deductible.* Reach out to our Volunteer Coordinator ([ODIM.VolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:ODIM.VolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com)) if you would like to see a sample budget from a previous team or to begin working on an itinerary and budget specific to your team.

**It's our first time volunteering with ODIM. What do we need to do before coming to Guatemala?**

We try to make this process as easy as possible. You will work with our Volunteer Coordinator to plan your trip. All you need to provide is basic information such as the team roster and flight times to help us out. Once we have your team's information, we take care of reserving all transportation and hotels. We also will manage the team's funds, including hotels, transportation, and food. We want our volunteers to be able focus on their experience and not have to worry about some of the more stressful aspects of traveling.

### **Whom will we be serving?**

We primarily work in the villages of San Juan La Laguna and San Pablo La Laguna on the shores of Lake Atitlán in the Solola Department. However, people come from around the lake and sometimes other departments as well to visit our clinic. The people in our villages are nearly all Tz'utujil (one of the 22 groups of Indigenous Maya in Guatemala).

### **Where will we sleep and eat?**

There are a few hotels in San Juan where teams can stay. They range from \$6-\$30 per night.

A local woman from town (Petrona Sumoza) prepares our meals. Teams eat dinner and breakfast at her house depending on the location of their hotel. Petrona makes delicious Guatemalan food, and many of the teams' favorite memories are spending time with her family, eating at her house, and sometimes even having a chance to help prepare the meals and make tortillas!



*Petrona with her grandchildren Milo and Perlita*



*Petrona's "comedor", where groups eat their meals in San Juan*

## Safety in Guatemala

A lot of what you read about Guatemala can make it sound very scary, especially if you have never been here before. While violence and crime is very much a problem in Guatemala, it is one that is generally isolated to certain areas and cities. We will not be spending time in any of these areas! While in Guatemala, you will be spending the majority of your stay in San Juan, a very friendly and safe community. Other towns where volunteers will spend a free day such as Panajachel and Antigua are also very safe, though in those places it is recommended to keep a close eye on valuables as petty theft is more common. If you are worried about traveling to Guatemala, please contact us and let us know about your concerns. Most likely we will be able to put most of your fears to rest.

### What kinds of vaccines and travel medical information should we have?

Vaccines: We highly recommend that you have both **Hepatitis A** and **Hepatitis B** vaccines before coming to work with us. We also recommend that you have a current **tetanus shot**. If you are only traveling to Guatemala City, Antigua, Lake Atitlan (where we are located) and the highlands you DO NOT need malaria medicine.

Please bring any prescription you take regularly with you, and any sort of emergency medicine you have or might need (epi-pens, inhalers, nitros, etc). We advise you carry these on your person while traveling.

Recently the Guatemalan Ministry of Health has reported cases of Dengue Fever around the lake. This is new. It is important that people take the necessary precautions to avoid Dengue, especially by using **insect repellent** in the rainy season (May-Oct).

Altitude Sickness: We are about 1 mile above sea level so please take this into account in your visit here. Drink plenty of water and pace yourself.

Sun exposure: Because of the altitude and proximity to the equator, the sun is very intense here. Please remember this and protect yourself with sunscreen, a hat and lots of water.

Gastrointestinal issues: This is a developing country; the water is not filtered or treated, so it is important to take necessary precautions. Also, many bacteria which are located here cause our immune systems to react because they are foreign to our bodies. Many people suffer from "traveler's diarrhea." A couple of things can help prevent this: many people bring ciprofloxacin (antibiotic) and imodium. We usually suggest not taking imodium unless you have to travel and only to use cipro after you have had symptoms that will not go away. We advise teams to take pepto-bismol tablets prophylactically three times a day before meals starting a couple days before the trip and continuing the whole length of the trip. We have had very good outcomes with this. Teams who do this have rarely gotten sick while here in the country—

thus we HIGHLY recommend this. We also recommend using GSE (Grapefruit Seed Extract), which is what we personally use to treat ourselves when we have gastrointestinal issues. It works very well as a natural way to treat and prevent illnesses. Mostly we ask you not to worry too much while you are here. Drink only purified water, brush your teeth only with purified water, don't eat street food, wash your hands, and take pepto-bismol prophylactically and you should have an uneventful week and be able to enjoy all the local Guatemalan fare served to you.

### **What is the weather like?**

Guatemala is called the "Land of Eternal Spring." The temperature is mild year round, usually in the 70s-80s during the day, getting down to the 60s and sometimes 50s at night. The rainy season lasts from the middle of May through October. During the rainy season the sun still usually shines in the morning. In the afternoon it clouds over and rains almost every day either in the afternoon, evening, or night. The rest of the year (the dry season) lasts from November through the middle of May and it does not usually rain at all during these months. The coolest part of the year is December and January where it can be rather chilly at night. The hottest part of the year is in March and April where temperatures can sometimes reach the 90s.

### **What should I pack? (Personal Packing List)**

- Passport and copy of passport
- Copies of UMVIM insurance (team leader)
- Work clothes: (scrubs for medical team/ clothes you don't care very much about for construction team—modest (see below)
- Modest Clothing for the evenings and free days: No shorts (especially for women) or short skirts—must cover the knees. Shirts need to have a sleeve. (No spaghetti straps or tank tops).
- Sweater or sweatshirt for evening
- Rain gear/umbrella (during rainy season)
- Good shoes for walking (lots of walking)
- Rain boots/sandals (shoes that can get wet during rainy season)
- Hat
- Water bottle
- Sunblock
- Insect Repellant

- Hand sanitizer
- Sunglasses
- Toiletries
- Tampons (hard to find in Guatemala)
- Contact Solution (also hard to find here)
- Pepto-bismol
- Grapefruit Seed Extract (helps with stomach issues/nausea)
- Healthcare providers—otoscope, ophthalmoscope, stethoscope
- Construction team: safety goggles, dust mask, work gloves
- Earplugs (people sometime complain of dogs barking at night)

### **What about money?**

The leader will deposit team money into our Bank of America account before you arrive. That will make it easier for you, and you won't have to worry about bringing large amounts of cash with you. If team members can change money in the United States BEFORE you arrive that is ideal! You can change money at the airport in Guatemala but they do not offer a very good exchange rate. We will send the team leader more information on the process to deposit your team money in a later email.

The currency in Guatemala is the Quetzal. It fluctuates, but is usually between 7-8 Quetzales per USD. We recommend only using specific ATMs to get money out as there has been a lot of ATM fraud especially in Guatemala City and Antigua. We now have an ATM in San Juan. There is a daily limit of \$200 withdrawals. Be aware of fraud (ask the Volunteer Coordinator for the safer ATMs) and be sure to advise your bank that you will be out of the country.

Many places in Panajachel and Antigua will take US dollars. Some places in San Juan take dollars (artisan places, tours, etc). But little stores and such in San Juan only accept Quetzales. If you cannot change money in the US before you arrive, please bring US dollars with you to exchange at the bank. Make sure that your dollars are in good shape (look fairly new, are not worn, have no little nicks missing, are not crinkly). If they are not in good shape the bank will not accept them from you.

### **UMVIM Paperwork:**

If you are an UMVIM team (with the United Methodist Church) we recommend that you get UMVIM accident insurance. You can find the form and directions for filling out this form on the UMVIM website.

We ask all volunteers not to drink alcohol or use drugs while working with us. If you are an UMVIM team we request that team members sign a covenant. These covenants are also found on the UMVIM website.

### **Planning & Coordination:**

For medical teams we work with our local staff to coordinate our clinics to best suit the needs of the community. Our motto is to provide bottom-up services to our patients by serving their needs in a culturally sensitive manner.

For construction we coordinate with our local construction crew and each family before the team's arrival in order to ensure that the construction project is ready to go upon group arrival.

We also plan each group's itinerary with team leaders beforehand, and have a volunteer coordinator present with each team from the moment they arrive at the airport in Guatemala City until their departure.

### **Budgeting**

We will create a budget and itinerary for each team that incorporates their desired free-day activities as well as arrival and departure dates. The budget will include all food, hotels, transportation, and free-day activities as well as operational clinic costs and medicines. For more information regarding the budget, please email Yaneth Cholotio at [odim.volunteercoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:odim.volunteercoordinator@gmail.com).

### **Communication:**

Spanish-speaking team members are very helpful; however, we will always have a translator to accompany each volunteer group wherever they go to assist in communication and coordination. During the medical clinics, we have one local interpreter working at every medical station, translating from English to Tz'utujil (the Mayan dialect). We always provide medical care in the native language of our patients so that they are as comfortable as possible with us and our teams.

### **Any other questions?**

Please contact Yaneth Cholotio, Volunteer Coordinator, at [ODIM.VolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:ODIM.VolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com).