Group Volunteer Manual

Everything you need to know about living and working with the Long Way Home Team
The Long Way Home Story

Long Way Home’s Executive Director, Matthew Paneitz (aka Mateo or Norm), is a former US Peace Corps Volunteer from Texas. Mateo was stationed in San Juan Comalapa during his Peace Corps service where he worked with youth groups through a local community development organization called Chuwi Tinamit. This organization owned land and had plans to build a park, but they lacked the funds and asked Mateo for help.

Mateo moved to Oregon and founded Long Way Home (LWH), achieving 501(c)(3) status in late 2004. He began raising funds to build Chuwi’s park, Parque Chimiyá, and, at the beginning of 2005 he returned to Comalapa to start construction.

Once Parque Chimiyá became established as a community gathering place, area residents began coming to LWH for help with other endeavors. LWH projects now include education and alternative construction.

In 2009, LWH began its most ambitious undertaking to date: the construction of a primary and vocational school using alternative methods and materials including rammed-earth and recycled tires. This school will expand the local capacity by up to 250 students, increasing educational opportunities in Comalapa. Currently most residents of Comalapa wishing to pursue education beyond middle school must travel to a city 25 km away. In January 2012 we welcomed our first students; that has led us to a successful 130 students currently enrolled at LWH from kindergarten to grade 9. Our school construction will continue so that we can increase the school's capacity and expand the LWH family to high school students. This expansion is expected to commence in 2018.
Staff

In-Country Staff

Matt (Mateo) Paneitz, Executive Director & Founder
Cell # 4796.8608
Oversees general operations and represents LWH in Guatemala and abroad. Matt focuses on fundraising for Long Way Home’s projects. He is the man with the vision who started it all.

Thomas Hartig, Campus Development Coordinator
Cell # 5592.4230
Thomas is in charge of development and makes sure things run smoothly. He is the connection between San Juan Comalapa and the rest of the world.

Adam Howland, Director of Construction
Cell # 4932.2857
Oversees all alternative construction projects. Adam focuses on adapting alternative methods and systems to the local environment. He is the man with the architectural imagination.

Bryna Cortes, Volunteer Coordinator and Outreach Specialist
Cell # 4609.9214
Bryna runs the Volunteer Program and is your go-to person for any questions or concerns about your stay in Comalapa as a volunteer. She also manages research and data analysis.

Roberto Peren, Construction Assistant
Cell #
Oversees the construction team and assists with the volunteer program. Roberto is your go-to person when you need help with something or have any questions about Comalapa, and its history.
All staff want to help make your volunteer experience as productive and worthwhile as possible. They have all come to Guatemala for the same reason as you: to do everything they can to improve the lives of the people in Comalapa. At one time they have all been in your shoes; do not hesitate to ask for their advice or help.

Projects

_Técnico Chixot Education Center_

Centro Educativo Técnico Chixot is a primary and vocational school we are constructing in Comalapa. In addition to the Guatemalan national standards, the curriculum currently being developed by our local teachers, focuses on critical thinking and technical skills.
In December 2008 LWH purchased 1.75 acres in the village of Paxán, about 1/2 mile from the center of Comalapa. We broke ground in 2009 and are building using environmentally friendly techniques (rammed earth construction, water-harvesting systems, eco-bricks). There are currently full time local workers at the site; they work Monday-Friday 7am to 4:00pm.

Volunteers are integral to our project and most will find themselves doing construction for the majority of their time with LWH. It is physically demanding work; therefore you must remember to bring a water bottle, snacks, sunblock, and work gloves.

The construction of the campus is almost complete with the 18 critical campus buildings. However we will always be working on maintenance at the school and green building construction projects here in Comalapa even when the campus is finished. Volunteers will have the opportunity to assist our students with projects within the community of Comalapa and nearby villages, as a part of the school curriculum.

Green Building in Comalapa

Construction of other green building projects are a part of the financial sustainability model of our school. These projects will be completed in the area of Comalapa and all over the world which help to continue giving jobs to our construction workers, our alumni and financially support the continuing operations of the school. Currently we are beginning construction of a home in an aldea of Comalapa, where a majority of our construction team will be working. It will be constructed with variety of green building techniques, including rammed earth tires. If you would like to participate at this other construction site, please inform the Volunteer Coordinator when you arrive here. Volunteers will automatically be placed at CETC upon arrival.
Funding

Grants and awards have paid for LWH’s projects, from the construction of Parque Chimiyá’s outdoor classroom to parts of Tecnico Chixot. Individual donors, fundraising events and the volunteer program produce majority of our revenue for LWH. We are always seeking new funding opportunities for our projects.

The Volunteer and Group Program Fee is an extremely important part of our income stream. The fees help sustain LWH and pay for materials and labor at the school, and we maintain the lowest administration fees possible to ensure the projects are priority. We encourage all our volunteers to help raise money for LWH projects whether through grant writing, hosting fundraising events, and/or soliciting donations from friends and family.

A Volunteer’s Daily Life

Volunteer Work Schedule

During your stay with LWH, you will be expected to work a minimum of 30 hours per week. The usual work week is Monday through Friday (8am to 4:00pm). Your Project Manager and the Volunteer Coordinator will help you determine your specific daily work schedule. Always ask if you are unclear about your assigned tasks or schedule. Be prepared to work hard and to play in the dirt daily.
Tools

We take our tools very seriously at LWH. Every tool must be signed in and out with Adelina who is in charge of the tool shed (bodega). When you return a tool please let her know and put back exactly where it belongs at the end of each use. Before putting a tool away in the bodega you MUST make sure it is clean. If you lose a tool or break it because of your own carelessness, you may be asked to replace it.

Accommodations

You will be staying in our partner hotel, Comalapa Sol, owned by Feliciano and his family. You will have your own rooms, hot shower, wireless Internet (that sometimes “goes down”) and private kitchen (with refrigerator and propane stove-top) to cook your own meals. The staff will be preparing dinners for you, so please inform us if you have dietary conditions or sensitivities. The family lives in the house across the courtyard, so it is a great option to have both privacy and a window into Mayan life.
What to Pack

When packing for Guatemala, keep in mind that you can buy many of the things you need once you are here (toiletries, clothes, etc.) though it can be difficult to find specific things you may want (e.g. a particular brand).

Clothes

Because of the work involved, you can get dirty fast, so you will want adequate changes of clothing. Quick dry is a good idea.

*Comalapa is a conservative community; our female volunteers are not permitted to show their shoulders, chest, midriff, knees, or wear spandex.* (see sections on “Confianza” and “Appropriate Behavior” for further reasoning)

- T-shirts
- Loose jeans/trousers (bring at least two pair of long pants suitable for construction work; they should not be skin tight!)
- Warm sweater and pants (it gets cold at night)
- Jacket (a good raincoat during the rainy season, May – September; windbreaker for the dry season, October - April)
- Hat(s) (as protection against the sun and the cold)
- Warm sweats or pajamas (it gets cold at night)
- Lots of socks and underwear (these will dictate when and how often you do laundry)

Footwear

- Work/hiking boots or sneakers (appropriate for a construction site)
- Rubber boots (during the rainy season – also locally available but not in large sizes)
- Sandals (suggested for evenings and weekends)

Toiletries

- Towel
- Any specific hygiene products needed
- Contact solution (if you wear contacts)
- Females: feminine hygiene products (tampons are difficult to find)
Personal work site equipment: *highly recommended*

- Rubber-/PVC-coated work gloves
- Regular work gloves - required personal equipment
- Hearing protection (e.g. ear plugs)
- Eye protection (e.g. sunglasses or goggles)
- Dust protection (e.g. dust mask or bandana)
- Tape measure
- Water bottle
- Day pack
- Pocket knife (Leatherman/Gerber)
- Pencil

**Miscellaneous Recommended Items**

**Personal:**
- Any medication needed during the time of your stay
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Batteries
- Insect repellent
- Camera/charger
- Books

**Items that are hard to get here and very much appreciated**

For the CETC school project:

- Eyewash
- Exterior Screws (2”, 2.5”, 3”, 3.5”, 4”)
- HP 60 Printer Ink
- Duct Tape
- Dust Masks
- Colored Electric Tape
- Saws-All Blades for Metal & Bamboo. (jigsaw, t-shank, circle)
• Submersible Bilge Pump & Float Switch: 14’ head, Dc, 1” output port (If you are interested in bringing this, please ask Roberto for details)
• Solar Lamp (If you are interested in bringing this, please ask Roberto for details)
• 6” & 12” Crescent wrench
• Heavy Duty, PVC-Coated Rubber Gloves
• Clear Safety Glasses/Goggles
• DC light bulbs
• Rotary Hammer
• Drill Bits #2 Philips Drivers (For wood, metal, concrete)
• Lithium ion batteries (20v) for porter cable and DeWalt
• Sharpie markers
• Anti-dust solution for cleaning solar panels
• Muslin cloth
• Screw driver set
• Ratchets ¼”, ⅜” & ½”
• L.E.D. Light Bulbs (3 & 5W)
• Angle grinder and 4 ½” blades for concrete
• Grind angle blade 4 ½ inch
• Heavy duty scissors
• Tin snips and or aviation snips
• Circular saw 15 Amp
• Jig Saw
• Japanese pull saw and or replacement blades

For the school kids:

• Construction, Tissue & Plain Paper
• White Board/Permanent Markers & Erasers (Black, Red & Blue)
• Pens, Pencils, Erasers & Pencil Sharpeners
• Backpacks
• Calculators & Rulers
• Maps & Educational Posters
• Watercolors & Brushes
• Star Stickers, Ink Pads & Fun Stamps
• Staplers, Scissors, Masking/Scotch Tape, Elmer’s Glue, Glue Gun & Glue Sticks
• Notebooks & Manila Folders
• Coloring Books & Crayons
• Children’s Books in English and Spanish
• Small Toys and Trinkets for Prizes
- Children’s Shoes & Clothes

For the staff:

- Good Chocolate
- Cheeses (Monterey Jack, Cheddar)
- Doggie Treats (Beggin’ Strips)
- Dill Pickles
- Chunky Peanut Butter
- Homemade Cookies
- Gummy Bears

Medical Supplies:

- Sports/athletic tape
- Antihistamine
- Eye Wash/Contact Solution (VERY IMPORTANT)
- Disposable nitrile gloves
- Band Aids (Fun patterns for the kids)

San Juan Comalapa

Guatemala is divided into departments (rather than states or provinces). We are located in the department of Chimaltenango. The official name is San Juan Comalapa but the Kaqchikel name is Chixot (Chi=land of and xot=tortilla plate). Comalapa is a municipality that consists of a main town and 16 outlying villages, or aldeas. Chimiyá, where the
park is located is too small to be considered a village and Paxan, where the school is being constructed, is a barrio of Comalapa.

Comalapa sits at about 7,000 feet above sea level and is in the region of Guatemala known as the Western Highlands. It is 1 1/2 hours from both the capital and Antigua, and 2-3 hours from Lake Atitlan. The population of 41,000 is 97% indigenous Kaqchikel Maya. The Kaqchikel language is spoken as a first language in many homes, especially as you get farther from the main town. Although it is often their second language, almost everyone in Comalapa speaks Spanish.

Traditional Clothing

Most Mayan women in Comalapa wear traje (traditional indigenous dress). The basic female traje consists of a huipil (embroidered blouse), corte (skirt) and faja (sash/belt). Many women also wear aprons with their traje, even when they’re not in the kitchen, to hold their money and cell phones. Each indigenous area of Guatemala has a traje that is specific to their region. The traje for Comalapan women consists of a red huipil with dark blue corte, but most Comalapan women wear styles from all over Guatemala.

Comalapan men have stopped wearing their traje, with the exception of a few elderly men you might see in their white pants, white long sleeved shirt, and small dark brown apron. In some parts of Guatemala traje is still commonly worn by both women and men.
Confianza

Gaining the trust, or confianza, of any new community is very important. Confianza is very difficult for outsiders to obtain and is a key component of successful development work. One of the reasons that LWH is so successful in Comalapa is because of the confianza we have built in over a decade of working with the local people. It is every LWH volunteer's responsibility to maintain and build on the confianza we have in Comalapa to continue our sustainable projects.

Trash

At Long Way Home we are obsessed with waste! We have a great system of trash separation here at LWH and expect every volunteer to follow it diligently. Every piece of trash that you create during your time in Comalapa should be managed appropriately and never make its way into the Municipal Landfill. We burn non-glossy paper, compost our fruit and veggie scraps, feed old food to the dogs, recycle aluminum cans, tetra packs and styrofoam, return or reuse glass bottles, and fill empty plastic bottles with other inorganic garbage (cookie wrappers, chip bags, etc.). We also pound trash into tires when it doesn't fit into a plastic trash bottle. Look for signs in the volunteer kitchen to help direct your “waste” management.

Food & Drink

Groceries

Market days in Comalapa are Tuesday (the largest), Friday and Sunday. You can get a lot of produce in the market area of town any day of the week, but there is more variety available on market days. Market is in full swing by 8 or 9 am,
and there is always more food available in the mornings. By 2pm the vendors begin to leave, earlier if there are heavy rains. One day during the week we will visit the market in full swing.

*Tiendas* sell many staple foods such as rice, salt and beer. We are close friends with Fidelia, the owner of a *tienda* near Parque Chimiya and love to provide her with as much business as possible. There is a Supermercado, “Nim K’ayb’al,” on the main street with a great bakery, “Comalapán,” next door.

**Cooking**

Our staff will be preparing your dinners, and lunches are provided on-site, but you may be responsible for your breakfasts and snacks, depending on your group. All fruits and vegetables that will not be peeled or boiled should be washed with purified water (not tap water) before eating, especially if eaten raw. Be sure to cook meat thoroughly.

**A Note to Vegetarians and Vegans**

If you are a guest in someone’s home, it is polite to accept the food you are offered. The simplest way to get around being served meat is to say that meat makes you sick to your stomach, or that your doctor told you not to eat it. Vegetarianism and veganism are not widely understood in Comalapa, and attempts to explain it are not always successful. One volunteer carefully explained her reasons for being vegetarian to a family she had befriended, only to have them trick her into eating something with pork in it in an attempt to show her that she likes eating meat after all. Please remain flexible, and understand that meat is often something that locals can rarely afford; as a luxury item, it can be offensive to refuse it.

**Glass Bottles**

Any time you get a beer or soda in a glass bottle, return the bottle to the store you got it from. Sometimes you can drink your drink while standing in the *tienda* and give the bottle back right away. Other times drinks from a glass bottle may be poured into a
plastic baggie for you to take with you and drink with a straw. We reuse non-returnable glass bottles as skylights or glass-bottle bricks.

**Water**

There is a purified water dispenser in all kitchens and on the construction site. Water is produced at the school site using an ion filter. Please use this water for drinking, raw food preparation, and brushing your teeth only. If you are cooking something that will boil for at least 5 minutes, it is okay to use tap water. Please clean the water dispenser with vinegar or bleach weekly or it will grow algae.

**Atól**

Atól is a thick hot drink usually made from corn that can also be made from rice, other grains or beans. It can be homemade or come from a powdered mix, and is common anywhere vendors are selling street food. You may be offered Atól as a breakfast drink or snack.

**Coffee**

Coffee plays an important role in the Guatemalan culture and economy. Sadly, the good coffee grown in Guatemala is used almost exclusively for export (check your local Starbucks) and tourist sales. It is traditional for Guatemalans to drink coffee, but few can afford anything other than instant coffee anymore, and they generally put tons of sugar in it. Don't be surprised if you are offered coffee only to be served coffee-flavored sugar water instead of a strong cup of brew.

**Transportation**

**Chicken Buses**

“Chicken buses” or *camionetas* are the public buses that go around Guatemala. They are old US school buses that get converted with diesel engines and make them a colorful bus. They are pretty cheap and tend to get super packed with people, also are great for an adventure! It is the main local form of transportation, however we will not be using these to get around ourselves.
To and From Comalapa

One of the Long Way Home staff will be meeting you at the airport. Look for a Long Way Home shirt or hoodie. A microbus and/or van will be taking you to and from the airport, and the ride is about 2 hours, depending on traffic.

Around Comalapa

_Tuk tuks_ are the three-wheeled taxis you see all over town. The usual fare is Q3 per person anywhere in town, including to Parque Chimiyá. If you are carrying a big pack or traveling late at night you will be charged more. Be prepared for a bumpy ride. Your driver may also pick up additional passengers who are headed in the same direction.

Communication

Internet

Internet cafes are all over Comalapa, and internet use is usually Q5 an hour. There are several within a few blocks of the hotel. There is often internet at the hotel, but it is not reliable and often “goes down”.

Phone Calls

To make calls to the States dial 001 followed by the area code and the seven-digit number. For people outside of Guatemala to call you they dial (from the US/Canada 011) +502 and then your eight-digit Guatemalan cell phone number. Calls outside of Guatemala are fairly expensive but you can stretch your funds by calling on a triple day. Receiving a phone call on a Guatemalan cell is free to the recipient.
Money/Bargaining

The Quetzal (ket-SaL) or (Q) is the currency of Guatemala and the exchange rate is approximately 7.4 quetzales to the US dollar. The quetzal is divided into 100 centavos (cents), and there are coins worth up to Q1. There is also a paper bill for Q1, as well as Q5, Q10, Q20, Q50, Q100 and Q200. Although the Q100 bill is worth about USD $13, it can be hard to get change when paying with a Q100 bill. It is recommended that you carry small bills when making small purchases.

Cash from the US

NO banks in Comalapa will change your US dollars to Quetzals. **It is best if you use the ATM, or exchange your USD before you get to Comalapa.**

ATM’s

There are a couple ATMs in Comalapa, with the mark “Cajero 5B”. One is next to the Banrural on the main street, and another across the street inside the large Galeno pharmacy. There is a service fee per transaction. The ATMs accept Visa, MasterCard, Plus, and Cirrus. Your bank may also charge a fee for their use. There are ATMs throughout Guatemala, but it’s wise to withdraw cash you will need before heading to small, non-touristy towns.

Bargaining

When buying things in the market setting, where prices are not marked, you are expected to bargain with the vendors. If you are buying produce at the Comalapa market, vendors will usually ask for only a small amount more than they expect to receive. If you’re not a committed bargain shopper, you can say something like, “y lo menos?” and see if their price comes down, or simply pay the asking price. People won’t think you’re rude if you don’t bargain with them; they’ll just think you are not a clever shopper.

If you are in a tourist area shopping for clothing, jewelry or souvenirs, a good rule of thumb is to try to pay less than half the original price you are quoted. For example, if a
vendor asks for Q100, try to talk him down to under Q50. It’s a tourist vendor’s rule of thumb to ask for at least twice as much as they’re willing to sell for.

Weather

In Guatemala there are 2 distinct seasons. The dry season is usually between October-April and is the “winter”, and the rainy season is generally May-September which is the “summer”. During the dry season, there is literally no rain and can tend to get very dusty. It also tends to be very cold here, in Comalapa, in the evenings. Even if it is a cloudy day, the sun is very strong here (especially since we are at the top of a mountain) and it is advised to wear sun protection, and have a good hat. The rainy season, is just that, raining majority of the time. It usually rains every day, in the afternoons and overnight. There is sometimes sun and clear skies in the morning, but always muddy. Quick-dry clothing will be your friend. It is important you are prepared for heavy rains with a good rain jacket and boots if you are in Guatemala during this time.

Health and Hygiene

Always tell LWH staff immediately if you need to see a doctor or have an urgent medical concern. Currently, we have an on-site nurse, Ashley she can help you with any medical concerns you may have. You are required to have an up-to-date tetanus booster prior to your arrival at LWH. Also recommended are Hepatitis A and B vaccines. Malaria, Zika and Dengue Fever are not a danger (due to the elevation above 6,500 ft) in Comalapa but can be contracted if you plan to travel elsewhere in Guatemala, especially in the East. You may also want to consider a typhoid vaccine.

The most common health issue for LWH volunteers is stomach upset or diarrhea. Changes in climate, diet and stress levels are just some of the factors that can contribute to intestinal problems. These problems often occur upon entering the country, but can pop up at any time during your stay. They are not often serious but can be inconvenient. To avoid intestinal distress, wash produce properly, cook meats thoroughly, and drink and brush your teeth with purified water. Remember to wash your hands before you eat and after you use the bathroom. If you become ill, you should rest, drink lots of fluid and stick with bland foods.

It's important to note that Comalapa is located at 7000 ft.; therefore one should expect a few days to acclimate to the elevation. Drinking plenty of water, getting plenty of rest
and avoiding intoxicating substances are good ways to ease into the thinner atmosphere, especially if you are coming from sea level.

The Composting Latrine

There are several dry composting latrines (*letrina abonera*) at the school, that are designed to separate the urine from the feces. This design allows more efficient bacterial decomposition, keeping the feces dry and reducing the smell. Never pee in the large back hole.

Again: Never pee in the large poop hole, or poop in the small front hole.

Flush Toilets

Never throw toilet paper into any toilet. Most bathrooms in Latin America provide a trash can for you to throw away your toilet paper, and the same is true for our toilets. When the trash can gets full, toilet paper can be taken outside and burned.

If you are using a flush toilet that doesn’t flush when you push the handle, look for a bucket or barrel of water nearby. Take a big scoop of water and pour it quickly down the toilet bowl to make it flush.

Pila Sink

The *pila* is the large concrete sink used throughout Latin America. The middle part is the receptacle for clean water and that is to stay clean. You take the water from the middle to the side (usually the right) to wash dishes, clothes or other dirty things. The left side is usually where dishes and clean things are put to dry. There are large public pilas in Comalapa where women gather to wash. Families without plumbing bring water to their homes from public pilas, and sometimes we see people taking their horses or cattle to the pilas for a drink.
Safety

Guatemala is a developing country and has its share of crime and violence. The capital is more dangerous than the rest of the country and it is advisable not to spend too much time there unless you are staying with someone you know. When you hear news about gang violence or the homicide rate in Guatemala, it is generally a reflection of the statistics in Guatemala City.

Comalapa is not dangerous, but you should always take precautions. Don't walk around alone at night and never drink or smoke in public. Get to know your neighbors. Be mindful of your surroundings and personal belongings. You may never see or be involved in any problems during your time at LWH. However, as an outsider it is good to keep your guard up a little; more than you would in your own country, especially when you are first learning your way around.

Theft

Petty theft is extremely common in Guatemala. We have actually had plants stolen out of the garden. You are most at risk when you are traveling on buses or staying in touristic areas. Be wary of people who offer to help you for no reason. Elderly women and children can be skilled pickpockets. People sometimes work in teams and try to distract you. Keep an eye on your belongings.

In Comalapa theft most often results from volunteers leaving their belongings unattended. Things that you might not think anyone would want to steal, like a dirty baseball cap or a shovel, are fair game, even if you only leave them unattended for a short time in broad daylight. Do not leave tools lying around. If LWH tools are stolen as a result of your negligence, you will be expected to replace them.

While LWH has great relationships with our neighbors, we have been the victims of theft. Any possessions that you bring with you (ex. electronics, passport, large sums of money, etc.) should be kept safe locked up at the school. They are still at risk with a door locked and closed. Let the Volunteer Coordinator know when you arrive that you would like to bring your things up to the school.

Theft has never been an issue for LWH volunteers staying with our the hotel, but it's still probably best not to leave our valuables lying around. Set clear boundaries with the
children in the house if you are concerned about them handling your things or coming into your room.

Unwanted Attention for Women

Catcalls

Snappy comebacks or attempts to educate Guatemalan men about why catcalls are demeaning, or annoying, are generally fruitless. Even a negative response from you will often provoke more whistles and shouts. The best option is to ignore them.

Come-on’s

What do you do when a casual conversation suddenly turns sketchy? These situations are best dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but you should use the same self-preservation skills you would use in your own country. Giggling as a response to come-on’s will often provoke more attention. You can always simply end the conversation and walk away.

Bolos (Drunk Guys)

If you are walking to town and see a bolo headed your way (the staggering should give him away), walk fast and keep walking. He will usually be too drunk and confused to bother you. On rare occasions he might want to talk to you, shake your hand, or grab onto you. However, he will pretty much never want (or be able) to run alongside you to keep up. Don’t slow down or stop.

Appropriate Behavior

While some unwanted attention is unavoidable for foreign women, there are behaviors that will make you stand out even more. For example, short skirts and tank tops that seem appropriate to wear in Antigua are much less common in Comalapa, and will draw extra attention to you. Wearing tight or revealing clothing and going without a bra are signs of promiscuity here, and are not permitted on the construction site and in town. The same goes for drinking and smoking in public; it is not permitted for either men or women to smoke and drink on the street in town. Please also be mindful that the culture of romance in Comalapa is probably unlike your home town and “dating rules” between men and women may be quite different from what you’re used to.
These actions obviously do not give anyone the right to harass you, but modest dress and conservative behavior in public are likely to make your stay in Comalapa more pleasant. Your behavior helps shape the impression of all foreign women in Comalapa. Behaving appropriately helps maintain a safe environment for all current and future female LWH volunteers. Inappropriate behavior on the part of our volunteers may result in being asked to leave Long Way Home immediately, without a refund.

In Case of Emergency

Natural Disasters

Guatemala experiences occasional natural disasters including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, floods, and landslides. It is a good idea to contact your family if you hear of a natural disaster happening in Guatemala, even if you are not affected. There's always a chance they'll see something about it in the news and become worried if they can't reach you.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes occur frequently in Guatemala and many parts of Central America. You are likely to feel a small tremor or two during your stay. If you're in the volunteer house during an earthquake slowly go outside away from trees. Don't go running out of the house. If you are in a home, school or other facility, calmly move to a doorway or a more structurally sound part of the building. Most earthquake injuries occur from people falling down while trying to evacuate, or moving through a building that has falling debris, so don’t try to run. If there is a large earthquake it may last longer than one minute. Stay calm and help others around you to remain calm. People are more capable of making rational decisions when they are calm. The school is probably the safest place to be in the whole region.

Volcanoes

Volcanoes don't pose an immediate threat to Comalapa, though you can see them in the distance from the main street in town. The closest active volcano is Volcan Fuego that you can frequently see puffing smoke from the construction site. The most popular active volcano to climb is Volcan Pacaya (a day trip from Antigua). Climb active volcanoes at your own risk.
Hurricanes, Flooding and Landslides

Hurricanes do occur in Guatemala but are rare. They produce flooding and landslides. Hurricanes are not sudden, and precautions can be taken in the event of an approaching hurricane. Landslides can also occur during very heavy rains, and might affect you if you are traveling during the rainy season. Ask locals and check newspapers for information about road conditions before heading out.

Protests and Riots

Protests and riots, or manifestations, don’t often occur without warning. They are usually in the form of roadblocks at major highway intersections, which will only affect you if you are traveling. Asking locals and checking newspapers when you are traveling are two ways to find out if roadblocks are planned in your area. Always avoid angry mob and unruly crowds.

Please ensure that you have your embassy contact information and know the location of the nearest embassy prior to coming to visit. We advise you look at their travel recommendations and it may be a good idea to let them know you will be travelling in Guatemala.

Customs and Courtesy

Greetings

When walking around Comalapa or to and from town, always smile and say buenos dias (before noon), buenas tardes (afternoon) or buenas noches (at night) to the people you pass. You can also say adios, or a simple buenas. Buenas is particularly useful if you’re not sure whether it’s morning or afternoon. People generally won’t address you first, but will be happy to respond. Always make an effort to communicate with people in the neighborhood where you live or you will be perceived as unfriendly.

“Con Permiso”

When entering someone’s home, ALWAYS say “con permiso” as you enter, even if they have already invited you in. It is polite to do the same when entering a store or other small business, or walking to and from work through fields. When someone says “con
"permiso" to enter your home or enter the park, your appropriate response is “pasé adelante.” Also use “con permiso” to excuse yourself from a room or a conversation. In that situation, the appropriate response is “propio.”

“Buen Provecho”

At the end of every meal, everyone says “gracias” and then “buen provecho.” You can also say “buen provecho” to other customers as you are leaving a small restaurant or comedor.

Yes or No Questions

An important custom to remember, when asking questions, is that Guatemalans tend to say yes, regardless of the correct answer. They simply feel it is impolite to tell you no. For example, if you ask someone, “Do all your children attend school?” A polite response is “yes.” To be sure you get the correct information, it is better to ask, “How many of your children attend school?” Be careful not to use yes or no questions when asking for directions.

Dating and Relationships

It is recommended that you refrain from having anything more than a platonic relationship with local Guatemalans during your time here. The cultural values here are extremely conservative and are likely very different from yours. There is no casual dating in Comalapa. Therefore you should never lead anyone on, or even show interest in someone you're attracted too, unless you are interested in getting married. Matt will talk to you more about this subject if you have any further questions.

Drugs/Alcohol

Volunteers are not permitted to smoke or be drunk while in town. The reason is, just as everything else we do, we are all examples to the community and do not want anything to reflect badly against foreigners and most importantly the project. Additionally, we want a good reputation with our workers at LWH therefore smoking with other Comalapans is not permitted. We are here because we have built a good relationship with the community. Please recognize that your actions could jeopardize that. There are private locations, such as the volunteer house that if you would like to participate in these activities, do so with other volunteers in private.
Specific to Women

Sincere friendships between men and women are rare in Guatemala. Men who attempt to befriend you, or ask you for English lessons, likely have romantic intentions. Never assume a man is not hitting on you just because he’s married. Inviting a man into your home is viewed as an invitation for courtship, no matter how you explain it or what your intentions really are. Think twice before giving your phone number to a man; calling women 20 times a day is an acceptable way to show interest in Guatemala.

Specific to Men

Something as simple as asking for a phone number may have you playing groom in a shotgun wedding. For the sake self-preservation, take care to not appear as if you are courting a Guatemalan.

Community Contacts

Doña Fidelia is a great friend to everyone at Long Way Home. She lives close to Parque Chimiya and has a small tienda. She is usually very eager to make friends with LWH volunteers and is always invited to large dinners or parties. She is Long Way Home’s in-country mother and will make sure that you know she’s there to help any way she can. Fidelia has one dog, many chickens, turkeys and pigeons. She sells the eggs from her chickens and turkeys; the eggs are very nutritious because Fidelia feeds her animals a varied diet of corn feed and fresh vegetables. She loves to chat and has a lot of knowledge of Long Way Home’s history.

Donal is our taxi driver, one of our homestay fathers and good friend. He can take you anywhere at anytime for a price, and his honesty and friendship have been priceless to LWH.

Feliciano owns the hotel, Comalapa Sol, where you will be staying. He also owns the hardware store, Ferreteria Quetzal, where we purchase many of our construction materials. His wife Clara teaches at the main elementary school in Comalapa, up the road from Paxán. They have three children: Clarissa, Carol and Manuel (Chino) and grandsons, Diego and Luis.
Oscar and Angelica are the owners of Alpha Omega English school in town. You are also welcome to take lessons with Angelica. If you want to help with English Classes in the evenings this is also an option.
Animals

Long Way Home’s in-country staff has many animals.

Staff Animals

The concept of pets is very different in Guatemala, the only dogs you should pet are staff animals; all other dogs should be treated as if they have rabies (though this is unlikely).

**Obi** – The largest of our dogs, he is big and black and he leads the pack.

**Lucy** – Yellow dog with a bushy fox-like tail. She is sweet but loves to roll in nasty things.

**Cleocatra** - She is the newest kitty at the school. We are hoping she is a good mouser.

**Robin’s Dog Sadie** – She is a beautiful chuccho mix with 2 different colored eyes. Will hassle you for love.

Other Animals

Chuchos are street dogs. Sometimes nice dogs during the day turn into chuchos at night. Do NOT feed or touch chuchos, or let them follow you. Do NOT bring them to the school or volunteer house. The same goes for stray cats and just about all animals; better not to touch. If threatened by a dog, stomp your foot, throw rocks or act like you’re going to throw a rock, and say CHUCHO loudly and they will run away. If you get bitten you will need a rabies shot. Always assume that an animal has rabies.