

CASA VISITOR PACKET

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Romans 12:1

We are so glad that you are considering spending time at Casa. There are several things to keep in mind as you prepare for your visit:

- Be prepared to expand your comfort zone a little and allow yourself to grow in Christ through your service to some of God’s special children in Mexico.
- Plan to work hard—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Pray that you will be able to leave behind all of your personal struggles and use the time that you have here to focus your mind and heart on this mission of which God has led you to be a part.
- You may be asked to try something that you have never tried before. Adopt the attitude that God has brought you to this place at this time to learn new skills and to see His world and His children in a new light.

Life at Casa is based on love, consistency, and routines. Be prepared to be a role model with your participation and conformity to these routines and other house rules.

Team Unity and Focus

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5

Each member of the mission team should know his/her purpose for coming to Casa. Each person on your team has unique God-given talents and gifts. Determine how to best utilize the talents of every person on this mission trip. Focus on your mission. Be prepared for anything and everything that might happen. Ask a lot of questions and work hard on team unity before you come, so that when you get here you can focus on the children, not the struggles of team building.

Lead your team through discussion groups, meetings, and prayer sessions that build community and focus. We suggest monthly meetings through the early months and increased frequency in the last three or four months before you arrive. In doing these things your team can be most effective, and you will be a greater blessing to the children here, and afterwards, to others back home.

A Typical Schedule

- Monday - Friday
 - 7:00 AM - Breakfast with the kids.
 - 8:00 AM - Morning Meeting to focus thoughts and determine work assignments.
 - After the morning meeting until lunch. - Work/Project time (the Casa kids will have school, or their own chores to do).

- 1:30 PM or so - Wrap up the day's work and clean-up workstations.
- 2:00 PM - Lunch with kids.
- After lunch: Activity time with kids is scheduled for most afternoons.
- 6:00 PM - Dinner with kids.
- 7:00 PM - Daily Devotionals.
- After the daily devotional, the youngest Casa kids head off for bedtime routines. Sometimes there are game nights with the older children. This is also the time for cards, games, relaxation, and socializing for volunteers.
- 10:00 PM - Lights out and voices off. (This is a time set by Casa.) Energy conservation is a high priority, as is consideration for your tired teammates who are ready to sleep.
- Saturday is often a travel day for groups.
 - 7:30 AM – Breakfast with the kids.
 - If team is here, work schedule is same as Monday through Friday.
 - 1:00 PM – Lunch with kids.
 - If team is here, activity time with kids is same as Monday through Friday.
 - 6:00 PM – Dinner with kids
- Sunday
 - 7:30 AM – Breakfast with the kids
 - 10:30 AM – Church is held on campus
 - 1:00 PM –Lunch with kids
 - The Sabbath is reserved for play and rest
 - 6:00 PM –Dinner with kids

House Rules

Casa de la Esperanza means “house of hope”. We strive to provide the best Christian care and environment for the children residing here, giving them the hope that only Jesus can provide. As you come to Casa de la Esperanza to serve, help the children, and work, remember that we are constantly setting examples for them. As Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example as I follow Christ.” Therefore, we have a few basic house rules to keep in mind as we set the example of Christ daily:

- Running and yelling are strictly outside activities.
- The children’s bedrooms are reserved for sleeping, reading, visiting, and other quiet activities. Play is confined to designated areas both inside and out.
- Only cooks and dishwashers are allowed in the kitchen. Hairnets and mouth covers must be worn at all times in the kitchen or when serving food.
- Work groups are responsible for the cleaning of their respective work areas.
- If you see it dirty, clean it up – whether you made the mess or not. “See a need; meet a need” is a good rule to follow.
- Respect the gender boundaries (i.e., no wrestling between boys and girls, respecting privacy of both the boys’ and girls’ wings of the dorms, etc.).
- Special care should be taken when showing affection to the children, as well as other group members. This is not a trip for inappropriate relationships with our children or amongst you. Do not

get involved, except as Christian friends, brothers, and sisters. Many of our children come from backgrounds of physical and sexual abuse; therefore, we must be conscious of our actions.

- Our sewer system is septic tanks. This requires that toilet paper be put in the trash receptacle next to the toilet. Flushing toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, or other solid items will clog the system.
- Noise should be controlled after 7:00 PM as we have young children who need to be calmed down and put to bed at an early hour. Evening devotionals may be held outside as weather permits.
- Appropriate dress is required at all times. Shorts are permitted as long as they are loose fitting and are just above the knee. Biker shorts and tight exercise pants should not be worn. Summer tops should be modest and not too form fitting.
 - For those groups attending church services with us, it is a casual environment, but remember to be respectful. The Casa girls usually wear skirts or dresses, but that is optional. Skirts or dresses should be no shorter than just above the knee. For men and boys, a nice pair of pants (nice jeans are OK) and a collared shirt are good choices.
- We also ask that no money be given directly to the children. If you are so inclined to provide financial support, please speak directly to Gil, and he will make sure that the money is spent for the children's needs.
- Candy should generally be distributed after meals so as not to spoil appetites. Please check with Gil or the supervising staff member before giving out candy.
- We do not allow sunbathing, foul or harsh language, bad behavior, smoking, or using personal devices (phones, tablets, etc.) in ways that are detrimental to your interaction with others. You cannot buy or possess alcohol, drugs, fireworks, knives, guns, or other weapons.

Project Expectations

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

A typical schedule for a visiting group at Casa includes a morning work project on Casa grounds or possibly in the community. Your group should be prepared to work on their projects from approximately 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. These projects might involve painting, working on the grounds, or other maintenance and construction projects.

It is very important for your group to make a thoughtful assessment of the individual and collective God-given talents of its members. After determining these gifts and considering the list of current needs at Casa or in the surrounding community, your group will work with the director and administrative staff to design a project and schedule that will allow you to develop and use your talents to their fullest. In addition to on-site building and maintenance projects, other groups have been involved in community outreach through food and clothing distributions and medical missions. If you would like your trip to include any of these outreaches, please discuss and plan these activities with Casa staff as well.

Interactions with Kids

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3–4

The afternoons and evenings are typically spent in activities and interaction with the children. After lunch, your group will have two to three hours, from 3 pm to 6 pm to spend with the children. You are encouraged and welcomed to plan activities with the children during this time. Some ideas include Vacation Bible Schools, educational enrichment activities, crafts, outings, or recreational/sports time. Be original and be sure your whole group is prepared and excited, as your attitude is contagious to our children. Your daily schedule will also include nightly devotionals. Devotional time is an awesome encouragement to all and a great time of praise to our God!

Your Group’s Service to the Community

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:31

In addition to serving the children at Casa, many opportunities exist for serving and being a light for Jesus in the community. These services can range from cleaning up public areas or buildings to having organized and planned activities in town. Medical, dental or vision missions can address some of the basic medical needs of the community. Other community outreach activities could be focused on children’s ministries, such as community puppet shows or recreational sports leagues.

There is always an opportunity to provide food to the local people who are in need. Many groups bring funds to purchase food, and then team up with the kids and staff from Casa to go into the community and distribute it. If you choose to do this you will go into Anáhuac and the surrounding communities. The bags usually include rice, beans, potatoes, and some Bible verses. Some teams have brought Spanish New Testaments to distribute with the food. Some Bible studies have resulted from this work, and it is a wonderful way to show the love of our Lord.

These are only a few examples of the many good works you and your mission team can do for the Lord in Mexico. We encourage you to discuss your specific ideas and visions with the director so that your group’s talents can be used to the fullest.

Trip Planning Calendar

One year in advance

- Contact Casa as soon as possible. Space for the summer fills up fast so it is a good idea to let us know as soon as possible when you would like to come and visit us. If possible, when you are here visiting one year, let us know a tentative date for the following year.
- Begin team-building activities for those who would like to visit the next year.
- Begin thinking about and assigning tasks to individuals.
- Trip planners should begin holding meetings and developing original ideas for the team to begin planning for time spent here at Casa.

Four to six months ahead of time

- At this point you should begin to be sure of the team who will be visiting. Ensure that all group members have a passport or Passcard.
- Group leaders should be in contact with Casa to plan your projects and schedules.
- Team members should be prepped for what to expect from their trip (bi-monthly meetings for preparation).
- Fundraising activities should be under way.

Two months before arrival

- Activities should be planned, and materials need to be gathered for building projects and activities with children.

Six weeks in advance

- If possible, construction funds should be sent to SW Church of Christ (see contact page).
- Funds should be secured and modes of transportation readied (including paperwork).
- Begin meeting more regularly (weekly/biweekly) to go over responsibilities, activities, and packing.

Two weeks before arrival

- Double check that those preparing devotionals are fully prepared. It is very helpful if this person works with your group's translator (if one is available) at this point.
- Be sure parent consent letters are typed, signed, and notarized.

One week in advance

- Go over the checklist for papers and other preparations.
- Hold final group meetings and team-building sessions.
- Make final phone calls and/or send final e-mails to Casa.

Upon arrival at Casa

- Remind your group of courtesies and rules while at Casa.
- Group leaders meet with Casa administration to check schedule and plans.
- Enjoy being here as part of our extended family.

Packing List

Most of your clothes for the trip should be work clothes. You may be painting as one of your projects, so bring paint/work clothes that you aren't worried about spoiling. There are no laundry facilities available at Casa for the missionary teams, so pack accordingly.

Summer teams will find shorts and t-shirts appropriate attire while at Casa. Shorts should be Bermuda or walking length – no short shorts, please. Also bring clothes appropriate for church. Blue jeans or casual skirts are fine. Evenings can be cool, so include a light jacket or sweater.

Winter teams should pack layers. The weather can range from below freezing to the low 70's. A light jacket, as well as a warm coat, is needed. Remember, you may be working in these, so don't bring your nicest coat.

Team Member Pack List

- Bible
- PASSPORT!!!
- If you are a driver you will need the following:
 - Original title to your vehicle and two copies
 - If you **DO NOT OWN** the vehicle going across the border free and clear (no loan), you **MUST** have a letter from the loan company on their letterhead stating that they know you are taking the vehicle out of the country.
 - Original vehicle registration and two copies
 - Driver's license and two copies
 - Two copies of your passport
 - The deposit for your vehicle will require a credit card. The deposit is around \$300, most of which will be refunded when you leave Mexico, except for a fee of about \$60.
- Clothes for the duration of your trip (there is no laundry available for the missionaries)
 - A light jacket. If you are coming in the winter, bring a warm coat, as well.
 - Most of the clothes should be "work clothes"
 - The weather at Casa in the summer is hot during the day, but chilly when the sun goes down. The weather at Casa in the winter is variable so bring clothing you can layer. It could get very cold while you are here, so be prepared.
 - Please remember that modesty is important; no shorts more than a few inches above the knee, no biker/exercise shorts or pants and no low-cut tanks or crop tops.
 - Painting clothes (that you don't mind getting covered with paint)
 - A nice outfit to wear to church on Sunday
 - Pajamas

- Shoes. You will be working in these. An extra pair is recommended in case you get a job where you may get your feet wet.
- Towel for showering
- Toiletries
 - Toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, brush, etc.
 - Shower shoes are a good idea.
- Bedding
 - The bunks you will sleep on have plastic covered mattresses on them. A sleeping bag works well on these. Some people prefer sheets and blankets. If you are visiting in the winter and your sleeping bag is not very warm, you may want to pack some extra blankets as well. Even in the summer it can get chilly at night!
 - Pillow
- Water Bottle
 - The water at Casa is well water, and it is safe. We will need to stay hydrated while we work so your water bottle is **IMPORTANT**.
- If you are a coffee drinker, a “go cup” is nice to have. Sometimes finding a mug is a challenge.
- A small flashlight for use in in the dorms after lights out is recommended.
- Work gloves if you have them
- Hat or bandanas
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- A Spanish/English dictionary is helpful.
- Travel money for snacks, etc. (avoid bringing too much).

Border Crossing and Vehicle Requirements

Border Crossing Procedures: Destination Mexico

Individual

Each person in the group will need to get a temporary tourist visa. It is fairly simple to get, and these are the things you will need in order to get one:

1. Passport or Passcard.
2. Every unaccompanied minor must have a letter of permission that is signed by both parents and by a notary. The letter should name the group leader as the child's guardian for the appropriate time period and the authorization for them to enter Mexico.
3. If you plan to be in Mexico for more than seven days, you will need to pay a fee of approximately \$26. If you will be in Mexico less than seven days, you will not need to pay the fee.

Vehicle

The following are the Mexican requirements for bringing a vehicle into the country:

1. Documents. You must have the following documents with you at the time you cross into Mexico and apply for a vehicle permit.
 - a. Original title in the name of the driver.
 - b. If the vehicle is not in the driver's name you will need a letter from the title holder giving permission to the driver to take the vehicle into Mexico. The title holder could be a bank, church, or a spouse.
 - c. Driver's license of the driver.
 - d. The deposit for your vehicle will require a credit card. The deposit is around \$300, most of which will be refunded when you leave Mexico, except for a fee of about \$60.
 - e. Vehicle registration.
2. Insurance. You must have proof of insurance for the U.S. and for Mexico. Mexican vehicle insurance is very inexpensive.
3. Copies. You will need 2 copies of all of these documents as well as the tourist visa you acquire upon arrival. To save time you may make the copies beforehand; however, if there is a copy that you missed, there is a place available for you to make copies.

We also ask that you bring the proper transportation. In the past almost any vehicle was allowed to enter Mexico. However, this has changed, and regardless of our past experiences, any vehicle that seats more than 15 passengers will not be allowed into Mexico. If your title says "bus" it will not be allowed to cross, regardless of size. If you do not meet the requirements there are some rental companies that will rent vans into Mexico. If you would like to plan that beforehand, give us a call and we will be able to direct you to those we know will allow their vehicles to enter Mexico.

Border Crossing: Return to the U.S.A.

When you return to the U.S. from your visit to Casa, you must cancel your visitor's visa. You will need to return to the same border crossing and get a stamp out. If you do not get the stamp out and return the following year, there will be a fine for everyday that you left and did not have the stamp. For example, if it was exactly one year, they will charge you a certain amount per day for one year as a fine. So be sure and get the stamp out.

If you obtained a permit for your vehicle, you will also need to cancel your vehicle permit. If you do not cancel your vehicle permit within the six months the permit allows, your entire vehicle deposit will be forfeited.

If you forget to cancel your vehicle permit, do not take the sticker off yourself if you plan to return to Mexico. Wait until you return (as long as it is before the termination date of the permit) and cancel it before getting a new one. If you do not cancel the sticker and have no proof that you did, there is a possibility that a fine is involved. Before your trip, check on the newest guidelines for re-entering the United States. A U.S. passport is required for re-entry into the United States.

Also use common sense when re-entering the U.S.; it is not a time for smart remarks and jokes that you think might be funny. The authorities might take you a little too seriously and you could be at the border for longer than you anticipated. Their job is to protect U.S. citizens from whoever/whatever dangers could come in through a foreign border, so please help them do their job and make it easy for them. Taking souvenirs home is acceptable; just be mindful of what you take. Things you can find in Mexico can incur a felony, if taken back to the U.S., so we suggest that you always think on the cautious side.

Directions to Casa de la Esperanza

As time and schedules permit, we can provide assistance with the border crossing of your group, but we request all expenses be covered. Border travel expenses generally run approximately \$175–\$200, depending on the price of gas. This includes motel and toll expenses as well. We are happy to assist if needed or requested. (Please print up the Contact information from this web site in case of travel emergency.)

From El Paso through Juarez (Main Bridge)

The main bridge crossing from El Paso to Juarez is Exit 19 off of I-10. As soon as you cross, follow the signs for Hwy 45 to Cd. Chihuahua. As you leave Juarez, you will come to the Mexican Customs building. You will need to stop here and receive your tourist visas and vehicle permits. As soon as you leave customs, follow Hwy 45 to Chihuahua.

Entering Mexico through the Santa Teresa crossing point

Follow I-10 to Exit 8 and head to the Santa Teresa border crossing. You will stop at the Customs building to receive your tourist visas and vehicle permits. When you leave customs, follow this road to the next checkpoint about 15-20 miles from the Customs Building. After this checkpoint, you will merge onto Hwy 45 and continue to Chihuahua.

After Border Crossing

The Highway 45 is a well-maintained, four-lane highway. It will cost about \$30 per vehicle, each direction. The drive is approximately four hours to get to Chihuahua, depending on the number of stops made. Hwy 45 will take you directly to Ciudad Chihuahua. When you get to Cd. Chihuahua, Hwy 45 loops around the city. A good rule of thumb is to follow the highway signage directing you to Cuauhtémoc. When entering Chihuahua City, look for “Perterico de la Juventad” - the street you will turn right on. Follow the curve and take a left turn at the stoplight. You are still on Hwy 45 through the city. You will come to a stoplight with a large grocery store on the right. Follow the sign to merge onto Hwy 16, which will take you through the mountains and to Anáhuac. You will go through one tollbooth after the city. The road to Anáhuac will be at the top of the hill shortly after Km marker 90. Turn right when you see the Anáhuac sign in the tiny town of Tacuba (you may also see a sign for Apache Station). Follow this paved road about four miles until you see Casa on the left side. *Bienvenidos!!!*