



Via
International



ViaGO Frequently Asked Questions





WHAT IS VIA GO?

Simply put, Via Go is the combination of an interdisciplinary approach to voluntourism where volunteering, community participation, and strategic development initiatives converge resulting in long-term problem solving. We are very proud of our history as a development organization working in partnership with communities for 40 years. Through the participatory process we've learned how to bring volunteers to unique communities in the most effective, meaningful, and honest possible way.

WHO VOLUNTEERS WITH VIA INTERNATIONAL?

Volunteer groups of all kinds join Via International including: colleges, universities, high schools, church groups, families, professionals, individuals, and other NGOs offering their skills and energy.

HOW BIG SHOULD MY VOLUNTEER GROUP BE?

For strategic reasons as part of our overall approach to voluntourism through integrated development, all groups need to have a minimum of 10 participants (certain exceptions may be considered). Groups tend to average between 10-20 participants in size. The maximum number of participants per group varies depending on the destination and work projects. Via International can easily accommodate groups as large as 30 or 60 in some locations. Details will need to be discussed to determine what is best for your group.





HOW LONG IS THE TRIP?

Trip lengths vary and range from 3 to 14 days. Most international trips average 7-10 days and domestic US trips average 5-7 days. However, weekend getaways, as well as DayTrips for local excursions are available in San Diego, Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate, New Mexico and Appalachia.

HOW MANY ADULT CHAPERONES ARE WE REQUIRED TO BRING?

All high school student groups must be accompanied by at least one group coordinator and/or adult chaperones. However, we highly recommend having at least two adult chaperones. Groups with all participants over 18 years do not need additional leadership, however you may have specific requirements for faculty and chaperones through your school or institution.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL WEEK LIKE?

Groups participate in integrated community development activities including work projects as determined by the local community. Work projects may include: pouring cement, facility construction, building and home repair and weatherization, environmental restoration, green area development, garden maintenance and development, land and water conservation, permaculture, home building, graffiti paint-outs, youth mentoring, elder care, food harvesting and transportation, beach and river clean-up, building with adobe, and more. Groups will also participate in cultural and educational activities including visits to regional museums, cultural and historic sites, churches, special events, micro-enterprise cooperatives, local businesses, community centers and clinics, schools and universities, and local markets. Adventure activities may be incorporated for some groups during the itinerary design. In addition, you may also schedule time for dialogue, sharing, reflections, journaling, and other communications and team-building exercises.





IF I GO TO GUATEMALA, CAN I ROAST A MARSHMALLOW ON PACAYA VOLCANO?

YES!!! OK, so maybe this isn't a frequently asked question, but perhaps it should be! The view from the top of Pacaya Volcano is nothing short of spectacular... standing on top of the world looking at 3 more huge volcanoes in the distance... Yes, you can do that.

HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE VOLUNTEERS ARE SAFE?

Safety is the single most important element of traveling with Via International and we have an excellent track record. We have safety procedures and protocols in place in every location and make sure that you'll always be accompanied by a trained Via facilitator who speaks the local language and is always there to help. The best way that we keep you safe is actually through our long-term relationship and development model itself. When Via works in a community we commit and build relationships at every step of the way. In this way we are like family and when you travel with Via you're welcomed into our family and community. Our community and it's members help keep you safe and it works.

WHAT IS THE FOOD LIKE?

We take the utmost care in providing local, healthy, and tasty meals for all groups participants on each of our trips. We use a combination of local vendors and often employ community member to help facilitate cooking. We take special care to accommodate allergies, vegetarian & vegans, and do our very best to serve everyone high quality foods that they will enjoy. Food says so much about a culture and a community and we work hard to bring you the best of all three.





WHAT KIND OF ACCOMMODATION CAN I EXPECT?

Lodging varies depending on the trip itinerary and destination. Groups are often housed in simple and affordable locations in the community including dorms, small locally owned and operated hotels, churches, other community organizations. Most lodging sites provide beds or bunk beds, while others require guests to sleep on mats or air mattresses. We will confirm if it is necessary for your group to bring sleeping bags. In remote communities, accommodations can include camping outdoors or overnight stays in local villages or traditional housing structures like a hogan. Hotel accommodations may also be available in some locations for an additional cost.

HOW MUCH DOES A VIA GO PROGRAM COST?

Our programs are some of the most affordable voluntourism programs and provide a great value. We do our best to keep direct costs low, leverage impact, and ensure that over 90% of program fees go to community support. With over 10 locations to choose from, it's not possible for us to have universal pricing, and costs vary depending on group size, location, and length of travel. To get an estimate for a specific program visit the Program Fees page of your desired location or simply contact us.

WHAT OTHER COSTS SHOULD I EXPECT?

Eating out at local restaurants, optional tourism activities such as zip line tours, horseback riding, hiking a volcano or other adventure activities are not covered in the program cost. These will be the responsibility of volunteers. We recommend bringing a few extra bucks to buy a souvenir, support a local vendor, and/or spontaneously add to your adventure.





HOW DO I REGISTER AND MAKE PAYMENTS FOR MY TRIP?

There are multiple ways to register for a program. Often Universities and High Schools have their own internal application processes, and you'll pay directly to your school. Please check with your trip coordinator for details. Via is also happy to receive your payments directly through PayPal or by major credit card. Once a program is scheduled, we'll set up an online registration portal where you'll provide basic information, a medical self-assessment, and complete a volunteer waiver.

DO PARTICIPANTS OR GROUP LEADERS NEED TO SPEAK THE LOCAL LANGUAGE?

Participants and group leaders do not need to speak the local language, although service trips are an excellent opportunity for individuals to practice and improve language skills. Regional representatives usually speak English and are often fluent in the local language as well. In addition, Via will provide a translator.

DO YOU HAVE A SUGGESTED PACKING LIST?

Yes, you can review our general packing checklist [here](#). We also advise double-checking with your program coordinator for location specific items prior to departure.





CAN I BRING THINGS TO DONATE TO PEOPLE IN THE HOST COUNTRY OR COMMUNITY?

No. It is NOT recommended that participants bring gifts for community members and local children. Via International is committed to integrated community development that supports individuals and communities by building paths to self-reliance rather than conventional charity give-away models. We advise that you observe closely during your travels and if a need is identified, we can work together on a specific solution. Please speak directly with Via staff to discuss ideas or alternative options.

WILL I BE ABLE TO CONTACT FAMILY OR FRIENDS IN THE UNITED STATES DURING MY TRIP?

Access to international cell service and internet may be limited during visits to many of the rural communities we work with. However, regional staff members have cell phones and computer access in case of emergencies and can assist group leaders as needed. We ask and recommend that participants agree to “disconnect” from the modern world and refrain from using cell phones and computers during their visit.

WHAT ABOUT GROUND TRANSPORTATION ONCE WE LAND?

In International locations, ground transportation by van or bus with a driver is provided to and from the airport, to the lodging site and throughout the length of the trip.

In domestic locations in the US, ground transportation to and from the airport to the lodging site and throughout the length of the trip is provided by your group. It is the responsibility of the group to secure, reserve, pay for, coordinate, and facilitate ground transportation by van, bus, or cars and to provide legal drivers for all vehicles transporting participants from their group. In San Diego, Via International can arrange ground transportation for an additional fee.





WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PURCHASING AIRLINE TICKETS?

Groups are responsible for arranging their own transportation to and from the Via International trip destination. Booking and purchase of airplane tickets are the sole responsibility of the group and the individual trip participants.

WILL SOMEONE MEET US AT THE AIRPORT?

In international locations, an In-Country Coordinator will meet your group at the airport. In most domestic US locations, the group is responsible for coordinating their ground transportation to and from the airport and throughout the length of the trip. The group is responsible for getting to the regional lodging site and a regional representative from the destination will meet the group at the regional lodging site. For first time groups, it is possible to schedule for a regional representative to meet you at the airport.





DO WE NEED A PASSPORT AND VISAS?

As of June 1, 2009, all American citizens returning to the US by plane, train, vehicle, or on foot are required to show a valid and current US passport in order to enter the United States. Simpler forms of identification like a driver's license are no longer acceptable at US/Mexico border crossing checkpoints. ALL trip participants who are legal US citizens will be required to bring identification including a valid and current US passport. Trip participants who are not legal US Citizens or visiting the US on student visas MUST bring their passport from their country of origin, as well as any other pertinent documentation that validates permission to be in the US such as a student visa or green card. If you are not a US Citizen, check with Immigration and Naturalization Services to see what is needed to re-enter the USA. The necessary forms of ID are likely: Passport, Visa, I 20, I 94 (INS Website info @ www.ins.gov). Also check with the appropriate Consulate to confirm the documents needed to enter the destination country. Regarding visas to enter other countries, US citizens currently do not need a visa to enter Mexico, but may need visas to enter other countries. Please check with the US government or destination country's consulate to confirm what documents, fees, or national tax may be required to enter or leave the destination country.





DO WE NEED INTERNATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE OR MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE?

All trip participants are required to have and show proof of personal medical coverage, both domestic and international. Traveler's medical insurance can be purchased through a variety of providers for short-term coverage over the exact dates of your trip. Medical evacuation insurance is not required, but it is recommended and may be included in popular international traveler's medical insurance offers.

ARE THERE MEDICAL SERVICES AVAILABLE?

Most programs are located in places with access to medical clinics, doctors, and hospitals, although access can be more limited in our most remote locations or during more remote activities.

Basic first aid kits accompany all groups, but it is recommended that individuals with prior or active medical conditions or any physical limitations or allergies:

- Alert our staff in writing through the Online Registration Medical Self-Assessment AND in person upon arrival
- Bring all necessary medicines and medical support materials and instructions that may be necessary in the case of a flare-up

Of particular concern are allergies to food or bees, asthma conditions, diabetes, and back problems. If you are taking prescription drugs of any kind, please ensure that you bring enough for the journey and that medications are stored and carried in official medical bottles clearly labeled with your prescription details. It is also advisable to bring a copy of any eyeglass prescriptions AND an extra pair of glasses if you have serious vision problems.





ARE PARTICIPANTS ALLOWED TO DRINK ALCOHOL? NOPE.

Via International does not allow, provide, or serve alcohol on service learning trips. Participants may not bring or consume alcohol, drugs, or any illegal substances during the service learning trip and these substances are not allowed anywhere including lodging areas, work sites, or community activity locations. Participants who do not comply with these rules may be asked to leave and sent home. Underage minors caught drinking on the premises or in the community are subject to local arrest, imprisonment, heavy fines, and complicated legal proceedings. Via International is not responsible for the illegal and inappropriate conduct of trip participants and cannot intervene on your behalf should local law enforcement be involved.

