

Long Way Home

San Juan Comalapa

Guatemala



Volunteer Manual

Everything you need to know about living
and working with the

Long Way Home Team

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The Long Way Home Story

Long Way Home's Executive Director, Matthew Paneitz (aka Mateo or Norm), is a former Peace Corps volunteer from Texas who completed part of his Peace Corps service in San Juan Comalapa. During his time in Comalapa, Mateo worked with youth groups through a local community development organization called Chuwi Tinamit. Chuwi Tinamit owned a piece of land where they had plans to build a community park, but they lacked the funds to complete the project.

When Mateo returned from Peace Corps, he moved to Oregon and founded his own nonprofit organization, Long Way Home, Inc (LWH). He began raising funds to build Chuwi's park in 2004, and at the beginning of 2005 he returned to Comalapa to start construction. Once Parque Chimiya became established as a community gathering place, area residents began coming to LWH for help with other endeavors. LWH projects now include reforestation (*on hold*), water distribution, education in local schools, and alternative construction. In 2008, LWH began its most ambitious undertaking to date, the construction of a primary and vocational school using rammed earth and recycled materials



The LWH On-Site Staff

Matt (Mateo) Paneitz, Executive Director & Founder
Cell #5703-5238



Oversees the on-site staff and general operations of the organization and is the figurehead of the organization in Guatemala and abroad. Matt focuses work on construction projects at the school land in Paxán, he is the man with the vision who started it all.

Adam Howland, Construction Manager
Cell # 4932-2857



Oversees all alternative construction projects at the land in Paxán and at Parque Chimiyá. He was a Peace Corps volunteer in Huehuetenango, constructing stoves, latrines and water cisterns, before joining LWH. He works long hours everyday of the week (except Sundays) and has a movie quote for every occasion.

Liz Howland, Construction Assistant
Cell # 4894-8940



Assists in all alternative construction projects and trains all new volunteers in construction methods and safety regulations. She works as translator and guide to every Engineers Without Borders chapter we work with. Liz was also in Peace Corps in Huehuetenango where she specialized in animal husbandry and adopted her dog, Lucy.

Genevieve Croker, Director of Operations

Cell # 4669-6064



Manages day-to-day in-country operations with a focus on communication and internal processes. She came to LWH planning to volunteer for three months and quickly decided she couldn't leave. A mean cook, Genevieve is currently trying to train her puppy, Indie, to stay out of the kitchen.

The staff is here 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; please do not hesitate to ask for their advice or help.

Upon your arrival, you and the Volunteer Coordinator will discuss your education, experience, abilities and interests. The Volunteer Coordinator will help you decide which projects you will work on and assign you to a project manager. You will report directly to your project manager concerning your daily work, but any questions and concerns can be discussed with the Volunteer Coordinator.

Projects

Parque Chimiya

When LWH arrived in Guatemala in 2005 to start park construction, Chuwi Tinamit had already built the two adobe cabins and the block building that is our volunteer house. Chuwi Tinamit graciously continues to let LWH use these facilities for a small charge. In return, LWH constructed the soccer field, basketball court, outdoor classroom, community kitchen, plant nursery, two storage sheds (bodegas), latrines and all park landscaping and signs. With the assistance of volunteers and local laborers, we continue to maintain these facilities.

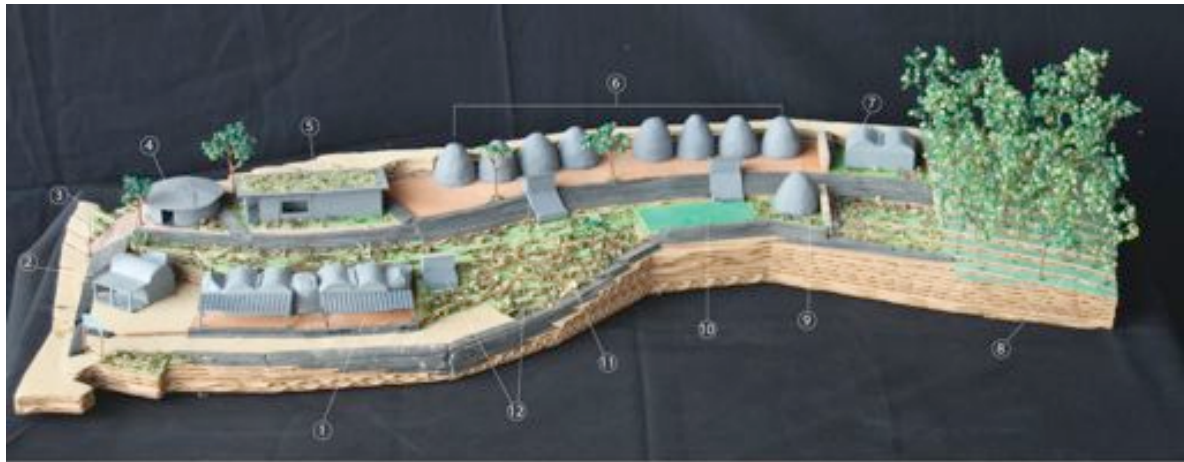


The entrance fees that are charged at Parque Chimiya cover the basic maintenance expenses of the park, including the salary for our groundskeeper. The park is financially sustainable in that it generates enough income to support its basic operations.

Volunteer work at the park is very important to its continual success. Work includes gardening, painting, leading recreational and education activities, and general maintenance.

Técnico Maya Vocational School

Escuela Técnico Maya is an elementary school in Comalapa that teaches the Kaqchikel Mayan language and culture in addition to the government-approved curriculum. Since the curriculum is not entirely in the approved language, Spanish, the school receives reduced in public funding. As a result, the school building they currently rent is inadequate for their needs.



- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| ① vocational workshops | ④ administration | ⑦ volunteer housing | ⑩ recreation |
| ② auto mechanic workshop | ⑤ library/computer lab/cafe | ⑧ protected forest | ⑪ garden + nursery |
| ③ main entrance | ⑥ primary + secondary school | ⑨ art | ⑫ toilets |

After working with Long Way Home for several years, the Directora of the school asked us to build Técnico Maya a new school. In 2008, LWH purchased a piece of land and began construction of the new facility. It is being built using environmentally friendly techniques (rammed earth construction, water-harvesting systems, trash-filled plastic bottles) and will include a vocational school for older students, another part of its sustainability plan. There are currently 5 full time local workers at the site; they work Monday-Friday 7am to 4pm.



Volunteers are integral to the construction. During construction work, volunteers will learn the methodology of rammed earth construction, including how to pound a tire or earth bag, build a wall with trash bottles or mix cob with pine needles or hair. **It is physically demanding work; therefore you must remember to bring a water bottle, snacks, and sun block and work gloves.**

Reforestation*

The reforestation project was one of the first things established at Parque Chimiya. AIRES (Alianza Internacional para Reforestacion), a non-profit organization in Chimaltenango, worked closely with LWH and Chuwi Tinamit staff for three years to train us to grow native saplings for planting in the local area.

Volunteer work may include all aspects of this process, including: growing, tending and selling of the trees. Between December and February we sprout tree seeds (White Pine, Cypress and Elm), fill planter bags with the soil mix, and transplant thousands of tree sprouts into their individual planter bags. In the following few months (the remainder of the dry season) we water, weed, and fertilize the trees with our own organic fertilizer. By June the rainy season is in full swing and the trees are ready to be sold and/or planted. Volunteers help buyers plant the trees. The newly planted trees then have the rest of the rainy season to establish roots before the next dry season sets in (typically September or October).

The tree saplings sell for 1 Quetzal (approximately \$0.13), creating an affordable option for people wanting to reforest a plot of land, or help secure the soil around their crop areas. All the income generated by tree sales is used to purchase materials to produce the next crop of trees. The reforestation project is financially sustainable because it generates enough income to cover its expenses.

** Reforestation volunteers must have previous experience and be able to work largely unsupervised. At this time this project is inactive and would require a highly skilled volunteer to reinstate. Please contact the volunteer coordinator if you are interested.*

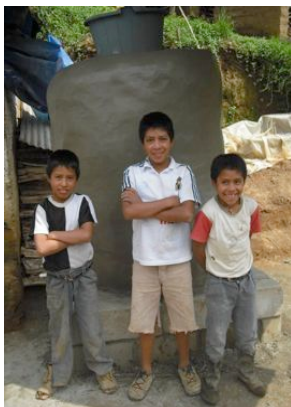
Environmental Education and English Classes*

LWH volunteers have the opportunity to develop and lead environmental education and English activities in local schools. Activities may take place in the schools, or at Parque Chimiya, and should include the promotion of trash bottle collection. English classes are held Wednesday and Thursday mornings for 3 hours. LWH has taught in both Cohol Juyu and Técnico Maya schools for several terms and is developing a general curriculum, flash cards, and other teaching tools. Volunteers working in the schools are encouraged to have regular meetings with the teachers and principal about expectations for the students' education.



**Teaching requires a one-month minimum commitment and intermediate Spanish skills.*

Water Distribution



Engineers Without Borders' first water project with LWH brought running water to Parque Chimiya (including water to the volunteer house). They are now working to bring water to villages (aldeas) of Comalapa that have community springs, but no reliable running water. Depending on the time of your stay with LWH, you may have the opportunity to assist the engineers with their water projects, including surveying families, mapping the local area, translating, and/or performing manual labor.

Funding

Granting organizations have paid for the water projects, the construction of Parque Chimiya's outdoor classroom and sections of the vocational school. Individual donors, fundraising events and the volunteer program also fund LWH. We are always seeking out possible grant opportunities for our projects. The Volunteer and Internship Program Fee is a very important part of our income stream. The fees help sustain LWH and pay for materials and labor at the school. 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.

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. Also bring plenty of underwear and socks.

- T-shirts
- Jeans/trousers
- Warm sweater (it can get cold at night)
- Jacket (a raincoat during the rainy season, May - September)
- Hat(s) (as protection against the sun and the cold)
- Warm sweats or pajamas (it gets cold at night)

Footwear

- Work/hiking boots or sneakers
- Rubber boots (during the rainy season – also locally available but not in large sizes)
- Sandals (suggested)

Toiletries

- Towel
- Any specific hygiene products you may need
- Contact solution (if you wear contacts)

Miscellaneous Recommended Items

Personal:

- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Batteries
- Any medication you'll need during the time of your stay
- Insect repellent
- Camera/charger
- Pocket knife

For working on the site:

- Personal safety equipment: rubber-/PVC-coated work gloves, hearing protection (e.g. ear plugs), eye protection (e.g. sunglasses), dust protection (e.g. dust mask or bandana)
- Tape measure
- Water bottle
- Day pack

Items that are hard to get here and very much appreciated

For the school project;

- Duct tape
- Band aids
- Dust masks
- Electric tape in colors other than black
- Saws all blades for cutting metal and bamboo
- Heavy duty, PVC-coated rubber gloves
- Clear safety glasses

For the school kids:

- Notebooks
- Pencils
- Crayons
- Soccer cleats/football boots
- Stickers
- Coloring books

For the staff:

- Olive oil
- Dijon mustard
- Extra sharp white cheddar
- Gatorade powder
- Spices/seasoning packets
- Doggie treats
- White vinegar
- Dill pickles

A Volunteer's Daily Life

Volunteer Work Schedule

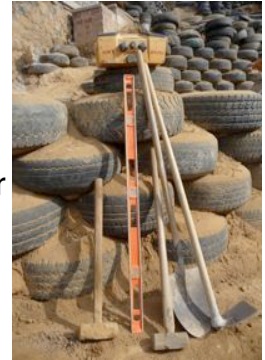
As a LWH volunteer or intern, you will be expected to work a minimum of 40 hours per week. The usual workweek is Monday through Friday, but you may be asked to participate in occasional weekend activities. Your Project Manager and the Volunteer Coordinator will help you determine your specific daily work schedule. Always ask if you are unclear about your assigned tasks or schedule. You are welcome to travel in your free time, but you **MUST** make arrangements with both your supervisors in advance if you are planning a trip beyond the weekend. At the very least, talk to your housemates to make arrangements. Please, make sure the house is clean before you leave. You may want to consider not traveling on the weekends because construction work is demanding, and you should be well rested for work on Monday.

Time Sheets

All LWH volunteers and interns are required to fill out weekly time sheets. Give your completed time sheets to the Volunteer Coordinator every other Monday. Time sheets help us to determine how many hours have been worked on each LWH project - information that is useful to our Construction Manager, Board of Directors and to potential grant organizations.

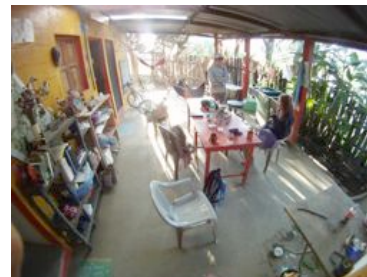
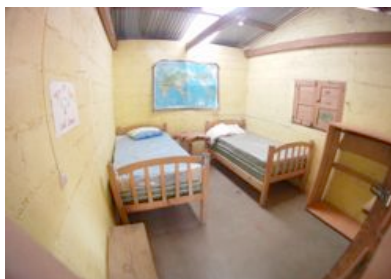
Tools

We take our tools very seriously at LWH. Every tool must be put back exactly where it belongs at the end of each use. Before putting a tool away you **MUST** scrape it clean. If you lose a tool or break it because of your own carelessness, you will be asked to replace it.



Accommodations

Chuhi Tinamit owns the volunteer house and allows LWH volunteers to live there in exchange for park maintenance and a small fee. Each volunteer is given their own bed and personal space in one of the three bedrooms. It is the responsibility of every volunteer to maintain the house with the supplies provided by LWH. Please be considerate of those around you (i.e. no loud music or yelling when your housemates are sleeping). We expect the volunteer house to run like a community, where all help each other to be clean, healthy and happy.



Porch: The porch is a roof-covered concrete pad in the center of the volunteer house. It's a communal space outfitted with dining tables and chairs for mealtime and relaxation. Hammocks and a hanging chair round out the lounge. A wood-burning fireplace provides warmth on cool nights. A clothesline, recycling station, and electrical outlets are located in this area. A bookshelf contains assorted literature, games and supplies donated by past volunteers.

Kitchen: LWH has a fully equipped kitchen with propane stovetop, plancha stove, plates, bowls, cups, utensils, cutlery and cookware. A pila (see the "pila" section for more information) for cleaning dishes is set on the porch. An agua pura (purified water) dispenser is provided. Volunteers typically purchase communal foodstuffs and store them in the wall mounted food lockers. It is recommended that food not intended for communal use be stored with an individual's personal property.

Bedroom: 7 twin beds, in 3 separate rooms, are available in the volunteer house. * Pillows, linens, and blankets are provided and cleaned every two weeks. Rooms include electricity, lights and some shelf space. Skylights provide an excellent light source during the day and may function en lieu of a morning alarm clock (if the community's roosters and dogs don't wake you first).

Upper Cabañas: In the event that we are full in the Volunteer House, we may place volunteers in one of the upper cabañas. There is a separate kitchen, bathroom and pila sink in this area. Standards of cleanliness, and items provided by LWH are the same.

**Larger groups are housed in our partner hotel, Comalapa Sol.*

Bathroom: The volunteer house bathroom is electrically lit and contains a flush toilet. Don't flush the toilet paper - the system can't handle it. Dispose of the TP in the wastebasket. When the wastebasket becomes full burn the contents in the Parque Chimiyá parking lot. **DO NOT BURN BATHROOM WASTE IN THE PORCH FIREPLACE.** For more on this subject see the "flush toilets" section.

Shower: The volunteer shower is contained in a private room adjacent to the bathroom. Often an assortment of soaps, shampoos, and conditioners are provided from the leftovers of previous volunteers. The shower is not heated; therefore, water temperature is often cold. Typically volunteers will take a "bucket shower" by dousing themselves with water heated on the stove. [See the "Bathing" section for more information.]

Staples Provided

LWH provides the volunteer house with the following staples. If you run out, ask the Volunteer Coordinator for a replacement, or reimbursement (you must have a receipt) if already purchased:

- Cooking oil
- Salt/pepper
- Sugar
- Powdered milk
- "Fósforos" (matches)
- Cleaning supplies
- Toilet paper
- Laundry: personal bedding every two weeks
- Internet connection: LWH currently has one USB modem for volunteers' will that provide an internet connection for one computer at a time (Macs can share). This stick may occasionally be appropriated for staff use during the work day. Internet connection time is purchased at 15-day intervals. A [ping test](#) claims 0.68 Mb/s download and 0.22 Mb/s upload speeds. more than sufficient for basic functions such as E-mail, Skype, and internet browsing.

Other Housing Options

LWH has a great relationship with a local family that can offer you a bedroom in their house in Comalapa. They are a merchant family who sell native crafts. This is a great option if you would like to immerse yourself in Kaqchikel culture and the Spanish language. If you'd like to stay with a host family you will be asked to pay an additional \$10/week above your program fee.

You may also stay in our partner hotel, Comalapa Sol, for an additional fee of \$20 per week. You will have your own room, hot shower, wireless Internet and private kitchen (with refrigerator and oven/stove-top). The family who owns the hotel lives in the house across the courtyard, so it is a great option to have both privacy and a window into Mayan life.



Trash

We want everyone to think about their trash. We have a great system of trash separation here at LWH and expect every volunteer to follow it diligently. We burn non-glossy paper, compost our fruit and veggie scraps, feed old food to the dogs, recycle aluminum cans, return or reuse glass bottles, and fill empty plastic bottles with other plastic garbage (cookie wrappers, chip bags, Styrofoam, etc.). Look for signs in the volunteer kitchen and the bodegas to help direct you where to put your trash. If you buy a beer or soda in a glass bottle, return the bottle to the tienda where you bought it. Also, put trash in tires.

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.



Tiendas sell many staple foods such as rice, salt and beer. We are close friends with Fidelia, the owner of the closest tienda to us (the first green door on the way into town from the volunteer house). There is a Supermercado, "Nim K'ayb'al," on the main street with a great bakery, "Comalapán," next door. "La Despensa" is a Wal-Mart owned supermarket, just outside of town (on the main street), that stocks a dependably numerous amount of goods.

Cooking

Be prepared to cook your own food unless you go into town for street food. Anything growing in the park gardens that are ready to be harvested is available for you to use. Ask if you're not sure what you can eat from the gardens.

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.

Restaurants

The few decent restaurants in Comalapa include: Cafe Adobe (on the main street) and El Shadaii (on the main road at the entrance into Comalapa). There are several small diners called "comedors" that offer a set lunch for Q15. The food is tasty, but there is no guarantee on the cleanliness with which it is prepared. Food stalls line the main street during the day and especially at night. Eat at your own risk.

A Note to Vegetarians

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 is 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.

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, so store empties in the bodega.

Water

There is a purified water dispenser in the volunteer kitchen. Water deliveries are made every Monday afternoon and are paid by LWH. 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 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.

Beer

Gallo is the national Guatemalan beer. Your beer options here are usually limited to Gallo or Brahma, a similar South American export. There is also a darker beer called Moza. It is difficult to find in Comalapa, costs more, and is only available in 12oz. cans. If you go to a tienda to buy beer, only to be told that it is "a tiempo," that means it is room temperature. Sometimes you can ask the tienda owners to put beer in the fridge for you and come back and buy it later. Fidelia will always put beer in her fridge at your request. Save your empty bottles and return them to the tienda you bought them.

Liquor

Rum is the most popular and least expensive liquor in Guatemala. Popular cheap rums are Venado and XL (EH-kees EH-lay), but you can also find other brands including Bacardi. Ron Zacapa is a world-class rum made in the eastern Guatemalan department of Zacapa. You can find it throughout Guatemala, but it is cheapest at the duty free shops at the airport. There are also a few brands of whiskey, vodka and tequila available in Comalapa.

Cuxa

Guatemalan moonshine is called cuxa (Koo-sha), and every town in Guatemala claims to make their own special blend. It is made from corn chaff and sugar and is very crude. Try it if you like, but you're likely to regret it. When you see men passed out on the sidewalks at ten in the morning, cuxa is likely to blame. Cuxa is not permitted at the construction site.

Transportation



To and From Comalapa

Buses leave Comalapa for Guatemala City every hour from 3:30 am to 6 pm. Buses go through Zaragoza, Chimaltenango and San Lucas Milpas Altas, and then continue on to the capital. It takes about 40 minutes to get to Chimaltenango and 1 1/2 hours to get to Guatemala City. The last bus leaving Chimaltenango for Comalapa is at 7pm but they are hard to find after 5pm.

Around Comalapa

Tuk tuks or mototaxis are the three-wheeled taxis you see all over town. The usual fare is Q3 per person anywhere in town, including to Parque Chimiya. 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 two favorites among LWH staff and volunteers. "Compusolutions Xtreme" (the first internet cafe you come to when walking into town from Parque Chimiya) has a fast connection and an English speaking staff. "Compu Chec" (take a right at Banrural and it is up the street) has comfortable seats, reliable Skype cameras and headsets, and is well lit.

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 to the US and calls within Guatemala both cost about Q2 per minute.

Buying a Cell Phone

You can buy cell phones at several stores in town with prices starting at Q150 (approx. \$20 USD). Before buying a phone, check to see if there is an extra phone left by a previous LWH volunteer. Tigo is the company that seems to have the best nationwide coverage, but Claro does get decent service throughout Comalapa (although not at the volunteer house).

Buying Minutes

If you have a Tigo phone, you can only use Tigo phone cards. If you have a Claro phone, you can only use Claro cards. Stores put up signs to let you know when it's discount day for buying minutes. Buy minutes on double or triple days and get more minutes for your money. But be careful, on those days your calls cost double or triple the minutes as well.

Receiving Mail

You can receive mail at Parque Chimiya. The address is:

Your Name
Parque Chimiya
San Juan Comalapa
Chimaltenango 01009 Guatemala, C.A.

Mail can take anywhere from one week to six weeks to arrive, if it arrives at all. Sometimes packages are held at the national post office in Guatemala City. In that case, you receive a letter informing you that your package has arrived and you have to travel to the national office to pick it up. Take the letter, your passport, and a photocopy of your passport (which they keep) to retrieve your package. Letters, small boxes and padded envelopes are less likely to be held in Guatemala City.

Money/Bargaining

The Quetzal (ket-SaL) or (Q) is the currency of Guatemala and the exchange rate is approximately 7.7 quetzals to the US dollar. The quetzal is divided into 100 centavos, and there are coins worth up to Q1. There is also a paper bill for Q1, as well as Q5, Q10, Q20, Q50 and Q100. Although the Q100 bill is only worth about USD \$13, it is the largest bill in Guatemala and 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.

ATM's

There are two ATMs in Comalapa. One is located in the "Despensa" supermarket and one marked "Cajero 5B" next to the Banrural on the main street. Both charge 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.

Cash from the US

All the banks in Comalapa will change your US dollars to Quetzals. Make sure your bills are crisp and clean, and take your passport with you to the bank.

Traveler's Checks

Although banks change their rules from time to time, currently the G&T bank in Comalapa will cash some traveler's checks. You can cash them in Antigua or Guatemala City but we recommend you don't bring them.

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.

Health and Hygiene

Always tell LWH staff immediately if you need to see a doctor or have an urgent medical concern. 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 (talk to Genevieve if you doubt this). Malaria and Dengue Fever are not a danger 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 generally not 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.

Personal hygiene is an important factor in health.

Bathing

The bucket bath is the most common method of bathing in this part of Guatemala. Heat water on the stove, fill a bucket or tub with the warm water, and use a palangana to scoop out water to wet and rinse yourself. For more warm water, and a bigger bath, heat water to a boil and mix it with cold water in your tub.

The Composting Latrine

There is a dry composting latrine (letrina abonera) by the cabañas (Matt's house, Bodega de Felix, etc.) that is designed to separate the urine from the feces. But we tend to place a small bucket in the toilet to catch the urine and then we pour it out in the cornfields behind the latrine. This design allows more efficient bacterial decomposition, keeping the feces dry and reducing the smell. Never pee in the large main hole.



The new Técnico Maya school has a latrine system similar to the one near Matt's house, except that it's larger scale and doesn't require you to trap your urine for deposit in the cornfields. Again: Never pee in the large poop hole, and vice versa.

Flush Toilets

Never throw toilet paper into any toilet. Most bathrooms in Latin America provide a trashcan for you to throw away your toilet paper, and the same is true for the flush toilet at the volunteer house. When the trashcan gets full, toilet paper can be taken to the parking lot and burned. **Do not dump used toilet paper in the fire pit.**

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. Every house, school and workplace in Guatemala has one. It consists of a middle basin for holding clean water and two side sinks; one for dirty dishes and the other for clean. Never put anything except clean water or a clean palangana (a scooper) in the middle basin. Use a palangana to scoop out water as needed.

The water in the pila is Guatemalan public tap water, and it is not recommended for drinking.

There are large public pilas throughout Comalapa where women gather to do their washing. These areas can also serve as social gathering places for women who use them. Families without plumbing carry water to their homes from the public pilas, and you sometimes see people taking their horses or cattle to the pilas for a drink.

Laundry

There is no laundromat in Comalapa. You can wash your clothes by hand in your pila, on the clean or left side wash it by hand at that public pilas (bring your own soap and palangana), or pay a local washerwoman to do it for you. LWH staff gives our laundry to our neighbor, Doña Fidelia, who lives at the public pool below the Tire House/Volunteer House. Bear in mind that having laundry done may take up to a week, depending on the weather.

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 don't drink in public. Get to know your neighbors. Be mindful of your surroundings and personal belongings.

Parque Chimiya is safe, and our relationships with our neighbors and the community maintains that safety. 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 touristy 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 in the park area. 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.

When you are leaving the volunteer house, make sure your room is locked behind you. Inviting children onto the volunteer house porch is not permitted, unless they are accompanied by an adult. Even then, be mindful that with a child you know and trust you may be the only person they know with a digital camera or iPod and they might not be able to resist the temptation. Feel free to play with children in the park.

Theft has never been an issue for LWH volunteers staying with our homestay families, 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 with a man 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. 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 and at Lake Atitlan 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 and dating local men. It is absolutely forbidden for both men and women to smoke and drink in town.

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.**

In Case of Emergency

Natural Disasters

Guatemala experiences occasional natural disasters including earthquakes, volcanoes 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. The volunteer house at Parque Chimíya is strong and reinforced; if you're in the house stay put. Stand in a doorway or corner, but 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 two minutes. Stay calm and help others around you to remain calm. People are more capable of making rational decisions when they are calm.

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 Vulcan Fuego. The most popular active volcano to climb is Vulcan 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.

San Juan Comalapa



Guatemala is divided into departments (rather than states or provinces). The official name is San Juan Comalapa but the Kaqchikel name is Chixot (Chi=land of and xot=tortilla plate). We are located in the department of Chimaltenango. Comalapa is a municipality that consists of a main town and about 20 outlying villages, or aldeas. Chimiya, where the park is located and Paxan, where the school is being constructed, are two aldeas 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 few Comalapan women still follow this tradition and most 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 commonly worn by both women and men.

Confianza

Gaining the trust, or confianza, of any new community where you live 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 through years 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.

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. 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. Matt will talk to you more about this subject if you have any further questions.

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. 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

Our closest neighbors at Parque Chimiya are **David, Doña Fidelia** and **Don Justo**. David's family owns the nearby swimming pool and the land that the tire house is built on. David is a tuk tuk driver and his mother, Fidelia, washes laundry for us. Don Justo, a Mayan priest, lives in the house adjacent to the soccer field.

The closest tienda (with a green door) to the volunteer house is owned by a great friend of ours, another **Fidelia**. She is usually very eager to make friends with LWH volunteers and is always invited to large dinners or parties. She has three dogs, 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.

Feliciano owns the hotel, Comalapa Sol, where LWH work groups stay. He also owns the hardware store, Ferreteria Quetzal, where we purchase most of our construction materials. His wife Clara teaches at the main elementary school in Comalapa, up the road from Paxan. They have three children: Clarissa, Carol and Manuel (Chino) and a grandson, Diego.

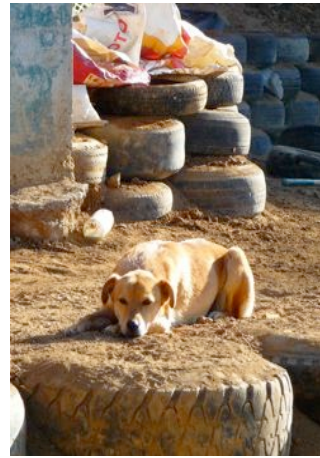
Valeriano is the director of Chuwi Tinamit. Chuwi Tinamit is the community development organization that owns Parque Chimiya. They have been involved in almost all LWH projects and are one of our closest community contacts.

Carmelina is LWH's Spanish Teacher. She used to work in one of the Spanish language schools in Antigua until she married a local Comalapan and moved here. She charges Q35 per hour for individual lessons and also offers weaving classes. If you are interested in taking classes, talk to the Volunteer Coordinator and they will take you to visit her and to discuss your class schedule.

Animals

Long Way Home's in-country staff has many animals. Do not let the dogs follow you when you walk to town.

Staff Animals



Matt's Animals:

Suz (or La Susa) – Smallest of all the dogs (considered the baby) black/brown with beagle features.

Maxi – Multi-colored grey and white dog; pretty skittish, but very sweet.

Meester – Orange and white cat who likes to throw his dish when he is done eating.

Chimi – Grey striped cat that loves to cuddle, but you must let him come to you.

Liz and Adam's Dog:

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

Genevieve's Dog:

Indie – She's the newest member of the LWH dog family and is black and brown. Indie is short for "Independencia;" she goes where she will.

Volunteer House Cat:

Supreme Chairman Meow – She looks like a mini version of Meester and serves as the park mouse hunter.

Other Animals

Chuchos are street dogs. Sometimes nice dogs during the day turn into chuchos at night. Do not feed or touch chuchos. 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.

Important Numbers

US Embassy (Guatemala City)	2326-4405
After Hours	2331-2354
Comalapa Police	7839-1418 5318-3966
Abner Mota (Fire Chief), Ambulance and Emergency Services	7849-9000
Feliciano (owner of Hotel Comalapa Sol)	5315-9338
Drinking Water Delivery	5928-8246
Zeta Gas	5577-4304