



UPAVIM VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

The following is some practical information that we thought might be useful to applicants or you for your upcoming trip to UPAVIM if you are accepted to volunteer.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION: Unidas Para Vivir Mejor (translated, United to Live Better) is a women's artisan cooperative. It is located in the former squatter settlement of La Esperanza, on the edge of Guatemala City. Currently there are 80+ members. The women support themselves and UPAVIM through the production and sale of fair trade handicrafts. UPAVIM works to improve the quality of life for the women and children of La Esperanza. With the profits from its fair trade craft sales UPAVIM supports: an elementary school (grades K-6) and a Children's Center for children ages 54 days to 5 years. International volunteers contribute mainly by teaching classes in UPAVIM's tutoring project, Reforzamiento.

ADDRESS (& HOW TO GET HERE):

UPAVIM
Calle Principal, Sector D-1
Colonia La Esperanza, Zona 12
Villa Nueva, Guatemala 01012

UPAVIM is located just south of Guatemala City, about a 30-minute cab ride from the airport. The easiest way to get here is via public transport. Get on the transmetro (one of the green buses that runs through the city) and take it all the way to Centra Sur, the very last stop on the line. Walk down to the first floor of the bus station (the transmetro will drop you off on the second floor) and grab a bus to Búcaro. The Búcaro bus is free and stops right in front of the UPAVIM building--the big three-story, melon-colored building on the right hand side of the street. It says "Bienvenidas a UPAVIM." It should be about a 15-minute bus ride from the Centra Sur bus station.

If you are flying into Guatemala City and want to come directly to the cooperative, just send us an email with your flight information and we will be more than happy to pick you up!

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE UPAVIM: The easiest way to get in touch with the UPAVIM women or volunteers if you are in Guatemala, is to give them a call. This is the UPAVIM office number: (502) 2479-9061. If you call between 7:30AM and 6:00PM, our office staff will pick up. If you call before 7:30AM or after 6:00PM, one of the current UPAVIM volunteers will pick up. If you need to speak with someone in English, this would probably be the time to call. If you are outside the country they can be reached by email (upavim@itelgua.com) or Skype (upavim).

WORK EXPECTATIONS: The vast majority of UPAVIM volunteers contribute to the afterschool tutoring program called Reforzamiento. Volunteers work with a Guatemalan program director from 8AM to 12PM and 2PM to 6PM from Monday through Friday to tutor local elementary school children in math and Spanish. If there is no work in the tutoring program or it finishes early the volunteer should report to the main office for another assignment. During the school vacation (October to December) volunteers work with their director to put on a vacation program for elementary schoolers and youth in the community. The volunteers are given a great deal of liberty within the school year and vacation programs. They are encouraged to start up additional clubs, workshops, excursions, special events and really anything that would grab the kids' attention. Past volunteers have organized trips to Volcano Pacaya, coached soccer teams, opened up the building to youth break dance crews, sponsored community health fairs and curated local art exhibits. If volunteers come to UPAVIM with special skills or experience (medical, marketing, design, computing, etc.), they can sometimes be placed within other programs according to their interests. We have had doctors and nurses volunteer at the medical clinic, product designers help out with the craft program, and elementary school teachers lend a hand in our English program. If volunteers would like to work with a program other than Reforzamiento, we ask that they submit a special letter of interest explaining why they would like to work in that program and, if necessary, a work plan

HEALTH: You will probably need to get certain vaccinations before you come. Since the requirements change occasionally, we suggest you check the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website for current recommendations for Guatemala. While we do not have malaria here in Guatemala City (due to the elevation), you may need preventative medication if you plan on traveling to other regions of Guatemala, including the coast and Peten. Chloroquin tablets for malaria protection can generally be bought here much cheaper than in your country. Also, while we do not have too many bugs in the city, it is recommended that you bring a bug spray with DEET. Also, sunscreen is recommended and an antibiotic for "traveler's diarrhea." There is an affordable medical clinic, pharmacy, and laboratory on the second floor of UPAVIM (<http://www.upavim.org/english/medical.htm>) that is available to volunteers. For serious illnesses there are several very good hospitals in the city. Most medicine you will need can be bought here, but if there is something specific you like to take for colds or stomach problems, bring it with you. UPAVIM does not provide health insurance, and we recommend purchasing it before coming or checking with your current insurance to make sure you are covered abroad.

WEATHER: It's springtime in Guatemala City all year round! During the day it is pleasant and warm (70-80 F; 21-26 C). During the evening and night it is cooler, especially in January and February when it can get down to 50-55 F; 10-12 C. Guatemala has a rainy and dry season. The rainy season starts in April or May and lasts until October or November. Although the weather in Guatemala is beautiful, you will occasionally find UPAVIM volunteers in hats, scarves and/or wool sweaters. We suggest that you bring clothing that you can layer.

PASSPORT AND VISA: You will need a current passport to enter Guatemala. Most people from North America and Europe receive a visa upon entering the country, but make sure to check with your embassy before coming. The visa that will be issued to you is for 90 days. After the first 90 day stretch you will have to renew your visa in the immigration office downtown (for about \$13). After the next 90 day stretch you will have to leave the country to Mexico, Belize, or Costa Rica (other Central American countries do not count)

for a period of 3 days. When you return, you will be issued a brand-new tourist visa (for free) and can start the process all over again.

MONEY: The two safest and most efficient ways to bring money into Guatemala are ATM cards (debit cards) or traveler's checks. There are many banks and ATM machines a short bus ride away. Credit cards are accepted sporadically, mostly by expensive restaurants and hotels. If you are coming from the US, it is advisable to bring a small amount of dollars.

COMMUNICATION: There is both a phone and email access at UPAVIM. In fact, your home on the roof has wireless service. Volunteers have in the past brought laptops, so feel free to bring yours if you would like (with a wireless card). The internet service is available for free. If you do not bring your own laptop, you are welcome to use the office computer anytime after 6PM. For international calls you can use a phone card or Skype (an internet-based calling service). Some volunteers who are here for a longer period choose to purchase cell-phones (which you can find for about \$20 each). You can also receive mail at:

Your Name
UPAVIM
Calle Principal, Sector D-1
Colonia La Esperanza, Zona 12
Guatemala, Guatemala 01012
Central America

VALUABLES: We recommend not bringing anything of value unless it is necessary. Your rooms are fairly secure if you remember to keep them locked. Do not bring expensive jewelry. You can bring nice cameras and computers, but remember you are doing so at your own risk. There is a safe in the main office that you may use to store your passport and other important papers if you like. Be sure to also bring a photocopy of your passport.

TRAVEL: Short-term volunteers (<4 months) are encouraged to travel at the beginning or end of their stay here. Long-term volunteers are encouraged to take off a week every 3 to 6 months for travel and relaxation. However, such trips must be scheduled and approved by your program coordinator. For Reforz Volunteers that would be Liz Vega. Volunteers are free to take weekend trips around Guatemala. Also, if you are planning to attend a language school (highly recommended for those without conversational Spanish), you should do so before you start working at UPAVIM. You cannot simultaneously volunteer at UPAVIM and attend language school. There are good language schools in Antigua and Quetzaltenango. UPAVIM recommends the PLQ Language School in Quetzaltenango (<http://www.hermandad.com/faq.html>). It is a bit expensive, but arguably the best language program that Guatemala has to offer.

LIVING HERE: Most volunteers stay on the roof (techo) while they are here, though homestays can be arranged if you are interested. On the roof there are currently four volunteer rooms, a kitchen, and a lovely little garden. Your home is on the 4th floor of the main building of UPAVIM. You will most likely be sharing a room with another volunteer during at least part of your stay. Each room has two beds, a dresser, pillows, sheets and blankets. We also have enough towels for everyone. There is a communal bathroom and a shower with relatively hot water. Volunteers have their own kitchen where they prepare their own breakfasts and dinners (UPAVIM provides free lunch during the week). The kitchen is fully-equipped and has a stove and refrigerator. Volunteers are responsible for

buying their own gas for the stove, but bottled water is provided. There are many stores with fruits, vegetables and the basic necessities right in the community. Volunteers generally contribute about \$13 (100Q) to a communal fund every week from which the volunteers buy and cook their food. Volunteers can do their own laundry in our big sink or take it to a nearby lavandería, which charges about \$2 per load. Clothes are line-dried. We currently have a communal CD player.

LANGUAGE: The living situation is not entirely Spanish-speaking. During the day you will be speaking exclusively Spanish, but on the roof the volunteers can decide how they want to handle language. This usually evolves into a mix of Spanish, Dutch, and English.

EXERCISE: Generally speaking, running alone in the community is not encouraged, but you always run with a friend and get an excellent work-out running up and down the three flights of stairs!

PACKING SUGGESTIONS

Apart from the basics (underwear, shirts, pants and shoes) you don't actually need that much to live at UPAVIM, and it's a good thing because you only have two dresser drawers and one bookshelf to store your stuff. In general, we suggest that you pack light. Just about anything that you could need (soap, first aid supplies, etc.) can be purchased here in the community. However, here are some packing tips that might be useful to you:

- The land of eternal springtime can get pretty cold at night. UPAVIM volunteers have been known to wear hats, scarves, sweaters and wool socks, most especially from November to February. If you're coming at this time, make sure to bring some warm clothing.
- For your travel safety and comfort, we recommend that you bring the following:
 1. Money belt.
 2. Good travel guide to Guatemala or any other region where you might be traveling (we recommend Lonely Planet or Rough Guide).
 3. Driver's license or ID card.
 4. Two color copies of your passport.
 5. A small backpack or bag for weekend trips.
 6. Flashlight
- On a more personal note, these are some items that are difficult to find in the community. If you use them, you might want to bring along your own.
 1. Tampons...or you might consider investing in a diva cup (www.lunapads.com).
 2. Contact solution.

3. Any special medicines that you need or like to use.
- When you're living in La Esperanza for more than a month, it's pretty certain that you will be invited to at least one of the following: wedding, night out at a club, funeral, formal business meeting, and/or day at the beach. As such, it is nice to have an outfit that works for each. Is this necessary? No, but it's good to know that Guatemalans are pretty good dressers and they actually pay attention to how *you* dress. Clothing is clean, well-matched, and generally speaking, if you're a woman, stylish. If clean, well-matched, and stylish is not...well, your style, that's totally okay. The trick is to be comfortable...but you have been warned.
 - If you plan to work on any special projects in the community (health projects, sports programs, afterschool clubs) we suggest that you bring along any materials that you will need from home. You can find just about anything in Guatemala City; however, medical supplies, sports equipment, books, etc. can be quite expensive.
 - And if you still have some space in your bag and time to look for donations, UPAVIM is always in need of children's books for its library; pens, pencils, crayons, scissors and other school supplies for its afterschool tutoring program; donations of clothing to sell as small-scale fundraisers; and chocolate, peanut butter, and cheese (because they're delicious and hard to find in the community).

UPDATED: FEBRUARY, 2011

If you have any questions, logistical concerns or worries, please don't hesitate to contact us. We would also be happy to put you in touch with past volunteers so that you can learn more about their time at UPAVIM.

Thank you so much for your interest in our organization! We look forward to meeting you soon!

Saludos,

Lis (liz_vega@hotmail.es)
Coordinator of Reforzamiento

Pieter, Kim, and Alex (alexeurich88@gmail.com)
Current volunteer team