Operation Groundswell's
2016 Mayan Roots Adventure
to Guatemala
WE'RE SPARKING A MOVEMENT OF GLOBALLY ACTIVE & SOCALLY CONSCIOUS BACKPACKTIVISTS.

"It was the perfect balance between travel, adventure, education, and volunteering; it pushed my boundaries and allowed me not only to see how local people live, but also to experience it first hand."

- Kate (OG 2012)

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THE BEST TWO WEEKS OF YOUR LIFE ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN. HERE’S EVERYTHING THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.

A LETTER FROM OUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

¡QUE PASA OG GUATEMALA!

“What I treasure most in life is being able to dream...”
- Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Guatemalan Indigenous Rights Activist

On behalf of our team here in Guatemala and your incredible program leaders, bienvenidos a OG! We’re stoked you’ve chosen to join us here in this magical place this year.

So, dream...dream of a land of cobblestoned streets, sun-soaked coffee fields, and refreshing volcanic lakes. Imagine yourself trekking in its highlands and exploring sacred Mayan sites. Because come summer, your imagination will meet the real sights, smells, sounds, and general awesomeness that is Guatemala.

Your eyes will be opened to the land of the quetzal and cradle of Mayan civilization. You will work alongside campesinos in Sacatepequez and hear about the “Guatemalan Dream” from Willie at Café Red in Xela. You will plant trees and explore how Mayan cosmology and ecology connect with Chico Mendes. You will follow in the footsteps of guerrilleros and journey by foot to a volcanic lake with Quetzaltrekkers. And you will see what backpacktivists and local communities can do when they work together.

Over the years OG has developed special partnerships and bonds with these people and places. We hope that you too might find your heart and head shaped by the stories they tell and the experiences we share. We will discuss what it means to travel to unfamiliar places, play and laugh at our own misconceptions, and push our comfort zones to find new perspectives.

After only 14 days, we don’t expect you to have changed Guatemala but I’m confident that Guatemala will have changed you.

So, pack light but make sure to bring hiking boots, your curiosity, and a whole a lot of imagination ‘cause it’s almost time to live out those dreams in Guatemala!

Adelante!

Ben Sampson
PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

ANTIGUA ORIENTATION & HISTORY
We begin our Guatemalan adventure at the front doors of La Aurora International Airport but quickly take our orientation to Antigua where Guatemala’s culture and landscape collide. There amongst the iconic volcanoes and artisan markets the group will acclimatize to the sights, smells, sounds, and smiles of the region. We’ll explore the cobblestone streets of Central America’s historical colonial capital and begin our fun-filled exploration of culture and ecology with De La Gente on the slopes of Volcan Agua.

XELA HIGHLAND CULTURE
We’ll then travel by chicken bus through the Western Highlands to the city of Quetzaltenango, popularly known as Xela (pronounced Shay-la). There in Guatemala’s ladino and indigenous metropolis, we’ll see the confrontation of traditional and modern cultures close-up. We’ll join revolutionary-turned-reformer Willie at Café RED to talk about the “Guatemala Dream” and work alongside Mayan youth with DESGUA.

PACHAJ, QUETZALTENANGO CHICO MENDES
In the nearby town of Pachaj we’ll visit Armando and the Chico Mendez Reforestation Project. For two days we’ll stay with local families while learning about Mayan cosmology and how reforestation is being used to defend local culture and livelihoods. We’ll also get our hands dirty collecting seeds, clearing invasive species, and cultivating some of our own home-grown seedlings before gathering to celebrate the sacred day of kab’an.

LAGO ATITLÁN THE HUB
After joining Quetzaltrekkers and journeying for 2 days by foot across the highlands and into the mouth of a former super volcano, we will conclude our adventure on the shores of beautiful Lake Atitlan. For three days we will work and live at the Hub, a physical embodiment of OG’s culture, philosophy, and mission. We’ll get our hands dirty with local partners doing permaculture, growing medicinal plants, and learning natural dyes. After a whirlwind two weeks, we’ll celebrate with a traditional BBQ and bonfire!

YOUR PROGRAM ON A GOOGLE MAP
Here is the itinerary for the nine days that we will be together! In the age of Google, we decided that an interactive map is the only way to roll. Feel free to play around with it, make it your browser’s homepage, and share it with your friends and family. Soon enough we’ll be on the ground doing that route for real!

You can find your google map here: http://bit.ly/1PjXrz1
GUATEMALA IS NOT THE COUNTRY THAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT. HERE ARE THE DETAILS.

GUATEMALA COUNTRY PROFILE

**Capital:** Guatemala City  
**Population:** 14.9 million  
**Major languages:** Spanish, K’iche, Kaqchikel, Mam, Q’eqchi  
**Major religion:** Catholic, Evangelical, Maya  
**Life expectancy:** 70 years (men), 74 (women)  
**Monetary unit:** The Quetzal  
**Time Zone:** UTC -6:00

Dotted with lakes, volcanoes, and jungles, Guatemala is most certainly one of the most biologically diverse and beautiful countries in the Western Hemisphere. The size of Ohio and home to over 14 million people, this Central American country is bordered by Mexico to the north, Belize to the northeast, and El Salvador and Honduras to the southwest.

Guatemala is perhaps most renowned for being the birthplace of the great Maya civilization which flourished between 800BC-900AD. Despite their mysterious disappearance from Guatemala at the turn of the 1st millennia, the legacy of the Maya remains very visible today. The Maya still make up over half of Guatemala’s population and Mayan languages are still commonly spoken alongside Spanish. Most other Guatemalans are of a mixed Amerindian-Hispanic origin popularly called Ladino, with only 1% still identifying as European.

Unfortunately, Guatemala’s natural beauty and strength of identity have not been accompanied by political cohesion or economic prosperity. In 1996, the country emerged from a devastating 36-year-long civil war, which pitted leftist Mayan and Ladino insurgents against a repressive military. Backed by the US, the military waged a vicious campaign to eliminate the guerrillas, as well as the indigenous and peasant communities perceived to support them. The result has been described by Human Rights Watch as nothing less than genocide.

More than 200,000 people - most of them indigenous civilians - were killed or disappeared while another 1,000,000 were displaced. Despite an official finding that state security forces carried 93% of all the war’s atrocities, moves to bring those responsible to account and reconcile a legacy of racial discrimination and socio-economic marginalization has been slow. As a consequence, Guatemala’s young democratic tradition remains tenuous.

Guatemala is Central America’s largest economy. However, its resource wealth has not been translated into economic growth or development. Poverty is acute and particularly widespread in the countryside and among indigenous communities. Rates of illiteracy, infant mortality, and malnutrition are among the region’s highest while life expectancy is among the lowest.

All-in-all Guatemala is a country of striking contrasts, a rich cultural history, incredible natural beauty, and immeasurable economic potential compared against a bloody past, troubled present, and uncertain future. But generosity, optimism, and determination best describe the remarkable people that call this funny-shaped country home.
GETTING IN & OUT OF GUATEMALA

WHERE WILL WE BE SLEEPING?

With OG, you live like the locals. Whether it’s a youth hostel in Antigua or a bamboo bungalow on the shores of Lago Atitlan, we will be sleeping and eating as a team in ways that reflect a backpacker’s ethos. Grassroots travel and homestays will allow us to immerse in the local culture but living as the locals do sometimes means living without some of the comforts we’re accustomed to. Cold bucket showers are common while continuous electricity can’t always be guaranteed – so come prepared! Be ready to share the wonderful simplicity of life in rural Guatemalan communities.

PASSPORTS

You will need a valid passport with an expiry date of no less than 6 months after your date of departure from your home country. If you have not done so already, you should immediately begin the process of acquiring/renewing your passport as it can take some time.

For U.S. citizens applying for a passport visit: www.state.gov

For Canadian citizens applying for a passport visit: www.ppt.gc.ca

VISAS

You are responsible for having all of the proper visa requirements. For citizens of Canada and the U.S.A., a valid passport usually grants entry to Guatemala for a stay of up to 90 days. We advise that you confirm this directly with your embassy.

FLIGHT INFORMATION

With years of experimenting on how to arrange flights, Operation Groundswell has found that participants often find cheaper flights by booking on their own. What we want to stress is that you must arrive into La Aurora Airport in Guatemala City no later than 4 p.m. on July 30, 2016 and depart no earlier than noon on August 13, 2016.

If you would like to arrive before 8 a.m. on July 30, please coordinate with our team in Guatemala. They can be reached at ben@operationgroundswell.com and christine@operationgroundswell.com.

We suggest checking Kayak, Orbitz, Cheapoair, Google Flights and other flight sites to get the cheapest rate.

If you are an American student, we have a partnership with StudentUniverse to offer you some of the most affordable airfare options. Click here to look for flights.

If you are Canadian and you would rather the personal touch of a travel agent, you can get in touch with Alan Borenstein at Flight Centre. He is a past program leader and currently books all our program leader’s flights. You can reach him toll-free at 1-877-815-4906 or send him an email at alan.borenstein@flightcentre.ca.

NOTE: If you arrive before the program begins, you will not be under the auspices of Operation Groundswell. We cannot guarantee that anyone will meet you at the airport or arrange your accommodations. You will be entirely responsible for yourself until the first day of the program. Always check with us before booking flights.

**IMPORTANT**

You will receive an email (if you haven’t already) with a link to fill out your flight information. It is imperative that you fill this out so that we can arrange pickups on the first day of the program.
HEALTH & SAFETY ARE OUR TOP PRIORITY.

TRAVEL HEALTH & MEDICINE

STAYING HEALTHY ON THE GROUND

Staying healthy on your program is one of the most important aspects of enjoying an Operation Groundswell experience. With the proper preparation beforehand and careful attention on the program, you can minimize most health risks while still having a great time. Operation Groundswell expects you to meet with a travel doctor or your GP (if he or she is comfortable advising), before leaving your country of origin. You must be up-to-date with all necessary vaccinations and equipped with any necessary medications for travel in Guatemala. We advise you to bring a copy of your itinerary to your appointment or send it to your doctor beforehand. While we provide a lot of recommended information here, the travel doctor will know what you absolutely need at the time of departure according to which region(s) you’re traveling to.

Operation Groundswell requires your doctor’s signature on a personal medical history form stating that you are both physically and mentally cleared for participation in the program. Operation Groundswell does not discriminate against physical or mental conditions or disability. We simply want to make sure that you are fully aware of the risks and challenges of the program, that we are aware of any previous medical conditions, and that we have the capacity to support you while you’re abroad! This form will be sent to you shortly after your deposit has been paid.

REGIONALLY RELEVANT MEDICINE

Malaria
Recommended for travelers visiting areas with a high incidence of Malaria.

Hepatitis A & B
Recommended for all travelers.

Typhoid
Recommended for all travelers.

Yellow fever
Required for travelers arriving from a yellow-fever-infected area in Africa or the Americas.

Rabies
Recommended only for travelers who will be at high risk for animal bites or who will be coming into contact with bats.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Operation Groundswell requires you to purchase travel health insurance for the duration of your time abroad. It’s important to make sure you find the insurance plan that suits your needs.

At the minimum, participants generally get basic medical insurance to cover themselves for any medical emergencies that occur while they’re abroad. We recommend shopping around on sites like squaremouth.com, which will list a variety of options and compare their coverage. The cost will depend on the extras you get on top of medical (covering lost or stolen baggage, electronics, etc.)

If Operation Groundswell must cancel a program due to low numbers, we will be happy to relocate you to another program. If you would rather cancel than relocate, OG will reimburse your full program fee but is not responsible for refunding any flight cost or other costs associated with the program. You decide if you’d like to insure your flight, buy a flexible ticket, or buy separate flight insurance through your airline.

KEEPING US IN THE LOOP

Two weeks after paying your deposit, you will receive an email with:

» A copy of the personal medical history form that your doctor must sign
» A personal link where you can upload the signed copy

**We require this form at the latest a month before your program starts.**

A month before your program starts, you will receive an email with a link for you to provide your:

» Emergency contact
» Travel insurance
» Flight information

The links you will be sent are live forms, so you can fill out a portion of the information when you have it and continue filling it out once you’ve booked your flights closer to the program date.

**IMPORTANT**

The above information is required for participation in every OG program.
SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

STAYING SAFE ON THE GROUND

As a well-established and experienced volunteer-abroad organization, Operation Groundswell takes active precautions to keep you safe and secure while overseas on your program. We take travel safety very seriously. Each section of your program undergoes a standardized risk assessment. Your program leaders do a dry run of your program before you arrive to confirm the nearest medical facilities and potential risks. At least one program leader on each program has taken a Wilderness First Aid course and is fully certified by Wilderness Medical Associates. Our program leaders are proficient in local languages (where it is necessary) and have met and discussed safety concerns with our local partners.

Each program checks in daily with our Toronto headquarters to relay important information and ensure the health and safety of participants. Our Programs Director reads regional travel warnings daily and is available 24/7 to deal with emergencies on the ground.

With that in mind, it is important to remember that every OG program prides itself on taking you directly into the experience of living in that region. Pick pocketing, purse snatching, and various types of scams are the most common forms of crime confronting visitors. Those who limit their display of jewelry and handle their cash discreetly reduce their vulnerability to crime. Participants are advised to carry limited amounts of cash for this reason.

There is no nationwide advisory in effect for Guatemala. However, travellers are advised to exercise a high degree of caution due to the prevalence of violent crime, particularly in the major cities. Additionally, roadblocks, strikes, and demonstrations occur periodically throughout the country. Travellers are also advised to be very cautious when in transit. Secondary streets and rural roads are poorly lit, local motorists rarely obey traffic laws, and steep, winding mountain roads and lack of road signs all present additional dangers.

OG and our Guatemalan partners are familiar with these risks and will take all necessary precautions to ensure the safety and security of our participants.

This includes maintaining an effective flow of information and using the knowledge of our wonderful partners, local contacts, and officials. Equally, OG program leaders will project an inclusive, respectful, and non-partisan image. They will be running through the entire program prior to your arrival to ensure that everything is safe and secure. Nevertheless, program logistics will remain under review and the itinerary flexible to unforeseen developments. Learn more about our safety protocols.

Safe travellers are informed travellers. Do research about where you’re going!

**IMPORTANT**

There are also a variety of safety precautions that we require you to undertake prior to and immediately upon arrival in Guatemala City. First, participants should read the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trades Travel Advisory for Guatemala here and the U.S. Department of State page on Guatemala here.

NOTE: Keep in mind that government advisories provide a country-wide assessment of risks and we will provide more region-specific information.

Second, all Canadian participants are required to register with Consular Services Canada as a “Canadian Traveling Abroad.” This will allow the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to contact us in case of an emergency. Please make the required registration for a trip to Guatemala here.

Those traveling with a U.S. passport should register here.

STAYING IN TOUCH

Internet will be available periodically for you to email home. Telephone access will be limited. Buying a local cell phone can be a more cost effective way of keeping in touch. Additionally, both your program leaders have locally serviced cell phones for emergency use. In case of emergency, please ask your family or next of kin to call OG’s main line at 1-888-422-0164. From there, they will be connected directly to one of our on-call coordinators.
PACK YOUR BAG THEN REMOVE HALF OF IT AS YOU PROBABLY WON'T NEED MOST OF IT.

Remember: The rule of thumb is always to pack as lightly as possible!

WHAT TO PACK

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

» Passport (valid beyond 6 months from the start date of the program)
» Extra passport photos (if you have them)
» Copies of passport/tickets/credit cards (you want extras in case you lose a document)
» Customer service numbers for credit cards/insurance
» Proof of vaccinations
» Student card/ISIC card (even if they are expired, student discounts can be very helpful!)

BACKPACK & DAYPACK

Because we’re not wheelie-baggers, we’re backpackers! We recommend going to an outdoor adventure store and getting a pack fitted to you. Most people should only need a 45-65L pack. Try a bunch on and compare prices to find one that is right. You could also borrow from a friend!

It is also important to bring a daypack for short trips and daily use. Also, you’ll probably want to have room in your bag so you can pick things up along the way like weavings, coffee, or books.
PACKING LIST CONTINUED

ESSENTIALS

» Sleeping bag (0-3°C rating is recommended, but as small as possible. Compressor straps come in handy too. Try to borrow from a friend, if possible!)
» 1 bath towel (quick-dry adventure towels are the lightest)
» A flashlight (headlamps are popular and recommended)
» A pocket-knife if you have one (which you probably don’t want to pack in your hand luggage)
» Min. 1L reusable water bottle
» Medication/EpiPen if you need it

GENERAL CLOTHING

» 7 pairs of underwear
» 5-7 pairs of socks
» 1 pair of shorts (ladies, please try to keep them knee length, short shorts don’t go over too well in some areas and we want to be culturally sensitive)
» 3-4 t-shirts/tank-tops (revealing clothing isn’t your best bet, but we also know that it gets damn hot during the day. Just try to keep a balance.)
» 2 pairs of comfortable pants for treks and work in the coffee fields (ideally lightweight & quick-dry – you may get wet!)
» 1 pair of jeans or khakis and a nice shirt/polo for when we meet community leaders/important folk
» 2 longer sleeve shirts as it can get cold at night and it’s good to layer
» 1 sweater - a good quality fleece is great because it is warm but light!
» One waterproof jacket (a shell that you can layer a sweater underneath is probably the best!)
» A hat to protect you from the sun
» A bathing suit (Note: modesty is your friend)
» Other warm layers, a hat or pair of light-weight mittens for early morning hikes in the highlands

When packing, try to think of the work, activities and landscapes you will see and experience in Guatemala. It’s good to wear shoes in before mixing concrete or tackling a mountain. Work will be dusty and dirty so try to pack a few work/older clothes. As for temperatures in Guatemala, you can expect variation with up to 34°C (91°F) day temperatures, which change into very cold nights, layers of clothing will be your best option and preparation against all weather types. It will also be the rainy season so remember your waterproof rain jacket and if you’re extra cautious, weather-proof pants!

SHOES

If you buy new shoes, break them in before the trip
» 1 pair sturdy hiking boots/trail shoes (for work and the trek)
» 1 pair water-proof shoes, sandals, or flip flops
» 1 pair comfortable, everyday shoes

PERSONAL HYGIENE & TOILETRIES

» Regular hygiene items - e.g. soap, shampoo, deodorant, shaving cream, etc. (Note: these are all readily available locally in smaller quantities and at a cheaper price if you would rather buy them down there. Another good option is bringing small quantities to begin with and refilling once in-country)
» Vitamins, painkillers, cold medicines, etc.
» Toothbrush/toothpaste
» 1 extra pair of prescription glasses or contacts/contact solution (if required)
» Tampons and pads (it is always a good idea to bring more than enough tampons. Although you can buy this in-country, most smaller communities will only sell pads)
» Bug spray and after bite
» Sunscreen and lip balm
» Imodium/Pepto Bismol
» One round of prescription medicine (i.e. diarrhea meds – ask your doctor)
» If you have asthma and you need a puffer, bring it even if you rarely use it. Same goes for allergies and EpiPens
» Any prescriptions that you need (refrigeration may not always be possible, so check in with your program leaders)

NOTE: All program leaders are equipped with First Aid Kits, so though it is useful to have basics like Advil or Tylenol, you don’t need to pack a pharmacy. There will be a medical form sent out closer to the program start date so you can outline any specific mental or physical health problems.

OPTIONAL ITEMS

» Journal & Pen
» Camera
» Ear plugs
» Eye mask
» Deck of cards
» No need for a computer, iPhone, iPad, or anything similar as we will have access to a computer when we have access to the internet!

If you tend to be a light sleeper or not used to shared sleeping spaces, bring a set or two of foam ear plugs and an eye mask. A travel pillow makes long bus journeys a tad more comfortable!
CHANCES ARE SOMETHING IN ONE OF GUATEMALA’S BUSY LOCAL MARKETS WILL CATCH YOUR EYE.

**MONEY MATTERS**

**IT’S EASY TO GET AROUND RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVELY ON AN OG Program. WHAT YOU SPEND IS REALLY UP TO YOU.**

The program fee covers the costs of accommodations, three meals a day, transport, and excursions. It does NOT cover any personal expenses such as souvenirs, laundry, or snacks between meals. For these cases, you will want to bring some spending money.

We recommend that you bring some cash with you, $50-$100 USD (You do not want to carry too much cash).

**MONEY TIPS**

- Leave any traveler’s cheques and Canadian money at home. They are problematic to cash or exchange.
- Visa is the most widely accepted credit card. Do your best to have a chip card that is PIN ENABLED to have it work in ATMs. Make sure that the PLUS sign is on the back of your card so that it works in international ATM locations.
- Debit is also an effective option. ATM/ABMs are widespread and can dispense up to $200 USD equivalent. There is a transaction charge of approx. $2.50-$5.00 USD, but they are the most convenient and safest option. It is advisable to communicate with your bank before departure to determine their level of accessibility.
- Call your bank and inform them of your travel plans so they don’t place a hold on your account when they see money being withdrawn in a foreign country (you do NOT want this to happen!)
- There will be a safety talk before the program, but money in large amounts, Interac/credit cards, etc. will NOT be carried in any one location and we recommend using money belts/discreet wallets.
- **DO NOT CHANGE MONEY IN THE GUATEMALA CITY AIRPORT** (the rate is the absolute worst!)
THE BEST WAY TO FIT IN IS TO DO AS THE LOCALS DO.

CULTURAL DO’S AND DO NOT’S

Be a cultural chameleon and do what you can to show as much courtesy and interest in the local culture as possible. Do as the locals do and try to follow these basic rules while in Guatemala! Being aware and sensitive to your surroundings is the first step towards being a traveler and not a tourist!

DO...

» Be personable. Preface conversations - even simple requests - with buenos días (good morning) or buenas tardes (good afternoon/evening). It is also courteous to say hello to the person sitting next to you on the bus and to make a general greeting when entering a public place like a restaurant.

» Shake hands and say mucho gusto (nice to meet you) the first time you meet someone.

» Be respectful. Use the formal “usted” (you) to address locals until they use the informal (“tu” or “vos”) to address you.

» Learn the language.

» Pay attention to your appearance. Looking scruffy and unwashed is considered an affront.

» Be modest. Short shorts and tank tops are sometimes frowned upon. To be on the safe side, dress conservatively, especially in rural indigenous communities.

» Be sensitive. Avoid being openly critical of the region’s problems. Guatemalans recognize their country’s challenges but are sometimes sensitive to criticism from outsiders.

» Ask first. Always ask before photographing people, especially children. Some communities are extremely sensitive about child photography for reasons we will discuss.

» Practice patience. Time is a flexible concept and there can be a severe lack of urgency in Central American culture. RELAX, sit back, and enjoy life off the clock.

» Be grateful. Accept local food and drink when offered. Guatemalans are extremely generous and hospitable. They will offer to share whatever they have. Try to receive it graciously but if necessary, decline politely.

DO NOT...

» Try not to talk too loudly; the Maya in particular find westerners overbearingly loud. If you visit on of the smaller highland markets, one of the most interesting aspects is how quiet it is, with business being conducted in sotto voce.

» Do not put toilet paper in the toilet. It goes in the garbage can.

» Do not refer to indigenous peoples as indios. Indigena is the preferred term.

» Do not expect everything to run as planned and/or on schedule. Many things will not work out as intended but almost always works out in the end.

» Do not take pictures of religious ceremonies or inside religious centers without permission.

» Do not be offended if people comment frankly about your appearance or even provide you with a nickname associated with it (e.g. Gordita/fatty). Weight = health for many in Guatemala and the name is intended affectionately.

» Do not be offended by the word “gringo”. Although it can sometimes be used derogatorily, it is often used in a playful, affectionate tone.

» Do not give/lend money or gifts if/when requested, especially by children. We are not trying to create dependent relationships or unrealistic expectations. Decline politely and/or blame OG (e.g. “our organization does not permit us to”). We will talk more about this.

» Do not be offended if you see people spitting and/or urinating in public as they are both prevalent and accepted practices. Similarly, don’t be surprised/offended to see men sleeping in public places. We will discuss this more as well.
GETTING AROUND IN GUATEMALA.

SPANISH FOR DUMMIES

Hello:  
Hola (o-la)

Good Morning:  
Buenos Dias (bwe-nos dee-as) or simply: Buenos (bwe-nos)

What’s up?:  
Qué Tal (keh tull) or Qué Pasó (keh pass-o)

Please:  
Por favor or “porfa” for short

Thank You:  
Gracias

Sorry (forgive me):  
Disculpe (dees-kool-pe), Lo siento (low see-en-toe)

Very good:  
Muy bien (mooh-y bee-en)

Yes:  
Si (see)

No:  
No

Stop:  
No hagas eso (no ah-gahs eh-sow) literally “don’t do that”

How much (does this cost?):  
Cuanto cuesta? (kwan-to kwes-ta)

Nice to meet you:  
Mucho gusto (moo-cho goose-tow)

I am Canadian/American:  
Soy canadiense/american(a) (soy kah-nah-dee-en- say/ ah-meh-ree-can-oh/a)

I don’t understand:  
No entiendo (no en-tee-en-doh)

Can I have --- to eat?:  
Puedo tener ---- (pweh-doh ten-ehr)

Can I have ---- to drink?:  
Puedo tomar --- (pweh-doh toe-mar)

Chicken:  
Pollo (poe-yo)

Rice:  
Arroz (ah-ross)

Water:  
Agua (ah-gwa)

Beer:  
Cervesa (ser-ve-sa)

No, I cannot marry you:  
No puedo casarle (no pweh-doh kas-ar-leh)
At Operation Groundswell, we forge partnerships with local NGOs and charities to work with them on community-requested projects. This means that the communities we work with decide what kind of partnership they are looking for, how we as volunteers can be best put to use, and how our community contribution can most effectively help them achieve their goals. It also means we don’t always know in advance what will be needed in our partner communities or how we can best serve. Seasonal weather patterns, a changing political climate, and organizational needs may change so get ready to adapt like a true backpacktivist!

Though we spend solid days on the ground getting our hands dirty and volunteering, a larger chunk of our time is spent learning from our partners to better understand the underlying issues and challenges that they face. We’re not going to “save Guatemala” in our 14 days abroad, but we will be making deep connections with and learning immensely from the real change makers on the ground!

WHO WE’RE WORKING WITH

OG’S HUB!
Located in San Juan La Laguna, the Hub is Operation Groundswell’s base of operations in Guatemala. It is also a physical embodiment of OG’s culture, philosophy, and mission. It is a place where solidarity is cultivated in and between people and local partners through conversations and collaborative projects. It is also a site where OG can test and develop new ways to create positive impact alongside our participants and our local partners. Current partners on the site include Xe’ KuKu’ Aab’aj and OMET, two women’s weaving cooperatives from San Juan.

DE LA GENTE
De La Gente, meaning “from the people” is a coffee cooperative and non-profit organization committed to organic principles, sustainable agriculture, and economic development in the town of San Miguel Escobar. They are a collective of farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs looking for new and novel ways to make and market their goods.

QUETZALTREKKERS / EDELAC
www.quetzaltrekkers.com
Quetzaltrekkers is a volunteer-based trekking company. It was started in 1995 by a South London social worker and local Guatemalan teacher as part of a multifaceted fundraising campaign to fund a rehabilitative home for children living on the street and/or with histories of drug abuse and child prostitution. QT directs 100% of its profits to what has grown to become the Escuela de la Calle (EDELAC). The sustainable fundraising enterprise now provides free education to 225 children and has allowed the opening of El Hogar Abierto, a group home supporting 15 additional children who have difficulty reaching educational services.

CHICO MENDES REFORESTATION PROJECT
The Chico Mendes Reforestation Project is a local non-profit organization based in the municipality of Cantel. Established in 1998 by Armando Lopez, Chico Mendes is founded on the principles of environmental remediation and community awareness. Population growth, resource extraction, and climate change have produced deforestation and the pollution of local forests and waterways as well as increasing pressures on the region’s ecosystem. Through the efforts of community members and visiting volunteers, the Chico Mendes Reforestation Project promotes environmental and cultural education as well as defensive reforestation to restore the area’s natural environment.
TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO OPEN YOUR MIND AND SOAK UP EVERYTHING YOU CAN.

KNOWING STUFF MAKES YOU SMARTER

RESOURCES BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Read and watch some of these resources for a glimpse into Guatemala’s story of civil war, coffee farming, and mining oppression. Some of these books and clips are heavy but are highly recommended to acquaint you with sensitive issues we’ll be taking a first-hand look at. Take the time to browse them if you can! It will make a huge difference once we’re on site.

FILMS

Granito (2011)
La Camioneta (2012)
When the Mountains Tremble (1983)

MUSIC

Luna de Xelajú by Paco Perez
Es como un duende by Alux Nahual
Verbo No Sustainivo by Ricardo Arjona Jesus

BOOKS

Pillage of a Continent by Eduardo Galeano
Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico by Ronald Wright
Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation by Greg Grandin
I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala by Rigoberta Menchu
Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala by Stephen Schlesinger
Men of Maize by Miguel Asturias

VIDEO CLIPS

Guatemala, mi amor.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBmogbgvX00

Even after the civil war, Guatemalan communities continue to fight for even the most basic human rights. These videos tell their stories.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgwtLuiSE1Y
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJC0K-0uKh0
FINISH PREP FOR THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME.

FINAL CHECKLIST

Almost there! Let’s make sure you’ve got everything you need checked off!

☐ Make sure you have a valid passport! You must have a passport valid 6 months after your date of departure from your home country.

☐ Make an appointment with your travel doctor ASAP and make sure you’re up to date with your vaccinations.

☐ Fill out your medical history form with your doctor’s signature and upload it (link sent via email; contact us if you do not receive it by the month leading up to your program).

☐ Book your flight! You are responsible for booking your own flight but once you’ve found it, check the exact details with your program leader before booking.

☐ Get travel insurance.

☐ Pay your final installment.

☐ Fill out the emergency contact, travel insurance and flight form (link will be sent via email; contact us if you do not receive it by the month leading up to your program).

☐ Meet your team in our pre-program meetings!

☐ Sign our online waiver (to be sent via e-mail).

☐ GET EXCITED!!!
GET READY TO BACKPACK WITH A PURPOSE

ALL OF THE PHOTOS IN THIS BOOK ARE MEMORIES CAPTURED BY OG ALUMNI