

Global Education Travel Guide

ViviendasLeón



Lake Atitlán, Guatemala 2019

Dear Educators and Parents,

ViviendasLeón is a non-profit sustainable development organization whose mission is to eliminate rural poverty by creating self-sufficiency within rural communities and educating our next generation of engaged global citizens.

Our travel programs have been developed to give students, faculty, and families in the United States the opportunity to build intercultural relationships, support rural development directly, and foster their awareness as global citizens.

Since the civil unrest began in Nicaragua in April, we have been working with our León staff and board of directors to understand the impact of the very dynamic events of the past couple months and how they might affect our work and programs in León, Nicaragua. As of now, the situation is much calmer, and our León staff has returned to work in the rural communities of Goyena and Troilo. But we do not foresee a resolution of the issues that caused the large civil demonstrations anytime soon. As a result, we are taking an important step to implement a strategic goal of our organization:

To expand the work of ViviendasLeón into neighboring Central American countries.

The León team will continue working in the rural communities supporting the families and the work they are doing to improve their lives. Our development programs will continue to operate, with periodic adjustments for situations on the ground and to the current national conflict. Our research partnerships with Universities will continue in Nicaragua and remain an important contribution to ongoing development.

Because of the uncertainty in Nicaragua, we cannot bring travel groups there for the foreseeable future and recognize we need a plan in place now for all of the schools we have been working with going forward. Therefore we are excited to announce we will expand our education travel program to the Mayan highlands region of Lake Atitlán, Guatemala and develop an office with program staff there, while maintaining our staff, office, and development programs in León, Nicaragua.

This is a great opportunity for us to continue our mission to eliminate rural poverty and build lasting relationships between countries. We have forged a partnership with an established organization with 20 years of experience in the region, and have established a staff of two program officers who will manage the program in country. [Mil Milagros](#) and [Vivamos Mejor](#) are like-minded organizations that have deep roots in the region allowing us to increase our impact to more rural communities. We will offer the same elements that make our global education program so successful including homestays, cultural and language immersion, and authentic rural development projects. While the partnership is new, the shared mission and experience in development is not. By partnering with Mil Milagros we can mirror our León program with established and trusting relationships.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with your school on our new partnership. Please let us know if you have any questions about our expansion, our León team and the new program in Guatemala.

Evan Markiewicz

Sample 7-day Global Education Travel Itinerary

ViviendasLeón Global Education Program, Guatemala 2019

Partner: *Family Service Trip*

7-day Trip *Lake Atitlán, Guatemala*

Day 1

9:30 AM Overnight flight from SFO to GUA + Airport Pick-up
10:30 AM Depart for Lake Atitlán
12:00 PM Lunch in Tecpan
2:00 PM Arrive in Sololá
Tour of Sololá, Parque Central, Cemetery, Campanario Museum
4:30 PM Arrive in Panajachel
Central location for group at La Galeria. Snack.
Meet Carolyn Daly of Mil Milagros. Presentation on their work
5:00 PM Lake Atitlán region and Panajachel Orientation
6:00 PM Meet Homestay Families in Panajachel
7:00 PM Dinner with Homestay Family
8:00 PM Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed time

Day 2

6:00 AM Breakfast with Homestay Family
6:45 AM Group Meet-up
7:00 AM Depart for Panajachel
7:30 AM Group Briefing for the Day
8:00 AM Depart for Santa Catarina Palopó
8:30 AM Orientation
Cultural Tour of Santa Catarina Palopó with Sarah Matzar
Presentation: Handweaving + Local Dress around Lake Atitlán
12:00 PM Lunch
1:00 PM Depart for Santa Lucía Utatlán
2:00 PM Service Project Orientation with Mil Milagros
2:30 PM Maya Ceremony Blessing
3:30-5:00 PM Service Project in Santa Lucía Utatlán
6:00 PM Arrive in Panajachel
Snack.
Activity: Meet PCI/AMA Students + Panajachel Scavenger Hunt
7:00 PM Depart for Homestays
7:30 PM Dinner with Homestay Family
8:30 PM Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed Time

Day 3

6:00 AM Breakfast with Homestay Family
6:45 AM Group Meet-up
7:00 AM Depart for Panajachel
7:30 AM Group Briefing for the Day
8:00 AM Ferry to San Juan la Laguna
9:00 AM Environmental Stewardship in San Juan la Laguna
Tour the city with Flavio Vazquez
Reforestation + Coffee Farming with La Voz
11:30 AM Lunch in San Juan la Laguna
12:30 PM Ferry to Panajachel
1:00 PM Depart for Santa Lucía Utatlán
2:00 PM Service Project Orientation with Mil Milagros
2:30-5:00 PM Service Project in Santa Lucía Utatlán
6:00 PM Arrive in Panajachel
Snack.
Activity: Swim at Peña de Oro
7:00 PM Depart for Homestays
7:30 PM Dinner with Homestay Family
8:30 PM Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed Time

Day 4

6:00 AM Breakfast with Homestay Family
6:45 AM Group Meet-up
7:00 AM Depart for Panajachel
7:30 AM Group Briefing for the Day
8:00 AM Depart for Reserva Natural Atitlán
Tour Nature Reserve
Butterflies, Monkeys, Coatis, Animal Recovery
12:00 PM Lunch in Panajachel
1:00 PM Depart for Santa Lucia Utatlán
2:00 PM Service Project Orientation with Mil Milagros
2:30-5:00 PM Service Project in Santa Lucia Utatlán
6:00 PM Arrive in Panajachel
Snack.
Activity: Kayaking in Lake Atitlán
7:00 PM Depart for Homestays
7:30 PM Dinner with Homestay Family
8:30 PM Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed Time

Day 5

6:00 AM Breakfast with Homestay Family
6:45 AM Group Meet-up
7:00 AM Depart for Panajachel
7:30 AM Group Briefing for the Day
8:00 AM Depart for San Antonio Palopó
Tour Ken Edwards Ceramics Factory
Ceramic Tile Project
12:00 PM Lunch in Panajachel
1:00 PM Depart for Santa Lucia Utatlán
2:00 PM Service Project Orientation with Mil Milagros
2:30-5:00 PM Service Project in Santa Lucia Utatlán
6:00 PM Arrive in Panajachel
Snack.
Activity: Sports with PCI/AMA Students
7:00 PM Depart for Homestays
7:30 PM Dinner with Homestay Family
8:30 PM Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed Time

Day 6

6:00 AM Breakfast with Homestay Family
6:45 AM Group Meet-up
7:00 AM Depart for Tecpan
9:00 AM Iximche
Tour Pre-columbian Mesoamerican Mayan site
12:00 PM Lunch in Tecpan
1:00 PM Depart for Antigua
2:30 PM Tour Antigua
Tour cultural, religious, and colonial sites
6:00 PM Check-in at hotel in Antigua
7:00 PM Group Dinner
8:00 PM Final Seminar Gathering
9:30 PM Bed Time

Day 7

7:00 AM Group Breakfast
8:00 AM Walk around Antigua
Explore Central Market
Shopping, Souvenirs, etc...
11:00 AM Lunch in Antigua
12:00 PM Depart for GUA airport for drop-off

Activities and Excursions around Lake Atitlán

NATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



Hike to El Pico de Cielo, Santa Lucía Utatlán

El Pico de Cielo is a peak based on the north side of Lake Atitlán. This place is known for its amazing views of Lake Atitlán and the surrounding lakeside communities.



Nature tour at Reserva Natural Atitlán, Panajachel

The Atitlán Nature Reserve's outdoor activities, butterfly preserve, trails, hanging bridges and lodgings brings you in close contact with nature. Explore waterfalls, coffee groves, oak stands and the steep cliffs that guard the lake. Some trails are ancient, many bridges unexpected, and everywhere you hear the sounds of water, birds, and the wind.



Coffee Tour at Cooperative La Voz, San Juan la Laguna

The Guatemalan highlands produce some of the best and most distinctively flavored coffees in the world. La Voz's coffee arabica trees are cultivated under a rich shade tree canopy that includes many trees native to the region. This canopy provides a home to a diversity of migratory bird species. Explore their coffee farms as well as the coffee making process.

MAYAN CULTURE, IDENTITY & HISTORY



Cultural tour in San Juan la Laguna, San Juan la Laguna

A proud Maya Tzutujil village whose inhabitants earn a living through agriculture including coffee production, fishing, textiles and more recently community tourism. Over the last 10 years, the town has made a concerted effort to re-inculcate traditional Mayan values of protecting mother earth. There is a joyful quality to the population, as we have experienced in Nicaragua, in spite of the poverty, and this will be quite evident to all who spend time in San Juan.



Discovering Mayan History at Iximche, Tecpan

Iximche is a Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican archaeological site that was the Maya Kaqchikel capital in the Late Post Classic period from about 1470 - 1524. Located in Tecpan, it is still considered a very sacred site by the Maya



Mayan Rituals with Journeys in Living, Santiago Atitlán

For those who want to truly adventure into and experience the living Maya culture, this is an experience for you. Walking tour of the town including the beautiful Historic Church and its wonderful altar that tells of the Traditional Maya and Catholic history, Peace Park, and the vibrant arts throughout the town. And participate in a ritual with Maya Shaman in one of the Cofradias (Ceremonial Houses).



Xe' Kuku Aab'aj, San Juan la Laguna

San Juan La Laguna is the home of several female run textile cooperatives. One of the unique characteristics of the textiles in San Juan is the natural dyeing process using a combination of plant material, bugs and bark to achieve their sophisticated palette. In San Juan, you will observe the process of spinning white and natural brown ixcacao fiber into thread, the natural dyeing process and a traditional weaving process called backstrap weaving.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



Farming with Universidad del Valle de Guatemala - Altiplano, Sololá

Learn of the university's "Huerto" (Farming) Program and how they are working to establish small-scale farms to benefit the educational community. Students, teachers, and parents learn how to cultivate a variety of crops while also receiving further training on nutritional cooking and increasing food security.



Nutrition and Youth Development with Mil Milagros, Santa Lucía Utatlán

Mil Milagros equips mothers and teachers with skills and resources to improve the lives of children and families in rural Guatemala. Their programs range from early childhood development; nutrition; health and hygiene; and education.



Community Development with Pintando Santa Catarina Palopó, Santa Catarina Palopó

This is an initiative by Harris and Melissa Whitbeck, two Guatemalans who grew up visiting this population and who have a strong bond with this municipality, its inhabitants and Lake Atitlán. It seeks to join the efforts of different sectors (local and international), to achieve a visual work with social impact at a monumental scale in the population of Santa Catarina Palopó, Sololá.



Ken Edwards Ceramics Factory, San Antonio Palopó

Ken Edwards arrived in San Antonio Palopó two decades ago. He set up a stoneware workshop and found immediately that the craftsmanship of the locals was superb. He began to teach several local families the craft and set up workshops for them, an act that transformed the local economy by not only providing employment but a tourist attraction as well. Today these ceramic studios produce some of the world's finest Talavera hand-painted pottery. We will be spending some time in one of the workshops painting our own tiles for future community service projects.

EDUCATION



Panajachel Colegio Internacional (PCI) & Atitlán Multicultural Academy (AMA), Panajachel

Panajachel has two bilingual English/Spanish international middle and high schools, Panajachel Colegio Internacional and Atitlán Multicultural Academy. We will be collaborating with the student from these schools in various activities from the first-day orientation to Panajachel as well as game nights.



Jabel Tinamit Spanish School, Panajachel

Jabel Tinamit Spanish School is a local Spanish school run by Gregorio and Candelaria Xep, both Maya Cakchiquel. They will be working with us to improve the Spanish language skills of the students as well as offering a wide range of amusing and dynamic activities to assist in the process.

LECTURES & PRESENTATIONS



Mayan Handweaving with Sara Matzar

The Maya Cakchiquel, Tzutujil and Quiche that live around Lake Atitlán all have distinct hand woven garments that can be identified from their color, pattern, style of weaving and embroidery. Anthropologist, Sarah Matzar, has lived with a Maya Cakchiquel family for over three decades. She dedicates her time to creating quilts using bits of fabric from the local textiles. Sarah will give a brief lecture on how to identify the village where each textile is from.



Asociación Maya de Desarrollo K'amolon K'i K'onojel.

A women's weaving cooperative formed in 1987 to provide economic and social well-being for over 180 women and their families. The original founding members are all widows from the brutal internal conflict in Guatemala that culminated in Peace Accords in 1997. The women use traditional artisanal methods to dye their bamboo thread. And they use traditional backstrap weaving to produce their products. We will stop at their workshop to observe this process and hear their stories.



Cofradías with LeeAnn Heinbaugh

Born in a small farming town in rural Indiana, she has an indelible curiosity about the cultures and spiritual practices of native peoples around the world. To nurture this love LeeAnn has spent 30 years traveling in Central and Latin America, working with the native healers. LeeAnn has a Master's degree in Psychology and was a participating member of the cofradía in Santiago, Atitlan where she lives. LeeAnn will talk to us about the history and spiritual practices in Santiago, Atitlan



Grupo Stoz'il, Sololá

Our name, Sotz'il, means bat. The bat is a sacred animal for the Mayan K'aqchikel people, as written in the Memorial of Sololá, it was the bat that brought fire to our people. In addition, it was the Ajposotz'il Jay (House of the Bats) that led the K'aqchikel people to create the city of Iximché until the Spaniards arrived in 1524. Enjoy their presentation of traditional Mayan theater and art revolving around the sacred bat.



Casa Kakchiquel, Panajachel

Casa Kakchiquel is a 70 years old building, built by the then Swedish ambassador to Guatemala as the first hotel in Panajachel, now owned by a Swiss and renovated some ten years ago. Today its hosts a radio station, the Japanese Hana restaurant, exhibitions of old photos and some paintings, and much more. This place will serve as a location for our presentations.



La Galeria, Panajachel

La Galeria celebrates the arts as a whole and provides at the same time a center for local and international artists. They sell a vast range of artwork, rare and fine art pieces for collectors as well as unique frames of our own design. The building, a piece of art in itself is located in the heart of Panajachel. Since 1973 we also organize community events, concerts, theatre, cabaret, art movies. Our additional show of unique folk art began in the 1920s and continues to this day.

Guatemala Readings

- *Beyond the Mexique Bay*: Aldous Huxley (1934)
- *The Little Prince*: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943)
- *El Señor Presidente*: Miguel Ángel Asturias (1946)
- *Men of Maize*: Miguel Ángel Asturias (1949)
- *I, Rigoberta Menchú*: Rigoberta Menchú (1983)
- *The Long Night of White Chickens*: Francisco Goldman (1992)
- *Long Life, Honey in the Heart*: Martín Prechtel (2004)
- *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?:* Francisco Goldman (2007)

Guatemala Film

- *Ixcánul*, Dir. Jayro Bustamante (2015)

Guatemala Staff and Partner Bios



Molly Molander, Project Director VL: Molly is an architect living and working in Panajachel, Guatemala since 1998. She is the principal of Tierra Linda Architects and is responsible for numerous private and community design projects in the Lake Atitlán region. Molly has been a friend of ViviendasLeón since 2005 and together with VL has worked toward supporting the development of an education and service travel program over the last 5 years. Molly will be responsible for planning and managing the service projects we work on with rural communities.



Masumi Patzel, Program Director VL: A native Guatemala, Masumi previously managed Global Exchange's international travel program in San Francisco as well as worked for the United Nations in Guatemala and Geneva. She is responsible for the administrative and organizational aspects of the travel program.



Carolyn Daly, Mil Milagros: Carolyn is responsible for managing day-to-day operations of Mil Milagros in Guatemala, including strategic alliances with other organizations. Before joining Mil Milagros, Carolyn was a Peace Corps volunteer in Sololá. Fluent in Spanish and conversant in Kaqchikel, she is a graduate of Colgate University.



Bryan Reyna, Vivamos Mejor: Bryan is an architect and manages Vivamos Mejor's intercultural bilingual education program in Guatemala. Bryan works to promote access to quality education with cultural relevance, motivating active participation and strengthening the capacities of the educational community, to contribute to the integral development of children in rural communities.



Martin Juarez, Global Education Director, U.S.: Martin coordinates with U.S. schools and partners to develop, plan, calendar and budget trips. Martin and Masumi will collaborate to prepare for the arrival of delegations to Guatemala.

Homestay Families in Panajachel



A central part of our Global Education Program is the experience of staying in a family's home in Lake Atitlán, where they experience the cultural richness and hospitality of Guatemala. The families are very warm and generous. Trip participants eat breakfast and dinner in the home, and we eat our lunches as a group at restaurants around the lake.

Trip participants stay with host families in Panajachel, on the shore of Lake Atitlán. The families we work with have many years of experience hosting international guests and have a unique desire to develop good relationships with visitors from other countries.

Students stay in groups of 2-4 in each homestay where they have their own bedrooms, and often share bathrooms with the family. Students will be able to practice their Spanish skills while having breakfast and dinner with their host families each day as well as when interacting with their peers in rural communities.

The Guatemalan people are extremely warm and gracious. The time spent with host families always turns out to be some of the fondest memories travelers have of their stay in Panajachel..

We are collaborating with a local language school, Jabel Tinamit Spanish School, to secure homestays as well as a group stay option at their Residential Hotel, all in Panajachel.



ViviendasLeón and our Guatemala Partnerships



ViviendasLeón



When ViviendasLeón decided to explore an expansion to Guatemala, we had developed a set of criteria that would help us to identify a location, population, infrastructure, critical services and established organizations that would be a good match for our organization's rural development and education travel programs. The Lake Atitlán region offers all of these and much more. Our partnership with [Mil Milagros](#) and [Vivamos Mejor](#) is the centerpiece of the work we will be doing when school groups begin arriving in Guatemala next year.

The program will be centered in the town of Panajachel at Lake Atitlán, an amazing lake region 3 hours from Guatemala City in the Mayan highlands. Mil Milagros partners with communities to prevent malnutrition and hunger and to improve children's health and education in the region. They are working in three Mayan communities near the lake in the municipality of Santa Lucía Utatlán: Nuevo Progreso, Xesampual, and Chuijomil. Vivamos Mejor is focused on improving the quality of life of the human being and the natural environment that surrounds it. Our partnership will support and complement the work that Mil Milagros and Vivamos Mejor are doing by building school kitchens and classrooms, among a number of other projects we are currently exploring with them.

Mothers and grandmothers are the key to Mil Milagros' success. Mil Milagros works with their partner schools to organize Boards of Mother and Grandmother leaders in each community. They train these leaders, and they, in turn, train their peers. The mothers and grandmothers take turns to prepare nourishing meals each school day, and also help with hygiene interventions including the application of fluoride varnish and lice shampoo. The children bring their own dishes and utensils to school, along with firewood for the stoves.

Mil Milagros forms strategic partnerships with other organizations to address other pressing needs in its partner communities including health and dental care, water, and housing and school construction. Our work in the coming year will center on the needs of community schools where Mil Milagros' programs occur.



Santa Lucía Utatlán and the rural communities of Lake Atitlán



Lake Atitlán is surrounded by many villages in which Maya culture is still prevalent and traditional dress is worn. The Maya people of Atitlán are predominantly Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel. During the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the Kaqchikel initially allied themselves with the invaders to defeat their historic enemies, the Tz'utujil and K'iche' Maya, but were themselves conquered and subdued when they refused to pay tribute to the Spanish.

The most important geographical features of the municipality are the hills that form part of mountain ranges. According to municipal data, 90% of the municipality's inhabitants either by inheritance or by legal documents (deeds) own land. An average family has a 3 to 5 cuerda property, where 1 cuerda is used for the home and animal shelter while the rest is used for agricultural purposes (1 cuerda = 32x32 varas).

The municipality of Santa Lucía Utatlán has 18,011 inhabitants, 50.56% are women and 49.44% are men, of which 93.4% live in the Rural area and 6.6% live in the urban area of the municipality. The density of the population is from 410 to 487 inhabitants per square kilometer. It is important to emphasize that the population density increases every year, due to the growth of the population of the rural and urban areas. In average of members by family in the municipality is of 5 to 6 members.

Santa Lucía Utatlán is one of the municipalities with the largest indigenous population: 95.56% of the total population, belongs to the Kiche' ethnic group within the Maya indigenous group. While 4.44% belong to the non-indigenous group.



Map of Lake Atitlán

