

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Shenandoah Presbytery Mission Trip to Baja California, Mexico

July 6 - 12, 2025

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Dates/Deadlines/Registration/Costs

When did we start serving in Baja?

In 2000, August Stone Presbyterian Church in Fort Defiance, Virginia served in Baja California, Mexico. Then, in 2003, Augusta Stone PC invited additional churches to serve in Baja. Other than in 2020 because of COVID, mission teams from Virginia have served in Baja since 2000. We are grateful for the longstanding relationships we have built over the years with the community.

When is the trip?

The trip begins in San Diego at 9:00 a.m. Sunday, July 6, 2025, and ends approximately 5:00 p.m. in San Diego on Saturday, July 12, 2025. You must plan to arrive in San Diego no later than Saturday, July 4, 2025.

When can I sign up?

Registration ends April 1, 2024. If the trip fills up prior to this date, registrants will be placed on a waiting list in the order that their registration forms are received.

Why does the registration open and close so early? The trip isn't until July!!

The trip has become extremely popular and for the past several years we have been reserving our week two years in advance. By mid-January we have to pay YWAM (Youth with a Mission, the mission group we work through in California) a deposit of \$100/person to reserve our team spots (60 spots x \$100 = \$6,000). Our team has to be set no later than April 1 so we can make adjustments to our team numbers (and payments) if necessary.

If I'm under 18, do my parents have to go?

Not necessarily. YWAM requires minors age 14-17 be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, although with the proper consent forms, YWAM may agree to be the "legal guardian" for the duration of the trip. For minors age 13 and under, YWAM requires the child to be accompanied by their own parents or a legal guardian other than YWAM. The Baja Mission Trip Leadership Team has the same requirements.

How much will it cost?

That depends on you!!

Costs that we hope to cover through fundraising: The costs associated with the trip are: \$400/person YWAM fee to cover room, board, and travel for the week while in Mexico; approximately \$5,500 for a house; extra money for each family and building site (paint, extra lumber, used furniture, used mattresses, propane stove, taking families shopping) estimated to be \$2,500 per house. **We are hoping to cover all the above expenses through grants, gifts, and fund-raising activities, but if we fall short, every team member will be expected to come up with the remainder. An excellent incentive to do some great fundraising, no?!**

If you are not a member or active participant of a Presbyterian congregation, you pay the \$400 YWAM fee. The fee is payable at the time of registration; instructions are included on the registration form.

Your cost will be all your U.S. expenses, including your round-trip travel costs to San Diego; any overnight expenses you might incur either before or after the mission trip; and your meals and ground transportation expenses in the U.S. Round-trip flights to San Diego tend to run in the \$500- \$700 range, depending on the airline industry and when you purchase your tickets. Hotel for two nights (one before and one after the trip) have run about \$150 - \$225 per night (we usually put four in a room and share the cost, but you can stay as expensively as you like); ground transportation about \$10 (can be free if your hotel has a free shuttle); and we

typically have about four meals. So, your cost will likely be in the vicinity of \$700-\$1,000 per person but may be less – and could be considerably more depending on airfare and your personal tastes. If you use frequent flyer miles and have friends or relatives you can stay with in San Diego, *it could be nearly free!*

Maybe you'll want to drive to San Diego and see the country; maybe you'll want to delay your return a week or two and travel the West Coast. Doing it this way puts **you** in control of your trip to and from California, both from the standpoint of cost and scheduling.

We hope your home church might be able to help you with some of your expenses, and you likely will want to do some fund-raising on your own to help raise money to cover some of your expenses. Tell your friends and family that for a birthday or Christmas gift, you want money for your trip.

Will we be doing any fund-raisers?

Yes. Most church teams do their own fund-raising, but we might plan to do one or two group fund-raisers to generate enough funds to make the trip. We try to raise additional monies to help support our families and the missionaries who help the Oaxacans. **Everyone who goes on the trip will participate in some type of fund-raising.** Proceeds from any group fund-raisers will not be used to defray your individual expenses. You may wish to do some fund-raising of your own to help with that.

Will I need any money in Mexico?

Yes, you'll want money for several things. Sometimes in the evening we run out to get ice cream or tacos or pizza, so you might want a little cash for that. A couple of times we have gone to the circus, if it's in town. On Friday morning we'll go to the town square park where we'll have the opportunity to buy things that the Oaxacan women have woven. We always like to buy their wares, as this is how they make their living. On our way home Saturday, we stop in Ensenada where we'll have an hour or so to shop for souvenirs. **Please note: You can spend dollars in Mexico, but don't bring anything larger than a \$10.00 bill, and plan to use your fives and tens only in Ensenada. The rest of the time you'll want ones. ONES; got it??**

What do I need to do if I want to go?

You need to give us a firm commitment in writing by filling out the combined **registration form that** is included in this FAQ or can be downloaded from the Shenandoah Presbytery website <http://shenpres.org/baja-mission/>. You can register anytime up until April 1. Spots will be reserved on a first- come, first served basis. A commitment means you definitely plan to attend, not that you just think you might want to go. **You are not considered registered until we have received form properly filled out, including a photocopy of your health insurance card (and a check for \$400 if you are not a member or active participant of a congregation in Shenandoah Presbytery).**

Where can I get the registration forms?

The forms are included in this FAQ and also are available on the Shenandoah Presbytery web site at <http://www.shenpres.org/baja-mission/>. You must **complete the form and include a copy of your health insurance card.**

Where do I send my completed forms?

Completed forms can be mailed, emailed or faxed to:

Rhonda Richie
1058 Woodmont Dr.
Staunton, VA 24401
FAX – 540-886-0148

Scan and email to: RhondaRichieRealtor@gmail.com

Do I have to send any money with my registration?

If you **are not** a member or active participant of a congregation in Presbytery you will include a check for \$400 with your registration to cover your ground transportation, meals, and lodging in Mexico. *Members and active participants of the Presbytery do not need to pay this fee.* Our team raises this fee, plus all costs to build the houses, through grants, donations, and fundraising. You will, however, be responsible for your personal travel costs in the U.S., and remember, if we don't raise all the necessary funds, then everyone will be responsible for "anteing up" the remainder. But we've always been able to raise the necessary funds in the past.

SHENANDOAH PRESBYTERY BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO MISSION TRIP
REGISTRATION, WAIVER & RELEASE OF LIABILITY, AND CONSENT FOR TREATMENT

Full Legal Name (and Preferred First Name): _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Male _____ Female _____ Age _____ Date of Birth _____

Emergency contact: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Insurance Provider: _____ (attach a copy of your insurance card – front and back)

Are you taking any medications? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please describe: _____

Do you have any allergies: Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please describe: _____

(Note: Anyone is welcome on this trip but those who are not members or active participants of a Presbyterian Congregation in Shenandoah Presbytery must pay an additional fee)

_____ I am a Member or Active Participant of a Shenandoah Presbyterian Congregation - _____ Presbyterian Church.

_____ I am not a member or active participant of a Presbyterian Congregation and agree to an additional fee of \$400.00. Checks are to be made payable to Shenandoah Presbytery.

WAIVER AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY:

I, the undersigned, acknowledge the sponsors and coordinators of the Baja California, Mexico Mission Trip to be Shenandoah Presbytery and certain people who are designated as team planners, all of whom are hereinafter referred to as "Team Representatives". I further acknowledge that those who are leading the team are volunteers who want to make the best, safest, and meaningful trip for me and / or for my minor child. I further acknowledge and understand that Team Representatives will always try to make the best decisions possible concerning my, or my minor child's, welfare. I further acknowledge and grant permission for Team Representatives to transport me or my minor child across the Mexican Border.

I, the undersigned, have been advised of the nature of the activities that may take place during the Mission Trip and represent to you that I, the participant, or minor child, are physically and mentally able to participate in those activities. I understand that the Mission Trip does present a possible risk of injury. I represent to you that I, the participant or minor child, assumes the risk of any such injury and hold Team Representatives harmless from any liability for injury to myself or my minor child while engaged in this activity and agree to indemnify and defend Team Representatives against such injury to myself, the participant or my minor child.

I, the undersigned, hereby authorize any photos taken that I am in may be used for marketing, fundraising, and promotion of the trip

I, the undersigned, hereby release Team Representatives from, and agree to indemnify and hold them harmless from and against all liability from any actions, damages, causes of actions, suits, costs, losses, expenses, claims, demands, damages and judgements collectively known as "Losses and Claims" which I, my spouse, family members, children, invitees, heirs, executors, administrators, successors, and assignees ever had, now have or hereafter can, shall or may have resulting from or arising in connection with my or my minor child's travel to, attendance at, or participation in the Baja California, Mexico Mission Trip.

I also hold Team Representatives harmless from all liability to any other person or entity arising as a result of conduct of the participants in the Baja California Mexico Mission Trip and agree to defend and indemnify Team Representatives against any claim or liability arising as a result of such conduct. As a participant of the mission team, I agree to a background check.

AUTHORIZATION AND CONSENT FOR TREATMENT: Youth With a Mission staff members, volunteer workers and / or Team Representatives are

hereby authorized on my or my minor child's behalf to arrange for any medical and hospital treatments as may be deemed advisable for the health and well-being of me or my minor child. I agree to the performance of medical treatment, anesthesia and operation as, in the opinion of an attending physician, is deemed necessary.

AGREEMENT OF PURPOSE OF MISSION TRIP:

The Shenandoah Presbytery Baja Mission Trip is a ministry of the churches of the Shenandoah Presbytery, PCUSA.

The purpose of the Baja Mission Trio is to show the love of Christ to those we go to serve in Baja California Mexico and to each other as we work together in house building and mission outreaches. As we work together with the local Baja community and with each other, I understand we represent Shenandoah Presbytery and our individual congregations as we build and strengthen relationships of the indigenous people with each other. I agree to:

Work cooperatively with each other; Participate in a house-building team; Participate in the outreaches; Treat those we go to serve with compassion and respect; Be a part of this Christian community and support and encourage each other; Support the purpose of the Baja Mission trip as stated above; Refrain from any activity which is counter to Christian values to include abstaining from alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs and vulgar or distasteful language.

While on this mission trip you are an example to other team members, especially the youth and are expected to conduct yourselves in a way that exemplifies the values of your church and fellow mission teammates.

MINOR CONSENT (IF APPLICABLE)

Minors may participate in an outreach sponsored by YWAM – Chico CA ("YWAM") provided

- That minors are accompanied by both parents or that this Minor Consent Form is signed by the non-traveling parent.
- That minors, who are between the ages of 14 and 17, are accompanied by a legal guardian (see below) or that they travel in the care of YWAM which may, under careful consideration, agree to serve as legal guardian* for the minor child.
- That minors 13 years of age and younger, are accompanied by their parent(s) (see above) or a legal guardian* (other than YWAM)
- That in every case the legal guardian* is authorized by BOTH parents, who will both be required to indicate their consent by signing this Minor Consent Authorization Form, in the presence of two witnesses.

*A legal guardian is one who has the legal authority (and the corresponding duty) to care for the personal and property interest of another person. This includes but is not limited to having the legal authority to request and authorize medical care for the persons for which the guardian is responsible.

I, _____ (parent) AND I, _____ (parent)

GIVE PERMISSION TO _____ (name of Guardian) to take our child(ren)

_____ Full Legal Name(s) and date of birth of minor child(ren)

To Mexico on YWAM sponsored outreach. Our child(ren) is/are scheduled to return to the US on: _____

I, the undersigned have read the above Waiver and Release of Liability and Consent for Treatment and Agreement Of Purpose of Mission Trip, and Minor Consent (if applicable) and agree to its provisions

Participants Signature _____ Date: _____

Photo/Video Release: I give my permission for _____ (minor's name) to be photographed/videoed during the Baja mission trip, understanding that the photos/videos might be used for social media and promotional purposes.

_____ (guardian's printed name and signature)

If Participant is under 18 years of age, both parents or the legal guardian must sign in the presence of two witnesses:

Parent / Guardian printed name and signature: _____ Date _____

Parent / Guardian printed name and signature: _____ Date _____

Witness printed name and signature: _____ Date _____

Witness printed name and signature: _____ Date _____

Please return to: Rhonda Richie, 1058 Woodmont Dr. Staunton, VA 24401 or RhondaRichieRealtor@gmail.com

Teams/Participation

What mission groups are we working with?

All of our arrangements are made through Youth With a Mission (YWAM), headquartered in Richardson Springs near Chico, CA. and YWAM Mexico. YWAM is a world-wide mission organization with missions everywhere. Richardson Springs does many types of missions; some of the missionaries there are devoted to building houses for the Oaxacans, one of the short-term outreach programs they operate. One of them will be leading our trip for the week. To learn more about YWAM, visit their web site at <http://www.ywamchico.com>. For the house-building mission: http://www.ywamchico.com/ministries/sto_main.html.

Who can join the team?

The trip is open to anyone (certain age restrictions apply for youth), and everyone is responsible for paying their own travel costs in the U.S. Participants who are not members or active participants in a congregation of a Presbyterian Church shall pay a fee covering travel/meals/lodging in Mexico.

How many can go?

We have 60 spaces available. We can make the trip with any number under that.

Who's leading the trip?

The Leadership Team and contact information is updated annually. Several committed individuals who have been numerous times in the past also serve as advisors to help make decisions and organize the trip. If you have questions you can call or email Rhonda Richie at (540) 290-3404 or rhondarichierealtor@gmail.com, Keith Folsom at (540) 294-0025 or keithspringdale@gmail.com, or Nikki Griffin at 540-448-0726 griffinn170@gmail.com, April Cranford at (540) 942-1145 or wpcpastor@gmail.com, if you have specific questions not answered in the FAQ.

Will we have any team meetings before we go?

Yes, there will be a total of six team meetings. The first meeting, the organizational and informational meeting, is held on a Sunday afternoon in February, and the remaining five meetings are held monthly until we leave in July. All team meetings will be held in one of the sponsoring churches. The exact meeting place and schedule normally is announced in January. Meetings are an essential part of the trip preparation. Every effort should be made by each participant to attend each meeting. Every participant should make every effort to attend all meetings in order to build a team relationship.

Is there a minimum age limit?

Yes.... sort of. YWAM (Youth With a Mission) requires minors under 14-17 to be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, although with the proper consent forms, YWAM may agree to be the "legal guardian" for the duration of the trip. For minors age 13 and under, YWAM requires the child to be ACCOMPANIED by their own parents or a legal guardian other than YWAM. The Baja Mission Trip Leadership Team has the same requirements.

Is there a maximum age limit?

No. We've had team members in their 80's.

How many people will be there?

We have 60 spots available on our team. There may be other teams at the mission compound that week building houses as well, perhaps as many as 100 people total. Sometimes our team is the only one at the mission base that week.

Area/The People/Climate

Where are we going?

Vicente Guerrero, Baja California, Mexico. It's a small town about 200 miles south of San Diego, CA

Who are we building houses for?

We are building houses for Oaxacan Indians, one of the native peoples of Mexico. They are similar to Native Americans, like the Navajos and other tribes we know here in the U.S., in that they speak their own languages and have their own culture. And they are extremely poor. Many of them are illiterate, and some do not speak Spanish. Most of the children do, however.

Why are we building them houses?

The Oaxacans are very poor and there is much discrimination against them. Many of them live in shelters made of flattened cardboard boxes, scrap paper and plastic, sticks, cast-off lumber... anything they can lay their hands on. We have seen some who literally live in cardboard boxes.

Will they have electricity and running water?

Usually they don't have electricity, but we may wire the house anyway for future electrical connection. They have no running water, no plumbing, and no toilet facilities. We usually provide them with a new outhouse; occasionally we find that a family doesn't have an outhouse at all. We also usually provide them with a shower house, which is simply an outhouse without a seat in which they can pour a bucket of water over themselves in privacy.

Do I have to be able to speak Spanish?

No, but if you do, all the better. The people at the Mission are Americans and Canadians, and the people we are building for are Oaxacan Indians or other native Indians. Most of them speak Spanish, but occasionally we encounter a family who doesn't speak Spanish and speaks only a Oaxacan dialect. All of the children speak Spanish. We usually have an American/Canadian building supervisor on the build site (one of the missionaries) to help with translations, so while knowledge of Spanish is helpful, it's not necessary.

Do they speak English?

Everyone at the mission speaks English. In the colonias or towns, it's mainly Spanish, though we have encountered a few Oaxacans, particularly children, who know a little bit of English.

What's the climate and weather?

It's desert, but we're two miles off the Pacific Ocean, so it doesn't get very hot (usually!). Days usually are sunny or overcast with highs around 70-75, occasionally up to 80. Every now and then we get a week that is quite hot, into the upper 80s and low 90s. Nights generally get down to the upper 50s to around 60. The beach itself often is socked in with fog or a marine layer. It has rained on us only a couple of times during the years we have been going there, and then for only a couple of hours. They normally get about two or three inches of rain a year, generally in October and February, or thereabouts.

About the Mission Base

Where will we be in Mexico?

200 miles south of San Diego on the Baja Peninsula in a small town called Vicente Guerrero. It's about the size of the Town of Bridgewater or Verona or Stuarts Draft. We will stay about two miles out of town in a tiny community of about 40 houses. There, we stay at the YWAM Mission Base, a small mission base on about an acre of land. We are building houses in a "colonia," or shantytown, which might be as close as one mile away but could be as far away as 15 or 20 miles.

Where is the mission base?

The mission base is located a couple of miles out of the "downtown" area of Vicente Guerrero. It's located in a very small, isolated "housing development" set apart from everything else. The mission base proper is about an acre and consists of a three-bedroom brick ranch house that has been modified to contain offices, a chapel, a kitchen and dining room. There are a couple of smaller miscellaneous buildings on the property which contain classrooms, tool storage, etc., and about a dozen bunkhouses ("dormitories") where we sleep.

Where will we sleep?

In bunkhouses ("dorms") made of plywood, with concrete floors. Each one has four sets of bunks that sleep eight people. It has a door, a window, one light bulb, and nothing else! If you're lucky, you might find a beat-up chair or a makeshift table. If you want, you can take your own tent or hammock and pitch it there in the courtyard at the mission; in past years we've had several tenters and as many as 11 people sleeping in hammocks. There will be dorm space and a mattress available for everyone on our team. If you decide to sleep in a tent, you can drag a mattress out of one of the dorms and use it in your tent if you like. ***Males and females are separate; the tent option is a provision for married couples.***

Is the food and water safe to eat and drink?

Yes. ***But you must play by the rules!!!*** We are provided with purified water and safe food at all times. The food we have for our meals at the mission is prepared specifically for us, and a couple of times we eat out during the week at places the missionaries know to be safe. However, you should listen carefully to what the mission team members tell you about what and where not to eat. They have learned the hard way! And if you ever purchase any fruits (not recommended), they must be either peeled or washed in water treated with Clorox before you eat them.

What kind of meals will we eat?

A variety of American and some very tasty native Mexican dishes, too. All our meals are prepared at the Mission Base except the first night upon arrival in Vicente Guerrero. It's not fancy, but there's plenty. On Sunday night we eat at a local taco stand, *Papa Reuben's*, and have real, honest-to-goodness, Mexican tacos. On Friday night, we all eat a special gourmet dinner prepared by the excellent cook staff at the base. These meals are included in your fee.

I'm a vegetarian/vegan/lactose intolerant; can they prepare special meals for me?

No. Due to the size of the groups there during the week and the very limited kitchen facilities and staff available, the mission cook staff is unable to prepare special meals. Nearly every meal we will be served at the mission will contain meat, cheese or dairy products. Fresh fruit and peanut butter and jelly are available at some meals, but if you have special needs, please plan on bringing your own "snacks." (Be sure to read up on government/airline web sites to ensure you are not carrying any items that might be confiscated or are illegal).

I have food allergies; will I be okay eating food there?

If you have specific food allergies, such as nuts, etc., please inform your leaders when you register so that we can make arrangements with the mission kitchen staff to shield you from those food items.

What about drinking water and toilet facilities?

We drink purified water all the time we are in Mexico. The toilet facilities at the Mission are fine; three hot/cold showers; three toilets, and three sinks in both the men and women's facilities. They're nice and clean. On the build sites, we always are provided with pure drinking water, but the only toilet facility will be an outhouse. However, we do purchase and install a brand-new outhouse the first day on the job for each build site. You should plan on using an outhouse for the six to eight hours each day we are on the build site. *[Note: occasionally, particularly toward the end of the week, the sewer system can't handle all the water going into it and toilets will back up. If things like outhouses and toilets that back up bother you, perhaps this is not the type of trip you will want to make. This is a less-developed country, and you should not expect conditions to be like they are in your own home or the local Holiday Inn.]*

Is there electricity at the Mission Base?

Yes. There are very few outlets (usually only one, maybe two per bunkhouse) for plugging in things, so you may want to bring a power strip or multi-plug to plug in camera and phone chargers, things like that. There are outlets in the bathrooms for electric razors and things like that, but you might as well know that plugging in hair dryers or curling irons often results in a blown circuit breaker! It's not your daddy's electrical system!

Do I have to take bedding materials?

Yes. You will be supplied with a mattress. You bring your own sleeping bag, or sheets and a blanket. And take a pillow and pillowcase. What most people do is buy new or used sleeping bags, sheets, blankets, pillows and pillowcases at a discount store or second-hand shop, use them for the week, and then leave them at the mission when we depart so they can be distributed to needy families. Places like Wal-Mart sell inexpensive sleeping bags for about \$10.00 that are great for the week and make wonderful gifts to leave. That way they get bedding, and you don't have to carry things home. We've not had any luck trying to purchase linens (sheets, pillowcases, pillows) in this area of Mexico (can't seem to find them in stores anywhere), so we always try to take enough sheets and pillows to furnish the beds for the homes we build.

What kind of clothes should I wear and take?

Casual and old! You can wear shorts on our travel days into and out of Mexico, and you can wear shorts around the Mission base. Although shorts really aren't a part of their culture, and "When in Rome, do as the Romans," this rule seems to be changing somewhat over the years. Team members and missionaries have been wearing shorts more and more, even in the colonias, and you will be fine as long as your shorts are **knee-length or longer**. **Short** shorts are **not allowed** at anytime, anywhere, so don't bother to bring them along. If you bring shorts, they must be conservative. The same applies to tops: leave the navel-barers and low-cut V-necks at home. If you wear them, you will be asked to change into more appropriate clothing.

On outreaches and to church, men should wear clean pants and a collared shirt; a polo shirt is fine. Women should wear a long skirt (mid-calf to ankle length) and a nice shirt, or a long dress. Ladies, you may want to wear pants under your skirt to keep you warm during evening ministry.

Some people take two pairs of pants: one to wear every day on the build, and one other to wear everywhere else. You're not trying to impress anyone down there! Most people leave their clothes behind when they leave; the clothes can be washed and given to the Oaxacans who often have only one or two sets of clothes. You'll definitely want a windbreaker, sweatshirt or light jacket for the evenings, especially for the windy beach!

Will other people/teams be there as well?

Probably. There might be as many as 40 other people there the same week, and it might be that our team will be the only ones. We've had it both ways in the past.

What we do/Activities

What will we do?

We'll build several houses from the ground up for indigent Oaxacan Indians. Or we'll build a church, or a schoolhouse, or we may work on certain other projects at the mission base or other mission outposts. In the past the focus has been on building houses, but needs are constantly changing there, and we might be asked to do other types of projects. In earlier years we mainly built one- or two-room houses, but we have also built schoolhouses (the same structure as a house) and have worked on other repair and building projects. The current house design is what they call a "double build" and consists of either three or four rooms. We began building these in 2006, and this is what appears to be the greatest housing need, so it is likely this is what we will be building. House builds begin on Monday, and we try to have them completed by Thursday evening, leaving Friday as a day for touring the local orphanage, shopping for Oaxacan handicrafts, and going to the beach. In addition, we always do one or two evening "outreaches" during the week, including attendance at a local worship service. Outreaches are mandatory and an important part of this mission trip.

What kind of house will we build?

The houses have evolved since the earlier years of this mission and the current design, the "double build," is a four-room configuration. The size of a double build is 20' x 22' (440 square feet), and the houses are built on a concrete pad. It's constructed of "panels" made from plywood and 2 x 4s. The roof is made of panels as well. It has one door, three windows, and an outhouse (there is no plumbing or running water). We always purchase and install an additional window or two for each house for more ventilation, and we build beds, tables, etc., and purchase used mattresses, chairs, propane stove, kitchen utensils, etc.

How many houses will we build?

Probably three or four. It depends on a number of factors: available funds, the size of the team we take, and also how many houses are being built the week we are there. The missionaries we work with have set a limit of 6 houses per week. We generally have 15 on a house-building team, give or take a couple, and it is likely we will build three or four houses, depending upon the makeup of the group.

I don't know anything about building houses or construction or anything like that; can I go?

Yes! Can you swing a hammer? Blow bubbles? Screw in a screw? Cut a piece of wire with pliers? Stick a sticker on a child's forehead? Paint? Draw a line with a pencil? Blow up a balloon? Lift a board? Smile at a shy person? Hug a child? Bounce a ball? Play ring-around-the-rosy? If you can do any of these things, then we need your skills!

Can we form an all-woman build team?

Yes! If there is enough interest, we can put together an all-girls team. We have done this in the past, and although we have added a few men to make the numbers work out, the women are in charge, call the shots, and make the decisions, and run the power equipment. Will this be the year that we have the first all-girls team without any men??

Do I need to bring any tools?

You can if you want, but tools are supplied. But not many! If you want to bring along a tape measure or hammer or pocketknife or some small tools like that, it's okay. In the past we've brought a few things like that and just left

them in the missionaries' toolboxes. Not all of the sites have electricity, and we sometimes have generators or use battery-powered tools. One thing that is extremely handy that you might want to consider: a multi-tool, like a Leatherman. It's possible we'll purchase some tools in San Diego to donate to the cause as well, if we raise enough money, and recently, some team members have been bringing their own power tools, such as circular saws, drills, and sawzalls. Especially valuable are battery-operated tools; you're welcome to bring your own if you wish.

What's an outreach?

In addition to building houses, YWAM work among the Oaxacans to spread God's Word. In the evenings, usually twice during the week, we go to a colonia or rehab center to share and interact with the Oaxacans or Mexicans. Share the Word; maybe serve a meal; take gifts to the children; distribute personal hygiene kits; just share fellowship. Sometimes there is a worship service. We never know beforehand if or how many outreaches we will do, but your participation is mandatory; it's a part of doing mission work and learning more about the culture.

Can we go to the beach?

Yes. But be forewarned: this is not a beach vacation! We always go to the beach on Friday afternoon after the houses are completed, but the Pacific is very cold, often too cold to swim in, and the weather often is cool.

What's a typical day like?

Most people get up around 6:00 or 6:30. Breakfast is served at 7:00. At 8:00 we gather for a 30-minute informal worship service and announcements, and around 8:45 we pile in the vans and head for the build site. We work until noon when we eat a bagged lunch of sandwiches, chips/cookies, apple, and Kool-Aid. We eat sitting on the ground or a pile of boards (usually we give most of our lunch to the kids who have little or nothing to eat). We generally work until around 3:30 or 4:00, then head back to the Mission for a shower and early dinner around 5:00 or 5:30. In the evening we may go do an outreach somewhere, or maybe we'll ride over into town to get tacos at Papa Ruben's or some ice cream. Or maybe we'll just hang around and play games or relax. Usually on Wednesday night we attend church services in Vicente Guerrero. Everyone is expected to attend outreaches.

Medical & Safety Issues

What shots/immunizations do I need?

None are required for the trip, but an updated tetanus is highly recommended.

Tetanus is a no-brainer; lots of nails and ways to get a cut on a piece of rusty metal, so make sure your tetanus booster is up to date. You can get this immunization at your local health department or your family medical facility. I've found the health department to be a less costly source, and they are very accommodating.

This is not a malaria area.

All that having been said, these are personal health decisions. Here is a link to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website for Mexico: <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mexico.aspx>

Are there medical facilities in case I get really sick or injured?

Yes, there is a small medical clinic about four miles from where we are staying where you could be treated for minor injuries or medical emergencies, like broken bones, flu, etc. There is also a hospital about 15 miles away. We've taken team members to both in the past and they have received excellent care. Major medical emergencies most likely would require you return to San Diego. We would take you or help get you there; we wouldn't just

leave you hanging totally on your own.

Have other team members gotten sick in the past?

Yep, sure have. Every year a half-dozen or so people get sick for about 24 hours, and it's usually the standard diarrhea and vomiting routine. Not pleasant, but survivable. It's a combination of things: dry climate, not drinking enough water, heat, bacteria we're not used to, time change, different foods.... any number of things. Cleaning your hands constantly with waterless anti-bacterial soap and **drinking plenty of water** can go a long way to ward off sickness.

Should I take any medicines or things like that?

By all means, take your prescription medications; make sure they are in the original container issued by your pharmacy or doctor. Be sure to take *and use* waterless anti-bacterial soap. Take a small size that will fit in your pocket or belly-bag so you can keep it with you at all times, as you need to clean your hands frequently. Aspirin, Pepto-Bismol, Imodium or similar products are good to have along as well. Sunscreen is a must.

Communicating

How can we be contacted in case of emergency?

Prior to departure from home, you will be provided with an emergency phone number at which family members can contact you while you are in Mexico.

Can my friends and family call me during the week?

Only in case of emergency, unless you have an international cell phone.

Can I phone home?

Not likely, but maybe. You can purchase long-distance calling cards in Vicente Guerrero which work in pay phones, but there no longer is a pay phone at the mission and they are hard to find in town. ***It is best to plan on not being in voice communication with people back in the States during the week.***

Can I take a cell phone?

Sure, you can take it, but it won't work in Mexico unless you have an international cell phone. And if you have an international cell phone, you should thoroughly research your phone plan before the trip because international calling and texting can be extremely expensive.

Will I have access to the internet?

Maybe. The mission has wireless internet, but it doesn't always work. Smart phones and laptop computers can access it – when it's working. One year we didn't have access all week until Thursday, but in 2012 it worked perfectly all week long.

Travel logistics

Where do we meet?

In San Diego! Many of us end up staying at the same hotel so you'll probably run into a lot of your friends there. On Sunday morning you will be responsible for getting to our meeting place, usually a hotel parking lot or the San Diego airport. The exact meeting place will be clearly communicated to everyone well in advance of the trip.

Is there a list of items I should bring or purchase in San Diego?

Miscellaneous items:

- Ear plugs – for sleeping
- Sunscreen
- Hat – preferably with a brim
- Work gloves
- Safety Glasses or goggles
- Water bottle
- Camera and / or phone
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Sunglasses
- Backpack
- Towels, washcloth, soap, shampoo and any personal items
- Hand Sanitizer
- Bandana
- First Aid Kit
- Passport
- Bible – and small booklet for notes and to record memories
- Pens, or pencils

Bedding: we're supplied with a bunk and a mattress

- Bring sleeping bag or sheets and blanket
- Pillow and pillowcase
- Can leave these at the end of the week for the families (or you can bring them home)
- Bringing a hammock for sleeping is an option instead of using the beds.

Medications: all should be kept in original containers

- Motion sickness for travel to and from Baja
- Anti-diarrhea meds – Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, Antacid: Tums, etc.
- Sunburn lotion for after you get a sunburn

Clothes: usually bring 2 sets of clothes – one for work, and one for evening events

- Bring work clothes, and one clean set for evening outreaches and church
- Women – calf-length dresses and nice slacks to possibly wear under that
- Collared Shirt or nice outfit for church.
- Long pants or knee-length shorts – not short shorts.
- Shirts with sleeves – no sleeveless or tank tops
- Shoes to use for work – tennis shoes or work boots
- Shower shoes – flip-flops are good to wear in showers
- Sweatshirt and/or jacket – for cool evenings and the windy beach
- Rain jacket or poncho – in case some the 2” of rain per year fall while we're there (probably not necessary)
- Conservative bathing suits – women, one-piece or conservative two-piece; no hot bikinis; men, no speedos
- extra socks

Money: minimal needed, except for souvenirs and for Market on Friday

- Have small bills, mostly ones, few fives. Avoid 10s & 20s or higher denominations.
- For lunch on travel days to and from Baja
- For evening snack runs into town for tacos, ice cream, etc.
- Credit and debit cards not accepted here; this is a cash-only area
- Suggested is \$100 - \$150 per person (this suggestion is completely discretionary)

Pack: one medium-sized suitcase

- Be sure all luggage and sleeping bags have your name in them
- Can bring one extra bag for toys, games and gifts for the children and the families. Should be small, inexpensive and have lots so all the children can have something

Tools to Bring:

- Basic – pencils, tape measure
- Pocket knife or Leatherman- type tool (remember it must be in checked luggage)
- tool belt, nail apron

Do not bring:

- Hairdryers, curling irons, anything needing electricity or anything valuable
- Cell phones – don't work in Baja unless you have an international cell phone (but you may want it in San Diego)

Notes:

- Any valuables like cell phone, camera, iPod, should be guarded and kept in a sealed plastic bag to protect from sand and dirt and from being stolen
- Snack food – if you bring any, make sure it's sealed in a good container. Lots of ants and other insects may be attracted to it
- Contact lens wearers: bring a set of glasses as well. It's windy sometimes and may get dust in your eyes.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and there may be other items you need to bring.

Can I take an extra piece of luggage?

Yes. YWAM has discouraged that in the past, but the last several years, since the Mission has gotten a trailer to haul the luggage, there seems to have been plenty of room. However, **extra luggage can only be for donations, not for your personal items.** You will receive further guidance on this as we get close to departure time. Also, you likely now will have to pay for extra luggage if you are flying to San Diego, but it is always airline dependent.

Will we be traveling together?

Once we meet up as a team in San Diego on Sunday morning, we will be together as a team until we return to San Diego the following Saturday afternoon. In fact, on that first Sunday morning, our team probably will be meeting up with others going down that week, so we generally are part of a larger group traveling, living, working and worshipping together for the week. Before and after that, you're on your own, but you might want to buddy up with several other team members and travel to and from San Diego together.

How do we travel to and while in Mexico?

Once our entire team has gathered at the meeting place in San Diego, we'll pick up rental vans and caravan as a

group all the way to our destination in Mexico. The vans are our transportation for the entire week. We travel in 15-passenger vans.

How long does the trip take? What are the roads like?

From San Diego, it's about a 5-hour drive (200 miles) to Vicente Guerrero. Hard surface highways, a combination of four-lane and two-lane.

Who drives the vans?

Adult members of our team, selected before we leave home, are drivers. Only approved drivers 25 or older are allowed to drive the vans, so you youngsters, don't ask!

Will we have a guide?

Yes. Our "leader" for the entire week will be a YWAM missionary, and they sometimes have an assistant helping them as well. YWAM has been taking groups down for years, and they will be our guide and shepherd for the week. At the Mission in Vicente Guerrero, there are several missionaries who will be helping and working with us during the week. There is often a build supervisor (missionary) on each build site.

Is it safe in Mexico?

The issue of safety in Mexico is one all of us who organize this trip take very seriously. We monitor the Homeland Security website, follow news coverage, and stay in contact with the missionary group in California (YWAM) that runs these trips and takes us into Mexico, and with the missionaries who run the mission base and live and work in Vicente Guerrero, where we will be for the week. We talk about these concerns at every meeting. The Leadership Team believes this is a very safe trip with very low risk. If at any point leading up to the trip the Leadership Team feels the situation is not safe, the trip will be canceled.

While we do cross the border at Tijuana, YWAM continually keeps us apprised of information concerning the situation in Tijuana, and we never have experienced any problems. However, we would not want anyone to make this trip if they are uncomfortable doing so.

The "war" between two drug cartels in Tijuana ended in 2010. Drug violence has subsided dramatically since that time, and nearly 3,000 police and government officials that had been "on the take" were cleaned out and replaced. Since the 2010 truce between the two cartels, life in Tijuana has largely returned to normal; violence there now is no different from any large city in the U.S., and in fact, the crime rate there is much lower today than in most U.S. cities.

Our experiences in Mexico thus far have been extremely safe. Everyone on the team is expected to abide by the rules agreed upon prior to becoming a part of the group. These rules help to promote safety for you individually as well as the group.

There is absolutely no reason for concern about violence in the towns in which we live and work during the week, nor in the tourist town (Ensenada) in which we stop for an hour's shopping on our return trip.

Barry Wineroth, a missionary with Youth With a Mission, is the gentleman who runs the Baja mission trips to Mexico. He or one of his two associates personally escort us to and from the mission base in Mexico and stay with us the entire week. In spring 2010, he sent the following letter:

The media has worked overtime from time to time spreading exaggerated reports of violence and criminal activity in Mexico, thereby engendering great fear in North Americans about traveling into Mexico. Based on this type of misinformation, many people, both tourists and short-term missionaries are avoiding Mexico. This is a very sad situation on many levels. The financial impact trickles down through the Mexican economy,

hurting an already-struggling economy. But even more devastating is the loss of assistance which mission teams bring to the poorest people of this state.

We would like to set the record straight: life in Vicente Guerrero where your group will be going, and on the Baja peninsula, is normal, safe and calm. People are going about their normal business, going to work and school, shopping and playing. We are bringing teams down at least twice a month and we have crossed the border at Tijuana many, many times in the past several months. We do not go into Tijuana at all...we stay on the main highway. Our shopping at the end of our weeks is in Ensenada...where four cruise ships a week allow 1000's of people to disembark and stroll around the city, with no problems at all. We have never, ever witnessed even a hint of violent activity in all of our travels. Nor have any of our teams reported ever hearing or seeing anything of that nature.

The spate of crime that the news media is so quick to inflate and report is, for the most part, between drug cartels and between the cartels and police/military. Mexican President Felipe Calderon has pledged to fight the drug cartels which means, if anything, we are seeing increased police and military presence, which we feel is a good sign. It makes us feel safer. The major areas of violence are Juarez Mexico near El Paso Texas, which is over 1,500 miles from where we are going, the State of Guerrero which is almost 2000 miles away from where we minister, and the Mexico City area, which is also close to 2000 miles from where we minister.

The Baja California area and in particular the town that we minister in (Vicente Guerrero) is in the green (safe) area on the U.S. State Department violence maps. The U.S. State Department site also notes that "millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year (including thousands who cross the U.S. land border every day for study, tourism or business)."

Please feel free to email us (sto@ywamchico.com) with any questions or concerns. If you would like further reassurance from any of the many group leaders who have led teams to Mexico in the last few months, we can provide contact information. We have groups going to the Baja every month with no problems whatsoever!

Barry, Asher, and Jill

Mexico Adventures

Youth With A Mission, Chico, California

What's it like to cross the border?

Going down it usually takes only a few minutes or so to cross the border, and rarely do any of our vans get pulled into secondary inspection for additional questioning or a search. If we do, that could add a few minutes. (In recent times our trailer of luggage was pulled into secondary for searching and we were delayed about 40 minutes, but this is highly unusual). Usually only the driver has to do any talking, answering a couple of questions. This year all participants must have their passport in hand for going into Mexico, regardless of age. Children must have birth certificates for entry into the U. S. Coming back into the U.S., it usually takes 1-1/2 - 2 hours to get back across the border; traffic is very heavy coming out of Mexico. It's the same routine; usually only the driver has to answer questions, but they might ask any one of you if you bought any fireworks, or where you were born, etc.

Can I take a camera? An iPod?

Sure. Just remember to take proper precautions; keep it with you or locked up at all times, etc. Treat it the way you would on any trip. You might also want to keep it in a Zip-Lock bag to help protect it from sand and dirt; there's lots of that around there!

Do I need a passport?

Yes. The law continues to be a moving target, but here is the information provided by YWAM in September 2007 which applies to this trip: “We will be unable to take you into Mexico without your passport. If even one person does not have their passport within a group they will detain the entire van load of people when we try to leave Mexico.” If you need a passport, apply early, as it can take several months to get one. We did run into a problem one year when one of our youth did not have a passport, and our van was delayed about 20 minutes before they decided to let us re-enter the U.S. – and this was before it actually became a law!

Do I need a birth certificate?

Not for adults. All you need is a passport. A Birth Certificate is required for minors.

What’s a “certified copy” of a birth certificate?

[This information no longer applies to this trip, but you might be interested anyway. A certified copy is a special copy that is issued by the Health Department of the state in which you were born. *It is not a photocopy!!!* Normally there is a fee, maybe \$15-20, to get a certified copy, and it may take a few days.]

Can I take gifts, toys, medical supplies, etc?

Yes, but make them small and inexpensive. Nickel- or dime toys such as balloons, rubber balls, stickers, etc., are fun for the children. Beach balls are cheap and pack nicely. They love soccer balls but deflate them and take an air needle and a pump with you (to use and then leave there with them) so we can blow them up. Toothbrushes and toothpaste, small hand-held mirrors, combs, soap, etc; things like that are useful and appreciated.

What airports do you recommend?

You want to fly into Lindbergh International Airport in San Diego; the airport code, if you're doing internet searches, is SAN. The best rates in the past always have been out of BWI (Baltimore), Dulles (IAD) or Richmond (RIC). Charlottesville (CHO) occasionally offers a really good fare.

What hotels can you recommend?

The hotel where most of us have stayed in past years and which has been very satisfactory is:

Motel 6 San Diego Airport 2353 Pacific Highway San Diego, CA 92101 619-232-8931	Best Western, Bayside Inn 555 Ash St. San Diego, CA 92101 619-233-7500
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The rooms aren’t fancy, but they are clean; they provide a reduced-rate airport shuttle; it’s five minutes from the airport. There are lots of other hotels in the area, some are nicer, and some are not as nice. Stay wherever your heart and budget desires. You are not required to stay at Motel 6 or Best Western.

Important: Sometimes our weekends in San Diego coincide with ComiCon International, the largest annual convention hosted by San Diego. Hundreds of thousands flood the place. Hotel prices rise dramatically, and if you don’t make reservations early you might find you have no place to stay. Flight arrangements might also be an issue the weekend of ComiCon, so start early.

The Team Leader usually tries to reserve enough hotel rooms for the entire team, but those arrangements normally cannot be made until January or February. You might want to check with the Team Leaders to see if rooms already have been secured.

What are your travel suggestions?

Whether you fly or drive, you must arrive in San Diego no later than Saturday night before the trip begins Sunday morning. Stay the night in San Diego. That way you'll get a good night's sleep and be up in plenty of time to meet up with the group by 9:00 a.m. YWAM's instructions allow for you to arrive in San Diego no later than 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, but **our rules are that you need to plan to arrive Saturday night.** The way flights get re-scheduled, and with weather and mechanical delays a constant, it just does not work to try to book a flight that arrives Sunday morning. Several times we have had team members scheduled to arrive Saturday that ran into mechanical or weather problems and were not able to arrive in San Diego until Sunday morning. If your flight already was scheduled to arrive then and you ran into delays, you would miss the trip into Mexico. The caravan cannot wait for you if you are late. It's not worth the risk of missing the trip or inconveniencing a number of people to save the cost of a cheap hotel! It will make for a more enjoyable experience for you – and everyone else.

More on air travel.

From years of experience, the Leadership Team highly recommends selecting flights that are scheduled to arrive in San Diego no later than early afternoon on Saturday. If it is a direct flight, there is usually no problem. But if changing planes in route, flight delays for weather a thousand miles away can delay or even cancel your flight and cause you an overnight delay. If possible, arriving on Friday evening allows an extra day for travel in case there are weather delays. No flights are allowed into San Diego any later than 11:30 pm due to noise regulations in the city.

Updated September 2024