

El Salvador Student Participation Projects



Guidelines for Leaders and Participants

Attachment B – Information about El Salvador

ESAG 102

Preface

This document is a set of suggestions and guidelines for the El Salvador Project Team (“Team”) from the El Salvador Alumni Group (“Group”), based on the Group’s experience; both in El Salvador and within the working environment. It is not a comprehensive list of rules and does not represent the Group taking responsibility for the Team.

The most important thing for the Team is that the individuals all have an awareness of the risks that exist, and they all realise they are responsible for their own health, safety, and security, no-one else. During the preparations effort should be put in to educating the less experienced members of the team as much as possible, as well as ensuring they appreciate they are responsible for themselves. It is also important to emphasise that individuals who go on to take risks not only risk themselves but also the success of the project as a whole, as such participants are requested to bear this in mind when making decisions.

Use of this document

This document is free to use by all those interested in the El Salvador project. In addition anyone who wishes to use this document in similar projects is free to do so, with the provision that they understand as stated above that this document does not form any official recommendations and as such the authors take no responsibility to damage to property or person as a result of using this document.

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Versions

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	01 March 2007	First Version

General Information about El Salvador

Regions

Administrative divisions : 14 departments; Ahuachapán, Cabañas, Chalatenango, Cuscatlán, La Libertad, La Paz, La Unión, Morazán, San Miguel, San Salvador, Santa Ana, San Vicente, Sonsonate, Usulután.

Cities

San Salvador - national capital; San Salvador department

Santa Tecla - El Salvador's second largest city

Acajutla

La Libertad - surf paradise

Santa Rosa de Lima, La Unión Department

Puerto Cutuco

Puerto El Triunfo

Santa Ana

San Miguel, San Miguel department

San Francisco Gotera, Morazán department

History

The civilization of El Salvador dates from the pre-Columbian time, around 1500 B.C., according to evidence provided by the ancient ruins of Tazumal in Chalchuapa.

The Spanish Admiral Andrés Niño led an expedition to Central America and disembarked on the Island Meanguera, located in the Gulf of Fonseca, on May 31st, 1522. This was the first Salvadoran territory visited by the Spaniards. In June, 1524, Spanish Captain Pedro de Alvarado began a predatory war against Cuzcatlán (land of precious things) that was populated by the native tribes of the country. After 17 days of bloody battles many natives and Spaniards died, including the legendary indigenous leader Atlacatl. Pedro de Alvarado defeated, and hurt in his left hip, abandoned the fight and ran to Guatemala, appointing his brother, Gonzalo de Alvarado, to continue with the conquest of Cuzcatlán. Later, his cousin Diego de Alvarado established the villa of San Salvador on April, 1525. King Carlos I of Spain granted San Salvador the title of city in the year 1546. During the following years, El Salvador developed under Spanish rule.

Towards the end of 1810, a feeling of a need for freedom arose between the people of Central America and the moment to break the chains of slavery arrived at dawn on November 5th, 1811, when the Salvadoran priest, Jose Matías Delgado, sounded the bells of the Iglesia La Merced in San Salvador, making a call for the insurrection. After many internal fights, the Acta de Independencia (Act of Independence) of Central America was signed in Guatemala on September 15th, 1821.

On December, 1931, the corrupt and incapable regime of the Labour Party, headed by Araujo, was overthrown. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez assumed the presidency. The fraudulent elections of January, 1932, were the detonating factor of the social outbreak. Several voting sites were

suspended in populations in which the Communist Party had strong presence. The insurrection began. Two frustrated assaults to the Cuartel de Caballería (Cavalry Quarters) were conducted by the rebel forces. The government ordered martial law. Strict censorship of the press was implanted. In the following days thousands of farmers and workers, carrying machetes and some few "Mauser" rifles attacked police quarters, municipal offices, telegraph stations, warehouses, and wealthy landowners' properties. This insurrection was crushed. On January 31st, Manuel Antonio Castañeda sentenced Farabundo Martí to death. He was shot and killed on February 1st, 1932. Many Coup d'états followed, including the one that overthrew General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez.

Soccer War

Relations with Honduras deteriorated in the late 1960s. There was a border clash in 1967, and a four-day so-called Football war (Soccer War), as it was named by the international mass media, broke out in July 1969. The war ended with a cease-fire prompted by pressure from the United States and the Organization of American States. The Salvadoran forces that had invaded Honduras were withdrawn. They were just a few kilometers outside Honduras' capital.

Civil War

A movement of organized leftist guerrillas was created in 1974 and 1975, increasing the political violence. In 1980, three of the leftist organizations united to coordinate a fight against the government. This movement was called FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional. english-Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). On March of the same year. Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador, was killed while he was celebrating the mass. It is widely believed that the final order came from Major Roberto D'Abuisson, the founder and leader of ARENA, a right-wing party. D'Abuisson is best known for his suspected involvement in death squad murders. He died of cancer in 1992. On January 16th, 1992, the government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), signed in Chapultepec, Mexico, Los Acuerdos de Paz (Peace accords), putting an end to one of the most painful chapters in the history of El Salvador. The 12 years of armed conflict claimed the lives of over 75,000 people.

Whilst the situation in El Salvador has improved considerably since the civil war ended, there are still questions around the fairness of the elections. Development has been slow and whilst the ultra-wealthy of El Salvador continue to prosper, poverty-stricken Salvadorans continue to struggle for survival on a daily basis.

Ethnic groups

Mestizo 90%, White 9%, Amerindian 1%

Climate

Tropical; rainy season (May to October); dry season (November to April); tropical on coast; temperate in the uplands.

Holidays

Date	English Name	Local Name	Remarks
March/April	Holy Week	Semana Santa	Celebrated with carnival-like events in different cities by the large Catholic population
May 1	Labor Day	Día del Trabajo	International Labour Day
May 10	Mother's Day	Día de la Madre	.
August 1–7	August Festivals	Fiestas Agostinas	Week long festival in Celebration for the El Salvador del Mundo, patron saint of El Salvador.
September 15	Independence Day	Día de la Independencia	Celebrates independence from Spain, achieved in 1821
October 12	Columbus Day	Día de la Raza	This day commemorates the discovery of the Americas
November 2	Day of the Dead	Día de los Difuntos	A day in which people usually visit the tombs of deceased loved ones.
November (final week)	Carnival to San Miguel	Carnaval de San Miguel	Week long carnival in San Miguel
December 25	Christmas Day	Navidad	Salvadorans stay up on December 24th until 12 am to welcome Christmas with a huge "arsenal" of firecrackers
December 31	New Year's	Año nuevo	Salvadorans stay up on December 31st until 12 am to welcome the new year the same way as Christmas (You can hear the deafening sound of the firecrackers on both days all over the country).

Travelling in El Salvador

The countryside of El Salvador is breathtaking, with volcanoes and mountains offering "green" adventurers what they are looking for. Many of the environmentally oriented community-based organizations promote eco-tourism, and there are a number of beautiful and secluded beaches and forests scattered throughout the country. An already well maintained and practically deserted national park is found in the west at Bosque El Imposible, also Montecristo Cloud Forest, and a quaint fishing village with incredible local hospitality and remote coconut islands in La Isla de Méndez, Isla de Olomega in the department of San Miguel, beautiful Isla El Cajete in Sonsonate, Isla San Sebastian, Conchagua, Conchagueta, Isla Conejo, Isla Teopan, Isla Meanguera among other beautiful salvadorean islands. You should also try to visit the colonial towns of Apaneca, Juayua, Panchimalco, and Suchitoto as well as the Mayan sites of San Andrés, Joya de Cerén (The Pompeii of Central America and an UNESCO World Heritage Site), and Tazumal, whose main pyramid rises some 75 feet into the air. The on-site museum showcases artifacts from the Pipil culture (the builders of Tazumal), as well as paintings that illustrate life in pre-Hispanic El Salvador.

El Salvador is gaining a reputation of having some of the best waves for surfers in the world. Tourists all over the world are discovering the surfing meccas of La Libertad, near San Salvador, El Sunzal, El Zonte and the wild El Este (the east), transforming El Salvador into the fastest growing surf tourism hot-spot in Central America.

Souvenir hunters will find some of the best artesans in San Juan el Espino and La Palma (The artesan capital of El Salvador). The capital, San Salvador, is a cosmopolitan city with good restaurants highlighting the country's fresh seafood, as well as plenty of shopping, entertainment, and nightlife.

El Salvador covers an area of about 21,040 square kilometers (the smallest country in central america), although it is the most densely populated. El Salvador is home to more than 6,500,000 people. It is divided in 14 sections. It has 25 volcanoes, 14 lakes, and four large cities. Its capital is San Salvador. Its origin comes from the ancient civilization of the Pipils.

Travel by Car

The Pan-American highway travels through El Salvador and is a safe route for entering the country.

Travel by Bus

Numerous buses also traverse the highways of the country. Domestic bus services are typically very cheap (not more than two or three dollars for even the longest rides) and difficult to understand. The buses themselves are often very well painted and adorned with all kinds of posters and trinkets, ranging from the religious to the pop-culture. Longer bus rides may include a stop in some town where plenty of mujeres, and sometimes their children, too, will board hawking mangos, nuts, water, and even sometimes fried chicken in a box. There is no central agency that coordinates bus routes and schedules, so it is best to just ask the cobrador where the bus is going and when. Most are very friendly and helpful, but do watch out for scams on the buses.

Note, anyone visiting El Salvador that is not a native to the country should take caution in riding the buses (Microbuses) that are seen around the country. The buses are often crammed and it is very

easy to be robbed. The buses are cheap and are a great way to get around, but remember that as a visitor you are at a higher risk of being robbed. If you must ride a bus take extra care of yourself and your belongings.

Get around

If driving, rental car agencies include Alamo and Hertz. Buses and taxis also provide good ways of getting around. Distances between sights make walking an unpopular option, as does the street layout in the city; San Salvador is not a square city, but has long avenues that are straight and streets that aren't. That said, in some areas walking is a great option, such as in Zona Rosa.

Travel by Plane

TACA Airlines (also sometimes referred to as LACSA Airlines) is the national airline of El Salvador, as well as that of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala. TACA flies a fleet of new A319s, A320s, and A321s throughout North, Central, and South America.

Costs

El Salvador's official currency is the US Dollar.

San Salvador has a number of large modern shopping centers stocking the latest in international fashion, accessories & cuisine. These are generally found in the city's upscale suburbs such as Escalón, Santa Elena, and their surroundings. These malls include; Multiplaza, La Gran Vía, Galerías, Plaza Merliot.

El Salvador is cheap, except when compared to other Central American countries such as Nicaragua. Expect to pay \$5-8 for a room in a hostel, \$1-3 for a simple meal, \$0.20-0.23 to ride a San Salvador city bus, \$1/hour to use the Internet. The one drawback to this is that large bills (\$50 & \$100) are almost unspendable.

Eat

Many American and Central American franchises have expanded into El Salvador and do offer clean and reasonable food. In the capital some of the best restaurants are located in Zona Rosa (Paradise, Alo Nuestro, 503).

The typical Salvadoran diet includes lots of rice and beans, seafood (particularly among those who live on the coast), and the most common Salvadoran dish, the famous Pupusa, a round corn tortilla filled with cheese and other elements, usually chicharon (shredded meat).

Also Salvadorans eat plantains (platanos) usually with beans sour cream and cheese and sometimes with eggs, yuca con chicharron, pastelitos de carne, panes con pavo, hand made tortillas among other very delicious Salvadoran foods.

Many large modern supermarkets are scattered throughout the capital and in large towns, such as La Despensa de Don Juan and Super Selectos, which sell local produce and a large variety of international products. Like anywhere else in the world, these are a cheaper alternative to eating out every night.

Drink

The trendiest night spot to visit is called Zona Rosa and although it doesn't cover a large area (around 1sq mile), it's home to many exclusive, upscale bars and nightclubs (Los Alambiques, Los Rinconitos, Code), and the best restaurants in town (Paradise, 503, A lo Nuestro).

The local beers are Pilsner and Bahia, but one should try the Flor de Cana Rum (Nicaragua) and indeed any rum-based cocktail.

Security

El Salvador has a bad reputation due to the civil war of the 80s. However, 15 years after the peace agreement, El Salvador's tourism industry is growing faster than other countries in Central America. Studies reveal that Guatemala and Honduras have more criminality than El Salvador. Crime is an issue, mostly caused by gangs that appeared in U.S.A and were deported back to El Salvador. These are mostly seen in industrial areas and some specific districts. You must use common sense and avoid entering into a zone that does not seem safe, just like you do in any country of the world. Avoid carrying fancy stuff if you are walking on the public streets, such as jewellery, expensive cameras, watches.

A good idea for any person visiting El Salvador is to keep only necessary forms of identification, such as a driver's license, when exploring the city or tourist locales. If you must keep your passport on you at all times, a traveller's pouch would allow you to have it safely with you.

El Salvador has a high level of gang activity due to the deported gangs that were born in U.S.A. But they mostly fight against themselves. However take caution in walking around the city if you have many piercings or tattoos because of their connection with gangs. Be extra careful and avoid wearing clothes with numbers 13 and 18. If the local police do stop you because of your tattoos or clothing, obey all of their orders and resolve the matter in a peaceful manner.

San Salvador has had a history of violence. Since the end of the civil war in 1992, San Salvador has become one of the safest cities in the region. Of course there is violence as in New York, London or any big city. To stay safe there is some advice:

- Don't walk on streets that look abandoned and dark.
- Use only licensed taxis or rent a car. If you're adventurous, watch your valuables and put away jewellery when using the public buses.
- At best, walk in tourist areas and not STRANGE areas.
- Be careful with your handbag or purse while walking on crowded streets.
- Don't flaunt jewellery/Mobile Phones etc on public transport or crowded areas - remember, common sense prevails!

You won't have a problem in major stores or museums, and most public buildings are full of security guards, alarms, fire extinguishers, etc. There is much gang violence in El Salvador, but in San Salvador, only in the poorer, older neighbourhoods; but in the downtown areas, the malls, the Zona

Rosa, most tourist attractions, and the upmarket neighbourhoods where the hotels are it's generally safe. The government is controlling the gangs with a tactic called "Super Mano Dura" which means "Super Strong Hand". No matter how adventurous you may feel, it is advisable to stay away from the city's poorer districts of Soyapango & its surroundings

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Health

'Agua en bolsa' (water in a plastic bag) is very commonly sold in the streets and corner stores of El Salvador. Visitors from First World countries should always drink 'agua en bolsa' or some other form of pre-packaged or bottled water rather than drinking from the tap in El Salvador. Likewise it's good to avoid food that has been washed with tap water .

Pharmacies are easily found all over the country. Be sure to have a first-aid kit if you travel to the countryside and to archaeological sites.

Respect

Salvadorans are known for their great hospitality. They are among the nicest people in the world. They are very happy people always willing to help anyone. That is what has earned El Salvador the nickname of "the country with a smile". When speaking with people you don't know, it is customary to address them in a formal manner, using señor, señora and/or usted.

San Salvador

The capital city of El Salvador, located approximately in the centre of the country in a valley near the base of the San Salvador volcano. The city has a long history, with origins dating back to the Spanish conquest of the Pipil tribes.

San Salvador lies in the "Valle de las Hamacas" (literally "Valley of the Hammocks", as it was called by the Pipil, due to its intense seismic activity) at the foot of the San Salvador volcano. It covers an area of 600 square km and is home to nearly 2.1 million people. It is home to one-third of El Salvador's population and one-half of the country's wealth. Its location along the Pan American Highway makes it the country's transportation and economic hub. The downtown area is filled with shops and modern buildings, but unfortunately earthquakes have damaged or destroyed many of the city's historic buildings.

The people of San Salvador are generally friendly. The wealthy live in exclusive suburbs behind tall security walls or luxury condominium buildings. Wealthier areas such as San Benito, Colonia Escalon, Colonia San Francisco, Colonia Maquilishuat, Santa Elena (where the U.S. embassy is located) and Ciudad Merliot have tree-lined avenues, the biggest malls in Central America, bars, clubs, gyms, restaurants, luxury hotels, modern high-rise buildings, plazas, boutiques, cafes, luxury salons, jewellery stores, etc. Some of these neighbourhoods are located in the hills surrounding the city and have breathtaking views. A number of new gated housing communities complete with parks, swimming pools, fitness facilities & tight security are popular with middle class families. Most of the city's hotels can be found in these suburbs.

There are middle class neighbourhoods and residential areas close to the wealthy neighbourhoods. Poorer areas are located in the northern & eastern districts, along with an abundance of shanty towns sprawling along the city's fringes.

San Salvador's climate is tropical, although the weather can vary; the nights may be cool (especially in December), however, most of the time it is sunny and warm. Wearing t-shirts, jeans, and possibly a light rain jacket is usually sufficient.

Monuments

San Salvador has many beautiful monuments, some of them dating back to the early 20th century, while others are more modern. Some of the most important monuments include the National Palace, Plaza Gerardo Barrios, Plaza Morazan, Water Clock, Monument to the Sea, Atlacatl Monument and the Proceres Monuments (it has 10 monuments). One of the most recognizable monuments in El Salvador is the Monumento a El Salvador del Mundo, or "Monument to the Saviour of The World".

Parks

San Salvador has the large urban park, the "Parque de los Pericos". There is another park called Parque Cuscatlan (close to downtown), which is very elegant, with lights, trees and paths. Popular with locals, the beautiful botanical gardens of La Laguna (close to the the U.S. embassy) showcase much native fauna. Zoologico Nacional (The National Zoo), and Parque Saburo Hirao (with a collection of native plants) are in the SE part of the city by the old Presidential House.

Museums

San Salvador has many museums, the two most important are "Museo David J Guzman" and "Museo de Arte, MARTE" (recommended). David J Guzman National Museum of Anthropology contains a variety of Mayan and Pipil artifacts, while Museo de Arte MARTE displays an extensive collection of international art. There is also a children's museum, the Tin-Marín museum, where kids can experience the world in a fun way. The old national palace is being restored to house the "National Archives," and the "National Museum." Also a new display of early mammal fossils, including a giant sloth, mastodon and more than twenty other species is being set up in the "Museo de Historia Natural," or "Natural History Museum" situated in the SE section of Saburo Hirao park by the National Zoo. Close to the zoo is the "Museo Militar," or Military Museum which is housed in the old castle-like "El Zapote" barracks built in 1895. In the military museum you can find weapons and army uniforms from the 17th, 18th, and early 20th centuries, which were historically used by the Salvadoran army.

Theatres

San Salvador has numerous theatres, including the beautiful Teatro Presidente (located near Zona Rosa), where the symphony regularly performs expensive and inexpensive concerts, and the Teatro Nacional (downtown), which was recently restored to its full splendour. Here you can step back and experience the grandeur once reserved for the city's elite in the early 1900s.

Aquarium

There are plans for an aquarium to be built in El Salvador. This Aquarium will be built in El Parque de los Pericos, next to the Multiplaza mall.

Entertainment

Cinemas in San Salvador include:

Cinemark Various locations throughout El Salvador Ph:503 22294315,Merliot.

Multicinema Various locations throughout El Salvador Ph:503 22439269, Multiplaza

Cinepolis Galerías Escalón

Bookstores

La Casita. Locations in both Centro comercial multiplaza, San Benito and Centro comercial Plaza San Benito.

Bookmarks, Centro Comercial Basilea, Zona Rosa (Next to the Hilton).

La Ceiba, Galerías, Col.Escalon Av. Paseo Gral.Escalon. There are Many other la ceiba stores in the city.

Multi Plaza Bookstore (recommendation)

Shopping/Commercial centres

San Salvador has the largest malls in the region and has the highest number of shopping centers in Central America. Some of the shopping malls include: Loma Linda, Multiplaza (very modern), Las Fuentes, Galerías (elegant), Metrocentro (said to be the largest in Central America), El Paseo (expensive), Plazamundo, Plaza Merliot, La Gran Via (a lifestyle center / "city walk"), Las Cascadas, Basilea (unique), Plaza San Benito, Villas Españolas and many more.

Eat

The restaurant scene in San Salvador is influenced by many different cultures. Food options include Italian, Korean, Japanese, French, Chilean, American, Peruvian, Mexican, Spanish, Middle Eastern, German, Chinese, Argentinian and others. Local food options include Tipicos Margot where one can purchase the famous Salvadoran Pupusas.

La Panetière, San Benito, Zona Rosa Ph: (503) 2-263-8792, Fax: (503) 2-264-1759. There are many other La Panetière in all San Salvador.

Punto Literario. In El Museo de Arte Marte col. San Benito. Zona Rosa.

Sal y pimienta, Tercera calle poniente #3877 entre 73 y 75 av. Norte Col. Escalon, Ph: (503) 2-298-1766, Fax: (503) 2-245-0998.

Restaurante Chileno Hey, 97 av Nte. calle Pte. #4509, Col. Escalon. Ph/Fax: 503-22637281

Restaurante Basilea, Blvd. El Hipódromo 2-502, col. San Benito, Zona Rosa Ph: 503-22236818 Fax:503-22790056

Pasquale, Paseo Gral. Escalón, Col. Escalón frente a Galerías shopping center. Ph:503-2263-1693 Fax: 503-22635445. Italian food.

Tre fratelli, Blvd. El Hipódromo #307, Zona Rosa Ph/fax: 503-2224-2951 Italian Food.

Al Pomodoro, Paseo Gral. Escalón #3952 Ph: (503) 2514-4455 or 2257-2545 [15] Italian food.

Inka Grill, Blvd. El Hipódromo, Col. San Benito, Zona Rosa Peruan food.

La Ventana, Plaza Palestina, Great food and general surroundings, favourite with local and internationals, reasonable price.

Nightlife

San Salvador is well-known for its nightlife. Clubs and bars can be found in the Zona Rosa, Basilea Mall, La Terraza (Sheraton Hotel), Las Terrazas (Multiplaza Mall), Boulevard de Los Heroes, Temptation Plaza, and the bars and restaurants area in La Gran Via (Mall and night lifestyle center). These places have many bars, discos, restaurants, DJ centers and boutiques.

Bars and Clubs

La Luna Casa Y Arte - Art Gallery/Restaurant/Bar, popular with artists, art exhibitions, poetry, live acts, reggae nights, jazz nights etc, check out their website for extensive list of events. You must go here on the last Friday of the month for Salsa night, it is fantastic.

Los Rinconcitos, Zona Rosa, good bar, three levels with a karaoke bar out the beach.

Zanzibar, Zona Rosa. Great live party music on Saturday afternoons and Acoustic Thursdays quality faves. Centro Comercial Basilea.

El Arpa, San Salvador's obligatory Irish Pub - Popular with expats, Avenida "A" 137, Col. San José La Ventana, Colonia Escalon. This is not a club, more of a lounge/coffee spot with munchies available, and a little bit of liquor. Owned by a German who now resides in El Salvador.

Leyendas, close to El Arpa. Quiet but always great on a Friday and Saturday with NGO types.

Los Tres Diablos, close to El Arpa and Leyendas. Considered slightly dangerous but absolutely brilliant.

Stay safe.

Banks

Finding a bank is not a problem within the city. Banks include Banco Cuscatlan, Citibank, Banco Agrícola, BanTpyM, Banco Centromericano, Banco Uno, Scotiabank, Procredit and others.

Whilst cash points can be easy to find, always be vigilant when drawing out cash. If it is essential to take out large sums, always do so with 2 other team members there and do so during the day, preferably in a complex with security guards around.