

Santa Barbara, Honduras Water Project

Trip Information

General Overview

Preparing for a trip to Honduras can be an overwhelming task. Most of the planning will be done by your trip your trip leader, making the trip a far more enjoyable experience. This document attempts to provide much of the information you will need to successfully prepare for a volunteer work trip to the Santa Barbara area of Honduras. It is intended to be a checklist of things to do or to be aware of in order to prepare for such a trip. It is also intended to be a reference guide for Santa Barbara-area information.

Due to the volunteer nature of such a trip, the cost per person should be taken into account. As airline flights can amount to more than half the cost of the trip, the precise scheduling of a trip will depend on prices for flights.

This document assumes a trip length of 7-8 days. A recommended trip would start with an orientation on the town of Santa Barbara and the surrounding area, training on filter installation, 3 days involved in the direct installation of filters in homes in rural communities, and 2-3 days of other aid work, most likely in a school or orphanage. One of the most rewarding experiences of a trip to Honduras is interaction with the people. Efforts should be made to maximize the direct contact with the local people of Honduras during your trip.

Santa Barbara Project Background

Honduras is a mountainous country located in Central America. It is slightly smaller than Pennsylvania with a population of about six million. The climate is tropical with lush vegetation that offers magnificent vistas. Principal crops are corn, bananas, coffee and tobacco. The language is primarily Latin-American Spanish with some rural pockets of native Indian languages.



The City of Santa Barbara

Named after the patron Saint Barbara, the small city of Santa Barbara was founded in 1761 by Spanish families from the nearby towns of Gracias and Tencoa. Santa Barbara was officially incorporated as a city in 1848 and is still a city where the Spanish influence is easily observed.

The country of Honduras is divided into 18 departments (similar to U.S. states) and 298 municipalities (similar to U.S. counties). Located in the western mountains of Honduras, the City of Santa Barbara is the capital of the department of Santa Barbara that extends southeast from the Guatemalan border, covering an area of 1,600 square miles with a population of approximately 325,000. The municipality (county) of Santa Barbara is located in the southern part of the Santa Barbara department and covers an area of approximately 117 square miles.

In Honduras, municipalities have a central town or city where the municipal government is located, surrounded by rural villages and hamlets. The municipality of Santa Barbara includes the central city of Santa Barbara, with a population of 13,177, and over 50 villages and hamlets, home to a rural population of 16,106. It is the people of these rural villages and hamlets which have the greatest need for access to pure water.

Visit <http://www.santabarbara.gob.hn/eng/tourism.html> for more information about the city of Santa Barbara.

Our Mission

With the tropical climate in Honduras comes a multitude of parasites, most of which are found in the surface water from which a majority of the population drinks. Some of these parasites kill the crops; others cause dysentery or other gastro-intestinal problems, mostly in children. The leading cause of death for children in Honduras is from diarrhea caused by drinking this contaminated water.



In an area such as Santa Barbara, with its rugged, mountainous geography and isolated homes, the most effective solution for purifying water is a low-cost, low-maintenance slow sand filter.

The Santa Barbara, Honduras Water Project is led by the Rotary Clubs of Freeport and Portland, Maine with the assistance of 18 other U.S. Rotary Clubs, Pure Water for the World and the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara, Honduras. The mission is to bring slow sand filters to the homes of over 1900 families in the rural villages surrounding Santa Barbara over a 2 year period beginning around January, 2007.

Participants shall experience many conditions or situations that would need to be addressed and may at another time lend themselves to another Rotary project. Experiences such as this are what add value to making the trip. An effort must be made to not lose sight of the main purpose of the trip in providing clean drinking water. But it is equally important to be alert to other needs or projects that we can deal with once the filter project is well underway. There is no reason to not look at the filters as only the start of what could be a multi year contribution to Santa Barbara and the surrounding villages. You will be experiencing a different culture and it is important to respect the differences. Do not suggest the people of Honduras to do things our way unless they ask for our help.

Trip Pre-Requisites

Many issues must be considered before traveling to Honduras. Chief among them are:

- 1) You must have a **passport valid for at least 3 months** from the date of entry. No visas are required for US citizens traveling to Honduras.
- 2) If students (under 18) are on the trip without BOTH parents present, they will require a **notarized letter of consent** signed by both parents or guardians (or the parent/guardian that is NOT on the trip) indicating that the student is allowed to travel with the person(s) leading the trip.
- 3) There is considerable walking involved in sometimes difficult terrain and, depending in the season, very hot conditions. Each participant must **understand their own physical limitations** and consult with their own doctors to ensure they will be comfortable with what they will be doing. See later comments on medical care.

Expenses

Each participant will be responsible for their hotel, food, airfare and a share of the ground transportation. In addition, trip participants are encouraged to each take some things to give to the children. The estimated cost per person for a trip is about \$1200 (\$500 to \$700 for airfare, \$400 to \$500 for all other expenses).

See Appendix A for information on how Rotaplast handles the tax deductibility of these expenses.

Safety

Unlike the major cities such as San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, Santa Barbara is considered a safe place to be. Even then, some caution should be taken in walking around at night – it is best not to do so alone. Care should also be taken to “fit in” and not wear flashy jewelry, watches, etc., so as to draw unnecessary attention.

Air Travel

There are two major airports in Honduras worth considering for travel to Santa Barbara: San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. San Pedro Sula is about 2 hours drive from Santa Barbara whereas Tegucigalpa is about 4 hours. San Pedro Sula is preferred for its proximity to Santa Barbara and relative convenience.

As of this writing, American Airlines (from BOS) via Miami and Delta Airlines (from PWM) via Atlanta and Continental via Newark offer the most convenient and better priced flights to San Pedro Sula. Note that an overnight stay in Boston on the way out of the US may be required depending on how early you start your day from BOS or PWM. The airline chosen for your trip will depend on which offers the best price at the time.

For convenience and sanity, it is suggested that the flights for a group are booked as a block by one person who is then repaid by the remaining participants. This way, the group has the best chance of traveling together and not having to worry about finding each other, especially if students are traveling with the group. Those wishing to use frequent flyer miles should book well in advance (many months) in order to guarantee seating.

San Pedro Sula

This is the preferred city of entry. Depending on the arrival time of the chosen flight, an overnight stay in San Pedro Sula may be required. The preferred hotel (due to proximity to the airport, cleanliness and safety) is the Microtel Inn & Suites. This is a comfortable modern facility about the same as a Days inn or Hampton Inn. The Microtel offers a \$64 per night rate for Rotarians for a room with two double beds. There is also a clean swimming pool and relaxing garden area on the premises.

The Microtel is managed by Ricardo Escoto who is a Rotarian with one of the San Pedro Sula clubs. For current information on the Microtel Inn, visit the hotel's Web site:

http://www.hotelhonduras.com/english/hotel_honduras_index.html. However, as with airline reservations, it is suggested that a group leader arrange for the group's hotel reservations.

Check with your group leader on hotel plans.

It must be noted that San Pedro Sula is not a safe place for tourists. Always function as a group, be careful of where you go, try to dress “unlike a tourist” and carry relatively small amounts of money (things are less expensive in Honduras!) in a money belt.

Ground Transportation

The trip to Santa Barbara is about 2 hours. While driving yourself in Honduras is possible, it is not recommended, especially with a large group.

If the group arrives later in the day and does not go directly to Santa Barbara, Ricardo at the Microtel Inn would arrange to have a taxi meet the group at the airport. If a group taxi is not arranged, it is strongly suggested to be very careful on what taxi you use and to confirm a price **prior** to entering the taxi. Also be aware that many people (mainly hungry children) will try to assist you by carrying your bags in the hopes you will give them a tip. It is best to resist this temptation and handle your own luggage. Just say “No gracias!”

For travel while in Honduras, the group will arrange for a large van that will hold the entire group, with luggage. This might also be arranged by Ricardo or one of the Rotarians in Santa Barbara.

Note that the van driver is likely to have little or no English so it will be necessary to have someone with at least “travel Spanish” on your trip or to have Ricardo give him directions to Santa Barbara where there will be bi-lingual Pure Water and/or Peace Corps volunteers. Once in Santa Barbara, work with the Pure Water or Peace Corps volunteer to discuss the daily plan with the driver as he will need to drive the group to/from the day’s work site.

The ground transportation will be a shared cost of the trip participants. As with airfare, it is easiest to have one person pay for the van and driver and receive reimbursement from trip participants after the trip.

Santa Barbara Hotels

There are two recommended hotels in Santa Barbara – the Hotel Colonial and the Boarding House Moderno. The Hotel Colonial is the largest (50 rooms) and most conveniently located. The cost for a double room is \$34 per night with air conditioning (recommended in April or later). The Colonial is not fancy, but includes some English TV channels, daily maid service and a typical Honduran breakfast at a small restaurant down the street. Although the Boarding House Moderno has also been recommended by other volunteers who have traveled to Santa Barbara, we have no experience with this hotel.

Both hotels are within a couple blocks of the central park and it’s an easy walk to shopping, dining and an Internet café for staying caught up on your email.

While neither hotel will accept credit cards, they will accept traveler’s checks or Honduran cash (Lempiras) for payment. Once again, it may prove beneficial to have one person pay the entire hotel bill and divide it up after the trip.

See the Communications section below for contact information.

Health Issues

NOTE: It is your responsibility to properly plan for your health needs.

Check on the CDC site (www.cdc.gov/travel) for the recommendations for immunizations. There is a question of malaria medication which may not be required during the dry season and with Santa Barbara being up in the mountains. Also, check with your insurance carrier as to whether they handle any claims for services required in Honduras. We have no experience with their system, but the local Peace Corps volunteers have recommended health services for doctors as well as hospitals.

Do not drink the tap water, including ice in drinks. Drink only bottled water (or beer) in factory-sealed bottles. Use bottled water or Scope to brush your teeth. Be careful of where you get the bottled water. Some street vendors may refill bottles. Be certain it has been properly sealed. Do not eat ice or eat anything that has not been cooked or that you have not peeled yourself.

Wash your hands frequently and take some waterless anti-bacterial hand sanitizer. A 3 oz. bottle of Purell Hand Sanitizer or similar should be kept in your pocket for the week, to **always** be used before touching your face or any food. Do not handle animals – including dogs and cats – no matter how cute they may be.

Money

The currency in Honduras is the Lempira which has an exchange rate of about 19 to the US dollar. Credit cards have limited use in Honduras, but some places will accept traveler's checks and there are ATMs available in San Pedro Sula and Santa Barbara.

You can arrange in advance for exchange of some travelers checks at the Microtel Inn in San Pedro Sula. To avoid confusion, it is best for all participants to let the trip leader know how much they would like to exchange so that the leader may contact Ricardo with one amount to be exchanged. The leader should call or email Ricardo at least one business day ahead of time and tell him how much the group would like to exchange. It is advised that each person exchange no more than \$200 US. For reference, it will cost less than \$15 per day on average for meals and water and probably much less than \$50 for gifts. Note also that it is difficult to exchange Lempira back to dollars.

In Santa Barbara, the Peace Corps volunteers suggested using ATM machines in the San Pedro Sula airport or Santa Barbara to obtain Honduran cash (there is a \$3 charge plus your bank charges). The banks are usually very slow and most businesses will either not accept travelers checks or if they do, will not be able to cash very large ones (more than \$20 US).

NOTE: You will need \$35 or more **per person** (in US or Honduran currency) for a departure tax at the airport, just before going through security to depart. It is probably best to tuck \$40 away in a hidden pocket of your carry-on luggage for this purpose. It is also a good way to use any Lempiras you may have left.

Dining

Breakfast is included in the hotel room if you are staying at the Microtel Inn in San Pedro Sula or the Hotel Colonial in Santa Barbara. Other hotels may offer breakfast. There may be

some days when you will want to try other places, such as Casa Mesón Blanca in Santa Barbara.

Lunches will be arranged for as part of each day's program (there may be a small cost). Dinners will generally be on your own. Your group leader will have a list of places that are considered safe (clean) by the local Peace Corps volunteers.

Restaurants

The following information on dining in Santa Barbara is offered by the local Peace Corps volunteers.

The most popular restaurants in town are the Casa Mesón Blanca (family cooking, somewhat buffet style and very good), Betty's (a little diner with typical food from the area), Charlie's (another diner), Pollo Patepluma (fried or rotisserie chicken with fried plantains...very good). There are no "fancy" restaurants in Santa Bárbara. There is also a guy in the park that comes in the evenings and makes good mexican style tacos and quesadilla-type things. The Karaoke bar also has very good fried chicken. There is also a little red and white shack on right off the highway headed toward Tegucigalpa that has good carne asada (grilled meat with fixins and tortillas). It's within walking distance from the center of town...although somewhat of a long walk. Santa Barbara restaurants do not expect tips, but a modest amount would be appreciated.

Clothing

Wear comfortable and casual clothing. All clothing should be free of "tourist colors" with an effort not to stand out. Shorts or revealing clothing is not recommended for women due to the cat calls and attention they will evoke from local men. Women in Honduras generally wear conservative skirts or dresses and tend to dress up a bit more than men. Blue jeans and a short or long sleeve button down shirt are common amongst the men. The temperatures in February and early March should be comfortably in the 70s. Late March and April are hot and humid with temperatures in the upper 80s.

You will be working in dirty areas so bring appropriate clothing. The most dressed up may be at a Rotary meeting, which Santa Barbara holds on Friday evenings, usually at one Club member's home. Dress in this case should be slacks and short sleeve sport shirts.

For your feet, sneakers or other closed-toe shoes such as low-cut hikers should be worn while "in the field" or walking around town. Consider flip flops for the shower and to wear around the hotel.

Pack as light as possible and use **soft sided luggage** so that bags may be tightly packed into the back of the passenger van. Plan to do some laundry while there, take quick-dry, no iron items, etc.

Things to bring

Your passport (again, no visa is required). Make 3 color copies of the photo page: Leave one at home, keep one on you at all times, and give one to someone else on the trip with you. If your real passport is lost or stolen during the trip, having extra copies will make it much

easier to have a new passport issued at the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa or a Consulate in San Pedro Sula.

Bring enough needed medications to last for twice the length of the trip. Divide the medications in half and give half to another trip participant in case you lose your half. You should have some Imodium and possibly Cipro (or another anti-biotic) in case you get the “Montezuma’s revenge”. Bring several end roles of toilet paper. Your hotel most likely will have some, but others places may not. This is also a good item to have in your day pack.

It is fine to bring a camera but try to keep it as inconspicuous as possible. Be careful of taking pictures of people if they express any negative response to the camera and **always** politely ask before aiming the camera. Politely ask “Una foto, por favor?”

Bring chargers for your camera, razor etc. The electricity is the same as the US so no adapters or converters are necessary.

Gifts to bring

As a group you we will select some items to take such as toothbrushes, soccer balls, shoes, school supplies etc. Make sure your group discusses your plan for gift giving ahead of time with the Rotarians in Santa Barbara so that they may make suggestions that are appropriate. This will be some expense, but hopefully much of this can be donated by people in the US.

Shopping & Leisure Time

Check with the Rotarians or Peace Corps volunteers for places to spend your leisure time. Besides a little shopping, casual walking, or email checking, there is not much to do in Santa Barbara, so take some good books.

There is a limited selection of gift shops offering local hand-woven or carved wares, t-shirts, etc. The Santa Barbara area is known for its woven baskets and hats, but they become bulky items to bring back. Or you may want to stop by a hardware store and purchase a machete with leather sheath.

Your group leader(s) may try to arrange visits to such places as a coffee processing plant or to see the hat weavers, but plan on some good reading, good company in a local bar or even time at the Karaoke or sports bar. Of course there will be ample opportunity to practice your Spanish with the locals.

Communications

There is free access to some Internet computers at the Microtel in San Pedro Sula and two good Internet shops in Santa Barbara. Your group may purchase a cell phone that can be used in Santa Barbara and used to call the US for emergencies. An inexpensive cell phone costs about \$50 and can be “refilled” with call minutes by purchasing phone cards in most small stores. Experience and reception with the Alo cellular service (now called “Claro” at <http://www.alo.hn/>) on a prior trip was good in most areas.

Phone Service

- All Honduran numbers are preceded with a 504 country code. From the US, dial 011, then the number starting with the 504 country code.

- To dial the US from Honduras, dial 00 + 1 (country code for US) + area code and phone number. For example, 00-1-207-865-1884. You can dial direct this way using cell phones (tested with Alo/Claro cellphone)

- To use a calling card or credit card, first dial 800-0123 (AT&T) OR 800-0122 (MCI), then the US area code and number. You will be prompted for your calling card or credit card number. Click here for more info:

http://www.usa.att.com/traveler/access_numbers/country/index.jsp?iso2=HN&%26lid%3DGo_Button_Index_Page.x=23&%26lid%3DGo_Button_Index_Page.y=8

- To see if your Cingular GSM cellphone will work in Honduras (provided you buy a chip at a cell phone store in San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa):

<http://onlinestorez.cingular.com/travelguide/coverage/roaming/step1.jsp>

* Be advised that some cell phones (especially those in group plans such as businesses may have) may be locked to only work with a certain network so they may not work even though the above tells you the type of phone will.

- It's possible that your cell phone may work in a roaming mode in Honduras. Cingular Cell Phone Roaming in Honduras is \$2.29/minute for calls. Uses the GSM 850 band on the tigo system

Contacts

Contacts: Ricardo Escoto - Microtel Inn & Suites, San Pedro Sula - 011-504-559-0300

ricardo@hotelhonduras.com

Rene Vasquez - SB Rotary President (Spanish only) 011-504-974-1432

reneobduliosb@yahoo.es

Hector Madrid - SB Rotary VP (Spanish only)

Ninette Mingula – Santa Barbara Project Manager (Bi-Lingual), ninette_mm@yahoo.com

David Putt - Project long time volunteer - putt@netidea.com

David Stanley – Pure Water in-country coordinator - DavidStanley@yahoo.com

Gerardo Martinez - Honduras Director

Carolyn Meub – Pure Water Executive Director - carolynMueb@adelphia.net

Jim Dawson - Portland Rotary - 207-846-6082 - dawson.jim@verizon.net

Curt Combar - Freeport Rotary - 207-865-1884 - ccombar@gwi.net

George Crockett - Portland Rotary - 207-828-9571 - gcroccke2@maine.rr.com

Hotel Colonial, Santa Barbara – 504-643-2554 (Spanish only)

Boarding House Moderno, Santa Barbara – 504-643-2203 (Spanish only)

US Embassy, Tegucigalpa - 504-236-9320 or 504-238-5114
(prefix Honduras numbers with 011 if calling from the US)

Appendix A.



Dear Volunteer:

The purpose of this communication is to discuss the expenses you incur in connection with a Rotaplast mission that can be deducted as contributions on your U.S. Individual Income Tax Return, Form 1040, Schedule A.

The general rule is that any expense that is not reimbursed in connection with a mission is deductible. The Internal Revenue Code does not give a complete list of what is and is not deductible. Rather it states all ordinary and necessary expenses paid or incurred in connection with a charitable activity are tax deductible. The rules are voluminous, with several acceptable optional methods, and can be quite confusing. Let us discuss some examples.

- Airline Ticket(s)
- Lodging
- Meals: 50% of meals while away from home, including tips.
- Transport: During the mission itself, to and from the group departure airport, for planning meetings pre and post mission, etc. Allowed: mileage at 14 cents/mile for your vehicle travel, parking, tolls, bus, train, etc.
- Mission Supplies

Let us discuss a few expenditures that are not deductible.

- The cost to extend your travel before or after the trip for personal vacation.
- Scrubs
- Cost of blazer and pants/skirt considered the "uniform" as they can be worn for normal use.

The burden of proof is yours. You are encouraged to keep accurate records of your expenses. This could include a receipt whenever a normal receipt should be expected such as for airline tickets, lodging, meals, etc. Keep them in an envelope identified for the mission. A diary of some sort will also assist in the substantiation.

You are encouraged to attach a statement summarizing your involvement and expenditures to your income tax return. Include information about Rotaplast International, Inc. and your mission. The Rotaplast federal identification number is 94-3247677.

Please read IRS Publication 526 for more information. Consult your own income tax advisor.

This information is not the opinion or position of Rotaplast International, Inc.

Sincerely

William Spalding
Board Treasurer