

# Guatemalan Weaving Adventure

## Frequently Asked Questions Answers by Deborah Chandler



### **1. How Do I Register for a Guatemalan Weaving Adventure Tour?**

The registration form is available online at [www.harrisville.com/classes.htm](http://www.harrisville.com/classes.htm). Scroll down to the Guatemalan Adventure, July 5-15. You will find the registration form, print it, fill it out, and return to Harrisville Designs with a \$250 deposit (to register) or call 603 827 3996. We are happy to register you over the telephone. The \$250 deposit is non refundable so we recommend you purchase travel insurance.

The balance will be due as follows:

March 1, 2010	\$600
May 1, 2010	\$600
June 1, 2010	\$600

Harrisville Designs will bill your credit card automatically on these dates.

If you would like to pay by check, please post checks to arrive by the scheduled dates to:

Harrisville Designs (Guatemalan Adventure)  
Box 806  
Harrisville, NH 03450

### **2. How much does the trip cost?**

The \$ 2050 fee includes all instruction costs and materials, in-country transportation (bus, van, boat), museum and other fees, hotel accommodations (double occupancy per person), and all meals. Single rooms may be reserved throughout for an additional \$200.

**Not included: international travel / personal shopping.**

### **3. Which airlines fly to Guatemala?**

Continental flies through Houston (and feeds you)

American flies through Dallas or Miami

Delta flies through Atlanta

TACA flies through El Salvador

We will pick you up at the airport; earlier arrivals are preferable. If you must arrive late, we will have our friends with a B&B near the airport pick you up, and we will come for you in the morning.

### **4. What is the weather like in Guatemala?**

In general, the weather in Guatemala is better than in Harrisville. Officially this is the rainy season, but that is no guarantee it will be raining. In July there is a break called *canícula*, when the weather is beautiful, sort of like Indian Summer. Some years there is lots of rain, some years almost none. We will send you a current year weather report in June, but bring an umbrella.

### **5. I hear that Guatemala is mountainous. What will the altitude be, and what does that mean to me?**

Half of Guatemala is mountainous, and where we will travel the altitude will range from 5,000 - 8,500 feet. If you are coming from lower altitudes you are likely to be tired the first few days as your brain adjusts. Alcohol will affect you more and faster, so take it easy. In general, you need to be drinking a lot of water, so bring a good water bottle. There will be 5 gallon jugs of bottled water available at all times and we don't want to be adding MORE plastic to the landfills.

### **6. What kinds of accommodations can I expect on this trip?**

We will stay in comfortable hotels, with an emphasis on convenience and safety. In La Antigua a bus will take you between the hotel and school each day. In both La Antigua and Panajachel you will be able to walk to the most fun parts of town, including many good restaurants. (We pay, you choose and eat. What a deal!) We will send you the names and websites of the hotels in June or sooner. Your last night in Guatemala we will take you to a bed and breakfast close to the airport, and they will give you a ride to the airport at whatever time you need to go.

### **7. How will we travel around Guatemala?**

For the tour, we contract a van and driver for the people and luggage. The van drops us at a hotel each night and picks us up in the morning for travel. The drivers with whom we work are from the area we will be visiting, so they know both the territory and the languages.

## **8. What kinds of meals should I expect?**

Most meals are in restaurants or cafes. We choose places that are clean and have good food, sometimes traditional Guatemalan, sometimes with the diversity that tourists want (even tofu!). Many hotels provide breakfast on site and sometimes we make sandwiches or buy something to eat on the road. It is usually pretty easy to find vegetarian options. (Remember, this is the land of black beans and corn tortillas.) If you have special restrictions, please let us know in advance. Anything can be accommodated if we are prepared.

## **9. What are the health considerations for a trip like this?**

We will not be going where the malaria-carrying mosquitoes are, so malaria isn't a worry. An updated tetanus shot is always a good idea. We always carry purified water but stomach problems are the most common problem tourists experience. Some people also use probiotics (Acidophilus) in advance to help them tolerate the different foods here.

Useful medications to bring, (depending on your own body and its reactions), are those for motion sickness (all roads are twisty mountain roads), diarrhea, constipation, colds, and headaches. Also bring bandaids. Tropical sun can be fierce, so bring anything you ever use for protection, including hats and dark glasses.

## **10. Communication with my family/friends/work at home: How can I access my e-mail? Should I bring a cell phone?**

Many hotels have internet access and there are now internet cafes in most towns. The cost is ridiculously low, usually around \$1/hour. WiFi is available some places, but don't count on it being everywhere. Cell phones are a much better deal in Guatemala than in the US. You can buy a pre-paid card phone here very inexpensively. For around \$25 you can buy a phone with enough time to cover your whole trip here. Calling from here to the US is much cheaper than calling from there to here: From Guatemala to the US costs around \$.10 per minute. You do not pay for incoming calls, so anyone can call you and you won't pay anything.

## **11. How do you provide security for the group?**

First, we travel in private vans with drivers who are known to us and we do not pick up strangers; this is the best way to avoid problems in Guatemala. We do not drive at night (too many road hazards); we go places where we are known; we listen to what is going on locally, and always have someone with us who speaks the local language. Deborah Chandler, the Mayan Hands staff, and the driver will always be carrying cell phones, for whatever need there is.

If your families need to reach you from the US, they can dial 011-502-5308-0234 to reach Deborah Chandler any time. Sometimes curves in the road can block phone signals, so an alternate number in case of urgent need is 011-502-5308-1677, Teresa Cordon, who speaks English and can relay a message to the group. We cannot promise there will not be surprises. In fact I can promise there WILL be surprises. But I have been hosting groups in rural Guatemala for ten years, and everyone has survived to tell their tales --- with gusto.

## **12. How accessible is this trip?**

While we always try to make arrangements for your comfort, this trip requires the ability to climb in and out of high vehicles, walk up and down hills on cobblestones or dirt and tolerate high altitude and heat to 90 degrees. Bring your braces, pillows, walking sticks etc, whatever you need to be at ease. That said, we have had numerous travelers in their 80s, and all have done fine.

## **13. What should I pack?**

Bring casual, comfortable clothing. Good walking shoes are important, even though we won't be going on any long hikes. Since we will have the van nearby most of the time, you can leave extra layers in it. Bring a bathing suit, it doesn't take much space and you will be happy when we come to the surprise saunas, pools or hot springs. Bring a good sweater or jacket for cooler evenings and rain gear. A good daypack helps with all the stuff we like to take with us - cameras, toilet paper, water, sweaters, notebooks, postcards and pictures from home to share with the women, granola bars or other emergency rations, etc. Expensive or irreplaceable jewelry is best left at home.

**14. Are skirts still more appropriate for a woman than pants?**

Pants are fine. Lots of us wear them all the time, even some young indigenous women when they are away from their villages. Leave your short shorts home.

**15. Is there a convenient time/place to do laundry on this trip?**

Yes, you can do laundry part way through the trip. There are laundromats in Panajachel and Antigua, and some hotels will send out the laundry for you.

**16. Should I bring gifts for the women we will visit?**

We don't want to short circuit anyone's generous spirit, but we also don't want to add to the welfare mentality that equates Gringos with Gifts. The school, teachers, and groups are all going to be paid for the time they give us, as is fair and just. What they (and I) DO like is when you can show them some easy technique (think mini-workshop) that they might be able to use. Last year one woman brought magazines and glue and showed them how to make beads out of rolled up shiny colorful paper, torn out pages of ads. They loved it. Obviously not everyone wants or is able to do that, but as an example, it is a far better gift than just giving them things.

Another idea is to bring postcards of the area where you live, so they can see your world a little too. Many of the women have old calendar pictures on their walls as their art, postcards of pretty places could be used that way too. Keep in mind that you could be meeting close to 60 women and God-only-knows how many of their kids, so plan accordingly. A big bag of candy can go a long way (though I cringe at passing out sugar in a land where bad teeth and diabetes are rampant). We will be visiting groups in three communities, plus other projects.

**17. What should I do about money? Are ATMs widely available?**

When you arrive, I will have \$100 worth of quetzales for you. (You have to give me \$100 to get them.) That will certainly hold you for a few days, since all your basic expenses, including food, are already covered. Sorry to say, travelers' checks are often more trouble than they are worth. Cash has to be in good condition - no tears, no ink marks, no writing... old is okay, but clean and pristine. US cash can be changed in most banks and hotels.

There are now ATM machines in many places, but there are also people who have some kind of card that allows them to read all the access info from the person(s) who used the ATM just before they did, and then can use it to withdraw money from your account. Given some risk with ATMs, I recommend cash, but you can do as you wish. Also bring one check, as it's good for emergencies.

**18. What can I expect at the school?**

The school is on a coffee plantation in Jocotenango, just outside La Antigua. ([www.indigoartestextiles.com](http://www.indigoartestextiles.com)) The students prefer to commute the 15 minute ride and stay in La Antigua itself because there is so much to enjoy there walking around in the evenings. Those of you who live pretty far north will be amazed that dark arrives by 7 PM, but La Antigua is designed for walkers, and going out to find your restaurant-du-jour will be fun and safe well into the evening. (The streets are all cobblestone, charming but difficult to walk on. Be careful.)

**19. How much weaving experience do I need?**

Since the Guatemalan techniques being taught will be new to most, the classes require no weaving experience.

**20. How much Spanish should I know?**

Knowing the language makes it more fun, but we will have translators present at all times, so you don't need any Spanish either.