



Personal/Team Safety



Sending Out Servants

March 2009



Personal/Team Safety

- **Guatemala**

- ❖ A developing country of 13.6 million with wide income disparities
- ❖ Primarily mestizos and indigenous
- ❖ Spanish is primary language, but there are 24 known indigenous languages (ex. Quiche)
- ❖ 36-year armed conflict that ended in 1996 overshadows the populace



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- **Concerns**

- ❖ **Wide income disparity**

- ❖ The wealthiest 10% of the population receives almost one-half of all income; the top 20% receives two-thirds of all income.

- ❖ **Endemic poverty**

- ❖ 32% of population lives on < \$2/day; 13% of population lives on < \$1/day.
- ❖ 50% of population is engaged in agriculture.
- ❖ Infant mortality rate is 32/1000 (US is 6.9; Japan is 2.8).

- ❖ **Legacy of societal violence and dysfunctional and corrupt law enforcement and criminal justice systems**

- ❖ **History of civil rights issues**

- ❖ **Increased drug, gang, and kidnapping activity**



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- **Comment on Military**

- ❖ While the military's focus has been internal, their mission has shifted in recent months to protecting against external threats (ex. 1,400 military sent to Mexican border).
- ❖ The military has been downsized from 28,000 members to 15,500 in 2008. This downsizing may explain an apparent increase in weapons visible in the streets.
- ❖ Unlike the U.S., carrying of unconcealed weapons in Guatemala is not unusual and the Government fails to exercise adequate control over civilian possession and use of firearms.



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- **Safety Precautions Taken By S.O.S.**

- ❖ 24-hour Eucharistic Adoration.
- ❖ Home Team heavily covers Travel Team with prayer.
- ❖ Daily monitoring of social and political issues prior to and during mission.
- ❖ Trusted local hosts and drivers (drivers carry cell-phones at all times).
- ❖ Organization Emergency Insurance (incl. evacuation)
- ❖ Registered with American Embassy in Guatemala.



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- **Awareness**

Although Guatemala is known for its high crime rate, one can avoid most risks/dangers if a few guidelines are followed.

- ❖ You are responsible for your safety, as well as the safety of your “buddy” when paired.
- ❖ Think before you act. Don’t be a “cowboy” - you’re not in Texas anymore.
- ❖ Use common sense and be as cautious as you would be in Houston or any large city in the United States.
- ❖ Awareness is recognizing subtle environmental changes and responding without creating panic.



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- **What Can I Do To Protect Myself: Generally?**
 - ❖ Don't be an "Ugly American" (demanding or impatient – drawing attention to yourself and/or the group).
 - ❖ Any visible tattoos **must be covered** as tattoos are a sign of gang membership.
 - ❖ Don't wear jewelry (especially gold) and keep cameras and all electronic devices out of view.
 - ❖ Do not discuss politics.
 - ❖ Use caution in dealing with children. Don't approach, pick up, or take photographs without parental approval.



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- **What Can I Do To Protect Myself: Out And About?**
 - ❖ **Buddy system, buddy system, buddy system!**
 - ❖ Do not go out after dark
 - ❖ Be especially cautious in areas where you may be more easily victimized. These include narrow alleys or poorly lit streets, crowded tourist sites and market places.
 - ❖ Avoid demonstrations or unexplained gatherings of people.
 - ❖ Try to seem purposeful when you move about. If you become lost, act as if you know where you are going. Ask directions only from individuals in authority.
 - ❖ Leaders carry cell phones.
 - ❖ Know name and phone number of hotel.



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- **What Can I Do To Protect Myself: From Theft?**
 - ❖ Keep cash and passports concealed and on your person at all times.
 - ❖ Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction.
 - ❖ Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money or purchase souvenirs.
 - ❖ If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the team leader.
 - ❖ After reporting missing items, report the loss or theft of:
 - ✦ travelers' checks to the nearest agent of the issuing company
 - ✦ credit cards to the issuing company
 - ✦ airline e-tickets to the airline or travel agent
 - ✦ passport to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate



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- **What Can I Do To Protect Myself: From Theft?**
 - ❖ Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will: jostle you, ask you for directions or the time, point to something spilled on your clothing, or distract you by creating a disturbance.
 - ❖ Beware of groups of vagrant children who create a distraction while picking your pocket.
 - ❖ Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.
 - ❖ **If you are confronted, don't fight back -- give up your valuables!**



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- **What Can I Do To Protect Myself: At The Hotel?**
 - ❖ Keep your hotel door locked at all times.
 - ❖ Meet visitors in the lobby.
 - ❖ Do not leave money, passport, personal or business documents, or other valuables in your hotel room while you are out.



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**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to
observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I
am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

Matthew 28:19-20