

**Volunteers needed** Hospitalito is looking for short term (minimum 1 week, preferably 1 month or more) and long term (6 months to a year) medical volunteers.

**Doctors** are most urgently needed who speak Spanish, are up to date with current medical practice, and are willing to do “24 hour call”: cover ER, inpatient, OB (first line). Resident doctors in emergency medicine and family practice have worked with us. They have found it a wonderful learning experience, while helping us with the burden of shift work. We are a small hospital and most specialists will not be able to practice their specialty.

Currently, volunteers are working 24 hour shifts, covering the ER, OB, inpatients. The commonest cases are OB and pediatric pneumonia and diarrhea. One of our staff is available for backup for OB questions and complications.

**Medical students** are welcome if they have completed a clinical year and have a good working knowledge of Spanish. The minimum time for a student volunteer is one month. They will be integrated into the team with constant supervision on site, while being given first hand experience not usual in major US hospitals. Selected preclinical students may be accepted if they have research projects proctored by their schools and excellent Spanish.

**Ultrasound** We have an (old) ultrasound and are specifically looking for doctors or ultrasonographers to teach our staff ultrasound.

**Nurses**, also Spanish speaking, are needed to teach our nurses (who have had a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education plus 6 weeks of training) and to do call covering ER, inpatient, OB, surgery. Also to help sort out the stock.

**Midwives** are welcome if they have knowledge of fetal monitors, ability to assess presentation of the baby, infant resuscitation skills, and knowledge of when to refer for C section.

**Pharmacists** are needed to help organize our pharmacy and keep the inventory up to date, as well as to teach our pharmacist (who had a 6 week course in pharmacy some years ago).

**Medical personnel who know routine hospital stock** are needed to sort through donations and purchases and arrange them in storage areas.

**Minimum requirement:** All volunteers must be able to speak enough Spanish to work with Spanish speaking only staff and treat Spanish speaking only patients *without help*. They must complete the application and send the required forms.

**Legal requirements:** A Guatemalan license is not needed to practice short term at our institution.

**No malpractice insurance** is needed to practice in Guatemala.

**History** Hospitalito Atitlan was reopened April 1 2005 after being closed for 15 years due to the extreme violence in Santiago Atitlan during the war years. The hospitalito offered office visits Monday to Friday and emergency care 24/7. As of December 2005 there is a staff of 4 full time doctors, 1 Tzutujil and 4 US, and 9 Tzutujil workers: 3 auxiliary nurses, a pharmacist, a lab tech, a laundress, a social worker and 2 guardians. December 2005 census is 2-8 inpatients daily. The commonest problems are

deliveries, (often complicated, referred in by the “comadronas”), respiratory diseases (pneumonia and asthma), and dehydration and diarrhea.

A devastating mudslide occurred in the neighborhood of Panabaj, where the hospitalito was located on October 5 2005, just after the newly renovated hospitalito had reopened for surgery. Approximately 500 people died. The hospitalito was partly buried and is in an area that has been declared a cemetery and an area of high risk. In two weeks, a temporary facility was located and the hospitalito reopened, seeing clinic patients, ER patients, treating in patients. A week later, the OR reopened for C sections (One of our doctors is family practice with a special year of maternal and fetal medicine, and a retired OB-GYN comes periodically for 3 month stints). Decisions on a permanent facility are currently pending. At the time of this writing, the hospitalito is giving free care to the victims of the mudslide (5000 remain homeless) and temporary homes are being built.

**The town** Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala is located a mile high, on the shores of a beautiful 1000 foot deep lake formed by a volcanic caldera. The population of Santiago is approximately 40,000. It is 95% Tzutujil, the largest Mayan city in the world. The nearest hospital is across the lake and up the mountain, at best an hour and a half trip. Santiago has one of the highest maternal-infant death rates in the western hemisphere. The people of Santiago often refuse to go to Solola, the nearest hospital, because of fear that they will be misunderstood and poorly treated (Solola is K’aqchikel, the traditional enemies of the Tzutujil), and that they might die, which would give their families the large expense of transporting their bodies back to Santiago. Before the hospitalito reopened, many would choose to just stay home to die.

There is little medical knowledge in this largely illiterate town. Superstition abounds. If a baby is thought to suffer from “mal de ojo” or evil eye, the parents will often not take it to the doctor and it will die at home. Also, patients can go to the pharmacy and obtain all medicines except some controlled drugs. Therefore patients often have had multiple injections of unknown medicines before they arrive for treatment.

The lake is gorgeous, the weather temperate, with a rainy season from May to November. It is often quite chilly at night, in the 50s (with no heat in the houses or hospitalito). The days often get to mid 80s. In the rainy season (May to November), it usually rains in the afternoon. During the dry season there is often quite a strong cold wind.

**Points of interest** Santiago has the original Catholic church built in the 1500s. Most of the other early buildings have been destroyed. There is also a chapel for Maximon, the Tzutujil chief god. Maximon, however, moves around to various houses and for the donation of a beer, can be visited and asked for prayers. There is a strong mix of the Tzutujil religion with Christianity.

A lovely peace park is on the side of the road on the way to Panabaj. It marks the site where the army massacred 13 Tzutujil during a peaceful demonstration in 1990. Approximately 1,700 residents of Santiago had been killed or disappeared during the war. Following the massacre, the leaders of Santiago bravely signed a petition to the president to remove the army. It was ordered out of the city within the same month.

**Traditional woven and embroidered clothing** Almost all the women here wear the traditional Tzutujil dress: a huipil, like a blouse, hand woven and lavishly hand embroidered, and a corte, a long hand woven skirt wrapped around and fastened in place

by a faja, a belt also beautifully embroidered or beaded by hand. Only about a quarter of the men wear the traditional garb. During the war years, men who wore the “traje” were commonly disappeared. But still many wear hand woven white and red striped pants that come just below the knees, a dark woven wide sash, and a white sombrero. There is a major initiative now to provide the victims of the mudslide with looms and thread so that the women can make new traditional clothes to wear. Woven and embroidered articles and beaded jewelry is for sale at many shops in Santiago and is an important part of the economy of the town.

**Lake access** Launches, both public and private, visit the town dock regularly, connecting Santiago with the multiple small towns around the lake. San Pedro, about 45 minutes and \$2 across the lake, has lovely hiking and horse back riding trails. Panajachel, about 1 hour and \$2 across in another direction, has lots of US style restaurants, a four star hotel and a nature reserve.

**Airport** The nearest airport is Guatemala City. Santiago is about 3 ½ hours from Guatemala City (the nearest airport) by private van. Or 3 hours from Antigua, Guatemala, the original capital of Guatemala, and a lovely Spanish Colonial town, renowned for its Spanish schools and charm

**Public busses** (fondly called chicken busses) connect with Guatemala City and other cities several times a day.

**Private Vans** Guatemala City is confusing to get around in and many areas are considered dangerous. A private van can be arranged for airport pickup. It costs approximately \$90 to get to Santiago Atitlan. If you arrive early in the day, the van can take you to Antigua for a few hours of sightseeing for the same price.

**Hotels in Guatemala City** If arriving late (after 3PM) it is advisable to stay in Guatemala City or Antigua for the night. Below are several hotels in Guatemala City:

Biltmore (has a van to pick up at the airport (502-2338 5000 or 502-2338-5005) nice free breakfast, similar to a midrange US hotel, approx \$80/night for a couple.

Hotel Mansion Imperial Double \$65, with breakfast, 15 Calle 5-85 Zona 10 502-2368-2419 or 2367-7874 [hotelimperia@guate.net](mailto:hotelimperia@guate.net) (nice Guatemalan flavor)

Hotel Posada Proceres y Eco Hotel Proceres \$45 for a double per night, continental breakfast. 16 Calle 2-40 Zona 10 502-2363-0744 [posadazv@gua.net](mailto:posadazv@gua.net) a little less fancy. All are about 5 min from the airport.

**ATMs** are available in the airport in Guatemala City and in Panajachel. They take all cards. There is one ATM in Santiago. Traveler’s checks are a bit of a hassle to cash. If for some reason the ATM in Santiago does not like your card, it is often easier to take the day off and go to Panajachel to use the ATM and get some US food.

**Internet** is available at reasonable rates (\$US 1.00 /hour) in several places in Santiago. The hospitalito has a wireless router, if you have a laptop, bring it.

**Cell phones** can easily be rented for a week at very reasonable rates, and time added in small increments. Using them, it costs about 15 cents a minute to call the US. Reception is not perfect, though! A new phone costs about \$50. A phone must be “unlocked” and have a Guatemalan ‘chip”, available in Guatemala City. For that reason, it is probably cheaper to buy or rent a phone here.

**Safety** is always a concern in Central America. The hospital volunteers and visiting medical and nursing students are comfortable walking around most of Santiago during the day. Multiple tuc-tucs(three wheeled vehicles) are available to get around at

night for about \$2 a ride. Ask about areas to avoid when you arrive. It is advisable to stay off the roads after dark.

**Housing** There are a few houses and apartments for rent in Santiago. A house costs \$200-\$400US a month. Living with a family is about \$100 a month and a great introduction to the people and culture of Santiago. For help obtaining housing or transportation to the hospitalito, please contact Violeta Luz. Ask for her e-mail.

**Hotels** There are two semi-luxury hotels in Santiago. Posada de Santiago and Bambu. Both have lovely rooms and a good restaurant that costs US prices. Posada is reachable at [posadadesantiago.com](http://posadadesantiago.com) or [info@posadadesantiago.com](mailto:info@posadadesantiago.com) Bambu is [ecobambu.com](http://ecobambu.com) or [hotel@ecobambu.com](mailto:hotel@ecobambu.com) A third, more expensive, luxury hotel, Turicentro or Tiosh Abaj recently opened [tioshabaj@gmail.com](mailto:tioshabaj@gmail.com) .

**Food** A market in town is open every day. Beans, rice, corn, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, chicken, eggs, beef, dry cereal and local cheese are all available at very reasonable prices. Powdered milk is also available in some stores. Simon's and Distribuidora Ramirez sell butter and cheddar cheese. There are multiple restaurants in town to choose from. Most are local food and very cheap. "Pescador" and "Grand Sol" are popular with tourists. "Pizza Utz" with the med students.

**Weather** The temperature varies from an occasional 45F at night in the cold months (Jan-March) to 85F in the days. May to Oct usually has rain in the afternoon, November to April usually does not (Note the "Usually").

**Clothing** The Tzutujil are traditional and dress modestly. Volunteers are requested to do the same. Slacks, skirts and shirts with sleeves are appropriate for volunteers. Sandals are ubiquitous. Layers are definitely indicated. The houses, hospital and hotels do not have heat or air conditioning. Bring sunscreen.

**Spanish** is essential for medical and nursing volunteers. Almost none of the hospitalito staff speak English. There is no Spanish school in Santiago now, but there are multiple people eager to give private Spanish lessons for about \$4/hour.

**Feast days and holidays** Santiago has several colorful feast days. July 25 is the feast day of Saint James (Santiago) and there is a week long celebration leading up to the feast. September 15 is a national holiday. November 1 and 2 the day of the dead is celebrated with many flowers and candles and visits to the cemetery. Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter, has multiple festivities including processions and street carpets made of colored sand or flowers. Christmas and New Years are also big holidays.

**Immunizations** Everyone coming to Santiago should be current with the following vaccines: tetanus, hepatitis A and hepatitis B, and typhoid. TB skin test should be within one year. Those volunteering for a long period should consider prophylactic Rabies vaccine (there are many street dogs). Medicine to prevent malaria is not needed in Santiago. Due to the altitude, Santiago does not have malaria. Check the CDC guidelines for current recommendations.

**Medical and Mental health Care** The hospitalito can provide basic care for volunteers, who are expected to pay. It does not have any back up specialist medical care nor any mental health care nor drugs. Any specialist care, mental health care, mental health or controlled drugs must be obtained from doctors/pharmacies/hospitals in Guatemala City at the expense of the volunteers. Volunteers with recent or ongoing health issues are expected to let the chief of staff of the hospitalito know in advance of

these problems to discuss the feasibility of volunteering in this physically and mentally stressful setting.

**Financial support** Hospitalito currently does not offer any type of financial support to volunteers. The comité (board of directors) is actively looking at ways that they can provide some assistance to volunteers. This might include very basic housing and food, especially for volunteers staying for more than 3 months. Anyone needing such help should let the volunteer coordinator know that it is needed.

**Summary** The people of Santiago were very excited that the hospitalito reopened and consider it a major sign of healing from the war. They are very friendly and eager to share their way of life and traditions.

A volunteer here will love the traditional Tzutujil and their passing way of life, the lovely lake surrounded by towering volcanoes, ancient ways, but will also find superstition, poverty and great and challenging medical needs.

24/3/06