



**AMIGUITOS**

*“Good Friends”*

*Community Development Projects  
in Veracruz and Pénjamo, Mexico*

**Travel Information**  
**For Trips to**  
**Veracruz, Mexico**

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**Important Phone Numbers**

Curtis Wait: 303-518-2446  
Anne Wait: 303-518-2447  
Goldi Santana Mera: 011-52-1-229-912-5480  
Saúl Suárez Salazar: 011-52-1-228-179-2093  
VOIP phone number (local call from Colorado) 303-731-2498

**US Department of State**

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) –for information on travel to Mexico  
[www.step.state.gov/step](http://www.step.state.gov/step) --to participate in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

**Amiguitos Website**

[www.amiguitos.net](http://www.amiguitos.net)

## **Health Information and Safety Procedures**

### **Immunizations:**

Mexico is an underdeveloped country, so health issues may be of concern for people who are visiting. You must have a current tetanus booster to go on the trip. Other immunizations are not required for travel on an *Amiguitos* trip, however, we advise that you consult a doctor before the trip to see what is recommended for you. Please remember that some immunizations require up to six weeks of incubation before they become fully effective, so schedule your appointment well in advance of your trip.

Many cities have public and private travel clinics which keep the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control about recommendations for travel to foreign countries. You can also access CDC travel recommendations on the web at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).

### **Water and Food:**

Obviously, on a trip with *Amiguitos*, we emphasize that you don't drink the tap water. We will provide bottled water at the work/clinic sites. We also recommend that you always carry a personal bottle of water. You are advised to use bottled water when brushing your teeth and to bring a few extra toothbrushes so that if you forget and run your brush under the tap, you can throw it away and use a clean toothbrush.

Due to insufficient filtering of most water sources in Mexico, we must be careful about food preparation. When eating at the guest house, extra precautions are taken to cleanse and prepare food that is safe for Americans. Outside of the guest house, these are some general guidelines to follow:

- Only eat fruits and vegetables that have been cooked or peeled.
- Order bottled beverages in restaurants.
- Only use ice that is made with purified water (ask if you are unsure).
- Avoid salads and other foods that are uncooked and may have been rinsed in tap water.
- Avoid eating food from street vendors or low quality restaurants.

### **Hydration:**

When you are traveling internationally, especially to places with warm climates, it is essential that you stay hydrated to reduce your chances of getting traveler's diarrhea or other sicknesses. Be sure to drink more water than you normally do in the days before you leave on your trip and continue to do so throughout the trip.

### **Emergencies:**

The public hospitals in Mexico are less sophisticated than most hospitals in the US. However, there are also private hospitals that provide excellent care on par with many American hospitals. Should an emergency occur, you will be taken to one of these private hospitals and your family will be notified immediately. Before the trip, you may want to check with your health insurance company to find out what they want you to do in case you need to visit an emergency room while out of the country.

**Political Unrest:**

Mexico has experienced political unrest in many areas. The situation is continually changing. For the most current information refer to the US state department website: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

In the unlikely event that violence or political unrest does occur in Veracruz, we will immediately contact the American consulate and take whatever action is suggested. The US State Department suggests that you register with them whenever you leave the USA. It is especially recommended if you have youth with you.

**How to Dress**

The weather in Veracruz is usually warm. During the day, you may want to wear lighter-colored clothing to lessen the intensity of the heat when you are in the sun. Pack a light fleece sweatshirt or windbreaker just in case the weather is cool while you are there. It is definitely cooler in the evenings and the mountains.

For normal running around and work, jeans and khaki pants are fine for both men and women. Women may wish to wear lighter pants such as capris. It is becoming more culturally acceptable now to wear shorts, so that is fine as long as the shorts are not more than a few inches above the knee. You will probably be spending a fair amount of time on foot and will be walking through some unpaved areas, so please wear comfortable shoes for walking.

A good guideline is to wear simple clothing that is modest. For swimming, one piece swimsuits for women are most common and recommended, and for men, knee length swim trunks. Also, because of the poverty in Mexico, it is best to not wear flashy jewelry or watches. A good precaution is to avoid wearing anything you would be upset to lose.

Although there are some cultural differences, you need not worry about committing a fashion faux pas. The people we will be working with know that we are from a different culture and have different standards.

**Money**

Veracruz is not a typical tourist town for Americans. Therefore, we make our purchases with Mexican pesos. There is an ATM near the guesthouse where you can get pesos using your US debit or credit card, or you can get them at your bank before you leave the USA. US credit cards are generally not accepted in stores in Mexico, and they often don't work even where they are accepted.

**Tipping:**

Tips are a major source of income for many in Mexico. Restaurants: 15%; Taxis: generally no tip  
Luggage help (if desired) upon arrival at the airport: US \$1-\$2 (no US coins) or 10-20 pesos for each piece—be mindful of the size of your bag when thinking of a tip.

## **Packing List**

### **Necessities:**

- Passport
- Photocopy of passport to keep with you (and a copy in each piece of luggage)
- Plane ticket
- Toiletries and personal medications (keep in original container)
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunscreen
- Clothing
- Lightweight jacket
- At least two pairs of shoes and one pair of closed toed shoes for construction work
- Small backpack or tote bag (for day trips)
- Work gloves for construction
- Sun hat
- Water bottle

### **Optional:**

- Camera
- Wet wipes and anti-bacterial gel
- Travel alarm clock
- Flashlight
- Sunglasses
- Small Spanish/English dictionary or translator
- Diarrhea medicine (Pepto-Bismol or Imodium)
- Motion sickness medication (Dramamine)
- Snacks (power bars, nuts. . .)
- Toilet paper or small packs of tissue (many bathrooms have no toilet paper)
- Swimsuit (one piece for women and knee length trunks for men)
- Journal
- Personal reading material

### **Packing Tips:**

Security at the airports is still very strict. You can check current requirements at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov). If you plan to travel with any liquids or gels in your carry-on luggage, remember to pack them correctly. Each liquid item must be in a container of less than 3.4 ounces and all must fit into one clear quart-size Ziplock bag. Anything else must be in your checked baggage.

You will also need to check the current baggage allowances for checked bags and carry-on. The information can be found on the airline websites. Currently, United Airlines is allowing one 50 pound bag checked for free and a second bag is allowed for \$40. One 35 pound carry-on item is allowed as well as one small personal item such as a backpack or computer bag.

## **Accommodations**

You will be staying at the *Amiguitos* guesthouse or a nearby rental guesthouse.

The guesthouse has three bedrooms that sleep 2-3 people in each. It has warm showers and all linens and towels are provided. You will share a bathroom and bedroom with 1-4 people. Other amenities: telephone, bottled water, wireless high speed internet.

The rental guesthouse will have warm showers with linens provided. Most likely you will be sleeping on a very comfortable air mattress on the floor. You will use all the other amenities at the main guesthouse.

Laundry: There is a public laundry (*lavandería*) in the neighborhood near the guesthouse. If you would like to have your laundry washed, you may take it there and they will have it ready for you the next day. The price is about 10 Mexican pesos/kilo (this is about 40¢ per pound). It is also possible to wash clothing by hand in the sink and hang it in your room or on the clothesline in the guesthouse patio.

### **\*\*\*Important Note\*\*\***

The sewage systems are very fragile in Mexico (in all the homes, hotels, and other public buildings that we visit). Therefore, no toilet paper or other sanitary products should be flushed in the toilets. There is always a waste basket in the bathrooms to place your used toilet paper. Simply wrap some clean toilet paper around what you are throwing away. Failure to follow this guideline can lead to overflowing toilets and great embarrassment as toilet plungers and other tools are also rare.

## **Immigration Procedures**

You will be given an immigration form on the flight as you travel to Mexico. If not, you can obtain one in the immigration area of the airport after you land. Check tourism as the reason for your visit on this form. Enter the guesthouse address (or hotel name and address, if applicable) in the blank where it asks for an address in Mexico.

Guesthouse Address: Circuito Prehispanico numero 9017  
Condominios Teotihuacan Fraccionamiento siglo XXI  
Boca Del Rio Veracruz  
CP 91963  
Mexico

If asked, be clear that all of the items in your luggage belong to you. If you say that they are donations, it will imply that you are a business. Of course, you will be able to give items later when you arrive at the community center.

\*\*\*You will receive an entry permit as you enter the country. You **must** keep this paper and present it at the airport in order to leave the country.

It is recommended that you travel on a flight that is direct from the USA to Veracruz. United Airlines has a direct flight from Houston and American Airlines has a direct flight from Dallas.

### **Flying into Veracruz:**

Upon landing in Veracruz, you will proceed through immigration. You will need to present your immigration form and your passport. Next, you will collect your bags from the baggage carousel. Security is usually controlled and you may need to show your baggage claim check. All of your bags will need to go through x-ray. You will probably be asked to open your bags for customs. Do whatever you are told—including leaving those items the customs agent won't allow you to bring into Mexico. Exit the baggage claim area and you should find a representative of *Amiguitos* there to meet you. If there is no one there to meet you when you arrive, please wait in the lobby of the Airport and call the contact numbers on the front of this packet.

## **Cultural Sensitivity & Giving to People in Need**

### **Flexibility:**

Things in Mexico tend to happen at a much more relaxed pace than in the US. People are generally less task-oriented and more relationship oriented. In the Mexican culture, getting to know people and creating relationships are more valued than simply accomplishing objectives. Americans, on the other hand, are taught to be more project-oriented and value accomplishing goals more than relationships. It is important when we visit another culture that we have the flexibility to adapt to the circumstances and not be too rigid about our own itinerary or objectives.

### **Giving Gifts or Money:**

We urge you to resist the temptation to give someone gifts or money for their needs. There is already a stereotype that Americans have more money than they know what to do with. Also, even if the need is real and legitimate, we would ask you to work with us and the Veracruz community leaders to determine the best strategy for helping. Our desire is to support the community centers as resources in the neighborhoods, so we want to do everything possible to empower the centers to be the solution to people's problems (not a rich American).



## **General Information**

### **Traveling with children:**

We highly encourage you to bring your children or grandchildren on trips with *Amiguitos* as it can be a profound experience that may shape their perspective on life and can be a great bonding experience. Young people who have participated in *Amiguitos* trips have had very positive experiences and have coped well with being in new environments. However, bear in mind that some children are more able than others to adapt to new foods, a foreign language, etc. For these reasons, we encourage you to stay emotionally tuned in to how the child is feeling and to engage them in dialogue about what they are experiencing. If you are bringing children, it is strongly encouraged that you register your group with the US State Department in the *Smart Traveler Enrollment Program*.

### **In-country transportation:**

When you are on an *Amiguitos* trip, you will most likely be traveling in private van/truck or in a public taxi. The road conditions in Veracruz may not be as good as what you are used to in the US; many of the roads in the communities where we work are either unpaved or in very poor condition. Therefore, if you are prone to motion sickness (or even if you normally aren't), we recommend that you have Dramamine or ginger on hand to alleviate any motion sickness.

### **Communication with home:**

When you are traveling internationally, it is more difficult to communicate with loved ones at home. Here are some of the possible options:

- E-Mail: E-mail is the easiest form of communication to the USA. We have a computer at the guesthouse that is available for e-mail.
- Cell-phones: Many US cell phones work in Veracruz, but you will most likely incur international roaming charges. We recommend that you check with your cell phone provider prior to the trip to determine how to use your phone when you are in Mexico.
- Skype: Skype is a free internet protocol that allows you to have a voice conversation over the internet between two computers. For more information on how to use this free service, go to [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com). Bear in mind that Skype requires a high speed internet connection.
- Facetime: Apple products' app
- Phone: This is the Voice Over Internet Phone (VOIP) the number is 303-731-2498. It is a local call from Colorado but it is not always reliable.

### **Extending your travel after an *Amiguitos* trip:**

Should you choose to do additional tourist activities either before or after the *Amiguitos* work portion of your trip, you will be responsible for making all of the arrangements. *Amiguitos* will not be able to provide transportation or pay for any tourist activities that are not part of the scheduled *Amiguitos* events.

## Travel risks for Veracruz, Mexico

Mexico is a beautiful country full of wonderful people, but there are risks associated with travel there. We encourage you to go to the State Department website [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) and select International Travel on the top menu. Then select Mexico as the country option to review information about travel in Mexico.

### **Precautions that *Amiguitos* takes:**

- Travel in groups; there is security in numbers.
- Groups will stay in our guesthouse or rental house located in safe neighborhoods and will avoid travel to or through unsafe neighborhoods whenever possible.

### **Precautions that travelers should take:**

- Do not show any form of wealth. Please leave expensive jewelry at home. Do not wear anything flashy. Do not carry valuables. Dress conservatively to avoid making yourself a target for theft.
- Be cautious when exposing cameras, cell phones, and electronics in public.
- Do not walk alone or wander away from the group.
- If assaulted, give the person whatever they are asking for immediately.

We do not want to alarm you; we simply want to make you aware of the risks involved. We anticipate that you will have a very positive experience and will leave with wonderful memories of this very beautiful country.

## Weather in Veracruz

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average High Temperature °F	76	77	79	83	86	87	88	88	87	85	82	78
Average Low Temperature °F	65	66	69	73	76	77	75	76	75	73	70	67
Rainfall in inches	.8	.6	.7	.6	2.5	10.6	15.1	11.7	13.8	6.8	2.4	1.1
% Humidity	80	80	81	80	78	79	79	78	78	74	77	80



## **Information About Mexico**

### **History:**

Prior to the Spanish conquest, Mexico was home to several highly developed cultures, including the Olmecs, Mayas, Toltecs, and Aztecs. Mexico was conquered by Hernando Cortes during the period 1519-21, and he founded a Spanish colony that lasted for nearly 300 years.

Mexican independence from Spain was proclaimed by Father Miguel Hidalgo on September 16, 1810. Father Hidalgo's declaration of independence is known by Mexicans as the "Grito de Dolores." After a decade long period of battle between Mexico and Spain, an 1821 treaty recognized Mexican independence and called for a constitutional monarchy. The monarch soon failed and a republic was proclaimed in December 1822 and established in 1824.

During much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mexico's government and economy were shaped by contentious debates among liberals and conservatives, republicans and monarchists, federalists and those who favored centralized government. Eventually, Mexico's severe social and economic problems climaxed and began a revolution that lasted from 1910-17. The revolution gave rise to the 1917 Constitution, which is still used today.

From 1917-2000, Mexico was ruled by one political party—the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Representatives from the PRI won every presidential race and most gubernatorial races for 71 years. In the 2000 presidential elections, Vicente Fox Quesada of the PAN (National Action Party) was successful in breaking the 71-year stronghold of the PRI. Mexico's 2006 presidential elections resulted in a very tight race with a margin of less than one percent separating the two leading candidates. Felipe Calderon of the PAN was victorious over Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the PRD (Democratic Revolution Party). In the 2006 elections, the PAN emerged as the largest political party in both houses of Congress but does not have a legislative majority. The PRI no longer controls the presidency and has fewer congressional seats than the PAN or the PRD but remains a significant force in Mexican politics. PRI candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, was sworn in as president on December 1, 2012. He won with 38% of the vote.

**Religion:**

Mexico's constitution provides for freedom of religion and the government generally respects this right in practice. According to Mexico's 2000 census, approximately 88% of Mexicans identified themselves as at least nominally Roman Catholic. Non-Catholic Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern part of Mexico.

**Education:**

Education is one of the highest priorities for the Mexican government. Government spending on education has grown considerably in recent years. There have been efforts to decentralize education from the federal government to the state level in order to improve accountability, but the central government still holds much of the power. In recent decades, there have been great strides in improving education in Mexico, but there are still major problems with the education system such as how to provide education to rural and indigenous population.

Education in Mexico is mandatory for children 5-15. In 2005, 18.8 million children between the ages of 3 and 5 (77.4% of the population) were enrolled in school. Enrollment at the secondary level rose from 5.4 in 2000 to 5.9 million in 2005. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in enrollment at universities over the last few decades.

**Mexico – Facts and Figures:**

- Mexico is the most populous Spanish speaking country in the world (114,975,406 in July 2012) and the second most populous country in Latin America (second to Brazil).
- There are over 60 indigenous languages spoken in Mexico.
- In 2011, over 50% of the population in Mexico was living in poverty and at least 10% are living in extreme poverty.
- Many families live in total poverty and some children are compelled to work on the streets in order to supplement the family income.
- While 70% of the moderate poor have their own home, only 5% indicate that they are paying for their house which is an indicator of the predominantly self-financed purchase and construction process.
- Between 4% and 9% of Mexicans still live on less than one dollar a day.
- Ongoing social concerns in Mexico include low wages, underemployment, inequitable income distribution, and a marginalized indigenous population in the southern states.

## **Information about Veracruz**

### **Veracruz State:**

Veracruz State is a long, slim crescent bordering the Gulf of Mexico about five hours east of Mexico City. The state covers 27, 759 sq. miles and has a population of 7,110,114 (2005). The capital is Xalapa. The state's principal natural resource and dominant industry is oil. Veracruz is a favorite vacations pot for Mexican families. The area is known for its beaches as well as scenic lakes. Most of central Veracruz is mountainous. Abundant rainfall and extremely fertile soil permit the cultivation of numerous crops. The state is a leading national producer of coffee, sugarcane, corn, and rice.

Historical sites and attractions:

- El Tajin—large Mayan ruins
- Papantla's Voladores—men spin from the top of an 82 ft. pole in a breathtaking Totanac ceremony
- Catemaco—popular vacation destination which overlooks an immense blue lake
- Mocambe & Boca del Río—best beaches in the area

### **Veracruz City:**

Veracruz City is one of the country's busiest ports in Mexico. It has a population of 552,156 (2010). During the evenings, the city parks are filled with music and dancing. The site of Veracruz was first settled in 1519 by the Spanish, who subsequently abandoned the area; the city was permanently established by the Spaniards in about 1600. It was captured by United States forces in 1847, during the Mexican War. The French occupied Veracruz in the 1860s and the United States landed troops here for a short time in 1914.

Historical sites and attractions:

- Veracruz Aquarium—one of the biggest and best aquariums in Latin America.
- Paseo del Malecón—walkway along the harbor in downtown Veracruz
- Plaza de las Artesanías—artisan's market
- Plaza de la Constitución—the city's main square
- Fuerte de San Juan de Ulúa—a unique coral-stone fort that was the last land in Mexico to be held by the Spanish Royalists. Fortification began in 1535. It was later used as a prison.