



## Immersion Trip Orientation Manual



# Montaña de Luz Manual

## Table of Contents

Letter of Introduction

About Montaña de Luz & Honduras

Immersion Trip

Immersion Trip Overview / What to Expect

Our Team / Points of Contact

Pre-Trip Timeline

Trip Costs / Payment Schedule & Required Forms

Immunizations, Health, Hygiene and Safety

What to Pack, Emergency Contact Information

About the Culture

Privacy Policy

Helpful Information

- *Recommended Reading*
- *About HIV/AIDS*
- *Communication and Conduct*
- *Money Exchange*
- *Speaking Spanish*

Supporting MdL Upon Your Return



# Montaña de Luz

Dear friend,

We are delighted that you have decided to join us for a week of discovery, learning, and cultural exchange. Your safety, and the safety of our staff and youth, is our number one priority. You will find all of the information you need in this manual to have a safe, wonderful time in Honduras. Please read it carefully.

We trust that you will find this trip fun, educational, inspiring, and for some, even life-changing. You have made a significant sacrifice in terms of time and money in this endeavor. Our experience is that most return home feeling that they have received more than they gave.

We know that for some there will be last-minute doubts and questions, especially if this is your first trip to a lower-income country. This is very normal, so please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to sharing this very important experience with you.

Sincerely,  
Anna Jackson  
Executive Director

--

[anna@montanadeluz.org](mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org)

Cell: +1 614-625-2468

## About Montaña de Luz

In 1998, Honduras and other parts of Central America were hit by a devastating hurricane, Hurricane Mitch. This hurricane, named one of the deadliest hurricanes in history, destroyed nearly 80% of the country's infrastructure, left 1.5 million people homeless, and caused \$6 billion in damages. A group of volunteers from Ohio traveled to Honduras to do hurricane relief work and while there learned of the lack of resources for young people living with HIV.

The first documented case of HIV in Honduras was in 1984, yet Honduras didn't receive any HIV medication (antiretrovirals) until 2003. As a result, by 1998 Honduras had the highest rates of HIV in Latin America. At this same time, because of the high death toll and loss of resources, orphanages began opening throughout Honduras. In addition to children losing their parents, many families were suddenly living in extreme poverty and felt it was their best option to have their child grow up in an orphanage. Today there are over 150 children's homes throughout Honduras.

These two things-- rising HIV rates and children needing support-- caused that group of volunteers from Ohio to dream up the vision of Montaña de Luz. In 2001, we opened our doors as a hospice. There was little to no support for children with HIV complications, so we opened our doors to be a peaceful place for children to die with dignity, surrounded by loving caretakers and medical professionals.

HIV medication became available in 2003 throughout Honduras and we were able to successfully transition from a hospice to a children's home, where over 60 children and young adults have lived at one point in their lives. Some youths have spent their entire lives in our care, while others have spent a short period.

In 2017, in accordance with Honduran children services, we began to focus on family preservation, family reunification, and family-based care. Globally, it's estimated that nearly 85% of children living in orphanages have at least 1 living biological parent. Research and studies show that children growing up in institutional care, rather than in family-based care, have developmental, emotional, and psychological delays. In short, there is nothing like the love of a family.

At that time, we began improving and strengthening relations between our youth's biological families so that one day the child or young adult could transition from MdL to live with them. For a handful of our youth, their biological families are not a safe option, so we also began developing a foster family network. Today, 4 of our youth are living in a happy, healthy, and supportive foster family. The youth at MdL today are on track to one day be able to live with their family or are at MdL temporarily while we work to improve their family's situation. For some MdL youth, we are prepared to care for them indefinitely.

We launched an ambitious program in 2018 called Healthy Families Honduras. The goal of this program is to identify vulnerable families and intervene *before* they feel forced to make the decision to send their child to a children's home like MdL. Today we work with over 40 families affected by HIV throughout Honduras who were at one point vulnerable to being separated. Our team made up of a nurse, psychologist, social worker, and educational specialist travel to visit these families each month to provide medical, emotional, and educational support. We accompany families to their doctor's appointments to help them navigate the health care system, help them understand their diagnosis, and make sure the children in the home can stay in school.

MdL is thrilled to have been able to transition from hospice to home and to be one of the leading providers of HIV/AIDS care throughout Honduras today.

## About Honduras

Honduras is one of the 7 countries that make up Central America. It is roughly the size of Tennessee and has a population of about 10 million. It is bordered by Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Tegucigalpa is the nation's capital and largest city. Honduras got its name after Christopher Columbus remarked that it was a land of great depths; hondo in Spanish means deep. Honduras is the most mountainous country in Central America.

Before Honduras was conquered by the Spanish in the 1500s, Honduras was home to many indigenous groups, including the Lenca, Maya, Lempira, Garifuna and many more. Honduras gained independence from Spain in 1821.

Spanish is the official language of Honduras and the country is predominantly Catholic.

Honduras is a democratic republic with an elected president. In November 2021, Honduras elected its first female president, Xiomara Castro. The country has a long history of political instability and corruption, including several military coups and conflicts between the political parties.

Roughly 68% of the Honduran population lives below the poverty line; this number is slightly higher in the rural areas. These individuals typically live on less than \$2 a day. It's estimated that 50% of the population is under-employed. Nearly 60% of the workforce works in agriculture, as coffee and bananas are the country's main exports and a huge part of the Honduran economy.

Due to these high poverty rates, it's common for Hondurans to feel pressure to migrate north. There are over 1 million Hondurans living in the US today. You can read more about migration later in this manual.

Despite these challenges, Honduras is a beautiful country with a rich culture. Roatán, one of the islands off the northern coast, is one of the best places in the world to scuba dive. It is often ranked second behind the Great Barrier Reef. These Northern islands are some of the top tourist destinations in Central America. Copán Ruinas, which are ancient Mayan ruins, are another population tourist destination.

Soccer is by far the most population sport in Honduras, with Olimpia being the most successful Honduran team. Baseball and boxing are other popular sports.



Map of Honduras



Roatán

## Immersion Trip Overview

Since 2000, MdL has been welcoming teams from churches, schools, universities, social and civic organizations, neighborhoods, families, friends, and open groups of individuals seeking to spend a meaningful week together in Honduras. We have historically called these groups “service trips” because there was often a work project associated with each group.

- **What is the difference between a service trip and an immersion trip?**

Today we are calling our groups to MdL *immersion trips*, rather than service trips, because these trips are focused on cultural immersion and learning, rather than providing a service to Hondurans. You will definitely be making important relationships with our Honduran staff and youth, but it’s important to understand that we are not traveling to Honduras to provide something; this perpetuates the stereotype that those from higher-income countries need to travel to lower-income countries because these individuals are suffering, incompetent, or unable to help themselves.

Another important thing to note is whenever possible, we want to support the Honduran economy and support those in need of employment. It’s important that all the service work we do at MdL does not take away a potential job from a Honduran. We will talk more about this important topic in your group’s pre-trip call!

Immersion trips can be scheduled year-round by groups, with a minimum of 5 people and a maximum of 14. Due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, we need to keep groups smaller than previous years. The only time we are unable to host groups is from the second week of December through the third week of January, which is when Honduras is on the equivalent of summer break and our staff is on vacation. There are also some holidays, like Holy Week, when we are unable to host groups. Please contact our Executive Director if you are interested in joining a group that fits your schedule.

Immersion trips at MdL focus on providing an intercultural experience of learning, serving, and growing through our daily activities, speakers, group reflection times, team building activities, and seeing parts of Honduras.

As you prepare for a trip to MdL, you likely have many questions about things like what to wear, what to bring, schedules, local culture, safety, and what to expect in general. To address these topics, please take the time to explore the information in this orientation manual. We encourage you to download this manual and share with the other team members or potential team members as needed.

Please visit [www.montanadeluz.org](http://www.montanadeluz.org) for additional information and videos on our organization. We value the opportunity to help you learn more about MdL, Honduras, HIV, and much more. It is our ultimate goal that you return from this trip an ambassador for this organization and those in need.

**To schedule your trip, contact us today at 614-398-0209, or [anna@montanadeluz.org](mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org).**

## What to Expect

As soon as you arrive, you will be immersed in a week of:

- **Learning:** Experiential learning is a priority. Our staff and guest speakers will host different talks on very important topics. As an individual and team member, we hope you can learn from and about the Honduran culture. If you have not traveled to a lower-income country, this will be an eye-opening experience to learn more about what you value. We hope you learn about Honduras, international child care, and HIV so that you can be an ambassador for these things in your everyday life.
- **Growing:** We believe that making a better world begins with our own lives. We value each person's spiritual journey and encourage time for reflection, journaling, and solitude. We appreciate the diversity and richness of each person's path and seek to be an inclusive community. We welcome both religious and secular immersion trips.
- **Exchange:** As part of your trip, you'll have the opportunity to work hands-on with our staff and youth. They want to learn about your life experiences and make meaningful relationships with you. Our team will help you prepare different activities, team-building games, and talks on important topics that impact us all.

### ***A typical week might look like:***

- Morning reflection/devotion: You are welcome to join our youth and staff during their morning reflection. Most groups will also have their own group reflection to set the goals for the day.
- Guest speakers: We want you to understand as much as possible about the work we are doing, so we will invite some guest speakers to MdL to talk about important topics like child care in Honduras, cultural issues, and what it's like to live with HIV in Honduras.
- Community service projects: We are on a mission to give back to our community as much as possible. You might be part of a team that packages donations to give to the community where MdL is located.
- Learn from our staff: You will have the opportunity to both hear from and watch our amazing staff in action. It's important to understand what they do at MdL and the importance of their job. They will give an overview of family-based care and why we are moving in that direction.
- Visit important places: You'll have the opportunity to visit the public school, health clinic, have a tour of MdL's community, and maybe even visit some of the families we serve in the field. All of this is important to see so you can better understand our mission.
- Cooking class: Don't you want to try making a typical Honduran dinner?! You'll have the opportunity to learn more about Honduran cuisine through making it yourself.
- Hang with our kids: Each afternoon, you'll have the opportunity to spend quality time with the youth currently at MdL. Our team will help you plan activities and games to share with them.
- Share with our staff and youth: If you are traveling with a specialized group, you may be asked to share a talk on a specific topic, like health/mental health, early childhood education, computer literacy, etc. Our Executive Director will cover this in more detail with your trip leader.
- Excursion day: You'll have the opportunity to visit some popular tourist spots in the area, as well as do some shopping.

Other activities include:

- Baking with the kids
- Playing soccer
- Learning Spanish
- Relaxing/reading/watching movies

## Our Team & Points of Contact

**Anna Jackson, Executive Director:** +1 614-625-2468, [anna@montanadeluz.org](mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org)

Coordinates pre-trip planning for your group, including everything in the pre-trip timeline below. Will also schedule pre-trip video calls with the team to answer any questions, discuss expectations, and help create the week's itinerary. The Executive Director will also be in Honduras with you during your trip to help lead the team and work alongside you throughout the week. Will be able to answer any questions about the organization, help with cultural norms, and aid in communicating with staff and youth.

**Sara Castellanos, National Director:** +504-9865-5098, [sycastellanos@gmail.com](mailto:sycastellanos@gmail.com)

The Honduran National Director oversees the daily operations at MdL. Sara is the emergency contact in Honduras; for children and young adults under 21, Sara will be the designee on the Power of Attorney form, meaning she will be able to coordinate with doctor's offices and authorities on behalf of the team participant should the need arise.

### **Trip Leader:**

You will select a trip leader among the team members. This person will ensure that everything in the pre-trip timeline is completed in a timely manner on the groups' end, so that everyone is prepared to make the most of the experience. The trip leader will work alongside the Executive Director once the group arrives in Honduras.

## **Who can my family contact while I'm in Honduras?**

It's important that your family members know who to contact while you're in Honduras in case something happens while you're away. There is WiFi at MdL, but we typically do not share the password with team members. This is an opportunity to completely unplug and be present in the moment. If there is an emergency, you are welcome to use the Wifi.

***If your family needs to contact you, they will need to send a message via WhatsApp to Sara Castellanos at the number listed above.*** WhatsApp is the common messaging app used in Honduras and Sara will have service 100% of the time. Our Executive Director will be able to receive text messages, emails, and WhatsApp messages only when in WiFi. If you have an international phone plan, you are welcome to use your phone as needed but please be mindful of the amount of time you spend on your device.

## Pre-Trip Timeline

| Action Item:   | When:   | Date for your trip: |
|--|---|---------------------|
| Your group works with the MdL team to decide a date for your immersion trip.   | 5-6 months before departure date  | (Write in date)     |
| Your group identifies a Trip Leader. This person will be the point of contact between team members and the MdL staff.  | 5-6 months before departure date  |                     |
| The Trip Leader recruits members for the team through informational sessions, announcements in church bulletins, social media, and general outreach.<br><br><i>MdL's Executive Director can virtually attend informational sessions and/or send you materials to promote the trip.</i>   | Up to 3 months before departure date  |                     |
| At least 5 and a maximum of 14 individuals have committed to the trip.<br><br>An application and \$100 deposit have been submitted for each of these individuals.<br><br>Applications can be sent via email to <a href="mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org">anna@montanadeluz.org</a> or via mail to PO Box 410, Worthington OH, 43085. \$100 deposits can be sent to the same address, or through our website: <a href="http://www.montanadeluz.org/give">www.montanadeluz.org/give</a> | 120 days prior to departure   |                     |
| Team members obtain a passport or verify that their existing passport is valid for six months after their return date from MdL. Individuals with passports that expire within 6 months of the travel date will be denied at customs.<br><br>Team members meet with their doctors to discuss vaccinations and medications.  | 120 days prior to departure<br><br>*Check the US Government webpage for current wait times on passport applications or renewals. You may want to start this process ASAP as wait times tend to be longer now due to the pandemic. |                     |
| Trip Leader reaches out to all confirmed team members to establish timelines for payments. This includes final payment to MdL (due 60 days prior to departure date) and purchase of plane flights.   | 120 days prior to departure   |                     |
| Final payments of \$800 are made to MdL, either by check to PO Box 410, Worthington OH, 43085 or through our website at <a href="http://www.montanadeluz.org/give">www.montanadeluz.org/give</a>   | 60 days prior to departure  |                     |
| MdL Executive Director meets with Trip Leader again to begin to identify strengths of the team, potential projects   | 60 days prior to departure  |                     |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| and activities, and interests for site-seeing day.  |  |  |
| <p>Purchase flights! Your group will purchase flights and send confirmations to <a href="mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org">anna@montanadeluz.org</a>.</p> <p><i>Airline FAQ at the end of this document.</i></p>  | <p>60 days prior to departure date</p> <p>*Airline prices are constantly changing. You do not have to wait until 60 days out to purchase your flights, this is only a recommendation. Consider tracking flights so you know the best time to purchase.</p> |  |
| <p>All team members have completed the online background check through the Verified Volunteers link sent by the MDL staff.</p> <p>They also send the Release of Liability Waiver (all group members) and Limited Power of Attorney (required for those under 21 years old traveling without parent/guardian) to <a href="mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org">anna@montanadeluz.org</a>.</p> | <p>45 days prior to departure</p>  |  |
| <p>The Trip Leader and Executive Director organize an orientation meeting to make sure all forms, payments, documents, and vaccinations have been completed.</p> <p>The Executive Director will meet all team members and go over any questions. You will get your group's itinerary for the week.</p>  | <p>30 days prior to departure</p>  |  |
| <p>The Trip Leader reaches out to all team members for any last-minute questions and concerns. Team members are given emergency contact information and important items for customs.</p>  | <p>7 days prior to departure</p>   |  |
| <p>Team members and their families are encouraged to join our Facebook page "Friends of Montaña de Luz", where pictures will be share throughout the week. This is a private group and you will need to request access.</p>   | <p>Any time prior to departure</p>   |  |
| <p>Team members depart for Honduras, go through customs, and meet our Executive Director at the arrival gate.</p>   | <p>Departure day</p>   |  |

## Trip Costs / Payment Schedule

The total cost is \$900 per person. Airfare is purchased separately by the team member. Guidelines can be found in the Airfare FAQ (Appendix A). For a schedule of when to purchase flights, see the Pre-Trip Checklist.

### *Included in the cost of your trip:*

- Basic travel insurance, ground transportation, security, dormitory style lodging, all meals (airport meals and snacks not included), any materials needed for community projects, pre-arrival cleaning & maintenance of our facility, site-seeing entrance fees, site-seeing day lunch.
- You should bring approximately \$75-\$150 for souvenirs, snacks, incidentals at the airport.

### *Discounts available for 2022 and 2023:*

- Trip Leader discount of \$200 for a team of 14.

## Timeline for Payment

**NOW:** \$100 non-refundable deposit and application to secure your spot on the trip.

**60 days prior to trip:** \$800 or remaining balance due. You may pay by check to PO Box 410, Worthington OH, 43085 or through our website: [www.montanadeluz.org/give](http://www.montanadeluz.org/give)

## Refund Policy

### ***More than 45 days prior to departure***

Option #1: Refund any money paid except the \$100 non-refundable deposit. The airline ticket is in your name and it is your responsibility to work with the airline to change the date. There may be additional charges from the airline for changes which would be at your expense.

Option #2: All money paid is credited toward a rescheduled trip to MdL within 12 months. The airline ticket is in your name and it is your responsibility to work with the airline to change the date. There may be additional charges from the airline for changes which would be at your expense.

### ***Less than 45 days prior to departure***

Option #1: All money paid is credited toward a rescheduled trip to MdL within 12 months. The airline ticket is in your name and it is your responsibility to work with the airline to change the date. There may be additional charges from the airline for changes which would be at your expense.

Option #2: Any money paid will be accepted as a tax deductible donation to MdL.

*Disclaimer: If there are unforeseen circumstances in Honduras, such as flight delays/cancellations, emergencies, or other unplanned events, MdL will work directly with team members to minimize costs and/or gather the appropriate documentation to the airline or travel insurance provider for reimbursement when applicable. Our travel insurance is purchased for all team members within the cost of the trip (there is no additional cost to you). Nevertheless, there may be unique circumstances that do not fit within the travel insurance policy, for which MDL does not provide a refund. In addition, if a claim is denied by our travel insurance provider, MdL does not provide a refund. Our staff is willing to assist in submitting all claims. For more information on insurance, contact us at [anna@montanadeluz.org](mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org).*

# Travel Insurance

MdL provides travel insurance through Travelex. No additional purchase of travel insurance is necessary for the coverage listed below:



Trip Cancellation coverage includes Cancel for Business Reasons



15 day pre-existing condition exclusion waiver available



Emergency Medical and Evacuation



Primary Coverage with no deductibles

## Travel Basic Details

Travel Basic provides essential trip protection for the budget conscious traveler. This plan is perfect for short, domestic vacations. When you compare this travel protection plan against other suppliers' coverage, you'll see that Travel Basic is competitive and offers a broad list of benefits. This competitive coverage provides necessary safeguards to ensure the trip investment is protected against the unexpected. Travel Basic provides you with a wide range of covered reasons for Trip Cancellation, as well as extensive post departure coverage to help protect you while you're away.

Traveling creates memories that can last a lifetime. Gain peace of mind by purchasing the right travel insurance to protect your trip investment from unexpected events..

[Buy Travel Basic Travel Insurance](#)

| Benefits                                      | Coverage Per Person              |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ▶ Trip Cancellation                           | 100% of Insured Trip Cost        |
| ▶ Trip Interruption                           | 100% of Insured Trip Cost        |
| ▶ Trip Delay                                  | \$500 (\$250/day)                |
| ▶ Missed Connection                           | \$500                            |
| ▶ Baggage & Personal Effects                  | \$500                            |
| ▶ Baggage Delay                               | \$100                            |
| ▶ Emergency Medical & Dental Expense          | \$15,000 (\$500 dental sublimit) |
| ▶ Emergency Medical Evacuation & Repatriation | \$100,000                        |
| ▶ AD&D  | \$10,000                         |
| ▶ Travel Assistance*                          | Included                         |

## Required Forms

The application and waiver must be completed by all participants individually. The Limited Power of Attorney form must be completed in the presence of a licensed notary by all participants under 21 years of age. Send all forms and payments to our home office:

**Montaña de Luz, PO Box 410, Worthington, OH 43085**

These forms will be sent to you by your Trip Leader. You will be emailed instructions for an online background check through Verified Volunteers. This is done because you will be interacting with young children.

## Travel Documents

Passports are required for entry to Honduras. It must be valid six months beyond your departure date. If you do not have a valid passport, begin the process online or through your local post office immediately. The cost ranges from \$110 for minors to about \$135. Expediting the process is an additional cost. Wait times are currently longer than usual due to the pandemic. Do not wait to get a valid passport. Please make three copies of your passport before leaving: one to leave at home, one to give to your Trip Leader, and the third to carry in your carry-on.

**You need to know the address and location of MdL for your Customs and Immigration form. Please save this address and keep it with you during your travels:**

**Montaña de Luz, Nueva Esperanza, Morocelí, El Paraíso.**

If you are asked in customs, MdL is located in the department of El Paraíso. The Executive Director will help you manage customs.

## Recommended and Required Immunizations

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the following for travel to Honduras:

- Hepatitis Type A and Type B
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- Malaria Preventative (usually started one or two weeks before trip)

These are not required for travel to Honduras and MdL, but please check with your physician or health department to find out what immunizations and medications they recommend specifically for you. Give yourself ample time to make arrangements.

## COVID-19

At this time, we are requiring everyone traveling to MdL to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. This is the request of our team in Honduras, whose health and safety we take extremely seriously. The CDC defines fully vaccinated as three covid vaccine doses for adults under 50 and four doses for those over 50. Full details are online at [bit.ly/definefullyvaxed](https://bit.ly/definefullyvaxed). Because we work with those living with HIV, who are immunocompromised, we must do everything we can to keep them healthy. Furthermore, the COVID-19 response was very different in Honduras, compared to the US. Hospital workers did not have access to protective equipment, funds promised to be allocated to frontline workers were not received, and hospitals did not have access to ventilators. Hospitals continue to be at capacity.

**You will be required to send proof of vaccination to your Trip Leader before your flights are purchased.**

To ensure complete safety, you will also be required to send proof of a negative test to your Trip Leader 24 hours before you are scheduled to depart. We request that you be fully masked during your travels to Honduras. Please use your best judgment in the days before you travel to MdL; please understand you are going to interact with an extremely vulnerable population and act accordingly. This will all be discussed in your first call with our Executive Director.

## Health, Hygiene, and Safety

Sanitary standards throughout Honduras are different from North American Standards. You may be exposed to different micro-organisms that could cause diarrhea and minor digestive disorder. To remain healthy, it is important that you be aware of the following:

- **Water:** The water that is provided through the water coolers at MdL is filtered and safe to drink. Tap water is safe for bathing, brushing teeth, and washing dishes. Hot showers are (sometimes) available.
- **Food:** Meals will be provided by our Honduran staff. They are very conscientious of safe food handling and storage. We recommend that you do not purchase street food on our site seeing day unless the Executive Director gives the “ok”. When we do eat out, the restaurants chosen will reflect the standards of safe food preparation.
- **Sleeping arrangements:** All teams are housed on-site in a gated and guarded facility. Dormitory style rooms sleep up to four people. Each room has either bunk beds or single beds. There are fans, a shelving unit, bedside tables, and mosquito nets. Bed linens and towels are provided. You will need to bring your own toiletries (shampoo, toothpaste, washcloth, etc).
- **Bathrooms:** Team members will share a large bathroom. There are 3 individual showers and 4 toilets with private stalls.
- **Laundry:** If needed, you will be able to do your own laundry Honduran style. There is a large hand washing laundry area and one of our kids can show you how it’s done!

## Safety

Since the beginning, MdL has made group trip safety our #1 priority. We provide our own drivers, vehicles, and travel with an armed guard to and from the airport and on site-seeing days.

Our facility is guarded 24/7 and is located atop a hill that overlooks a community of about 350 people.

We do not travel at night, unless to go get some snacks from the pulperia (snack stand) just down the hill.

On our site-seeing day, we travel to well-known tourist destinations where there is a visible police presence. We ask that all visitors leave excessive and expensive jewelry, big cameras and other electronics at home.

Our team is constantly monitoring the state government’s travel advisories on a regular basis and follow their recommendations should any new advisories be issued.

## What to Pack

Pack lightly- you will only be gone a week! Airlines allow for two carry ons: one to fit under your seat in front of you, the other goes in the overhead storage bin. You can check a bag if you need additional room but be aware of additional fees. Checked bags cannot exceed 50 lbs.

### General Packing List:

- Passport (must be valid for at least 6 months beyond trip departure date)
- Money for souvenirs/snacks/airport incidentals (recommended \$75-\$150), our team will help you exchange money in the Honduran airport
- Journal/devotional resource
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Hand sanitizer
- Flashlight
- Water bottle
- Personal care items (soap, shampoo, face wash, deodorant, toothbrush, etc)
- Clothing (please read recommended clothing in the cultural section below)
- Both closed-toe shoes & sandals (recommended to bring a pair of flip-flops for the showers)
- Light jacket for cooler evenings or rain
- Any medication you need, including medications you may need in case of stomach upset.
- Any materials you need for activities/games/workshops
- Snacks: please bring snacks! If your stomach has trouble adjusting to a different style of food, it will be helpful to have snacks you are familiar with. They must be able to be packaged up due to ants.
- Phone/Camera: you are welcome to bring your phone or camera to take pictures but please do not take any pictures of our kids without their consent. This will be covered in your call with the Executive Director. You do not need to bring an adapter to charge anything.

## About the Culture

Each country has its own unique culture- the pattern of behavior and rules regarding what is and is not accepted or expected. Honduran culture is in many ways unique from American culture. The tendency of many Americans traveling abroad is to assume that “different” means “inferior” and to criticize or ignore the host culture, while arrogantly strutting their own cultural bias and offending the nationals. This is the “Ugly American” syndrome. While in Honduras, always remember that you are a guest in their country. Act with appropriate humility, respect, and sensitivity. Remember that while many Hondurans do not speak English, they might understand a fair amount and can certainly understand body language. Words of criticism can hurt and offend. Come with an open mind and willingness to learn about the culture of your hosts.

Since you are a guest in Honduras, it is up to you to conform as much as possible to the Honduran culture while there. North Americans tend to be “task” oriented. We want to do things faster and better. Conversely, Hondurans are “relationship” oriented, with far more emphasis on people and far less on time and the task. The benefit? You will have far more respect for and a better understanding of the value of patience and resourcefulness. Always remember that you are an ambassador for your country.

Beyond being a guest in a new country, you are a guest in somebody's home. The youth you will meet at Mdl live there and many have grown up there. They are literally opening the doors to their home for you. Please act the same way you would entering a stranger's home in the US.

### **Basic Etiquette to Follow:**

- Please refer to Hondurans as "Hondurans", rather than natives.
- Always be polite and courteous to the staff and youth. There is a lot of work behind the scenes that goes into hosting a group. Many of them will take on extra jobs, or work longer hours, to accommodate groups.
- Go out of your way to initiate greetings and shaking hands. Always start with "buenos días, buenas tardes, or buenas noches" before even asking a simple question.
- Whenever entering a room, ask permission "con permiso?"
- The Honduran people are very warm and friendly by nature. In most instances, they will be very receptive and outgoing, especially if you initiate conversation. However, be careful when dealing with the opposite sex. Young Hondurans may confuse ordinary friendliness with something more. Please avoid what you might consider harmless flirting.

### **Appropriate clothing:**

Honduras has a very warm and sunny climate, and most days will be over 85°F. Despite the heat, Hondurans dress very modestly and conservatively, and you will rarely see people, especially women, wearing shorts. Please consider this when packing. Short shorts and spaghetti strap tank tops are not appropriate. Our Executive Director will cover this more in your orientation call and may ask you to change your clothes if something is too revealing.

We recommend bringing light-weight clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. Tank tops with thicker straps are appropriate. Shorts, skirts, and dresses that reach your knees are appropriate.

## **The Rights of our Youth**

Protecting the rights of our youth is our number one priority. When visiting their home, it is important to remember that, by the very nature of being minors, our children are often not in a position of power. Children cannot as easily voice their concerns. Moreover, some of our youth have experienced trauma in their lives. It is therefore our duty to have systems in place that promote their long-term wellbeing. Sometimes this means the teams have to sacrifice certain interactions with the youth so that they maintain the structures we have put in place to help their development.

For instance, our youth have a routine schedule—they go to school, they come home to do homework, they eat dinner, getting ready for bed, etc., just as children in the United States. Our Executive Director will set up times to interact with the children that do not impede this normal schedule. They will always involve the Tios (caregivers), who serve as parent figures for the children and intimately know their routines, recent behavior, etc. If a child cannot participate in an activity, it may be that the child has not followed the rules and the Tio is trying to instill good behaviors, values, and morals for that child, just as we do in the United States.

The youth also have particular needs brought about by their history, condition, and individual needs. These may include taking their medication, meeting with our psychologist or social worker, or going to

appointments. Not all of the youth will be on the mountain at all times. It is very important to be respectful of the structures that are in place.

**Giving Gifts:**

Never arbitrarily give things away to the youth or staff. We do not want them to look to teams as the sole provider of their needs. If you brought something make sure that it can be shared with the entire group of children and staff, but please consult with the Honduran Director first. This includes candy, balloons, gum, clothing, other trinkets and something a child may inquire about. You are never allowed to give a child money or anything else directly. It is very important not to add to the disempowerment of the people by creating a begging mentality.

**Taking Pictures:**

You are not permitted to take pictures of any youth or staff without their permission. Additionally, you are not permitted to post any pictures that include a face or a name of any of our MdL youth on any social media. Remember: you are a guest in their home. Many of our youth have been denied jobs, university entrance, entrance to the military because of their presumed HIV status. They have even been denied the right to eat in public restaurants because of their association to MdL. A picture on social media that can connect them to MdL can be life-threatening. The Executive Director will cover this in your orientation call.

You are permitted and encouraged to take pictures of our facility, the landscape, and throughout your site-seeing day. The Executive and National Directors will be taking pictures throughout the week to share with your team after you return home. Pictures will be shared throughout the week on the private Friends of Montaña de Luz Facebook page.

Please read through our Privacy Policy on the next page.



# PRIVACY POLICY

MAKING SURE THE PERSONAL, HEALTH, AND DIGITAL PRIVACY OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS OF MONTAÑA DE LUZ IS PROTECTED AT ALL TIMES.

## Personal

Volunteers should never enter the private space of a child or young adult, including their rooms and bathrooms, and may only enter common areas reserved for the children and young adults if permitted by all of the children present.

## Health

The children have a right to keep their health information private. Health information, including HIV status, should not be shared by volunteers/employees. Information regarding physical, mental, or emotional health is only shared with trained direct-service staff.

## Digital

The children and young adults should have agency in determining what, where, when, and how their digital presence is developed and distributed online. Any images, including photographs, videos, memes, gifs, snaps, etc., posted of or with the children or young adults of Montaña de Luz on a public forum must protect his or her anonymity. Pictures must be from behind or at a far distance.

## Digital

Images of the children which do not meet these criteria can be posted on "closed" forums. Closed forums are defined as a digital space where a controlled number of persons have access. This includes the Friends of Montaña de Luz Facebook page, our MtL Instagram page, the eNews, and your personal social media page, as long as privacy settings for images are restricted to friends.

Each child is a unique gift to this world. All of our children have a story, but it should be theirs to tell. At Montaña de Luz, we try to protect, support, and empower our children. In a society full of stigma, we try to give each child the agency to determine whether or not to discuss or reveal his or her health status, as well as whether or not to be publicly associated with Montaña de Luz.

For more detailed policy, go to: [www.montanadeluz.org/privacy](http://www.montanadeluz.org/privacy).

## Helpful Information

### Recommended Reading:

#### Books:

*Mountain of Light: The Story of Montaña de Luz* by Fe Anam Avis (Russell Crabtree, founder of MdL)

*The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* by Oscar Martinez

*Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario

*Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart* by Elvia Alvarado

#### Links:

<https://www.npr.org/2021/05/10/994065661/why-people-are-fleeing-honduras-for-the-u-s-all-thats-left-here-is-misery>

<https://www.unfpa.org/news/voices-women-living-hiv-aids-honduras>

<https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/violence-against-women-other-pandemic-impacting-honduras>

### HIV/AIDS

MdL is an organization for youth and families who have been *affected by* HIV. This means that everyone in our care has been affected, in a variety of ways, by HIV; it does not mean everyone in our care is living with HIV. Some have lost their parents to the virus, or have siblings living with HIV, etc. Their HIV status is strictly confidential, and their status is protected by law. Our staff will not disclose anyone's status to you.

The Executive Director will go over HIV/AIDS myths in your orientation call, but please visit these links to learn more before your call:

<https://www.ajmc.com/view/contributor-the-importance-of-people-first-language-in-the-hiv-community>

<https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics>

<https://www.aidsmap.com/about-hiv/basics/myths-and-facts>

### Communication and Conduct

Good communication is essential for preventing and solving problems. If you have problems or concerns during your trip, do not hesitate to speak to the Honduran Director or Executive Director. It is important that you have the best possible experience.

Being sent home: The Honduran Director and Executive Director, in consultant with other staff members, have the right to send you home early, at your expense, should your behavior compromise the safety and well-being of the team and children.

### Money Exchange

Money exchange will take place at the airport upon arrival with the help of the Executive Director. The currency used is called "Lempira". We recommend \$75-\$150 for souvenirs, snacks and airport meals on travel days. Credit cards can be used at some businesses, but you will need to call your bank to advise them in advance or you may run the risk of having it denied. The general exchange rate tends to be \$1USD = 24 Lempira.

## Speaking Spanish

Although knowing Spanish is NOT necessary, many visitors express that they wish they had learned a few basic words and phrases prior to coming. Here are a few free sites and apps you may want to check out:

[www.studyspanish.com/travel/meetpeople.htm](http://www.studyspanish.com/travel/meetpeople.htm)

[www.duolingo.com](http://www.duolingo.com)

## Supporting MdL Upon Your Return

We hope you feel inspired to support MdL upon your return. There are a variety of ways to stay involved with MdL! On your last night, the Executive Director will go over different ways to continue to support MdL and the people you've met during your week in Honduras.

Different ways to support MdL:

- Become a monthly donor at any amount
  - Monthly donations help sustain our programs. You can donate any amount, as little as \$5 a month, to support our youth and families in Honduras. To sign up: [www.montanadeluz.org/give](http://www.montanadeluz.org/give)
- Consider MdL when making an annual charitable gift
  - We host two annual campaigns (summer and winter) and each campaign will highlight the program we are looking to support at that time. Sign up for our newsletter to stay updated!
- Join our Friends of Montaña de Luz Facebook page to stay updated with everything going on in Honduras.
- Consider joining our board of directors
  - Our board meets every other month and this is a fully remote position. You'll help our Executive Director make important decisions regarding Honduran operations, finances, fundraising, grant writing, and more.
- Support our events team
  - We host one big event each spring, Fiesta. This event typically raise over \$100,000 and is a huge fundraiser for MdL. We are always looking for volunteers to help plan this event!

***On behalf of our organization, the staff, the youth and families in Honduras, thank you for your interest in Montaña de Luz! We wish you many blessings on all of your preparations. Our team is always available to assist in any way we can. Please know that your decision to travel to MdL means the world to us and makes a huge impact in the lives of many young people in Honduras.***

## **Appendix A: Airline FAQ**

### **Where do we start and what is the most convenient way to purchase flights?**

Start by determining whether your group will purchase flights together, or separately. Your group may determine that it is easier to send cash or checks to one person (Trip Leader), who then purchases the flights. Conversely, group members may have frequent flyer miles, airline-specific credit cards, or want to try to purchase flights at a reduced rate from discount websites. You should start by determining how your group wants to purchase its flights.

### **How far in advance do we need to purchase flights?**

In our experience, the prices and available seats on flights to Honduras remain relatively stable until around two months prior to your departure. However, it is best to decide whether you are buying as a group or separate and purchase the flights as early as possible.

### **Which airport do we need to fly into, and are there any layovers?**

You need to fly into Comayagua, Honduras; airport code is XPL. Typically, groups purchase flights into Honduras with one layover. Different airlines have different connecting flight locations and layover times. For example, if you book United, you will most likely fly into Houston for your connecting flight. You should pick layovers that have at least one hour in between flights from the US to Honduras, and at least **2 hours** between the return flights (it will take more time to get through customs when entering the United States).

### **What websites should we use to purchase flights?**

We recommend that you use the website of the airline company, especially if you are booking as a group. The most frequently used airlines into Comayagua are United and American Airlines. You can also compare prices on booking websites such as priceline.com or expedia.com. At this time, Delta does not fly to Comayagua. This is a new airport.

### **What airlines are the most reliable and what is the best deal to Comayagua, Honduras?**

We recommend flying United. They have been a reliable partner over the years and have consistently provided good service to and from Honduras.

### **What are the refund policies for flights?**

The airline ticket will be in the name of the passenger and it is his or her responsibility to work with the airline if a ticket needs to be refunded or changed. There may be additional charges from the airline for changes which would be at the passenger's expense.

### **Can we apply our frequent flyer miles?**

If you purchase tickets individually and you have frequent flyer miles with the airline from which you are purchasing, you should be able to apply frequent flyer miles.

### **Are there any other expenses to consider?**

Depending on the airline, there can be a fee for checked bags. This fee will be charged at the check-in counter or console at the airport. This fee will be charged on both your flight into Honduras and your flight back to the United States. Sometimes, if the person booking the flights purchases with a credit card that is affiliated with that airline, he or she can get bag fees waived.

**Should I check a bag?**

We recommend packing light if possible! If you need to check a bag, that is no problem. If your group is bringing donations, we recommend checking a bag. Our Executive Director will let you know if donations are needed.

**Who can we contact if we have problems or need assistance in making the final purchase?**

If you have any questions during this process, please do not hesitate to call us at 614-398-0209 or email us at [anna@montanadeluz.org](mailto:anna@montanadeluz.org). This is one part of the process that you should start **sooner** rather than later! Good luck and let us know if you need anything at all. We look forward to your visit to Montaña de Luz!