

# **Team Leader's Handbook**

**Your guide to a successful mission trip to the  
Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico**





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# 1. Introduction

Acción is directed by Oscar R. Dorantes (called Jr.), who is a seminary-trained Social Anthropologist (the Mexican term for what we would call a Sociologist) and the son of its founder, Rev. Oscar Dorantes (called Sr.). Acción Ministries was officially founded in 1989 as a Christian relief effort in the wake of Hurricane Gilbert. The organization embodies Rev. Dorantes' vision of bringing Americans to partner with Mexican Presbyterian Churches to further their programs and needs of the people. The vision continues to expand to help provide educational opportunities to the children -- especially those from the rural Mayan communities served by Acción.

For the past forty years Acción has hosted hundreds of work team projects. The first Acción work team was Chapel Woods PC of (then) Decatur GA in July of 1981. Since then we have hosted teams from all over the U.S.

The primary objective of Acción is to share the love of Jesus Christ by serving those in need. This service can take many forms, including:

1. Construction projects for churches (e.g. patios, roofs, etc.)
2. Construction and improvements at Acción facilities, including Villa Infantil Maya (VIM) (e.g. expansion, painting, even woodwork)
3. Construction of one-room homes (hurricane shelters) or concrete floors for the poor
4. Doctors and nurses who work to provide medical services for the poor

The extraordinary beauty of the land, the friendliness of its people, and the enchanting Mayan village culture both attract and invite many who want to come, explore, and experience the Yucatan while at the same time working hand-in-hand with their Mayan Christian brothers and sisters across the Yucatan Peninsula.

## 1.1 Welcome

We are so pleased that you are interested in leading a team of people for a mission trip with Acción. We pride ourselves on customizing trips based on the team's experience, abilities, and size. We look forward to working with you to make sure that your work team has a great experience as you partner with Acción. Not only will you make a positive impact on the lives of Mayans in the Yucatan Peninsula, but you will also be impacted and hopefully come home with a renewed perspective on life.

## 1.2 Your Role as a Work Team Leader

The work team coordinator has many responsibilities to prepare your team members and help plan the mission trip. These include:

- Making flight and R&R hotel arrangements for your team
- Sending cost per-person charge to Friends of Accion at least 10 weeks before your team arrives
- Watching out for the health and safety of your work team members (Acción staff will help with this too)

- Briefing your team on: trip itinerary, health and safety, what to bring, your rules and expectations, and cultural sensitivity
- Making decisions and handling emergencies while you are in Mexico (Acción staff will help with this too)

The rest of this Team Leader Handbook will give you more details and instructions on how to fulfill all of these duties. Remember, the Work Team Leader is responsible for making sure all of these duties are carried out, but you don't have to do it all alone! It is wise to delegate some of these responsibilities among other members of your team.

Please, send feedback on this Handbook to Rich Neidinger ([rinedinger@davidson.edu](mailto:rinedinger@ davidson.edu)); we welcome suggestions! Thanks to Abby Gwaltney for creating this document!

### **1.3 Acción Staff in Mexico**

There are several Acción staff members that will be interacting with you throughout your week:

#### **Oscar R. Dorantes (“Jr”)**

Oscar has a degree in social anthropology and is a Presbyterian pastor, having attended seminary in the U.S. in Charlotte, North Carolina. Oscar and his wife, Patty, lived in Charlotte for eight years while they worked and Oscar attended school. They now reside in Mérida with their children, Andre and Maya. Oscar R. Dorantes is often called “Oscar Jr.” to distinguish from his father Oscar Dorantes who founded and lead Acción until his retirement in 2008. At that time, Oscar “Jr.” became the Director of Acción Ministries, after working with his father for many years. He is also active in the Yucatan Presbytery, pastoring and teaching. Oscar’s cell number from a U.S. cell phone is +52 9991276549.

#### **Roger Aviles**

Roger first became involved with Acción Ministries as the Student House Director. He soon started working with American work teams and learned English from his interactions with them. Roger continues to work with work teams that come down and serves as Acción’s Assistant Director. Roger and his wife, Anna, and their children, Eduardo and Cristina live in Mérida. In his other job, he runs the physical plant at a Presbyterian school in Merida.

#### **Other Acción Staff Members**

The Acción staffer(s) assigned to a team are to be primarily "liaison" between the team and Oscar. He is likely to be the team's driver and translator throughout. He is also to be a part of the work team; at work and at play. (It's important that leaders remember this when they take their teams to dinner or a special outing.)

The staffer is also expected to take an active role in getting the VBS program underway - especially the first day - with introductions, explanations of procedure, getting the kids (and extended families) revved up with enthusiasm, etc. The staffer will remain with the team throughout the work week when not making daily runs for water, ice, or other supplies.

Additionally, Acción often has contracted masons on-site in the village who will do the concrete work that requires more skill. If you visit one of our educational homes, you could meet the wonderful director(s), cooks, and caretakers there.

## 1.4 Friends of Accion volunteers in the U.S.

There are several volunteers that serve as Acción staff members here in the U.S.:

### **Stacy Lynch – U.S. Work Team Coordinator**

Stacy Lynch has been on work teams with multiple churches, including her home church First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte. Stacy will be your main point of contact as you plan your trip. Her role is to be a liaison between you and Acción staff in Mexico. She works to make sure that you and the Acción staff in Mexico are making all of the necessary preparations to ensure a successful trip. Stacy is also a former President of the Friends of Accion Board of Directors (see below). Stacy is an elementary school teacher in Charlotte. Contact Stacy by phone to 704-408-0678 or by email to [stacy.lynch2131@gmail.com](mailto:stacy.lynch2131@gmail.com).

### **FOA Board Members**

Friends of Accion, Inc. was founded in August 2003 to “render meaningful support to the charitable activities of Acción in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico with a view to advancing the well-being of the people served and the Christian faith.” We saw the need for an organization that would enable all donations for the support of Acción to be tax deductible. We formed a board that can coordinate American financial support for the growing ministries of Acción and provide increased financial accountability.

Rich Neidinger ([rineidinger@davidson.edu](mailto:rineidinger@davidson.edu)) is the founder of Friends of Acción and is now Treasurer. He is a member of First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC and has worked with Acción through his church for many years. Rich lives with his family in Charlotte, NC and is an emeritus mathematics professor at Davidson College.

Other FOA board members can be found on our website <https://friendsofaccion.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors/>.

## 2. Pre-Trip Preparations

Please contact our U.S. Work Team Coordinator ([stacy.lynch2131@gmail.com](mailto:stacy.lynch2131@gmail.com)) to answer questions about or to start the process of arranging a trip for your work team. Usually, six to twelve months of lead time are needed for the church or sponsoring organization to develop a trip.

### 2.1 Work Team Information Document and Planning Outline

The Coordinator will maintain a Work Team Shared Data document of all possible work teams in a calendar year with progressively more information as details are arranged. This document will be shared from a cloud location accessible to Work Team Leaders, Oscar and Roger in Mexico, and Friends of Accion Board members. Information in this document will include the following:

- Church or sponsoring organization name and whether youth or adult trip.
- Dates of trip proposed by team and then confirmed with Oscar (see Section 4.1 for a typical 8-day itinerary).
- Work Team Leader name(s).
- Group size, including number of males and females for housing purposes. Early estimates are appreciated and number should be locked in by 10 weeks before when funds must be mailed. Then e-copies of Work Team Participant Forms (see Section 11.4) should be sent to Coordinator or deposited in an e-folder with cloud permission.
- Work site village and project, proposed by Oscar a few months before considering leader's preferences.
- Cost per person and due date, mailing funds 10 weeks before departure.
- Flight details for travel coordination with Acción staff.
- R&R Hotel name for travel coordination with Acción staff.

### 2.2 Preparation for the Work

Your team will need to prepare mentally and physically for the work you'll do with Acción. The construction work with concrete will be physically demanding, so team members should try to be in reasonable shape before they come. Folks should also mentally prepare for the heat and hard labor, and know their limits. Getting exhausted or dehydrated can hurt the whole team and work project (as well as make you miserable)! Also note the recommended vaccines described in Appendix F.



## 2.3 Commemorative T-shirts

Your team may want to design a special T-shirt which connects your church mission team in the U.S. to your host church and village. This same logo may be repeated in consecutive years and also on pre-publicity posters, etc. pertaining to the mission trip.

Each team member should purchase one T-shirt for his/herself and one to leave behind. Additional T-shirts may also be sold as part of your preliminary fund-raising campaign. You may also want to print identical children's T-shirts especially to give to the village children. Churches and Sunday school classes may adopt this as a mission project. If you intend to have special project T-shirts printed, be sure to include the state in which your work site is located just as you would in this country (e.g. Bethania, Quintana Roo, Mexico). It has been suggested that your shirt colors be very bright and the design distinctive. This makes for easier spotting in an airport flowing with T-shirts from everywhere else in the world.

## 2.4 What to Wear/Bring

Your team members may want to do some pre-project shopping at the thrift shop. Heavy duty shoes, work clothing, and gloves should be "throw-away" equipment at the project's end. Gloves should be carefully chosen for concrete work; these should be leather work gloves, not gardening gloves. Tools are generally unnecessary unless Oscar advises a team otherwise. This is true of other forms of equipment as well. Specialized projects involving carpentry, painting, or electrical work may be more successful if special tools were brought from home. However, these are the exceptions rather than the rule, and leaders are always consulted before hand.

Team members should bring a small bag or backpack to take water bottles, sunscreen, first aid items, hat, or other personal effects from their home base to the work site each day.

Appendix A and Appendix B contain sample packing lists for individuals and your team as a whole. Some of the items we want to highlight are a personal mess kit (with cup, bowl, plate, and silverware), Wet Ones hand wipes (these are unavailable in Mexico), and sunscreen (this may be hard to find and will definitely be expensive in Mexico). Remind your team members to pack light and to bring a "Salvation Army-ready" wardrobe, rather than cherished clothing items. You should NOT bring aerosol cans (you need to have pump-squirt bug spray), fruit, meats, or any other items prohibited by airlines or immigration/customs laws.

Use your own good judgment for appropriate attire. Knee length shorts or long pants are acceptable. Christian women in Mexico are expected to dress conservatively which includes: no tight-fitting clothing and no spaghetti straps. Be selective in choosing T-shirts, making sure that words or pictures are not offensive. Keep in mind that your team will be representing "Americans" and "Christians" with their dress (and behavior).

## 2.5 Passports and Documents (including for minors)

Every traveler, including minors, will need a passport valid for 6 months beyond the date of departure. U.S. Citizens do not need a visa. Everyone will need to fill out a Mexican immigration form, now called a Tourist Card, which can now be done ahead of time online at <https://www.mexicotouristcard.com/> and printed out to bring along. This is the same as the

immigration form that has been handed out on the airplane, though airlines will stop this practice. The form requires the name of a hotel that you will use, the arrival flight information, and departure date. The Mexican official will keep the ENTRY part of the form and will stamp the EXIT part of the form which YOU MUST KEEP with your passport while in Mexico. Present the Exit Part along with your passport when you are checking in for your flight back home.

## **2.6 Luggage Transport and Getting Through Customs**

Remember that each team member will be expected to carry his/her own possessions at all times (airport, cities, and villages). Weight is important; keep it to a minimum. Also remember to save room in your luggage for the hammock you'll get in Mexico (if you don't bring one with you) although participants may donate their hammock to Acción for students or others.

Each team member should be given the responsibility of overseeing two pieces of major baggage: his/her own suitcase plus one suitcase for the team. This means personally identifying each piece as his/her own with appropriate destination labels as well as holding on to the baggage-retrieval tickets in Mérida/Cancun, and going through customs inspection at the airport. Each team member should shepherd the two items independently from the carousel through customs inspections. If he does get the "red light" and must submit to luggage inspection, there will only be two items to contend with allowing the rest of the team to move swiftly through the process and re-team once outside the Customs area. This process will also reduce the risk of an item being lost or misplaced in the shuffle and give the leader a more effective handle on equipment inventory before exiting the airport.

As many of you are already aware, getting your team and your supplies through the Mexican airport can, at times, be a real headache. We're sure that these few simple steps will make the process a whole lot simpler for you to get your team outside the airport and onto the buses as quickly as possible and with equipment intact.

## **2.7 Tips for Packing**

Pack daily changes of clothing (underwear, shirts, shorts, socks) in Ziploc bags (2 gallon size) for convenience in locating clothing and rearranging your bag. Soiled clothing may be separated from clean clothes by reusing bags.

Toiletries may also be placed in Ziplocs as well as towels and washcloths. Small travel sized packets or bottles of toiletries are recommended. Take old work clothes (in good condition) which may be left with the church for distribution to the needy. By leaving work clothes behind, your luggage will be lighter for the return trip and will make room for gifts for your family at home.

If your assignment is cement/concrete work, we suggest that your team visit the local thrift shop and purchase "throw-away" clothing from that aspect of your visit. Rugged shoes and tough, durable work-gloves are a must. Do not bring expensive jewelry.

## 2.8 Assigning Responsibilities within the Team

In preparing for your team's arrival in the Yucatan, it would be helpful for you to assign the following tasks to specific team members. Team leaders are encouraged to delegate and NOT to take on these responsibilities.

### **Kitchen Staff**

Early in your team planning, one of your team should be given the job of planning menus and writing grocery lists before you leave. This person should also take charge of preparing your kitchen in the village and shopping for food and kitchen supplies in Mexico. Cooking and kitchen duties during your trip can be shared among several team members, but one person should be in charge.

### **Money Handler**

One member of your team should be assigned the duty of handling the team's money, daily purchasing, and records-keeping after touchdown and throughout your workweek.

### **Passport Manager**

Unless an all-adult team decides otherwise, one person should be given the responsibility of securing the team's passports and Immigration/Customs documentation throughout the workweek and until the day of departure.

### **Photographer**

Although everyone is welcome to bring cameras, it is helpful to have a designated photographer that is responsible for ensuring photos are taken regularly throughout the trip.

### **Secretary**

Acción would like to track our efforts in the Yucatan. We would appreciate a summary of the work team's accomplishments during the week including: the name of the village, name of the host church, estimated size of village, number of kids attending VBS and a description of the work accomplished. Also, we always appreciate stories and personal experiences to publish in our newsletter.

### **Vacation Bible School (VBS) Coordinator**

You should assign one person in your team to be in charge of planning and coordinating VBS. You may want to assign additional team members with Spanish skills to help lead VBS activities. Planning for VBS must be completed in the U.S. prior to arriving in Mexico. All activities should be rehearsed with the team responsible for the activity. Appendix G lists ideas for VBS activities and supplies.

## 3. Money

### 3.1 Acción-Related Expenses

Acción requires prepayment of \$600 per person for expenses for the team's work project and trip, but not including expenses for airfare, food, recreation, sightseeing or hotels. The prepayment does include three categories of expenses. (1) Project expenses include construction materials, equipment, and Mexican masons as necessary for expertise. A normal project includes up to four days of work (along with VBS or alternative cultural interaction) with team members working up to a maximum of 7 hours per day average. (2) Trip expenses include ground transportation in Mexico at the beginning from airport to project and at the end to R&R and airport (mid-project travel is not included and is discouraged due to logistics); one hammock per person; expenses for Acción staff as they prep for and accompany your trip; and group gratuities for your team's primary Acción staffer and for housing host families in the village. (3) Each person also contributes \$30 (for teams of less than 15 people) or \$60 (15 or more) to Friends of Accion to support the broader overhead and ministry of Acción. Past experience has shown that, of all the money sent to Acción for a trip, roughly half goes to (1) project expenses and half to (2) trip expenses. Acción strives to give every team "their money's worth," but manages work team expenses on an annual average, while reporting actual expenses to Friends of Accion. After money is sent to Mexico, the funds are part of this planning and execution, so it is not practical to refund anything if a team member unfortunately has to cancel.

Some teams or team members prefer to bring their hammock from previous trips. If the leader clearly informs the Coordinator before payment, it is possible to deduct \$50 for the cost of each hammock that will not be provided. Otherwise, every team member will receive a hammock which they can either bring back to the U.S. or leave with the Acción staff to provide for Mayan villagers and students in need.

If the team desires a more extensive project than normal, this should be arranged and the cost (at least \$650 per team member) negotiated with the Coordinator. A more extensive project could include extra day(s) of work, mid-project travel, and/or travel outside the normal Yucatan peninsula to areas such as the state of Chiapas. Any more than up to four days of work, or work days longer than 7 hours, will require the extra supplement. If a team will not be doing a usual work project, please discuss the plan with the Coordinator.

One special case is a "family work trip" where children between the ages of 6 to 12 are accompanied by at least one parent or guardian. The cost per child will be \$300, though any over 12 will be the usual \$600. The expectations for the amount of work will be less, although the spirit of such a trip is to involve everyone in service.

Your prepayment must be mailed 10 weeks before you leave on your trip. If mailed later (ASAP), include one \$25 late fee for cost of a special wire transfer. Your organization should send a check made out to "Friends of Accion" to the following address and email the Treasurer ([rineidinger@davidson.edu](mailto:rineidinger@davidson.edu)) with exact amount enclosed.

**Friends of Accion  
c/o Covenant Presbyterian Church  
1000 E. Morehead St.  
Charlotte, NC 28204-2813**

### 3.2 Team Money to Bring

Most teams purchase several \$40 fans in Mexico for lodging areas and donate them to their hosts. (Unfortunately, experience has shown that Acción cannot maintain fans for multiple work teams.) Since you prepay your trip costs to Acción, the remaining expenses you will have to pay for in Mexico are your food (purchase/arrange as described in Food section), hotel, restaurant bills, or other R&R activity costs. One team member should handle “team” money and make single payments at restaurants and hotels. In the village and worksite, the only team cash expenses will be any food (e.g. tortillas), water, or beverages that might be purchased locally. Your team members may also want to have a small amount of money for personal bottled drinks, meals at R&R, or souvenirs. Small stores in villages will be unable to break large bills. It is important to have as many coins, 20 and 50 pesos bills as possible for purchases you make in the village.

Credit cards may be used for purchases at large stores in Merida or Cancun, but there may be a limit on the maximum amount per transaction charged to foreign credit cards. As a result, teams may have to divvy up their large supply purchases onto more than one credit card, or plan to exchange money at the airport, or in the U.S. to have pesos ready to pay for the team supply expenses. Individuals may take out cash (pesos) from ATMs in Mexico for their personal purchases. (ATMs usually offer the best exchange rates.) If you are planning to exchange U.S. dollars for Mexican pesos at a bank while in the Yucatan, be sure that the U.S. currency is in virtually pristine condition. Mexican banks sometimes refuse bills that are torn, dog-eared, marked, excessively dirty, or very old in appearance, no matter what denomination.

### 3.3 Tipping

Your group could bring money for gratuities for your team’s primary Acción staffer and for bus/van drivers, which are no longer included in the per-person prepayment. Group leaders may determine the amounts; a suggestion is around \$15 per person up to a maximum of two or three hundred dollars total for a week with Acción staffer(s), and \$30 per driver for each long day with van/bus (typically one on each end of trip). U.S. dollar or peso tips are fine. With clear arrangement at least one month before the trip, you may prepay for Acción staff tips and some village food expenses through Friends of Accion.

Tips for local housing hosts and salary for master mason(s) are covered by the per-person prepayment. Groups that want to further tip locals should ask your primary Acción staffer about who may be appropriate to receive and give tips and how much is recommended.

General tipping is common in Mexico, though taxis are tipped less than in the U.S. People in service jobs get paid very little in Mexico and tips provide an important source of income. Here are some suggestions:

- Wait staff in a restaurant (15% of the bill amount). NOTE: be careful to check if the gratuity (propina) has already been added to your bill, especially for large teams.
- 50 – 100 pesos (or \$2 to \$5 dollars) for taxi drivers (optional).
- 50 – 100 pesos (or \$2 to \$5 dollars) for hotel bellhops and hotel maids per day.
- 20 pesos for people who bag groceries at the supermarket.
- 20 pesos for the man with the red rag who “helps” you park your car (Acción will handle group vans) and watches it while you’re away; given when exiting your parking spot.

## 4. Schedule and Transportation

As the Work Team Leader, it is your responsibility to schedule certain aspects of your trip and to communicate with Acción. The shared Work Team Information Document will serve as the repository for your schedule information and will help keep everyone on the same page. Make sure this information is accurate.

### 4.1 Typical Itinerary

Table 1 shows a typical 8-day itinerary. A 7-day trip usually combines Day 1 and 2 without work. Day 7 can be eliminated or exchanged for another work day. The exception to the "rule" would be the occasional team that books a 9 to 14 day project. We can accommodate all of these with cost of extra days negotiated with the Coordinator. The length of stay is one variable that is taken into consideration when pairing teams with projects.

Ideally, arriving in Mexico before noon and departing after 10 a.m. makes for a decent travel itinerary. Most teams, however, are at the mercy of servicing airlines, cheap fares, and available seats. As with any air travel in the world, there will be lousy arrival and departure schedules; we can accommodate them.

The best day of the week to begin a mission trip is entirely up to the team. It makes little difference to Acción. Traditionally, most teams prefer to have a Sunday to spend in worship with the locals and will plan their project dates with that in mind.

If a Sunday falls within a team's work week, it is expected that your team will share in the worship service(s) with the host church. Occasionally it is necessary for the team to work on a Sunday. This is acceptable and the locals will understand. Typically there will be two services: morning and evening. Team members usually find it possible to attend one or the other.

**Table 1. Sample Itinerary**

Day 1	Arrive in Mexico. Travel from airport to night's lodging. A small group from the team goes shopping for groceries.
Day 2	Early travel to village work site. Set up camp and begin work.
Day 3	Work in the morning and do Vacation Bible School in the afternoon.
Day 4	Work in the morning and do Vacation Bible School in the afternoon.
Day 5	Work in the morning and do Vacation Bible School in the afternoon.
Day 6	Clean-up, pack. Travel from village to R&R location (beach or archeological site).
Day 7	Free R&R day. Transportation to/from restaurant in evening.
Day 8	Travel from hotel to airport for departure to states.

**Table 2. Sample Work Day Schedule**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
5:15 am	Cooks wake up and fix breakfast
5:45 am	Everyone else, rise and shine!
6:15 am	Eat breakfast, prepare water coolers and personal water supplies. Load bus.
6:45 am	Leave for work site.
7:00 am	Arrive at work site, get organized, review work safety rules and get started!
9:00 am	Break
9:15 am	Continue working
12:30 pm	Cleanup construction site and all materials and equipment
1:00 pm	Lunch
2:00 pm	Showers and prep for Vacation Bible School, personal devotion time
5:00 pm	Begin VBS
6:45 pm	Finish VBS
7:00 pm	Dinner
8:30 pm	Team meetings
10:30 pm	Lights out!

## 4.2 Making Travel Arrangements

You as the Work Team Leader are responsible for making airline and hotel reservations for your team. When booking your flights, be sure to ask about the airline's policy regarding signed parental permission for minors traveling with your team. These airline requirements may differ from company to company. If your flight itinerary involves more than one carrier, be certain of the policies of each.

We always prefer that teams use Mérida as their port-of-entry rather than Cancun. It's simply closer to Acción's seat of operations and many of the work sites. However, Cancun remains a viable option for less expensive airfare.

Tell the Coordinator if you know for sure which airport you plan to use, so that Acción staff will take that into consideration when choosing a work assignment.

It is quite uncommon for a team to be "split" between two different flights. Occasionally a member(s) will arrive or depart a day or more off from the rest of the team. These sorts of situations make things a bit complicated and difficult at times, but we can accommodate, although separate airport transport costs will usually be the responsibility of the people needing the exception. It does involve very carefully orchestrated communications and pre-planning on everyone's part.

### **4.3 Adjusting Travel Plans**

Once a team leader has given us his or her choice of dates and there are no conflicts with other teams, those dates are put on the calendar and reserved for that team. They are written in stone, so-to-speak. If for any reason, a leader must alter those dates, even by one day, he is asked to contact the coordinator (BEFORE) he changes his bookings. This is extremely important so that we don't run the risk of overlapping two teams' arrival or departure dates.

### **4.4 What to Expect When You Arrive**

Mexican Customs (*Aduana*) agents will ask "family groups" to go through customs together. Each family group will press a button and a green or red light will appear. Red lights result in random luggage searches. Of course, they may also decide to search your luggage for any reason.

If the team arrives in Mérida, Acción staff will meet them inside (just after Customs) and take the team to an awaiting bus. If the team arrives in Cancun, it must go through Customs and then exit the building (as one team) where someone from Acción will meet them. (We can no longer meet a team inside the building.) Cancun airport regulations restrict non-approved vehicles from picking up groups of tourists from the airport. As a result, Acción must hire approved coaches to pick up teams from the Cancun airport. These approved coaches are more expensive than other bus lines or Acción-owned vehicles. Therefore, a team may be transported by the approved coach from the airport to a location in Cancun, then transfer to Acción-owned buses or vans for the remainder of their travels.

There is really no way to contact the person who is supposed to meet you at the airport in Cancun if he is not immediately there to greet the team. It is important that the team stay together and wait outside the Customs building until someone from Acción arrives. We haven't forgotten (or lost) a team yet. Oscar's cell phone number is provided in Section 11.1 in case you have trouble meeting up with your staffer.

Team transportation throughout the week will be in one of Acción's smaller buses or in a commercial (tourist) bus hired for this purpose. Travel times depend, of course, on distances involved. To get to banks and supermarkets in the cities of Cancun and Mérida is quite easy. From these cities to the assigned work site may take less than an hour or up to 3+ hours in additional travel. It takes approximately 4 hours to drive between Mérida and Cancun.

If your team is scheduled to enter the Yucatan by way of Cancun and your village work site is deep within the state of Yucatan or Campeche, you should plan on an overnight stay in



either Valladolid or Merida before actual arrival at your village. If this applies to your particular assignment, contact the Coordinator for information concerning room rates and reservations.

## **4.5 Transportation in Mexico**

The unavoidable overlap of multiple teams in the Acción mission field at the same time during the summer months causes a real crunch of the availability of our vehicles for major team use. Please note that your project transportation fees cover the following responsibilities accepted by Acción:

- Pickup of your team at the airport upon your arrival
- Initial transportation of your team to its work site and/or project housing area
- One support vehicle (small car or truck) at the work site during the week for daily needs. This will be provided by Acción or by the local church.
- Final transportation from your work site at the project's end back to Mérida or Cancun (this will include the team's recreational trip as mentioned below).
- One recreational trip to/from an archeological site, or the beach or to a resort area
- Transportation back to the airport for your flight home

If your team will require additional transportation during its stay, please discuss these special arrangements with the Coordinator prior to completing your project itinerary.

## 5. Food

In some villages, Acción can arrange for locals to safely prepare meals for most of the work team dinners at \$15 per person per meal. Coordinate this possibility with Oscar or the Work Team Coordinator. Otherwise, your team will cook your own food while in the village and breakfast and lunch are always by the team. The Acción staffer who meets you at the airport will take you to buy food and kitchen supplies when you arrive. During your R&R you may prepare some of your own meals and eat out for others.

### 5.1 Where to Buy Food

Cancun and Mérida have a nice array of supermarkets. Many are Walmart-style and provide just about all the foods and supplies that a team will need for its time in the Yucatan. Costco and Sam's Club are available in Cancun and can also serve as a "restaurant" for the team to eat a meal.

Food and supply shopping is done the day of arrival or early the following morning; depending on time of arrival. The team should attempt to purchase everything you will need at the village during the week, but that is not always possible. Daily runs from the village can be made for purified water, ice, baked goods and additional food supplies when necessary. Leaders are instructed to budget additional funds to cover these daily needs in the village. We try to provide some sort of vehicle transportation to remain with the team for this purpose.

Purified water is readily available throughout the Yucatan and provided by several large commercial bottling plants. Purified ice is also easy to find. Teams purchase their water in 5 gallon bottles for drinking and cooking.

### 5.2 What to Buy

Appendix C and Appendix D provide a sample menu and a shopping list of grocery items that every team will probably purchase, although the specific meal ingredients you will buy depend on your menu. You need to plan a menu for every work day of your itinerary and estimate the quantities of food (and costs) that you will need to purchase. Because you will be buying food at a supermarket or Costco/warehouse supply store, you can count on finding most of the same types of food as you would at home. Some items, like spaghetti sauce, canned chicken, celery, and "Wet-Ones", may not be available and the meal planner must be flexible to adapt menus in the store. Some non-food, canned or boxed items may be brought from home, although Customs has been known to confiscate any meat, including canned meat. Prices for most packaged foods are about the same in Mexico as the U.S.; fresh produce and meats are less expensive in Mexico. Milk is available in shelf-ready unrefrigerated cartons (Parmalat), or powdered. Some teams decide to have individuals bring their sealed personal snacks and breakfast food.

### 5.3 Food Preparation and Clean Up

Your team will have a communal kitchen in your village where you prepare and eat all of your meals. Meal time should be announced in advance and all team members are expected to eat together.

A few people should also be assigned to snack preparation for the day; they are responsible for having water, flavored beverage, cookies, crackers, and fruit on hand and easily accessible prior to mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks. The snack area should be set apart from the kitchen so that workers are not tracking through the food preparation area. This is important for food safety!

It is recommended that no more than 4-5 team members be assigned to cooking duties at one time, and that one person oversees all food preparation to ensure continuity and sanitation. Food preparation should be completed by the same team throughout a given day. This team should also be responsible for putting away the food items before the sanitation crew takes over. Kitchen crew duties include:

- Cooking/preparing all meals for the day
- Washing, drying, and putting away cooking equipment
- Replenishing the community bleach dip after each meal
- Sweeping and mopping as necessary
- Kitchen trash collection and removal
- Cleaning bathroom facilities at the kitchen area daily (including toilet trash removal, wiping surfaces with Lysol or other disinfectant, and replenishing toilet paper supplies)

## 5.4 Sanitary Considerations

It is important that every member of your team understand sanitary food preparation techniques and follow these rules:

- Wipe all surfaces with Lysol, Clorox or other disinfectant before and after preparing any food.
- Be vigilant to discourage ants, flies, roaches, etc. by never leaving food out. Use fly strips, and roach/ant traps as necessary. Pay attention to drink spigots (like those on igloo-style coolers) that may attract flies.
- Use only purified water for all cooking applications.
- Disinfect your personal mess kits and team cooking utensils before and after use. (Use the bleach-water dip described below.)
- Do not drink soda out of cans. Instead, choose bottles that you open yourself (wipe the lid with an antibacterial wipe if it's questionable).
- Place all trash in large plastic bags with secure closures, out of reach of animals, if possible.

The following prep and clean-up method has been found to work well for teams:

1. Designate an area for dish dipping/washing in or near your kitchen. (This should be easily accessible enough to move everyone in the team through in a line.)

2. Before preparing a meal, mix up your bleach/water solution (1/4 cup of bleach per gallon of water).
3. Dip all cooking utensils you will use in the solution.
4. Prepare the meal.
5. Mix up 2 additional tubs of hot soapy water and rinse water.
6. Have team members wash their hands in the soap/rinse water and dip hands and eating utensils in the bleach water. (It's important to disinfect utensils before eating because flies may have landed on the items since your last meal.)
7. Eat
8. As soon as people finish eating they should start washing their utensils in the soapy/rinse water with a final dip in the bleach water. (You may need to replace the soapy/rinse/bleach water periodically if you have a large team.)
9. Wash the pots/pans/utensils used in cooking.

## **5.5 Trash Disposal**

When planning your trip and meals, please try to minimize disposable items and trash accumulation. We've found that using mess kits rather than disposable dinnerware drastically reduces the amount of trash generated during your trip.

All trash must be placed in large plastic bags with secure closures, out of reach of village animals. Remove bags daily according to instructions from villagers. Ascertain if food scraps may be used to feed "barnyard" animals (e.g., chickens and pigs) and handle accordingly.

## **5.6 Eating Out**

"Safe" foods are those prepared in the team kitchen, purchased in supermarkets, or available (factory-sealed) in most tourist areas or served at major tourist restaurants. Team members should never eat foods from street vendors, regardless of their faith in their own constitutions. Foods served to the team at local church gatherings or fiestas are generally regarded as safe for Americans; provided that Acción staff has overseen the preparation.

It is not safe to eat in all restaurants. Restaurants in major hotels or in heavily-trafficked tourist areas such as high-end streets, parks, squares (zocalos) are the best bet. Let common sense prevail. If you're not sure that the water in your glass or the ice in your drink is purified, stay away from it. It's simply not worth ruining a week of wonderful experiences with a moment of carelessness.

## **5.7 Tips for the Chef**

- Locally made tortillas are an excellent bread alternative both for sandwiches and dinner. A day's supply (2 kilos) costs less than one loaf of bread.
- Jello should be kept on hand at all times to sooth upset stomachs

- Hot water takes time to boil in large quantities, so plan ahead for coffee and cleanup
- In preparing sandwiches for lunch, always prepare extra for the local workers
- Soft drinks are readily available. Use soda straws!
- Powdered milk is fine on cereal and in coffee.
- Use a little powdered milk in the grits for a smoother texture.
- Coffee singles are more like “home brew” and minimize the mess.
- Think of potential problems with humidity, heat and insects when choosing your snacks.
- Never eat lettuce or other leafy green vegetables while in Mexico. Only eat fruit which can be peeled. Green vegetables should also be avoided on the flight to/from Mexico.
- Always wash fresh eggs in Clorox dip before cracking into the bowl.

## 6. In the Village

While your team is working in the village, you will participate in the daily life of the village. This may include staying in homes that your hosts have vacated for you. Living in a village is an integral part of your Acción experience as you get to experience first-hand the daily life and hospitality of the Mayan people.

### 6.1 Lodging

Several possibilities exist for team lodging; local (village) church/church annexes, homes of congregants, a combination of these two, hotel or posada, or one of Acción's facilities for students (VIM or CEM).

Turning over one's home to a work team is a common and happily-done practice in the Yucatan. It's reflective of the culture of Mayan hospitality. They consider it a privilege to offer, and we should consider it an honor to accept when done so. The amenities will certainly be less than you are accustomed to, but please remind your team of the sacrifice your housing hosts have made and the pride they have in their home. Gratuities to the housing host(s) are included in your per person trip costs and will be paid to the host families/churches by Acción staffers. See Section 6.6 for more information on housing hosts.

Team housing in Mérida may be at the Student House (CEM). Teams may also stay at Mayan Children's Village (Villa Infantil Maya or VIM) in Quintana Roo. Generally, these are used for one night while in transit. For longer stays, there are plenty of showers, toilet facilities, and cooking accommodations. There is a nice little posada (small hotel) around the corner from the Student House that teams working in the Mérida area prefer to use for their entire stay. This is done through special arrangements with Oscar.

Acción will make hotel reservations if you prefer; call the Coordinator to request this. However, with access to today's internet, most leaders are now making their own reservations directly. If a staffer is remaining with the team throughout the week, and the team is being housed in a hotel or posada, you should include that staffer in its room reservations. Otherwise the staffer will hang his hammock where everyone else does.

### 6.2 Hammocks

Yucatecans sleep in hammocks. You will too! Although you and your hammock may have trouble adjusting to one another, you will grow to LOVE your hammock! The trick is to lie diagonally in your hammock such that your body is parallel to the floor (rather than curved like a banana.) Get an experienced work team member or local to show you. Hammocks are very comfortable and, in most cases, do not aggravate back problems.

It is proper hammock etiquette (and good hygiene) not to let your shoes touch the hammock (especially someone else's). It is also polite to fold up your hammock and hang it on the wall to keep it out of the way when you're not using it.

Most places you go will have hammock hooks mounted in the concrete walls; you may need to tie each end with rope to get your hammock at the right height. If you are in a thatched roof house, hammocks can be tied with rope to the support poles. (Get a local or Acción staffer to do this for you—the correct knot and technique can mean the difference between waking up from a good night’s sleep or a surprise fall.)

You should bring a sheet to wrap up in at night. You may want to spray your hammock, sheet, or yourself with insect repellent before sleeping.

### **6.3 Bathrooms**

Acción ministries will try to provide cold-water showers and American-style toilets (i.e. with toilet seats) on site. Some sites already have them from previous teams. Some of the newer churches have them. If your work site does not already have suitable shower and toilet facilities, Acción staff will construct them prior to your arrival. A few leaders must be reminded, however, that this will be a third-world experience, and that the team must anticipate accordingly.

In Mexico, most toilets do not have seats. Also you must place your used toilet paper in a wastebasket instead of flushing it. You will likely find that using a waste basket for toilet paper and the occasional absence of toilet seats is difficult to get used to.

### **6.4 Electricity**

Most of the Yucatan has electrical service; even to the most remote areas. It’s 110V and U.S. compatible. However, we urge teams to refrain from using electrical appliances (except at a hotel) as the cost of power is extremely high and it would be disrespectful to the host church or family to waste it.

### **6.5 Medical Care**

We recommend that you bring someone with first aid or medical training on your trip to treat and diagnose minor illness or injuries. Each team should have a first aid kit stocked with pain relievers, Pepto-Bismol, Imodium AD, band-aids, etc (see Appendix B). The main maladies people may experience are dehydration and food poisoning—both are preventable.

As good preventative practice, we recommend that all members of your work team have Hepatitis A and B vaccinations, as well as a current tetanus shot. Because the Hepatitis vaccinations are a series of shots, it’s important to give your team members plenty of advance notice. If your team will be working in rural areas of Quintana Roo or Campeche states, you may consider taking preventative malaria medication. For more travel health information or advisory updates, see the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) web site <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mexico>. Appendix F contains a list of vaccines currently recommended by the CDC for travel to Mexico.

There are many good, well-equipped hospitals, clinics and qualified doctors and throughout the Yucatan Peninsula. There have been past instances when team members have made good use of these services (usually for dehydration), and we

have received no complaints. Because medical care is much cheaper in Mexico than the U.S., it is often easier to pay in cash rather than make a claim to your insurance company.

## **6.6 Your Host Church**

Many of Acción's work team projects involve construction at churches. As your team works side-by-side with local church members, you will form a relationship with that church. Many teams have been kind enough to bring gifts of piano keyboards, communion sets, guitars, etc. to their church work sites. These gifts are certainly prized and welcomed. However, teams should first make sure that such gifts are not only needed, but not duplicated. In other words, a host church should not possess more than one communion set or keyboard; nor should any individual have more than one guitar, or other major gift. The need for these gift items is widespread. Check with the pastor for a recipient that will benefit the most. Appendix B contains gift ideas for your host church.

Additionally, small gifts are always appreciated by your housing host families and village people. Some items you have used during your stay may be given when you depart. Examples include: work gloves, mugs, cups, personal clothes, T-shirts, flip-flops, shoes and bath towels (see Appendix B for additional gift ideas).

Unless you are taking food back to the states, your extra food should be left in the hands of a few church elders to be distributed amongst the church members with the most need. You may also want to check to see whether food scraps from your kitchen throughout the week would be a welcome donation for animal fodder. Your Acción staffers can help you sort the food and inform you as to what types of foods would not be good to leave. The village people are not familiar with macaroni and cheese, box pancakes, granola bars, or Rice-a-Roni and would likely just throw them out. Your staffer can bring them to Acción student facilities CEM or VIM and they will be used there.

## **6.7 Recreation**

In addition to VBS, your team may want to interact with the village community through sports and games. Your athletic and recreational programs will not only give a great boost in gaining rapport with the children, but will also provide an excellent means of gaining the children's and teenagers' attention and interest in your total program. It is a great way to get to know the children and to let them gain a confidence in the team members.

Each team should have ample athletic equipment such as kick balls, volleyballs, basketballs, bats, wiffle balls, tennis balls (used are okay) and jump ropes. Be flexible but prepared. Most villages will have a centrally-located basketball court and baseball/soccer field for community use. The team should be prepared for traditional sports as well as children's games such as Follow the Leader, Duck-Duck-Goose, Hot Potato, Dodge Ball, London Bridge and Simon Says. As a result of a good recreational program, you will be able to make a profound impression on the lives of the villagers. Therefore, plan your recreation carefully and prayerfully. This sports/recreation equipment should be donated to the host church at the end of your project stay.



## 7. Work Projects

Your construction work will be a significant and meaningful part of your Acción experience. Your work team will provide valuable construction materials and labor to a needy church, family or community. Without your support and preparation, the work project would simply not get done, or take months/years to complete.

### 7.1 Typical Projects

Ninety-five percent (95%) of Acción's work teams deal with concrete construction; church roofs, social platforms, and floors as well as small homes for hurricane victims. Major construction is also ongoing at Villa Infantil Maya (VIM). Generally, a team will work in one location throughout its work week. Occasionally, due to its size and/or duration in the field, a team will have two work sites; however, this is not common.

Some projects may be better suited to different teams (large/small/family/youth/college). Acción never "creates" work. There is always something that needs to be done. We can accommodate large teams, small teams, teams made up of senior citizens, or high schoolers. Recently there has been an increase in activity by college teams and even small (independent) "family" teams; kids and all. We adjust the project to a given team's overall age, physical abilities (or limitations), size, and gender balance. The strenuousness of a project is always taken into consideration when projects and available teams are matched-up. There is rarely an unsuccessful pairing. If a project is too large for completion by one team, and occasionally this does happen, it will be completed either by the locals or more likely, by another team coming later.

### 7.2 Working with the Locals

Local participation (teamwork) is a predominant aspect of Acción projects. The locals and the Americans form a single work unit toward a common goal; physically and socially. The days of "Big Brother" mission work are gone and have been replaced by mutual cooperation and fellowship. The team is asked to discuss community participation with the Acción staffer or Oscar.

### 7.3 Construction Site Safety

Each person should dress in long pants, short sleeved shirt and work boots and bring his/her own water bottle, hat, bandana, sunscreen, sunglasses, and work gloves to the work site. Use the following guidelines for construction site safety:

- At all times protect your skin with a liberal application of sunscreen (minimum strength 15) followed by a liberal application of insect repellent.
- Broad brimmed hats, caps or bandanas are a must while in the sun.
- Clothing should be loose fitting and light colored.
- Jeans or other long pants are advisable while working with concrete. Medical "scrub" pants are a good light-weight alternative for long pants.

- Work breaks should be frequent (at least every hour). Water should be consumed copiously. Wet bandanas can be worn around the neck. Workers should seek shade during all breaks.
- Scorpions and tarantulas seek shade in the heat of the day. Be careful around stacks of building materials. Inspect or shake out shoes before wearing.
- Small towels may be folded and used as padding on shoulders when carrying heavy beams.
- Check ladders for safety before using.
- Remember that the locals are accustomed to construction methods different from your own and may take risks which would be dangerous for you. Do not give in to the temptation to take unsafe shortcuts.

## 8. Vacation Bible School (VBS)

Each team is expected to prepare and carry out a VBS program at their host church or village. There have been exceptions to this over the years, but they have been rare. Generally speaking, three (perhaps four) consecutive VBS sessions are carried out. There is no reason why this could not include Sundays. Most of our teams will be assigned one site for their VBS and that is usually at its host church or village. If a team is assigned more than one work site due to its unusually lengthy stay, they may have two separate programs (with the same lesson plans used twice).

### 8.1 How Many Kids to Expect

We jokingly tell leaders to expect 50 on the first day of VBS and 150 on the second. There is more truth in this than not. As word spreads through the village and the local school that the Americans are having VBS, the numbers grow accordingly. Over-preparing for VBS is essential. We always advise leaders to be flexible and expect the unexpected; not only with VBS, but throughout the work team experience.

Occasionally teams experience a low turn-out for their VBS program. There are any number of reasons why parents would not allow their kids to attend—just as in the United States. One outstanding reason that this might occur in the village setting is the Catholic tradition. Catholicism is still a powerful (and restrictive) force in the Yucatan, and leaders must be sensitive to this when dealing with the children. On the positive side, however, there seems to be a "trend" toward more and more flexibility among Catholic parents in allowing participation.

### 8.2 Pre-Trip Preparations

You should assign one person in your team to be in charge of planning and coordinating VBS. You may want to assign additional team members with Spanish skills to help lead VBS activities.

Planning for VBS must be completed in the U.S. prior to arriving in Mexico. All activities should be rehearsed with the team responsible for the activity. It is better to have too many supplies than too few, as extras may be donated to the church. Also, as much physical preparation of materials as possible should be completed before leaving the U.S. Sample VBS materials have been provided in Appendix G.

Pre-cut, glue and stamp as much as possible to make arts and crafts run smoothly. Preparations may include some games and toys (bubbles), Spanish songs for the kids, Bible stories, skits, puppets, mime, and a craft that is age appropriate. It would also be nice if you could include local Mexican church members in leading the VBS.

### 8.3 Language Barriers

Teams are asked to prepare non-verbal lessons. Preschool and kindergarten teachers are good at this and can be a great source of information when preparing. If it's done well, the language aspect of the VBS lesson is inconsequential. On the other hand, one of the important services that the Acción staffer provides is "translator". He is here not only to help overcome a language barrier, but also to introduce the team to the kids and their families,

and to whip up enthusiasm for the VBS presentation to come. Remember that pre-school age children in a Mayan village may not speak or understand Spanish or English. Try to use non-verbal communication.

## **8.4 Activities**

The variety of activities presented to the kids is limited only by the imagination of those who have prepared the VBS. Keeping it non-verbal is the only constant. It is also essential to provide some sort of craft that the child can take home and put on the wall.

Teams are instructed to bring everything needed for their VBS with them. Any materials and/or equipment left over should be donated to the host Sunday School after conferring with Oscar or Roger.

## **8.5 Gifts to Children**

Whenever the question of giving the kids gifts arises, the team leader must first ask for the Acción staff member's input and advice. This is also true when considering giving a gift to any individual. Gift-giving can, unfortunately, lead to negative results among the church of village community and this is why asking for advice before doing so is crucial.

## 9. R&R

Most teams take a couple days of “vacation” time after completing work in their village. Typically, the standard 8-day calendar span includes two nights at an R&R site. The team will “break camp” in the village during the morning of Day #6, visit one of the archeological sites, and then go on to its R&R destination until day-of-departure.

Typically, R&R is at a Mayan ruin tourist area or a beach along the “Mayan Riviera” (the costal corridor from Cancun to Tulum). You as the Work Team Leader are responsible for making reservations and providing food and accommodations for your team’s R&R period. (Don’t forget to include Acción staff if they will be going.)

Appendix E provides a list of Acción recommended hotels. These hotels were picked because of their location, price and willingness to accommodate large teams. Most of these hotels will provide a free room for Acción staff (when requested). Please don’t feel restricted to these choices, we welcome you to try out additional hotels. When choosing a location and hotel for your team’s R&R, please keep in mind this note from Oscar:

“When a team decides for a place to R&R we hope it is a safe place with enough parking for guests and for arrival/departure moves, also close to the beach. Sometimes, we find ourselves struggling getting a big bus in a small street because the hotel does not have enough space for arrival-departure moves. This is mostly what we want team leaders to consider.”

### 9.1 Individual Spending Money

Your work team members shouldn’t need much cash before this point in your trip because all food, lodging, and transportation will be provided by Acción or your team. However, everyone will probably want to have some money on hand during your R&R time (for shopping, etc.).

We suggest that individuals use ATM cards to get Mexican pesos; ATMs provide the best exchange rates and charge the lowest fees. Plus, it keeps you from having to carry a lot of cash with you for your whole trip. The tourist-friendly places you go for R&R should have an ATM. Travelers checks are not accepted at most stores and can be a hassle to exchange for cash.

You can pay at large grocery stores or chains like Walmart with credit or ATM cards, but everywhere else you’ll have to pay in cash. In resort areas, credit cards are often accepted.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Shopkeepers/vendors, especially at smaller stores, do NOT like to break large bills or give you much change. If you give someone a large bill, they may shrug their shoulders and say they don’t have change. In some situations, this is a bargaining tactic, but most of the time they are telling the truth and just don’t have the money. Small bills and coins are convenient for shopping; you should try to conserve your coins and break large bills while you are in the city.

### 9.2 R&R Safety

Just a reminder about safety as you relax during R&R. Your team may have let their guard down in the work site village, but in tourist areas you will be more likely targets for crime.

Take the same precautions that you would take in American tourist areas or cities. See Crime in section 10.1.

### **9.3 Staff arrangements for R&R**

Whether or not a staffer is to be included in the team's R&R depends upon whether he remains with the team or not. (Roger often drops a team off at the R&R site, then leaves for other duties. Oscar will have hired other drivers to get the team to the airport.) If the staffer remains, then he is to be included at the team's cost -- room and board. This is a matter that should be discussed between Oscar and the leader before R&R reservations are made.

When booking reservations for your R&R, please ask the hotel for a "Courtesy" double room for Acción personnel. This is a common practice in the Yucatan and most hotels and resorts will gladly provide a free room that includes "courtesy" food and drink; but you must request it. This is the only extra room that a team needs to reserve. If, however, the hotel or resort refuses to provide this "courtesy", then it will be necessary for the team to reserve the staff room at its own cost.

## 10. Culture

This section contains very generalized information regarding the Yucatecan people. As with any culture, stereotypes and generalizations can be harmful when used inappropriately.

The Mayan is by nature very friendly, but initially shy. They are "private" individuals deeply centered in their family and extended family. For Mexicans in general, family is the most important unit, and the source of one's identity. (In comparison, American culture is more individualistic.) Most people live their whole lives in the same close-knit community where they were born, although the younger generation may have to go to a larger city to find work. It is common for people to live near their extended family and for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to take an active role in raising children together.

Mayans have traditionally been discriminated against, similar to Native Americans in the U.S. Speaking Mayan and acknowledging one's Mayan heritage were once looked down upon and only recently started to become acceptable in popular culture.

We encourage you to learn about Mexican history and culture in the Yucatan and to discuss cross-cultural issues with your team members before coming to Yucatan. It is important to acknowledge and talk about the fact that you will be interacting with a different culture. Working with the Mayan people and getting to know their culture will add a great richness to your experience in Yucatan. You may want to provide each team member a copy of this "culture" section of the handbook early on. Everyone can read it, digest it, then discuss it in depth as a group close to the date of your departure.

### 10.1 Cultural Considerations

#### Family Ties

Family ties are strong. The father is the dominant personage. The eldest member of the family unit is usually the one who controls all the family actions. This may be the grandmother or another older person who lives with the family. The mother is the major or unifying force in the family, although she is typically subservient to the husband.

#### Discipline

Small children are not strongly disciplined or inhibited. The common view seems to be that they are too young to understand what should be done; therefore, it is not worthwhile to teach them until they grow up somewhat. (This is not the standard being advocated in the homes of Christians). Parents are strict with older youth, especially the girls. They are often heavily chaperoned when in mixed company. The girls are expected to maintain a reserve in public.

#### Boy-Girl Relationships

Teenage boys are relatively free to come and go. Their friendliness to American girls might be termed "forward", with no encouragement. The proper response by the American girl is to be more reserved. It would be culturally appropriate for American

boys to work with Mexican boys and American girls with Mexican girls. Mexican girls do not go places “alone”. American girls should behave similarly while in Mexico.

## **Education**

Most of the older adults in the villages have a maximum of three years of formal schooling and many are illiterate. The youth have had the opportunity of public schooling, beginning at the age of 7. No transportation is provided and the distance to a high school, or even middle school, is often prohibitive, hence the need for the Mayan Children’s Village (VIM). The people are uneducated, but not ignorant. They are intelligent and possess real wisdom and a keen understanding of human nature. They read people as some read books. Remember, these adults, though lacking in education, are truly adult in their actions, outlook, and ambitions. They have successfully reared families and are operating in an adult society with all the problems and concerns thereof. All their knowledge is that which they have learned and retained mentally.

## **Community Interactions**

The Mexicans are warm, friendly, and courteous. They are also suspicious of strangers and foreigners and are reserved in their response. The natural solution to overcome this shyness is to get to know the people in your village. Make sure that you show interest and respect to those in leadership roles within the local church and community. Visit with them, discuss your project with them, and let them know that you appreciate all of their efforts on your behalf. They are concerned about the attitude and influences you will have upon their village and their children. Thus, they will watch everything you do, and how you do it to determine your true motives for being with them.

## **Religion**

The Roman Catholic Church has been the dominant church in Mexico for 4 centuries. This does not mean that the people have an understanding of the Roman Catholic Church or its teachings. It does mean that there is an indication of an unseen force in their midst. This has led to an inborn feeling of a necessity to do good works to gain merit. To them, the awareness of the “saints” and the “Virgin” as forces for good and of help are a part of their heritage. To condemn either the saints, the Virgin, or the Roman Catholic Church is to stir up needless dissension, without aiding the Gospel message. Biblical knowledge is very slight and no Bible truth can be assumed as common knowledge.

## **Crime**

The crime rate in the Yucatan is considered low when compared to other parts of Mexico. In villages, crime is very rare, probably because most people know each other. In tourist areas, crime is comparable to tourist areas in the U.S. Generally, crime against Americans is more likely to be theft of personal property than any sort of physical endangerment. We ask teams to leave the jewelry and non-essential electronics at home.



The U.S. State Department maintains a travel advisory for countries and for separate states within Mexico at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/mexico-travel-advisory.html>. Crime, health, and other considerations go into assigning one of four levels: (4) Do not travel, (3) Reconsider travel, (2) Exercise increased caution, and (1) Exercise normal precaution. The Yucatan peninsula is perennially safer than many other parts of Mexico and one of the safer international destinations. In Sept. 2022, Yucatan state (where most teams work) was level (1) and Quintana Roo state (with Cancun resorts) was level (2). Level (2) is favorable for our mission teams, although caution is recommended.

## Gender Roles

Mexican men and women tend to have much more defined gender roles than Americans. Men do the hard physical labor and are the “heads” of their families. Women stay at home and take care of children and do housework. This does not mean that women never work outside the home, or that women are less valued in the society. On the contrary, most Mayans are very proud of the women in their family and respect them. This does mean that people in your village may find it strange that women in your team are doing construction. That’s okay!

## Time

Mexicans have a very different sense of time than Americans. There is rarely a sense of urgency about the clock, and people typically arrive later than the “posted” time an activity is supposed to start. Keep this in mind when you invite people to VBS or other activities, or when you are invited to church/community events. You may find this frustrating, but understand, if someone is late it is not a personal insult to you.

## Language

Many families speak Mayan in the household, so many children in the village learn Mayan as their first language. Only when they start attending school do the children begin to learn Spanish. In a small Mayan village, young children and elderly people may not speak any Spanish.

A note about the slang “gringo”: Technically, this word is an insult; however, it is widely used as a nickname for Americans – with no negative connotation. Accordingly, you shouldn’t be offended if someone calls you a Gringo. However, you should also recognize that when you use the term Gringo to describe yourself or someone else in your group, Mexicans may be surprised by your use of this insult.

Also note that some Mexicans will be confused if you refer to yourselves as Americans. They consider the term “Americanos” to mean anyone from North or South America. In their minds you are Estadounidenses or Norteamericanos.

## 10.2 Standards of Behavior for Team Members

The following are some practical suggestions as you become a representative of your Lord and your country. Although you are enthusiastic and personally convinced of the value of

your program of activities, your ideas will be accepted only to the degree in which you are accepted by a foreign people.

Many leaders use behavioral contracts of one sort or another with their youth; especially high schoolers. Oscar is in favor of this.

### **Understand**

Try first of all to understand new customs, habits and ways of thinking. There are real reasons behind them. Some of them depend on climate, some on religion, some on very old traditions. Many are sensible. For some, the reasons are obvious. For others, the reasons cannot be seen, though there most certainly are some. For example, in Latin areas, people do not pick their teeth without cupping the free hand over the mouth. Who is to say that this is not a better custom than the way most of us use toothpicks?

### **Respect**

Try to respect these customs and habits of thought even when you can't understand them and even when they seem unpleasant, effeminate, or crazy. They seem as natural to the people who have them as yours to do you. Foreign people cannot seem anymore different to you than you do to them.

### **Suppress your Disapproval**

When you cannot respect a foreign custom, then suppress your disapproval. Some of these customs have existed for centuries. No one likes to have a stranger correct his virtues or what he and his ancestors have always held as virtues. When you can respect a foreign custom, show it. You can win many friends in this simple way.

### **Adopt their Manners and Suppress your Own Peculiarities**

When your own customs are contrary to the customs of the land, try to suppress them as much as possible. Remember that some acts which are right in America, may hurt feelings or even be insulting abroad. Don't follow American customs before foreigners when they contradict the foreigners' rules. Avoid clothing of camouflage design or those that bear patriotic symbolism. After you understand the new customs as manners, try to fit in by adopting them when you feel comfortable.

### **Be Friendly**

After all, the only way to make other people like you is for you to like them. You may not like them right away perhaps, because it is rare that we are immediately fond of strangers. But if you act like you like them from the start, then you will find things to like about people everywhere. Your friendliness, if it is genuine, will usually bring out friendliness in them.

### **Understand your Own Cultural Patterns**

Analyze and understand your own cultural patterns in the U.S. Foreign people can ask penetrating questions. Be prepared to discuss the factors in our high rate of

divorce or the unfair treatment of some minorities. Explain situations as they exist, do not attempt to rationalize or make excuses. Simply point out that we do have some problems and are doing our best to resolve them.

### **Don't Make too Many Comparisons**

Try not to make too many comparisons between this country and your country, particularly when the differences are extreme. A constant parading of the contrasts between two cultures leads to resentments by a foreign people. You are likely to be tagged a braggart if you aren't careful.

### **Take People as They Come**

Like them for who they are, not for the way they happen to measure up to your own standards or what you expected of them. Of all the millions of men and women in this world, each one is different from every other one. You are different, too. Each stranger you meet will surprise you, interest you, thrill you or puzzle you. Each is a challenge for you to show the best that God has put in you.

### **Share your Convictions**

Remember that although you are in a foreign land, you will be respected for your own convictions. These adjustments to foreign mannerisms are not expected to alter your deep appreciation for your democratic ideologies. Many foreigners are hungry for a share of your basic convictions, so share them. This cross-fertilization of ideas will give rise to new ideas in the minds of those people. Most importantly, become aware of the needs of the people and see how directly the Gospel relates to the fulfillment of those needs. Keep your heart and mind open and allow the Holy Spirit to perform a work in you that will be lasting, motivating, and life changing.

### **Accept their Hospitality**

Be very gracious as you visit the people. They will be extremely hospitable toward you. Accept their acts of hospitality. Share their fruit, etc. when it is offered.

## **10.3 Cultural Courtesies**

### **Rules in the Home**

- Electricity bills are very high. Turn off all fans, lights, etc. when not in use. Do not bring blow dryers, curling irons or anything electrical. You may also want to leave some money for electricity.
- Keep your things packed away neatly. Put your hammock away when you wake up. Try to keep your things out of the way.
- When using the bathroom, toilet paper goes in the trash can. Throwing it into the toilet can easily cause it to clog.
- Privacy is universal. Please don't enter places where you are not invited.

- You will have to do your laundry, if needed, unless someone offers to do it for you. Don't ask to have it done. Wait until someone offers.
- We suggest that the team leader and the staffer (together) handle the gratuities set aside for those families who have given over their homes to team members and/or to the host church where hammocks have been hung. In this category, however, the gratuities should be divided equally among the hosts.

## **Eating Habits**

IF you are invited to eat with a local family, the following guidelines may be helpful. However, most Mexicans are familiar with our finicky American stomachs and will not be offended if you decline politely to eat something.

- Lunch is the heaviest meal. Get used to it.
- Don't ask for seconds. What they serve to you is what you get. Remember that they may be giving up some of their finest food for you.
- On the other hand, try to eat everything served to you. People have taken a lot of time to cook for you.

## **Church and Village Rules**

- If women sit on one side of the church and men on the other, your team will do likewise.
- There is great reverence for the Bible in Mexico. Do not put it on the floor; toss it around, prop your elbow on it, etc. If a page rips, tape it back together.
- Make sure you have money for the offering. Coins are more commonly given than cash (and the jingling noise lets people know you've given money!)
- Men must wear shirts at all times.
- We recommend that women wear one piece, conservative bathing suits.
- Modest shorts may be worn by men and women during work activities and recreation. Shorts should not be worn inside the church, for services, or for other religious activities.
- Avoid physical contact with someone from the opposite sex. Shake hands or participate in any game where there is contact, but do not hug, give back rubs, etc. This includes your team members as well.
- Do not spend time alone with a Mexican national of the opposite sex.
- Drinking alcohol during your stay in the village is prohibited. We also strongly suggest that there be no drinking at any other time either (but this is up to the team leaders).
- You will not smoke or take any illegal drugs during any part of the mission trip. You should not even ask or speak about drugs because this suggests that you are interested in buying them, which could cause grave problems.
- There should not be any dancing while in the villages.

### **Conversation Tips**

- Avoid getting into political or religious arguments. Ask questions, listen, and share, but don't argue.
- Do not make special arrangements to go on trips, preach, visit, etc. without clearing it with your leader first.
- There are many, many needs in Mexico. Do not make any commitments until you discuss it with your leader or Oscar.
- You may become aware of conflict within or between churches that at times do arrive (just as they do in the U.S.). If this is the case, then do not get involved.
- Don't be shy; instead smile and ask questions. Use the Spanish you know and ask them to help you learn more.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Don't slam car doors. This is considered an insult in Mexico
- In Mexico, waving your hand downwards (or opening and closing your hand) means "come here" not "hello". This can be confusing when you waive "hello" to little kids and they think you are asking them to come to you.

## 11. Communication and Emergencies

### 11.1 Communication While in Mexico

Personal smartphones have become the most common way to communicate while you are in cities or resort areas in Mexico. Note that while you are in the village it is unlikely that you will be able to communicate in any fashion. It will be on the vacation days that you will have opportunities to access phones or the Internet. Connecting to wifi will allow communication through apps that use the internet. For phone, text, and/or data over cellular lines check with your cellular service company for a plan with international access. International roaming charges can be significant.

If you are carrying a U.S. cell phone in Mexico and you want to place a call, dial the “+” (press and hold zero for a moment on phone’s dial pad and “+” will appear), then the country code (for Mexico this is “52” and for the US and Canada this is “1”), then the area code and number.

#### **Emergency Contact:**

Oscar’s cell number from a U.S. cell phone is +52 9991276549 (from the U.S. or Mexico). From a U.S. land line, Oscar’s number is 011 52 9991276549.

Your Acción staffer will have a cell phone to contact Oscar or anyone needed in Mexico, whenever cell service is available. The staffer will usually have a vehicle that can help with transport or accessing service in case of an emergency.

### 11.2 Mail

Regular mail is 100% inadvisable. It is unlikely that any letters you mail during your trip would arrive in the U.S. before your trip is over; if they arrive at all. Similarly, if people from home try to mail you anything, it probably will not arrive in time for you to receive it in Mexico. If necessary, the best way to send packages or letters is via FedEx. FedEx is the ONLY carrier that guarantees delivery in the Yucatan. Use the following address:

Recipient’s Name  
c/o Oscar Dorantes  
Acción Ministries  
Calle 66 #551-C (Entre 67 y 69)  
Mèrida, 97000  
Yucatàn, MEXICO  
(Shipment information on the FedEx air bill should read: "Documents").

### 11.3 Travel Insurance

Group Travel Insurance is very highly recommended for each member of your team. This will cover medical expenses from accident or illness, emergency evacuation, and more. The cost is usually per person and can be arranged by the trip leader (or their assistant) and the per person cost included up-front in the trip fees. There are many companies that have special packages and service for mission trips. For example, one of our churches uses Faith Ventures, part of Brotherhood Mutual; see <https://www.faithventures.com/compare-plans/>.

## 11.4 Work Team Participant Form

Friends of Accion requires that each work team participant complete the form on the next page to be forwarded to the Coordinator before the trip departure. This asks for basic contact information, emergency contact, and a risk release. While Acción will strive to help in any emergency, individual participants accept personal responsibility for the risks involved. The contact information will never be shared outside of Acción and Friends of Accion, Inc., and the phone number would only be used in case of an issue or emergency, never for solicitation. The email or address may be used two to four times per year to share newsletter updates on the work of Acción, unless the participant marks “No mailings” on the form.

Team Leaders can ask for an e-copy of this form in format .docx, .pdf (for printing), or fillable .pdf. The Team Leader should collect all signed copies and send them to the Coordinator. An e-copy, phone photo, or scanned copy of each signed form is ideal, as these can be forwarded by email.

## **Acción / Friends of Accion, Inc.**

### **Work Team Participant Information**

The staff of Acción in Mexico and U.S. volunteers with Friends of Accion, Inc., are delighted that you will be partnering with us and your Mexican neighbors in a work team project. Not only will you make a positive impact on the lives of Mayans in the Yucatan Peninsula, but you will also be impacted and hopefully come home with a renewed perspective on life and faith. We hope that you will continue partnering with us, including in our ongoing mission to provide access to education for young Mayan men and women through residential facilities. While the Yucatan Peninsula is a relatively safe part of Mexico and the world, caution advises that you complete the following.

**Sponsoring church or organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dates of Travel:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Emergency Contact (Parent/Guardian if under 18)**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Relationship:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Participant Risk Acknowledgement and Release Agreement**

I acknowledge that participation in the above trip involves risk to the Participant and may result in various types of injury including, but not limited to the following: sickness, bodily injury, death, emotional injury, personal injury, property damage and financial damage. In consideration for the opportunity to participate in the above trip, the Participant acknowledges and accepts the risks of any type of injury associated with participation in the trip. The Participant accepts personal financial responsibility for any injury related to the trip, including but not limited to any injury related to a mandate from any source whatsoever that the Participant quarantine in Mexico for any length of time during or after the trip. Further, the Participant promises to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless Acción, Friends of Accion, Inc., and their coordinators, agents, employees, volunteers, or any other representatives (collectively included hereinafter in the term "Accion") for any injury arising directly or indirectly out of the above trip, whether such injury arises out of the negligence of the Accion or otherwise. If a dispute over this agreement or any claim for damages arises, the Participant agrees to resolve the matter through a mutually acceptable alternative dispute resolution process. If the Participant and the Accion cannot agree upon such a process, the dispute will be submitted to a three-member arbitration panel of the American Arbitration Association for final resolution.

Participant Signature (or Parent/Guardian Signature for Participants under age of 18):

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix A – Individual Packing List

Each individual is responsible for bringing the following equipment:

### Clothing

- Work boots (you will get concrete on these)
- Shower shoes (flip flops, etc.)
- Sandals/casual shoes
- Sneakers
- Around town/R&R: shorts/skirts, pants, shirts, light jacket/sweater, socks, under garments, bathing suit (modest), 1 "nice" outfit for church (long pants for men, skirt or dress for ladies—nothing too fancy), rain jacket or umbrella
- Work clothes (you will get concrete on these): long pants or medical scrub pants, short sleeve/sleeveless shirts (no T-shirts with offensive words or pictures), hat, sunglasses, work gloves, bandana

### Personal Care

- Medicine: whatever you typically use
- Personal prescription medications (copies of all prescriptions, including the generic names for medications, and a note from the prescribing physician on letterhead stationery for controlled substances and injectable medications should be carried)
- Toiletries: soap, shampoo, toothbrush & toothpaste, deodorant, etc.
- Other: Travel packs of Kleenex/tissues (for bathroom stops where TP isn't available), antibacterial gel (Purel) or hand wipes (Wet Ones), Sunscreen, Bug spray (with DEET), small amount of laundry detergent

### Other

- Wallet/purse (including your passport and credit/ATM card)
- Bible
- Flat bed sheet (for your hammock) and/or (winter) blanket or fleece sleeping bag liner, optional small travel pillow
- Towel & washcloth
- Mess kit
- Flashlight
- Alarm clock or watch
- Small "day" bag or backpack (to carry your stuff to/from the work site)
- Spanish-English dictionary

- Notebook & pen
- Camera (or phone with camera and charger)
- Large Ziploc bags (useful for packing soiled clothing)
- Personal snacks and breakfast food, if team decides to go this way.

## Appendix B – Team Packing List

Each team is responsible for bringing the equipment listed below. Team equipment should be distributed among team members for transport (see Section 2.6).

### Kitchen Supplies

- Optional cooking utensils to supplement Appendix H provided by Acción (Remember which is which!)
- Fly strips and ant/roach traps
- Permanent markers
- Masking tape
- Rubber gloves
- Disinfectant wipes
- Antibacterial hand wipes
- Straws

### First Aid Kit

- Antimalarial medications, if applicable
- Antidiarrheal medication (e.g., Pepto-bismol and Imodium AD)
- Antibiotic for self-treatment of moderate to severe diarrhea
- Antihistamine (e.g. Benadryl)
- Decongestant, alone or in combination with antihistamine
- Acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, or other medication for pain or fever
- Mild laxative
- Cough suppressant/expectorant
- Throat lozenges
- Antacid
- Antifungal and antibacterial ointments or creams
- 1% hydrocortisone cream
- Epinephrine auto-injector (e.g., EpiPen), especially if a team member has a history of severe allergic reactions. Also available in smaller-dose package for children.
- Insect repellent containing DEET (up to 50%)
- Sunscreen (preferably SPF 15 or greater)
- Aloe gel for sunburns
- Digital thermometer

- Oral rehydration solution packets
- Basic first-aid items (adhesive bandages, gauze, ace wrap, antiseptic, tweezers, scissors, cotton-tipped applicators)
- Antibiotic ointment (Neosporin)
- Antibacterial hand wipes or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Moleskin for blisters
- Lubricating eye drops (e.g., Natural Tears)
- First Aid Quick Reference card

This information was obtained from the CDC web site ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

### **Vacation Bible School Supplies – See Appendix G**

- Supplies for 1 art project per day for ~100 children
- Name tags for your team members
- Props or other supplies for skits, or other VBS activities
- Musical instruments and song charts (if you'll be using them)

### **Gift Ideas for the Host Church**

- pencil sharpeners (school “crank” kind)
- Spanish language Bibles and tracts from the American Bible Society
- wooden cross necklaces
- full size electric keyboard
- Sunday school supplies (glue, scissors, spiral notebooks, and crayons)
- 2-tray aluminum Communion service with cups (used)

### **Gift Ideas for the Host Families**

- A picture book of your state or city and home church (include bulletins, etc.)
- Plastic containers with lids
- Kitchen towels, hot pads
- School boxes with paper, pencils, crayons and paint
- Matchbox cars, etc.
- Baseball, football, race car trading cards
- Children's summer clothing
- Perfume, cosmetic samples
- Scarves, handkerchiefs

- Hair ornaments, bows, barrettes
- Men's belts (small), men's clothing in small and medium sizes
- Left-over insect repellent
- Photos of your family, pets, church and community
- A gift from your community to the host community
- A special souvenir of remembrance presented to the leader of the civil authority within your host community. This might be a framed copy of your state seal or county or town, the state bird, or a commemorative copy of a governmental logo.

## Appendix C – Example Menu

Day	Itinerary	Breakfast	Snack	Lunch	Dinner
Day 1	Travel to Mexico, buy groceries	Team members on their own	Nab crackers, dried fruit	Team members on their own	Team members on their own
Day 2	Travel to village	At hotel	Nab crackers, fruit	On the road, at a travel stop	Canned ravioli, vegetable, cookies
Day 3	In village (doing construction & VBS)	Pop-tarts, cereal, oatmeal, fruit, coffee, tea	Crackers, cookies, peanuts, Kool-Aid, dried fruit	PB&J sandwiches, fruit, soda, chips	chicken casserole with stuffing, green beans, cookies
Day 4	In village (doing construction & VBS)	Pop-tarts, cereal, oatmeal, fruit, coffee, tea	Crackers, cookies, peanuts, Kool-Aid, dried fruit	PB&J sandwiches, pasta salad, fruit, soda, chips	Spaghetti, vegetable, applesauce, cookies
Day 5	In village (doing construction & VBS)	Pop-tarts, cereal, oatmeal, fruit, coffee, tea	Crackers, cookies, peanuts, Kool-Aid, dried fruit	PB&J sandwiches, Macaroni and cheese, fruit, soda, chips	Chili, rice, vegetable, cookies
Day 6	Travel from village to R&R location	Pop-tarts, cereal, oatmeal, fruit, coffee, tea	Nab crackers, dried fruit	PB&J sandwiches, fruit, soda, chips	Team members on their own
Day 7	R&R	At hotel	Crackers, cookies, peanuts, chips, fruit	PB&J sandwiches, fruit, soda, chips	Group dinner at restaurant (including Acción staff)
Day 8	Travel from R&R location to airport	At hotel	Nab crackers, dried fruit	Team members on their own	Team members on their own

## Appendix D – Example Shopping List

### Purchase in the U.S.

Purell® hand sanitizer  
Reynolds full size steam pans  
canned chicken  
raisins  
fruit  
apple sauce  
parmesan cheese  
canned chili  
canned green beans  
peanut butter  
“nab” crackers  
grape jelly  
canned ravioli  
boxed stuffing mix

### Purchase in Mexico

Styrofoam bowls  
napkins  
plastic cutlery  
paper plates  
tin foil and/or plastic wrap  
trash bags  
rubber gloves  
handiwipes  
paper towels  
bleach  
dish soap  
Lysol®-type liquid cleaner  
Windex®  
napkins  
butane lighters  
can openers  
cereal  
milk  
bread  
strawberry jelly  
potato chips  
nacho chips  
crackers  
cookies  
mayonnaise  
cooking oil  
peanuts  
pasta for pasta salad (lunch)  
spaghetti sauce  
spaghetti noodles  
macaroni and cheese (not microwave)  
rice  
oatmeal  
drink mix  
Splenda®  
vegetables  
fruit  
cream of mushroom soup

## Appendix E – Recommended Hotels

### Uxmal

Mision Uxmal  
Muna 4, Km. 78 Carretera Campeche - Mérida x Uxmal Yucatán  
[www.hotelesmision.com.mx](http://www.hotelesmision.com.mx) (web site for several “Mision” hotels)  
Carretera Mérida-Campeche Km. 78 s/c s/n  
Muna, Uxmal, Yucatán C.P. 97840  
Teléfono Conmutador: (997) 97 6 20 22  
Fax: (997) 97 6 20 23

### Mérida

Del Gobernador  
<http://www.gobernadorMérida.com.mx/>  
Calle 59 No. 535 by 66, Centro  
Mérida, Yucatán, México, C.P. 97000  
[reservaciones@gobernadorMérida.com.mx](mailto:reservaciones@gobernadorMérida.com.mx)  
Tel. 52 (999) 930-4141  
Fax 52 (999) 930-4149  
U.S.A 1888 787 6865

D'Champs  
Calle 70, 543 X 67, Mérida 97000, Mexico  
011 52999 924-8655  
Fax:(52) (9999) 23-60-24  
[armandolugo@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:armandolugo@prodigy.net.mx)  
[www.hoteldchamps.com.mx](http://www.hoteldchamps.com.mx)

### Valladolid

El Meson del Marques  
[www.mesondelmarques.com](http://www.mesondelmarques.com)  
[reservaciones@mesondelmarques.com](mailto:reservaciones@mesondelmarques.com)  
Phone (985) 856-2070  
Fax (985)856-2280

San Clemente  
[www.hotelsanclemente.com.mx](http://www.hotelsanclemente.com.mx)  
Calle 42 # 206  
Tel-Fax (985) 856-2208 (985) 856-3161  
Valladolid, Yucatán, México  
[reservations@hotelsanclemente.com.mx](mailto:reservations@hotelsanclemente.com.mx)  
[info@hotelsanclemente.com.mx](mailto:info@hotelsanclemente.com.mx)



## **Cancun**

Suites Cancun Center

[www.suitescancun.com.mx](http://www.suitescancun.com.mx)

Alcatraces #32 S.M. 22 Mza. 10 CP 77500, Cancun, Mexico

Phone (998) 884-2301 / 884-7270

Fax (998) 887-5655 / 887-5833

[scancun@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:scancun@prodigy.net.mx)

## **Akumal**

Las Casitas

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

[lascasitasakumal@aol.com](mailto:lascasitasakumal@aol.com)

800-525-8625

Hotel Club Akumal Caribe – Villas Maya

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

800-351-1622

[reservations@hotelakumalcaribe.com](mailto:reservations@hotelakumalcaribe.com)

## Appendix F – Vaccines

In addition to making sure your routine vaccines are up to date (measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT), poliovirus, etc.), you may want to consider getting the following vaccinations before travel to Mexico.

### **Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG)**

Transmission of hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.

### **Hepatitis B**

This is especially necessary if you might be exposed to blood or body fluids (for example, health-care workers) or be exposed through medical treatment. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11–12 years who did not receive the series as infants.

### **COVID-19**

See Appendix I.

### **Typhoid Vaccine**

Typhoid fever can be contracted through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected. Large outbreaks are most often related to fecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors

See up-to-date Information at the Centers for Disease Control Web Site

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/mexico.htm>

Subpage on Malaria information for Mexico

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/preparing-international-travelers/yellow-fever-vaccine-and-malaria-prophylaxis-information-by-country/mexico#seldyfm948>

recommends Malaria vaccine (in 2021) only for the far southern state of Chiapas. Normally Acción serves in the states of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, and Campeche, where only Mosquito avoidance is recommended.

## Appendix G – Example Vacation Bible School Materials

Your team member in charge of VBS should feel free to use their imagination and draw on past experience of working with children. The key to running a successful VBS program in Mexico is **preparation**. Some important questions to consider as you prepare for your Bible lessons and activities are:

1. How many people are going on your trip (i.e., how many people can you count on to help lead skits, activities, and carry supplies)?
2. How big is your village's church? And how many children are likely to attend? (The safe rule of thumb is to bring enough supplies for 100 kids per day; extras can be donated to the church to use in Sunday school later.)
3. How much money do you have available to purchase VBS supplies?

Tips for success:

- Find or translate Sunday School songs into Spanish to match your VBS lessons. (Acción staff in Mexico can help with this.)
- Translate the Bible stories into Spanish and print stories and song lyrics on easel paper before you leave (adding pictures/drawings is fun—this is a good task for children or teens on your team).
- Use lightweight and inexpensive materials for your craft projects (for example: brown lunch bags, pipe cleaners, plastic lace and beads, and foam art)
- Work with your church's Sunday School program to get ideas (2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is a good age to plan your activities around)
- A good internet resource for activities and supplies available in bulk is <http://orientaltrading.com/>
- Ask your church members, Sunday School, or local elementary school for donated supplies like used crayons, construction paper, or markers
- A good tactic for communication across languages is adding a skit to your VBS lesson plan or acting out the Bible story as it's told.
- In addition to your regular planned VBS craft activity, you may want to bring along coloring sheets in case of extra kids or extra time.
- Do as much prep work in the U.S. as you can to make your crafts and activities run smoothly (i.e., try to print out, cut out, write out, tie up, hole punch, etc. as much as possible before you get to Mexico)

Table G-1 lists Bible stories with VBS activities. Table G-2 lists additional Old and New Testament stories that would be good for VBS.

**Table G-1. Example VBS Activities**

<b>Bible Story</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Materials</b>
Noah, Genesis 6-7	<u>Paper bag animal puppets:</u> Kids color in animal faces and bodies (including tongue) on paper bag. VBS helpers glue the face to the bag)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper lunch bags</li> <li>• Pre-cut animal faces</li> <li>• Crayons</li> <li>• Glue</li> </ul>
Fishers of men, Luke 5:1-11	<u>Fishing poles:</u> Kids color in the fish; VBS helpers tie string from the fish to their pole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-cut fishes with hole punch near mouth</li> <li>• Precut 12” string pieces</li> <li>• ¼ inch dowels cut to 12” length with notch cut at one end</li> <li>• Crayons</li> </ul>
House built on sand/rock, Matthew 7:24-29	<u>3-D paper house:</u> Kids color in house template with printed Bible verse; VBS helpers help fold and glue/staple the house into shape.*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-cut construction paper with dotted fold lines, printed with door/window shapes and Bible verse (in Spanish)</li> <li>• Crayons</li> <li>• Glue/stapler</li> </ul>
Sower of seed, Matthew 13:3-9	<u>Visors:</u> Kids color the visors; VBS helpers tie the elastic to the visor. (Kids wear visors and look cute.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-cut paper plates in visor shape with holes to tie elastic</li> <li>• 10-12” elastic string pieces</li> <li>• Crayons</li> </ul>

\* Keep in mind that your paper houses should match the Yucatecan idea of a typical concrete house, i.e., four walls and a flat roof.

**Table G-2. Other VBS Bible Story Ideas**

<b>Old Testament Stories</b>	<b>New Testament Stories</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses, Exodus 2:1-10</li> <li>• Red Sea, Exodus 13:18-22; 14</li> <li>• Ten Commandments, Exodus 19:20; 20:1-17</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birth of Christ, Luke 1:26-32; 2:6-16</li> <li>• Baptism of Jesus, Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22</li> <li>• 12 Disciples, Matthew 4:18-20; 9:9; 10:39; 16:25</li> <li>• Jesus healing, Mark 2:1-5; 12</li> <li>• Light of the World/Salt of the earth, Matthew 5:13-16</li> <li>• Feeding the 5000, John 6:1-14; Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17</li> <li>• Jesus Walks on Water, Matthew 14:23</li> <li>• Parables – all the parables lend themselves to lessons</li> </ul>

## **Appendix H – Kitchen Equipment Provided by Acción**

The following are typically provided by Acción if requested, although multiple teams in the Yucatan at the same time may limit availability. Please, confirm what you expect Acción to provide with the Coordinator and/or Oscar.

- Stovetop (in host facility) or camp stove (two burners) with gas
- Refrigerator
- Two 5 gal insulated beverage jug cooler(s) for use on worksite and at meals
- Purified Water in 5 gal containers is obtained by Acción (though usually purchased with team funds) or purified at VIM, or treated in very remote areas
- Large cooler for storing food
- Plastic tubs for wash and bleach stations and, as necessary, for bathing in remote areas
- A few assorted pots and pans
- Basic set of cooking utensils (spatula, serving spoons, cutting knives, etc)

## **Appendix I – COVID-19 Special Protocols**

While the global pandemic of COVID-19 cancelled the work team seasons of 2020 and 2021, work teams successfully resumed in 2022 and we look forward to wonderful years ahead. Still, COVID is a concern, so these guidelines seek to provide safety for team members and for our Mexican brothers and sisters. The situation can change considerably over time, so stay informed. The team leader is encouraged to contact Oscar or FOA leaders to discuss the current protocols.

### **Vaccination and Tests**

Acción strongly recommends the following precautions: That team members (1) are fully vaccinated and boosted for COVID-19 at the time of the trip and (2) have a negative COVID test (any kind) within three days of travel. We also recommend that the team take rapid COVID test kits to evaluate any sickness while in Mexico. The team leader will be responsible for setting and confirming group requirements.

### **Requirements and Recommendations for Flights**

The website <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html> has up-to-date information about recommendations and requirements (none in Fall 2022) for international travel.

### **Masks**

Bring masks for each team member for use in close indoor interaction or in travel settings. Requirements can vary between Mexico and the U.S. and change over time.

### **Outdoor Village Activities**

All personal interaction with villagers is best outdoors, including interactive Vacation Bible School and worship. No glasses ministry for now. The Acción staffer will provide guidance on safe activities.

### **Group Housing**

Groups of team members are usually housed together at the church or in village buildings, where no Mayans will be staying. If the building has been vacated by a local family, you are certainly encouraged to meet and thank them.

### **Illness and Potential Quarantine**

Acción will help find a good doctor and hospital as necessary. They will help find good accommodations if it becomes necessary for any infected team members to quarantine in Mexico, with your hotel being one choice. Such unexpected problems can be handled. The cost is borne by the individual and/or travel insurance.