



# constru CASA



volunteer manual 2010

## Index

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1. Welcome Letter	
1.2. Constru Casa Volunteering Experience Overview	
<b>2. Constru Casa Overview</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Description and History	
2.2. Mission and Vision	
2.3. Poverty and the Need for Housing in Guatemala	
<b>3. Constru Casa Volunteering Experience</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1. Requirements	
3.2. Accommodation and Transport	
3.3. Sample Itinerary and Workday	
3.4. Support from Constru Casa	
3.5. Free time and Weekend Activities and Excursions	
3.6. Costs and Fundraising	
<b>4. Getting Ready for Guatemala</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1. Reservations	
4.2. Travel Arrangements	
4.3. Packing List	
4.4. Health Guidelines	
4.5. Recommended Reading	
4.6. Spanish: Useful Words and Phrases and Construction Vocabulary	
4.7. Culturally Appropriate Behavior	
4.8. Security Issues	
<b>5. Fundraising Ideas and Instructions</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1. Fundraising for Constru Casa	
5.2. Mail-shot	
5.3. Sponsored Activities: Marathon Run, Walk, Cycling	
5.4. Poker Tournament	
5.5. Packing Bags at the Local Supermarket	
5.6. Involve your Church	
5.7. A Gift in Your or Someone Else's Honor	
<b>6. Multiplying your work and Staying Involved</b>	<b>20</b>
6.1. Multiply Your Work!	
6.2. Stay Connected: Website, Newsletter, Facebook	
<b>7. Contact</b>	<b>21</b>

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Welcome Letter**

Welcome to Constru Casa!

A new home is life changing. We experience this every day with the families that we help. Dirt floors turning into mud do not exist anymore, and neither do walls that crumble in strong winds, or roofs that leak onto school books or into food stuffs. Families with a new home experience a new sense of security, self esteem, and economic and educational opportunities.

And indeed, as life changing as a new home for a family can be the experience of building a home for a Constru Casa volunteer. If you are reading this, you are contemplating to come to volunteer with Constru Casa in Guatemala. You already made the first step towards an experience that will broaden your horizon, challenge you in unexpected ways, and possibly will give you a new outlook on life.

Being confronted with extreme poverty is not easy, and might well shake some of the assumptions you held about the world, and even yourself. And working on the construction site, you will experience extreme poverty first hand. These families would never have the possibility to build their own formal house, and the construction period you will share with them is one of their dreams coming true. It is very special to be part of these moments, and it will be an immensely rewarding experience for you. Sharing time and hard work with the family, their children, the masons, and the community is a truly unique experience, and we encourage you to fully enjoy and thoroughly benefit from it.

Constru Casa is here for you, and will accompany and support you in every way possible to ensure that you have a memorable and enriching experience. We aim to give you a true cultural experience of Guatemala and a clear impression of what it is like to live in poverty, a situation that so many Guatemalans face everyday. We have involved over two hundred volunteers in our organization over the years, and while their experiences were all different, they all benefitted from it, and in their hearts took a part of Guatemala home.

I want to thank you for your commitment to our work and our families, and hope that your experience with Constru Casa will make you as passionate as us about helping poor families in need.

Caroline van Heerde  
Founder and Director of Constru Casa

## **1.2. Constru Casa Volunteering Experience Overview**

Volunteering at Constru Casa offers a unique cultural experience, sharing the lives and situations of poverty with Guatemalan families, but also a transforming event: the building of their new home. While helping others that are less advantaged than yourself, you will be able to make experiences that broaden your horizon and might even give you a different outlook on life.

The Constru Casa volunteer experience is intended to provide volunteers with a cultural experience, enabling them to understand Guatemalan people and culture in a very direct and hands-on manner. This will educate, provoke compassion, and inspire volunteers to do more.

Constru Casa relies on volunteers to help pay for the cost of the houses that we build, and to build sustainable relationships with active partners who can multiply our work.

Volunteers will share intensive work time with local masons, and also have the opportunity to share the lives of a disadvantaged Guatemalan family, whilst contributing to improve their lives through the building of a new home.

Constru Casa houses are built by paid local masons and their assistants. At least one member of the beneficiary family also helps to build; often it is the father or the eldest son. Volunteers and the family member work under the close supervision of the masons. For volunteers, the work consists of digging foundations, carrying materials including concrete block, sand and rocks, mixing concrete and generally helping the masons with their tasks. It takes approximately two weeks to build a complete house. The construction sites vary considerably, although generally, volunteers work in the Antigua area.

Your experience with Constru Casa does not have to end once you return home: returning home is an excellent opportunity to share your experiences in Guatemala with friends and family. You can inspire others at home to do something too, and thus multiply our work. Constru Casa's success depends on people who share our vision and help make it a reality, wherever they are. Therefore, we rely heavily on the spirit and activism of our volunteers.

## **2. Constru Casa Overview**

### **2.1. Description and History**

Constru Casa is a non-profit organization offering basic housing to families living in extreme poverty. Constru Casa always works in collaboration with local social partner organizations to identify families of exceptional need. Recipient families participate in both the construction of their home and through a financial contribution of typically ¼ of the cost of their house, paid interest free over four years. In addition, Constru Casa carries out a variety of programs, offering stoves and water filters to beneficiary families, carrying out maintenance of their houses and supporting them over four years in the areas related to housing.

Constru Casa offers selected families a house built of concrete blocks, with a corrugated iron roof and a concrete floor, including a toilet and a shower. Families can choose between different types of houses, varying in size and design.

A Constru Casa house, together with the provision of additional programs of support, improves living conditions and enables better physical and mental health, as well as improved family, work and social life for the entire family.

Constru Casa is an initiative of Carolien van Heerde. In March 2004, she started with the design and organization of Constru Casa and constructed the very first houses together with a local daycare center for extremely poor families. Over time, Constru Casa's model of development improved, and today we average 80 houses per year, always constructed in cooperation with local social organizations. Constru Casa co-operates with a number of social organizations in Guatemala. These organizations work in the areas of education, health-care and community development; they are daycare centers, schools, clinics or community committees. Constru Casa always selects beneficiary families in co-operation with these local partner organizations. For these organizations, housing and construction work is not part of their main objectives. Constru Casa complements their mission by offering simple houses to the people affiliated who live in dreadful conditions.

This co-operation is what makes Constru Casa unique and is the most important mark of our initiative. The missions of Constru Casa and its partner organizations complement each other and lead to mutually reinforcing positive outcomes for the beneficiary families.

As of May 2010, over 370 houses have been built in different departments of Guatemala.

### **2.2. Mission and Vision**

Constru Casa's mission is to improve the quality of life of the poorest families in Guatemala by providing housing and offering support programs. Additionally, Constru Casa carries out other construction projects for the benefit of communities.

We strive to accomplish our mission through:

- The construction of sustainable houses for poor families.
- Cooperation with strategic partners in the areas of housing, education, health-care and social work.
- Providing post-construction services including family new-home orientation and instruction, maintenance and a four year long follow-up program.

- Offering additional support to strategic partners and individual families in the areas of health care, education and social support.
- Consulting, supervision and execution of community construction projects.

We aim to be recognized for our professionalism, for our dynamic contribution and for the quality of the projects we develop for the benefit of the poor Guatemalan population. Our integrated approach is not only based on offering a sustainable house to a poor family, but also on stimulating more development in social and economic areas. We regard a good relationship with our strategic partners as crucial, as they enable us to give more efficient and complete help to each family and its specific needs, before, during and after the construction of their house. We see ourselves as a positively growing, sustainable organization with a cooperative spirit taking into account all housing-related projects in Guatemala.

### **2.3. Poverty and the Need for Housing in Guatemala**

Guatemala is among the poorest countries of the Americas with more than half of the population living in poverty. Particularly acute is the problem of inadequate housing. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE) 35.8% of the population lives in poverty (less than \$2 per person per day), and 15.2% in extreme poverty (less than \$1 per person per day). The United Nations identifies the Guatemala Human Development Index as the second lowest in all of the Americas, second only to Haiti. Guatemala's poverty is rooted in many social, economic and political factors, manifest in high illiteracy rates, poor health and often extremely inadequate housing. The income of many Guatemalans only allows a day-to-day existence, with just enough money for the basic necessities of life. For a large part of the population, health conditions are poor and living conditions dreadful.

According to a report from the COHRE (Centre On Housing Rights and Evictions) in 2003, more than half of the population of Guatemala lives in unsuitable 'houses' and the overall shortage was approximately 1.5 million houses. This data is consistent with the results of research the Guatemalan government published in 2005.

### 3. Constru Casa Volunteering Experience

#### 3.1. Requirements

- **A passport:** To enter Guatemala you need a passport that is valid for at least 6 months after your return.
- **Application and disclaimer:** Each volunteer for Constru Casa needs to fill out an application form and sign a disclaimer. These documents will be sent to you once your reservation is finalized.
- **Fundraising:** We ask volunteers to fundraise for a part of the houses that they will build. Please see below section 3.6. Costs and Fundraising for more information.

#### 3.2. Accommodation and Transport

Constru Casa will organize all local transport and accommodation. You will be picked up at the airport and taken to your accommodation. You will also be taken to the construction site everyday. In terms of accommodation, you have several options: a home stay with a Guatemalan family, a simple hostel, or a hotel in different price ranges. Please see section 4.1. Travel Arrangements below for details.

#### 3.3. Sample Itinerary and Workday

Day 1: Arrival

Arrival in Guatemala, pick-up from the airport, transfer to your chosen hotel/home stay. Introductory meeting with Constru Casa staff: presentation about Constru Casa, its mission, vision, and outlooks, introduction to the village where you will be working, and its history, as well as to the local social organization, time for questions.

Working Days: Day 2 – Day 5

7:30 am: Transfer to construction site, introduction to the masons and short presentation about the volunteer work. Work on the construction site under the close guidance and supervision of a skilled local mason and his helper. The work mainly consists of digging foundations, carrying materials, mixing concrete, laying block, etc. At least one family member also works with you constructing the house during the whole time, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and sharing.

12:00 pm: Lunch together with masons and sometimes the family. Some free time for relaxation or often for a soccer match with the masons, then back to work.

4:00 – 5:00 pm: End of work, transfer back to hotel/home stay. Enjoy deep sleep enabled by physical exhaustion.



One of the working days you will be taken on a Constru Casa tour to see a finished house and meet a family who has been living in their Constru Casa house for some time to see the long-term impact of Constru Casa.

Day 6: Special Cultural Experience

Options include: climb a volcano to see live lava, do a tour with traditional weavers, do a coffee and nature tour, or other one-day tours out of Antigua.



Day 7: Return Home  
Goodbye event with Constru Casa, transfer to the airport, and flight back home.

A trip with Constru Casa is fun and safe, and will enrich you with unforgettable impressions and experiences, and may even change your outlook on life!

Sample workday:

7:00am	breakfast
7:30am	transfer to construction site
8:00am-12:00pm	work on construction
12:00pm	lunch
1:00pm-5:00pm	work on construction
5:00pm	transfer back to home stay/hotel
6:00pm	dinner

### 3.4. Support from Constru Casa

Prior to your arrival, Constru Casa will arrange all local transport and your accommodation according to your preferences. We will provide you with information and assistance of any sort you might need.

On the day of your arrival, a Constru Casa representative will meet with you or your group and give you a presentation about Constru Casa, the work we do, and the work you will be doing. There is ample time for questions.

Whilst volunteering with Constru Casa, a representative will visit you on the construction site at least once a day, making sure everything is going well. It is optional to book a local leader for your volunteering experience. This leader will have to be paid apart, and have a cost of around US\$25 (EUR 15) per day.

Constru Casa staff will arrange additional activities for you during lunch breaks or in some afternoons, such as making tortillas (the local staple food), or taking you on a ride on a pick up truck through the village you are working in.

On one day we will take you to the social organization that selected the families receiving a house and introduce you to their work, meet their staff and visit their installations.

One of the working days you will be taken on a Constru Casa tour to see a finished house and meet a family who has been living in their Constru Casa home for some time.

This will give you the opportunity to observe the long-term impact of a Constru Casa house.

Constru Casa can also arrange a weekend activity for you, which you can choose from the list below.

### 3.5. Free time and Weekend Activities and Excursions

#### *Orientation in Antigua*

Antigua is not very large, with a population of about 34,000. The streets are cobblestone and there are very narrow sidewalks, often with window boxes protruding into the sidewalk, and there are beautiful churches and ruins. It is very easy and fairly quick to walk anywhere in town. As in most Guatemalan cities, Antigua has numbered Avenues going north (*norte*) to south (*sur*) and numbered Calles going east (*poniente*) to west (*oriente*). In Antigua, Volcán Agua is always to the south, so it's easy to orientate yourself.

#### *Bank and money*

The banks in Antigua are usually open; Mon-Fri 9am-6pm. For changing traveler's checks or cash you always need to bring your passport.

- Change your foreign currency at a bank during daylight hours; there are a number of banks on the central square in Antigua.
- ATMs are located inside banks or to their side.
- While some places do take credit cards, using them in many restaurants is risking theft. Some of the restaurants/shops will charge you 4% to 5% commission on top of your bill when using credit card.

#### *Post office*

The post office is located on the corner of Alameda Santa Lucía and 4a Calle. Mon-Fri, 8am-12pm, and 2pm-4pm. Unfortunately, the national mail service is not 100% reliable, so we recommend you to only send postcards.

#### *Food*

There also are lots of places to eat out in Antigua. You can get a breakfast dish for \$2.50 to \$4 (EUR1.50 to 3) called *tipico* that consists of eggs, black beans, tortillas, and a piece of fried plantain. There is also great yogurt and granola. Lunches and dinners can be as inexpensive as \$3 to \$7 (EUR2 to 5). Guatemalan food is not spicy like Mexican food and there isn't too much variety in the local food. A typical local lunch or dinner will be chicken pepian with rice and maybe a vegetable like squash, beans with sausage and rice, or a bowl of beef soup with vegetables, all served with tortillas and maybe part of an avocado or some papaya. There are also bars, pizza, McDonalds, local fried chicken outlets, etc.

#### *Weekend Trips*

Depending on what your preferences are, Constru Casa will arrange a weekend trip for you. This will be a fun activity to share with your group. The cost of this weekend trip will



have to be covered separately and is around US\$10 (EUR7) per person for most half day activities. Here are some options:

- Volcano Pacaya (half day, strenuous)

Pacaya is one of the active volcanoes of Guatemala, and can be reached from Antigua by car/bus in about an hour and a half. You can hike up the steep slopes of Pacaya for about an hour and a half to reach the top and see live lava flow!



- Tour with traditional weavers in Santiago Zamora (half day, easy)  
The women's weaving cooperative in Santiago Zamora produces beautiful textiles and supports the local school with a part of their earnings. They provide an afternoon tour with a lunch, showing you how traditional back-strap weaving is done and telling you about the history of their village. Santiago Zamora is about 20 minutes outside of Antigua.

- Coffee Finca Tour (half day, easy)

Visit one of the coffee fincas around Antigua and get to know everything about how coffee is grown, harvested, roasted and tasted!

- Macadamia Nut Tour (half day, easy)

Visit an organic Macadamia Nut farm that also runs sustainability and reforestation projects. Here you can enjoy a macadamia nut pancake breakfast!



There are many other tours that you can take, like climbing other volcanoes, go to the beach, visit Lake Atitlan, Chichicastenango, or Tikal. We can help you find the tour that suits you best!

### 3.6. Costs and Fundraising

Constru Casa is an NGO working for the poorest people in Guatemala, and is heavily dependent on donations. One important source of donations is volunteers. We therefore ask our volunteers to fundraise for a part of the cost of the house that they – you! – will be building. This is not an administrative fee, but goes fully towards the house you will build. The total cost of a house is US\$3,500 (EUR2,600), of which the family pays back a quarter in monthly installments over four years (US\$875, EUR650).

Constru Casa asks individual volunteers to contribute a minimum of US\$300 (EUR250), whilst volunteer groups are asked to fundraise together for the total cost of a house US\$3,500 (EUR2,600).

We encourage you to think of your contribution to Constru Casa not as something that has to be paid to Constru Casa, but as a donation that goes fully and directly to the family you will be working with, in the form of their new home.

We would also like you to think of your donation not as money that you have to give out of your own pocket. We have seen over and over that family, friends, and colleagues are very generous if you ask them to sponsor you for coming to volunteer in Guatemala for a good cause. On returning home, you can organize a presentation or send out an e-mail with pictures and a little story of your experience here with Constru Casa. And be assured, people will love it!

To this end, we have compiled some suggestions for fundraising at home. Please read them in section 5. Fundraising Ideas and Instructions. These are ideas that you might want to try, and if you have your own ideas, all the better! And please let us know about them, we are always looking for new ideas.

## 4. Getting Ready for Guatemala

### 4.1. Reservation

If you consider volunteering with Constru Casa, please contact us at [voluntario@construcasa.org](mailto:voluntario@construcasa.org). We will be very happy to check availability and start planning your trip!

### 4.2. Travel Arrangements

Constru Casa will assist you with all your local travel arrangements in Guatemala. The only thing you have to do is to buy your plane ticket to Guatemala City.

#### *Visa*

Citizens from most countries do not need a visa for Guatemala (USA and European countries), but receive a tourist visa (stamp in your passport) upon entering the country.

#### *Airport Pick-up*

Please let us know as soon as you have booked your flight (arrival time and flight number) so we can arrange for a shuttle to pick you up. The cost of the shuttle is approximately US\$30 (EUR 20), and can be paid directly to the driver, either in Quetzales or in US\$.

#### *Accommodation*

There are a wide range of accommodations to choose from in Antigua. This ranges from \$8 dorm rooms to luxury hotels. Any of these can be arranged for you, according to your preference. However, we encourage volunteers to stay with a host family in a home stay. We believe that this experience increases your awareness of Guatemalan culture and can be very enriching for you.

#### *Home stays*

Home stays are an excellent way to experience how Guatemalan middle class families live, and will give you a great opportunity to learn about Guatemalan culture and history, and of course practice your Spanish. The host families are very friendly and welcoming, making you feel at home instantly. Sometimes though, visitors find it not always easy to adapt to a different culture and standard of living. But if you are prepared to be flexible and understanding, you will gain a lot from your experience with the family. Please observe some simple rules:

The cost of living in Antigua is relatively high and the families ask students to help them economize in some simple ways:

- Electricity in Guatemala is particularly expensive, so please avoid excessive use of electric appliances, and turn off the lights when leaving your room or the bathroom.
- Do not leave the water running when it is not necessary.
- Please respect the privacy of your host family.
- Please do not bring people to your home stay, especially not over night.

Your family will serve you three meals daily (except Sundays) and these are served at specific times. You should always inform your family if you are not going to be present for a meal. Please do not expect food to be served apart from the specific meal times. Lunch is the biggest meal of the day, with dinner often being light (eggs, beans, salad, rice). Remember that you are in Guatemala to experience a different culture and that includes different food. Obviously you should feel free to tell the family if there is

something you don't like, but please don't expect to be served exactly the same food that you eat at home.

### 4.3. Packing List

Suggested packing list for Constru Casa volunteers:

- |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sturdy work pants                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Raincoat (the rainy season lasts from May to November)                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> T-shirts                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> A padlock if you are staying in a hostel                                                                                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable, but sturdy work shoes           | <input type="checkbox"/> Passport and IDs, photocopy of the identification page of your passport                                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweaters or sweatshirts                      | <input type="checkbox"/> ATM card (make sure to tell your bank you are going abroad so that they do not cancel your card), bring an extra card if it is possible. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Socks and underwear                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicine: stomach discomfort pills, motion sickness pills, hand sanitizer, insect repellent, sunscreen and lip balm                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A shower towel                               |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toiletries (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, etc.) |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hat for sun protection                       |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work gloves                                  |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small back pack                              |                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Camera, charger, flashlight                  |                                                                                                                                                                   |

Please do not bring: Expensive jewelry and watches, expensive electronic equipment that is not absolutely necessary.

Please remember to keep your packing simple: When returning home, you should be able to say that you used everything you brought.

### 4.4. Health Guidelines

The tap water in Antigua is treated with chlorine, but it is not completely trustworthy, so always drink bottled or boiled water (Agua Pura).

We advise you to **avoid** the following:

- Tap water or ice made from tap water.
- Food from street vendors.
- Undercooked meat, fish, and prepared foods that have been laying around at room temperature.
- Raw vegetables and fruits (unless peeled and eaten immediately, or soaked in treated water).
- Milk and milk products that are not kept refrigerated, including pastries with cream fillings.

To stay healthy you should:

- Drink a lot of water to avoid dehydration. Keep a water bottle with you at all times.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Protect yourself from the sun. Wear a hat and sunscreen.
- Know your limits and do not push yourself beyond them. Please keep in mind that construction work is physically demanding. It is your responsibility to take your own decision on what you can and want to do, and what you cannot and do not want to do. The construction workers will respect your choices.

#### *Vaccinations*

No shots are required for Guatemala. However, we recommend that you check your tetanus shots, since you will be doing construction work.

#### 4.5. Recommended Reading

*Guatemala: Never Again!*, by ODHAG (Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala). Orbis Books, 1999.

*The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?*, by Francisco Goldman. New York: Grove Press, 2007.

*Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Courage, Terror and Hope*, by Beatriz Manz. California: University of California Press, 2004.

*Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer. New York: Doubleday, 1982.

*The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*, by Greg Grandin. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

*Men of Maize*, by Miguel Angel Asturias. London and New York: Verso, 1988.

Please consult your local library for other titles, and research the internet for more information. The above books are centered largely on the recent history of Guatemala.

#### 4.6. Spanish: Useful Words and Phrases and Construction Vocabulary

##### Basic phrases

si – Yes  
no - no  
no hablo español - I don't speak Spanish  
buenos días - Good morning  
buenas tardes - Good afternoon/ evening  
buenas noches - Goodnight  
hola - Hello  
adios - Good bye  
hasta luego - See you later  
por favor - Please  
gracias - Thank you  
de nada - You're welcome  
disculpe - Excuse me  
con permiso - Excuse (getting by)  
como se llama? - What is...your name  
me llamo - My name is...  
bien, gracias - Fine, thank you  
mucho gusto - Pleased to meet you  
como se dice? - How do you say. . . ?  
cuanto cuesta? - How much does this cost?  
más - More  
menos – Less

##### Basic vocabulary

el hotel - the hotel  
el proyecto – the project  
el restaurante - the restaurant  
el baño - the bathroom  
damas - ladies  
caballeros - gentlemen  
la cuenta - the check

el carro - the car  
grande/pequeño - big/small  
temprano/tarde - early/late  
barato/caro - cheap/expensive  
facil/difícil - easy/difficult  
abierto/cerrado - open/closed  
bueno/malo - good/bad  
arriba/abajo - above/below  
con - with  
y, o - and, or  
nada - nothing  
también - also  
aquí/allí - here/there  
qué? - What?  
cuando? - When?  
donde? - Where?  
cuanto? - How much?  
cuantos? - How many?  
por qué? - Why?  
habla inglés? - Do you speak English?  
comprendo - I understand  
no comprendo – I don't understand  
me ayuda,por favor? - Can you please help me?  
can you give me... - Puede darme...  
tengo hambre - I'm hungry  
tengo sed - I'm thirsty  
tengo calor/frío - I'm hot/cold  
estoy cansado/a - I'm tired  
me he perdido/a - I'm lost  
yo quiero... - I want...  
yo necesito... - I need...  
donde está...? - Where is...?

**Family**

madre/padre – mother/father  
hijo/hija - son/daughter  
abuelo/a - grandfather/mother  
tío/a - uncle/aunt  
niño - child  
bebe - baby  
hermano/a - brother/sister  
primo/a - cousin  
esposo/a - husband/wife  
amigo/a – friend  
padrino – godparent

**Colors**

rojo – red  
verde – green  
azul – blue  
amarillo – yellow  
negro – black  
blanco – white  
cafe - brown

**Numbers**

1 – uno  
2 – dos  
3 – tres  
4 – cuatro  
5 – cinco  
6 – seis  
7 – siete  
8 – ocho  
9 – nueve  
10 – diez  
11 – once  
12 – doce  
13 – trece  
14 – catorce  
15 – quince  
16 – dieciséis  
17 – diecisiete  
18 – dieciocho  
19 – diecinueve  
20 – veinte  
30 – treinta  
40 – cuarenta  
50 – cincuenta  
60 – sesenta  
70 – setenta  
80 – ochenta  
90 – noventa

100 – cien

1000 – mil

**Construction**

albañil - construction worker, mason  
ayudante -auxiliary construction worker  
supervisión - supervision  
mano de obra – labor  
casa - house  
cimientos - foundation  
pared - Wall  
piso - floor  
techo - ceiling, roof  
viga - beam, girder  
arena - sand  
pedrín - gravel  
cement - cement, concrete  
block - block  
solera - u-block  
hierro - Iron  
madera - wood  
clavos - nails  
lamina - corrugated iron  
zanjéo - groove  
wheelbarrow carretilla, carreta  
shovel - pala  
hammer - martillo  
ax - hacha  
pickaxe - piocha  
sieve - cernidor  
L-shaped tool - escuadra  
tape measure - cinta métrica/metro  
water-mark - nivel de burbuja  
scaffolding/platform - andamio  
gloves - guantes  
thread, yarn, string - hilo  
wire - alambre  
to dig a groove - zanjea  
to level - nivelar  
to sift - cernir  
to mix - mezclar  
to put - poner  
to place - colocar  
to outline, to plan - trazar  
to construct, build - construir  
construcción - construction  
to measure - medir  
to move - mover

#### **4.7. Culturally Appropriate Behavior**

The Constru Casa volunteer experience is intended to be one of cultural exchange and understanding. For this, there are certain things you should know about Guatemalan culture, and about how to interact with people.

In general, we encourage you to keep an open mind and not to judge people or their behavior. Many things are done differently in Guatemala, and this does not mean that it is better or worse, just different. Please also remember that you are a guest in people's country, and often also in their house. Also remember that you represent your country while being here and Constru Casa while you are working on site. Constru Casa is a much respected organization in Guatemala, and we have worked hard to earn this respect. We ask you to keep this in mind.

Guatemala runs on a different pace than Europe or the US. Please keep a flexible attitude and an open mind. If your driver is late, please do not get frustrated and try to make the most of the extra time you have.

Guatemalans are very friendly and formal. It is important that you greet people that you encounter, and that you can say *buenos días*, *buenas tardes*, *buenas noches*, and *mucho gusto*. When entering a house or someone's property, you should always say *con permiso* before entering.

Before taking pictures, please ask people for their permission. Many Guatemalans do not like their picture taken, and we ask you to respect their wishes. You may sometimes also be asked to pay for taking someone's picture. Here, it is up to you to decide. But please do respect people's privacy and dignity.

We expect volunteers to treat the construction workers and the family with respect. The construction workers take the decisions on how to construct, the use of materials and they solve problems that arise. Volunteer will begin by observing how the construction workers do their work and help the assistant.

#### **4.8. Security Issues**

If you take common-sense precautions, Guatemala is generally a safe place.

Please take the following precautions:

- Avoid walking alone after about 9:00pm, especially on empty and dark streets. You can find taxis on the east side of Parque Central and in front of the bus station.
- Don't carry around too much money. It is best to use a money belt and put your money in several different places on your body. Also do not show openly the money you carry with you and take care when taking money out of ATMs.
- Hold on tight to your belongings, especially in crowded places or when entering/exiting a bus. It is always better to carry bags or backpacks in front of you, as bag slashing and pick pocketing are common in Guatemala.
- Carry your camera or other expensive items discretely.
- If you are robbed, do not fight for your possessions, they are not worth the pain or injuries.
- Know your host family address and telephone number.
- Make a copy of your passport and carry it with you at all times.
- Go in a group with a local guide when walking/hiking/running/hiking outside Antigua. We discourage climbing Cerro de la Cruz alone or with just 2 people.
- Do not get drunk. Do not get involved in drugs.
- Be generally cautious, observe your surroundings and use your common sense.

## **5. Fundraising Ideas and Instructions**

### **5.1. Fundraising for Constru Casa**

This part of the Constru Casa manual for volunteers will help you to raise the necessary funds for your contribution to the house you will be building before you come to Guatemala. It is a list of suggestions on how to fundraise, and gives you instructions. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and there are many more creative ways with which you can raise funds. We sincerely appreciate your collaboration in raising funds, and will assist you as much as we can in your efforts. If you have questions or suggestions, please e-mail us at [voluntario@construcasa.org](mailto:voluntario@construcasa.org).

### **5.2. Personalized CDP Fundraising Page**

We can help you create your own event page on our fundraising website CDP. We will set up the page and include a personal letter to your family and friends, explaining your participation with Constru Casa and why you are fundraising. We can provide you with a sample letter, if you wish. You simply need to send an e-mail to all your contacts with the web site link, and they can donate a chosen amount with their credit card information.

To prepare your letter, you should not write more than one page, create a list of names and addresses of all your contacts (it is amazing how many people you know!). The letter should include a short description of Constru Casa (you can get this from our website: [www.construcasa.org](http://www.construcasa.org)), explain why you want to volunteer, and explain what the money raised will be used for (the building of a house for a poor Guatemalan family). If you wish to receive a sample letter, please contact us at [voluntario@construcasa.org](mailto:voluntario@construcasa.org).

Don't get upset if you don't get an immediate response – it will arrive!

However, if after 3 weeks or so, you have not received a reply from some people of whom you expected a reply, send out a reminder, and make it nice! If they still don't respond, forget it.

That's it – all we can say is good luck!

### **5.3. Mail-shot**

The Mail-shot is easy to do, and very effective. It entails sending out letters to all your contacts explaining that you will volunteer with Constru Casa, and asking them to contribute to your efforts. You can do it all by yourself and Constru Casa will provide you with an authorization letter to make your effort official. We can also provide you with a sample letter, if you wish.

A Mail-shot is a very effective tool for anyone who prefers to explain – in writing – to family, friends, colleagues, businesses, local newspapers, etc., what he / she is going to do in Guatemala and the reasons why you need their financial support.

Start by learning about the mail merge function by going to Microsoft Word Help and read about "How do I start a mail merge". When you think that you understand the mail merge function, try it out on a small sample.

Write your letter as described in 5.2. *Personalized CDP Fundraising Page*. Also, decide on how you wish to address these people in your letter (Dear John, Dear Mr, Dear Ms).

Explain how they can make their donation directly to Constru Casa's account. There are several options, and it should be as simple as possible for people to make their donations. This information is available on our website. In general, people do not wish to give cash or write a check directly to the fundraiser – they like their sponsorship to go directly to the NGO for which it is meant and to receive a tax exemption. However, if you would like to collect all the money yourself and then send it to Constru Casa, this is not a problem. Allow a minimum of 2 months for the entire Mail-shot project.

Now use the mail-merge function to print out the individually addressed letters. Make sure that your print work / lay-out, etc looks professional – you have only one chance to make an impression!

Sign each letter – add a handwritten note on it, if you think it is appropriate.

To your own letter, add the Constru Casa authorization letter. Make sure you contact Constru Casa Guatemala well in advance of the date of your Mail-shot. Provide them with all the information you have and they will provide you with this letter. This is an important document which will help convince the potential donors that you are serious. It is important to ask donors to include a reference (your name is easiest) when making their donation – it will make it so much easier for Constru Casa to identify the donations. Also, ask Donors to advise you by email of the date and the amount of the donation they made.

Now print out your envelopes using the mail-merge function. Now buy your stamps and post the letters!

Prepare a simple document (maybe in Excel) on which you record the name, amount and date of the donation that have been made.

Similar to the event web page, send a reminder if you do not get a response within three weeks of your first letter.

#### **5.4. Sponsored Activities: Marathon Run, Walk, Cycling**

There are many sponsored activities you can organize, such as walks, hikes, runs, cycling tours, etc. You can either charge the runners, hikers, cyclers, etc. a fee for participating, or get them to find sponsors for each mile/kilometer they run, hike, or cycle.

You should hold an initial planning meeting. Establish procedures and discuss policies for registration, media relations and publicity, volunteers, safety, traffic management, first aid and other services such as massage and foot care, food, rest rooms, accommodations, cleanup and entertainment.

Approach potential sponsors to help finance, publicize or even organize the event. Contact an athletic or sporting-goods store, a running club, a podiatrist, and local sports hero. Solicit corporate donations for water, energy bars, other snacks and sports drinks to be handed out along the route and at the end of the race. Sponsors will always want to promote their product with giveaways such as T-shirts, caps and water bottles.

Contact law enforcement agencies about local ordinances, road closures, traffic barricades, crowd control and security issues.

When you have a sense of the number of participants, contact your local media to inform them of the event. Get the word out to as many volunteers, runners and walkers as possible. Contact a local TV station to see if it will get involved, get the local newspaper to run a story about your event; maybe a news anchor is an avid runner. You should prepare materials for them to use in their press coverage, including information about your charitable cause, the date and location of the event, and the number of participants. It also helps if you have a unique story to tell, as they will be more likely to feature you. Be sure to give the media enough notice that they can cover the event – the more publicity you receive, the more funds you'll raise!

As with most fundraising endeavors, planning is key to the success. Also, the more you can predict and organize the event before it happens, the more fun you'll have on the day of the event.

### **5.5. Poker Tournament**

Organize a poker tournament either at home or at a venue and make sure you get someone to hold it (free of charge, of course) – he or she must know all about this poker game. Get friends to provide sufficient chips and if possible proper poker table tops. Entry fee can be €50, US\$50 or how ever much you think your invitees can afford. Decide which percentage of the money collected goes into the prize fund, while the rest is your donation. A good idea to get a venue free of charge is if they can get the drink sales. At home, people can bring their own food and drinks, or you can sell them to make even more money.

### **5.6. Packing Bags at the local Supermarket**

In countries where supermarkets still use plastic bags to pack purchases, this can be a good way of raising money. Agree with a large supermarket in your town, that you will bring in teams of 6-8 people each on 3 or 4 of the busiest nights of the week, who will position themselves at the check-out points to pack the bags for customers. Customers will make a donation in a specially prepared cash box. Each team works for 4 to 5 hours. Many teams will work for 2 nights. Each team member should have a special t-shirt, so they stand out from the crowd. Your message to the Customers must be clear.

### **5.7. Involve your Church**

If you are a church member, it is a good idea to involve your church into your fundraising activities. Very often churches already have structures and good ideas in place on how to fundraise. Why not take advantage of this?

### **5.8. A Gift in Your or Someone Else's Honor**

Instead of a traditional gift for your birthday, anniversary or other important celebration, you can ask your friends and family to give to Constru Casa in your name, or make a gift in someone else's name.

Additionally, there are many resources available on the internet, and many how-to guides for fundraising. Examples would be <http://www.fundraising-ideas.org/DIY/> or <http://www.fundraiserinsight.org/ideas/>.

The above list is a compilation of some suggestions, but there are so many more great ways to fundraise. Feel free to use any of them, and if you have great and successful ideas, please share them with us! We are always looking for new ways to raise funds, so we appreciate your ideas greatly.

## **6. Multiplying your Work and Staying Involved**

### **6.1. Multiply Your Work!**

By coming to Guatemala and working with Constru Casa you have had a unique insight into a different culture, housing in Guatemala, and probably expanded your perspective on life. Constru Casa relies on your support to continue its work, and to expand our reach. You can help us to continue to grow, and change the lives of even more families!

The best way to multiply what you have already done in Guatemala is to share it with other people. If you had a great experience with Constru Casa, let everyone know about it. There are many different ways for doing this: talk to people you know, organize a presentation for your family and friends, at your workplace, at your civic group, your book club, and share all these special moments you lived, write an article in a local newspaper about your experience, send an e-mail to all our contacts telling them about Constru Casa, and so forth.

As Constru Casa depends on donations, we of course would also like you to continue fundraising for us. In the previous chapter you can find a list of activities that you can carry out if you would like to support us. If you know of any foundations, or grant opportunities, or if you have contacts in this area, please let us know. We are constantly looking to diversify our sources of funding and are grateful for any help we can get. And please always remember what a long way your money can go here in Guatemala!

If you would like to become more involved, please talk to us about the possibility of becoming an Ambassador for Constru Casa: [voluntario@construcasa.org](mailto:voluntario@construcasa.org).

### **6.2. Stay Connected: Website, Newsletter, Facebook**

After you return home, we will send you our newsletter every three months, where you can learn about our latest projects, new families, and our needs.

You can also stay connected on facebook, liking our page, and getting frequent updates on what is new with Constru Casa.

The most comprehensive information about Constru Casa you can get by browsing our website. There too, we update you about our recent activities.

And of course, we would love to hear from you in the future! We are always available for answering questions, providing you with resources, and we always like to hear what our volunteers are up to: [voluntario@construcasa.org](mailto:voluntario@construcasa.org).

## 8. Contact

For more information and current updates, please visit our website:  
**[www.construcasa.org](http://www.construcasa.org)**

Post and walk-in address:  
Asociación Construcción Casa  
4a Avenida Norte # 22 'A'  
Antigua, Guatemala  
Tel/Fax (00502) 7832 2369  
[contacto@construcasa.org](mailto:contacto@construcasa.org)

Address in the US, also for sending tax-deductible donations:  
Asociación Construcción Casa USA  
23 Folklore Ct.  
The Woodlands, Tx. 77389  
United States of America

Our partner foundation in The Netherlands:  
Stichting Guatemala en Construcción  
Heiweg 235  
6533 PC Nijmegen  
telefoonnummer +31 (0)24 377 2071  
[info@stichtingguatemala.nl](mailto:info@stichtingguatemala.nl)