



Aldeas de Paz México - Volunteer Guideline

¡WELCOME!

Thank you for your interest and your continued trust! You are planning to volunteer with Aldeas de Paz for a great cause and we hope you will enjoy your stay in Mexico! This guideline has been created in order to help you to get started with the necessary information at hand. We hope it will be helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to [contact us](#). **Please make sure you arrive at your volunteer placement location and check-in between Monday and Friday!** On the weekend's almost all of us are on trips to discover the country and enjoy the weekend mostly out of town!

MEXICO - ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A valid Passport is all you need to enter Mexico. Citizens from Europe, the US and Canada as well as many other countries **DON'T need a visa!**

Your initial tourist entry stamp is issued for 180 days

Our Volunteers and Interns are considered tourists and are not "working" in the common sense of paid work and should consequently **NOT use the term "WORK"** at all when asked why they are here! You can say that you are "visiting a charity" and are helping out.

Read on here:

[Entry Requirements - Immigration & Custom - Mexico](#)

[Info - Visit Mexico](#)

[Info Mexico Wiki Travel](#)

HOW TO GET TO OUR PROGRAMS

Our programs in Mexico are basically focused on nature conservation and social conflict resolution so they are located in small towns and cities. During 2023, we are working on four localities:

For the first one (Chetumal), the closest airport is Chetumal [Code: CTM]. The other three can be reached through Mexico City International airports [Codes: MEX and NLU]

- *Chetumal, Quintana Roo*
- *Malinalco, Estado de México*
- *Chalma, Estado de México*
- *Mezquital Valley, Cardonal, Hidalgo*

Arrival at the main airport Mexico City "Benito Juarez" International Airport [MEX]

Mexico City “Benito Juarez” International Airport [code: MEX] is the closest for Chalma and Malinalco. Travel duration: 2,5 hours. For Valle de Mezquital, it takes an additional hour. This airport can also serve as a transit hub to Chetumal airport (1 hour flight from Mexico City to Chetumal).

Courtesy Welcome Service:

A hired English Speaking taxi driver or, if possible, an English speaking member of our staff *will be waiting for you just outside the gate from the luggage area! He will hold a big board with your name on it. He/she will bring you to the bus terminal nearby and buy your bus ticket! About 2,5-3 hours later on your arrival at the placement location in Malinalco/Chalma/Cardonal, local staff and volunteers are waiting for you and will take you to your accommodation!*

Be aware that, from 2022, there is also a new international airport that serves Mexico City that is located at its northern end (airport code: NLU.) From there it takes an additional one hour drive to Malinalco/Chalma, but one less to Cardonal, Hidalgo.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Your incoming flight should arrive before 13:00pm at Mexico City airport because the last connecting bus to your placement location leaves at 18:00pm!

In case your flight arrives after 15:00pm you will have to book a night in Mexico City before traveling on to our Foundation's location. Our driver will bring you to the hotel of your choice and the next day in the morning he will pick you up and bring you to the Bus Terminal and purchase the bus ticket for you! Please make sure that if you have to spend a night in Mexico City and need to travel the next day to Malinalco/Chalma/Cardonal that you arrive between Sunday and Thursday since we only check-in volunteers from Monday through Friday!

Bus departures from Mexico City (There are four bus terminals in Mexico City)

Malinalco: From the Western Bus Station named “Terminal de Autobuses Observatorio”. Bus to Tenancingo City or Chalma (30 minutes away from Malinalco). Our staff will pick you up at the place you arrive and take you to Malinalco. Buses every half an hour from 8 to 4 pm.

Chalma: From the Western Bus Station named “Terminal de Autobuses Observatorio”. Buses every half an hour from 8 to 4 pm.

Cardonal: From the Northern Bus Station named “Terminal de Autobuses del Norte”. The bus will take you to Pachuca where the local team will transfer you to Cardonal.

Taxi service from MEX/NLU airports to Chalma/Malinalco/Cardonal:

It is possible to organize a direct transfer to your final destination directly from Mexico City airports. In that case we will pay the normal service included in your placement and you pay the difference to the taxi fare. Travel time is 2.30-3 hours and the current rates will be available under request. Usually over \$200

Arrival at airport Felipe Angeles (NLU) [Mexico City New Auxiliary Airport]

The new Felipe Angeles airport is in the Northern bound of Mexico City.

IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER:

This new international airport is opening new flights each month with affordable prices. There is a straight flight from the Dominican Republic and from some US cities. It is a good option if you are going to Mezquital Valley or if you use it as a leg while you travel to Chetumal airport. We don't suggest arriving here if you are going to Malinalco or Chalma because it will make your journey longer. You will have to drive through Mexico City traffic jams to reach the highway that takes you to your final destination.

Arrival at airport Chetumal (CTM)

Our staff will meet you at Chetumal airport and drive you to your accommodation. The airport is inside the city so it is a short drive (less than 20 minutes).

HEALTH / INSURANCE

While low cost medical care is available in Mexico, it is mandatory that you have travel insurance when you volunteer or intern with us! Please check with your insurance company before you leave to determine whether or not you are covered during your journey. If not, travel insurance must be purchased for the duration of your trip.

We expect you to present proof of the health/travel insurance on your arrival by providing us a copy of your insurance details in order to be able to ensure health insurance coverage in case of an emergency.

MONEY / LOCAL CURRENCY

The currency of Mexico is the Mexican Peso (MXN). You can exchange € or US\$ to MXN at the airport and you can withdraw money from any bank or ATM in local currency. A fee of around 4€/US\$ (100 MXN) is usually charged for the use of the ATM. The maximum amount that can be withdrawn in one go, is 9.000 MXN.

The amount of money, which you will need during your stay, will largely depend on your lifestyle and your planned activities.

Local groceries are quite inexpensive. Eating out at local Mexican restaurants is rather cheap, whereas a pizza may cost between 7-12US\$. Transportation is comparably cheap whereas tours offered for tourists to main attractions may cost around 100-200US\$.

ACCOMODATION

Our Volunteer Guesthouse Apartments

Our guesthouse apartments in Chalma, Malinalco, Cardonal and Chetumal are extremely conveniently located and are scheduled on a daily basis by our staff. Usually, we search for places

that are a few minutes away from our offices, places we work, supermarkets and touristic spots. **Your local coordinator will send you pictures of your accommodation previous to your arrival once your placement is secured.** Our Guesthouse apartments are fully furnished and have well equipped kitchens with gas stoves and a fridge. Each apartment also has WiFi access. A shared room is the standard option.

Upgrades are available for single room occupancy!

The single room upgrade secures the privilege of an individual room all by yourself during your entire placement while other volunteers might be sharing their gender divide room with fellow volunteers.

Living together with volunteers from all over the world is a unique chance for cultural exchange and can be an exciting and new way of living compared to anything you've ever experienced before. It has certainly been a key experience in the lives of many past volunteers! Volunteers work and live together and learn how to be empathetic and to be considerate of the others' needs. They share their free time, house cleaning tasks and cooking (optional). It means that they also get close, have immense fun along the way, and possibly develop lifelong friendships! We feel that it is important to highlight that we have created an environment of respect and consideration.

Staying at a Host Family home (Not available in Chetumal)

Volunteers with a genuine interest in cultural exchange and language immersion will enjoy this accommodation option! Integrate yourself into these strong communities, and enjoy the different pace of life and the fantastic opportunity to make local friends.

Amenities are basic, but you will enjoy your private room and WiFi. Local inhabitants speak Spanish and some speak English as well! The two meals included are shared with the host family. Volunteers are welcome to spend free time with the family and discover the villages and their beautiful surroundings.

SPANISH LESSONS

We offer free Spanish language immersion classes because it is quite possible to volunteer and learn Spanish at the same time! Walk away with capabilities in a new language or learn, expand, or polish your Spanish skills. The focus is on conversational skills and full cultural/social immersion. Lessons focus on developing communication skills so that students are able to put their knowledge to practical use as soon as they step outside the classroom.

Learn Spanish in a natural and spontaneous way, just as you have learned your mother tongue. Next to traditional classroom lessons, our Spanish classes may also include conversational practises, group games and activities.

Our students are encouraged to speak Spanish right from the very first day, using it in typical real-life situations: the basic syllabus is supplemented by special exercises, such as role-play, situational dialogues and work projects. Outside the classroom, the learning process continues as you are immersed in Spanish language and culture. Any extra private lessons can be booked while you are here!

LIVING IN MEXICO

Living in Mexico can be a unique and exciting experience, with its vibrant culture, rich history and beautiful landscapes. However, there are also some challenges and considerations to keep in

mind. Here's a guide to give you an idea of what it's like to live in Mexico. In conclusion, living in Mexico can be an incredible experience, but it's important to consider the culture, language, cost of living, safety, healthcare, cuisine, and climate. We will help you as much as we can so that you can fully immerse yourself in Mexican culture and enjoy all that the country has to offer.

Mexico has electricity with current running 110/120 volts, 60 cycles, short occasional power outages are common in rain/hurricane seasons. During the dry season, sometimes the water supply is subject to inconsistencies. (Our volunteer apartments have western style bathroom facilities)

CULTURE

Mexico has a strong cultural identity that is deeply rooted in its history and traditions. Mexican culture is a blend of pre-Columbian and European influences, and it is reflected in its art, music, food, and language. Mexicans are generally friendly and hospitable, and family is an important aspect of their culture. It is common to see large extended families gathering for celebrations and holidays.

LANGUAGE

The official language in Mexico is Spanish and while many people speak English, it is not widely spoken outside of tourist areas. It's recommended to learn Spanish to fully immerse yourself in the culture and communicate effectively with locals.

COST OF LIVING

The cost of living in Mexico varies depending on the region and lifestyle. Generally, the cost of living is lower than in many developed countries.

SAFETY

While almost all of Mexico is beautiful and safe to live and travel, it is also known for some criminal activity in certain regions. It is important to do your research on the safety of the area when traveling out of town and take necessary precautions to stay safe. The towns where we work are safe and peaceful. In big cities, avoid walking alone at night, keep valuable possessions out of sight, and be aware of your surroundings.

To reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime, you can take several steps to make yourself less of a target such as integrating into your community, learning the local language and acting responsibly. In many ways, you can behave as you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware.

HEALTHCARE

Mexico has both public and private healthcare systems, and the quality of care can vary widely depending on the region and type of healthcare provider. Please remember that health insurance is mandatory for volunteering with us.

CUISINE

Mexican cuisine is known for its bold and flavorful dishes, such as tacos, panuchos, tortas, enchiladas, and guacamole. The country is also home to a wide range of regional specialties, such as mole in Oaxaca, and cochinita pibil in Yucatan. If you enjoy spicy food, you'll love the cuisine in Mexico! In the Central Highlands, regional bread is awesome!

CLIMATE

Mexico has a diverse climate, with hot and humid conditions in coastal areas, and cooler temperatures in mountainous regions. The country also experiences seasonal variations, with rainy seasons in the summer months and drier conditions in the winter.

***Weather in Chetumal** - Chetumal is a city located in the southeast of Mexico, near the border with Belize. The climate in Chetumal is classified as tropical wet and dry, with hot and humid conditions throughout the year. The average temperature in Chetumal ranges from 24°C (75°F) to 32°C (90°F), with the hottest months being May through September. During these months, temperatures can sometimes exceed 35°C (95°F), so it can feel very hot and humid. The coolest months are December through February, with average temperatures ranging from 20°C (68°F) to 28°C (82°F). Chetumal also experiences two distinct seasons: a wet season and a dry season. The wet season runs from May through October, with the most rainfall occurring in September and October. During the wet season, it's common to experience heavy rainfall and occasional tropical storms. The dry season runs from November through April, with very little rainfall and sunny weather. Overall, if you're planning to volunteer in Chetumal, it's important to be prepared for hot and humid conditions, especially during the summer months. You'll also want to bring appropriate clothing and gear to handle the occasional heavy rainfall and tropical storms that can occur during the wet season.*

***Weather in Malinalco and Chalma** - Malinalco and Chalma are small towns, located just 15 kilometers apart, in the Malinalco Valley in the State of Mexico (Central Highlands), about 115 km southwest of Mexico City. The climate in both towns is classified as subtropical highland, with mild temperatures throughout the year. The average temperature ranges from 15°C (59°F) to 25°C (77°F), with the warmest months being April through June. During these months, temperatures can sometimes exceed 30°C (86°F), but it's still relatively mild compared to other regions of Mexico.*

***The coolest months are December through February**, with average temperatures ranging from 8°C (46°F) to 20°C (68°F). The area also experiences two distinct seasons: a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season runs from May through October, with the most rainfall occurring in July and August. During the rainy season, it's common to experience occasional thunderstorms and heavy rainfall. The dry season runs from November through April, with very little rainfall and sunny weather. Overall, if you're planning to volunteer in Malinalco or Chalma, you can expect mild temperatures throughout the year, with occasional fluctuations during the warmest and coolest months. You'll also want to be prepared for the occasional thunderstorm and heavy rainfall if you're visiting during the rainy season.*

***Weather in Mezquital Valley (Cardonal, Hidalgo)** - The Mezquital Valley is located in the central region of Mexico, and its climate is classified as semi-arid. The weather in the Mezquital Valley is characterized by hot temperatures during the day and cool temperatures at night, with low levels of precipitation. The average temperature in the Mezquital Valley ranges from 10°C (50°F) to 25°C (77°F), with the hottest months being April through June. During these months, temperatures can sometimes exceed 30°C (86°F), making it quite hot and dry. The coolest months are December through February, with average temperatures ranging from 5°C (41°F) to 20°C (68°F).*

The Mezquital Valley experiences a dry season from October through May, with very little rainfall and low levels of humidity. The rainy season runs from June through September, with the most rainfall occurring in July and August. Despite the increased rainfall during the rainy season, the total annual precipitation in the Mezquital Valley is relatively low, with an average of around 400 mm (16 inches) per year. Overall, if you're planning to volunteer in the Mezquital Valley, you'll want to be prepared for hot and dry conditions throughout most of the year, with occasional cooler temperatures at night. The dry climate also means that you'll need to be mindful of water usage and conservation.

FOOD AND DIET

Mexican cuisine is one of the most diverse and flavorful in the world, with a rich history and a wide variety of regional specialties. Mexican food is known for its bold flavors, colorful presentation, and use of fresh ingredients such as chilies, tomatoes, avocados, and a variety of herbs and spices.

Traditional Mexican cuisine is based on a variety of staples, including corn, beans, and various meats such as beef, pork, and chicken. Popular dishes include tacos, burritos, mole, panuchos, enchiladas, tamales, and pozole. Mexican food also features a wide range of salsas, guacamoles, and other condiments that add flavor and texture to dishes.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards healthier, plant-based diets in Mexico, with an emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins such as beans and tofu. This trend is reflected in the growing popularity of vegetarian and vegan restaurants and dishes throughout the country.

Mexican cuisine also includes a wide range of beverages, including fresh fruit juices, soft drinks, and traditional alcoholic drinks such as tequila, mezcal, and beer. Mexican coffee is also well-regarded, with a growing number of specialty coffee shops popping up in cities and towns throughout the country.

Overall, Mexican cuisine is a rich and diverse reflection of the country's history, culture, and geography, and offers a wide range of delicious and nutritious options for those who are interested in exploring its many flavors and traditions. Volunteers that travel to Chetumal will find a different cuisine tradition than those who volunteer in the Central Highlands (Chalma, Malinalco, and Mezquital Valley)

In general, you will be able to find most of the products you are used to from home, in the local supermarkets and on the market. Along with the traditional recipes, some restaurants also offer pasta or pizza and international dishes.

COMMUNICATION

All our volunteer apartments, host family homes, the NGO management and MultiMedia workplace and office as well as our attention center have access to WiFi. In addition, WiFi is very common and available in most buses, public spaces, and restaurants. Many communities have computer centers or internet cafés that provide email and internet access. Prepaid SIM-cards and internet data are freely available and cheap.

***Cellphones.** Most communication for the organization is via WhatsApp. It is recommendable to buy a prepaid Mexican SIM card. Telcel, Movistar, AT&T, Pillofon (only available for Chetumal) are the most common providers. At the Telcel shop or at a convenience store, a prepaid card costs 60 MXN (3 \$US) plus the desired credit for data. We suggest you buy "data packages" that offer you a determined amount of data during a period of time. Unless your cell phone can hold two cards at the same time, we advise you to bring a second (old) cell phone for everyday use. Country code from abroad: +52. All calls to/from Mexican cell phone numbers to other Mexican cellphones are considered local calls. There is no roaming within the country. Also, if you own a Mexican SIM card, there is no roaming between Mexico, US, and Canada. In almost any convenience store it is possible to buy cell phone credit and data.*

***Mail Letters and packages** sent by public post take from 10 days to several weeks or months to arrive. Some never arrived though! The safest option for post and valuable content is sending it with FedEx, UPS or DHL or any other private post company!*

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is easy in Mexico. Most urban travel is by bus and vans, although taxis or colectivos (a sort of shared taxi) are available as well. Intercity travel is by bus.

Most volunteers rely on public transportation such as the combis (local bus) or taxi to get around. For safety purposes, we advise you not to use public transportation alone between 7pm and 7am. Private taxis are a safer means at night. In Chetumal it is possible to use UBER. For your orientation: taking a local taxi in Chetumal will cost you 30-40 pesos and local buses will go from 15 to 50 pesos according to the distance in the Central Highlands.

INFORMATION ABOUT MEXICAN CULTURE

Mexican culture is a diverse and complex mix of influences from the country's indigenous, colonial, and modern history. Some of the most important aspects of Mexican culture include:

Family is the cornerstone of Mexican culture, and extended family members are often very close and involved in each other's lives.

The majority of Mexicans are Catholic, and religion plays an important role in daily life, with frequent celebrations of saints' days and other religious holidays.

Mexican cuisine is world-renowned for its bold flavors, fresh ingredients, and colorful presentation. Popular dishes include tacos, burritos, enchiladas, and tamales.

Mexico has a rich artistic tradition that includes everything from pre-Columbian pottery and textiles to modern muralists and painters like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Dr. Atl, Remedios Varo and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Mexican music is diverse and includes genres such as mariachi, banda, norteño, and corrido. Music is often a central part of celebrations and festivals.

Mexican dance is also diverse, with traditional dances like the Jarabe Tapatio and modern styles like salsa and cumbia.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Central Mexico, while Baseball is almost as popular in the North, South and the coastal areas. The country has a strong tradition of boxing and lucha libre (Mexican wrestling).

Mexico celebrates a variety of holidays throughout the year, including Independence Day (September 16), Day of the Dead (November 1-2), and Christmas (December 25).

Public Holidays 2023

- 1. January - New Year's Day (Sunday)
- 6. February - Constitution Day (Monday)
- 20 March - Benito Juarez's Birthday (Monday)
- 13 April - Holy Thursday (Thursday)
- 14 April - Good Friday (Friday)
- 1. May - Labor Day (Monday)
- 16 September - Independence Day (Saturday)
- 1. November - Day of the Dead (Wednesday)

20 November - Revolution Day (Monday)

25 December - Christmas Day (Monday)

Aldeas de Paz programs and projects are ongoing throughout the whole year and you are welcome to join us and stay with us even through summer holidays and Christmas holidays from December 23, 2023 until January 2, 2024. Working life and business life comes to a halt through this two week period since the whole country is celebrating Christmas and New Year which are very important holidays for Mexicans. However, Volunteers are welcome to celebrate Christmas and New Year together with us.

WHAT TO DO IN AND AROUND CHETUMAL?

Chetumal is the capital city of the state of Quintana Roo in Southern Mexico, located on the border with Belize. Here are some things to do in and around Chetumal:

Explore the Mayan Culture Museum: This museum showcases the history and culture of the Maya civilization, including a replica of a traditional Mayan home, artifacts, and interactive exhibits.

Visit the Chetumal Bay and the Malecon: The Malecon is a scenic boardwalk along the bay where you can walk, run, or bike while enjoying beautiful views of the water.

See the Oxtankah Archaeological Site: This Mayan ruin is located just outside of Chetumal and features a small pyramid, ball court, and other structures from the ancient Mayan civilization.

Visit Bacalar: This nearby town is home to the beautiful Laguna de Bacalar, a stunning lake with crystal clear water and a variety of aquatic activities.

Explore the Calderitas neighborhood: This charming neighborhood is located just outside of Chetumal and is known for its seafood restaurants and picturesque waterfront.

Visit the Chacchoben Mayan Ruins: These ruins are located about an hour's drive from Chetumal and feature several well-preserved pyramids and other structures from the ancient Mayan civilization.

Visit Belize: Chetumal shares a border less than 1 km away from this central American country. Taxi boats can take you from Chetumal pier to San Pedro or Caye Caulker for less than 100 USD.

WHAT TO DO IN AND AROUND MEZQUITAL VALLEY (Cardonal, Hidalgo)?

The Mezquital Valley is a region located in central Mexico, known for its stunning landscapes, rich history, and unique cultural traditions. Here are some things to do in and around the Mezquital Valley:

Visit the Tula Archaeological Site: This ancient city was once a major center of the Toltec civilization and is home to several impressive structures, including the Temple of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli and the Atlantes.

Explore the Real del Monte: This charming town was once a mining center and is home to several historic buildings and landmarks, including the English-style Panteón Inglés cemetery and the Hidalgo State Mining Museum.

Visit the El Chico National Park: This beautiful park is located in the mountains near Real del Monte and offers hiking trails, camping areas, and stunning views of the surrounding landscapes.

Taste the local cuisine: The Mezquital Valley is known for its delicious food, including barbacoa (slow-cooked lamb), mole (a rich sauce made with chili peppers and chocolate), and pulque (a traditional fermented drink made from the agave plant).

Take a hot air balloon ride: The Mezquital Valley is known for its beautiful landscapes, and a hot air balloon ride is a great way to see the region from above.

Explore the surrounding towns and villages: The Mezquital Valley is home to several charming towns and villages, each with its own unique culture and traditions, including Actopan, Huasca de Ocampo, and Tecozautla.

WHAT TO DO IN AND AROUND MALINALCO AND CHALMA?

Malinalco and Chalma are small towns, just a few kilometers apart from each other, located in the state of Mexico, just a few hours southwest of Mexico City. These towns are known for their beautiful natural surroundings and their rich history and culture. Here are some things to do in and around Chalma and Malinalco:

Visit the Malinalco Archaeological Site: This ancient site features several well-preserved structures from the Aztec civilization, including a temple, ball court, and other buildings. The site is located on a hillside overlooking the town and offers stunning views of the surrounding countryside.

Hike to the Cerro de los Idolos: This nearby hill is home to several ancient rock carvings, including images of deities and animals. The hike to the top of the hill is relatively easy and offers beautiful views of the town and the surrounding valley.

Explore the town center: Malinalco's town center is home to several historic buildings and landmarks, including the Parish of the Divine Savior, the Municipal Palace, and the Franciscan Convent.

Visit the nearby national parks: This beautiful park is located just outside of town and offers hiking trails, camping areas, and stunning views of the surrounding landscapes.

Taste the local cuisine: Malinalco is known for its delicious food, including mole (a rich sauce made with chili peppers and chocolate), barbacoa (slow-cooked lamb), and tamales (a traditional corn-based dish).

Take a day trip to the nearby town of Tonatico: This charming town is known for its hot springs and is a great place to relax and unwind.

Visit the nearby Monastery of San Francisco: This beautiful monastery is located in the nearby town of Ocuilan and features stunning colonial-era architecture and a rich history.

PACKING LIST

Everyone's packing list will differ depending on the programs they are involved in: check here: <https://www.peacevillages.org/pack>