

“So, you want to lead a bottle school trip?”

A guide for prospective trip leaders

The purpose of this guide

This guide is for people who are thinking about leading a bottle school trip to Guatemala.

This guide will answer your questions about your role as trip leader, and how to get started with preparing a trip.

How to lead a trip

In short, the process works like this:

1. Read this guide in full, and the whole of the [Serve The World Today web site](#)
2. Contact friends, family and colleagues to confirm that you have at least 15 people who will “definitely” come on the trip
3. Fill out the [online application form](#)
4. Once we have asked you any follow-up questions and confirmed your trip dates, we will create a web page where you all can book your trip.
5. We will support you in answering questions from people interested in going on your trip

The minimum number of people we can take on a trip is 15, and the maximum is 25.

If you haven’t been on trip before, make sure you know **exactly** what is involved – this is **your** responsibility. Ask us if you are not sure about anything: we are here to help you.

Role of the trip leader (before the trip)

The trip leader is the person who makes a bottle school trip happen. Your enthusiasm and passion for bottle schools is what people will latch on to; that’s what people are buying in to when they sign up for your bottle school trip.

In general, we expect you to:

1. Advertise the trip to your friends, family and colleagues
2. Guide people through the process of booking their trip
3. Answer common questions from potential trip participants (see below) and refer more complicated questions to the Hug It Forward team on the ground in Guatemala
4. Check in with people regularly to make sure that they feel excited and at ease about their trip
5. Communicate with the Hug It Forward team any concerns that come up

Common questions you may have to answer

Some common topics for questions are listed below. Most of these are answered on the Serve The World Today web site, or you may be able to answer the questions from your own experience on a bottle school trip. You should try to become as knowledgeable as possible about Hug It Forward and bottle school trips, so that you can answer the majority of questions from trip participants yourself, without having to refer questions to the Hug It Forward team.

Trip participants commonly have questions about the following topics:

- Health and safety
- Accommodations
- Transportation
- Booking flights
- Sustainable giving
- Internet/cell phone connectivity
- Packing list
- Dietary restrictions
- Temperature and climate
- Spending money and tipping
- Language concerns
- Fundraising
- Relationship between Hug It Forward and Serve The World Today
- Any other special needs

Role of the trip leader (during the trip)

The trip leader is the “glue” that holds the trip together. You are the common element, the person that all trip participants know and trust and to whom they will instinctively look for support and advice. You are the link between the group and the trip guides. The trip will take on your personality – each trip will have a unique “feel” because of what the trip leader brings.

On a day-to-day basis during the trip, you will help with:

- Maintaining safety
- Group cohesion and energy
- Communicate concerns/feedback that volunteers have to the trip guide
- Keeping the group punctual and ensuring they follow the trip guide’s instruction
- Meet with the trip guide each night to confirm itinerary for the following day
- Check in with people on an individual basis, ensure that they are being appropriately challenged and supported
- Regular reminders to sanitize hands, drink water, apply sunblock, and not eating food that is not provided by Hug It Forward

- Encourage people to step outside their comfort zones
- Coordinate the collection of tips for trip guides, private chef, and drivers
- Guide conversation at mealtimes to stimulate the sharing of experiences, thoughts and feelings (see below)
- Deal with situations as they arise and bring them to the trip guide's attention (see below)

Guided Conversation topics for Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Mealtimes are an opportunity for the whole group to sit together, reflect and share observations of things that have happened since the last mealtime. You as team leader can help to direct conversation away from casual chitter-chatter to more profound experiences that people have had. Sharing experiences with the group encourages thoughtfulness and fuels personal growth and learning.

Some ideas for conversation starters:

- What did you learn today?
- How were you challenged today?
- What made you feel uncomfortable today?
- What is something that you will start doing/stop doing once you get back home?

Dealing with situations

It is very rare that serious situations arise on bottle school trips. However, there are some things that you should be aware of. Know that the trip guides have a lot of experience with dealing with groups of volunteers, and they can handle any situation imaginable. You should never feel that you are alone in having to deal with any situation.

Sickness and Injury: Check in with people on an individual basis. When someone is not feeling well, acting quickly and discreetly is key, as sharing details about a team member's health can affect other people's morale. If someone is experiencing a fever, stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea or other discomforts, notify the trip guide privately. Let the volunteer know that there is access to a doctor anytime they wish. Encourage them to see a doctor if their health is keeping them from participating at 100%. In some situations, an *Incident Report Form* might need to be filled out and if it does, the trip guide might ask for your assistance with that process.

Homesickness: Be alert to individuals that are secluding themselves from group activity. Encourage homesick travelers to engage with the group. Be sensitive and positive with anyone dealing with this.

Heated debates: A team leader is responsible for keeping the environment open and safe for people to speak their mind, and to voice their opinions and reactions to whatever this experience means to them. If necessary, a team leader should interject and remind the volunteers why they are here, and that while their opinions can be voiced, it needs to be done in a respectful tone and with non-judgmental words.

Complainers: If someone is complaining about anything at all, kindly and privately give them a reality check. Remind them why we are in Guatemala and that any “sub-ideal” circumstances are a part of the experience and challenge them to look for the good in the situation or conditions they are complaining about. If they must complain about something, let them know they can express their concerns with a team leader privately.

Alcohol and Drugs: There is a zero tolerance for alcohol abuse and illegal substance use on bottle school trips. The communities we work in are very conservative, and drinking alcohol could be considered offensive to their culture. When you return to Antigua at the end of your trip, we strongly discourage all trip participants from drinking alcohol. Although it may seem to some to be a harmless activity, being out drinking late at night greatly increases the chance of something “bad” happening. We respect the right of adults to make their own decisions, but the fact is that if something “bad” happens this could affect the reputation of Hug It Forward, and ultimately could threaten our entire bottle school program in Guatemala. As a trip leader, you will be expected to lead by example, and to communicate the reasons for not drinking to the group in a way that people understand and respect our policy on this topic.

Meal preferences: If you notice someone is not eating or is having any issues with what is being served, talk with them immediately about accommodating their needs. Cristy is extremely attentive to people’s diets and she will do whatever she can to make sure each person is well nourished and enjoys their meals while they are in Guatemala.

Role of the trip leader (after the trip)

Once everyone is safely on the plane home, your role is 90% complete. However, that last 10% is important to us too:

1. 2-5 days post trip, follow up with each volunteer to thank them and inquire about their interest on going again and/or friends that have expressed an interest. Ask for more feedback from them, maybe things that they did not share on the feedback form.
2. Give us *your* feedback! How did you enjoy leading a group? How could we have made the experience easier or more enjoyable for you? Would you like to come back again and lead another group? Do you know anybody else who would want to?

Some questions to think about if you’re thinking of leading a trip

Before you jump in to leading a trip, here are some things to think about... It doesn’t matter if you don’t answer “yes” to all or even most of these questions – they are just things to think about. Thinking about these things might lead to some questions you have for the Hug It Forward team, which we would be more than happy to talk to you about.

1. Have you fully read the [Information About Your Trip](#) section on the Serve The World Today web site?
2. Have you ever lived in or worked directly with a developing country?
3. Does poverty and sickness upset you emotionally when you see it?
4. Have you ever started, created or contributed to a long term volunteering cause?
5. Do you have any fears of being in Guatemala, e.g. border crossings, lack of comfort physically or emotionally?
6. Do you have a database of contacts to create excitement and get 15-25 committed volunteers to book a trip to Guatemala?
7. Do you speak Spanish or are you willing to learn the basics to communicate with local people?
8. What is your work schedule and how would a trip fit into your life?
9. Do you have leadership attributes to tackle any daily issues as a liaison for your team?
10. Are you aware you need to purchase your own airline ticket or raise funds to lead the trip?
11. Do you have any physical, emotional, dietary restrictions or financial limitations?
12. Are you comfortable encouraging your volunteers to fundraise for Hug it Forward?

Next steps

We hope that you have found this guide useful. Please let us know if you have any questions, anything at all. If you are encouraged by what you have read and you are ready to lead a trip, start talking to people and fill out the [online application form](#)!

Contacts

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