



Community-led Initiatives for a Sustainable Future

2201 Broadway, Suite 508  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 835-1334  
info@ecoviva.org

## **Community Empowerment Tours Travel Program Policies**

Thank you for choosing EcoViva Community Empowerment Tours! We look forward to traveling with you. This document explains our policies regarding trip payment, cancellation, arrivals, and other important issues. Please review it carefully.

### **Application and Payment Process**

Each participant will be sent an email with a link to an online application form. Please complete this form in its entirety. In addition, please print, sign, and send in the attached Intent to Participate and Release from Liability Form (see below) together with your payment.

After we receive your application and deposit or full payment, we will send you a Community Empowerment Tours Guidebook via email or mail. We encourage you to print it and read it in its entirety prior to departure. Please also review the [Tour FAQs](#) on our website for answers to many basic questions.

### **Payment Policy**

Full payment must be received at least forty-five (45) days in advance of the tour departure date, along with the application materials. At that time decisions will be made as to whether there are enough participants for the tour to proceed. More participants may be able to sign up for the tour past this date, in consultation with EcoViva staff.

### **Cancellation & Refund Policy**

All participant cancellations and refund requests must be submitted in writing via email (info@ecoviva.org) or by mail to our Oakland office.

Cancellation notices and refund requests received prior to one (1) month before tour departure will be issued a full refund minus a \$100 administrative fee. The fee can be transferred to another tour for up to one year.

EcoViva reserves the right to cancel a tour for safety or security reasons such as natural disaster, political unrest, or other factors beyond our control. If EcoViva cancels the tour, a refund will be given, minus the administrative fee of \$100 per person. If a participant

cancels less than 30 days prior to departure, the full payment is non-refundable. If a participant cancels all or part of a tour due to family emergencies or medical reasons, we will work with the person to issue a partial refund or transfer to another tour, for up to one year.

### **Travel Delays**

Flight information for all participants must be submitted to us no later than thirty (30) days prior to departure. EcoViva cannot give refunds for participants who do not arrive or depart on the scheduled dates due to factors beyond our control, such as missing one's flights, changes or cancellations made by airlines or other transportation companies.

### **Visas**

Currently it is not necessary for U.S. citizens to obtain a visa prior to entering El Salvador. Travelers are issued tourist visas by Salvadoran officials upon arriving at the airport. Please have \$10.00 cash to pay for this visa. EcoViva is not responsible for problems related to passports and visas, such as the documents being lost, forgotten, out of date, etc., or for any unexpected changes to the Salvadoran government's visa policies. Each participant's passport expiration date must be valid for at least six (6) months following the dates of travel, otherwise the Salvadoran government may deny entry.

### **Travel Insurance**

EcoViva does not provide any travel or medical insurance. You are responsible for purchasing your own insurance policy. We strongly suggest that you purchase a policy which provides emergency medical coverage and coverage for loss or theft.

### **Dismissals**

Any participant who violates the attached Code of Conduct (see below) may be asked to leave the program and return to the US at the participant's expense.

### **Late Arrivals & Early Departures**

It is expected that all the participants in a given tour arrive and depart on the same days, even though they may not be on the exact same flights, and to meet the EcoViva representative at the designated time and meeting place. It is disruptive to the tour experience and to host communities when participants arrive late or leave early, for whatever reason.

EcoViva is responsible for arranging the transportation and housing for the participants for the duration of the tour, unless otherwise noted in writing. EcoViva is *not* responsible

for transportation and housing arrangements and costs for those individuals who choose to arrive prior to the tour or who opt to stay longer after the tour.

Should an individual participant need to arrive at a time different from the rest of the tour:

- The participant must communicate this in writing to EcoViva no later than thirty (30) days prior to the tour arrival date. For notices received less than 30 days prior, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to accommodate the change.
- The participant is responsible for paying the transportation and any extra costs involved in meeting up with the tour at the place designated by EcoViva. These costs are to be paid per EcoViva direction (in advance; at the time of service; or as otherwise agreed.)

Should an individual participant need to leave earlier than the rest of the group:

- The participant must communicate this in writing to EcoViva no later than thirty (30) days prior to the tour arrival date. For notices received less than 30 days prior, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to accommodate the change.
- The participant is responsible for the cost of transportation and any extra costs involved in traveling from the group to the airport (or other place of departure). These costs are to be paid per EcoViva direction (in advance or at the time of service, or as otherwise agreed.)

### **Late Arriving Flights**

Unless otherwise advised by the group leader, participants should make sure their arriving and departing flights arrive in daylight hours. If the flight, for whatever reason, arrives in San Salvador past 4:00 pm, the participant(s) may be asked to stay in a hotel near the airport and will be responsible for all related expenses (hotel, taxi, food, etc.). In general, no reimbursement will be given for any unused room/board that had been prearranged for the tour that night. The participant will then be able to travel to the region in the morning, when it is safer to do so.

### **Gifts/Care Packages to Host Families and Communities**

Many of our participants and volunteers wish to respond to the experience of seeing the hardships of their hosts by offering gifts of clothing, household goods, medications or even cash. While we perfectly understand the emotional reasons behind this seemingly rational response, we kindly ask you not to provide any gifts, donations, or loans on a personal basis to the members of your host community during or after your participation in our programs.

A generous gift to your host family will feel very positive in the short-term, but will undermine their growth and development in the long-term. Our local partners have asked us to not make personal gifts to individuals in the community. Instead, we give our local partner organization any in-kind and money gifts to be distributed fairly among the different communities. This includes medicine, clothes, school supplies, toys, candy, and anything else.

Sharing photos and letters with your host family however, is welcome. If you wish to send a letter and/or photos (unframed) of no more than 3 oz. to someone you met in El Salvador, you can send them to the EcoViva office with clear notes as to the family name, place of residence, etc. When one of our staff travels to El Salvador, we will see that it gets delivered.



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## **Community Empowerment Tours Code of Conduct**

Please read the following carefully. While you are travelling with us, the Salvadoran communities you visit will look to you as a representative of EcoViva and of your country. Accordingly, it is important to maintain a high standard of behavior.

This Code of Conduct is designed for the benefit and safety of both the participant and the program in which you participate. By signing the enclosed *Intent to Participate & Release from Liability form* you indicate your willingness to observe this Code of Conduct in its entirety.

1. I will act with integrity and respect for the community, my fellow volunteers and the EcoViva Program in which I participate. If I have any questions as to what is within the realm of appropriate community behavior, I will speak to the local trip coordinator or EcoViva staff person.
2. I will respect the instructions of the local trip coordinator and staff, and follow their instructions even if I am not in agreement with them.
3. I will act in a safe and responsible manner, careful not to endanger the health and safety of others or myself. I will not engage in any behavior that may be detrimental to the program in which I participate.
4. I will comply with all the laws, including laws pertaining to alcohol, of both El Salvador and the United States.
5. I will not use or possess any drugs that are illegal under the laws of the United States or El Salvador.
6. I will comply with the program itinerary and will not leave the program unless there is scheduled time allotted for this purpose and I have received prior permission from the local trip coordinator or an EcoViva staff person.
7. I will not handle firearms or explosives, including fireworks.

Any participant who violates this Code of Conduct may be asked to leave the program and return the United States at the expense of the participant.



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## **EcoViva's Statement on Security**

October 2015

If you've been keeping track of current events in El Salvador, you may have read some alarming headlines in the U.S. press about the country and the continuing trends of violence. It's important to be clear about the exact nature of the high crime rates currently being observed in El Salvador, and how it may affect our work, our local partners' initiatives, and our colleagues and friends in the Lower Lempa and Bay of Jiquilisco.

On a national level, homicide rates per month are currently some of the highest recorded since the civil conflict ended in 1992. Over 90% of these crimes are committed between rival gangs, and state authorities in the police and military. A vast majority of the victims are young men between the ages of 18 and 30.

To date, U.S. citizens have not been the target of this violence. State Department Travel advisories highlight escalating violence, but the precautions they recommend U.S. citizens and visitors take have remained constant, and are the same that have been in place for a number of years. In addition, EcoViva's work with the Mangrove Association on their ongoing community initiatives have not been threatened or targeted by violence.

Nevertheless, EcoViva and local staff have reported an uptick in violent activity in the Lower Lempa, with cases that unfortunately affect the lives of our friends and colleagues that call the Lower Lempa home. It is because of this observed increase in violent events in select communities in the Lower Lempa that EcoViva and the Mangrove Association are taking greater precautions to ensure that project staff and visitors continue to collaborate on important local programs, and have a safe, productive, and fulfilling experience.

Since its inception 20 years ago, EcoViva has enacted a safety and security protocol that provides appropriate protections to ensure a safe, productive environment for visitors and collaborators. During our life as an organization, El Salvador has always exhibited conditions that require conscious situational awareness and safety measures. Now, more

than ever, it is important that visitors work with us to understand why our safety measures are in place, and see that they are strictly observed:

- Group itineraries are planned well in advance, and continuously assessed by EcoViva and local community actors for risk prior to and during the programmed visit.
- Visitors will not visit a community or area that has not been cleared first by EcoViva and local collaborators.
- In the region visitors will reside in the organization's local community center, a hub of the local community for over a decade, where the facility is monitored and cared for 24/7.
- Accommodations made outside of the region at hotels or other locales are vetted by EcoViva staff for safety and security conditions, in coordination with hotel staff.
- Visitors will always travel in groups of two or more, and not travel at night. They will never visit a community without accompaniment by local organization staff.
- The group will never rely on public transportation, and have a marked vehicle dedicated solely for their group's use.
- Throughout EcoViva's project work, security and safety are an active part of our periodic planning and evaluation of the work, and security measures are integrated into the implementation phase of planned community meetings, events, and other local activities.

El Salvador and our local partners are currently facing tough times. At EcoViva, our heightened security and safety measures allow us to safely and effectively continue to provide project support and much-needed collaboration. We hope that you will consider travelling with us to El Salvador, and being part of this important work.

Karolo Aparicio  
Executive Director, EcoViva



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## **Zika: What You Need to Know**

March 2016

Zika, like dengue and chikungunya, is a virus primarily spread by mosquitoes. Most infected people are asymptomatic; for those who do present signs of the disease, common symptoms include fever, rash, muscle or joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). In the majority of cases, the disease is mild and not life-threatening.

However, Zika has caused a lot of alarm because of its rapid spread and its possible link to birth defects in babies (microcephaly) and to Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare illness that causes muscle weakness, and, in some cases, paralysis and death. We have also learned that the Zika virus can be transmitted sexually from men to women, and can persist in bodily fluids like semen for extended periods of time. There is still a lot we don't know about Zika.

As of early March 2016, there have been 9,179 reported cases of suspected Zika in El Salvador. The number of pregnant women thought to be infected with Zika is 228; they are being monitored, and as of February 22, 29 had given birth to babies, none of whom presented microcephaly.

For those traveling with us to El Salvador on a Community Empowerment Tour, we continue to make the same recommendations we've always made: we encourage participants to use insect repellent and cover up with clothing to avoid bites.

In addition, based on the recommendations currently being made by health institutions worldwide, we recommend that pregnant women or women looking to become pregnant consult their doctors before deciding to travel to El Salvador. We also recommend that men be aware of the risk of sexual transmission of the virus.

The CDC published very complete and detailed information about [Zika in El Salvador](#) in a travel health notice issued March 11, 2016, for El Salvador and other Zika-impacted countries. You can also visit the [CDC](#) and [WHO](#) web pages on Zika for more information.

If you still have qualms about traveling to El Salvador, speak with your doctor about your concerns.



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Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I intend to travel to El Salvador with EcoViva. I am enclosing the full amount due (\$\_\_\_\_\_) OR a deposit of \$100 to reserve my space on an upcoming Community Empowerment Tour.

I understand that if I need to cancel the tour for any reason for up to 30 days prior to departure, I will receive a refund minus \$100 administrative fee. If I cancel less than 30 days prior to departure, I will not receive a refund.

I have read and understood the Travel Program Policies and the Code of Conduct, and agree to abide by them.

I understand that travel to any foreign country involves risks and I am undertaking these risks voluntarily. I agree to hold harmless EcoViva and its affiliates, including all employees, contractors and local partners, for any injuries, whether physical or emotional, incurred to my person or property while in El Salvador. I understand that EcoViva provides no travel insurance and that I am responsible for ensuring my own coverage for medical care and personal property while traveling abroad.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_  
(if Participant is under 18)

Tour name and dates: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return this signed and dated page along with your payment to the EcoViva office at the address above or via email at info@ecoviva.org.*