

FAQs

Rice Foundation, Copan, Honduras

Questions regarding the Copan area:

What can you tell me about the district of Copan?

Copan is in the northwest corner of Honduras, half an hour from the Guatemalan border. It is located in the longest mountain range of Honduras, known as the Merendon, and is lushly green. Even during the dry season, from December to May, Copan remains one of the most beautiful places in Honduras. The ancient Mayan Ruins, Ruinas de Copan, attract tourists from all over the world.

Do I need to know how to speak Spanish to get along well in Honduras?

You can survive perfectly well in Honduras even without knowing Spanish well. The Rice Foundation will use interpreters for all of its areas of service, but even when you go into the town of Ruinas de Copan you will find plenty of people who speak enough English for you to get along just fine.

What is the weather like?

The weather in Copan can vary greatly. It can be 98 degrees during the heat of the day and the height of the dry season, (mainly during February to May,) and a comfortable 85 during the rainy season. During December, it can get down to 60 degrees at night, and during the rainy season (the end of May through November) you can expect torrential rain every afternoon.

Questions about the culture:

What can you tell me about the culture of the locals?

Hondurans are a warm and friendly people who are quick to respond to friendly overtures. They like Americans and are generally very happy to interact with them. Hondurans are inclusive; if you're with them, they will welcome you in as part of the crowd. At the same time they are sensitive to slights; smile and be friendly, so that they don't think you have something against them.

Tell me about the Honduran concept of time.

Hondurans do not place a great emphasis on arriving on time. If you invite someone to join you at seven o'clock, it will not be unusual for them to arrive ten or twenty minutes late, or even up to an hour late. That would still be considered arriving on time, and is not at all impolite. Everything moves at a much slower pace in Latin America.

What about personal space?

The concept of personal space is not one that has much relevance in Honduran culture. You will quickly notice that people stand much closer to you than you are used to, and are likely to expect to converse with you with their face uncomfortably close to yours. If this happens, try not to take a step backwards or to lean too far backwards. Just smile and keep their cultural context in mind.

What can you tell me about male/female interaction?

It is very common for Honduran men to behave enthusiastically when they see a pretty woman, and should you, as a woman, be greeted with flirtatious remarks and gestures, just ignore them and continue on your way. At the same time, be careful when forming friendships between the sexes. Hondurans are more likely to think that you have serious intentions if you display friendship toward someone of the opposite sex. Be friendly to everyone, but cautious about whom you spend time alone with.

How do Hondurans greet each other?

Initially, Hondurans greet one another with a handshake. However, when middle or upper class acquaintances see each other, (even the first time after meeting,) women kiss each other on the cheek, and men and women do likewise. (Only men do not kiss one another.) This is the polite thing to do. If you see someone approaching their cheek towards yours, lean in and exchange the expected kiss.

About clothing matters:

What should I wear to work in?

While working in the clinic, scrubs are definitely the coolest and most comfortable thing to wear. Pants or skirts and shirts or tee shirts are also appropriate. If you're working in construction, jeans and boots or tennis shoes will be best.

What should I wear after work?

You can wear long shorts after work, at the hotel and around the village. For any church services, the ladies should wear skirts, and the men should wear collared shirts, button down or polo style. The main concern after comfort should be modesty; ladies should avoid spaghetti straps or anything too short.

Lodging:

Where will we be staying?

The Rice Foundation teams will be housed at the Hacienda El Jaral. El Jaral is a charming, picturesque place that used to be a working hacienda. The housing consists of Spanish-style cabins around a central green. There is a pool, restaurant, snack/gift store, soccer, volleyball, and basketball courts, and a game room.

What should I know about the cabins?

You will find everything straight forward and what you are accustomed to. The only thing you should definitely be aware of, (and this goes for all of Honduras,) is that you should not flush any toilet paper down the toilets. Always place all paper in the wastepaper basket.

Health Issues:

What immunizations should I think about getting before I travel to Honduras?

We recommend that our team members be up to date on their hepatitis A and B vaccines.

Is there a problem with malaria in Honduras?

There are occasional cases of malaria in Copan. These cases are not frequent, but we still advise our team to take cloroquin while in Honduras. You can see your personal physician about that before the trip, as protocol is to start taking it before the trip actually begins.

Is it safe to eat everything that is served to me while I'm in Honduras?

The only water that you should drink in Honduras is bottled water. Do not drink water that you don't know the source of. You will also need to be careful about not brushing your teeth using water from the tap.

As far as food, any hot, cooked food is safe to eat. Stay away from raw, unpeeled fruits and vegetables, such as green salads. While it is possible that the salad is perfectly fine, it is also one of the most frequent causes (besides water) of traveler's diarrhea.

Safety while in Honduras:

How safe is it to travel in Honduras?

Honduras has its fair share of thieves and pickpockets, so you will be wise to exercise precaution in strolling around town with your valuables on your person. It is better to leave your valuables locked up at the hotel, and just keep a small amount of cash on you. Keep your camera close; to leave it lying around is to invite temptation. The same goes for any backpacks or personal items you take to the work site with you.

Is it safe for women to walk around Copan alone?

It is generally safe, but we advise our female team members to walk around in groups of two or three. There is certainly no reason to walk around feeling afraid; we simply recommend the use of wisdom in all situations.

Cash Concerns:

How much money should I bring with me?

We recommend bringing \$100 to \$300 with you, depending on how many incidentals you plan on buying. There are souvenirs you can buy at Ruinas de Copan; you can buy simple trinkets or more expensive things such as paintings. You may also wish to have a coffee and dessert in town, or buy snacks at the gift shop at the hotel. Beyond on those things, you won't need much.

Can I use my credit card in Honduras?

You can use a credit card at the larger hotels and gift shops. At smaller, simpler places, you will definitely need cash.

What is the local currency and how can I obtain it?

The local currency is called the lempira. Ricardo will be happy to change your dollars to lempiras for you when you arrive.

What is the exchange rate?

It is currently at L.18.89 to every dollar.

Will there be an ATM machine there?

There is an ATM machine in the town of Ruinas de Copan. There is also the possibility that it could be out of order at one time or other while you are there, so you'd be wise to bring along cash as well.

Can we use traveler's checks?

No, you can't use traveler's checks. They are completely unfamiliar with them in Honduras, except at a few banks that you may not have access to.

Communicating with folks back home:**Will I be able to call my family?**

There are cyber cafes that you will have access to several times during the trip, and you can call from there. You can also send emails from there. You can also use the internet at the hotel.

What if there is an emergency and someone needs to get in touch with me?

You can reach Ricardo on his mobile phone: **1-469-939-6825**. The Hotel Hacienda El Jaral number is **011-(504) 656-7091**, but reaching people through the hotel is pretty unreliable.