

GPSA for Health: Frequently Asked Questions

PARTICIPATION

I am a senior in High School. So, I will have graduated by the time the program starts. Can I still apply?

Absolutely.

What are the dates for this year's program?

The dates are different each year. To find your dates, visit the program details section of the web site.

I have never traveled before. Will I be able to do this?

No one but you can tell you if you are ready. However, many of the past participants in GPSA trips have never traveled before. Our staff are experienced travelers; good guides as well as talented faculty. They will be there to help you.

Is it safe?

Traveling can be scary. But a GPSA trip is the one of the safest trips you can take. There is less violent crime in the developing world than in the United States. Also, you will be accompanied by the GPSA faculty or staff at all times. At no time may any GPSA program participant travel alone. GPSA has selected sites very carefully with safety in mind. If you or your parents are concerned about safety, GPSA encourages you to contact us at info@gpsa.org. We'll discuss the risks and the steps we take to minimize them.

I really want to go, but my parents are freaking out. What can I do?

Your parents may have valid concerns about your safety. Or, they may simply not know enough about GPSA to feel secure. Tell your parents to write to us at info@gpsa.org. Tell them to request that the Director call them back. Dr. Malkin has dealt with hundreds of parents over a decade of running programs. He will work with your parents to find a comfortable solution for everyone.

I won't be able to participate in some of the program because I have a family commitment. Is that OK?

No. If you cannot be part of the program from the first day to the last, then you cannot participate.

CONTACTING HOME/TECHNOLOGY

I'll be able to call home every day, right!?!?

No, you cannot. Homesickness and culture shock are a challenge for everyone on a GPSA program. The food will be new and so will be the language and the people. However, calling home tends to prolong the period of homesickness, rather than shortening it. You will have limited access to some communication tools, like twitter.

But what if I need to get a hold of my son/daughter right away?

Parents of participants are provided with a phone number that they can call 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

I guess I can call my son's cell phone, anyway.

No! GPSA participants are not allowed to bring cell phones on the trip.

Can I bring my laptop?

No! In addition, iPads, iPods, MP3 players, CD players, Game Boys and all other electronics, including cell phones, are forbidden on all GPSA trips. These are frequent targets for petty crime, placing our participants at unnecessary risk. Also, they are a distraction from helping the communities we are serving. All electronics are confiscated at the beginning of the trip.

What about my camera?

Digital cameras are allowed (unless they are part of a cell phone, in which case they are not allowed). We recommend that everyone bring a digital camera.

VISAS

Do I need a Visa to enter Guatemala?

This depends on your nationality and many other factors. For example, in the past, most Americans have not needed a visa to enter Guatemala and most Chinese have needed to obtain one before departure. However, the situation and requirements change depend on the country you are visiting and your nationality as well as any other visas you may be holding or required to hold. Please get in contact with your nearest Guatemalan embassy or consulate to get accurate information on your situation.

Do I need a Visa to enter Belize?

In many cases a Visa can be obtained at the airport in Belize upon arrival. In the past, Americans and Chinese holding an American visa have been able to obtain their Belize visa at the airport upon arrival. However, the situation and requirements change depend on the country you are visiting and your nationality as well as any other visas you may be holding or required to hold. Please get in contact with your nearest Belizean embassy or consulate to get accurate information on your situation.

MONEY/FUNDING

Can I get financial aid for the non-refundable deposit?

No.

How much spending money do I need to bring?

You may need money on the first and last day of the program for food in the airports. In addition, there are some tourist shops near the sites we will be visiting. There are also small shops in most towns where we work. A total of about \$5 USD per day (in local currency) plus what you think you're going to spend on souvenirs is about right. There are nearly no locations that accept credit cards anywhere on a GPSA trip. Checks are also not accepted (including traveler's checks). There are some ATM card machines, but they do not accept all cards. VISA is recommended. There is limited access to money changers at some sites.

Recommendations concerning spending money change frequently. Check with your coordinator during the last month before leaving to get the latest advice.

I've been raising money and I've been successful, but I'm concerned that I might not get into the program. What happens to that money?

For students who are not accepted into the program, all funds paid to GPSA are returned. Students who are accepted into the program, but choose not to go can either have all the funds returned to them (except the non-refundable deposit), or they can have GPSA hold their funds and defer placement for up to one year.

BEING ON-SITE/IN-COUNTRY

What will I be doing each day?

Helping the community! The program description has more details specific to your trip.

Do I work every day?

GPSA trips are rigorous and demanding. You should expect to be working most days of the experience. There are some planned social trips. However, your main objective is to learn, work and to help.

Is there any physical activity?

Yes. Quite a bit. You can expect to be walking many miles some days. People in the developing world rarely have personal cars. Some sites are remote and mountainous. Be sure you're ready for frequent, vigorous walking. In addition, you may be asked to do physical labor in the construction of schools, churches or clinics. Check with your trip director for specific details.

My parents would like to visit me during the trip. OK?

No.

I'd like to visit my daughter on site. Can I?

No.

What if my child gets sick?

Fortunately, GPSA trips are always near medical facilities. Minor illnesses are dealt with immediately on site or at one of the nearby, private, excellent hospitals. For more serious illnesses, GPSA staff will contact you and our medical evacuation insurance to coordinate treatment.

I'd like to extend my stay to visit some cool ruins. How do I arrange that?

The GPSA trip starts and ends at the airport. If your parents are with you or make special arrangements with GPSA, it is possible to depart from the airport without returning home.

Can I use my Dad's frequent flier miles?

Yes. Please see the departure dates information for the latest departure restrictions.

Will I be traveling alone?

No. Once the trip has started, all GPSA participants travel as a group.

Almost everyone speaks English. So, will I really need to struggle in another language?

Everyone does **not** speak English where you are going. Depending on your site, you may find only a few people who do. You are genuinely expected to learn a substantial amount of the local language

and use it. Some people find it quite advantageous to start studying as soon as they are accepted into the program. Often your level of enjoyment of the program will be proportional to your speaking attempts of the local language. Fortunately, mastery of the language is not required. Trying is enough.

I know that it is poor in the developing world, but my living conditions will be pretty close to what I am used to at home, right?

No. Living and working in the developing world is quite difficult. You should expect to find significant challenges in the simple tasks of your daily living (including such basics as drinking water and going to the bathroom) and at work.

Showers are typically cold – or at best warm - if they are available at all. There is typically no heat and there is very rarely air conditioning. You may need to walk long distances (many miles each day is common). Some sites are quite cold. Be sure to carefully check the packing list for your trip before departure.

My site is called Quetzaltenango, Guatemala but I can't find it on a map?

This town is often called by its indigenous name Xela, located in northwestern Guatemala. Just type Xela, Guatemala in to www.google.com/maps and it will take you right there!

My site is in Belize but I am not sure where?

In Belize, GPSA works in a remote mountainous part of the country in small villages near San Antonio in Cayo district. You won't find the villages named on most maps. There is a larger town nearby called San Ignacio. Just type San Ignacio, Belize into Google.com/maps and you'll find it.