

El Salvador Resource Guide

General information for short-term teams serving on the Pacific coast and its barrier islands. Your team leader will send details specific to your trip.

AT A GLANCE

Language	Spanish.
Currency	US dollar. Bring small bills, since \$50 and \$100 notes are hard to change.
Time zone	Central Standard Time all year, with no daylight saving. Same as US Central in winter, one hour behind it in summer.
Electricity	115 volts with US-style plugs. No adapter needed.
Phone	Country code +503. Local numbers have eight digits.
Airport	San Óscar Arnulfo Romero International (SAL), on the coast in La Paz department.
Seasons	Dry season November to April. Rainy season May to October, with heavy afternoon and evening storms.
Weather	Hot and humid on the coast all year, often 85 to 95 °F, with strong sun on the water.

THE COAST AND THE ISLANDS

	Costa del Sol and the Jaltepeque estuary	Jiquilisco Bay and its islands
Department	La Paz	Usulután
Setting	A long, narrow sand peninsula with the Pacific on one side and a mangrove estuary on the other. Beach hotels and restaurants line the road.	The country's largest mangrove forest, a protected bay sheltered by barrier islands and a long peninsula. Small fishing communities.
Island communities	Isla Tasajera and Isla Montecristo	Isla de Méndez, Corral de Mulas, Madresal, and the San Juan del Gozo peninsula, among others
Getting there	About 30 to 45 minutes by road from the airport. Islands are reached by boat from La Puntilla.	About 1.5 hours by road from the airport to Puerto El Triunfo, then by boat.
Services	Hotels, restaurants, and shops along the peninsula. Few on the islands.	Very limited. Expect little or no electricity, no cash machines, and no clinic on most islands.

Drive times are approximate. Boat times depend on the tide, so departures can shift by hours.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- **Passport.** It must be valid when you enter. We recommend at least six months of validity past your return date, since airlines can be stricter.
- **Visa.** US citizens do not need one for stays up to 90 days.
- **Tourist card.** You buy a \$12 tourist card at the airport on arrival. Have cash ready.
- **Yellow fever.** Proof of vaccination is required only if you arrive from a country with yellow fever risk. That does not apply to travel from the United States.
- **STEP.** Enroll your trip at step.state.gov so the US Embassy can reach you in an emergency.

HEALTH

- **See a clinician four to six weeks ahead.** Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines are recommended for El Salvador, along with being current on routine vaccines.
- **Malaria.** El Salvador has no malaria risk, so preventive medication is not needed.
- **Dengue.** Mosquitoes that carry it bite during the day and are common on the coast. Use repellent with DEET or picaridin and wear long sleeves when you can.
- **Water and food.** Do not drink tap or well water. Drink bottled or purified water, use it to brush your teeth, and skip ice and raw produce unless your hosts prepared it.
- **Heat and sun.** This is the biggest daily risk. Drink water steadily, add electrolytes, wear a hat, and reapply sunscreen, especially on boats. Tell your team leader early if you feel dizzy or sick.
- **Animals.** Do not pet street dogs, and report any bite or scratch right away.
- **Medical care.** Good hospitals are in San Salvador. Most require payment up front, and ambulances are not widely available. Carry travel medical insurance that covers evacuation.

ON THE WATER AND THE ISLANDS

- **Life jackets.** Wear one on every boat ride, fastened, for the whole trip.
- **Daylight only.** We do not travel by boat after dark.
- **Dry bag.** Keep your phone, passport copy, and medications in a sealed bag. Expect to get wet getting on and off.
- **Swimming.** Pacific beaches here have strong currents and undertow, and lifeguards are rare. Swim only where and when your team leader allows, never alone, and stay out when red or black flags are flying.
- **Island conditions.** Bring the cash, water, and medications you need for the day. Phone signal can be weak, and medical help is a boat ride away, so report any illness or injury early.
- **Wildlife.** Sea turtles nest on these beaches. Do not touch turtles, nests, or hatchlings, and take everything you brought back with you.

SAFETY

- **US travel advisory.** El Salvador is at Level 1, Exercise Normal Precautions (issued June 25, 2026). Violent crime has fallen sharply since 2022.
- **State of Exception.** Emergency powers in place since March 2022 let police and soldiers detain people with fewer legal protections. Carry a copy of your passport, expect checkpoints, stay calm and cooperative, and do not photograph security forces.
- **Stay with the team.** Do not go out alone, and tell your leader where you are going.
- **Transport.** Ride only in team-arranged vehicles and boats. Do not use public buses. We do not travel between towns after dark.
- **Valuables.** Leave jewelry at home and keep your phone out of sight on the street.
- **If you are robbed,** hand over what is asked for and do not resist.
- **Earthquakes.** They are common. On the coast, if you feel strong or long shaking, move inland or to higher ground with your team without waiting for a warning.

MONEY

- Prices are in US dollars. Bring clean bills in small denominations.
- Cards work at many hotels and larger restaurants. Island communities are cash only, with no cash machines.
- A 10 percent tip (*propina*) is customary in restaurants and is often already on the bill.

CULTURE AND CONDUCT

- Greet people before anything else. A simple “Buenos días” to everyone in the room goes a long way.
- Ask before taking photos, especially of children and patients. Never photograph inside a clinic without permission.
- Dress modestly, even in the heat. Swimwear is for the beach only, and cover up in the community.
- Schedules run looser than at home, and the tide sets the timetable. Be patient and flexible.
- Do not promise things you cannot deliver, and do not hand out money, candy, or gifts on your own. Give through your team leader so help reaches the community fairly.
- We are guests. Our local partners lead, and we follow their direction.

USEFUL SPANISH

English	Spanish	English	Spanish
Good morning	Buenos días	Where does it hurt?	¿Dónde le duele?
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes	How are you feeling?	¿Cómo se siente?
Please / Thank you	Por favor / Gracias	I need help	Necesito ayuda
Nice to meet you	Mucho gusto	Where is the bathroom?	¿Dónde está el baño?
What is your name?	¿Cómo se llama?	How much is it?	¿Cuánto cuesta?
I don't understand	No entiendo	God bless you	Dios le bendiga
More slowly, please	Más despacio, por favor	Boat / Life jacket	Lancha / chaleco salvavidas

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Service	Number
Police and general emergencies	911
Ambulance	132
US Embassy, Final Boulevard Santa Elena, Antiguo Cuscatlán, La Libertad	+503 2501-2999

Tourist police (POLITUR) patrol the main beach areas. From a US phone, call your team leader first.

YOUR TRIP CONTACTS

Team leader and phone	_____
Host partner contact	_____
Lodging name and address	_____
Boat operator and phone	_____
Nearest clinic or hospital	_____
Insurance company and policy	_____

Information checked October 2026 against the US State Department travel advisory, the US Embassy in El Salvador, and CDC and WHO travel health guidance. Advisories and health guidance change, so confirm at travel.state.gov and cdc.gov/travel before you leave. This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your own doctor.