

ABOUT PANAMA

On a trip to Panama you will experience city, suburban and rural areas. Throughout the very culturally diverse city you will see things that are very familiar like Domino's Pizza, Ashley Furniture or McDonald's. A few things that you will find similar to the US: Panama takes US currency and also honors your US driver's licenses. As you get further out from the city and into the suburbs you will find a rich culture.

We will spend the majority of our time up in the mountains in the city of Chicá. Chicá is a small community that is primarily lower income, many of them grow plants that are then sold in the city. Conditions at the church can vary day to day. Panamanians periodically have their water shut off without notice and sometimes lose power, so there is a need to be flexible. Panama's rainy season is from June to November and there is not much rain in between. Panama City weather in January for a typical day ranges from a high of 85°F (29°C) to a low of 76°F (25°C), it will be 5-10 degrees cooler in Chicá.

ABOUT OUR PARTNERSHIP

Hope Church has had a desire for some time to build a meaningful, mission-minded relationship and partnership with a church outside the US. After an exploratory trip in November 2019, we began a partnership with Iglesia Bautista Torre Fuerte (Strong Tower Church) in Chicá, Panama. This partnership falls under Reach Global, our EFCA missions division, and has child sponsorship as a backbone of the ministry under Global Fingerprints, which is the child sponsorship arm of Reach Global. We committed to this partnership in Fall 2021 and formalized it in March 2022 when we sent a small mission team to Panama to hold a VBS for children in the neighborhood of the church. The people of Hope Church currently sponsor 41 children and we hope to expand to more children in the future.

Beyond child sponsorship, our main purpose is to build a lasting and growing relationship centered around prayer and service where we can assist each other in spreading the Gospel. We plan to send mission teams to Panama multiple times each year by working closely with the church in Chicá and the Reach Global missionaries who oversee this relationship.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT IF YOU JOIN A MISSION TEAM?

It's very typical to return from a mission trip forever changed in your faith and in your perspective of how God has blessed and how God uses so many people around the world for His glory. As we serve, we are changed as God uses us and molds us through the experience.

You can expect to be challenged a bit to get outside your comfort zone to experience a different culture, different food, and different ways of doing things. Mission trip always have some structure and a plan, but flexibility is key to being able to build relationships and react to needs in the moment while we are there serving.

They speak Spanish in Chicá and we typically have an interpreter, but be prepared for a bit of a language barrier that makes the trip even more interesting. Do what you can to begin to learn basic phrases and vocabulary. The missionaries typically accompany us and help us with communication as well.

Chicá is generally safe and housing accommodations are comfortable. At the same time, there may be a need to bunk with multiple people in each room, share restrooms facilities, and generally show flexibility around meals and the start and stop times each day. This is a shared experience where you can expect to grow in relationship with the people who are on the mission team with you. Privacy and a lot of alone time will most likely be limited.

Food is not that much different and you will find some familiar choices. If you haven't guessed it by now, you may have to have some flexibility in what you eat and be adventurous to try new things. Special dietary needs are very difficult to accommodate.

COVID and the effects it has had on entry and exit from Panama has now been reduced and testing on entry or exit is not required. However, they are still recommending that we bring 2 COVID tests per person in case illness arises and testing is needed.

Be ready to travel together, eat together, serve together, and make friends together!

WHAT ARE BEING ASKED TO COMMIT TO?

Going on a mission trip is a commitment, but it is also a wonderful experience that God will use to change you. Below are the main things you will be asked to commit to as part of a mission team.

- Meeting with the team 3-4 times prior to the trip for prayer and education that will prepare you further for the serving role, logistics, and heart to serve.
- Non-refundable \$150 deposit that represents your commitment to go on the trip. The church will need this deposit 8-9 weeks in advance of the trip in order to make flight reservations as well as other plans. If you end up needing to cancel you would also need to reimburse the church for any cancellation fees incurred.
- Fundraising with friends and family to help raise the overall trip costs for the complete team. On average, the trip costs about \$1,100-1,400/person. In addition to the \$150 non-refundable deposit, each person will need to commit to sending out at least 20 fundraising letters (80% of those to people outside Hope Church) in order to raise funds to cover the rest of the costs of the trip. Fundraising by mission trip team members will be pooled to be used for the benefit of the team as a whole and not set aside for individual team members. These funds go to support other costs related to food, lodging, ground transportation, translators, etc. Any excess funds raised will be used by the church for future mission trips.
- Please commit to being flexible and working as a team in partnership with our friends in Panama with a focus on being the hands and feet of Jesus to help spread the Gospel and serve the Chicá community and church. Be ready for change, have a heart for relationship, be open to God's leadership, be willing to submit to local leadership to help meet their needs.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED TO DO?

- Fill out an application and be interviewed by the deadline for the trip. This helps us select people whose heart, skills, and gifts are aligned with the purpose of the trip.
- Have or get a passport in-hand at least 10 weeks before the trip. Your passport must not expire within 6 months after the trip departure date from the US. Don't delay application for your passport as it can typically take multiple months to get one. You will not be able to go on a mission trip unless you have your passport in-hand when flight arrangements are being made.
- Submit to a background check (and possibly an application and interview process with the EFCA, including reference checks).
- Complete online child-safety training from the EFCA (1-4 hours)
- Attend 3-4 meetings in the month ahead of the trip for prayer and education.
- Sign a travel waiver for EFCA Reach Global

WHAT WILL YOU WANT TO TAKE WITH YOU?

- 1 Carry-on bag & 1 personal bag/backpack. If you need to check a bag, please check with the team leader as space in the van may be limited. You will also be responsible for paying the extra cost of any checked bags.
- Passport (make a copy & keep it in your bag or with you in case your passport gets lost)
- Clothing (appropriate for nature of the trip & weather; laundry facilities may or may not be available). You may also want to bring a swim suit in case the team has time to go to the beach.
- Spending cash (\$100-200) and a credit card. You will be responsible for personal meals during travel, any snacks or food you want in Panama, restaurant meals while in Panama, and any entrance fees or souvenirs you want to purchase if the team is able to do any sight-seeing during the trip.
- Medications
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray
- Hat
- Toiletries
- Optional: e-sim card for your phone to be able to operate in Panama

WHAT ARE YOUR COSTS?

- \$150 non-refundable deposit.
- Background check and online child safety training cost (~\$15-30).
- \$100-200 miscellaneous costs for items mentioned above.
- Team t-shirt and any COVID tests will be provided by the church.

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