



Focus on MEXICO

Community Service Program

Adult Program

“My year in Mexico was all about learning and growing, friendship and family. Things were different from home, but my host family was very welcoming, and I became an integral part of their family and still am. My year in Mexico shaped the rest of my life in more ways than one, and I am extremely grateful and glad to have spent my year in Mexico, which I now consider a second home for me.”

Emily González, sojourner from Barbados, 1989-1990

Mexico encompasses deserts and jungles, mountains and beaches, volcanoes and ancient Aztec pyramids. The country is a breeding ground for whales, sea turtles and millions of monarch butterflies. And though many of its rural towns still feel 19th-century, Mexico is also one of the world's fastest-growing industrial economies. In big cities, skyscrapers rise next to low colonial churches that still have food and crafts markets arrayed on their front plazas. Yet no matter which natural setting or economic niche Mexicans occupy in this rich national smorgasbord, they are typically relaxed, casual and always ready to hang with family and friends.

Community Service Programs

AFS's Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Mexico by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Mexico have worked at orphanages, schools and medical facilities helping children with their physical and mental health and education. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Mexico has been in existence since 1976. AFS volunteers in 25 chapters across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. Each year, AFS Mexico hosts more than 100 students from as many as 20 countries. AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers.

Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have the support you need during your sojourn abroad.

Arrival orientation

Participants arrive at Mexico City's international airport where they are met by staff and volunteers. That night, they sleep in AFS-Mexico bedrooms at the national offices. The next day, an English-language orientation at the offices discusses Mexican culture, AFS rules and what participants should expect. Later that day, participants travel by bus to their host communities to be welcomed by local volunteers and perhaps host families. During the first two weeks in their host communities, participants will receive 40 hours of intensive Spanish instruction.

Additional orientations

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Mexico will provide you with several others, conducted in Spanish. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as new information and ways of looking at things, while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in Mexico

Living arrangements

Some participants in AFS Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Other participants live where their community service organization conducts its business. Still others live in rooms provided elsewhere by their local service organizations.

Typical day

Food

Staple foods include corn, beans and chilies. They are combined with spices, vegetables, meats or fish in daily meals. It is difficult to place vegetarians in Mexico.

It is customary for families to eat the same foods at meals together; it is considered inappropriate for individuals staying with host families to request special foods or to prepare separate food for themselves.

Clothing

In many of the organizations where participants are placed, they do not need to wear uniforms. The only strong preference that all organizations express is that clothes must always be clean.

Depending on the kind of project that you will work for, you may have to wear informal clothes (jeans, shorts, sneakers, etc) or semiformal clothes (pants, shoes, etc)

Activities

Hosting communities provide different activities during Community Service programs, most of them involving sightseeing or fundraising.

In addition, projects sometimes organize activities in which you will be included. The projects can be recreational or involved with the community. You will love them both!

Health

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Mexico (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Safety

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Mexican. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

Travel

Two weeks before the program ends, participants will be allowed to travel around Mexico on their own. Before that time, however, vacation-travel is not allowed.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host community; travel from your host community to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host family or other placement arrangement; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price are: passport and visa fees,

required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Mexico is the third largest country in Latin America, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico between Belize and the USA to the east and bordering the North Pacific Ocean between Guatemala and the USA on the west. Its topography includes low desert plains and jungle-like coastal strips, high plateaus and rugged mountains. The high plateau area has a spring-like climate (10°C-22°C). The northern plains are arid, and the southern areas tend to be hot, tropical and wet. The rainy season is from May to September.

Population

Mexico's population has grown rapidly over the past 50 years, from around 25 million in 1950 to nearly 94 million today. Mexico City is the capital and has a population of 20 million, making it one of the largest cities in the world.

The population is not evenly spread. The central states are heavily populated, but the northern states are less so.

Language

Spanish is the official language. There are more than 100 indigenous languages.

Government

The president is popularly elected to one six-year term. A bicameral legislature is made up of the Chamber of Deputies (500 members) and the Senate (64 members).

Religion

Mexico is primarily a Catholic country (92%); however, there are good-sized Protestant and Jewish communities within the country, especially in Mexico City.

In general, however, one can find families whose church attendance varies in all degrees. Do not be surprised if your family does not go to church every Sunday, or not at all.

It is your personal decision, based on your own beliefs, how you will conduct your religious life while in Mexico. We suggest that you talk about this matter with your host family at the very beginning of your stay, especially if you and your host family belong to different churches. This discussion will give you and your family a clear understanding from the start

Before You Go

Looking Forward

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience.

Make every effort to improve your Spanish language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Mexico, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Mexico. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or your country's AFS office.

In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Mexicans will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you will need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's Community Service Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Country data	Size	1,972,550 sq km
	Population	104 million
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Democracy with a President elected by popular vote
Currency	Pesos Mexicanos	
Useful websites	http://www.sectorturismo.gob.mx http://www.sectur.gob.mx http://www.mexicocity.gob.mx/ www.mexonline.com	

	http://mexico.web.com.mx www.mexico.com www.mexico.org
AFS Mexico website	www.afs.org.mx

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>