

PANAMA ADDENDUM



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Please note all spelling and grammar is in American English. To help make this document UK friendly we have included British English words in brackets and an estimated conversion of all costs in GBP.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

STAFF



Thea Hutchinson, Program Director

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Thea was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which means *holy faith* in Spanish. She has grown up in a fusion of Latin American culture and American Southwestern culture. She has spent the last four years completing her undergraduate at Bryn Mawr College, studying religion and the history of art.

She has traveled abroad and lived in several countries including Italy, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Mexico. She is also conversational in Spanish and Italian.

She will be in Panama for the entire program, whether in the Los Santos region, Panama City, or another area of the country. As communication in Panama is difficult, she will try to check in with everyone in the group at least once a week in order to check on conditions, deal with any complaints, as well as to organize weekend excursions. If you have any problems, questions, or concerns at all, contact Thea.

Lorena Valencia, Country Coordinator

Lorena is currently serving as an attaché on the U.N. Security Council for Panama, as a specialist in Western Africa politics. She recently completed a master's degree on International Education Development and Policy Studies at Columbia University and finished her undergraduate work at Georgetown University. Lorena founded the Panama program when she was a sophomore at Georgetown University in 2004. As country coordinator, she helps set up everything in Panama, from the homes the volunteers stay in to the activities during orientation. Lorena hopes to go back to her country and continue helping in many other ways! You will be given her contact information upon arrival.



PROGRAM HISTORY

Started in the spring of 2004 by Lorena Valencia, the Panama program is in its fourth year. Originally the volunteers were distributed in groups on the southwestern portion of Panama, between the Azuero Peninsula and Panama. Recently, the focus has shifted to the Los Santos region, a largely rural province that faces poverty due to the agrarian economy. There were eleven volunteers last year, all placed in different villages ranging from the province capital of Las Tablas to the extremely rural La Colorada.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Important Dates

Number of volunteers: 13

Orientation - June 17th- June 21st

First day of teaching – June 22nd

Midpoint break will be June 10th – June 12th (tentatively)

Last day of teaching - July 31st *(volunteers should then schedule to leave August 1st from Panama City, leaving a day to travel to Panama City)

Orientation Details

Orientation will be three days long and will be held in Panama City. This time will be spent getting to know one another as well as learning and sharing effective methods of teaching. Sightseeing will be arranged at the Panama Canal and hiking in the Metropolitan Park as well as several other destinations. We will also spend some time becoming familiar with Panamanian culture and customs. Updates will be sent on where exactly the group will be staying in Panama at a later date.

Village Information

Villages will range from rural to urban, depending on your placement. They will be distributed throughout the Los Santos region, which means that a neighboring village could be anywhere from a five-minute walk or a fifteen-minute ride. All villages are extremely accommodating, but due to the impoverished nature of the region, the comforts of home are few and far between. The schools will range in size with the villages, larger schools being in more urban areas, smaller ones in more rural areas. As a result, the resources in the school will vary from air-conditioning and computers to a bare, open-air room. All schools will have chalkboards, chalk, and desks for the students.

Some examples of villages where volunteers have taught at in the past include:

Las Tablas- the capital of the Los Santos region. Las Tablas is a fairly large town with a pop. of 6,000 and with a proportionally large school. Modern amenities have started to appear in the town, which has several air-conditioned Internet cafes as well as many shopping bazaars, yet it still has dirt roads in many parts.

Macaracas- a small yet urban town with pop. around 2,500. Macaracas has three Internet cafes, two of which are air-conditioned, as well as a small hospital. The school is very large, but the town center is fairly small, consisting of shops forming a square around a central plaza.

La Colorada- a small and extremely spread out rural town pop. around 1,000. La Colorada is a paradigm of rural towns in the Los Santos region. The roads are extremely basic, as are the living conditions, where running water is not always assured. Most houses have outhouses instead of indoor plumbing, yet paradoxically, the school has just been renovated to have computers, air conditioning, and Internet access.

Students/Teaching

Students in the Panamanian schools range in age from 6 to 14 years old. Adult classes will see a broader range of ages and fluency. Learning English is not a popular pastime in Los Santos, making it more difficult to teach any English; there is not much enthusiasm due to lack of use of the language. It is up to the volunteer to stimulate interest in English among the students and community.

A sample day in the life of a volunteer:

6:30-7:15 am Wake up, breakfast

7:30 am School starts

8:00 am First class

9:00 am Second Class

10:00 am Third Class

11:00 am Recreation time

12:00 pm Fourth Class

1:00 pm School Ends

Afternoon- Evening: Eat lunch and/or dinner, travel to other towns, teach adult classes, take a trip with host family, and hang out.

10:00 pm Sleep

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COUNTRY INFORMATION

WEATHER & CLIMATE

- There are two things to know about Panamanian weather: It is extremely hot and extremely humid. The humidity is due to the fact that it is the rainy season during our summer, which they consider winter. Temperatures will range from 90°F-70°F, with 80% humidity.

FOOD & DRINK

- Panamanians typically eat a diet of rice, beans and fried meats, like chicharones, which is fried pig fat. Vegetables and fruits are usually not served unless asked for, and they too are fried, like platacones, which are fried plantain slices. In order to survive as well as be respectful, you should eat everything put on your plate. If you cannot, be polite and excuse yourself. Also, if it's something new, try it. There are also not very many vegetarian options. Vegetables are not very common, everything that is not in the interior (Panama City) is fried. Vegetarians should be cautious of this and seriously consider this before applying.
- Drinks: range from water, which is clean to drink and should be consumed in large quantities to prevent dehydration. Also batidos are popular, which are fruit milkshakes as well as sugary fruit juices.
- Alcohol plays a large part in Panamanian culture. As a volunteer, you have been chosen to make responsible, mature choices, so it is up to you whether you choose to drink. Remember, you are not only a representative of Learning Enterprises, but also a representative of your country, so choose wisely.

LANGUAGE

- Spanish is the official language of Panama. You should have intermediate experience with the language, as it is necessary to communicate with your host parents, students, and any other people you may encounter along the way. Dictionaries might be useful when planning classes, but are impossible to use in conversation.
- Panamanian dialects or slang is something that you will pick up during the trip. In addition to the basics, you will also need to know different slang terms, such as “chiva” which means bus, “Balboa” the term for American money, and “chino” which is the convenience store.

CULTURE/RELIGION

- Panama is an extremely Catholic country. It is not unusual for your host parents to regularly attend “novena,” prayer, or to listen to church services broadcast over the radio. Homes often have small shrines or religious objects within the home. Even if you are of a different religion or choose not to identify with a religion, it is suggested that volunteers attend at least one service, as it helps integrate them into the local culture.
- Gender differences: girls are not supposed to drink in public spaces. They can have a beer/drink at home, but women do not drink in public. Also in America it is common to jog as a form of exercise. This is not done in Panama, and people do not understand it. You will be stared at and it is extremely uncomfortable.
- Everyone greets each other in the streets, even if it is redundant. Volunteers should come armed with a smile and a "Buenas!" for any passersby.
- Chiva stops are anywhere someone makes them— sometimes it can be right in front of your house and/or the chiva stops when they see someone on the side of the road. (This explains their irregularity).

POTENTIALLY UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS

- The following situations might be encountered during the program:
 - One of your host parents comes home intoxicated
 - A teacher at your school tries to control your classes or prevents you from teaching
 - You have to take a bucket shower and other bathroom problems
 - You are covered in mosquito bites and/or bug bites
 - Bats are living in the rafters of your room
 - Your students are undisciplined and won't listen to you
 - Kids with giant machetes in their agriculture class

GUIDELINES FOR LIVING WITH A HOST FAMILY

The host families with which Learning Enterprises works are self-selecting and are excited to have foreign students live with them. They see it as an opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures as well as a chance to improve their own English skills (you will probably have host brothers or sisters –if not host parents! – who are studying English). As a foreigner it is important to be aware of your behavior during your stay.

- Be kind, considerate, and gracious. Your host family will accommodate you as best as they can, but also remember that you are a guest in their house.
- Make an effort to communicate with your host parents and host siblings, this will be different for each of them, but playing games, asking questions, and showing an interest in their hobbies or activities is a great starting point. Gestures and facial expressions are universal and usually get the message across. Learn a few words in Spanish and use them whenever you can. Your host family will greatly appreciate your attempts to understand their culture!
- Spend time with your host family. Although they will encourage you to get to know your students as well as your peers in the village, they will also want to get the chance to see you. DON'T use your host family's house simply as the place where you eat and sleep!
- Follow the rules that your host family outlines for you (if they don't give you any, use common sense). Don't challenge your host parents if they tell you that you can't stay out past hour X or if you should avoid going to locale Y. Even if you think that something they tell you might be unreasonable (such as keeping your distance from certain people), understand that disregarding their advice shows utmost disrespect to them.
- When living with a family volunteers become part of that family, which means that host parents feel responsible for the behavior of LE volunteers. Volunteers must be respectful of the different cultural norms and how their host family is perceived as hosting an outsider in the community. This is not a vacation, and volunteers should not make extraneous demands on their host family that will strain their resources or trust in LE.
- Make sure that your host family knows about your plans ahead of time. If you accept a student's invitation to dinner at her/his house or plan to spend the weekend traveling, let your host family know.
- If you have serious conflicts with your host family, please contact your Program Director immediately!
- While in the villages, volunteers are asked to remain professional with their students and not to engage in romantic relationships with their students or other members of the village. This is for several reasons: to protect the reputation of LE, of non-profits, of Americans, and so that we can return the next year. Outside of the villages, these rules do not apply, but please act responsibly.

You will most likely live in a one-family house with a family that has one to four children varying in age. Due to the propensity of generational immigration, your host grandparents and other relatives will live nearby and may even spend the night at your home. During the day, the father will usually work, and the mother will stay home, take care of younger children and any household chores. Children who are six to fourteen years old will attend school, and children older than fourteen will attend high school or college. On the weekends, families will usually take trips together, whether to a nearby city for shopping and a movie, to the beach, or to a local beer garden to witness a rodeo. It is imperative that you spend the first weekend with your host family in order to acclimate to their habits as well as to become integrated as part of the family. If you do

not, you will be treated as an outsider, despite the fact that Panamanians are extremely amiable people. Nicknames like “gringo” are not endearing and mean that they see you as a foreigner.

Panamanian Schools & Teaching

- You will be teaching within the Panamanian school system. Some volunteers will be placed in a classroom with a Panamanian teacher, whereas others will have their own classroom. In the past, volunteers were expected to teach from a pre-existing English curriculum.
 - As mentioned previously, there is a dress-code for teachers: the volunteers do not have uniforms, but professional attire is important.
 - Each volunteer placement will be different. In the past, some volunteers have worked with 3 different teachers, grades 1-4, and had five sections with 20 kids per section, which is over 100 students. In other cases, volunteers teach k-6, teach 2x/week after school class with 20 kids, and then evening adult classes with an average of 7 students, which is about 45 average students.
 - Pronunciation: Many English words are very hard for Spanish speakers to say because they do not exist in their language; practice pronunciation EVERY DAY.
 - BE CREATIVE. Because of the limited resources, it is crucial that volunteers are flexible and can approach a problem or issue from many different directions.
 - Make this fun for the students. Native English speakers are an amazing resource and the students are very curious about American culture. Talk / teach things that they will not learn in an English textbook, pop culture, slang, etc.
 - Kids did not really take well to the alphabet and they wrote REALLY slowly. It is recommended to focus on activities that got them up and going (head, shoulders, knees and toes was great; hot potato, etc.). Making them write might be counterproductive, but it depends on the level/ability of the students. Sometimes, it worked to do an activity that required splitting up kids into small groups - this made it easier to manage, and also kept troublesome kids busy because they had a tangible task in front of them. Keeping kids engaged makes them more likely to respect you and less likely to act out.
- **EXCURSIONS :** There is a lot to do in Panama. Trips can range from the rainforest to the beach to the mountains. Below are some must-see places.
- Often we will meet in Chitre and travel from there; timing and meeting point will depend on where you want to go. This is because Chitre is a location that is easily accessible to the volunteers, also because the public transportation system varies tremendously, and is very irregular; oftentimes waiting 1-4 hours, for Las Chivas, the buses.
- **El Valle-** This is the closest any person can get to ecstasy. El Valle is a wonderful little town nestled in the crater of an extinct volcano. If you visit, stay in Residencial El Valle as owner Enrique Tiban is extremely nice and helpful. Also, get reservations to dine at Casa de Lourdes, one of the best restaurants you will ever dine in. On Sundays, El Valle has a large market where you can haggle for

the price of souvenirs to bring home. A tip for haggling is to cut it in half and work from there.

- **Pedasi-** Home to former president Mireya Moscoso, Pedasi is a sleepy town four miles away from the beach. You must take a tour to visit Isla Iguana, a wildlife preserve off the coast, which can be arranged in the town. Also, grab some dessert at Dulceria Yeli.
- **Volcan/Boquete-** These getaways are hidden in the foothills of Volcan Baru. Although hard to get to, it is worth it to stay in Volcan in order to take the Sendero de los Quetzales, a hike around the base of Volcan Baru, or if you are more adventurous, hike to the top of the volcano. Boquete is a charming, small town known for its high American expatriate population.
- **Bocas del Toro-** Bocas, as it is known, is almost impossible to get to, but when you get there, you won't want to leave. It is an amazing little archipelago focused around a main town that has tons to offer. English has a large influence there, yet McDonald's and Starbucks are absent, allowing one to enjoy the soft breeze in a hammock on the picaresque beaches or to take a scuba trip to view the underwater life and even swim with dolphins. We will most likely spend mid-point break in Bocas and take a trip into Costa Rica for a day.

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PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

FINDING A FLIGHT

Buy your ticket as early as possible, as prices tend to increase rapidly. Let your fellow volunteers know about any cheap flights you find. We will be meeting in Panama City to start our orientation, and this is where the majority of international flights will fly into. However, in the past volunteers have flown into other areas, or had already been traveling and came by bus. Though there are probably as many sites as there are flights you can take, some good places to start looking for cheap student flights include:

kayak.com
studentuniverse.com
statravel.com
discountfares.com
ba.co.uk
virginatlantic.co.uk

PASSPORTS & VISAS

- US and UK citizens need to have a valid passport in order to enter Panama. As soon as you disembark the plane and go to customs, you will be required to purchase a tourist visa for five dollars, usually. These are only valid for 30 days, and they can be extended in the Immigration Office in Panama or you can leave the country and return a day later. You may also get the visa from

- the Panamanian Embassy.
- You must make sure you have all the appropriate documents to travel to Panama.

Everyone must have a valid passport to travel. If you do not have a passport, start the process now. They may take a while to process.

If you are not a US or UK citizen, please let us know ASAP, since you may need a visa to travel. Each volunteer is responsible for researching and obtaining their own visa. Learning Enterprises can supply any additional documents. Some places to start research include:

Continental Airlines online database tells you all documents required for traveling into any country with a passport from any country (<https://www.continental.com/web/en-US/apps/travel/passport/default.aspx>).

You should also be able to find most visa information on the websites of your consulate, ministry of foreign affairs, or embassy.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Vaccinations

Vaccinations suggested for Panama include:

Routine shots (measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT))

Yellow Fever

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis B

Typhoid

Rabies

Tetanus

Please ask your medical professional which shots are needed or should be updated. In regards to the rabies vaccine, it is highly suggested to get it if possible as there is a high probability that you will be exposed to bats, either through guano or outside exposure. If you are exposed, it is imperative that you get the vaccine immediately, which is hard to do in Panama due to transportation difficulties. Please try to get the vaccine in the United States.

You will also need to get a prescription for a malaria prophylactic, which can either be chloroquine, atovaquone/proguanil or doxycycline or mefloquine. You should start taking this a week or two before you leave for Panama, during the trip, and a week or two after.

It is your responsibility to make sure that you are up-to-date on all of your normal shots and vaccinations (measles/hep B/hep A/typhoid/etc.) One of the easiest ways to obtain all your shots is to visit a travel clinic. Most universities have these in their health facility. You can also see your primary care doctor.

Prescription Medications

Bring all of your prescription medications for the summer. It will be difficult to obtain any refills.

We suggest that you ask your physician to prescribe a dosage of antibiotics ahead of time. Not all doctors will comply, but try to explain that you will be going to a rural area where pharmacies are not as easy to come by and where medicine brands may be unfamiliar. "Zithromax" is one, a common non-penicillin antibiotic that treats ear infections, strep throat, tonsillitis & other bacterial infections.

For additional information, consult the Center for Disease Control website (www.cdc.gov/travel/) and State Department Travel website (state.travel.gov) or <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPanama.aspx>.

Insurance

Learning Enterprises requires that all participants have valid insurance coverage that will cover them while in country. Check your existing plans (ask your parents or call your insurance company) and many of you will find that you already have international travel insurance - or at least an international coverage policy called "airlift", or "international evacuation coverage." Basically, this policy means that you are covered should something serious happen to you and you need to be flown either back to the US or to a nearby hospital facility in your volunteer region.

If you do not have international coverage, good temporary travel insurance is STA international student travelers insurance; here are some others to check out

(www.statravel.com,
www.statravel.co.uk,
<http://www.travelguard.com/mytravelguard?KAC-ppc2>,
<http://www.culturalinsurance.com>)

Though feel free to shop around.

Most importantly, we don't want to see anyone stuck in a situation where they have no way of covering medical treatment. Be smart - get an international insurance plan. Let us know if you have any problems and we'll be happy to provide whatever advice and answers we can.

However it is not uncommon to be in a medical situation where you cannot activate your insurance coverage at the time of treatment. Have an extra \$500-1000 (**£250-500**) available to you in a checking (current) account, or a credit card which you can put expenses on even if you don't have the money, in case of emergency. Often when you are treated for any illness or injury abroad, you cannot be reimbursed immediately with your insurance coverage. Instead you pay for these treatments yourself, keep the receipt, and then file for a reimbursement with your insurance company. In the case of an emergency, it is important that you contact the Program Director immediately.

Communication

The most reliable way to communicate with others is through e-mail, although getting to an Internet cafe is not always certain. Weekly e-mails are alright, but as it takes a while for people to check e-mail, it is also good to have the cell phones as a safeguard in case of immediate contact being necessary. A highly suggested option is to buy a cell phone or a SIM card while in country. A prepaid cell phone can be bought for about \$15-\$20 (£7.50), and pre-paid minutes for \$5.

It is helpful to communicate with other volunteers. Also, your parents and friends can call your cell for no charge to you. You may bring a cell phone to purchase a SIM card in Panama during orientation, but there is a high probability that your phone will get damaged, lost, or stolen. Prepaid cell phones are cheap, replaceable, and also serve as a great gift to your host family when you leave. The other option is to rely on the payphones that are numerous in the countryside. Most villages have access to a payphone, but many times the phone will not work. Also, in order to use the payphone you will have to buy a calling card, usually international, at a local convenience store. Your host families will have phones, but due to the economical nature of cell phones, they will most likely not have a land line. This means it will be expensive for them if you constantly use their phone. In the interest of being respectful, it is advised that you try not to use their cell phones if you can avoid it.

PACKING LIST

Use a backpacking backpack! This is really important. Volunteers spend a lot of time on buses, or walking around. Most sporting good stores carry them like REI, EMS, department stores, and online. **DO NOT BRING ROLL BAGS.** Duffel bags are not ideal as they are inconvenient to carry for long distances. Always watch your belongings. Even when you are on the buses, do not put anything in your backpack that you might miss. Although this is infrequent, robberies can happen (again emphasizing that as Americans, we are viewed as extremely wealthy). Always keep your passport, ID, cc/debit and money on your person. Careful with your back pockets, it is sad but true that many people make a living off of pick pocketing, and tourists are easy targets. Keep your money in a money belt, or in a safe place. Also always keep your bags with you.

- Keep in mind that all the school supplies that you bring you will probably leave in your village as gifts, so you will then have that room available for souvenirs, etc.

Clothes:

“Let’s Go” has an excellent piece of advice: lay out only what you absolutely need, and then take half the clothes. Simplicity is the key. Take the kinds of clothes that you would be comfortable wearing for days on end: basic pants, t-shirts, and shorts. Take clothes that breathe: it is very hot and humid here. Do not take anything fancy or anything that is not compact and easy to wash in a sink. Try to pack clothes that are not bulky and will dry fast. Host families will likely have washers, but dryers are unheard of, so everything is line dried, which means it take a day to dry. Just think twice about bringing jeans (especially since you can’t wear them to teach in)

For teaching, every school requires that the students wear uniforms. It is suggested for

teachers to dress up as well. This means long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt for males and either dress pants or a skirt and a blouse for females. Nice shoes are required for both sexes. You should be prepared to dress in dressy-casual attire, this means for guys, khakis, polos, a long-sleeve shirt and loafers. NO shorts, No sandals, No sneakers. Girls: dress sandals, NO tank tops, NO short skirts, NO JEANS. The culture very much judges on face value and visual impressions. It is important that we maintain a low profile and acclimate to their customs of dress. In their minds the clothes that you wear reflect your status. For females, women are often catcalled or harassed, so dressing modestly to avoid this behavior is suggested. When considering what to bring, pack as if you will be leaving most of the clothes in Panama. Don't bring expensive brand name clothes as they will be stained, worn out completely, or damaged. It is a good idea to bring clothes that you will leave with your host family to lighten your baggage and serve as a departing gift.

- The basics: five or six t-shirts, several pairs of shorts, several pairs of pants/trousers, socks, underwear, and pajamas. Bring outfits that are appropriate to hike in and others that will be appropriate to attend an important event in.
- A pair of shoes/sneakers to wear every day. Make sure that you have shoes that are sturdy and comfortable enough for sightseeing and walks around your village.
- Nice outfits to teach in (a button-down shirt to go with pants for males, a skirt and blouse for females). Make sure you have enough for the entire week. Also, take a pair of nice shoes. These clothes may also be acceptable to wear to church.
- A set of clothes to go out in,
- Some kind of rain outerwear, like a rain coat with a hood. This should be sufficient, but it is winter (i.e., the rainy season) when we are there.
- Shower &/or hand towel for showering and the beach. You may be able to purchase these during orientation.
- Flip-flops for the shower and the beach.
- Past volunteers have said that they would have felt uncomfortable and/or unprofessional wearing sleeveless shirts, or anything above the knee.

Hygiene/Medical Items:

Unless you have a very strong attachment to a specific kind of shampoo, you can buy shampoo and conditioner once you arrive. You do not have to bring a supply of toiletries for the entire summer. Sample sizes will last you through orientation, and afterwards you can stock up at local stores.

- Toothbrush & toothpaste
- Razor & shaving cream
- Deodorant/antiperspirant
- Shampoo, conditioner, soap.
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- A roll of toilet paper or travel packs of hand tissues for public restrooms (toilets) (Do not assume that toilet paper will be there!)
- Feminine Products (Tampons can be hard to find)
- Sunscreen

- Mosquito repellent/ bug spray (Panama is infamous for its mosquitoes, so this is a must. It is highly suggested to order a plug-in mosquito killer, available online at <http://www.stratford-pharmacy.co.uk/index.cfm?page=pharmacy.productDetail&productid=42>. Also, in case that doesn't work, it is suggested to order anti-itch cream online at <http://www.westons.com/acatalog/Online-Catalogue-ANT229M.html>.)
- Glasses, contact lenses, contact lens solution (as well as a copy of your prescription)

You should also put together a small first aid kit that includes the following:

- Aspirin/Advil/Tylenol (Paracetamol/ Ibuprofen)
- Neosporin, first-aid cream
- Band Aids
- Dayquil (Day Nurse), if needed
- Tums (Gaviscon)
- Diarrhea or upset-stomach medication
- Allergy medication, if needed
- Prescription medications (see Health & Safety)

Teaching Material:

Paper is really the only material you can count on having. You will be provided with chalk, a chalk board, and a classroom. Anything beyond that will vary depending on the location. It is possible that your villages will have other supplies, but you should not count on it. Here is what we recommend bringing:

- Notebook (for lesson plans and other notes)
- Scissors (small are best for traveling, and make sure to put in checked luggage)
- Notecards (an excellent multi-use supply)
- Tape, markers and/or crayons, pencils
- Map of the world and/or the United States (UK)
- Small ball and/or Frisbee (or something else to throw). Do not bring a soccer ball (football); there will be at least one in every village!
- Something small to give away as prizes, stickers, American "things".
- Anything else from the local dollar store (the pound shop) or CVS that is fun, not bulky, and can be used in a lesson.
- Second hand children's books, comic books
- Magazines from the U.S. (UK). Try to get 'younger' magazines with pictures of celebrities (Tiger Beat, Teen People, Seventeen, US Weekly etc.) (The Beano, Dandy, Twinkle etc). Of all the items on this list, you will probably get the most mileage out of these.
- Photos from home. These can be used in class and can be shared with people in the village and with your host family.
- Read over the teaching manual and see if any of the games/activities you would like to do require additional materials (e.g. puppets, glitter, stickers, etc.) Also talk

to friends/ family/teachers for ideas.

General Items

- A small, school-sized backpack (could be your carry-on bag): This is nice for carrying teaching supplies and when traveling.
- A small umbrella.
- A journal, this is a nice way to jot down notes and travels
- Gifts for your host families. Nothing shows gratitude better than a small gift, especially if it says something about who you are or where you are from. People LOVE stuff from the US (UK), especially if it is specific to your hometown or region, i.e. books with photographs, calendars, t-shirts, etc.
- A camera. You will want to record all of your wonderful memories from this summer! If you have a film camera, try to buy all your film in the States (UK). It is a lot cheaper, especially if you buy it in bulk. If you have a digital camera, make sure that your memory chip has enough memory.
- A guidebook: The Lonely Planet or Let's Go are good options.

Documents

- Passport. Make four copies: one to leave with your parents, one to keep on your person at all times, one to hide in your check-in luggage, and one to give to your PD when you arrive in Panama.
- Student ID: Good for occasional discounts. If you have an ISIC (International Student Identity Card), bring it. If not, do not get it unless you have to. It is also possible to get one abroad if you find that you do indeed need one (\$25) You will get a discount if you bring it to the Miraflores Lock of the Panama Canal, so it is very useful.
- Your Insurance Card
- Itineraries: Make sure to print all of your itineraries, especially the hostel information.
- Make sure that your parents have copies of all the documents that you plan to take with you (in case they're lost or stolen). You should also have copies for yourself that travel with you in case the originals are lost or stolen. It is especially important to travel with a copy of your passport. If you can scan them and e-mail them to yourself, you will always have a copy easily accessible.

Things Not To Bring

DO NOT pack valuables. While danger of robbery exists in all countries, it can be particularly prevalent in poorer areas. Danger varies from country to country, but please do not bring anything on any LE program that you would be devastated to lose or damage. You should not bring expensive jewelry or valuable clothing. Additionally, electricity is very expensive in many areas, and extraneous electronics causes an unnecessary burden on hosts. **Do not bring any iPods, laptops, or hair dryers.**

Money and Banking

- Alert your bank that you will be traveling and where you are going--some banks

- put a hold on accounts when cards are used abroad.
- Do not bring traveler's checks! They are hard to cash (especially if you are outside of major metropolitan areas), and most places will charge you exorbitant fees to cash them.
 - The best way to get local currency is through ATMs. You may be charged a fee of \$1 to \$5 (~£2) per transaction, but the exchange rate is much better than what you would get from a currency exchange booth.
 - It is a good idea to bring some cash as well (~\$300-500/ £150-£300). This can be your emergency backup money. Make sure the bills (notes) are not torn, dirty, etc., or people won't take them. You might also want to buy a money belt from a travel store/agency in order to carry around some backup cash.
 - You will be buying food, transportation, hotel rooms, souvenirs, calling cards, cell phones, and tours/entrance fees to attractions. Panama is extremely cheap, but these costs can add up to become very expensive.
 - Plan on spending at least \$100-\$150 (£50-£75) at orientation.
 - Midpoint break \$70-\$120 (£40-£70)
 - I would recommend splitting your money and keeping it in two locations, like part in your wallet and part in a money belt, just so that if you are robbed you have another source of money.

Additionally, have \$500-1000 (£250-500) of personal emergency funds available during the program. If you don't have this kind of money, we encourage you to get a credit card for emergencies only. If you get caught in an emergency, it is better to have a means to buy a ticket out (and deal with the costs when you get home) than be stuck in country.

Travel Tips

- Keep a low profile. Shouting, screaming, and talking loudly in English are dead giveaways! Be respectful to the culture and try to be observant.
- Remember to have patience and relax. Even without the language barrier, this is a new culture and things are not the same as they are in the US/UK. The sense of time is not quite the same. Although schools will start on time, everything else is basically an estimate, from 10 minutes to an hour or more.
- Bring a book, paperback if possible, and then at breaks/weekends volunteers can switch books. English books are expensive in Panama.
- It is also nice to keep a journal of sorts. Volunteers are doing so much it is nice to have a record.
- Teaching Supplies. This should take up a large portion of your backpack, and you can refill it with souvenirs as you use up your teaching supplies.
- TRY YOUR BACKPACK ON...and walk around with it for about 15 minutes around your house. This is a great way to see what you really need, and just how heavy your bag really is.

ADDITIONAL READINGS/LINKS

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_994.html

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pm.html>

<http://lepanama.blogspot.com/>

<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPanama.aspx>

<http://www.visitpanama.com/>

<http://panamafaq.com/faqs/000625.html>

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