



NPH USA.
Raising Children. Supporting Families.
Transforming Lives.



Visitor's Guide: NPH El Salvador

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

El Salvador is the smallest Central American country, and the only one without a Caribbean coast.

Area: 8,124 square miles
– about the same size as New Jersey

Population: 6.36 million
(2025 estimate)

Languages: Spanish, Nahua (among some Amerindians)

About half of all children and youth are poor.

Climate/Environment

- Mostly mountainous in the north with a narrow coastal belt along the Pacific Ocean and a central plateau
- Tropical climate with distinctly wet and dry seasons
- Known as “the Land of Volcanoes” - extremely susceptible to earthquakes, volcanic activity and hurricanes
- Environmental issues include soil erosion, deforestation, water pollution and soil contamination

Guide Sources: *The CIA World Factbook, Fodor’s Travel, Lonely Planet.com, UNICEF*

A Brief History

As early as 10,000 years ago, El Salvador was inhabited by Paleo-Indian peoples. By the 16th century, the Pipil people dominated the region when Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado arrived in 1524. The Spaniards soon established control, and by the 1700s their agricultural system prevailed. In 1811, the first revolt against Spain failed, but on September 15, 1821, El Salvador, along with the rest of Central America, gained independence.

Despite independence, inequality and unrest persisted. Coffee became the principal export, and by the early 20th century, 95% of the country’s income came from coffee controlled by only 2% of the population. In 1932, an indigenous uprising was suppressed in La Matanza (“The Massacre”), resulting in about 30,000 deaths and decades of military rule closely tied to the landowning elite.

Ongoing social and political tensions led to a 12-year civil war from 1980 to 1992 that claimed approximately 75,000 lives. The Peace Accords of 1992 ended the conflict and established a democratic system, but economic inequality and high levels of violence continued for many years.

In recent years, under President Nayib Bukele, El Salvador has implemented strict security measures to address gang activity. These policies have significantly reduced crime rates, making the country one of the safest in the region, though they have also raised concerns about civil liberties and the concentration of power.

Above: *Playa El Zonte, H-Media/Adobe Stock*

Below: *Government headquarters, Idea SV/WikiCommons; San Salvador, H-Media/Adobe Stock*





NPH OPERATIONS

As a result of the 12-year civil war and continuing violence and unrest, Father William B. Wasson saw the need to help El Salvador's many neglected and orphaned children. He founded a Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH, Spanish for "Our Little Brothers and Sisters") home in 1999. Located in Texistepeque, it is about 30 miles from San Salvador, the nation's capital. Construction on Casa Sagrada Familia was completed in December 2004.





DAILY LIFE

Highlights

- Since 1999, NPH El Salvador has offered residential care services to children, adolescents, and young adults who, due to vulnerability and risk factors, were separated from their biological families or orphaned.
- Since 2017-2018, NPH El Salvador opened its doors to the community with the **Child Wellbeing Center and Father Wasson Community Scholarship programs**, for children, adolescents, and young adults living with their families who experience need and/or are at risk. The Child Wellbeing Center supports children with early education and care in a safe, inclusive setting, located on the home's property.
- In September 2025, the **Father Wasson Community Family Center** was inaugurated in a community located in Chalchuapa, about 50 minutes from the main home. This center provides childcare, empowerment and strengthening workshops, academic support, and other recreational activities for children and families in the community.
- The **NPH school** on campus offers classes from kindergarten through ninth grade, featuring modern classrooms and a broad curriculum that includes mathematics, science, social studies, English, computer studies, and physical education.
- **Vocational training** begins in the eighth grade, where students can choose to study carpentry, tailoring, welding, or baking—building skills for future independence and employment.
- The **Clínica Refugio** provides comprehensive medical care, including a doctor's office, dental room, recovery areas, isolation room, and pharmacy. The clinic also offers some medical care or referrals to families of children who are part of NPH.
- The **chapel, Divino Salvador**, inaugurated in 2004, serves as a spiritual and community center for Mass, reflection, and family gatherings.
- The **farm and orchard** supply much of the home's food. Crops include corn, sorghum, and vegetables such as cucumbers and squash, while dairy cows provide daily milk for the children.
- Older youth from the residential care program pursuing high school or university studies live at **Casa Juvenil San Francisco de Asís** in nearby Santa Ana, which offers a supportive residential environment close to their schools.

Dora Serrano, NPH El Salvador's National Director, is an *Hermana Mayor* ("Older Sister"), who was raised at the home.

Responsibility

Responsibility is one of the most important values that NPH tries to instill in their children. This is why each child is expected to not only be responsible for him or herself, but to contribute to the family. This includes traditional chores such as washing clothes, cleaning, and serving food.

Each child also has additional responsibilities after school and during the weekends. Some work in the gardens, while others care for the grounds and clean common areas. Everyone knows how much effort goes into caring for their home and all the people who live there.

Before attending university, *pequeños* from the residential care program are asked to give a year of service to the home.

Typical Day at Casa Sagrada Familia

- 5:00 a.m. Wake up, shower, dress, make bed
(children from the residential care program)
- 6:15 a.m. Chores
- 7:00 a.m. Breakfast (children from the community program arrive at NPH and reunite with the children from the residential care program)
- 8:00 a.m. School day begins
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 p.m. Change clothes
- 1:45 p.m. Participate in afternoon extracurricular activities (all of the children)
- 3:00 p.m. Do the chores and homework
(children from the community program leave)
- 5:00 p.m. Playtime
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 6:30 p.m. Shower
- 7:30 p.m. Reflection, prayers and/or reading led by the caregivers
- 8:00 p.m. Good night!

Godchildren

If you sponsor a child at NPH El Salvador, arrangements will be made for him/her to spend time with you during your visit. Please contact us if you are interested in becoming a Godparent.



TRAVEL TIPS



Time Zone

Central Standard Time
UTC/GMT -6 hours



When traveling abroad, we recommend enrolling in the U.S. Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). This free service helps the U.S. government know where citizens are, so they can notify and assist them in case of emergency. To enroll, visit <http://step.state.gov/step>



The goal of the trip is to have fun, experience the culture of El Salvador and meet the inspiring children of NPH. Each traveler has so much to share with this great family and so much to learn. We hope that each visitor grows from their interactions with the children we support, just as your visit helps them to do the same.

Entry Requirements

A valid U.S. passport is required for entry into El Salvador. Passports should be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry.

U.S. citizens do **not** need a visa for stays of up to 90 days. However, travelers must purchase a **one-entry tourist card** upon arrival. The card costs **\$12 USD**, payable in cash, and can be obtained from the immigration officials when passing through customs.

Travelers of other nationalities should verify visa requirements with the nearest Salvadoran consulate.

Vaccinations

Before traveling to El Salvador, please consult your physician and visit www.cdc.gov/travel

Transportation

- For group trips organized by NPH USA, transportation will be provided by NPH.
- Do NOT hitchhike under any circumstances.

Accommodations

Lodging varies depending on trip package. See specific trip information or consult the coordinator for details.

Food

While at NPH facilities, we will eat just like the children and staff at specific mealtimes:



Please read NPH International's Visitor Policy and Guidelines, sign the form and return it to your trip coordinator.

M-F

Breakfast: 7:00 a.m.

Lunch: 12:30 p.m.

Dinner: 6:00 p.m.

Sat-Sun

Breakfast: 8:00 a.m.

Lunch: 1:00 p.m. (Sat) and 1:30 p.m. (Sun)

Dinner: 6:00 p.m.

Food at NPH is NEVER wasted. If you are unsure you will like what is being served, ask for only "un poquito" (a little), and if you cannot finish, please offer it to one of the kids.

While on day trips, we will eat in restaurants where we are sure that food will be prepared safely.

All visitors are welcome to bring additional snacks to share. Be sure to bring things that can withstand hot and humid conditions and preferably are individually wrapped.

Water

DRINK BOTTLED WATER ONLY. This cannot be stressed enough.

Bathroom Etiquette

It is not possible to flush toilet paper in most Latin American countries due to the poor plumbing systems. Toilet paper and all sanitary products must be thrown in

TRAVEL TIPS *(continued)*

small waste baskets next to the toilet. **DO NOT flush toilet paper or sanitary products while visiting the NPH home.**

Bring travel toilet paper, or a small packet of facial tissues on day trips. Tissue is not always available in public bathrooms.

Electricity

Electrical outlets are 115 to 125 volt 60 hertz, so no adapters are needed. You should expect power outages, which are common in Latin America.

Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi is available in certain areas of the home, though the connection can be limited — which is perfectly fine! It provides a great opportunity to stay present and fully engaged in daily life at NPH.

Clothing

Comfortable, broken-in walking shoes are a must! The days are warm, so light clothing – shorts, slacks, cotton T-shirts, sandals and/or running shoes – is appropriate. But please dress conservatively and in a tidy manner. Also, for Mass do not wear shorts or short skirts. Please shower directly before Mass (as the children do). A clean pair of pants with a tucked in shirt is appropriate for men, as are pants, jeans, capris or a skirt and a nice shirt for women.

Currency and Credit Cards

The official currency in El Salvador is the U.S. dollar. ATMs are widely available in most towns and cities. Before traveling, check with your bank regarding any foreign transaction or withdrawal fees that may apply.

A value-added tax of 13% is applied to all goods and services.

Tipping

Most restaurants will add a 10-15% tip to the bill. Bellhops and room maids should be tipped about \$.50 per day per person. Tip tour guides \$1-5 per day per person.

Safety

Outside the gates of NPH, we recommend that you never go alone anywhere. Be vigilant in regards to your surroundings. While at the home, we will be in a very safe and controlled environment. However, it is important to remember to watch your personal property. Our children have come from very different backgrounds and while NPH tries to help them realize that they are safe now, many of them are still in survival mode. They are not malicious, but for many, taking is the only way they have ever survived.



See page 9 for emergency contact information.

PLEASE DO NOT give children your address, e-mail or phone number even if you are their sponsor.

Terms to Know

Good morning/afternoon/evening! - *¡Buenos días/tardes/noches!*

See you later! - *¡Hasta luego!*

How are you? - *¿Cómo está?*

Fine, thank you. - *Bien, gracias.*

Please - *Por favor*

Excuse me - *Permiso*

Do you speak English? - *¿Habla inglés?*

Yes - *Sí*

No - *No*

Thank you - *Gracias*

You're welcome - *De nada*

How old are you? - *¿Cuántos años tiene?*

How much is this? - *¿Cuánto es?*

More - *más*

A little bit - *un poquito*

House - *casa*

Home - *hogar*

School - *escuela*

Backpack - *mochila*

Office - *oficina*

Kitchen - *cocina*

Water - *agua*

Food - *comida*

Rice - *arroz*

Beans - *frijoles*

Spoon - *cuchara*

Fork - *tenedor*

Cup - *vaso*

Plate - *plato*



NPH-Related

Pequeño/a - literally "little," but it is the term used for all NPH children

Tío/a - literally aunt or uncle, but at NPH it is a caretaker

Fr. Wasson - *Padre Wasson* (Founder of NPH)

Padrino - Godfather (Sponsor)

Madrina - Godmother (Sponsor)

Ahijdo/a - Godchild

Hermano/a Mayor - Older brother/sister - the term for a former *pequeño/a* or graduate of NPH



SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

Clothes

- Lightweight travel clothes - there is no laundry facility, but you can hand wash!
- Jeans/shorts/travel pants - your preference
- Comfortable shoes for walking - tennis shoes or something with closed toes
- Poncho/lightweight rain jacket
- Sweater, fleece jacket or sweatshirt - it is cold at night
- "Bug off" clothing - REI or Ex Officio (if sensitive to mosquitoes)
- One "nicer," but still casual outfit

Remember to dress conservatively. No visible undergarments; nothing torn, ripped or too short.

Toiletries

- Hand sanitizer
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Soap (we recommend a pack of disposable face cloths that have soap in the fibers. They work as soap and a washcloth.)
- Toothbrush/paste
- Deodorant
- Razor
- Earplugs
- Soap for washing clothes (if you want)
- Suntan lotion
- Insect repellent
- Small packet of facial tissues
- Travel toilet paper

Medicines

- Personal prescriptions (can be hard to get or expensive outside the U.S.)
- Pepto Bismol/Immodium
- Advil/Tylenol/Excedrin
- Cipro/antibiotic for travelers' diarrhea
- Benadryl/Hydrocortisone
- Bandages/Neosporin
- Emergen-C/cough drops

Personal Items

- Pillow
- Umbrella
- Water bottle
- Camera/Charger
- Fly paper
- Sunglasses
- Flashlight (plus extra batteries)
- Travel alarm clock (if desired)

Snacks/Food

While we encourage everyone to eat the food provided (it is tasty), if you are worried about not liking the food, or getting enough, consider packing some pasta or another substitution for a meal, just in case. In addition, you may also want to bring:

- Granola bars/fruit bars/popcorn/snacks to share
- Gatorade packets (it is easy to get dehydrated)
- Good ground coffee and sugar to share

Other

- Passport
- Two copies of passport and credit card information: leave one copy at home
- Pictures of your family to show kids (great conversation starters!) and/or postcards

Do NOT Bring

- Expensive or irreplaceable jewelry or other valuable items
- Flashy gifts



We often leave pillows, towels, sheets and dinnerware for the home to keep after we leave.





GIFTS

Visitors often ask what items they can bring for the children. Here are some suggestions.

Clothing and Shoes

- Underwear
- Socks
- Sandals

Education/Arts & Crafts

- Books in Spanish
- Coloring books
- Colored pencils and crayons
- Glue and tape
- Scissors
- Construction paper
- Play-Doh
- Yarn and pipe cleaners
- Beads
- Stickers

Toys & Games (for every age group)

- Card games
- Board games
- Jigsaw puzzles (100 pieces max.)
- Marbles

Sports Equipment

The kids spend most of their time outside, so think of items that require little or no maintenance and can be shared by everyone!

- Balls
- Jump ropes
- Air pumps with extra needles

Hygiene

- Feminine products
- Shampoo
- Soap
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes (for kids AND adults)

Health Care

- Vitamins
- Bandages
- Neosporin
- Tylenol

These items are always needed in the clinic. Please contact us if you are interested in donating other medical supplies.

Other

- Barrettes and hair accessories
- Inexpensive plastic jewelry
- Batteries of various sizes are always needed and easy to transport

When in doubt . . .

Bring things that NPH needs or wants, and that get depleted. If you are still unsure, ask!



PLEASE DO NOT

- Bring candy or small items to randomly pass out. This can result in hurt feelings among children who do not receive anything.
- Bring expensive gifts, such as music players, video games or jewelry. This may unintentionally create feelings of jealousy and cause problems for that child.
- Give gifts directly to the children. Give them to the home's Visitor Coordinator or a staff person.
- Give money to anyone at the home. This can cause confusion about how it will be used and will not qualify for a tax deduction under U.S. law. Please make all donations through NPH USA.



REMEMBER, YOUR VISIT IS A GIFT!

Neither NPH nor NPH USA want the children to associate your visit with material items. The best thing that you can bring is you! All your kind words, thoughts and affection are going to be the most lasting gift. Building relationships is the most valuable thing you can offer!



CONTACT INFORMATION

We suggest you leave this information as well as your flight and hotel details (if applicable) with your emergency contact.

National NPH USA Office

20 North Wacker Drive
Suite 4000
Chicago, IL 60606-3193

Phone: 888.201.8880
travel@nphusa.org

NPH USA, Federal Tax ID #65-1229309, is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that supports the homes, healthcare and educational programs of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos.



follow us: @nphusa
visit our website: nphusa.org

Before sharing photos or posts on your social channels, make sure your photos comply with the NPHI Child Media Policy found here: nphusa.org/cmp
Next, tag us @nphusa before posting!



NPH El Salvador Emergency Contact Information

km. 77 carretera a Metapan
Caserto San José el Sompopo
Cantón Cujucuyo
Municipio de Texistepeque
Depto. Santa Ana
El Salvador

Phone: 011.503.2487.1500
Fax: 011.503.2487.1532
e-mail: info.sv@nph.org



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