

DHS Band Chiapas Information

Update 3-14-2011

Our trip is less than three weeks away! Here is an update with lots of important information and details. ***Please read it carefully*** and if you have any questions or comments, contact William Edmisten or Lew Lefton.

1. Updated hosting arrangements. (IMPORTANT!)

This past weekend, we finally got the list of families who will be hosting us, and the proposed assignments based on the ambassador information we provided (e.g. allergies, dietary restrictions, spanish/english fluency etc.) A spreadsheet summarizing the new assignments is available on the google group, the band website, and attached to this email.

As expected, some of the original roommate configurations have been adjusted to match the available hosting options. Moreover, it turns out that there are more Mexican host families who would like to participate, so we are trying to be gracious guests and accommodate this. Another consequence is that there are more kids who would be hosted alone. The new hosting arrangements are still being finalized, and we will remain flexible if scheduling changes need to take place.

Before reacting, please keep these things in mind. Our entire group will be together for all the trip activities (which is most of the time) and much of the free time will also likely be spent in smaller groups that include several families, so everyone will still be seeing a lot of their DHS friends. It is also worth mentioning that part of an international travel experience is about having new experiences and making new friends.

You will also notice that some of the proposed hosting arrangements now have mixed genders. This is because the host family has children of both genders. Note that we had mixed gender hosting arrangements on both ends of the Solvakian exchange. Of course, everyone will have the same level of chaperoning no matter what the hosting arrangement is.

Thus, we are asking for volunteers who are willing to be hosted alone and for volunteers who are willing to be hosted with a child of the opposite gender. Obviously, it would be simplest if the new arrangements didn't have to change very much from the current proposed assignments.

As you can see from the updated itinerary, there is one night in which we will be staying in a hotel in San Cristobal de las Casas. Each hotel room will sleep 4, and for this night, we will revert to the same sex hosting pairs, which comprised our original roommate proposal.

In light of this last minute development, we are requesting that the travelers take a close look at the proposed changes and let us know right away if it is truly not an acceptable arrangement. ***If you don't let us know at or before the band parent meeting on March 21, we will assume you are OK with the new hosting arrangement.*** Thank you in advance for being flexible and understanding!

2. Health and medicine.

We have added an additional form for everyone to sign, which has information that we have collected from the CDC and other trustworthy sources about the health risks associated with travel to

this area. Each family should consult with their doctors and decide how they want to approach these decisions, but please read the form and acknowledge that you are aware of the situation. We don't anticipate any problems, but it is best to be informed before leaving.

Many people travel to this area and avoid traveler's diarrhea (including Ms. Williams and Vicky Stevens last fall!). You simply need to be diligent about water safety as outlined in the Health/Medical Information handout.

Malaria is not present in the city of Tuxtla Gutierrez, but we will be taking some trips outside the city, including a boat trip in Sumidero Canyon. **Insect repellent will be needed.** Some people may wish to take anti-malarial medication as a prophylactic measure (consult your doctor). And, since we'll be much closer to a tropical climate **sunscreen will also be needed.**

Please make sure we know about any medications or medical issues using the forms provided to you. Even if you don't bring any medications, know that our hosts will have two doctors available to assist with any emergency.

3. Luggage.

There are three rules of packing for the Chiapas trip.

Rule #1: Pack Small and Light

We will be on flights run by both Delta and Aeromexico, so you can look all this up on their websites, but here's the scoop: you get ONE checked bag for free. It can't weigh more than 50 lbs and its total size (length+width+height) must be less than 62". You are responsible for any fees for overweight, oversized, or additional bags. A bag that is 51-70 pounds will cost you \$50 extra, and 71-100 pounds will cost you \$450 extra. If the bag is too big, the oversize fee is \$175.

Everyone may take, free of charge, a carry-on bag that must fit in the size checker (22"x14"x9") and weigh less than 22 pounds. This should probably be a backpack. You will need a backpack to pack for the overnight trip to San Cristobal de las Casas anyway. You also get one personal item (purse, briefcase, or laptop case). If you have a small instrument (clarinet or smaller) put the whole case in a small backpack or tote bag and use it as your personal item.

Rule #2: Pack Small and Light

Be a good guest and a good ambassador. Don't take any more than you can handle by yourself. This includes lifting your stuff into overhead bins, fitting it into small cars, lugging it around city streets, and so forth. You're only going for a week, the weather will be warm most of the time, and we aren't using band uniforms and hats.

Rule #3: Pack Small and Light

If everyone checks a bag, the band will have to check the instruments as second checked bags. This costs \$30 a bag and will add to the cost of the trip. Help us keep the trip costs down!

4. Itinerary and Travel.

There is an **updated itinerary** on the band website and the DHS Band Chiapas Trip Google group. Also, travelers can get **frequent flyer miles** by looking at the eticket numbers, which were uploaded to the Google group (they are not on the website).

WE WILL MEET AT DHS AT **6:30 AM** on FRIDAY APRIL 1. We will take buses to the airport (need to confirm this...) departing 7 AM sharp. We connect to an Aeromexico flight in Mexico

City. Our itinerary has us going on to Tuxtla Gutierrez in two groups of 29 and 21 on two separate flights.

For our return on April 9 we will all travel together. We will pre-purchase Marta cards and upon arrival we'll take the train to the Decatur station, and then walk to DHS. Pickup will be at DHS. **We need a volunteer to pickup instruments and large luggage in the band trailer on our return.**

5. Host Gifts.

Every traveler should bring a small gift to give to their hosts. The gift does not have to be expensive, but it would be nice if it had a connection to Decatur or Georgia. Suggestions for gifts are books with pictures about places in Decatur or the state of Georgia, locally made crafts, art, sculptures or something with a local connection. You can find peach cookies, fried peanuts, hot sauces or grits from a place on La Vista road called David's. Also any small piece of art from a Decatur artist or DHS spirit wear from Intown Ace Hardware would be appropriate. There may still be time to order additional DHS Band polo shirts, check with Linda Herbers. Each student will also receive a small gift from the Mexican hosts.

6. Administrivia: Meetings, forms, packing list, clothing etc.

Mandatory Band Parent Meeting on Monday March 21 at 7 PM in the band room. Students and parents should both attend. If you have not yet completed the paperwork and handed in your passport, you must have it done at this meeting. There will be a notary there for the one form which needs to be notarized.

We are working up a checklist so you can verify the information we have for you and the status of your paperwork. There are currently 7 forms that need to be signed and turned in:

- Medical Information for Travelers to Mexico (NEW, not passed out at February meeting)
- DHSBPA Travel Permission (Needs notary)
- DHSBPA Release & Indemnity Agreement for Minors
- DHSBPA Medical Consent
- CSD Medication Release Form
- CSD Health Information Form
- Chiapas Behavior Pledge

Now that we are on Daylight Savings Time, the local time in Tuxtla Gutierrez is two hours earlier.

Although you will not likely be in regular communication with your child, we will be sending daily reports back to Casie Hughes who will distribute them to the whole band. We also hope to have some bloggers.

The weather is nice and warm and it rains some days. Please bring a jacket for when you go to San Cristobal de Las Casas located in the mountains. Casual clothing and comfortable shoes are recommended. School dress code applies. A slightly nicer outfit is suggested for the ceremony with the mayor and for a big party they are preparing. See packing list below for details.

The deadline for the shirt order is Friday March 18 so that they can be back by Friday 25th -for distribution on the 29th or 30th. Students should wear one shirt for the trip and pack one shirt. The shirts will

be worn at all performances with Khakis (tan colored). Check with Linda Herbers for details of the shirt order. We may have youth sizes now, so some of the petite girls may want a size smaller than an adult small. There's no Adult XS so some may like a Youth XL.

Chiapas Packing List

Trip Band Shirt – you should wear one for travel and bring the other
Khaki Shorts (tan colored)
Khaki Pants (tan colored)
Closed Toe shoes for performances
Instrument
Light jacket or sweatshirt
Nice clothes for special dinners (Girls: dress, shirt or dress pants. Boys: collared shirt and dress pants)
Sleepwear
Comfortable shoes for lots of walking and touring.
Comfortable clothing for 9 days including 2 travel days. Pants/shorts/skirts/dresses, shirts, underwear, socks. PACK LIGHT. Layer and reuse when possible.
Hat
Sunscreen
Insect repellent
Sunglasses
Bathing suit
Bag for overnight travel (this can be the back pack you use as a carry on)
Toiletries – toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, shampoo, hair brush/comb
Alarm Clock (Not a cell phone).
Folding music stand
Pocket Spanish phrasebook (optional)

7. Money, Phones, and Electronics.

As of March 8, 2011, the exchange rate is
\$1 US = 12.01817 Mexican Peso
100 Mexican Pesos = \$8.32 US.

The question of how much money to bring is an individual decision, but we are suggesting \$20 US per day (total about \$200 US). This should be enough to cover the meals, which we have to provide ourselves (see updated itinerary), some money for souvenirs, and other incidental expenses. We suggest that you do not bring cash or traveler's checks, but rather a debit card backed by a widely accepted network (e.g. PLUS, Cirrus, Star). A prefunded Visa Buxx card could be used as an alternative to a debit card. ***If you are getting either type of card for the first time, sign up soon so you have time to get the card in the mail.***

If you have a debit card, then having pesos in hand before leaving Atlanta is probably not necessary. If you want to have some Pesos before departure, you can get them at a local bank. Travelers will also have an opportunity to exchange money or withdraw local currency in the Mexico City airport. Tuxtla is a large capital city, so you can use ATM machines at any bank, in or near many supermarkets, in shopping malls, grocery stores and occasionally in hotel lobbies.

In some cases, it may be advisable to call bank and credit card companies prior to a trip to inform them

of the locations where the card may be used to prevent deactivation of the card. For more information, see: <http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g150768-c51116/Mexico:Atms.And.Credit.Cards.html>

We are recommending that students do not bring electronics such as cell phones since there is a potential for loss, theft, and/or excessive roaming and international data charges. Similarly for laptops and tablet computers. We know that students will still want to bring ipods or other music players for the trip. Obviously, they do so at their own risk. If you have an older model or if you are able to get an inexpensive mp3 player, that may be preferable.

8. Music and Performances

As you can tell by looking at our itinerary, we have 4 performances. Ms. Williams is working on the musical programs, and we are still finalizing the details. Students will be told what to start practicing in band class.