WELCOME TO LIGA
The Flying Doctors of Mercy

Thanks for getting involved. We are glad you have decided to join us. We are sure you will find it a very fulfilling and enjoyable experience. One you will not soon forget.

This has been prepared to answer some of the many questions we think you might have.

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW

WHEN
Volunteers leave the first Friday of each month from October through June. The usual hour of departure is between 7 and 8AM, depending on the individual pilot (faster planes can leave a little later).

We return from Mexico the following Sunday, usually arriving at your home airport between 2 and 7 PM, again depending on the individual pilot.

WHERE
You will depart from the airport where the pilot has his plane. It may be a small airport close by or it could be as much as an hour or more drive.

HOW
Most of the planes carry 4 to 6 passengers and come in all varieties. The Liga flight coordinator assigns passengers to pilots considering several factors, such as the clinic where you will be working, your location, even how much you weigh!

DAY BY DAY

FRIDAY
Typically you will take off from a local airport before 8AM on Friday morning. Your first stop will probably be Ciudad Obregon. Obregon is 3 ½ to 4 ½ hours south of Los Angeles (remember to limit your fluid intake Friday morning).

At your first stop in Mexico you will clear customs and immigration. …don’t forget your passport (see information under Passports). After the pilot refuels and everyone clears Immigration and Customs you will take off for El Fuerte (about 1 hour). Some clinics work on Friday evening others do not. There is usually a pilots meeting at the El Fuerte Hotel at 7PM after which we go to dinner. (See Saturday eve.)

SATURDAY
We put in a full day Saturday at the clinics starting by 7 or 8am and working until all patients are seen.

Although this is normally by 5pm, many times the surgery teams continue to work late into the night.

Saturday night is our time to relax and socialize with the other volunteers in El Fuerte. Some of the volunteers in San Blas prefer to spend Saturday night at a hotel in El Fuerte while others prefer to stay at the clinic. The choice is yours. Some of the volunteers prefer to eat at the Hotel, some prefer the Generals while others swear by the “Taco Stand”. It is good-sized group of volunteers, so there will always be someone doing whatever it is you prefer to do.

SUNDAY
On Sunday most pilots like to leave between 7 and 11 AM for the return trip. Pilots will stop at an international airport in Mexico to clear customs and immigration and take on fuel. The next stop is usually Calexico or Brown field in San Diego to clear American customs and immigration. You will again be asked for your passport, birth certificate or sometimes just a driver’s license. It is important you stay with your plane until the customs agent or your Pilot tells you it is OK to leave. If you are traveling on a foreign Visa or passport it is important you understand all the immigration regulations. Make absolutely certain you are not traveling on a single entry visa. They may not allow you to enter the US again. If in doubt check with the Liga office or US immigration prior to your trip. Do not carry anything down or back across the border without checking with your pilot as to whether it is legal or not!!!! His plane can get confiscated for your actions!!!
WHAT ELSE?

WHAT SHALL I WEAR?

The main thing to remember is to pack light. The less you bring, the more space in the planes for medical supplies. Please use soft luggage. A small duffel bag or backpack is all there is room for. Hard luggage takes up far too much space in the small planes.

The weather in Mexico is warmer than here, but it can get chilly (60-65) at night, so a windbreaker or sweatshirt may be in order during the winter months. Jeans or scrub and shirt are the usual wear in the clinics. Just be sure it's washable!

In the warmer months, you may wish to bring a swimsuit. Some of the hotels have a pool.

Be comfortable. You will be sitting in a small space for up to six hours. Loose comfortable clothing makes a big difference. It gets cool aloft, so bring a sweater or light jacket. (You can use it for a sunshade or a pillow if you don't need it for warmth.)

PASSPORT

If you don't have a passport, you must have your original birth certificate or a certified copy. These are the only documents officially recognized by the Mexican officials.

FOOD FOR THE FLIGHT

Check with your pilot. Some plots allow passengers to snack in the plane while others don't. Sandwich, granola bars, fruit, etc. Please don’t make a mess or leave crumbs all over. Remember your pilot is a volunteer too. While the contribution you make to the pilot for the trip may or may not cover his fuel and direct expense for the trip it doesn’t begin to cover his actual cost.

Most pilots will ask your help in cleaning the plane after you arrive home. Vacuuming the inside and cleaning the bugs off the outside usually takes your crew less than 20 minutes where it would take the pilot alone over 1½ hours.

MONEY

People want to know how much to bring for food and lodging. What you spend is, of course, up to you. Hotel rooms run from $30-$70 per night. Most people prefer to share a room. This is usually no problem. Meals are about the same as they are here. Dinner at the El Fuerte Hotel runs from $8-$15 while the taco stand is about $6. There are plenty of choices in between. Better to take a little extra. If you don't spend it, you can always take it home! It is not necessary to get pesos before going on the trip. You can usually get them at an ATM in El Fuerte or just use dollars they work too. Bring a number of $1 and $5 since you will often get change in pesos.

TIPPING

It is customary in Mexico, as elsewhere. Customary is 15% for waiters. We do not tip our local clinic volunteers, or the volunteers who transport us back and forth from the clinics.

WATER

Many people bring a small bottle of water for the flight. Some prefer sodas, but there are no restroom facilities on the planes, so water and juices are better. By the same token, coffee is not a good idea. There is not the room to bring water for the whole weekend but bottled water is available in Mexico.

PERSONAL MEDICAL EQUIP

Stethoscope, otoscope, small flashlight, any items of that nature that you think you will need for general clinic work. If you have a specific question, ask your clinic coordinator or call the Liga office.

Some people like to bring small items for the children at the clinics. Small cars are popular, as are little dolls and inexpensive toy jewelry. If you have a Polaroid or Digital camera, an “instant picture” is always a hit!

SMOKING

Since we are promoting good health, we ask people not to smoke in the clinics. (We don't let the patients smoke in the clinics either.) As a courtesy to your fellow passengers, please, no smoking in the planes.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

No one wants to monitor anyone's behavior, but please, we do ask that you do not drink in the clinics, as a courtesy to our patients and to our hosts. At the hotels, you are on your own. We ask only that you remember you are representing both Liga and the United States and conduct yourselves accordingly.

PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

We are guests in Mexico and we try to conform to their cultural standards. While we make no restrictions on individual behavior, we don't want to be 'Ugly Americans', so discretion and common courtesy are the rules. For example, please, no criticism or jokes about the country or its people. Don't assume they don't understand English!

Remember you are a Personal Ambassador of Liga International
And
The United States