

# HONDURAS

*"Honduras is so much more than white sandy beaches, warm crystal clear water, palm trees, ancient Maya ruins, cloud forests and tropical fruits. To me, Honduras is a country with people who have made me feel welcome, appreciated and special. For example: when the man in the wheelchair shouts "Hola Astrid, cómo está?" from the other side of the big crowd of people having gathered in the main street of San Pedro Sula for the annual celebration of the Human Rights National Week. Or when the old man in Puerto Cortés, who spent his Christmas in my country in 1954, comes running after me to give me a big hug good-bye after a seminary. I get the same feelings of being appreciated when the lady with the big, toothless smile gives me all of her nantes in honey after I have assisted on a Human Rights speech in Santa Cruz de Yojoa. Or when my very patient co-workers first will let me use my dictionary (if I still haven't understood), after they have come up as many Spanish synonyms as they can think of. Other examples are when my host family tells me we have to change my birth certificate to include my new Honduran family name. Or when people stop me on the street to ask my name, where I'm from, if I'm married and what has brought me to Honduras, and end up shaking my hand warm-heartedly to tell me that "Thank you. Thank you so much for coming to my country showing that you care." That's when you feel loved. That's when you know you have definitely done the right thing coming to Honduras to work as volunteer. That's when you know that there's no way you would have ever wanted to be without any of your experiences in Honduras. Let alone all the new friends you have made for life" .Astrid Aarrestad, Norway.AFS volunteer working at the National Commission for Human Rights in 2003.*

Honduras, the most mountainous country in Central America, is celebrated for its Mayan ruins and ecological bounty. In fact, the government has designated nearly one-quarter of the land as either national parks or nature preserves. Most Hondurans are the intermingled descendants of European colonists and local Indians, which mean that ethnic tensions, often found elsewhere in Latin America, are largely absent. One of the least developed nations in Latin America, Honduras is often bypassed by tourists and international developers, which contributes to a leisurely-paced lifestyle, even in the cities.

## **Community Service Program**

AFS's Community Service Semester program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Honduras 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 Semester 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 Honduras have worked in suburban or rural communities for social and environmental organizations. Participants are placed according to their abilities and interests respecting also the needs of the Hosting Organizations (CPO's).

## **AFS & Your Experience**

AFS Honduras has been in existence since 1963. AFS volunteers across the country work hard year-round to provide you with a high quality intercultural experience. Every year, AFS Honduras hosts approximately 70 AFS students and 50 participants in Community Service programs from more than 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, other chapter volunteers and the AFS Honduras Staff to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have the support you need during your experience abroad.

### **Orientations**

AFS Honduras's staff and volunteers meet participants at the airport when they arrive. Participants staying in Tegucigalpa meet their host families there; Welcome families in Tegucigalpa host those who will live in other communities for the period of the arrival orientation and Spanish course. During the arrival orientation, participants discuss their expectations and are given information about the culture, how to get around, safety tips, AFS rules, travel guidelines and activities during the rest of the program. This orientation concludes with 40 hours of instruction in Spanish, after which participants, who will live in other communities, travel, to their host communities where local volunteers and host families will be waiting for them. Participants WILL start working for their community service organizations immediately.

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Honduras will provide you with a mid-term and end of stay orientations. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet, to talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide 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 Honduras**

### **Living arrangements**

Most participants in AFS Community Service Semester 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**

During the week they spend all day at work usually the workday starts at 8:00 am and finish at 5:00 p.m. Afterwards the participants spend time with the host families, watch television with them or do other activities. Usually dinner is the mealtime the host family shares.

At weekends the participants usually go out with host family or with friends to do different errands, activities or to join social gatherings or groups. Some might have the opportunity to get involve in other community activities, to travel or visit different places in the community or elsewhere.

### **Diet and Meals**

Honduras is one of the largest exporters of bananas in the world, and you will of course gain knowledge of the subject while eating the typical fried *plátanos* (a starchy variety of banana cooked and eaten like potatoes). Fruits are an integral part of the diet, as they are used in many dishes. Typical foods include *frijoles* (beans), eggs, rice, *tortillas* (similar in appearance to pancakes but not sweet and made of corn) and white and red meats combining Caribbean and Latin American cuisines. Equally characteristic of Honduran food are some beverages: Honduran coffee is highly appreciated, and natural fruit juices are popular.

Usually families eat together. It is considered inappropriate for individuals to request special foods for themselves or to raid the refrigerator.

## **Dress and Appearance**

We suggest bringing “business casual” and casual clothes for daily wearing without forgetting to bring jeans and T-shirts. The participant will need to feel comfortable using the type of clothes that will allow him/her to do his/her work and also walk down the street. For office work “business casual” clothes are recommended. For a special occasion, it would be good to bring a nice dress or suit. Ladies, knee length or longer skirts that are lightweight and easy to wash are recommending. Due to the amount of rain and wind during the winter (rainy season), it would be appropriate to bring a small umbrella, a light jacket and a light sweater. There are some nice places to go swimming, so you may need to include a swimming suit and cap too. Shoes: sandals, sneakers are of a great use; those working in the countryside should not forget a pair of boots. Also it would be wise to include a pair of nice shoes to wear on special occasions.

## **Activities**

Besides the three orientations, the volunteers organize cultural activities where the participants can show their culture, through their work they provide a great support to the community. Activities do vary from one AFS Chapter to another.

## **Health Precautions**

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Honduras (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 any 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 and Support**

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Honduran. 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**

AFS’s Community Service Semester programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country’s cultural diversity.

## **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. Normally, all participants can enter the country without a visa. Upon arrival, participants are given a 30-day residence/tourism visa. All they need is a valid passport and no payment needs to be done at the airport. AFS Honduras will renew their permits for the remaining time of their experience; expenses are covered by the AFS Honduras national office. At the end of this period, should any participants decide to stay longer, they need to make the arrangements for additional time themselves, after receiving a program release. However, AFS Honduras does not encourage participants to stay longer once the program is finished, and AFS Honduras has to notify immigration authorities about it.

## **Program Prices**

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website [www.afscanada.org](http://www.afscanada.org) or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS’s medical plan; placement with your host; 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: 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**

Honduras is a small country located in the heart of Central America, between Guatemala and Nicaragua on the east and west respectively and El Salvador on the south. Honduras has a short coastline on the Pacific and reefed coasts on the Caribbean to the north. Mostly mountainous, Honduras has high peaks as well as lowlands, but all is covered with flourishing wildlife.

The climate in Honduras is tropical but varies from region to region owing to the diversity of the nation's topography. The northern coastal zone is generally warm and humid, while the mountainous central region is dry and cool with maximum temperatures of 25-30°C (77-86°F). Honduras has two seasons: the rainy season from June to October and the dry season from November to May, although on the Caribbean coast may see rain all year. Temperatures during the rainy season are slightly cooler than during the dry season.

### **Population**

With a population of approximately 6.5 million, Honduras has several interesting minorities. Ninety percent of the population is classified as mestizo, a mixture of Spanish and native Honduran Indians. Approximately 7% are pure native Honduran Indians differentiated in several groups as "Lencas", "Chortis", "Payas" or "Sumos." Another important minority is the "Garifunas," a mixture of African descendants and Carib Indians who live on the north coast and islands. Forty percent of Hondurans, or "Catrachos" as you may hear them referring to themselves, live in urban areas.

### **Language**

Spanish is the official language spoken throughout the country. The various ethnic groups also have their own languages. English is widely spoken, particularly on the big cities, along the northern coast and among the inhabitants of the Bay Islands (with a broad Caribbean accent).

### **Government**

Honduras is a democracy with a President elected by popular vote. The Constitution of 1982 establishes three branches of governmental powers: the Legislative, represented by a National Congress of 128 elected deputies; the Executive, made up of the President and the 13 members of his cabinet; and the Judicial, consisting of the Supreme Court and nine Judges chosen by the Congress.

### **Religion**

The great majority (90%) of Hondurans are Roman Catholic, but there are also many other Christian sects and denominations such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The indigenous tribes have their own religions, often existing alongside Christianity and incorporating elements of African and Indian animism and ancestor worship.

## **Launching your AFS experience**

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 Honduras, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, [AFS.org](http://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 Honduras. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a former participant, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada 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, Hondurans 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.

### Curiously Honduran

- Honduras has one of the oldest working clocks on the American Continent.
- Honduras lies along the world's second largest coral reef.
- Honduras is the only place in the world where whale shark can be seen all year long.
- Despite its modest size, Honduras is considered the second "lung" of the world, featuring the Biosphere del Rio Plátano.
- At the "Copan Ruinas", you can see the largest stone book of the Mayan Culture: "Escalinata de Jeroglíficos" (the Hieroglyphic Stairway).

### How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at [www.afscanada.org](http://www.afscanada.org). If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail

### Quick Facts

Country data	Size	112,492Km <sup>2</sup> (69,745 M <sup>2</sup> )
	Population	6,560,000
	Official language	Spanish
	Government	Democracy with a President elected by popular vote
	Currency	Lempira, divided into 100 centavos
Useful websites	<a href="http://www.honduras.net">www.honduras.net</a> <a href="http://www.honduras.com">www.honduras.com</a> <a href="http://www.letsgehonduras.com">www.letsgehonduras.com</a> <a href="http://www.hondurasindomita.com">www.hondurasindomita.com</a> <a href="http://www.hondurastips.honduras.com">www.hondurastips.honduras.com</a>	
AFS Honduras website	<a href="http://www.afs.hn">www.afs.hn</a>	

### Why Honduras?

Live in a country that has a lot to offer, from Caribbean beaches to wild nature and Mayan culture (three distinct worlds). Your time in Honduras will be a special opportunity for personal growth, especially because the country is unique in many aspects, and because its poverty and developing nature offers a challenge and a wide range of new things to learn (rich culture, customs and traditions). Because of the country's excellent weather, there is no need to spend money on winter clothing.