

Corazon de Vida Foundation

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Volunteer Bus Trips to Baja, Mexico

What is the procedure to register for a trip?

Corazon de Vida has an online reservation system in place for our orphanage trips. Please access our website to view the schedule and to register for a trip. Once a successful reservation has been made, a Trip Reservation email is sent as well as a receipt of payment if made by credit card. Bring the Trip Confirmation email with you on day of trip. If you are under 18 years old, a Parent Consent form needs to be completed and faxed to CDV at 949-861-6853. Form can be found on our website under the Monthly Trips section or can be downloaded using this link: <http://www.corazondevida.org/pdfs/consent.pdf>.

Will the bus wait if I am late arriving to the pickup location?

Please show up on time as delays will mean less time spent with the kids (and they will let us know if we are late). Please research the pickup location on Mapquest. It is no fun being lost at 5:00 AM, trying to figure out where to go. Download the Bus Trip Pickup Locations document from our website or by using this link: <http://www.corazondevida.org/DirectionsToPickUp.htm>

Can I follow the bus?

We request that trip participants ride the bus if they would like to go down on a Corazon de Vida Foundation (CDV) sponsored trip. It is too difficult to follow the bus because the bus enters Mexico from a different location than a car does and driving in Mexico can be treacherous.

Can I bring used clothes and/or toys?

Mexican Border Officials are now requesting that used clothing and toys NOT be brought across the border. If we have items on the bus that are not approved by the Border Officials, our bus could be sent back or we could be asked to leave and forfeit the items that are not allowed into Mexico.

Can I adopt?

It is possible to adopt from Mexico, but it can be difficult. Parents or next of kin must be found and must sign off that the child can be adopted. It is preferred that siblings be adopted together. Finally, Mexican nationals have first priority.

In order to focus our efforts on feeding children CDV is not able to help with adoptions and we do not provide referrals to agencies. For more information on Mexican adoptions, this website has a lot of great information:

<http://library.adoption.com/Mexico/International-Adoption-Mexico/article/1393/1.html>

Can just show up day of and see if there is room on the bus?

You now must pre-register by completing an online trip registration form and pay the \$25.00 bus fee via credit card (ideal) or by check. You will receive a trip confirmation email once a properly completed registration is completed. If you are under 18 years young, please download a Parent Consent Form from our website, fill in, have a parent sign and fax to CDV at 949-861-6853. Trips sell out FAST so please register early. Please do not show up on trip day if you did not register online, as we may not have room!

Can kids participate on the trips?

We encourage parents and their children attend these trips but do ask that the child be at least 8 years old. While on site, they can participate in a craft project, play games and have lunch together. Please complete a Parent Consent Form, fax to CDV at 949-861-6853 and bring with you on day of trip.

Can I get community service credit for the trips?

You can receive up to 2 hours of community service for your trip participation, depending on pickup location. Feel free to ask your bus trip leader for help with this.

Can I drop off donations of food or clothes at the CDV office?

We do not have any storage space at the CDV office. If you have items that you would like to bring to donate, we request that you bring them the day of one of our orphanage trips. If it is an appropriate item, we would love to bring it down with us. Check the "Needed Items" list located on our website for ideas – <http://www.corazondevida.org/WhatToBring.htm>

Can I leave the orphanage facility during the trip?

For the safety of the volunteers and the children we ask that you stay on the facility. At no time are the children who reside at the orphanage to be taken off the facility grounds without the prior approval of the home director.

When I sponsor a child does that money go directly to that child?

All funds raised are used for general purposes and are distributed among the various facilities. If you want to sponsor a particular child or a particular facility, talk with a CDV staff person and we will work with the orphanage management to accommodate your wishes.

Do I have to speak Spanish?

Speaking Spanish is not a requirement as the children are used to communicating with non-Spanish speaking volunteers. Check our website for common Spanish phrases - <http://www.corazondevida.org/pdfs/spanish.pdf>

Can you pick me up at another location than the standard pick up location?

We have pick up locations in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Diego counties. Check our website for pick up locations. For private volunteer trips

(churches, schools, companies, etc.) of 40 or more people we will pick up at a location of your choice.

What exactly do we do for the day?

We spend the day making lunch, making crafts, and play with the kids. This is our opportunity to provide love and support! We encourage reading a book in English or Spanish to a child or teaching them simple English phrases. The children enjoy playing with new friends so it is common to see people playing soccer, basketball, jump rope, UNO, giving piggy back rides, playing Twister, helping with homework and much much more. It is a super fun day.

What kinds of crafts do you do?

We do all sorts of crafts. Trip volunteers bring along items that they would like to use to interact with the children. Coloring books and face painting are among some of our most popular type of crafts. Please, no makeup or finger nail polish as it is not allowed at most homes or schools.

Can I bring sports equipment?

The children love to play sports. You can bring jump rope, soccer balls, and basketballs. Please no bats or balls – too dangerous.

What time do I get back?

An orphanage trips is usually a 12-hour day; however, drop off times can vary. Please see our website for trip schedules, times and locations.

Why can't we stop and shop at the border?

Our trip's focus is on the children and we want to spend the most time possible with the children. We have a limited amount of time and we are unable to make unnecessary stops.

Why is there a toilet paper shortage at the orphanage?

When most of the facilities are focused on the necessities of food and water, things like toilet paper, diapers, and toiletry items are often secondary or overlooked. These things that we take for granted can be much appreciated by our orphan friends. Please feel free to donate some of these items if you would like to help.

Can I drink the water?

Many of the facilities have issues with potable water. While we try to assist with clean water tanks and filtrations systems, we recommend that volunteers bring their own bottled water to drink during the trip. Water served during lunch at the orphanage will be clean filtered water.

How many kids do most of the orphanages have?

Orphanage capacity varies with the size of the home, their support staff and funding amounts from organizations like CDV. Home sizes vary from under a dozen to a large campus facility with over 100 children. With more consistent funding and help, most homes can take in more needy children.

What are their age(s)?

Ages vary from just a few days old to 18 years of age. Some homes have teenagers over 18 years old who have decided to go on to college and have an agreement to be supported by the orphanage until they graduate.

Where are their parents?

Children living in Baja orphanages come from varied backgrounds. The Mexican Foster Care Agency, DIF, will place many children into homes that are true orphans with no known parents or family. Other orphans do have parents, but are from abused, drug or prostitution households. Many homes accept voluntary children from parents who are not able to care for them, due to extreme hardship. These children may be accepted into the orphanage upon the discretion of the home director.

Will I get lice?

While lice is a common issue at most orphanages, most volunteers will not be infected. A lice removal kit is a common need and is a welcomed donation.

Can I leave my stuff on the bus?

Most people will bring a backpack of personal items and take it with them to the orphanage. However, you can leave items on the bus, but you do so at your own risk. While we are at the facility, the bus driver will remain on the bus, however CDV or the bus company is not responsible for lost or stolen items. It is strongly recommended that you keep your identification with you at all times. Do not bring expensive jewelry or electronic equipment!

What is the process for coming back across into the United States?

The bus will drop us off at the Otay Mesa border crossing and we enter the United States via the walk thru immigration. You must take all personal items with you from the bus like backpacks, purses, etc. The officers will ask you questions like your citizenship, where you were born and review your identification. Fruits and vegetables are not allowed to cross even if they were purchased in the US. The bus meets us at a designated area across the border as explained by your trip leader.

How many orphanages does CDV support?

We currently support 13 orphanages, affecting the lives of over 700 children by providing food, clean water, education, medical and housing for most of them.

Are there any sick kids?

Most children at orphanages are very healthy, but when a child has a cold, it spreads like wildfire. Orphan children with cancer or other critical ailments are cared for at other homes where they can get more specialized attention. CDV does not visit these homes per the request of the home directors but we do support them monetarily.

Can I bring my own food?

Yes. Bring water, snacks and food for your own needs, but do not try to bring fruits or vegetables back across to the US as it will be confiscated at the border.

Is a birth certificate ok instead of a license?

A birth certificate is usually OK for a youngster, but any type of ID with a photo is ideal. For example a drivers license, identification card, school ID, work ID, passport, green card, etc. IF NOT A US CITIZEN, YOU MUST BRING A VALID PASSPORT, GREEN CARD OR PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR GETTING YOURSELF BACK TO THE USA.

Why can't I bring these old used stuffed animals, toys, shoes or clothes?

These items can be difficult for us to get across the border by the Mexican customs agents. In addition, most homes have rooms filled with donated clothes and toys that they cannot use and end up discarding these items. To find out the current home needs, please check our website.

Does CDV run the orphanages?

CDV does not run orphanages, but we support the structure that is already in place as created by the home directors.

Why doesn't the Mexican government give aid to the orphanages?

Mexico does not have the funds to care for their youngest citizens and the orphanages rely solely on organizations like CDV and their generous supporters. The Mexican foster care agency (DIF) will visit the orphanages to confirm that there is no abuse, disease or other issues.

Why are the kids dirty?

Imagine having a family of 50 or more children! The overworked orphanage staff does their best to care for the children, but kids will be kids. The washing machines usually run 24 x 7 and are constantly breaking down.

Why don't you help more with the facilities (particularly the bathrooms)?

CDV does not have the funding for housing repairs, as our mission is to provide food, water and basic needs. We also strive pay utility bills if possible. We can work with organizations or companies who have the desire and skill to help with the facilities to improve their living conditions. Please contact the CDV office for more information.

Do any of these kids go on to college or trade school?

Most do not make it to college as the need to make money to support themselves as they get older overrides an education. The lucky few that do make it to a higher education usually get help from a sponsor.

What kind of schools do they go to?

Most of the children go to overcrowded public schools and is provided by the state at a very low cost. The major issue for the orphanages is the cost for the uniforms, school shoes, backpacks, paper, pens, pencils and the fuel needed to transport the children to and from school. Anyone interested in helping with the education program at the orphanages are encouraged to contact us.

What religious organization is CDV affiliated with?

CDV has no religious background as we are an organization of many faiths and backgrounds that have the same desire – To help feed and support children. We do not encourage people to discuss their religious beliefs while visiting orphanages as it may conflict with the beliefs of the home.

How much of the \$25.00 bus fee is donated to the orphanage?

None. CDV breaks even on the bus trips as the most important thing is to spend time with the children and let them know that someone cares. A 50 seat bus at \$25 per seat generates \$1250. Food and craft cost is approximately \$300.00 for a total of \$1550. The bus is \$1140 to rent and includes gasoline, driver salary, driver tip, tolls, insurance and Mexico permits fees. We depend on donations and child sponsors to make up the difference.