

Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the El Salvador trip. Most everyone is currently in flight somewhere in the US. Some are starting their flights this afternoon. I am currently tracking the flights, and if you have not heard of this website, you can track their flight by going on to: flightaware.com and inputting the airline and flight #. Most will be arriving in El Salvador between 7:00-8:00pm their time, very convenient. Remember there is a two-hour time difference behind those of us in the Eastern Time Zone. I will try to send another email tonight.

El Salvador-Flight day-Wednesday

Hi everyone,

Please know that everyone landed in El Salvador early on 3 different flights tonight from Washington DC, Toronto, and Houston. Two more will arrive--one Thursday at 8pm from Montreal and one Friday at 6am traveling all night from Idaho. Then there will be 74 of them.

Currently everyone is going through customs and there is a bus and a truck for luggage waiting for them. Imagine all of them in their blue shirts! They will then go to the Hotel Alamo in San Salvador, the capital, which is about one hour northwest from the airport (which is near the Pacific Ocean). When they arrive at the hotel about 10pm their time, they will be served a light meal and rooming assignments will be given out. I'm sure everyone will go to bed soon. It has been a long day of traveling for many of them. Remember they are two hours behind us in time.

Doug will not be sending an email tonight. This is why I am writing. Please know that you may not always receive a daily email from Doug through me. But I will forward emails on to you when they come in, usually early morning or late evening. If we are lucky, we may get pictures. Parents, if there are any medical issues with your child, this will be sent out first to you only. Feel free to forward these emails on to relatives and friends, instead of asking me to add more names to our database. You may also want to print and put these emails in a notebook for your child/spouse. Hope you enjoy YOUR trip!

Thursday, March 23-received 11:58am

Good morning to one and all,

Got up this morning to breakfast of cereal, yogurt, scrambled eggs with onions and peppers, beans and rice, juice, and coffee. We eat our hotel meals on an open veranda. Great weather could not be any better. Sun out, cool breeze, a perfect day so far at 85 degrees with a high coming of 94.

Last night was down to the mid-60's. When we arrived we had hamburgers, hot dogs and sodas waiting for us. We celebrated a birthday of one of our students and easily embarrassed him. Everyone got a good night's sleep and all seem to be in good spirits and mingling. Getting to learn everyone's name has become a game. I am getting a great feel for this group.

Today at our mid-morning meeting, we introduced all of the chaperones, split into groups and selected a leader for each group. We now have 5 groups with Interact leaders who will keep us organized. Lunches are being made and water bottles are being filled, so we will be off soon to the secluded community of Talnique.

Our police guards have arrived. Boy are these people over the top with wanting us to know that we are safe. Alan Stroshine from NH, whose Rotary group just returned to NH from here, told me that their group also felt they were overly protected. They understand why we didn't come here last year and they want the USA to know they want us to return and feel safe as well.

We will return to the Alamo after our work day and will shower and get dressed. We are ALL invited to the Noroeste Rotary Club president-elect's home for a cookout of hot dogs and pizza. Depending on when we get back, we will try to write again later tonight.

Love to all, Doug and the gringos.

El Salvador-Thursday 3/23/17

Hi everyone,

MAP: So that you can get your bearings as to where everyone is, go to weather.com and in the gray Search City, etc. box put in San Salvador. Click Search. Besides seeing the weather, click on the map. Zoom in and out. You will find San Salvador, the capital, where the Hotel Alamo is and Talnique (zoom in and to the left), where they will be building 5 houses in the Noroeste Rotary Club's "100 House Village" project. (If you cannot find Talnique, you can also put Talnique in the Search City box.)

The yellow lines are highways. If you look southeast from San Salvador on a yellow line RN055 and zoom in, you will find a small blue airplane symbol and the road they traveled on from the Compalapa Airport to the hotel. Going south from San Salvador on Hwy. 4 is the road to the beach and the Pacific Ocean. It is also a major port for ships coming in. Zoom out and the country of Honduras is to the north, Guatemala is to the west and Nicaragua to the east.

Until next time, have a great day.

Wed., 3/23/17 Received 9:00pm

Hi Everyone,

We have arrived back to the Alamo. Great day, very warm, but we had a breeze. It is sooo dry here. When we got to Talnique, we had to put up the windows in the bus to avoid having the flour-like dust from the dirt roads come in. The dust inside the bus was still really bad. This shows just how dry it really is here. The ride home was quiet as most were sleeping. They all woke up about half the way home and enjoyed the scenery.

EVERYONE here is doing well. We even had Maddie find a baby gecko that she has named Phjilipay. She wanted to bring it home, but that won't work. ~Doug

Now we will hear from two of our students....

Hi--My name is Jon Franklin and I am an Interactor from Forest Hills Northern High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So far so good! Besides Doug's snoring, most of us had a comfortable night's sleep! We have been here less than 24 hours and Doug has already managed to give us all a hard time and poke at us all. However, if there is one thing Doug has taught me, it's that he expects the same in return! But it is all in good fun and we are having a great time. I have gone on a few trips similar to this, and never before have I seen such a large group of people get to know everyone so quickly. Leave it to Interactors and Rotarians to be so welcoming to all. The stay at the hotel has been very comfortable so far and the Central American culture here is evident everywhere we look. Whether it be rice and beans for breakfast, the landscaping outside by the dining area and pool, or even the way the kids and families have greeted us with open arms and the biggest smiles, El Salvador has already been quite an amazing experience and culture shock. I am proud to say I have learned the majority of everyone's names already, and I can't wait to get to know all of those who are here with us. It's Day 1 of work and I can tell that this is going to be a trip that sticks with us all for a lifetime. I don't think any of us will come back quite the same. ~Jon

Hi--My name is Kelly Ignat and I am an Interactor from Houghton Lake, Michigan. After arriving in Talnique we immediately split into work teams and started getting the houses put together. Concrete slabs called "placka" slid into upright beams (tongue and groove), which then created the walls. One group had half of their walls already put up by

the locals, so they finished the walls on their house. All the other groups are more than 3/4ths done with their walls. After the walls are put up, we are going to have to apply mortar and put roofs on. This will most likely be done the next few days. The combination of heat and physical labor is already taking a toll on us kids, but the motivation to finish the job is amazing to feel and see. The police officers surrounded us almost all the time and we are practically being babied. When we wanted to go to the bathroom, they insisted they needed to escort us. The bathroom is inside a daycare, so many of us girls said we had to use the restroom, when in reality we wanted to spend some time with the children. The families are very welcoming and the children are so much fun to be with!

~Kelly

Until next time, good night. Doug and the gringos

The last email was Thursday night 3/23/17 not Wed.

Friday, 3/24/17 10:05pFm

Good evening everyone,

Well we finally arrived back at the hotel from Talnique, but not without incident. We had a flat tire on the bus during rush hour in a city where the drivers are only interested in getting home and could care less about a bus with a flat tire. But everything went well because our police officers normally pull up in front of us and turn on their cruiser (truck) lights to force the traffic to move over or stop.

We had a stern talking session with the police today. By "we" I mean Francis LaLomia (Interact alumni from Corning NY and formerly of Keene NH who speaks Spanish) and myself. The police wouldn't let anyone come near the worksite, and we normally have family members and teenagers come to help. We let the police know things would be fine with the locals with us. We were told this was the way this particular officer wanted things. We told him that we had different officers yesterday and things went well for all of us. We also told them we had no intention of working with them if they were going to change the playing field on a daily basis. In the end of it all, we won and things calmed down a bit.

The worksite is progressing extremely well. I am truly blown away by the work ethic of our students. We have finished paneling four houses, are mudding three with cement, and have completed putting in posts for five houses. The weather has been very warm, but there is a nice breeze.

Breakfast today was 3 kinds of cereal, yogurt (3 types), fresh fruit, hash browns, egg and cheese omelets, and orange juice. Tonight we had fried fish, rice with veggies, and beverage.

News of the day with Maddie is she is now looking for a monkey. She hasn't found one yet, and we told her she won't either. Of course, she can't find her gecko either, but we think she will keep looking. We think that she should become a vet. ~Doug

Julia Lee, Junior Interactor at Houghton Lake (Mich.) High School:

As you know the group went to the home of the President of the Noroeste Rotary Club on Thursday night and this get-together gave me the opportunity to get closer to others who are on this trip. I met others who I can relate to and I really enjoyed that. We had the same sense of humor and could relate to things that we would talk about. Also, my new friends and I sang and danced to songs that made me be myself. The President and his wife were very generous to invite us into their home as a welcoming. His friends also made the life of the party as they sang and danced as well.

Clark Meston, Sophomore Interactor at Mona Shores High School, Muskegon, Mich.:

I've seen and experienced a ridiculous amount of things during this trip. The thing that sticks out to me the most is the overwhelming gratefulness that the people of Talnique exhibit. It seems as if our group is always being thanked, offered homemade goods, and much more. On top of that, the people of Talnique are immensely grateful for everything that they own. This is really important for me to see because I believe I take a lot of things for granted in life, especially before going on this trip. Seeing the gratefulness of the people of Talnique in person made my perception of "be grateful for everything you have" that much more real.

Sidney Shaloy, Freshman Interactor at Houghton Lake High School:

I always remember that before the trip, the advisors and other leaders would tell us that we will extremely change families

lives. I knew that before the trip, but it becomes so much more real when you live those moments. The best part for me going on this trip is going to the worksite and actually working. It's because when we are finally done with this entire project, I will see their happy faces and you'll think, "Wow, I actually did that. The 74 of us just changed these families lives, for the better." To me, that is the warmest feeling a person could have. By the end of this trip, I will finally get to see their smiles and happy faces that we worked so hard for to see.

Connie's note: This is a view of the worksite when they arrived. The local men prepared the house foundations, which are terraced, and set the poles in place. Further down the hill you can see 2 more houses to be built with poles in.

Sat., 3/25/17 Received 8:54pm

Hello Everyone,

Saturday was another work day in Talnique. Great weather, nice breeze. When the breeze died, it sure got hot. Today is supposed to be our hottest day of our trip here--94 degrees, at least! The Noroeste Interact Club arrived to help us (they said 50 were coming but not sure how many showed up) and they did a great job at working along with us. They all spoke English, so there was no language barrier. About 15 might join us tonight here at the hotel. I hope to send out for three ice cream cakes.

The students are still working extremely hard. We now have most of our homes muddled with cement except for the very top. A welder is on scene to work on another roof. The native men here are working very hard to put in posts for house #6 or maybe it is #7. We are not sure anymore as the houses are separated by other finished buildings.

When we arrive back from Talnique to the Alamo, we come up the somewhat steep driveway beyond the locked gate. We take our shoes off and clap them together, so that we don't dirty up the hotel floors. We are going through water extremely fast and have already ordered many more huge jugs of water.

Menu for today: Breakfast was French toast along with the normal yogurt, cereal, juice, and fruit. Supper was beef, rice, steamed veggies, rolls, and beverage.

I am extremely pleased with maturity level of our students, as well as their work ethic. I know I have said that before. But when you have a group of 74 people who don't know each other, you truly keep your fingers crossed that everyone will mingle and get to know each other. ~Doug

This is Jordyn Hallberg, a senior from Orchard View Rotary Interact at OVHS in Muskegon, Mich. I have really enjoyed this trip to El Salvador. One of my favorite things about the trip is building the houses with the families. Each family that is getting a house has to help us build it. The kids of the house and the village of Talnique all help us too. Some of these kids are under 10 years old and they can lift the panels better than I can. They are not as much help as they are fun to be around. They like to use our gloves and sunglasses, and they wear them around to show their friends. The kids also like to play tag. So on our water breaks, we end up chasing a bunch of kids around. I also like trying to understand the family as they speak Spanish. I am definitely not fluent, but I know some words, and I like trying to listen and talk in Spanish. All around this has been a great trip. I have definitely been out of my comfort zone with being in a different country without my parents. But I love this new experience! ~Jordyn

Hi! I'm Sofia Di Loreto and I'm a junior Interactor at Grand Haven High School in Grand Haven, Mich. I am so happy to have the opportunity to come on this trip and experience a different culture. I was afraid that I would feel like an alien on another world, but I am surprised to see how similar to home it is. Obviously, many things are different. You don't see as many cows in the road or barbed wire fences in the US. But there are even more ways that the people of El Salvador are the same as us. The kids still play the same hand-clap games as I did, and the Burger Kings and Pizza Huts are just as greasy as at home. It really has been an amazing experience and I look forward to the rest of the trip. ~Sofia

My name is Ezekiel Chojnacki and I go to Allendale High School in Allendale, Mich. I'm a member of the Allendale Rotary Interact Club. The first two students seemed to cover the basics, but there are little things that seem to slip between the cracks that I will tell you about. In El Salvador the people seem to love America, even though most of the world does not. We are experiencing the best hospitality possible. At the Alamo the employees try their best to help us even though most of us don't know Spanish. They take their time to serve us to the best of their abilities. The hotel is not even a 1 star in rating, but their service is a 5 out of 5. Maybe it is because we are a part of Rotary or maybe because we are Americans. But none-the-less it makes working in Talnique a lot nicer. ~Ezekiel

Not a drop of rain is expected while we are here. Until next time.....

El Salvador Trip Facts... People

Doug & Connie Mealey <cldlmealey@gmail.com> Mar 26 at 11:31 PM

Connie's Facts: As you know, there are 74 people on this Rotary trip: 43 students and 8 chaperones from Lower & West Michigan; 6 students and 2 chaperones from Fall Mt. High School in western NH; 6 from Corning NY area; 1 guy from Austria who was a Rotary Exchange student and Interactor in Keene NH and is now attending college in Montreal, and 8 others who are all adult alumni from Doug's previous trips who live in NY City, Delaware, Boston, NH and Idaho. This is Doug's 17th trip taking Interact students to El Salvador, and his second year with a Michigan contingent, as we moved to Michigan from NH in 2013 after he retired as a funeral director in Keene, NH. This is his second to the largest group he has taken. There are 3 medical personnel aboard--2 are former Keene NH Interactors.

The NY contingent is headed up by Francis LaLomia, a former NH Interactor, a former Rotary Exchange student to Belgium, and now a NY Rotarian and college student. The Fall Mt. NH contingent is headed up by Zak Abbott, their Rotary Interact Advisor who loves to go to El Salvador any chance he can.

People have asked me if I have ever gone to El Salvador, and yes, I have three times. But I have never gone with the students, and believe me, I feel more valuable coordinating airline transportation and doing what I'm doing for you folks. Plus, it's not so hot sitting in my chair!

The high temperature at the hotel Sunday will be 91 but only 81 in Talnique! So the temperature is coming down.
~Connie