



July 18, 2023

2023-2024 SECURITY LETTER

CRISPAZ is very excited that you plan to visit with the people of El Salvador. In preparation for your visit, we would like to address certain issues regarding the safety of your group.

CRISPAZ takes the safety of your delegation very seriously. Our staff in El Salvador constantly monitors situations that may affect the safety of delegations. The U.S. State Department periodically updates its travel advisory for El Salvador and reissued one on July 17, 2023.

For over 38 years, our delegations have always been safe. We have taken, and continue to take, active security measures to provide a safe and meaningful experience in El Salvador. Over the years, we have not had any instances in which the well-being of our delegation participants has been threatened due to security risks or natural disasters.

According to the Salvadoran government's official numbers, as of June 2023, 1.6 million tourists have visited El Salvador. The majority of these visitors came from the United States, the rest from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Canada, in that order.

July 17, 2023, Travel Advisory

As previous State Department travel advisories have pointed out, no information suggests that criminals specifically target U.S. citizens. Most theft cases reported to the Embassy involve the loss of a U.S. passport during a surreptitious theft of bags, backpacks, or purses.

We recognize that El Salvador is still healing from a long-protracted war that ended in 1992 and that it continues to battle against poverty, gang violence, and a host of other social issues. However, the country is by and large safe, and the occurrence of violence is limited to particular areas that are known for Gang and organized crime activity. CRISPAZ closely monitors the local situations, so our delegations avoid these areas.

Delegation Safety

CRISPAZ had hosted hundreds of delegations continuously from 1984 until March 2020, when the country was closed due to the Covid19 pandemic. In the five years (2015-2020), we hosted 102 delegations with 1,303 participants. In 2022 we renewed our in-person delegations and hosted 12 delegations with a total of 147 participants. As of March 2023, we have hosted 12 delegations with 153 participants. All of these CRISPAZ delegations had no issues with violence or criminal activity.

While no program can guarantee the total safety of its participants, CRISPAZ has always placed participants' safety as its top priority. In addition, it is enormously helpful that our staff leadership team is made up of Salvadorans who live in El Salvador, have an intimate understanding of their own country, and are vigilant in obtaining current information about potential risks.

CRISPAZ Safety Measures

Members of CRISPAZ's delegations are never left to wander on their own. CRISPAZ intentionally avoids locations and situations that might be prone to violence, as gang territorial disputes have been one of the most common reasons behind the violence.

Housing: Participants stay at an enclosed guest house with a CRISPAZ representative present; contact information for the guesthouse and representative is provided prior to the trip. Rural stays are arranged in communities where we have long, well-founded relationships and have been free from violence for many years.

Transportation: CRISPAZ uses only one company properly certified every year for this service. The company has well-maintained, up-to-date micro-buses to avoid breakdowns. All the buses are air-conditioned to avoid windows opening at any time while driving.

Program: A CRISPAZ representative is always with the group. Participants remain together as a group, and, as in any large city or unfamiliar country, participants are reminded to move in pairs or groups. At no time will the group be taken into a known dangerous area. The Executive Director is in constant contact with the CRISPAZ delegation leader while the group is in El Salvador and periodically accompanies the group during its visit.

We would be glad to provide additional verification about the safety of our delegation to El Salvador by putting you in touch with any of our Board Members or any of the organizers from the groups that visit El Salvador with us.

“State of exception”

El Salvador is NOT in the State of Emergency, as the U.S. media mistakenly occasionally reports. El Salvador's government declared a “State of Exception.” The State of Exception is aimed at gang members; it basically has three components:

- It limits the right to assembly, specifically in gang-related areas.
- The authorities can detain suspected gang members and hold them in jail with no legal representation for 15 days rather than the 72 hours established by law.
- The government can engage in wiretapping without the need for a warrant.

The State of Exception does not affect the development of religious, sports, commercial, academic, restaurant, shopping centers, gyms, movie theaters, concerts, businesses, and other regular activities.

CRISPAZ reiterates that the safety of your delegation is taken seriously. Our staff in El Salvador constantly remains aware of situations that may affect delegations. During the group's time in El Salvador, will not travel to or near the areas where the violence took or takes place.

Sincerely yours,



Francisco Mena Ugarte
CRISPAZ, Executive Director



Peter Buck
CRISPAZ, Board Chair