

Our Sister Parish

Delegate's Handbook

2026



La Casa Pastoral, Berlín, Usulután, El Salvador

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for following your call to serve on this international mission to El Salvador! To prepare you for the upcoming mission trip, previous church delegates and volunteers have put together this handbook to aid you. The information was compiled from several books, websites, and many personal experiences. More information about Our Sister Parish (OSP) and its work can be found on the OSP website: www.oursisterparish.org

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GOALS FOR DELEGATION VISITS

Delegations should have one principal goal: to change for the better the lives of both the people of Berlín and the visitors from the United States by building relationships of mutual love, solidarity, and friendship with one another.

To achieve this goal, visitors to El Salvador need to educate themselves about the history and culture of the country. They do this by visiting sites of historical and cultural significance. Traveling to these important places helps them to gain a better understanding of how this nation's past has affected its present, and particularly how past socioeconomic and political injustices have contributed to a continuing state of poverty and disempowerment for most Salvadorans. Some of the sites delegations typically visit are the National Cathedral in San Salvador where Saint Oscar Romero is buried, the University of Central America (UCA) where the Jesuit priests were martyred, Divina Providencia where Romero was martyred, a civil war memorial wall in Parque Cuscatlán, massacre sites such as El Mozote and Cinquera, and a civil war museum and guerrilla encampment in Perquín. Most of these places were sites of great pain, trauma, and violence. But without understanding the Salvadoran past, visitors cannot hope to understand the current political, economic, and social systems that continue to benefit the rich and powerful while leaving many Salvadorans impoverished, struggling, and lacking access to basic resources.

Achieving this goal also involves building real, sustainable relationships between the people of El Salvador and the delegate (and, by extension, the churches or organizations with which they are connected). We hope that these relationships of solidarity will inspire and empower Salvadorans to lift themselves out of poverty. We also hope that they will provide delegates with an opportunity for conversion: to realize that the decisions and policies of powerful, wealthy, and privileged nations like ours often support oppressive, unjust socioeconomic systems and political regimes around the world. We hope that their newfound knowledge and real love for the people of Berlín will inspire them to act, pray, and live differently when they return home.

Traveling with a spirit of humility and a genuine desire to meet and speak with people allows delegates to truly walk alongside our friends in Berlín and the surrounding cantons. Delegations often visit nearby schools, rural communities, and the local Catholic Parish. Delegations also learn a great deal from the Pastoral Team in Berlín, who volunteer their time and efforts for the betterment of their community because of their love for the Kingdom of God and God's people. Upon returning, delegates are asked to reflect upon their experiences and share their stories with others to foster an awareness of life in El Salvador.

The goal of the Our Sister Parish mission is to build lasting relationships and to help individuals and families in need sustain their lives and build a better future for themselves. We encourage you to leave your assumptions behind and enter El Salvador with openness and humility, so that you can truly walk with the people. Listen, love, and grow.

ABOUT OUR SISTER PARISH

Mission Statement

Our Sister Parish brings hope and development to the poor of Berlín, Usulután, El Salvador through committed relationships of solidarity between US churches/organizations and our Berlín brothers and sisters. Faith will grow and the love of God will be profoundly experienced

The entities that makeup of Our Sister Parish

(More detail at: <https://www.oursisterparish.org/who-we-are>)

Partnered Communities

Our Sister Parish exists to serve the small communities in the rural areas surrounding the town of Berlín, Usulután, El Salvador. These communities and their leadership enter long term partnerships with OSP organizations in the United States.

Partnered Organizations

The organizations in the United States (primarily churches in the Des Moines, Iowa, area) that have formed long term solidarity partnerships with the communities in the Berlín area.

Pastoral Team, El Salvador

The Pastoral Team is:

Blanca, Cecilia, Idalia, Elmer, Alejandro, Margarita, Balmore and Jesús

Their responsibilities include organization and education for community leadership, project facilitation between the church partnerships and the communities, financial management for projects, and managing other basic requests for health, education, food, and clothing that come to the Pastoral House every day.

Our Sister Parish Board, United States

The Our Sister Parish Board is the coordinating body for the mission and serves as the legal board of directors for the Our Sister Parish, Inc. 501(c)(3) corporation. Their responsibilities include educating people within the Des Moines Presbytery and others about the work of the mission, assisting churches that wish to organize delegations, promoting specific projects that support the mission, and fundraising. They also hire the Mission Co-Worker.

The Mission Co-worker, El Salvador

An employee of Our Sister Parish who lives at the Pastoral House in Berlín, works alongside the Pastoral Team and serves as a communications and cultural interpretation liaison between the partnered organizations and OSP board in the United States and the leadership of the partnered communities and the Pastoral Team in El Salvador.

Brief History of the Mission

The mission began in 1990 when Rev. Robert Cook first visited Berlín as Hunger Action Enabler for the Presbytery of Des Moines, Iowa. Eventually, he began working with Salvadorans serving with the Parish Pastoral Team of the local Catholic Parish. Rev. Cook moved to Berlín to work with the Pastoral Time full-time in 2001 and retired in 2006. In January 2008, Kathy Mahler moved to Berlín to become the new Mission Co-Worker. She left the Co-Worker position in September 2012. In January 2013, the Rev. Katherine Pater became the new Mission Co-Worker. Katherine moved to another calling September 2016. Kathy Bassett is currently serving as interim liaison for the partnerships. A much more detailed history can be found on the OSP website at www.oursisterparish.org/history .

Much more information about the organization and work of Our Sister Parish can be found on the Our Sister Parish website at www.oursisterparish.org/who-we-are .

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF THE PASTORAL HOUSE

1. Love God.
2. Love and respect the people.
3. Love and respect one another.
4. Never hand out money in the communities or on the street.

Our mission is about empowerment as well as charity, and as such, we want community leaders to help us make decisions regarding who needs our help. Giving aid to some and not to others divides communities and undermines the Directivas' leadership. This is not a question of Christian charity or generosity, but rather of power.

5. Never make promises to anyone you meet that you cannot keep.

Promising certain things to some individuals and not to others can divide communities and disrupt the work of the Directiva and Pastoral Team. Again, this is about delicate and complicated negotiations of power, not generosity.

6. All communications regarding future projects must pass through the Pastoral Team or take place when a member of the Pastoral Team is present.

See #4 and #5.

7. Never eat or drink anything the Mission Co-Worker or Pastoral Team does not tell you is safe.

Please respect our efforts to keep you healthy and safe.

8. Never wander away from the group without informing the Pastoral Team or Mission Co-Worker where you are going.

Again, please respect our efforts to keep you safe: your wellbeing is our responsibility and priority while you are here.

9. Refrain from consuming alcohol in public places in Berlín. The Pastoral House has a zero-tolerance policy for illegal drug use.

Alcohol may be purchased and brought back to the house in reasonable amounts and consumed with Christian respect, prudence, and camaraderie.

10. Respect the advice, experience, culture, and suggestions of the Pastoral Team.

They have lived here their entire lives. This is their city, their language, their culture, and these are their people. Do you really think you know more than they do?

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

Please review all TSA policies regarding liquids, medications, and other items that you may want to bring with you, particularly in your carry-on: <http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information>.

It will be hot and humid (80-90 degrees) during the day, but the evenings can be cool (50s-low 60s) in the mountains of Berlín. Clothes should be clean but not fancy. T-shirts are common. Shorts are becoming a little more common (for women), but please dress conservatively.

What to bring:

Checked Bag

- Copies of passport, driver's license (leave a copy with family at home as well)
- Bandana (for dust & sweat), hat/ballcap, sunscreen
- Undergarments
- Pants, Skirts, dresses, T-shirts (wear what you are comfortable wearing). Discretion please ladies: no strapless shirts or short shorts. Try not to stand out. Knee-length shorts or skirts are ok. Capris are ok. Tank tops (not spaghetti straps) are ok. Jeans or khakis are ok. (Men RARELY wear shorts.)
- Pajamas
- Shoes and socks. DO NOT break in new shoes on this trip. Wear what you will be comfortable wearing walking long distances on rough terrain.
- Sweater, sweatshirt or light jacket for the evenings.
- Poncho or rain jacket. (Mid may to late October is generally the rainy season)
- Cosmetic bag: shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, Chapstick, body wash, face wash, toothbrush, toothpaste, ear plugs (if needed to sleep), nail clippers, comb, brush, hair ties, wash cloth
- Personal first aid kit: hand sanitizer, sunscreen, bug spray, 2% hydrocortisone cream, eye drops, antihistamine, pain reliever/fever reducer (acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen), antacid (Tums), motion sickness medication (Dramamine, ginger), anti-diarrheal medication (Imodium, Pepto Bismol), multivitamin, antibacterial ointment. Things you think you might need. Medicines need to be in their original bottle.

Carry-on

- Passport, driver's license, plane tickets
- Wallet, debit card (only for use in airports), cash (for use in El Salvador) SMALL BILLS for local shopping. Nothing bigger than a \$20, smaller is preferred
- Phone, charger
- Camera, batteries. (Your phone can serve as alarm clock and camera.)
- Computer or iPad, charger, mouse, bag, 3-prong to 2-prong plug adapter (some wall outlets are only 2 prong)
- Magazine, book
- Sunglasses
- Jacket
- Tissues
- Prescription medication **in original bottles**

- **Empty** water bottle.
- Pen, pencil, Journal
- Money belt (while traveling)
- Flash drive
- Medical information card- blood type, allergies for medication, emergency contact in U.S.

You do NOT need to bring bedding, pillows or bath towels. (But bring a washcloth, if desired.) If you forget a toiletry, you can usually find what you want (not specific brands probably) in Berlín. Or delegation friends could share the basics.

Clothing & Baggage tips

It will be hot and humid (80-90 degrees) during the day, but the evenings can be cool in the mountains of Berlín (50s-low 60s). Clothes should be clean but not fancy. T-shirts are common. Shorts are becoming a little more common for women, but please dress conservatively. Men, even young men, rarely wear shorts.

We advise against women wearing short shorts or spaghetti-strap tank tops. It can be quite hot in El Salvador and dressing less conservatively is often more comfortable. However, El Salvador is a more socially and religiously conservative country overall than the USA and, as visitors, it is best that we conform as much as possible to Salvadoran norms.

PACK LIGHTLY! You will be able to do laundry at the Pastoral House. Have the team teach you how to do your own laundry so they don't have to do it for you. You will be humbled.

- Carry-on luggage: remember to keep prescription medicines in original containers.
Remember that all liquids in carry-on luggage must be less than 3 ounces and they should all be able to fit into one, clear, quart-sized bag.
- Pack lightweight shirts, pants, dresses, skirts, etc.
- Pack conservative clothing: keep skirt and short hems at knee level, no spaghetti straps or strapless tops please. If you go to the beach during your stay, women may want to wear a tank top and shorts. Very few Salvadorans have a real suit and usually swim in the ocean in their clothing. Conservative shorts are appropriate for all at the beach.
- Be sure the shoes you take are comfortable—you will be doing a lot of walking and standing. DON'T break in a new pair of shoes on this trip. Flip-flops for showers or for wearing around the Pastoral House are a good idea.
- A light jacket or long-sleeved shirt is desirable for the evenings.
- A rain jacket or poncho, especially during the rainy season (May-November).
- You may purchase shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, combs, and brushes in Berlín if you don't want to carry those items down with you. But you will not have a great deal of time for shopping.

- Bring down your own over-the-counter medications, as much of the medication in El Salvador is expensive and not as potent as the medication in the US.

RULES, SAFETY TIPS, AND HINTS

“Normas” (Rules) for Delegates

Delegates must agree to obey the rules of the Pastoral House (see the [Ten Commandments](#)).

The Pastoral Team hires all the delegation translators. They understand that some delegations have their “favorites” from past trips, but unfortunately there have been instances of manipulation and exploitation of delegates’ good hearts, generosity, and naïveté by some former translators.

Delegations will meet with the Pastoral Team at the beginning of their visit for introductions and to talk over the plan for the week.

Delegations must place the utmost importance on following the guidance of the Pastoral Team during their visits. Sometimes delegates say or do things during community visits that could be construed as rude or cause power struggles and divisions among community members. The Pastoral Team members work with the communities on a regular basis and know the people and dynamics within each community. They would be the ones who must soothe any hurt feelings or straighten out unnecessary misunderstandings after a delegation leaves. Following the advice of the Pastoral Team can help avoid these situations.

“Compromisos” (Commitments) of the Pastoral Team

- To strive daily to improve our own work.
- To manage the projects and the funds from our partner churches well and with complete transparency.
- To help teach delegations of the realities of life in this country and specifically in this area.
- To physically and spiritually accompany delegations when they are in El Salvador.
- To physically and spiritually accompany the communities when delegations are not in El Salvador.
- To communicate and inform partner churches and their communities when there is important information to share.

Be respectful of the local culture

- Travel in the spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with local people.
- Be aware of the feelings of the local people; avoid what might be considered offensive behavior. Photography, particularly, must respect people. Ask if it’s OK to take photos.
- Cultivate the habits of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing or “knowing all the answers”.
- Realize that other people may have concepts of time and ways of thinking that are *different* from yours – not inferior.
- Remember that you are only one among many visitors; do not expect special privileges (unless you have special dietary or physical needs).
- When shopping on the street, bargaining is NOT the norm. An extra dollar or two for you can be a day’s profit to a vendor.

- **Do not make promises to local people or to new friends that you cannot keep. Do not hand out money or trinkets. Please consult the Co-Worker and Pastoral Team BEFORE presenting gifts to the community and/or families.**
- Spend time each day reflecting on your experiences to deepen your understanding.

Safety Tips

- Obtain recommended vaccinations and prescriptions prior to departure. We recommend Hepatitis A & B, Typhoid, Tetanus, & MMR vaccinations. For Hepatitis A, two doses of the vaccine at 0 and 6 months are needed for lasting protection. For Hepatitis B, three doses are needed at 0, 1, and 6 months. The Typhoid vaccine can be given by one injectable dose or 4 oral doses within two weeks. Most people already have Tetanus and MMR vaccinations; check with your doctor to be certain you have them.
- Make copies of your passport and driver's license. Leave a copy in the US with someone and take two with you to El Salvador.
- Avoid ingesting any local water or eating anything that might have been washed in local water. Use pure water provided by the Pastoral Team.
- Brush your teeth with pure water.
- Be careful not to get water in your mouth when you shower.
- Don't bite your nails or rub your eyes after washing dishes, hands, or laundry in pila water.
- Drink plenty of pure water to avoid dehydration.
- Avoid ice unless you are sure it is made from pure water.
- Avoid local food unless prepared or approved by the Co-Worker or Pastoral Team.
- Have your Imodium ready at the first sign of tummy rumbling!
- Avoid wearing flashy jewelry and watches. Leave them at home.
- Carry minimal valuables and always be aware of your surroundings and belongings.
- Carry minimal money and a copy of your passport. Leave your original passport at the Pastoral House.
- Keep prescription medicines in original bottles with your name on them.
- Do not leave the Pastoral House unless accompanied by someone from the Pastoral Team or the Co-Worker.
- Avoid all contact with animals, domestic and agricultural. **This includes dogs and cats.**

Other Tips

- Trust the Pastoral Team. Try any food they give you. You might be pleasantly surprised!
- Try to avoid wasting food – if you don't like beans ask for a plate with "no frijoles, por favor" or give them to a tablemate who likes them!
- Offer to help with dishes or with the laundry. Ask them to "teach" you because they sometimes feel awkward accepting your assistance!
- Play with the children. They give unconditional love!
- Listen with your ears and your heart at every opportunity. You will learn and understand so much more. When you are there, do as the locals do!
- Be thoughtful of the hard work of the Pastoral Team. They clean, cook, and pick up after you. Try to be maintenance free! Be respectful of their hard work.

- People like to have their photos taken but it is polite to ask first. Just say “está bien?” and point to your camera and then to them and smile a lot.
- Electricity in El Salvador is the same as in the U.S., so your phone/laptop chargers and other electrical appliances will work fine in El Salvador without any kind of converter. If you take down a laptop, be sure to bring an adapter if the plug has three prongs. Outlets at the Pastoral House will take 3-pronged plugs, but if staying in Sal Salvador the “hotel” may only take 2-prong plugs.
- The use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated.
- Alcohol/tobacco use is prohibited for those under the legal age of their country of origin. Use alcohol responsibly. **Any inappropriate actions you take reflect negatively not only on you, but on the Pastoral Team, your delegation, your church/organization and the US.**

Reverse Culture Shock

Returning to the United States can be a mixture of pleasure and pain: pleasure because you are returning to everything you love in the States, and pain at leaving all you have grown to love in the other country. Reverse culture shock basically consists of feeling out of place in your own country or experiencing a sense of disorientation. While everything is familiar, *you* feel different. Even walking through the airport and hearing English spoken can be a very surreal experience. After immersing in a developing country’s impoverished environment for a week, stepping off the plane into a first world airport’s opulence can have a strong emotional impact for some.

Money Hints

El Salvador uses the US Dollar as its currency. There are no ATMs in Berlín, and the closest one is a half hour away, so make sure you have enough cash to last for the length of your visit. If traveling with an OSP-sanctioned delegation the budget created by the Co-Worker will cover all your travel and living expenses. Therefore, you’ll only need enough personal cash to cover any souvenirs or snacks you might want to purchase. Generally, you’ll need to use bills of \$20 or less to do this.

If traveling outside of an OSP delegation you can use \$50 bills to pay the Pastoral House room and board, but you won’t be able to use anything bigger than a \$20 bill for everything else. Especially in Berlín, people may not be able to give you change from even a \$10 or \$5 dollar bill. People in Berlín will not take a debit or credit card or a check. Our drivers usually prefer that you pay them in \$20 bills because they must go to a bank to break anything larger than that.

Never give money or gifts directly to a “cause” or an individual. This includes people on the street and the folks in communities. It is best to let the Pastoral Team facilitate any gift-giving. That will be more equitable, and you won’t be inundated with people with “hands out” and hopes high. Also, if individuals are singled out to receive gifts from delegation members it creates schisms and ill feelings within communities.

DELEGATE'S WAIVER

HOLD HARMLESS, WAIVER OF LIABILITY & EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE AUTHORIZATION

_____ (*Sponsoring body*) is
sponsoring an Our Sister Parish delegation to El Salvador on
_____ (*dates*) (hereinafter referred to as the "Program"). I,
_____ (*your name*), of
_____ (*address*), in
consideration of the opportunity to participate in the Program, and in consideration of other
obligations incurred, hereby agree as follows:

1. I fully understand that I may be traveling or staying in areas of the world that may have unstable political, economic, and security situations where acts of war, potential danger from lack of control over local population, terrorism, or violence could occur at any time.
2. I fully understand that I may encounter difficult climates of living conditions; those risks are present concerning means of travel, food, water, diseases, pests, and poor sanitation and other health-related situations. Medical or emergency medical treatment may be inadequate or not available.
3. I accept and assume all responsibility for my personal actions and any and all risks of property damage or personal injury that occur during or result from my participation, including potential injury while working.
4. With the above in mind, I fully understand and agree that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the General Assembly, all of its entities, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a Corporation, the Sponsor, their staff members, successors, assigns, officers, agents, representatives, ministry divisions, and entities (hereinafter referred to as "PC(USA)") shall not be responsible or liable in any way for any accident, loss, death, injury, or damage to myself or my property in connection the Program, or any portion of the Program, even if said injury or action is due to the alleged negligence of PC(USA). Further, I do hereby agree to indemnify and hold costs and expenses (including, without limitation, reasonable attorney's fees) of whatsoever kind in connection with the Program or any portion of the Program. Further, I make this agreement on behalf of my heirs, agents, fiduciaries, successors, and assigns. I waive, knowingly and voluntarily, each and every claim or right of action I have now or may have in the future against the PC(USA) related to the Program, even if any such claim or right of action is caused by PC(USA)'s alleged negligence.
5. I hereby state that I am in good health and have all medication necessary to treat any allergic or chronic conditions, and I am able to administer such medication without assistance. If at any time during the Program I need emergency medical care and am not able to give consent because of my physical or mental condition, authorize emergency medical care decisions to be made of my behalf, and I specifically release PC(USA), in making those emergency

medical care decisions, from any and all liability associated with said decisions, even if injury or death is the result of PC(USA)'s alleged negligence.

6. This document does not release the PC(USA) from gross negligence.

7. I HAVE READ CAREFULLY, AGREE TO, AND INTEND TO BE LEGALLY BOUND BY ALL TERMS OF THIS HOLD HARMLESS, WAIVER OF LIABILITY, AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE AUTHORIZATION.

SIGNATURE: _____

WITNESS:

PRINTED

NAME:

DATE: _____

DON JUSTO COFFEE with DIGNITY

Coffee from El Salvador

Don Justo Coffee with Dignity (Don Justo) is produced in El Salvador exclusively for the Our Sister Parish mission. The coffee is organically grown on the hillsides of the mountain that is home to the cantons of Berlín. After picking, the coffee beans are hand-selected and roasted. Flavoring is added to some varieties. Some of it is ground and some left as whole beans. It is then hand-bagged, with a full pound of coffee in each 1-pound bag. (5-pound bags and small sample packets are also available.) The Salvadoran workers who tend the coffee trees, pick the coffee beans, run the roaster and fill the bags are all paid fair wages.

All profits from the sale of Don Justo Coffee are sent to the Pastoral Team in Berlín to support mission projects.

Fairly Traded

Coffee sold through **Don Justo Coffee with Dignity** meets and exceeds internationally recognized fair-trade standards; standards that balance inequities found in the conventional coffee trade. Fair trade standards more than triple the income of Salvadoran farmers who grow, harvest, and process this exceptional coffee. This additional income provides access to a host of social services such as education, medical care, public transportation, and recreation facilities. Farm families are also guaranteed adequate housing and access to clean water.

Sustainable Farming

While coffee farming can be particularly trying to the local environment, it doesn't have to be. Coffee plants need to be grown in high altitudes with warm days and cool nights. This usually means on steep hillsides where erosion and chemical runoff is likely. By using a combination of traditional and modern farming methods, farmers who sell coffee through this project protect their soil and water.

Farmers also use organic methods to protect the environment. Instead of using chemical fertilizers, they take advantage of the natural fertility of the coffee cherry. Once the beans are extracted from the fruit of the coffee plant, the remaining pulp is used to fertilize plants the following season. This natural process protects the health of the soil as well as neighboring creeks and rivers, while maintaining balance between soil, plants, and animals.

Local Development

Buying coffee through this project also promotes sustainable community and economic development, with a large portion of proceeds going to projects designed and organized by local residents and the Pastoral Team. Coffee flavors available are: Regular Roast, Dark Roast, French Roast, Snickeroo and Mocha. Regular and Dark Roasts are also available decaffeinated. Coffee can be packaged whole or ground.

You can purchase Don Justo Coffee with Dignity at selected churches in the Des Moines Area and on the OSP website at www.oursisterparish.org/coffee .

INFORMATION ABOUT EL SALVADOR

General

Country Code: 503
Population: 6.37 million (2025) 73% urban (most densely populated country in Central America)
Time: GMT-6 (same as Central time zone; no daylight savings time)
Borders: Guatemala, Honduras, Pacific Ocean
Religion: 41.9% of Salvadorans are Roman Catholic, 35.9% are Evangelical Christians, 19.9% have no religious affiliation, 1.3% are Jehovah's Witnesses, and 0.9% belong to other religions including a small segment of the population adhering to indigenous religious beliefs. (Source: UCA 2022)
Language: Spanish, Indigenous languages (Lenca, Pipil, Náhuat or Kekchí)
Currency: United States Dollar (since 2001)
Measurement: Metric system
Area: 21,040 sq kilometers/8,124 sq miles—approximately 1/7 the size of Iowa.

National

Flower: Izote flower (from yucca plant)
Tree: Maquilishaut (pink poui tree)
Bird: Torogoz (Turquoise-browed Motmot)
Song: "Saludemos la Patria Orgullosos" (We Proudly Salute the Fatherland), 1879

Climate

Highest average temperature: 94 degrees; Lowest average: 60 degrees
Dry season (Verano/Summer): approximately November – mid-May¹
Normal Wet season (Invierno/Winter): approximately mid-May to late October¹.
Annual precipitation: 60-85 inches

¹ Varies now, due to climate change

El Salvador has a tropical climate with pronounced wet and dry seasons (now subject to climate change variations). The rainy season (winter) is from around mid-May to late October and the dry season (summer) is from November through mid-May. (These are approximations because global climate change has scrambled the once clockwork timing of the rainy and dry seasons in Central America.) The rainy season brings the majority of the annual average rainfall for most of the country (about 70 in). Dry and very dusty conditions prevail during the dry season. Temperatures vary with elevation and show little seasonal change. However, the climate varies between regions. The dry season is referred to as "summer" (verano) and the rainy season is referred to as "winter" (invierno).

Conversion chart

Celsius	Fahrenheit	Kilometers	Miles
32	90	5	3
29	85	10	6
26	80	15	9
24	75	20	12.5
21	70	25	15.5
18	65	30	19
15	60	40	25
13	55	50	31
10	50	60	37
7	45		
4	40		

Wildlife

Because much of the land has been cleared for farming, El Salvador contains fewer species of plants than the other Central American countries. But it still has much of the luxuriant and colorful vegetation characteristic of the tropics, including more than 200 different species of orchids. The northern mountains of El Salvador have temperate grasslands and sparse forests of oak and pine. The natural vegetation of the rest of the country consists of deciduous trees and subtropical grasslands. Tropical fruit and medicinal plants are abundant.

Because of its high population density and extensive farming, roughly 15 percent of El Salvador's land remains as forest. This has limited the survival of animal life to a greater extent than in other Central American countries. Habitat destruction and logging have caused many animal species to become rare or to disappear altogether, notably the crested eagle and the jaguar. Among the mammals still found wild in El Salvador are the monkey, coyote, puma, and ocelot, along with a great variety of small animals. Reptiles include the iguana and boa constrictor, and there are 251 different bird species, including 17 varieties of hummingbirds. The Salvadoran government has established natural reserves and parks to preserve natural habitats, the most important of which are at Montecristo National Park, El Imposible National Park, Cerro Verde, Deininger Park, and El Jocotal Lagoon.

Main exports

Textiles (knit, crochet, manufactured clothing), sugar, coffee, plastics, paper products, shrimp

Crops

Corn, beans, rice, cotton, coffee, sugar, livestock, poultry, sorghum

Political parties

El Salvador has a multi-party system dominated by New Ideas, ARENA, and FMLN, alongside several smaller parties shaping the political landscape.

Major Political Parties

New Ideas (Nuevas Ideas): Founded by President Nayib Bukele after his expulsion from the FMLN, New Ideas gained formal recognition in 2018 and became the dominant political force by 2024, winning a supermajority in the Legislative Assembly in 2021 elections. The party is generally considered centrist to populist and has reshaped Salvadoran politics with strong executive influence.

Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA): Established in 1982 by Roberto D'Aubuisson, ARENA is a right-wing party that historically dominated Salvadoran politics, winning multiple

presidential elections from 1989 to 2004. It remains influential in conservative regions and has traditionally aligned with business and military interests.

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN): Originally a leftist guerrilla group, the FMLN became a legal political party following the 1992 Chapultepec Accords. It won the presidency in 2009 with Mauricio Funes and has historically represented leftist and progressive policies, particularly in urban and coastal regions.

Other Notable Parties

PCN (National Conciliation Party): Founded in 1961, historically aligned with ARENA, and often plays a key role in legislative negotiations.

PDC (Christian Democratic Party): A centrist party founded in 1960, historically associated with José Napoleón Duarte, now with limited influence.

GAN (Grand Alliance for National Unity): A center-right party allied with New Ideas in recent elections.

VAMOS, Solidarity Force (FS), NT, Democratic Change, PAIS, FPS, Salvadoran Democracy Party: Smaller or emerging parties that participate in municipal, legislative, and presidential elections, contributing to the multi-party system.

The terms “left” and “right” *do not* map directly onto U.S. understandings of these political terms or even other Latin-American understandings of these terms. For example, it is imprecise to compare the FMLN either to the Democratic Party in the United States *or* to United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Likewise, one should not necessarily compare the politics of El Salvador’s “right-wing” parties to the GOP (Republican) party of the United States.

Media

La Prensa Gráfica	https://www.laprensagrafica.com/
El Diario de Hoy	https://www.elsalvador.com/
El Diario Co Latino	https://www.diariocolatino.com/
El Mundo	https://www.elmundo.es/

Statistics

- According to the World Bank and Human Rights Watch, about 9% to 9.3% of the population (roughly 600,000 people) live in extreme poverty, based on the national food basket cost as of late 2023/early 2024. As of 2022, the financial poverty rate for rural Salvadorans was approximately 29.6%.
- Life expectancy in El Salvador for 2025 is projected to be approximately 72.5 to 74.5 years. Females in El Salvador tend to have a higher life expectancy, with estimates for 2025 around 76.7 to 77 years, while males are projected to live closer to 68 years.
- El Salvador's adult literacy rate is approximately 90% as of early 2026, reflecting a steady, albeit slow, improvement in education. The rate for adults aged 15 and older has maintained a consistent level above 89% since 2020, with higher literacy among youth, which is often above 98%.

- Roughly 1.6 million residents lack consistent, safe water, with significant disparities between urban (~79% access) and rural areas, where many rely on contaminated, non-piped sources, often walking miles to obtain that contaminated water. In the Berlín area, most communities now have access to piped water. However, one 2-inch or smaller pipe will serve multiple communities and water typically only runs in a pipe for a few hours once or twice per month. And that water is not treated to the level that it's considered safe to drink by our standards.
- 24% of Salvadorans are less than 15 years old. 67% are 15-64.
- Approximately 2.6 million Salvadorans lived outside the country in 2025. About 41% of the total population. Approximately 89% of the "diaspora" are in the United States.
- Remittances (money sent home by migrants) to El Salvador exceeded \$10 billion in 2025. That is approximately 27.3% of GDP according to the World Bank. 95.8% of remittances came from the US. Approximately 25.8% of the Salvadoran population receives these funds, which are critical for covering food and expenses. 70% of beneficiaries are women.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EL SALVADOR

Timeline

- 8000 BC:** El Salvador occupied by Paleo-Indian peoples.
- 5000 BC:** Tazumal occupy the area.
- 2000 BC:** Olmecs, the first advanced Mesoamerican civilization, occupies El Salvador
- 1200 BC:** Maya arrived.
- 300-900 AD:** Mayan civilization peaks.
- 1000-1500:** Pipils, the descendants of the Nahuatl-speaking Toltec and Aztec peoples of Mexico, settle in the country and come to culturally dominate in El Salvador until the Spanish conquest.
- 1524:** El Salvador conquered by the Spanish adventurer Pedro de Alvarado and made a Spanish colony. Resistance by native peoples is crushed by 1540. Alvarado destroys Cuscatlán & Izalco.
- 1600:** Some 10,000 native persons—fewer than half of the number present before the Spanish conquest—remain.
- 1811:** First call for independence from Spain by Jose Matias Delgado.
- 1821:** Independence from Spain achieved; El Salvador is briefly joined with Mexico.
- 1823:** El Salvador joins United Provinces (Federation) of Central America, which also embraces Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.
- 1833:** Unsuccessful rebellion against Spanish control of land led by Anastasio Aquino.
- 1840:** El Salvador becomes fully independent when the Federation is dissolved.
- 1859–63:** Coffee growing introduced by President Gerardo Barrios.
- 1932:** Peasant uprising, led by Augustín Farabundo Martí, is suppressed by the military at the cost of 30,000 lives, virtually eliminating indigenous peoples.
- 1961:** Following a coup, the right-wing National Conciliation Party (PCN) is established and takes power.
- 1969:** Brief ‘Soccer War’ with Honduras at the time of a football competition between the two countries following evictions of thousands of Salvadoran illegal immigrants from Honduras.
- 1977:** Allegations of human-rights violations by government; growth of left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla activities. General Carlos Romero (no relation to Oscar Romero) elected president.
- 1979:** Coup replaces General Carlos Romero with a military-civilian junta.
- 1980:** Archbishop of San Salvador and human-rights champion Oscar Romero assassinated; country is on the verge of civil war. José Napoleón Duarte (PDC) becomes the first civilian president since 1931
- 1979–81:** 30,000 people are killed by right-wing death squads. Civil conflict escalates to full blown civil war.
- 1981:** Mexico and France recognize the FMLN guerrillas as a legitimate political force. The USA actively assists the Salvadoran government despite allegations of gross human rights abuses on the part of the Salvadoran military and government death squads. Massacre of over 1,000 people at El Mozote. Four-day massacre at La Quesera.

- 1982:** Assembly elections boycotted by left-wing parties. Held amid considerable violence, the elections are won by far-right Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA).
- 1986:** President Duarte seeks a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas.
- 1989:** Alfredo Cristiani (ARENA) is elected president in rigged elections; guerrilla attacks intensify.
- 1992:** A peace accord sponsored by the United Nations signed by representatives of the government and the left-wing guerrilla group, the FMLN, which becomes a recognized political party.
- 1993:** UN-sponsored commission publishes a report on war atrocities; government amnesty is offered for those implicated. Top military leaders officially retire.
- 1999:** Francisco Guillermo Flores Pérez (ARENA) is elected president.
- 2000:** The FMLN displaces the ruling ARENA as the largest party in Congress, but does not win an overall majority. Government signs a free-trade agreement with Mexico.
- 2001:** El Salvador adopts the US dollar as its currency, phasing out the colón. Two powerful earthquakes kill over 1,500 people and leave 1 million homeless.
- 2002:** US court holds two retired, US-based Salvadoran army generals responsible for civil war atrocities and orders them to compensate victims.
- 2003:** In congressional and countrywide mayoral elections the FMLN wins 31 congressional seats and claims victory in more than 100 mayorships, including San Salvador.
- 2004:** ARENA candidate Tony Saca wins presidential elections.
- 2005:** Organization of American States (OAS) human rights court votes to re-open an investigation into the 1981 massacre of hundreds of people in the village of El Mozote. Thousands flee as the Ilamatepec volcano, also known as Santa Ana, erupts. Scores of people are killed as Tropical Storm Stan sweeps through.
- 2006:** El Salvador becomes the first Central American country to implement a regional free trade agreement with the US. El Salvador and neighboring Honduras inaugurate their newly-defined border.
- 2007:** 21 inmates killed in a riot at a maximum-security prison west of the capital. Three members of the governing ARENA party murdered in Guatemala. There are suspicions that an organized crime syndicate is behind the killings.
- 2008:** More than 400 judges hold a street protest over corruption allegations made against four of their colleagues.
- 2009:** More than 140 people killed and thousands left homeless in mudslides and floods. Mauricio Funes of the FMLN party wins presidential elections, marking the first time that an FMLN president was elected.
- 2009:** President Funes posthumously grants nation's highest award to the six Jesuits martyred at the UCA in November 1989.
- 2012:** Truce signed between rival gangs Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha. The homicide rate in El Salvador drops precipitously for a period of two years.
- 2014:** Salvador Sanchez Cerén (FMLN) elected president after an extremely close election.

- 2019** Nayib Armando Bukele Ortiz (Nuevas Ideas), politician and businessman, elected as the 81st president of El Salvador
- 2022** The gang crackdown in El Salvador, known as the "régimen de excepción" or war against gangs, officially began on March 27.

Peoples & Their Contributions

Paleo-Indian, 8000 BC:	Intriguing paintings found in the towns of Corinto and Cacaopera
Tazumal, 5000 BC:	Fourteen-step pyramid.
Olmec, 2000 BC:	Olmec Boulder, a sculpture of a giant head found near Casa Blanca.
Mayan, 1200 BC:	Ceramics, obsidian, weaving, sculpture, painting, hieroglyphics.
Pipil, 1000 AD:	Well organized, pottery, weavers, stonemasons, carpentry.

Important Archeological Sites

Joya de Cerén: This is one of El Salvador's most popular and protected ancient sites because of its superb level of preservation, which is said to be comparable only to that of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1993, Joya de Cerén offers a glimpse into the agriculture-based village that once thrived here. Buried twice by volcanic eruptions, it is one of the most important archaeological sites of the Americas. It is in the department of La Libertad.

San Andrés: This is an impressive group of ceremonial centers and pyramids where important Mayan dignitaries lived that date back to the late Classic period. These archaeological ruins were first discovered in the 19th century but excavations did not start until the 1940's. Findings on this ancient site prove that San Andrés had business dealings with the Maya in Copán (Honduras), Teotihuacán (Mexico) as well as with other Mayan villages in Belize and Guatemala; making it an important and influential Mayan center in the region.

Tazumal: The Mayan ruins of Tazumal are located in Chalchuapa in Santa Ana. This is a fascinating ancient site with many little secrets and historical treasures to discover. The findings on this site indicate that it was occupied during the late Classic period and was built the same way as other Toltec centers. Tazumal consists of a group of buildings that belonged to a very important and sophisticated people. It covers an area of about 10 square kilometers. Among the well-preserved discoveries are tombs, pyramids, palaces, water drainage systems and many other artifacts as well as a prized life-size statue of their god Xipe Totec.

Casa Blanca: These Mayan ruins are also located in Chalchuapa, quite close to Tazumal, so make sure to arrange a trip to both. The name Casa Blanca is taken from the coffee plantation farm that occupied the land, but the archaeological site dates to the Pre-Classic and Classic periods. These Mayan ruins form part of what is called La Ruta Arqueológica or the Archaeological Route, a series of archeological sites that tourism agencies recommend to interested tourists.

Cihuatán: The name Cihuatán means “land of the woman” in the native Nahuatl language. It is located in Aguilares, San Salvador, in the valley of the Guazapa volcano. It is believed that it was named Cihuatán because when one looks at the Guazapa hills, they look like the silhouette of a woman lying down. Excavations here have demonstrated that Cihuatán was an urban city with a significant population and large ceremonial centers. As of this writing, three platforms in what was the city center have been discovered along with pyramids, palaces, playgrounds, and many clay and ceramic artifacts.

Chronology of the Civil War

During the Civil War from 1980-1992, at least 75,000 Salvadorans were killed and 7,000 went missing. At least 300,000 were either externally or internally displaced.

- 1970s:** Resentment, frustration, and desperation of the people due to political and civil abuse.
- 1977:** Allegations of human-rights violations; growth of left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla activities. General Carlos Romero elected president.
- 1979:** A coup replaces General Carlos Romero with a military-civilian junta.
- 1979–81:** 30,000 people killed by right-wing death squads
- 1980s:** United States supports El Salvador's government & elite. Russia, Cuba, and Nicaragua support leftist guerrillas.
- 1980:** The archbishop of San Salvador and human rights champion, Oscar Romero assassinated, country on the verge of civil war. José Napoleón Duarte (PDC) becomes the first civilian president since 1931. Three Catholic nuns and a lay missionary from the US assassinated.
- 1981:** Mexico and France recognize the FMLN guerrillas as a legitimate political force. The USA actively assists the Salvadoran government despite allegations of gross human rights abuses on the part of the Salvadoran military and government death squads. Massacre of over 1,000 people at El Mozote. Four-day massacre at La Quesera.
- 1982:** Assembly elections boycotted by left-wing parties. Held amid considerable violence, they are won by far-right National Republican Alliance (ARENA).
- 1986:** President Duarte seeks a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas.
- 1989:** Alfredo Cristiani (ARENA) elected president in rigged elections; rebel attacks intensify. Six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter are murdered at the University of Central America (UCA).
- 1992:** The Chapultepec Accords: Peace treaty ends civil war. Peace accord sponsored by the United Nations (UN) signed by representatives of the government and the socialist guerrilla group, the FMLN, which becomes a recognized political party.
- 1993:** UN-sponsored commission publishes a report on war atrocities (Comisión de la Verdad). Government amnesty offered for those implicated. Top military leaders officially retire.

Lead-up to the Civil War

During the 1970s, the Salvadoran underclass suffered from landlessness, poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, and extreme income inequality. In the government, the polarized left and right tangled for power through coups and electoral fraud. In 1972, José Napoleon Duarte, co-founder of the Partido Democrático Cristiano (Christian Democrat Party; PDC), ran for president, supported by a broad coalition of reform groups. His victory was denied amid allegations of fraud. Subsequent protests and a coup attempt were averted by the military and Duarte was exiled. Leftist guerrilla activity increased and the right wing responded with the creation of “death squads.” Thousands of Salvadorans were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered.

In 1979, a junta of military and civilians overthrew President Carlos Humberto Romero and promised reforms. When these promises were not met, opposition parties banded together as the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR) and allied with the FMLN, a revolutionary army composed of five guerrilla groups. The successful revolution in Nicaragua in 1979 encouraged many Salvadorans to seek reforms and consider armed struggle as the only means of change.

Civil War 1980-1992

On March 24, 1980, the outspoken Archbishop Oscar A Romero was assassinated while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the San Salvador Divine Providence Cancer Hospital. Many see his murder as the point at which widespread civil unrest turned into a full-blown civil war.

The rape and murder in late 1980 of four US women religious (3 nuns and one lay missionary) performing relief work in El Salvador prompted the administration of US president Jimmy Carter to briefly suspend military aid to the Salvadoran government. But when newly elected Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, unnerved by the success of Nicaragua's socialist revolution, his administration pumped huge sums into the failing Salvadoran military (over US \$500 million in 1985), prolonging the conflict. Guerrillas gained control of areas in the north and east and the military retaliated by decimating villages. In 1981, the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion massacred over 1,000 men, women and children in El Mozote, Morazán. As many as 300,000 citizens fled the country.

In 1982, Major Roberto D' Aubuisson, founder of the right wing ARENA party, became president of the legislative assembly and enacted a law granting the legislative body power over the national president. D' Aubuisson created death squads that sought out trade unionists and others who supported PDC-proposed agrarian reform. The FMLN continued its offensive by blowing up bridges, cutting power lines, destroying coffee plantations and killing livestock; anything to stifle the economy. When the government ignored an FMLN peace proposal, the rebels refused to participate in the 1984 presidential elections, in which Duarte was elected over D' Aubuisson. For the next few years the PDC and FMLN engaged in peace talks unsuccessfully. Death squads continued their pillaging, and the guerrillas continued to undermine military power and jeopardize municipal elections.

Hope for peace appeared in 1989, when the FMLN offered to participate in elections if the government agreed to postpone them for six months to ensure the polls were democratically run. Their calls for fair elections were ignored. In March of that year, Alfredo Cristiani, a wealthy ARENA businessman, was elected president. The FMLN responded by intensifying its attacks, and on November 11, they launched a major offensive on the capital. In retaliation, the military killed an estimated 4000 “leftist sympathizers.” Among them were six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter, who were all brutally murdered at the Centro Monseñor Romero at the Universidad

Centroamérica (UCA). Today the UCA displays personal effects of the six priests, and of Romero and Father Rutilio Grande, as well as graphic photos of the murder scene.

In April 1990, UN-mediated negotiations began between the government and the FMLN. Among the first agreements was a human-rights accord signed by both parties in July 1990, but violations continued to occur. Violent deaths increased in 1991, the year that a UN mission arrived in the country to monitor human rights.

On January 16, 1992, an agreement - or rather a compromise - was finally signed. The ceasefire took effect on February 1. The FMLN became an opposition party, and the government agreed to various reforms, including dismantling paramilitary groups and death squads and replacing them with a national civil police force. Furthermore, land was to be distributed to citizens and human rights violations investigated. In return, the government granted amnesty to those responsible for human-rights abuses.

During the 12-year war at least 75, 000 people were killed, 7000 people went missing, and the US government sent a staggering \$6 billion to the Salvadoran government's war effort. United States' government justified this aid by evoking their Cold War-era policy of "containment"—to offer military aid to (or to militarily intervene in) countries that were supposedly in danger of falling under the influence of communism, socialism, or the Soviet bloc. Sadly, this policy did little to end the Cold War and Land distribution was a bureaucratic process involving loans to El Salvador by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and not all rural Salvadorans benefitted from the process. Unpaid loans were forgiven in 1997.

Óscar Romero: 1917-1980

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was born on August 15, 1917, to Santos Romero and Guadalupe de Jesus Galdámez in Ciudad Barrios. Romero entered a public school that only offered grades one through three. When finished with public school, Romero was privately tutored until age thirteen. Throughout this time Óscar's father had been training Romero in carpentry.

On April 4, 1942, Romero was ordained a Catholic priest in Rome. Romero remained in Italy to obtain a doctoral degree in theology that specialized in ascetical theology. Romero began working as a parish priest in Anamorós, El Salvador but then moved to San Miguel where he worked for over 20 years. In 1970 he was appointed auxiliary bishop to San Salvador Archbishop Luis Chávez, a move not welcomed by the more progressive members of the priesthood in El Salvador. On February 23, 1977, he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador. His appointment was met with surprise, dismay, and even incredulity. While the government welcomed this appointment, many priests were disappointed, especially those openly aligning with Marxism and/or liberation theology. These priests feared that his conservative reputation would negatively affect liberation theology's commitment to the poor.

On March 12, 1977, a progressive Jesuit priest and personal friend of Romero, Rutilio Grande, who had been creating self-reliance groups among the poor campesinos, was assassinated. His death had a profound impact on Romero who later stated, "When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, 'If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path'." In response to Father Rutilio's murder, Romero revealed a radicalism that had not been evident earlier. He spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture. As a result, Romero began to be noticed internationally. In February 1980, he was given an honorary doctorate by the Catholic University of Leuven. On his visit to Europe to receive this honor, he met Pope John Paul II and expressed his concerns at what was happening in his country. Romero argued that it was problematic to support the Salvadoran government because it legitimized terror and assassinations.

In 1979, the Revolutionary Government Junta came to power amidst a wave of human rights abuses by paramilitary right-wing groups and the government. Romero criticized the United States for giving military aid to the new government and wrote to President Jimmy Carter in February 1980, warning that increased US military aid would "undoubtedly sharpen the injustice and the repression inflicted on the organized people, whose struggle has often been for their most basic human rights". Carter, concerned that El Salvador would become "another Nicaragua" ignored Romero's pleas and continued military aid to the Salvadoran government.

Romero was assassinated on March 24, 1980 while celebrating Mass in San Salvador at the small chapel in the Divina Providencia Cancer Hospital, where he lived for the last three years of his life. He was shot the day after he preached a powerful sermon in which he had called on Salvadoran soldiers, as Christians, to obey God's higher order and to stop carrying out the government's repression and violations of basic human rights. According to an audio recording of the March 24th Mass, Romero was shot after finishing his homily, during the period that would normally be reserved for introducing the offering. As the Carmelite sisters who still run the Divina Providencia hospital say, "his life was the offering that day."

It is believed that the assassins were members of a death squad. This view is supported by an official U.N. report, which identified the man who ordered the killing as former Major and School of the Americas graduate Roberto D'Aubuisson. Romero is buried in the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador (Catedral Metropolitana de San Salvador). More than 250,000 mourners from all over the world attended the funeral mass (rite of visitation and requiem) on March 30, 1980, in San Salvador. Sadly, his funeral ended in the same way as his life: with violence. Government-sponsored snipers fired on the crowd outside the Cathedral, leading to panic, injury, and death. Many people were killed by these snipers while others were killed when their fellow mourners trampled them to death in their rush to seek safety inside the Cathedral. 42 people perished that day and many more sustained serious injuries.

El Mozote, 1981

The El Mozote Massacre occurred in the village of El Mozote, in the department of Morazán, El Salvador, on December 11, 1981, when Salvadoran armed forces trained by the United States military killed at least 1000 civilians in an anti-guerrilla campaign. It is reputed to be one of the worst such atrocities in modern Latin American history.

It began on the afternoon of December 10, 1981, when units of the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl Battalion arrived at the remote village of El Mozote. The Atlacatl was a "Rapid Deployment Infantry Battalion" specially trained for counter-insurgency warfare. It was the first unit of its kind in the Salvadoran armed forces and was trained by United States military advisors. Its mission, Operación Rescate, was to eliminate the rebel presence in a small region of northern Morazán where the FMLN (guerrillas) had a camp and a training center. The commander of the Battalion was Lieutenant Colonel Coronel Domingo Monterrosa Barrios, who was from Berlín. In the afternoon of December 10th the five companies of Atlacatl Battalion arrived in El Mozote. Upon arrival, the soldiers found not only the residents of the village but also campesinos (rural people) who had sought refuge from the surrounding area. Many campesinos had come to El Mozote thinking it would be a safe place: many of them had been told that the Red Cross would be distributing food supplies or offering medical help there. The soldiers ordered everyone out of their houses and into the square. They made them lie face down, searched them, and questioned them about the guerrillas. They then ordered the villagers to lock themselves in their houses until the next day, warning them that anyone coming out would be killed. The soldiers remained in the village during the night.

Early the next morning, on December 11th, the soldiers reassembled the entire village in the square. They separated the men, women, and children and locked them all in separate groups in the church, the convent, and various houses. At 8:00am the executions began.

Throughout the morning, they proceeded to interrogate, torture, and execute the men and adolescent boys in several locations. Around noon, they began taking the women and older girls in groups, separating them from their children and machine-gunning them after raping them. Girls as young as 9 were raped and tortured under the pretext that they supported the guerrillas or would someday become guerrillas themselves. Finally, they killed the children. A group of children that had been locked in the church and its convent were shot through the windows. Some children were hung from the trees surrounding the church. After killing the entire population, the soldiers set fire to the buildings. Over 1000 people were killed.

The massacre at El Mozote was part of a military strategy of genocide against the Salvadoran people. The government and army exterminated massive numbers of innocent campesinos in the war zones. Their strategy was to "take away the water from the fish": to deprive the FMLN of popular support in the area by murdering campesinos, all of whom they saw as current or potential guerrillas. As a result, massacres of hundreds of rural families were carried out in various places in the country. The operations were known as "Land Clearing Operations," or "Razed Earth Policies."

The guerrillas' clandestine radio station began broadcasting reports of a massacre of civilians in the area of El Mozote. On December 31, the FMLN issued "a call to the International Red Cross, the OAS Human Rights Commission, and the international press to verify the genocide of more than 900 Salvadorans" in and around El Mozote. Reporters started pushing for evidence.

Officials from the US embassy in San Salvador played down the reports and said they were unwilling to visit the site because of safety concerns. As news of the massacre slowly emerged, the Reagan administration in the United States attempted to dismiss it as FMLN (guerilla) propaganda because it had the potential to embarrass the United States government; if true, it would expose the human rights abuses of the Salvadoran government, which the US was supporting with large amounts of military aid.

It wasn't until 1992, the year the Peace Accords were signed, that a team of forensic anthropologists were allowed to examine the convent in El Mozote. 136 murdered children were found in that area. They determined that twenty-four shooters killed the children, using M-16 rifles and bullets manufactured in the US. The forensic experts concluded that it was a mass execution, and not the burial ground the Salvadoran government claimed it to be.

Rufina Amaya, 1943-2007

Rufina Amaya was the only survivor of the El Mozote massacre. She said when it came time to execute the women, she stood last in line because she wouldn't let go of her children. After they were taken from her and the soldiers weren't watching, she hid nearby, praying the whole time for God to protect her. She remained hidden close to the site of the massacre in briar bushes for more than a day until she had the courage to crawl many miles to safety. No words or pictures could possibly describe how she felt that day: listening to the screams of her husband being tortured and dying, having her children ripped from her arms and ruthlessly slaughtered. On December 11, 1981 she lost her husband and four children, aged 9 years, 5 years, 2 years, and 18 months.

Perquín

Perquín, located in the department of Morazán, was the FMLN headquarters during the war. Its leftover bunkers and bomb craters are evidence of the former guerrilla presence. The opposition enjoyed broad popular support here and the rugged landscape thick with trees provided cover from military patrols. The cool mountain climate and strong historical significance make a trip here the highlight of El Salvador for most visitors.



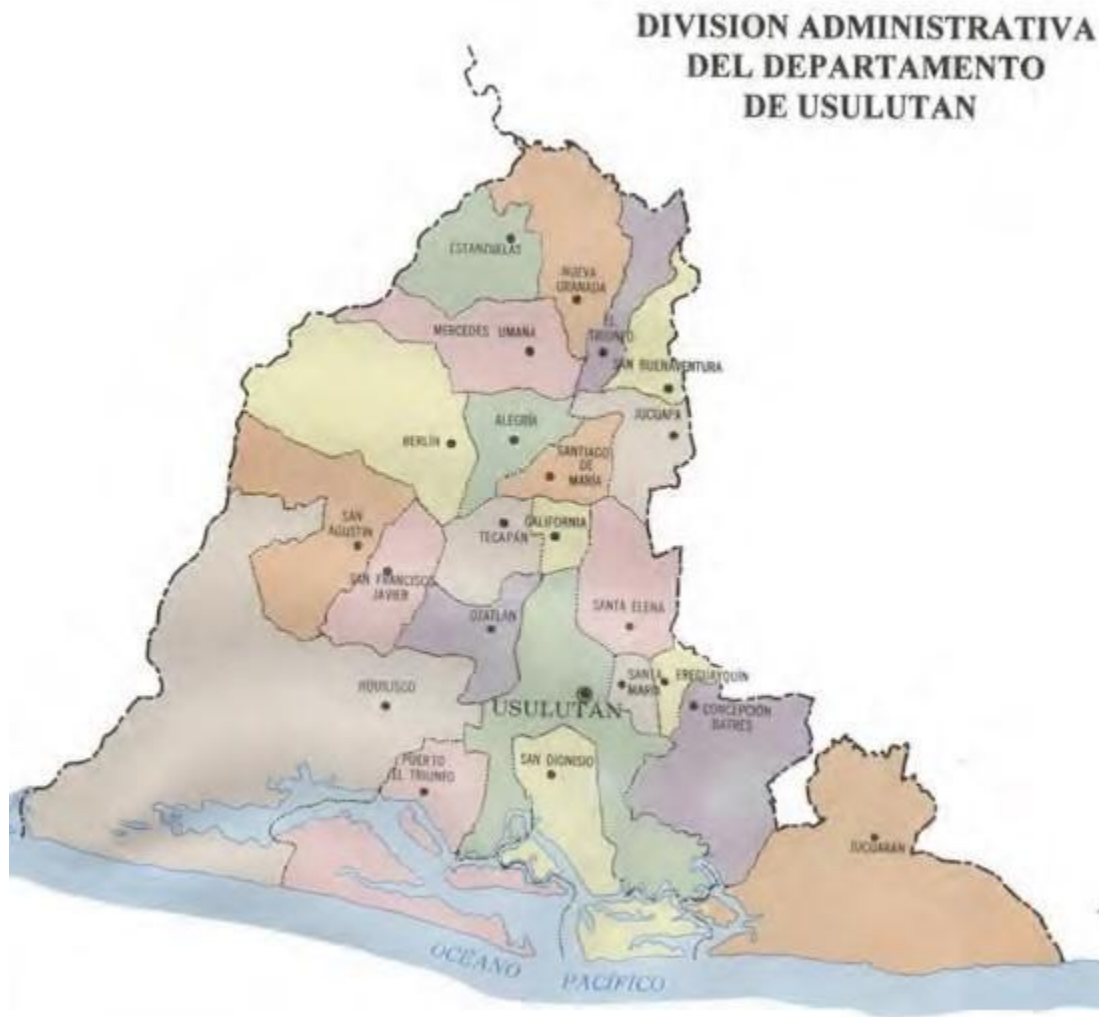
Central America



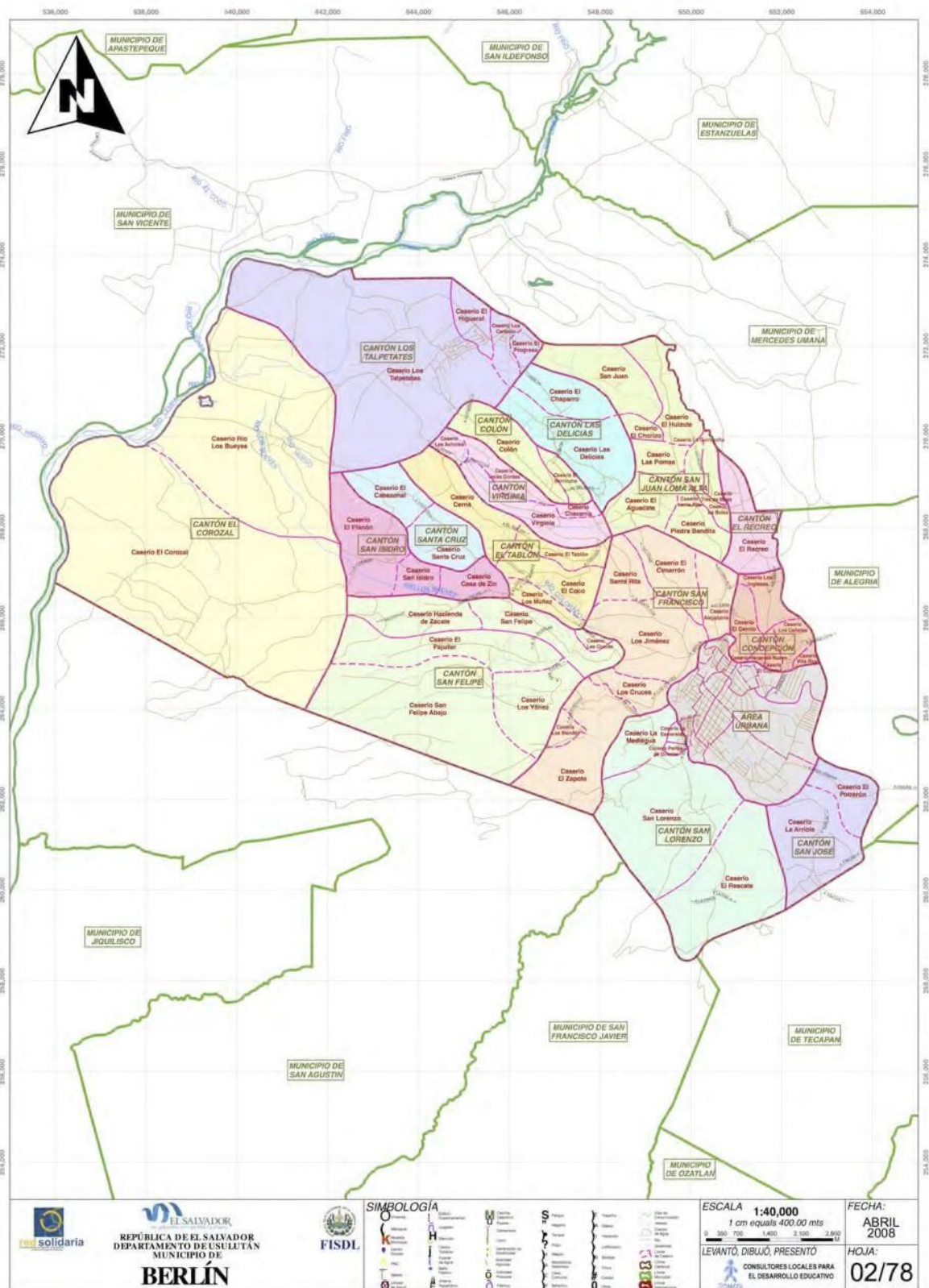
El Salvador
(14 Departments total)



Department of Usulután
Major Cities and Towns



Municipalities in the
Department of Usulután



Cantóns in the Municipality of Berlín

Other cities near Berlín in the department of Usulután include Mercedes Umaña to the north, Alegría and Santiago de María to the east, and Tecapán to the south. Artisan cities we often visit are Ilobasco in the department of Cabañas and San Sebastian in the department of San Vicente.

Alegría, Usulután

High in the mountains, Alegría is an unsung gem and one of El Salvador's most picturesque towns. The town of 14,000 people has a pleasant, fresh climate. It is 43 square kilometers (27 square miles) and 1250 meters above sea level.

The Alegría Lagoon is located 3 kilometers from the city in the crater of the dormant Tecapa volcano. The lagoon is one of the most visited sites in Usulután, not only because of its beauty, but by the mystery that exists about its water, considered medicinal by many people. This lagoon was formerly known as "Tecapa," the same name as the volcano, but its name was changed because it is near to Alegría.

According to the villagers there's a legend about the Alegría Lagoon. It tells of a mystical siren who lives in the lagoon and likes handsome, young men. When she sees a handsome, young man she sings to lure him into the water. When the man enters the water she pulls him to his death at the bottom of the lagoon to be with her forever.

Ilobasco, Cabañas

Ilobasco is in the department of Cabañas and has always been well known for the making of crafts out of clay. Ilobasco has almost 80 families that produce ceramics of every shape and size imaginable. There are many pottery workshops in Ilobasco where you can see the artists at work. Several of them also have small shops where visitors can buy what they want.

Miniature clay figurines called "sorpresas" (surprises) were made famous by local artist Dominga Herrera. Sorpresas are miniatures of everyday life. They are usually a round object such as a fruit, animal, or egg under which hides a mini scene. The cover can be removed and the scene is revealed. And surprised you will be when you hold that piece of finished miniature pottery in your hand and see all the details. They are amazing and make great gifts to bring back home because they are so tiny. Dominga Herrera's art of miniature pottery has become so popular in El Salvador that the Museum of Popular Art in San Salvador houses an exhibition of her work.

San Sebastian, San Vicente

San Sebastian is a small, picturesque town about 20 minutes from the town of San Vicente. This beautiful town specializes in the art of weaving. The Spaniards introduced the loom in this area but the people of San Sebastian have really given it their own touch.

Weaving textiles in San Sebastian have not changed much during the past 200 years. The fabrics are spun, dyed, and then woven on foot powered looms. The shops carry a wide variety of products from purses, belts, placemats, tablecloths, hammocks, and blankets. The weaver's bright sense of color and design make these treasures hard to resist.

Food

Pupusas: Corn tortillas stuffed with one or more of the following: refried beans, cheese (a soft Salvadoran cheese), chicharrón (cooked pork meat), or squash (usually guisquil/chayote). Pupusas can be bought nearly everywhere. There are even restaurants dedicated to this hearty treat, aptly named pupuserías. Pupusas are served with a pickled cabbage salad (“curtido,” though sometimes just called “repollo”—cabbage) and fresh tomato sauce.

Tortillas: Circular flatbreads made from corn, wheat, or rice originally made by Mesoamerican people. The tortillas in El Salvador are thick and usually made from corn. Tortillas are usually consumed during lunch and dinner.

Beans (frijoles): Beans, typically red beans, are cooked in many ways. They may be whole, mashed, or pureed and served hot or cold. They are often eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Rice (arroz): A popular grain known all around the world, rice is also common in El Salvador. This grain is second only to maize (corn) in worldwide production.

Casamiento: In Spanish “casamiento” means marriage. In El Salvador, casamiento is a mixture of rice and beans.

Tamales: Pockets of corn dough (like a corn dumpling) stuffed with meat or sweet corn and cooked in banana leaves or cornhusks. They can be served hot or cold and are often eaten with cheese.

Plantains (plátanos): Though similar to bananas, plantains are typically starchier and less sweet. They are usually fried or boiled. They are often served with a variety of accompaniments such as beans, sour cream, cheese, or eggs.

Chicken (pollo): Farm fresh chicken served fried, grilled, and in soup.

Seafood (mariscos): Fish, shrimp, oysters, lobster, and calamari can all be found in El Salvador. Fish and shrimp are the most common types of seafood served at the Pastoral House.

Ceviche: Raw fish cured in lime juice often mixed with cilantro, green peppers, salt, and onions.

Panes rellenos: Big stuffed sandwiches filled with roasted chicken or turkey and vegetables.

Cheese (queso): There are several types of cheese found in El Salvador. The most common type of cheese is hard, crumbly, white, and salty. It’s eaten with beans, tortillas, bread, and by itself.

Eggs (huevos): Farm fresh eggs served fried, scrambled, hard-boiled, and more. They are delicious fried inside of a tortilla.

Guineos: A word used to refer to many types of bananas but is particularly used in reference to the many varieties of small, very sweet bananas.

Guisquil/Chayote: This vegetable is a member of the gourd family and can be eaten in many forms: boiled, mashed, fried, baked, or raw.

Yucca: A white, starchy vegetable (root) originally from South America. Yucca can be served boiled, fried, and are sometimes fried up like potato chips.

Fruit (fruta): Pineapples, mangos, guava, watermelons, cantaloupes, bananas, limes, and oranges are common in El Salvador.

Vegetables (verduras): Avocados, lettuce, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli, green beans, onions, and squash can be found in El Salvador.

Pan dulce: Spanish for sweet bread, these breads are pastry-like treats come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and flavors.

Drinks

Horchata: A drink made from a mix of spices, rice, and morro seeds.

Ensalada: A thick drinkable blend of finely chopped tropical fruits and juices such as pineapple apples, marañon, and watermelon.

Atol[e]: Atol[e] is a thick, and usually hot, drink. It is made of corn flour, water, unrefined sugar, and sometimes milk and vanilla. A Salvadoran variety of atol is called atol chuco – “dirty atol” —because of its darker color. Another common type of atol is “atol de piña,” which is made from a root with a taste similar to pineapple.

Tamarindo: A unique drink with a tangy, earthy flavor made from tamarind fruit and pulp found inside the pods.

CAUTION!

All water should be regarded as potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth, preparing food, or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Avoid ice unless you are sure it is made from pure water. Non-commercial milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is recommended but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from un-boiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad, and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. Avoid juice and other local foods unless prepared or approved by the Co-Worker or Pastoral Team.

SALVADORAN ARTS, CRAFTS, AND MUSIC

Arts & Crafts

Salvadoran art is everywhere. In many towns you can find miniature pottery, woodcarvings, paintings, and even weaving on hand driven looms! Salvadorans display their love for life in their colorful crafts, arts, paintings, and sculptures, which often treat every day activities and objects. Traditional Salvadoran handicrafts often use natural materials to make wicker furniture, ceramics and pottery, weavings, masks, textiles, and basketry.

Gift Ideas

Pottery Blankets

Towels

Tablecloths

Hammocks

Jewelry

T-shirts

Wood carvings

Religious crafts

What the markets in various towns are know for:

Artisan Market (San Salvador): jewelry, hammock chairs, wooden crosses, magnets, key chains

San Sebastian: blankets, towels, tablecloths, placemats

Ilobasco: pottery, vases, t-shirts, sorpresas, wooden crosses, jewelry

Berlín: hammocks, some jewelry, cocoa

Pastoral House: purses, bags, coffee

Sorpresas

Salvadoran sorpresas (surprises) are miniature scenes painted inside small, clay shells a little bigger than a walnut. Often the outside of the shell is painted to resemble a nut, egg, or fruit. Inside is usually a detailed picture of village life. They are beautifully detailed and make great gifts because they are small and can be packed easily.

Art

Carlos Alberto Imery (1879-1949): founded El Salvador's first school of art

Valero Lecha (1894-1976): trained many 20th century painters

Valentín Estrada (1902-1987): created about 250 sculptures

Julia Díaz (1917-1999): 20th century painting and sculpture museum

Noé Canjura (1922-1970): 20th century painter

Benjamin Canas (1933-1987): internationally acclaimed painter

César Menéndez (1954): social and politically significant art

Literature

Alberto Masferrer (1868-1932): poet, speaker, journalist

Claudia Lars (1899-1974): plays about 20th century Salvadoran life

Salazar Arrué (aka Salarrué, 1899-1975): books, children's stories

Manlio Argueta (1935): poet, writer, critic, and novelist

Music

The music of El Salvador has a mixture of Mayan, Pipil, and Spanish influences. This music includes religious songs (mostly Roman Catholic) used to celebrate Christmas and other holidays, especially feast days of the saints. Satirical and rural lyrical themes are common. Popular styles in modern El Salvador include salsa, cumbia, hip-hop, and reggaeton. Popular music uses marimba tehpe'ch, flutes, drums, scrapers, and gourds, as well more recently imported guitars and other instruments. Their musical repertoire also consists of danza, pasillo, marcha and canciones. The marimba is a representative folk music instrument. Cuban, Colombian, and Mexican music has infiltrated the country, especially salsa and cumbia. María Mendoza de Baratta is a leading 20th century composer from El Salvador.

Salvadoran Radio Stations

Links to multiple Radio Stations in El Salvador:

La Femenina: Contemporary Spanish and English music	https://radios.com.sv/ http://www.femenina.com.sv/#
Radio Monumental: Adult contemporary music	https://tunein.com/radio/PLUS-1013-FM-s86502/
Radio Eco: Young adult music	https://www.radiocoolfm.com/
Radio Doremix: Station in the western part of El Salvador	https://streema.com/radios/Doremix FM
Radio Ranchera: Country music	https://www.ranchera.com.sv/

El Cadejo



"El cadejo" is represented by a dog of great size and penetrating gaze. There are two cadejos, white and black. White cadejo symbolizes good and black cadejo symbolizes evil.

Some people say that the black cadejo represents an evil spirit that appears to people who wander late at night, persecuting and hypnotizing its victims with its huge red eyes, similar to burning coals. According to the legend, if black cadejo hypnotizes you, it can steal your soul. On the other hand, white cadejo represents a spirit of light that protects all faithful believers, especially kids, from black cadejo. According to some villagers, black cadejo is usually scared away with the smoke of incense.

La Descarnada



In El Salvador there are a lot of people claiming to have had a macabre experience with a beautiful and sensual woman who appeared in the desolate roads asking for a ride.

When the drivers asked where she was headed, she answered a few kilometers from where she is. Then she enters the car and begins to seduce the driver. When the men began to touch and kiss her something dreadful happened: the skin of women dropped from her body and she was converted into a

human skeleton. Minutes after, the victims were found in a total state of confusion and only recalled the moments in which the gloomy scene occurred.

El Tabudo



This legend has become very popular among fishermen, residents, and visitors of Coatepeque Lake. One day, a rich man and owner of a beautiful mansion located on the shores of Coatepeque Lake went to take a ride in a canoe. When he was near an island a groundwater flow dragged him and took him to the goddess of freshwater domain.

A few months later, the rich man appeared to his servants and gave his mansion to them. They were perplexed because his knees had widened and his lips

resembled a marine creature rather than a human being. "Tabas" is a word used in El Salvador with the meaning "knees", so "El Tabudo" means "man of big knees". "El Tabudo" is a kind of marine creature that appears as a humble fisherman to win the confidence of his victims, taking them to the middle of the lake. "El Tabudo" transforms men into big colorful fishes and women into freshwater sirens.



The Salvadoran legend of La Siguanaba says that the woman, originally called Sihuehuet (beautiful woman), was a peasant girl that ascended to queen using her charms (and a witch's brew) to lure into marriage Tláloc's son, Yeisun, who was a Nahuatl prince. After marriage, when her husband went to war, she had affairs with other men, and Cipitío was the child of this relationship. Sihuehuet was a bad mother, neglecting her son, leaving him alone to meet her lovers. To inherit the throne she concocted a plot to use another magic potion to poison Yeisun during a festival, and so claim the throne for her lover.

But the plan worked too well. Yeisun was transformed into a savage giant monster with two heads, who ravaged the attendants to the palace's feast. The guard struggled and defeated the creature, ending Yeisun's life. When Tláloc found out about this, he sought the help of the almighty god, Teotl whom condemned and cursed Sihuehuet: She would be called Sihuanaba ("hideous woman"); she would be beautiful at first sight, but she would turn into a horrible abomination after luring her victims to isolated gorges. She was forced to wander the countryside, appearing to men who travelled alone mostly at night, but it is believed to appear at any time even during daytime. She is supposed to be seen at night mostly but on daytimes as well; in the rivers or bodies of water of El Salvador, washing clothes or bathing, and always looking for her son, Cipitío, who was also cursed by Teotl to remain a boy for eternity.

El Cipitío



Son of the Sihuanaba, "El Cipitío" is a very popular character among Salvadoran legends. He is a small and big-bellied kid that never grew up. El Cipitío eats bananas and the remaining ashes from wood rural kitchens, wearing a very large hat that moves with the measure of his walk. He appears at night as a scoffer spirit, making jokes, laughing, and dancing around his victims. According to some villagers, Cipitío throws pebbles to beautiful girls that go alone to wash clothes in the rivers.

Formerly called "Cipit", and now "Cipitío" or "Cipitillo", he was born of the relationship that his mother "Sihuehuet" had with the god "Lucero de la Mañana" (Morning Bright Star), betraying the god "Sol" (Sun). The god "Tlaloc" condemned both the mother and son. The mother was sentenced to be a wandering woman and the son to eternal childhood. Despite being the son of a god Cipit has the appearance of a poor child with a distortion in his feet, huge belly, and with the power to disappear from one place and reappear in another. Although harmless, El Cipitío is very obnoxious. Generally, he makes jokes and laughs at his victims. His name comes from the Nahuatl "Cipit" (Child) the same as "Cipote", a word used refer to children or young people El Salvador.

Witch Wagon

Years ago there was a man without faith called "Pedro el Malo". On May 15th, during the "San Isidro Labrador" festival, many people came to the town to have their farm carts blessed. Pedro also took

his cart, but had bad intentions, stopping his wagon very close to the door of the church far from the other carts.

When the priest asked Pedro to align his cart with the others, Pedro replied "I don't want your blessing. My cart is already blessed by the Devil." He tried to enter the church with his cart, but the oxen resisted. They escaped from the yoke and cart rolled street down with Pedro.

The priest said then: "You will wander forever with your cart". The oxen were saved from the curse, because they refused to enter the church. According to the legend, since the cart was already blessed by the devil, he wanders without oxen pulling it, causing horror with the noise of its wheels. According to some villagers, the cart without oxen wanders through towns where there is neither love nor harmony among its inhabitants, always after the midnight.

La Cuyancuat



This story happens in the municipality of Izalco, Department of Sonsonate, where a large mythological animal lives, half snake and half pig. Visiting the tourist centre Atecozol in Sonsonate you can find a stone image of this animal.

According to the villagers, at night you can hear a far away dark squeal followed by strong turbulence under the land. All that noise comes from this animal. When this happens the villagers are enclosed at early hours in their homes.

The Old Church

At San Dionisio Village, towards the south of Usulután City, there is a place called "La Iglesia Vieja" (The Old Church). During the colonial era, this place was called "Ucelucla" that in the indigenous language means "Tigers' Place". The Spanish colonizers founded there a town and built a church.

One day, during a Mass, the church completely sank. Some people believe that the church was very near to the sea and the land there was very weak, so the church sank from its own weight. People were very scared so they decided to abandon their homes and moved further north. They founded a new city on the shores of the "Río Chiquito" (Small River), to which they gave the name "Usulután". According to some villagers, every year on Easter, Wednesday, and Saturday, you hear the song of the bells from the old colonial town.

The Pond of Bululu



The Pond of Bululu is located in Sensunapán River between Sonzacate and Sonsonate. A long time ago there was a legend about this pond. Frequently a golden "guacal" (a kind of small, plastic basin) appeared floating on the surface, containing a silver

soap and a "paste" with diamonds. According to the legend, if somebody tried to reach the golden "guacal", it plunged in the water and appeared in another location of the pond. But if someone managed to take it, the golden "guacal" plunged into the water with that person forever. Some people say that these objects belong to the Patron of the Department, "La Virgen de Candelaria", who punished the greedy people who tried to steal her golden "guacal".

The

Amate Flower



The Amate is a very popular tree in El Salvador. This tree is totally different: its trunk is very thick, its branches resemble claws, and it doesn't have flowers.

There's a legend about the Amate. At midnight, a beautiful white flower blooms at the top of the tree and falls. If you catch the flower, you will have everything you want: love, money, and health. But don't think this is a piece of cake. According to the legend, in order to catch the flower, you will have a deadly fight with the Devil, the owner of the flower. If the Devil wins he steals your soul. But if you win and catch the white flower you will have everything you want.

La Llorona



This is one of the most popular legends of El Salvador, about the terrifying cries of a woman for her lost kids. Some people describe "La Llorona" as a floating woman dressed in white. Sometimes this woman starts crying in front of the door or window of a house, this is a bad omen because the family living in that house will have a lot of problems. If you want "La Llorona" away, you have to say a special prayer in your house during nine consecutive nights.

Juana Pancha's Hill



This is a story about a beautiful woman who stole money and lived in a cave at the top of Conchagua Hill, three kilometers from the town. Her name was "Juana Francisca Callejas", but she was called "Juana Pancha", a witch who disappeared flying from place to place as fast as the wind flows.

"Juana Pancha" used to travel to a palace in "Antigua Guatemala". Occasionally she transformed herself as a domestic animal, capable of entering any place and stealing

treasures. One night, during her travel to Guatemala, some warlocks caught her and agreed to burn her. In revenge, she put a curse on her cave. If you enter to that cave, you never come back, and the more you try to escape, the more you get lost in the cave. According to a prophesy, the curse will be broken during a Holy Friday if somebody dares to enter to the cave and sleep alone.

The Lady of the Rings



A long time ago, a bizarre woman dressed in white with an indescribable face and sporting numerous rings was kidnapping many kids in San Salvador.

One night, a man was working in his house while his wife was in the bedroom. The weather was very hot and their baby was next to a window. Drowsily, the man saw a mysterious hand hanging inside the window with a lot of rings. Once he rubbed his eyes the hand had vanished.

The man fell asleep and when he woke up a mysterious woman was next to his son. Scared, the man took his son to the bedroom with his wife. The next day, before the man went to his job, the lady of the rings was waiting for him in the entrance of his house. He ignored her and took the bus to his job. On the bus, a woman was laughing. The man looked forward and saw the lady of the rings with his son in her arms. Since then, the man became crazy and his son disappeared.

The Pitchers



This is a legend about some buried jugs full of golden and silver coins. Once, one of the jugs was discovered by greedy people who obsessively took care of it and never spent a single coin, and eventually died in misery. According to some villagers, the coins of the pitchers are cursed by the Devil. Whoever steals them steals the body and soul of greedy people. The Devil then buries the pitcher for a new victim.

Our Lady of Santa Ana



A very popular legend tells the story about how the image of Our Lady of Santa Ana is in Santa Ana. According to the legend, a group of natives were moving this image to Honduras. When they reached Santa Ana they were very tired and decided to spend the night under a big tree in a place called "Sihuatehuacán".

The next day in the morning, the natives tried to continue the way to Honduras, but the image became so heavy they decided to leave it in that place.

El Mico Brujo



A very popular story in El Salvador is the legend of "El Mico Brujo" (The Witch Monkey). In certain towns of the country this character is related to a pig instead of a monkey. Ancestors used to tell stories about some weird women with a magic "guacal" (a kind of plastic bowl) in which they stored their souls, transforming monkeys or pigs to make mischievous acts, like climbing trees and throwing fruits and stones to the people.

Trying to catch them or kill them is useless. These witches can vanish instantly when they feel they're in danger. According to some villagers, these witches can transform into big black pigs, grunting, charging, and biting their victims who awaken totally beaten and with empty pockets.

The Goblin



The Goblin is a spirit always looking for beautiful young ladies, harassing his victims, making noises, and laughing at night. The Goblin can even curse his victims to be unmarried forever. These Goblins are bizarre, tiny men with pointed ears; they like to dress in very luxurious and colorful clothes. They are also the guardians of big pots full of golden coins and speak a weird language that only they can understand. According to some villagers, the Goblins are suffering spirits who visit those houses where obnoxious kids live.

Caliche

“Caliche” is Salvadoran slang. Salvadorans use many unique colloquial terms that often prove confusing even for native Spanish speakers from other countries.

Here are a few examples:

Bayunco/bayunca – Someone who is being silly, rowdy, crazy, foolish

Bicho/bicha – A little kid, child; sometimes derogatory

Bolado – Something you don't have a specific word for (*ese bolado* – “that thing”)

Cabalito – Exactly, perfectly (*los zapatos me quedan cabalitos* – “the shoes fit me perfectly”)

Chele – Someone with a lighter skin color or blond hair

Chivo – Awesome, great, cool (*el viaje estuvo chivo* – “the trip was awesome”)

Chucho – Dog; usually refers to dirty, misbehaving, or stray dogs

Chuco – Dirty; also the name of a hot drink: atol chuco

Chunche – Object; an old thing that is not used for much

Cipote/Cipota – A child

Dundo – stupid or dumb (note that the word *estúpido* is very offensive)

Guanaco – A Salvadoran person. It's not meant as an insult

Guacal/Huacal – A basin, usually made of plastic, used to get water; often used in the large cement sinks used to bathe with or wash dishes/clothing.

Pisto – Money

Puchika – No exact translation – an exclamation with a sense similar to “Oh my gosh!”

Salú – Friendly goodbye (informal)

Vaya pues – OK that's fine. Often shortened to “vaya” or “va pues.”

Why English is Hard to Learn!

- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- The farm was used to produce produce.
- The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
- We must polish the Polish furniture.
- He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- A bass was painted on the head of a bass drum.
- When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
- I did not object to the object.
- The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
- They were too close to the door to close it.
- The buck does funny things when does are present.
- A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
- To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
- The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
- Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
- I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
- The accountant at the music store records records of the records.

Let's Face It – English is a Crazy Language

There is no egg in eggplant or ham in hamburger; neither is their apple nor pine in pineapple.

English muffins weren't invented in England. French fries are not from France.

Sweetmeats are candies while sweetbreads, which aren't sweet, are meat.

Quicksand can work slowly.

Boxing rings are square.

A guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

Why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham?

If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth?

One goose, 2 geese. So one moose, 2 meese? One index, 2 indices?

Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends but not one amend, that you comb through annals of history but not a single annal?

If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it?

If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught?

If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat?

In what language do people recite at a play and play at a recital? Ship by truck and send cargo by ship? Have noses that run and feet that smell?

How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?

How can overlook and oversee be opposites, while quite a lot and quite a few are alike?

How can the weather be hot as hell one day and cold as hell another?

Have you noticed that we talk about certain things only when they are absent?

Have you ever seen a horseful carriage or a strapful gown? Met a sung hero or experienced required love?

Have you ever run into someone who was combobulated, gruntled, ruly or peccable?

Where are all those people who ARE spring chickens or who would ACTUALLY hurt a fly?

Your house can burn up as it burns down.

You fill in a form by filling it out.

An alarm goes off by going on.

And why, when the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible?

WHAT'S DIFFERENT IN EL SALVADOR?

You'll probably notice right away that some things in El Salvador are different than things in the U.S. The following is a list of cultural and other differences. You might observe some of these during your visit—and perhaps notice differences that are not on this list.

1. Don't flush the toilet paper. The septic system can't handle it. Throw it in the provided waste basket.
2. Most water is not safe to drink. Visitors must drink bottled/pure water. This means closing your mouth while showering and brushing your teeth with clean water.
3. Often there is no running water and little hot water. Be grateful for the water you have at home.
4. All clothes and dishes are hand washed and air/sun-dried.
5. Do NOT drink the juice or milk that is sold in bags, it may make you sick.
6. Rarely any air conditioning.
7. Seat belts are often not in use, but are required for the front seat passengers. Use them when in a big town, when on the Pan-American or another major highway, or when you see police.
8. Crazy driving in El Salvador. Don't get in the way.
9. You can pull off the highway to take pictures, buy food, buy car parts, pick people up, etc.
10. Pickups full of people: It's a common mode of transportation.
11. Roads may be made of cement, brick, stone, dirt, other.
12. Dogs, cows, roosters roam the streets and highways. Slow down but keep moving.
13. Many stray dogs; people have a different attitude about stray dogs (called chuchos).
14. There are many machetes in the rural areas.
15. Many guards, police carrying machine guns or rifles.
16. Can't take pictures in the airport. Why? When the guard with a machine gun asks you not to take a picture you don't ask why.
17. Coca-cola light (instead of diet); pop in bottles (not plastic).
18. Fresh fruit, fresh bread, fresh vegetables, fresh cookies.
19. Huge, wild plants: poinsettia, croton, bougainvillea, hibiscus, etc.
20. Bottom of some trees are painted white.
21. Metric system, Celsius. Get with the rest of the world, USA.
22. People speak little to no English. This isn't a Mexican resort.
23. Speed bumps (túmulos) on the road are very common.
24. Advertisements painted on walls along the highway. No billboard necessary.
25. Political colors painted on electricity poles, trees, rocks: PCN, FMLN, ARENA 26. (Not so much these days.)
26. Garbage tends to line the roads; Some people burn their trash, sometimes in the road.
27. There are often people begging for money.
28. Sometimes broken glass or barbed wire tops the walls surrounding houses. It's used to keep people out.
29. "Fútbol" is everywhere; and there are 5 professional American football teams in El Salvador.
30. Different concepts of time. Slower pace and punctuality are flexible: Salvadoran time, not gringo time.
31. People are sincere and very thankful; when they ask how you are they really want to know!

SUGGESTED READINGS, MOVIES, AND WEBSITES

Also check the “Resources” page on the OSP website: www.oursisterparish.org/resources

BOOKS

About El Salvador/Salvadoran History

From Grandmother to Granddaughter: Salvadoran Women’s Stories – Michael Gorkin, Marta Pineda, & Gloria Leal
El Salvador: The People and Culture – Greg Nickles
Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory – Hector Lindo-Fuentes
Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador – Virginia Tilley
Bitter Grounds – Sandra Benítez
The History of El Salvador – Christopher M. White

About The War

The Massacre at El Mozote – Mark Danner
From Madness to Hope – Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (Official UN Report)
Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan – Ana Carrigan
The Weight of All Things – Sandra Benítez
One Day of Life – Manlio Argueta
El Salvador, Testimonies de Guerra – Ariel Romero
On the Front Line: Guerilla Poems of El Salvador – Claribel Alegría & Darwin Flakoll
Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador – Teresa Whitfield
Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace – Tommie Sue Montgomery
Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador – Elisabeth Jean Wood
Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified People – Jon Sobrino

About Monseñor Romero

Oscar Romero: Memoirs in Mosaic – María López Vigil
Salvador – Joan Didion
The Violence of Love – Oscar Romero
Through the Year with Oscar Romero – translated by Irene Hodgson
The Act of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop – Francisco Goldman

About Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians –Miguel A. de la Torre
Liberation Theology – Gustavo Gutierrez
Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth – Jon Sobrino

Movies

Romero (1989)
Salvador (1986)
Innocent Voices (2004)
Enemies of war (2001)
Monseñor: The Last Journey of Oscar Romero (2001)

I Am Not Afraid: Rufina Amaya's testimony

WEBSITES / BLOGS

Our Sister Parish <http://www.oursisterparish.org/>

El Salvador Ministry of Tourism <http://www.corsatur.gob.sv/>

Lonely Planet <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/el-salvador>

Frommer's <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/elsalvador/>

Explore Beautiful El Salvador <http://www.explore-beautiful-el-salvador.com/>

Discover Central America <http://www.discovercentralamerica.com/country.html?country=elsalvador>

Door to El Salvador <http://www.doortoelsalvador.com/>

The Library of Congress <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/svtoc.html>

US Department of State

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2033.html>

http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1109.html

CIA – The World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/es.html>

US Embassy in El Salvador <http://sansalvador.usembassy.gov/>

UNICEF <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/elsalvador.html>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/el-salvador.aspx>

El Salvador Perspectives tim.muth@elsalvadorperspectives.com

“HOW WAS YOUR TRIP?”

1. It made me realize that building friendships and solidarity with those in life-threatening circumstances can make us both feel a commonality in our faith and our lives as humans.
2. For me it marked the beginning of a long-term relationship with the people of Berlín. Conditions there are bleak but our partnership helps keep hope alive!
3. It is humbling to see such hope and love in the midst of desperate situations.
4. While there I learned about the finca (coffee plantation) that makes Don Justo coffee. This particular finca is special because the owners pay their workers three times as much as the average finca owner—the average being as little as \$2 a day.
5. The trip was a wonderful experience and quite an eye-opener! Over 20% of the population has no income and do not know where tomorrow’s meal will come from.
6. Did I enjoy my trip? The suffering from corruption, poverty, and violence broke my heart. But the faith, love, and hope of the Salvadoran people filled my broken heart.
7. How was my trip? It was the most beautiful landscape I have ever visited. And it is the most wounded place I have ever been.
8. How was my trip? That’s a hard question. I feel like I’ve been to the ends of the earth and seen the deepest level of poverty. And God was there.
9. Did I enjoy my trip? I loved the beauty of the place and the people. But it is hard to enjoy the poverty, suffering, and injustice I saw. We can’t enjoy the one and ignore the other.
10. My trip was one of sharp contrast. The people are open, warm, and loving; the countryside is breathtakingly beautiful; but all this is in a setting of extreme poverty.
11. During my time in El Salvador, I met some of the most loving people I have ever known in my life. I also learned that the nation and its people are deeply scarred by a horrendous civil war where thousands were killed and massacred for seeking economic and social justice.
12. While in El Salvador I fell in love with the gracious, warm people who live there. I was deeply saddened to learn that the horrific civil war that ended in the early 90s is not truly over as the people continue to suffer extreme social and economic injustice.
13. Although I truly and deeply enjoyed the wonderful people and the extremely beautiful countryside, I was saddened to learn that 25% of the population is in extreme poverty and another 30% live close to the poverty line.

These responses were taken from the Our Sister Parish Delegation Manual.

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