

PAG Policy on Hand-outs, Gifts, and Tips

To most Hondurans, every North American and European is wealthy, despite their true financial circumstances. The North is the land of plenty and opportunity, where money practically grows on trees. Many Hondurans assume, for instance, that North American and European volunteers do not have to sacrifice for the money they donate, but that they merely write out a check without any personal effort or cost.

It's easy to understand why Hondurans might have this point of view (that a poor North American or European simply does not exist) when observing the levels of poverty here. Levels of economic poverty in Honduras are generally way worse than in North America and Europe. Coupling this is the lack of hope, or light at the end of the tunnel, for the average, poor Honduran. Poverty starts with the government and infiltrates the entire economy...and...often ends up entering the minds of the people.

It is precisely the poverty of the mind that we at PAG discourage when we discourage groups to give hand-outs to people. Hand-outs at all levels and from all directions in Honduras have created a culture of dependency and a sense of a lack of responsibility for one's own life and economic situation. Examples of handouts are: giving out candy to random children one comes across, giving money to a stranger for a health problem, giving money or things to a stranger or acquaintance upon being asked. PAG's mission is to work with people to encourage the development of self-sufficient communities where people have a sense of control over their lives and practice self-determination. Thus, giving handouts is contrary to PAG's mission. Furthermore, accustoming a community to hand-outs will set a precedent for all future volunteer groups to that community and make their experience more difficult.

Gifts are something else all together. In Honduras, it is a custom to give gifts as a sign of friendship. Where as hand-outs generally flow from rich to poor, gifts flow between rich and poor. One does not have to be wealthy to give a gift. In fact, many of you will experience the generosity of some of the poorest people you will ever meet. You may receive fruit, a meal, someone's help, time, or a show of thanks-giving. When Hondurans travel abroad, they almost always take a gift to their hosts (often something representative of Honduras). Gifts for the genuine friends that you make in Honduras can be as simple as a t-shirt or a baseball cap with your institution's name on it. They can also be things that you brought along and planned to leave behind. Other gifts ideas are a photograph of your group, yourself, your family. If you do bring candy for the children, a way to make it a gift and not a handout is to give it to the school teacher to give out in class, to make part of a game, etc. You'll know when you want to give someone a gift because it will be unsolicited, for a new friend or a project co-worker. We suggest that all gifts be given at the end of your stay in a community so that others do not confuse the gift as a handout and come asking you for more. Gifts can be given through the local churches as well.

Tipping is yet another category of money transfer. Tipping is a practice in Honduras as it is in almost every country. Rather than a hand-out or a gift, a tip is a business exchange. PAG encourages visitors to tip people who have provided the group with a service, a job well done. For example, PAG encourages tipping the staff at our restaurant, La Naturaleza, and at our Lodge at Los Pinos when they have provided high quality service. We do not recommend tipping for bad service. Tips are a reward for professionalism and hard work, and we like to motivate our employees that way. People/places/situations that tips are expected in exchange for good service would be at restaurants (generally 10% or up to L. 100.00), the airport (bag carriers), hotels, the bus-driver, tour-guides, translators, car watch-men, etc.

To tip, however, a business transaction must have occurred. The person must be providing you with a service. One would NOT tip, for example, a community member that works hard on the community project...because the project is to benefit the community, the member himself. No one tips someone who is working on their own project. You would either give a gift symbolizing friendship or a hand-out.

If you have any questions regarding the above policy, please email Chet Thomas at chet@paghonduras.org. We are happy to help you out in any way we can.