



6-Month LATIN AMERICA

IMMERSION

experience **mission**



What is **IMMERSION?**

IMMERSION is an opportunity for young adults (age 18-30) to step outside of the normal cadence of their lives in order to gain a broader picture of: 1) the world around you, 2) the way God works in that world, and 3) the value of relationships and quality service alongside people whose lives are just as valuable as your own.

Simply put, **IMMERSION** is about focusing on the “how we do it” of international ministry and service rather than just “what we do.” Our central focus is on the importance of **authentic relationships** as the keystone to healthy ministry, and engaging in what it means to truly “love our neighbor” as people of privilege in the 21st century.

6-Month Latin America teams spend their time equally split

between service opportunities, cultural immersion in the community, and relationship building with community partners and host families in 3 countries: **Costa Rica**, **Peru**, and **Cuba**.

This means there is plenty of space to give your time and attention to others—a necessary part of doing missions well—prioritizing people over the simply seeking out projects to complete.



COSTA RICA *Partners*

Victor and **Sara Mayorga-Molina** are one of Experience Mission's longest-standing partnerships, serving together for more than 14 years. Over those years, Experience Mission and IMMERSION volunteers have had the privilege to build a deep relationship with them and their family, watching their kids grow up and their care for their community expand.

Victor and Sara live in the small town of **Shiroles**, in the Talamanca region of Costa Rica. They are members of the **Bribri** tribe, one of Costa Rica's indigenous people groups in the southern part of the country, near Panama.

Over the last 20 years of ministry together, Victor and Sara have dedicated much of their time to the youth of their town. They do their best to have an open-door policy, where young adults know they can stay with them as needed, and a hot meal can be prepared on a moment's notice. For many, they are seen as extended family, and a stable place where they are welcomed and loved.





PROGRAM

Schedule

Because you will be living in a remote indigenous community, **Spanish language** experience is a priority for this program. Your first two weeks will be spent in **San Jose** living with host families and learning Spanish through an immersive language program at the **Costa Rica Language Academy** (CRLA). During these two weeks, you'll learn Spanish *in Spanish*, practicing vocabulary and grammar in a classroom over the course of 40 lesson hours.

Upon completion of your two-week course, you and your team will travel to the

eastern coastline of Costa Rica, spending the remainder of your time living and serving in **Shiroles** alongside Victor and Sara.

Monday through Friday are dedicated to your local ministry project, with **Saturdays** set aside as both debrief days and time designated for outings with your host family. **Sundays**, you and the team will attend church locally. Many host families go to church throughout the week as well. Our hope is that you would join your host family in the rhythms of their daily life.



COSTA RICA



WEEKLY Ministry

COSTA RICA



Weekly ministry consists of a mix of **farming** and **local construction**. Previous teams have helped work on a local school, done repairs on local homes, helped dig a septic tank, and supported in the construction of a local church for a nearby pastor.

Whatever work project you and your team participate in, know that you will be blessing someone in the community who is also giving back to others! *(This is a*

major point of emphasis for Victor when he chooses work projects for the team.)

When not at your work project, you and your team will invest in your relationship with your **host families** in the community. This could look like helping around the house, babysitting their kids, going on outings around the town, and integrating yourself into the family. We see this as the best way to honor your hosts, who

have opened your home to you for these months.

Additionally, there will be many opportunities to engage with the **broader community**, whether through joining in local soccer and volleyball games, spending time playing with kids at the local park, or organizing a community meal for fellowship and fun.



HOUSING & Accommodations

Upon arriving in **Shiroles**, you and your team will be split up between **local host families**. This is at minimum, two people of the same gender in a household.

While Shiroles is a more remote community, you can still expect to have running water, electricity, and occasional Wifi access. During the dry season, be prepared for frequent water outages (usually during the daytime hours).

On weekends, you and your team will spend time at **Victor**

and Sara's home, getting to know their kids and sharing meals together as a team.

Host families are an integral part of the Costa Rica program. It is vital for anyone looking to join this program that you invest wholeheartedly in being present with your family and integrating as best as possible. When done well, this can be the most impactful and meaningful part of the IMMERSION experience.



COSTA RICA



PERU *Partners*



IMMERSION team members in Peru serve in the city of Lima alongside Experience Mission's ministry partners **Mark & Anna Burgess**.

Originally from the U.K., Mark and Anna have been full-time missionaries in Lima since 2006. During that time, they started a church called **Oikos**, and have focused on providing meaningful community and support for families seeking faith and belonging.



Starting in 2023, Mark and Anna handed over leadership of Oikos church to a local Peruvian couple, **Robert & Rosa Romaina**. The Romainas both grew up in the Peruvian jungle as members of the indigenous Shipibo tribe.

Together, they oversee the daily functioning of Oikos, with Robert as lead pastor and Rosa as the overseer of the **Casa de Paz** ("House of Peace") kids program.



CASA DE PAZ

Kids Program

Casa de Paz, an afterschool education program, supports low-income families and Venezuelan refugees living in Lima by providing free tutoring and teacher support for students of all grade levels. Their goal is to help each student get caught up in school so they can start the following year at grade level. As your main ministry focus, you will split time between their two locations each week:

the first at **Oikos** church, and the second in a shanty-town community called **Pacifico**.

During that time, you will work directly with teachers and students, helping with homework, focus, and motivation. The teachers and kids love consistency, so there is a good chance team members will work with the same kids for the majority of your time in Peru.



PERU



WEEKLY Schedule



Tuesday through Friday, you can expect to volunteer at **Casa de Paz**, which normally goes from mid-day to 5:00/5:30 PM (depending on the locatiaon).

Additionally, throughout your time in Lima, you will also work with two local **Spanish teachers** to help you improve your language skills. This includes two Spanish vocabulary lessons and two grammar lessons each week, plus homework.

Weekends often provide the opportunity to explore the city, with ideas and guidance from Mark and Anna, and connect over meals with the Burgess family, including their two youngest sons, Kaleb and Joel. Expect animated conversations, in-depth Bible studies, and lots of ping-pong. (They have a table on their patio and love to play!)

On **Sundays**, you will attend church gatherings and help

support the church service as your skills allow (whether it's with music, Sunday school, praying for others, or even giving your own sermon/testimony).

Because you are serving on Sundays, **Mondays** are treated as a "Sabbath" for rest and recuperation.



HOUSING & Travel

In Lima, you will be staying at **Oikos** church. Housing accommodations are comfortable, with bunk beds, gender-specific rooms, and a shared bathroom and shower.

While being mindful of phone use, you can expect to have **WiFi** access each day, meaning it is easy to keep in touch with family at home.

During the weekdays, you and your team will manage a weekly **food budget**, cooking breakfasts and dinners together. Lunch is normally provided while serving at Casa De Paz.

At some point, you will also have the opportunity to connect with local ministries in **Amazon** jungle, where the Burgess family has also served in various ways.

Lastly, Mark and Anna typically set aside one weekend for the team to go on a **tourism trip** to see more of Peru. Past teams have booked adventure tours or traveled together to Machu Picchu! Whatever you do as a team, expect a fun weekend exploring the sites and culture as you experience even more of Peru's beautiful country.

This program provides a lot of **independence** to teams. Mark and Anna make it a point to teach team members how to use public transit and encourage you to explore the city (safely, of course!)

Expect to have a wonderful 3-month trip tutoring kids and learning all there is to know about Peru and its people!





Experience Mission has had the privilege of partnering with local ministries in Cuba since 2015. For the protection of our partners, we have chosen not to share photos or last names in public materials; however, we are able to give some details about their work and the ministry **IMMERSION** team members join.

Back in 2014, EM's founder/executive director visited Cuba to meet with **Willie**, a local ministry leader who has dedicated his life to helping provide income, employment, food, and medical

supplies to families in his community. Willie has worked in ministry his entire life and cares deeply about issues of poverty, faith, human rights, and our call to love our neighbors well.

Working alongside Willie's different local ministry efforts, you will get to know **Daniela**, who functions as the main volunteer coordinator and translator for participants while in Santa Marta. Daniela is currently in seminary studying to work in ministry long-term.



MINISTRY Opportunities

Due to the limited resources in Cuba, ministry work can vary day-to-day based on the current needs while you are there and the transportation options available for your team. That said, you can expect to get involved in the following areas:

Volunteering at farming initiatives: One of the basic needs in Cuba is a stable supply of food. Whenever teams serve in Cuba, we make a point to connect you with a local farmer to help provide fresh fruit and vegetables for those in need. Expect to volunteer a few days a week, getting your hands dirty weeding and harvesting fruits and vegetables.

Helping in a nursing home: Spend time once a week playing games, singing

songs, and spending time with the elderly in Santa Marta.

Delivering supplies and resources: Throughout your time, there will be opportunities to deliver supplies to families in the community. Usually this functions as a kind of prayer walk, going from home to home, sitting and sharing life stories, and offering prayer and supplies to those who need it.

Fellowship with kids & young adults with disabilities: Spend time playing games, hanging out, and talking about life. We work with a local church pastor who has dedicated her resources to supporting people on the margins, those in her community navigating physical and developmental disabilities.



CUBA



HOUSING & Accommodations

Team members stay with a **host family** in Santa Marta, a small town on the coast next to Varadero, Cuba.

Housing accommodations are comfortable, with bunk beds, same-gender rooms, and a shared bathroom and shower. Because of the current trade limitations in Cuba, be prepared for frequent power outages and a limited water supply. While EM's partners have access to a backup generator, we want to preserve gasoline as much as possible while there, as it can also be a limited and expensive resource.

Internet access is limited to a local WiFi park, a 5-minute walk down the street. Because of the

lack of consistent power, it is not always easy to get in touch with family and friends. That being said, your team leader will have a Cuban cellphone with an active SIM card in case of emergencies or an immediate reason to get in touch with family back home.

The **food** in Cuba is basic but delicious. Be prepared to eat lots of rice, beans, and chicken, alongside plenty of local fruit—the mangos are unbelievable!

If you're a fan of **coffee**, be prepared to drink the very strong *cafecito*, a Cuban-style sweetened espresso with a touch of milk. You may even get a chance to roast coffee beans with your host family.





SAFETY

Measures

Safety is a huge priority for the IMMERSION program! We are up to date on all potential **safety concerns** in the countries where teams volunteer and would never send a team to a location where we have active concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

Experience Mission local staff and partners are **experienced residents** or welcome guests in the communities you are serving in, and they communicate to all team members the **safest way** to move about during their time on the program. Regular communication is also established between partners, team leaders, and EM U.S. Staff, allowing for quick responses to any emergencies should they arise.

For medical issues, IMMERSION team leaders are **CPR/ First Aid** certified, and carry **trauma medical kits** equipped to deal with a wide range of injuries and ailments.

In the case of a larger emergency, EM staff members will **support team members** by helping them communicate with home and making sure they get to a place to receive care.

Often, local **medical clinics** are a short distance from where team members are staying. However, outside of big cities, large hospitals can often be several hours away by vehicle. Team members would not be left to do this on their own.

To ensure medical care is readily accessible, EM secures **travel medical/ evacuation insurance** for all team members. Participants are also required to come with a **Personal Emergency Fund**—a debit or credit card with \$1,500 available and \$300 of reserve cash—in case they were to have a medical issue requiring upfront payment or need to **travel home** from the program unexpectedly. This amount may seem high, but it's

purely a precaution. Most team members do not touch their emergency funds while on the trip.

Preventatively, during initial training, all team members are encouraged to enroll with **STEP** (Safe Traveler Enrollment Program) through the U.S. State Department. This allows team members and staff to receive official travel alerts if there is an issue in the region including political protests, civil unrest, increased crime, weather alerts, natural disasters, terrorism, or specific threats for foreign travelers.

An **emergency phone line** is also available to all emergency contacts.