

1-Month CUBA

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.

Teams spend their time equally split between service opportunities, cultural immersion in the community, and relationship building with community partners and host families. 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.



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.





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.



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.
