

## **Brethren Disaster Ministries, Puerto Rico Recovery Project HOUSING/PROJECT INFORMATION**

Volunteer Housing: (Physical): 135, KM 64, HM Castañer, P.R. 00631  
(Postal): Box 34 Castañer, P.R. 00631  
Primary Contact Phone: 787-477-9501  
Secondary Contact Phone: 787-685-9647  
Email: bdmpuertorico@gmail.com

The project will initially be based in Castañer, Puerto Rico. Housing will be provided by the Castañer church and will be basic but comfortable and safe. Once the project moves to another location, this information sheet will be updated.

Interested individuals or groups should contact their District Disaster Coordinator to find out if the district offers reimbursement for all or a portion of volunteer travel. BDM has worked with the COB Puerto Rican District so that housing, meals, and transportation costs will be provided for you while in Puerto Rico.

### **Summary of Unique Details (Read at least this Summary!)**

- Spanish is the official language of Puerto Rico, but most people know some English.
- Volunteer housing does not have air conditioning but does have lots of fans.
- Volunteers need to be able to work in a hot humid climate
- Meals will be simple and some of the time construction volunteers will help with food prep.
- Funds are available to help with volunteer travel expenses.
- Volunteer groups size is 5-7, most staying for 2 weeks or more.

### **Sensitivity to language, situation and culture:**

- Spanish is the official language of Puerto Rico. Most residents understand some English and many speak at least a little. They all appreciate your effort to respect their language and learn a few greetings or phrases of Spanish. Keep in mind that in the mountains English is less common. You will receive a "Survival Spanish" document which will help you with some basic phrases. To avoid misunderstandings, volunteers are encouraged to ask for assistance with communication.
- Everyone in the communities where we serve was affected by the 2017 hurricanes. Many people are still in recovery and experiencing ongoing trauma that can be triggered by things such as anniversaries, memories, events, objects, etc. Be open and available to anyone who expresses a desire to share their stories but be respectful of their privacy. A willing listener is a precious thing. Ask before taking photos of homes and people.
- Puerto Ricans are generous people. Be sensitive to the fact that they may want to share things such as fruit, snacks, etc. with you. Use your own judgement about whether or not to accept a simple gift, but if you feel you must refuse, for example for safety or health reasons, be as gracious and tactful in your refusal as you can be. If in doubt, particularly if a gift seems

expensive or lavish, or seems designed to curry your favor, ask the advice of the project leadership.

- Dress appropriately for the situation and the culture. When working at the job site, clothes should be comfortable and lightweight and should limit exposure to the sun. Hats will help to prevent sunburn and shield you from other effects of the sun. Closed-toe shoes or boots are required for the job site. Beachwear is only appropriate for the beach, not, for example, for walking around town. When at the housing site, your dress should show respect for the other volunteers and our hosts. Please bring along a nice set of clothes to attend church or other local events.

#### **General guidelines:**

- Most groups will consist of 5-7 volunteers. This may be adjusted under certain circumstances as determined by BDM.
- The minimum age for volunteers for the Puerto Rico project is 16. Volunteers aged 16 & 17 must have a *Parent or Court Appointed Legal Guardian* sign the Minor Release and Medical Release forms and submit them before arrival to the project.
- Minors may not operate power tools or climb ladders unless under direct supervision of their parent or a Site Supervisor.
- No more than four youth of one gender per one adult of the same gender will be permitted.
- Volunteers should be able-bodied. The heat and humidity can be significant, particularly if you are traveling from a cooler climate. Under these circumstances, any work may seem more difficult than usual. Much of the work will include building new, or repairing damaged, metal roofs, involving heavy lifting and climbing ladders, often while wearing safety gear such as eye protection, safety hats, etc. However, volunteers will also be needed to work on the ground and inside the houses and volunteers who wish to help with cooking are also needed. ***THOSE CONTEMPLATING PARTICIPATION SHOULD CONSIDER THEIR HEALTH AND ABILITY TO ENDURE STRENUOUS WORK IN A WARM, HUMID CLIMATE.***
- Tools will be provided, although you are welcome to bring your favorite hammer, etc.
- An SUV, BDM Truck and passenger van are the project vehicles.
- Leadership will typically be two persons: construction leader and a liaison to the community and recovery committee. When possible, there will also be a household leader.

**Trip duration:** Project operation will be a five day work week, Monday through Friday. Start and end times will be determined by project leadership. Given the distance and cost to fly to Puerto Rico, as well as the 4-5 hour round trip from the project area in Castañer to the airport in San Juan, it is preferred that volunteers plan to complete *at least two work weeks (ten work days) or more* in Puerto Rico. Typically, volunteers will arrive on Saturday, which allows volunteers to acclimate to the surroundings, rest, and meet church members and friends on Sunday. Since it is a long journey to and from the project site, it is hoped that we can coordinate arrival and departure in San Juan so that all volunteers arrive and leave around the same time on a Saturday. This may mean that some may have to wait until the others arrive or wait if their flight leaves later than others.

***TO FACILITATE THIS PROCESS, PLEASE CHECK WITH THE BDM OFFICE BEFORE PURCHASING ANY TICKETS.***

### **Housing specifics:**

- The volunteer house is a cement block house with a living room and kitchen, as well as three rooms containing two sets of bunk beds (four beds). Depending on the gender makeup and size of the group, most volunteers should be able to sleep on a lower bunk bed. Bedding and pillows will be provided.
- Restrooms>Showers:
  - There is one restroom/shower in the volunteer house. There is also one men's and one women's restroom/shower available for volunteer use at the church, accessible by a short walkway.
  - Septic systems are sensitive to paper disposal, so toilet tissue is put in trash cans.
- There is electricity although it can be sporadic at times. If you require a medical or other device that needs electricity, please bear this in mind when making your decision to come.
- There will NOT be air conditioning, but fans will be provided. It can get cool at night, but blankets will be provided.
- A washer and dryer will be available, but we do request that they be used economically. Laundry detergent will be provided.
- Filtered drinking water is provided in professional water coolers. This water should be used for all drinking uses, including brushing teeth. Drinking water bottles should always be filled from these coolers, not from the water taps.

### **Housing/transportation and non-work day activities:**

- BDM will provide transportation to and from the project and job sites.
- Housing, courtesy of the Castañer Church, will be provided.
- You may want to purchase flight travel insurance which will protect you in case your flights need to be delayed or cancelled due to your own issues or issues due to weather.
- During the weekends in-between the work weeks and other non-work periods, volunteers are free to leave the project site. The town of Castañer is lovely and friendly, so walks around town are encouraged. We encourage volunteers to visit local sites (a list of opportunities is being prepared) and will try to assist with this, when possible. Volunteers are responsible for costs incurred outside of the project area when they are not working.
- **Tourism** - Due to the distance to popular tourist areas from the project site in Castañer, volunteers wishing to spend time on tourist activities that are not local to the project site, such as visiting beaches or Old San Juan, should consider adding days to their trip (before or after) to do so. Volunteers will need to make their own arrangements related to such activities and would be responsible for all expenses incurred. It would be helpful if these plans are shared with BDM ahead of your trip.

### **Meals:**

- ***Be gracious toward your cooks/meal preparers and pitch in as needed!***
- **Dietary restrictions:** It is extremely important that you inform BDM well in advance of your trip of any dietary restrictions or limitations that you have. Many food options/substitutes can be available in the more urban areas, but project leadership will need time to secure necessary items as well as to adjust menus.

- **Meals during the work week will be provided by BDM.** Meals will be similar to typical BDM sites, but will be simpler and may consist of more rice and beans than usual as well as canned ingredients when fresh fruits and vegetables are not available. Meal simplicity also means that dessert will not be offered at every meal, however a variety of hard ice cream, pastries, doughnuts and other delicacies are available in nearby local shops (as is 50 cent cups of fresh espresso!) We will also try to give volunteers a taste of local cuisine.
  - ✓ A well-equipped kitchen is available for project use at the Castañer church, where meals will be prepared and served. The kitchen has cooking and baking equipment as well as refrigerators. Morning and evening meals will be eaten in the dining area adjacent to the church kitchen. Volunteers will take turns helping to set out, and clean up after, the morning and evening meals.
  - ✓ Meal preparation: On weeks when there is no designated cook or household leader, volunteers will be asked to take turns to assist the project leadership with meal preparation. Since the groups are small, this should not be difficult. So, if you know of a person who likes to cook, encourage them to come with you!
  - ✓ **Breakfast during the work week:** Breakfasts will be simple continental meals prepared on a self-serve basis in the church kitchen. Breakfast items will be available and may include items such as pancake mix, eggs, cereal, oatmeal, grits, bagels, toast, coffee and tea. Delicious breakfast pastries are also available locally.
  - ✓ **Lunch during the work week:** A variety of products will be available each morning in the church kitchen for volunteers to prepare and pack a lunch to eat at the work site. Volunteers will not return to housing for lunch. Water and lunch coolers will be provided for volunteers to take to the work site.
  - ✓ **Evening meals during the work week:** Evening meals will be prepared and served in the kitchen/dining area of the Castañer church.
- **Volunteers are responsible for in-transit and weekend meals** (see exception below for meals upon arrival). The small kitchen at the Volunteer House will be stocked with snacks and basic groceries for simple self-serve meals for the volunteers' use. Volunteers are free to bring their own snacks or purchase them locally. The kitchen has basic utensils and appliances, such as a stove, refrigerator and coffee maker. There are also two small cafes with inexpensive food (and ice cream!) and a grocery store within a short walking distance of the housing site. PLEASE NOTE that these businesses may not take credit/debit cards or they may have a minimum purchase level, so be prepared to pay with cash (US dollars), if necessary. Volunteers will need to prepare a snack on the day they leave the project or be prepared to purchase a meal in transit.
- **Meals upon arrival at project:**
  - ✓ Saturday, arrival day – BDM will prepare a modest meal on the evening that volunteers arrive at the project (this will usually be a Saturday). Depending on the time of arrival, this will be before or after the project orientation.
  - ✓ Sunday, the day after arrival – Volunteers will be responsible for breakfast and lunch on the Sunday after their arrival, but the evening meal will be provided by BDM. This will allow a time to gather for reflection, instructions and questions before the work week begins.

**Clean-up:**

- Groups are encouraged to identify someone in their group to assist with cooking and light housework during their stay at the project. This
- Every volunteer is expected to clean up after themselves on a day-to-day basis and participate in maintaining the host facility as a matter of respect and consideration for one another and our hosts. Some weeks household leaders will coordinate general housekeeping. Other weeks all volunteers will help. Each volunteer needs to keep their area clean and assist with household chores.
- Everyone should be prepared to do end of week/stay chores at the direction of a representative of the host facility or project leadership.

**Communication:**

- Internet will be provided at the housing site. Please remember that a variety of issues (including electricity, number of users, weather, etc.) may affect the operation and strength of internet in this mountainous region. Patience will be needed.
- Cell phones: Generally, cell phones work in most areas with the exception of some of the more rural work sites. However, as with all things technological, they can be affected by issues such as weather conditions and electricity supply. Because Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, you should not incur extra charges for your phone usage, but this depends upon your individual plan. It is best to ask about this before you travel. Volunteers should consider bringing along a backup power supply in case there are extended periods without electricity. There will be cell phones available at the project site for emergency purposes. The main project number is 787-477-9501.

**The work:**

- Repairing and rebuilding roofs – mostly metal roofs
- Sealing concrete roofs
- Repairing damage to walls and other structures
- Repairing the insides of houses with water or mold damage
- Painting
- Cement and masonry work
- In time we expect to do some new construction, most likely concrete construction

**Medications and medical conditions:**

- **Pharmacies are available, but the variety of medicines and medical supplies may be limited. If you require or think you may need medications, be certain you bring an ample supply along for your trip.**
- **Motion Sickness:** If you are even slightly susceptible to motion sickness, please bring a supply of Dramamine (or equivalent). The roads to and around the project site are very winding with sharp turns. Please inform project leadership if this may be a problem for you so they can be prepared.
- It is a good idea to make and carry a 'wallet card' identifying any medications or conditions you have, which can help to inform medical personnel in the event of an emergency. The name of an emergency contact and your insurance information should also be carried. Please make sure the project leadership is aware of any health condition that may affect your ability to do certain tasks or that could possibly worsen under the living and working conditions. This is for your

protection and it enables them to do the best job they can. Fortunately, the project site is right next to the Castañer General Hospital so basic medical care will be available, if needed.

- Power outages are always a possibility and can last from several minutes to several hours or more. It is important to be aware of this, especially if you rely on medical supplies like CPAP machines to maintain your health.
- If you have particular medical training, such as CPR, or if you are a medical professional, please share this information with the project leadership. This could be helpful in case of emergency.

### **Finances and Passports:**

- Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory. While travel authorities suggest it is a good idea to carry a passport, you do NOT need a passport to travel there or to return home. Any photo ID which is valid for TSA will suffice. If you intend to travel to any non-U.S. territories (e.g. British Virgin Islands), you will need a passport.
- The currency of Puerto Rico is the U.S. dollar.
- Many businesses do accept charge/debit cards, but some don't (including many restaurants) and power and internet outages are common, whereby charge/debit cards will not work. There are ATMs in Puerto Rico (in fact, there is one at the Castañer hospital) for which you may have to pay a service surcharge and a foreign currency charge.
- If you plan to use your debit/credit card, you may want to inform your bank of your travel plans to avoid suspicion of fraud and the possible cutting off of your card.

## **Packing List for Puerto Rico - Suggestions of what to bring:**

- Emergency contact information and insurance cards
- Work gloves and a pair of safety glasses. A small supply will be available, but you may prefer to bring what you are used to
- Suitable work boots (The work will involve entering debris strewn properties and homes)
- Light, loose long sleeve shirts. (For work protection from debris and the sun, and for evenings which you might find surprisingly chilly)
- A nice change of clothes for church or other events
- Hat (a brimmed hat will offer the best protection from the sun)
- Sunglasses
- Rain jacket (optional – rainy season is April to November)
- Sunscreen (the serious stuff!) and sunburn relief cream or gel (some will be available on project, but you may want to bring the type you prefer)
- Insect repellent (can also purchase locally)
- Old jeans/long pants - work clothes
- Favorite water/sport bottle (BDM bottles and safe drinking water will be available)
- Flashlight & batteries (power outages are frequent)
- Cash (power outages are frequent, and some local shops do not accept cards)
- Toiletries (bath soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, etc.)
- Medications, including for motion sickness if you will need it
- Bath towel, washcloth
- Shower shoes/flip flops
- Swimsuit, water shoes, beach towel, snorkel, if you have one (for leisure time during non-work days)
- Cell phone/charger (see previous information about cell phone coverage)
- Back-up power supply for cell phone or other devices
- Camera
- Bible/Devotional Material
- Reading material, cards, games for evenings
- Travel guides and ideas of activities to do on non-work days (research ahead of time – don't depend on project leadership to plan this for you)