

You probably have many questions if you are considering coming to ASA to work. Below we've had some of our teachers answer some of the most frequently asked questions about teaching at ASA, living in Paraguay, moving to Asuncion, keeping in contact with family and friends and travel. This should give you a better idea of what living and working in Asuncion may involve.

## **Regarding teaching at ASA:**

### **Q. Are teaching materials readily available? Technology? Internet?**

The elementary school at ASA has a wide variety of manipulative and classroom materials. While some are a bit outdated and overused, others are in top condition and very handy. Additionally, each year all teachers are allotted a good sum of money to replenish teaching supplies.

There are three computer labs, one for elementary, middle and high school. Each classroom is also equipped with one computer and one plasma screen TV, which are useful but limited because they are not interactive (like a smartboard, for example). There is also a wide variety of equipment that can be checked out from the tech department (LCD projectors, VHS, TVs, and mini-laptops). While there is plenty of equipment, the internet is sometimes down and the older computers frequently have problems. Also, wireless is available throughout the school.

-Kathryn, an elementary school teacher

Every classroom is equipped with a computer, a flat screen TV hooked up to the computer and white boards. When I arrived I found class sets of textbooks ready to hand out to students, as well as several additional texts to use as teacher resources. I also have a class set of mini whiteboards in my room and an overhead projector. While there have been a few things that I have missed out on having (a classroom specific LCD projector - there are several movable ones that can be checked out, a document camera, some software), after making an educational argument for why I would like to have them for class I believe that they will be approved as part of the budget and materials for the next year. In addition there is a high school computer lab which can be booked for use by teachers as well as a mobile lab of laptops. Every classroom has internet access which is an acceptable speed and fairly reliable. We also have a wireless network on campus which will allow you to work on your own computer if you so desire. There are approximately two printers per school division - one in the office and one in the computer lab. These can only be accessed during school hours. I haven't really found that there is much that I would want that I can't find, and even have resources from previous teachers that I have not figured out how to put to use yet.

-Cristi, a high school teacher

### **Q. What are the classrooms like? Desks for every student? Do teachers use chalkboards or a projection system?**

There are desks for every student. My neighbor teacher and I each have one large class, so we share an extra desk as needed. All rooms have whiteboards and an LCD TV connected to the computer. I use mine every day to show pictures, videos, notes, instructions, etc... but in general, use of the TV varies with subject matter and individual teachers.

-Chris, a high school teacher

For the elementary classrooms, grades k-1, and 4-5 have very large and airy rooms. There is adequate space for a classroom library, a reading center table, desks for every student, and spacious teacher work space. For grades 2-3, the classrooms are smaller, just enough space for a carpet area and the tables for students. In the classroom, there is a 42" plasma TV mounted on the wall that is connected to the computer to show information as well as a large dry erase board. In the larger elementary classrooms, there is also plenty of bulletin board space for showcasing work or teaching materials.

-Jenna, an elementary school teacher

**Q. Do students have access to materials they need?**

For the most part, students have access to materials. The PTA has a store on campus so students can buy basic things such as pencils, poster board, etc. There are also three computer labs open for student use during breaks, lunch, before and after school. Standard materials depend on the subject and grade level you teach.

-Amy, a middle school teacher

This is the first school I have worked in where I arrived to find a classroom full of books for kids to read, math materials to solve problems, and other materials for science and social studies. At the beginning of the year, the orders from the year before arrived and we had even more new materials. So as far as having access to materials I would say in my classroom students have access to materials they need. There are supplies that the school provides and there are school supplies that each child brings for themselves. Students bring supplies including pencils, erasers, notebooks, rulers, colored pencils, markers, crayons, pencil sharpeners, folders, etc. The school provides materials for the class including poster paper, binders, folders, butcher paper, pens, pencils and other supplies for teachers to use.

-Kim, an elementary school teacher

**Q. What is the aura of the school? Do teachers work together? Does the administration side with teachers or parents?**

Generally speaking, I would say that ASA maintains a pretty laid-back atmosphere. Not in any *laissez-faire* kind of way...we have goals and deadlines that we achieve and reach within the common (and sometimes uncommon) constraints of our community. Rather, a

low stress, "It will all work out" attitude dominates...*tranquilo pa*, as a local may say. In a word--content.

*Re teachers working together:* From a Middle School perspective, a resounding YES! Academically, we work together at grade-level, across grade-level, and by department. Last semester, we finished compacting and aligning our curriculum by department. We are currently putting the finishing touches on a one page curriculum map that will further enable more cross-curricular and team teaching opportunities. We also have community service and exploratory groups that combine students across the middle grade levels with teachers from different grade levels and departments.

Well, I would like to think that teachers and parents are on the same side, though it may not always appear as such. That being said, all administrative decisions are made with the best interests of the kids in mind. In some instances, those decisions may appear to fall on the teachers' side, and in others, to the contrary. Again, administrative judgments are passed with the kids in mind...meaning all decisions fall in the middle, falsely leaving the appearance of side-taking, when in reality there are no sides to take...only paths to carve out.

-Paul, a middle school teacher

The school has a very open and inviting atmosphere. It is a small school so there is a strong community feeling at the elementary level. Teachers plan together and plan across grade levels. Teachers have a lot of plan time and common plan time built into their schedule so there are many opportunities to work with together. There are only two sections per grade level so that also makes it easier to work with the partnering teacher. The administration is very supportive of the classroom teachers. At the elementary level, the current administration knows the students well and spends time in all the classrooms. At the elementary level, there are clear expectations about what questions are to be directed to the administration and what the teachers are supposed to deal with in the classroom. Communication is always the key!

-Danielle, an elementary school teacher

### **Q. How involved are parents?**

Parent involvement at The American School of Asuncion generally decreases markedly as you go up the grade levels. I would say that only 10 - 20% of parents show up at the teacher open house once a year and a few more when we have student/parent/teacher conferences.

There are notable exceptions. Some parents are involved all the way through grades 9 - 12, with their participation dwindling greatly from the middle school and elementary years, on a day to day basis, but with their presence felt heavily in helping organize special events (field trips, "room mother" responsibilities, large class fundraisers, graduation and senior trip details, holiday fests, sports awards night, PTA events), and

at the intramural and sports competitions. A few even linger on a few years after their children graduate because they are called upon by school authorities for their experience collected over years in organizing some of the large school events.

-Russell, a high school teacher

In elementary, most of the parents are here everyday to drop off/pick up kids. There is regular communication between home and school. During Children's Literature week the kids are entertained by their parents who come to read a book. We also have scheduled Family Days in semester 2. The parents come to their children's class for a small presentation and the kids share a project with their family. In the past we have scheduled events such as Math Game Night. Parents come to school ready to learn from their kids. The kids demonstrate how to play the many games used in the classroom. In addition we have scheduled publishing parties at the end of the year. It is an opportunity for kids to showcase all what they have learned throughout the year in the writing process. Birthday celebrations for students and teachers (including aides) are regular occurrences. When it is someone's birthday, at the end of the day, we join together for a small party in the cantina. There is a committee of Room Mothers who are very helpful and when we need support. For instance, during our science unit we were studying plants. The Room Mothers went to a local nursery to collect various plants for science exploration. As you see, the parental involvement is here in reading, writing, math, science and social studies...AND even for the parties.

-Shauna, an elementary school teacher

**Q. Is the curriculum open or closed? Do teachers have freedom in the classroom when approaching the lessons?**

ASA's curriculum is fairly open. When I first came to ASA, the curriculum had been written not long before. My first year here we worked to revise the initial curriculum and each year since, we've revised it further. This year we are simplifying and streamlining the curriculum to make sure it is a viable document. As a staff, we feel that we should be doing what we say we are doing. Therefore, a more streamlined curriculum ensures that, as teachers, we are covering the content as it is written in the curricular documents.

I have found that ASA teachers have a great deal of freedom in approaching lessons in order to meet curricular requirements. Some teachers run a student-centered classroom, while others have more teacher-centered classes. I have taught grades 8-12 at ASA, and the least amount of freedom I felt was when I taught AP English Language and Composition. However, the few constraints I felt in teaching that class were due to the AP program itself--not to ASA.

-Tara, a middle school teacher

For High School, the curriculum is open. There is A LOT of freedom in the classroom. Compared to the US, there are significantly less standardized tests. However,

more tests have been incorporated lately and therefore different issues have arisen. For example, a Paraguayan math exam was given in November of 2009. That math exam was in Spanish, but the students have only been taught math in English. So, although the students knew or at least had seen the material on the exam at some point before, the different language used for certain math concepts caused much confusion. We also have been working this school year on setting clear goals for each quarter and semester so that there is a curriculum map that teachers would be able to access at any point in time.

-Molly, a high school teacher

Our curriculum is a living document to say the least. We revise it every year. After many years in the business (and we must remember that it is a business, like it or not) I find I have complete freedom to teach towards objectives.

-an elementary school teacher

### **Q. How much time do I get with my students?**

I see each class 4 times per week for 56 minutes per class period.

-a high school teacher

During a typical week, I see each section of language arts four times for about 50 minutes each. This comes out to about three hours and 20 minutes of contact time with students in each section per week. (I also have a 25 minute advisory block every day and teach a 50 minute exploratory class which meets once a week.)

-Nathan, a middle school teacher

I spend 3 ½ hours teaching my students in English each day. Language Arts - 90 minutes, Math - 75 minutes, and Science/Social Studies - 45 minutes. My students are also taught Language Arts and Social Studies in Spanish for 90 minutes. Elementary students go to PE, Music, Art or Guarani class for 60-70 minutes each day. They also get 3 recesses, which is another 45 minutes of the day.

-Chaya, an elementary school teacher

### **Q. How do students handle meeting the requirements for both the American and Paraguayan diploma?**

ASA has a differentiated and integrated program, according to the technical name that the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) provided to our academic reality.

MEC recognizes our differentiated program, because it not only has two programs (Paraguayan and American), but different from a number of other schools in Paraguay also. This differentiated program was built with a 70-75% of American subjects/areas and 30-25% of Paraguayan subjects/areas.

SACS recognizes the components of the American program. This system is different from the Paraguayan one, because the American calendar divides the years in two semesters, each of one divided in two quarters. The students, especially in High School, need to earn credits on a semester basis to be a candidate for graduation. In Paraguay there are two “etapas” and the grades are due as an annual average.

All these components are balanced to fulfill the requirements from Paraguay and USA. Reports must be sent periodically to MEC and SACS to demonstrate that the school satisfies both organizations/agencies. Also they visit the school to compile data to compare with the texts submitted.

Basically, because the program, with its limitations, are integrated the students who study all the curriculum, with all the required subjects of both programs can receive, with a minimum of passing grades in all the subjects, the dual diploma: the Título de Bachiller con Énfasis en Ciencias Sociales (from Paraguay), and the High School Diploma (from USA). Only a few number of students who did not take subjects from the Paraguayan Program, due to inability to master the languages of Spanish –in regular classes- and Guarani –in regular classes- can not receive the Paraguayan Diploma for not taking all the required subjects.

-Rodrigo, the Paraguayan Program Coordinator

**Q. What about the level of English of the students? Does it cause any difficulties in the classroom?**

The students take core curriculum classes in English (math, science, language arts, and social studies). This allows them to practice their English in an academic setting on a regular basis. However, the main social language of the students is Spanish. This can cause some difficulties for classroom communication but are easy to accommodate for with basic ESL teaching strategies (visuals, explanations in native language, hands-on activities, etc.).

-Amy, a middle school teacher

There is a varying English ability depending on the amount of time the students have attended ASA, their academic history, and the language(s) spoken at home. For the most part, the high school level students have pretty comprehensive English speaking skills and I often forget that they are ESL students. For the most part, they speak quickly and effortlessly.

They do however, still make silly mistakes and ask me to speak slower often. I've found the biggest obstacle is their English reading skills. It takes them much longer to complete any reading assignments than a typical US high school level class. I often have to reduce

the number of pages/chapters I assigned because I realize their comprehension suffers when there is too much for them to get through.

-Jacqueline, a high school teacher

**Q. As a young female educator, how will students respond to me as an authority figure?**

They understand that female teachers are still teachers, and they need to do what is asked. Yes, they will complain, as will students in the states. The students here are generally less attentive and will whine about school work and homework much more than those in the states. I don't think the lack of attentiveness has to do with gender (female teacher vs. male teacher), rather, it has to do with the social status (upper-upper class) of many of the students we are teaching.

-Sara, a middle/high school teacher

In my experience here at ASA, the students in the high school are no different than students I have taught before in the US. Being female has not presented any issues, but as is par for the course anywhere, some students need gentle reminders of appropriate behavior from time to time. There are, of course, good days and bad days, but overall I love coming to work each and every day!

-Molly, a high school teacher

**Q. What are the learning expectations held by teachers? Held by parents? Students?**

The learning expectations held by the teachers are at a very high standard and the parents follow suit for the most part. The students, like students anywhere, tend to have slightly lower expectations of themselves but are generally hard working and inquisitive when engaged in a lesson.

-a high school teacher

At ASA there is a very high standard of learning held among the students, parents, teachers, and administration. The English immersion program is difficult and demanding. It is quite a challenge to learn all the regular classroom subjects in what is, in most cases, a second language, in some cases a third language, and in few cases the first language. Because of the limited and chopped-up amount of instructional hours teachers and students spend face to face, an enormous weight is placed upon both the students who must be ready to dive into subjects as soon as they appear in the schedule, and on the teachers to be highly organized and fluid in their transitions between activities, and classes. There is also a high value placed on the cultural aspects of family time, and after school activities, especially sports. Families in Paraguay often spend entire weekends traveling among their relatives' houses to visit and eat asado. Homework can become a

lower priority than family time in these instances. As with North American high schools, sports are an integral part of the spirit and extracurricular activity at ASA. Students who are on the school teams take their practicing and their games very seriously. The culture reinforces the importance of sports, especially soccer, in almost all aspects of life. Although ASA is known for its high academic standards, sports activities can rival academics for importance in students', and parents' lives.

-Molly, an elementary school teacher

**Q. How long is the school year? When are holidays/breaks?**

The School year runs from early August to the end of June. We have 185 contact days with students during the school year. As with any school many of the days are not actual teaching days. We have one day a month set aside for community service (morning) and professional development (afternoon), as well as there being many other activities which take over individual school days throughout the year. There are three main holidays during the year: a week off for Spring Break in September/October, two months off in Dec/Jan/Feb for the summer, a week off for Semana Santa (the week before Easter). We also get the Paraguayan and US holidays off. There is a month break between the end of the school year and the start of the next (the month of July).

-Cristi, a high school teacher

**Q. How much vacation time do teachers get? What about sick leave? Personal leave?**

Our vacation matches up with the school calendar, except that we come back 3 days earlier in February and a week in July. That means that you get 2 months off in the summer (Dec/Jan/Feb), 1 month off in the winter (July), you get a week off for Spring Break (Sept/Oct) and a week off for Semana Santa (week before Easter, March/April). Each teacher gets 3 sick days and 2 personal days (subject to approval) per year. None of these days roll over for the following school year.

-Cristi, a high school teacher

## **Regarding life in Paraguay:**

**Q. Does the teacher salary cover all living expenses?**

This very much depends on your living style. If you want to live alone, like to eat out, and have bills at home, you are not going to walk away with much savings each month. Many teachers choose to have roommates, and this is a great way to cut down costs. But it also means dealing with roommates – some of us are too old for that. Food at the grocery store is quite inexpensive, if you get local stuff. You could easily spend \$100 a week if you choose to only get “American” stuff that has been imported here. Of course, eating out is one fun thing to do here, and it can add up quickly if you are not

Careful. If you share a house with some other teachers, keep the eating out down to a minimum and keep your maid down to a couple days a week, instead of full time, our salary is more than enough to cover all of your expenses. I am of course speaking as a single person who only has to pay for only myself. If you are going to try to support a whole family on one salary, it would be a very different story.

-Alison, an elementary school teacher

Yes, the salary covers all expenses. I am able to save money to pay off debt, as well as travel with my current salary.

-Brad, a high school teacher

**Q. Is quality health care accessible and available? Are pharmacies readily available?**

For me, the health care is of high quality and readily available, provided that you know where to go. It's hard to find a city block without a pharmacy!

-Paul, a middle school teacher

Yes, health care here is accessible and available. It is very easy to make an appointment with an eye doctor, dentist, general practitioner, etc. and get quick care. Pharmacies accept prescriptions from the States. Worldwide health insurance is provided. If you do happen to get sick, there are many people at school here to help you!

-Chaya, an elementary school teacher

As a local hire, private insurance through ASISMED is provided by the school, while I'm able to include my family onto the policy at a much better rate with ASA's group plan.

-Paul, a middle school teacher

**Q. Is Asuncion safe? Is Paraguay safe? Especially for a young female?**

In comparison to other capital cities in South America, Asuncion seems quite safe. There is a low level of crime, especially in safe and well-lit areas. The most common type of crime is petty in nature (stealing wallets, cameras, cell-phones, etc.). I walk to school everyday and feel very comfortable doing so. Despite being hollered or honked at every other minute, I have never felt that my safety was at risk. Some teachers travel on the bus, however the embassy does warn us against doing so. I ride on the bus occasionally, but only in a group or with a male. Each year there is news of kidnapping, but this tends to be targeted people with high social status (not American teachers).

-Kathryn, an elementary school teacher

**Q. Are foreign employees welcomed? American employees? Foreign/American tourists?**

Personally, I do not feel unwelcome at all here. Was I overwhelmed by the transition to a foreign country where the dominant language is not English? Definitely yes... Did I feel unwelcome? Definitely not. The Paraguayan staff have all been very friendly and helpful, but some of them speak little/no English. However, if you know any Spanish at all, they are very patient and understanding. They will speak slowly for you, and will enunciate more clearly knowing the accent here is very different from the Spanish most of us have learned/heard in other areas of the world.

As far as being welcomed as a tourist... I am a light-skinned and light-haired person in comparison to many Paraguayans. I attract attention on the streets, mostly in the form of staring (men are very bold) and some catcalls from construction workers (not unlike construction workers in the states) or car horn honks. My appearance makes me stand out as a foreigner, but I do not feel that I am discriminated against on a daily basis because of this. Sometimes taxi drivers will take advantage of you by pretending they do not understand what you are saying, even though your "transportation vocabulary" is perfect. One can guard against this by having several trusted taxi drivers programmed in their cell phone, and those are the taxis you call for a ride when you need one.

-Sara a middle/high school teacher

People willing to learn and grow are welcomed, regardless of their origin...teachers/tourists alike.

-an elementary school teacher

**Q. What is the culture like?**

This is a loaded question; it is hard to describe a culture. If I had to put it in a few sentences I would say it is very tight knit. Families are huge, very united, and have gatherings every weekend; friends pass traditional drinks around in circles for hours and share everything (forget about ordering your own drink or meal and keeping it to yourself); Paraguayans come together often to watch soccer games or just eat huge barbecues. Luckily for us foreigners, they include us in these traditions and love sharing their culture.

-Jacqueline, a high school teacher

**Q. What is the weather like in Asuncion? How hot does it get?**

The weather here seems to be at the extremes. Our first winter (2009) was very cold, in the 40's. That doesn't seem so bad, however, there is no indoor heating in most places and the buildings are concrete. There is not really an escape from the cold until it gets warmer. On the other side of the spectrum, Asuncion gets very hot. I was teaching

previously in Honduras, and it gets much hotter here in Paraguay than it did there. The weather can be very humid at times as well, which doesn't help! However, the strong heat doesn't seem to last more than a few days at a time, when a storm comes in and cools it off a little bit. Most houses/apartments have pools, so the heat isn't so bad if there is at least relief in the form of water. It does make exercising outside a bit of a challenge at times. Our school year presents us with ample vacation or travel opportunities to leave Asuncion during the hottest part of the year (January and February), so I personally have not been present in Asuncion during that time yet.

-Jenna, an elementary school teacher

It's an endless summer! You get to lay by the pool almost the entire year... and the air conditioner will be your best friend around Christmas.

-Alex, a high school teacher

**Q. What is the social life like both at the school and local community?**

The Paraguayan staff is very friendly and welcoming. Most tend to remain in their positions longer than international hires. This makes for an interesting and diverse staff. New, incoming staff can most definitely find a niche to accommodate their social life preferences.

The local community is more difficult to become a part of for the international hire. Most foreigners tend to stand out in a crowd and might never fully fit into the community. However, Paraguayans are some of the most friendly people once you talk and get to know them, you can create some strong bonds of friendship. Being able to communicate is important, so practice your Spanish :)

-Amy, a middle school teacher

Teachers who live in the Greater Asuncion areas have many social outlets. If you are interested in Arts and Music there is a Gran Teatro located down the street from school. If it is sports that you crave, there are 11 football clubs who play in the area and games seem to take place almost daily. Or if it is dancing and nightlife that you desire, there are many places located right off our school's main street that can satisfy you.

-David, a high school teacher

ASA is a very friendly and laid back place to work. The elementary, middle school and high school are generally separated physically, but some of the shared facilities (cantina, library, multipurpose room) allow for frequent interactions with staff from the whole school. There are "asados" that bring the staff together informally, and people often socialize with each other outside of school. There is definitely a division between Paraguayan hires and foreign hires in terms of how they interact. It seems mostly to do with language differences and maybe the transience of foreign hires. In the community,

there are bars, restaurants, movies, theaters, and parks where there are opportunities to socialize with local Paraguayans. Generally, Paraguay is a very safe place to do all of this socializing.

-Steve, a high school teacher

**Q. What about language barriers? Since I speak limited Spanish, will that be a problem?**

I would say that my limited Spanish that I came down with has been sufficient. Now, I would love to have time to learn more (and I'm hoping that will come more in the 2nd year), but I can easily say that I am quite comfortable around town (and traveling for 5 weeks all throughout South America) with the Spanish I do know. The students generally revert back to Spanish to explain things or to communicate with each other and as long as it is appropriate language, I don't mind. Also, I have noticed recently that my Spanish has gotten better just from traveling and forcing myself to go to different places around town, but on a day-to-day basis in the classroom I don't get to practice and/or use any Spanish.

-Molly, a high school teacher

Speaking limited Spanish can be a challenge, but it is still super easy to navigate your way through life in Asuncion. If you come to Paraguay with a few key phrases, you should be good to go! There are many native Spanish speakers on campus who are more than willing to provide classes for you!

-Chaya, an elementary school teacher

**Q. I don't speak any Spanish? What will I need to do in order to have lessons?**

The first week or two that you are here there will be a basic Spanish class offered which should help you get down a few of the basics. I came in knowing no Spanish at all, and that class helped me to start to hear the basic sounds and be able greet people. Because all of the new teachers have the same class, regardless of their incoming Spanish level, it will not be useful for everyone. After orientation is over it is up to each teacher to set up individual tutoring on their own. There is not a lot of guidance on how to do this, but speaking with other teachers at the school can give you an idea of who may be available. Lessons are cheap (I pay \$10 an hour) and you can get quite a bit out of one-on-one tutoring. I have two lessons a week and after two months have found that I am to the point of being able to hold a conversation (badly).

-Cristi, a high school teacher

**Q. Are living conditions similar to here in the States or what can I expect? What are living arrangements like? Is housing clean? Available? Is it wise to live with roommates? Is furniture provided?**

When I moved to Paraguay, I had few expectations. My yearly earnings in the USA were lower than my salary here, and the dollar does not go nearly as far in the states as it does here in Paraguay. I have found living here to be luxurious compared to my living arrangements in the states. Not everyone will experience this though, as many stateside salaries are much higher than mine was.

Housing/Furnishings: Construction here, in general, is not of the quality you would expect in the states. I do not know this for sure, but I doubt there are governing bodies of inspectors to ensure that the wiring and the plumbing are completed properly and construction is being done in an OSHA approved manner. This can cause problems, like leaking roofs and wall plugs that spark. But everything works. If you want to furnish a house/apartment cheaply, this is very easy. There are plenty of places to purchase items that are inexpensive and useful, but keep in mind that you get what you pay for, and cheap items may break or wear out easily. If you are looking for good quality furnishings, they are available, but are expensive.

In general, as long as one keeps in mind the adage "you get what you pay for", living here in Paraguay will be relatively simple.

-Sara, a middle/high school teacher

My current living situation is excellent. The house is large and comfortable. We have a maid, therefore it stays reasonably clean. Just like in the States, if you want to save some money, live with roommates. If you want your privacy and don't mind spending more money, live alone. Both options are available. In most cases, you have to pay extra for the furniture that is currently in the house or for new items.

-Brad, a high school teacher

Originally, I was slated to live with my wife and two children in a 3 bedroom apartment that I agreed to after seeing pictures sent by the liaison. The apartment was, in reality, in poor condition with unacceptable furnishings. Fortunately, an alternate housing arrangement was found, that in fact was an unfurnished house that was much more suitable for my family. We lost a \$600.00 deposit with the first apartment, and had to set up a house from scratch, but in the end, we are satisfied with the house and the location. The utilities and expenses have turned out to be higher than we expected, so as a family living on one salary, it has been financially tight. Housing has turned out to be our largest expense. It would be unlikely to find a lower priced house and expenses in such close proximity to the school. So, we are struggling to find a solution to this challenge. We love our house, but can't seem to afford it.

-Steve, a high school teacher

**Q. Was the transition easy or difficult? How was the move?**

The transition to living in another country was not difficult for me, but getting used to the new school system and ways of doing things was a challenge. The elementary schedule was different from what I was used to in the states. Each day of the week the students have a different schedule. Getting used to an aide in the classroom was a new challenge as well as understanding the process for making copies, getting supplies, and understanding the technology procedures and quirks.

I had communicated with other teachers before coming down to Paraguay so I felt comfortable about knowing exactly what to bring and what things I would have to purchase for my house. If you speak Spanish this will be not be a problem to figure out once you get down here. If you will need help buying household items, I would recommend doing it as soon as possible when you arrive. Once all the teachers are required to be back in the classroom there is no one really available to help you and take you around the city.

-Danielle, an elementary school teacher

The school offered plenty of help to get us acquainted with working & living here. Still, it was my first international school and a big change. At work, the most difficult transition was teaching a new population of kids with a different culture and a language I didn't understand (but I do now). At home, it took several months to find all the things I needed for my house.

-Chris, a high school teacher

**Q. How is the food? What does the local diet mainly consist of?**

The food is largely meat and starch based in Paraguay with few greens in the diet. Salads are simple and consist of lettuce and tomato mainly or there are bean salads and even rice salads. When you ask for a "legumbre" (vegetable) sandwich at a restaurant, it will come with egg, lettuce, and tomato because few could imagine eating a sandwich with only veggies. Many foods are greasy such as sopa and chipa guazu, an oven-baked cornbread, and the classic tortilla which many Hispanic countries have (here it is flour-based not corn based and has queso paraguayo - Paraguayan cheese - in it). Sunday barbeques are a norm, with red meat the staple and sometimes chicken and pork on the grill. Meat is not heavily condimented, and salt is the staple spice here. Manioc (cassava) is the side dish here, not rice or potatoes. Snack foods include a variety of empanadas - meat, chicken, ham and cheese - served, interestingly enough, with a bread bun on the side. Lomitos, a sandwich on hamburger buns with a thinly filleted slice of meat, pork, or chicken, is the fast-food of choice, almost always with lettuce and tomato and extra trimmings include ham, cheese, and egg. The lower socio-economic classes prepare tallarin, a rice and meat mix (like a goulash) with tomato sauce and a few veggies and bori bori, a soup with large chunks of meat, veggies, and potatoes but with the added ingredient of mandioca dough balls.

-Russell, a high school teacher

If you are a carnivore, Paraguay is paradise. The local cuisine centers around meat, delicious meat of all kinds. Beef is usually the center point, and it is usually grilled. Paraguayans are experts in their knowledge and enjoyment of different cuts of meat, and different preparations of meat. Although pork and chicken are also plentiful, beef is the most important dish at any gathering. Vegetarians do not despair. Almost all asados, or barbeques, include various salads, and delicious local dishes made from corn flour. There are a variety of restaurants that cater to almost any palate, including Italian, Mexican, and Asian food restaurants. The ingredients for any food you may wish to make from scratch are available. The only things in short supply are obscure spices, and canned or prepared foods. The frozen food section is pretty skimpy in most grocery stores. You can find almost anything here, but if there's something you really can't live without, learn how to make it, or bring the most important ingredient with your. For instance, if you love Indian food, bring curry spices, but rice and good vegetables are widely available.

-Molly, an elementary school teacher

**Q. What are the local past times?**

Soccer, drinking terere, eating a fantastic asado, soccer, a few other sports such as basketball and volleyball are played by a minority, and then more soccer.

-a high school teacher

Soccer is not only a sport but a national passion; when the two biggest teams play, the country gets divided. When the Albirroja (the national team) plays, the country stops and everything revolves around games. People are very social, and like to eat asadito (barbecue) or drink tereré (ice cold yerba mate tea) with friends.

-Alex, a high school teacher

**Q. What do people do on the weekends?**

Going out to eat is very popular, as there are lots of good, relatively inexpensive restaurants. There are also lots of bars and dance clubs, though at some of the more popular places, you have to be careful that you don't run into the ASA high school students there. It is very difficult to travel on a regular weekend, since Asuncion is basically in the middle of nowhere, and flights to the closest cool cities (Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro) are expensive. If you don't have a car, it is difficult to even go anywhere within Paraguay for a weekend, though it is possible, if you do some research on the best bus schedule. Renting a car is also an option, (though expensive) if you have an international driver's license (available from AAA).

-Alison, an elementary school teacher

There's not much beyond the city & outskirts, so most people stay in the area. We usually go out to dinner, as restaurants are cheap and plentiful. Soccer games dominate Sunday the way football does in the US. It's not for everyone, but those who go (like myself)

really enjoy watching soccer. There are parks, gyms, community service opportunities, and plenty of shopping, from pricey import stores to local craft markets.

-Chris, a high school teacher

### **Q. What are prices like? How do they compare with the US?**

**Food:** Produce is very affordable and high quality depending on where you shop. Cheese and meat are comparable to US prices in many places you will shop. The quality of the meat is very good. The varieties and quality of the cheese is not what we are accustomed to in the states - very little variety is available here. Going out to eat is less expensive than a comparable meal in the states.

**Entertainment/Luxuries:** Going out to a club for an evening of dancing and partying costs considerable less than it would in the states, but of course, this will also depend on how much alcohol one drinks. Services are also very affordable here, but the quality of services is usually not the same as the states. A manicure or pedicure here is about \$6-8 USD. But the quality is not as good as what you would get in the states. An hour of massage is about \$10-16 USD. But the massage may not be as thorough as one you would get in the states. Spending a day at the spa can cost \$60-80 USD for several hours of relaxation. It is a relaxing way to spend a Saturday, but it won't be the same quality as a \$500 day at the spa in the US.

-Sara, a middle/high school teacher

Overall Asuncion is pretty cheap to live in compared to the US. I am able to easily live off of \$500 a month. To give you an idea here are some prices in the local currency. The current exchange rate is approximately \$1 = 5000Gs. (You can always check the current exchange rate at [xe.com](http://xe.com))

#### **Food**

bread(sliced sandwich loaf) 7,550Gs  
eggs 3,450Gs/half dozen  
milk 3,600Gs/liter  
rice 3,000Gs/Kg  
sugar 3,720Gs/Kg  
flour 2,500Gs/Kg  
apples 8,300Gs/Kg  
tomatoes 6,500Gs/Kg  
chicken (breast. skinned) 22,000Gs/Kg  
beef (bola de lomo) 26,000Gs/Kg  
mozzarella cheese 25,000Gs/Kg  
gouda cheese 48,000Gs/Kg  
coca cola 580Gs/liter  
bottle of wine (nice) 53,000Gs

#### **Toiletries**

contact solution 90,000Gs

Pantene shampoo/conditioner 20,000Gs/400ml

toothpaste 12,204Gs

toilet paper (4 rolls) 16,740Gs

**Other items**

bus ride in the city 2,100Gs

10 minute taxi ride 13,000Gs

gym membership (with special classes) 300,000Gs per month

-Cristi, a high school teacher

## Regarding moving to Asuncion

### **Q. What type of clothing should I bring for work and casual wear?**

Professional dress is expected of all the teachers. Though the classrooms have air conditioning, the humidity and heat can be hard to escape throughout the day. That is taken into consideration for the dress code. Women can wear sandals and open toed shoes and dress tank tops are also appropriate and a necessity for hot days. Light weight cotton skirts and dresses seem to popular on hot days as well. Guys cannot wear shorts and usually are in dress pants and dress shirt. A tie is not necessary. Jeans are not part of the dress code and there are no dress down Fridays! There are always a few theme days and school spirit days throughout the year to make up for it though!

-Danielle, an elementary school teacher

About two months of the work year are cold and there is little to no heating in most buildings; you should come prepared with enough warm clothes to last you through those two months. Maybe not a large winter coat but a fleece, warm shoes, scarves, and mittens would be a good idea.

For the other 90% of the time, it is very very hot and humid. For work, bring clothes that look nice but you are also comfortable in. For girls, lots of light dresses and loose fitting dress tops with skirts are a good idea. Most of the female teachers wear dressy sandals. For men, short sleeve light polos and slack shorts.

For casual wear, again anything that is comfortable. Bring extra shorts, shirts, dresses, and t-shirts as it is possible you will sweat through a few in any given day. If you like to go out at night, people here get very dressed up so keep that in mind. And of course, lots of flip-flops!

-Jacqueline, a high school teacher

### **Q. What can I find here? What do I need to bring with me?**

You won't find many English books here but our school library has quite a few good titles. If you wear contact lenses bring PLENTY of solution with you because it is outrageously expensive here. There are plenty of places to find clothes at a good price,

but if you wear an odd size or are particularly tall you might have some difficulty. I believe that tampons would be advisable to bring with you as well.

-a high school teacher

In my opinion, you can find everything you need to live in Paraguay, but you might not find everything you want! I would recommend sending an email to the teacher you are replacing or to your fellow housemates you will be moving in with. Everyone has a "you must bring" list when giving recommendations to other teachers for housing and for school supplies. I would say to bring anything that is a specific brand you cannot live without (face lotions, allergy medicine, brand of tampons, bedding, favorite books, cooking spices, etc...)

-Danielle, an elementary school teacher

I was quite surprised when I got here at what you could find easily around town...I was especially surprised to see shopping malls. With that being said though, one thing I wish someone had reminded me of when I was packing was that I was actually moving here. For some reason, that concept really didn't sink in and I only brought what I thought were essential items. But in hindsight, I would have brought a lot more that first time especially since you have the moving stipend...USE IT! So, I would bring any and all clothes you realistically would wear. You'll need cold weather, cool weather, warm weather, and HOT weather clothes, shoes, and accessories. Also, bring anything that you would want as far as comfort items for your home. That may be photos or wall hangings, but chances are you'll want some reminders of home. Additionally, toiletries are all readily available, but some things are more expensive than others and it pays to bring extras. Contact solution is something that I would bring with you. It is more expensive here and the bottles are smaller. Also, feminine hygiene items limited so if you have a preference you should bring what you prefer.

As far as school items go, I would recommend bringing a plan book. I also really prefer to have hard-backed legal pads which I could not find anywhere here. The school has white board markers, but they dry out relatively quickly so I brought back EXPO markers with me at Christmas time. Other than that, I was fine on the school front. Really, things have been great and any adjustments I've had to make have either made things better and easier or shown me that I can survive (and love!) teaching abroad.

-Molly, a high school teacher

Clothing: I have found clothing and shoes to be expensive here, and the quality is not comparable to the states. Shopping in stores can be frustrating, because they have fewer sizes and styles available, which may or may not fit you. The other option is to have a seamstress make clothing specifically for you. This is often more affordable, and the seamstresses are usually able to copy something from a photo and tailor it to you.

-Sara, a middle/high school teacher

To work you should wear closed toed shoes with shorts and or pants that are both professional and comfortable. Remember to try and wear colors that support our school; red, white, and blue.

-David, a physical education teacher

## **Regarding Keeping in Contact with Family and Friends**

**Q. What are the easiest ways to communicate with family back in the States? Which of these is the least expensive?**

Skype is the best and cheapest way to talk on the phone to people at home. If friends and family at home also have Skype, it is free, and if they don't, you can call to landlines or cell phones for 2 cents a minute. It does require you to pay for more expensive internet here, (the cheap internet isn't fast enough), but it is well worth it. Even with the fast internet, if you live with roommates, it is possible that only one of you can be on Skype at a time in order for it to work optimally.

-Alison, an elementary school teacher

Skype is the easiest way to communicate. It is free, unless you call a land-line phone, which then costs around 2 cents per minute.

-Brad, a high school teacher

**Q. What about communicating with people in Paraguay or other areas of South America? Are cell phones a feasible way of communicating within Paraguay and other parts of South America?**

Cell phones are the best way to communicate. Everyone owns a cell phone--or two.

-Alex, a high school teacher

**Q. Is the mail system reliable? Can packages be easily received/sent?**

You can send mail out through the local Paraguayan postal service and it arrives to the US between 2-3 weeks; it is pretty reliable. You can have mail/packages sent to you but you will have to go downtown to the post office to pick it up. Otherwise, you can have mail sent to you at ASA (by having it sent first to the Miami address) but you have to pay \$7 per pound and this is taken directly out of your paycheck. Finally, you can have cards or letters sent directly to your house but there's no telling how long it will take to arrive.

-Jacqueline, a high school teacher

The school's mail system, although expensive, seems very reliable. From my experience, I have mail sent to the Asuncion mail service (as long as there are no valuables inside) and a member from the school's business office will retrieve the package and deliver it to my office for a fraction of the cost.

-David, a high school teacher

### **Q. How easy is it to have family or friends visit?**

Family is family, but friends (or travel-wary family) were difficult to convince. There are both real and imagined barriers that discourage people from coming. The real ones include the long, multi-flight trip, the cost, the need for a visa, and possibly immunizations. I also think people are reluctant to visit because Paraguay is not a place that anyone ever planned on going. Most would-be visitors can't even find Paraguay on a map, so naturally they wonder what on earth they'd DO here.

-Chris, a high school teacher

I have had one friend visit and unfortunately he had to endure many layovers and flight changes to finally get here. Once he arrived it was amazing how much sightseeing we were able to do. As for my family, they have yet to visit, but there is still hope.

-David, a high school teacher

## **Regarding Travel**

### **Q. How easy is it to travel? How often can you travel either within Paraguay or possibly to Argentina? Do groups of teachers go together? Where all do teachers travel to?**

It is fairly easy to travel throughout South America, but is becoming more and more pricey with the Visas required for Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. They range from \$60-140. Our salary and time off allows for ample travel, but status and dependents dictate that ultimately. Even with the language barrier, I find it easy to navigate as many know English. Depending on the time of year, I would say about once every three months because there is an extended break of about 1-8 weeks in every time period. At first, teachers will travel together, but after some time they travel in smaller groups (2-3) as their goals change. Many travel to the large touristy place like Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, Machu Pichu, Punta del Este, or Patagonia. Beaches seem to be a pretty come feature because the lack of them in Paraguay.

-Adam, a high school teacher