

International Trips Resume in Guatemala

In August 2022, a team of nine optometry students and four doctors embarked on the first Enfoque Ixcán/AMIGOS international eye care mission trip since the pandemic.

"We had no idea what to expect going in, but this trip exceeded our expectations and more. The beauty of Guatemala and the kindness of the people was more than enough for each of us to want to go back," said Mary Avisado, OD '24 and AMIGOS President.

Over four days, the team was able to serve 755 individuals from the Ixcán region and provide free eye exams, prescription eyeglasses, sunglasses, and more.

"I will never forget the patient that came in with the biggest smile on his face and the most heart-lifting spirit. He was extremely grateful throughout the entirety of the exam, and even more grateful when we gave him his glasses," said Josh Fleegel, OD '24.

Part of the mission of AMIGOS Eye Care is to serve underprivileged communities throughout the world and provide a clinical experience that brings these inequalities and disparities in health care to light.

"I will never forget the one gentleman we helped on this trip. He entered the clinic accompanied by his family members because he could barely see. He was an older man and



at his age, the loss of vision could be easily thought to be due to cataracts, pterygium, or other eye disorders common in the area. We found the best glasses prescription for him, but were surprised that his overall eye health was relatively normal considering his extremely poor vision at the start.

At the end of his exam, we escorted him to the optical station where he could get a new pair of glasses. When he tried them on and looked at his family members, he began crying because it was the first time he was able to see their faces. He immediately hugged our team members and expressed how thankful he was that we came and made time to see him. It was then that I realized that we can change a person's life in seconds through the simple services that we provide. We would not have traded this experience for anything in the world. This trip was a bittersweet reminder of the inequalities and disparities that continue to exist in health care and AMIGOS Eye Care is eager to help Enfoque Ixcán work towards a better future."

AMIGOS Eye Care plans to return to Ecuador, Guatemala, Belize, and Senegal in the near future.