



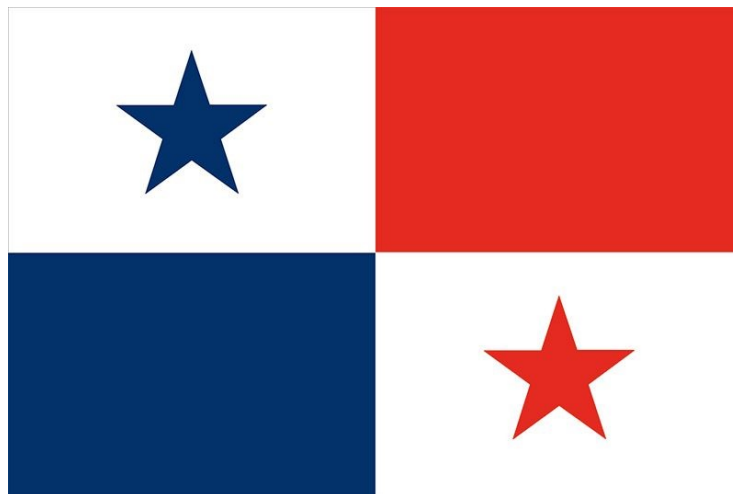
Trip Information Packet

to

Panama

**High School Students in Southwest
Washington**

Spring Break: March 28– April 6th, 2025





Welcome to Courts for Kids. Most likely, this is your first trip with our organization and we are confident that this trip will impact you in ways you cannot even imagine. We work closely with our in-country partner to make sure your basic needs are met, so we can all focus on the task at hand, creating a multi-purpose sports court with the initiative, help and support of the community.

A sports court is a great project because it requires the help of many community members, provides plenty of work for everyone, and becomes an asset that provides not only safe places for children to play, but also various other benefits. The hard work of our team will be a great bridge between us and the community and we will develop a mutual respect that will help provide inroads into a rich cross-cultural experience and first-hand insight into a developing world community.

We are looking for great cultural ambassadors, so please only sign up for this trip if you are willing to step outside of your comfort zone. You will need to work hard, you will be eating different foods, sleeping and bathing in less comfortable environments. But, as they say, if you want to live like you're in America, why leave?

Most importantly, we ask that you enter into this with a great sense of humility. We want you to be eager to learn and grow in this process as we are entering into a different culture with different values and norms. We want you be quick to listen and slow to speak.

We will not be giving you a detailed itinerary as things are very prone to change with this sort of construction project. But your time will be spent working on the court, taking part in various cultural activities and, most importantly, connecting with the locals.

Please look through this informational packet and feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.

If you choose to go, I can almost guarantee you will look back on this trip as a life-changing experience. You will grow so much in a week it will make you wish you could stay longer. In fact, you will probably say this was the best week of your year.

Hope you can come!

Derek Nesland
President
Courts for Kids

Community Information

Río Sereno is located in the province of Chiriqui in the Republic of Panama. Río Sereno is the “cabecera,” or capital, of the district of Renacimiento. As of 2023, the population of Río Sereno is 6,109 people. The locals enjoy going to the lake in Río Sereno, as it is a common park and attraction for the local residents to relax and celebrate holidays. There are two schools located in Río Sereno- One is the elementary school which is PreK-6th grade, and the other is the high school, grades 7th-12th grade.

Río Sereno has a humid, tropical climate and has two seasons: dry and wet. The dry season is from December-March while the rainy season is from April-November. The altitude of Río Sereno is 3,353 feet above sea level. Due to the altitude and the volcanic origin, the soil is very fertile and suitable for the production of coffee, bananas, tomatoes, vegetables, corn, beans, and other crops. Coffee is the main product of Río Sereno. Most food is grown, raised, and cooked in the home consisting of rice, beans, plantains, and a type of meat. A local dish in Río Sereno is tamales, made from corn and local vegetables.



There is a large indigenous population in Río Sereno that will fluctuate throughout the year. During the coffee harvest, starting in August, more indigenous individuals will make their way to Río Sereno and surrounding communities to work in the coffee fields. They come to Río Sereno with their entire family to work and live in the fields. However, some individuals will work permanently in some farms year round. There are many cultural celebrations in Río Sereno, as well as festivals and parties for holidays. The community loves to embrace their culture with dances, music, and activities. Locals in Río Sereno are also working with the Peace Corps to combat deforestation in the community. Therefore, they are planting trees and building ecological stoves to replace cooking on open flames.

Your group will be met at the airport by the Courts for Kids Panama Country Director who lives in Panama and has been working closely with the

community to plan all aspects of your visit. We will be staying in a community building sleeping on mattresses on the floor. The court will also be built at the school and will be used by the entire community. Many times it will be a place where the community will gather to dance and hold celebrations and ceremonies. We will work side-by-side with the locals and although it will be challenging there are jobs for everyone of every physical capacity. During the whole trip we will be fully immersed in the local culture eating authentic food, learning local traditions, customs, and way of life. It is important to note that this court will be built with the community not for the community. The community members are very motivated to make their court a reality and from the beginning, they have been the driving factor planning this project to see it come to fruition.



*More specific lodging, packing, and trip logistics will be provided as the departure date gets closer.

**Please note, the destination community is subject to change at the discretion of Courts for Kids in order to best meet the needs and safety of the volunteer group as well as the needs of the host community.

Funding Responsibilities

Everyone in your group will contribute to the total project costs.
Each participant will be required to fundraise/donate this amount:

\$2,700

100% of all donations are fully tax deductible

All funds raised are applied to court construction costs and the following group expenses:

- Round trip airfare (award points cannot be used)
- In-country costs (food, water, lodging, and transportation)
- Entrance/exit fees
- Emergency medical insurance
- Special activities
- Chaperone expenses
- Court construction costs (in addition to your giving, the host community also contributes making this court a reality).

Does not include: passport, immunizations, travel to and from the US airport, food or incidental costs on layovers and delays, or spending money for souvenirs.

**All donations are non-refundable (unless the entire project is canceled by Courts for Kids, funds will be refunded less non-recoverable costs). If you raise/donate more than the above amount, you can choose to apply the excess to passport or immunization costs (must submit receipts), the court construction costs, sports equipment, toward the balance of another trip participant or towards Courts for Kids in general. You will not be eligible for any other refunds or reimbursements due to IRS regulations.*

Scholarship Opportunities

Courts for Kids is committed to providing opportunities for every student, regardless of income. If you are facing financial hardship and/or qualify for free/reduced lunch in the school district in which you live (regardless of what school you go to), we encourage you to apply to our program.

If awarded a Courts for Kids scholarship half of your trip costs will be covered and you will be expected to fundraise the other half.

Information and Applications for Scholarships can be found on our website at:

<https://www.courtsforkids.org/scholarships/>

The participant must apply for a scholarship **within the first month** of registering for the trip.

A special thank you to all the Courts for Kids donors who have made this scholarship fund possible.

Trip Checklist

1. You must register with Courts for Kids here (find your trip registration here):

<https://www.courtsforkids.org/upcoming-trips>

Deadline to register is November 1st. Spots are first come, first serve for 22 students.

2. **Passport:** Make sure you have a passport that will not expire before **October 6th, 2025**. If you need a passport, go to the nearest post office for assistance. **In order to avoid the headache and stress, make sure you get your passport on time, do it ASAP.**

3. **Fundraising deadlines:**

- **Deposit of \$300 when registering— deadline to register is November 1st or until sold out**

- **1st amount of \$800 by December 20th, 2024**

- **2nd amount of \$800 by January 28th, 2025**

- **3rd amount of \$800 or remaining balance by February 28th, 2025**

** All donations are non-refundable unless the entire project is canceled by Courts for Kids, in which case funds will be refunded minus unrecoverable costs.*

3. **Vaccinations:** The recommended vaccinations for travel to Panama according to the Center for Disease Control are the following (**keep in mind these are recommended, not required. Check with your local doctor and make the decision best for you**):

a. Routine (DPT, MMR, Polio) and COVID-19—all travelers

b. Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Typhoid—most travelers

c. Rabies and malaria—some travelers

Note: Yellow Fever vaccine is not recommended for this area of Panama, as this community is west of the canal.

4. Students must attend **mandatory Courts for Kids pre-trip training on Sunday, February 2nd, from 1-4 pm** (more information will be sent once the group is solidified) and parents/guardians are **required** to watch the **Parent Informational meeting** which is posted on the website.

Flight Itinerary

American Airline Flight Itinerary*

(Award points cannot be used)

Date	Fl. #	Airport	Dep.	Airport	Arrival
March 28	2889	Portland	11:15 pm	Miami	7:50 am on the 29th
March 29	1407	Miami	10:05 am	Panama City	12:32 pm
April 6	0959	Panama City	1:55 pm	Miami	5:55 pm
April 6	2888	Miami	7:30 pm	Portland	11:00 pm

You are eligible for frequent flier miles on American Airlines. To enroll go to www.aa.com

*Flights and carrier are subject to change

Trip Safety

Courts for Kids makes your safety our number one priority. Being in a safe, tight knit community with strong awareness and ownership of the project will provide local people who will be personally invested in the safety of the team. Courts for Kids also has safety protocols in place that include, but are not limited to:

- A **Courts for Kids representative will lead the group** while in the destination country.
- We always contract **private transportation** to pick up and return the group to the in-country airport.
- We have a **strict behavior and conduct policy** for all trip participants which promotes the safety and security of the group. All participants are required to attend a **mandatory training**.
- We have **secure transportation** available to medical facilities in the case of any injuries.
- We will have a **first aid kit** with the group at all times.
- We only drink **clean, potable water**.
- We work with community cooks to adhere to our **Safe Cooking Practices**.
- We monitor the **US State Department** travel warnings and make travel adjustments as deemed necessary.
- We require all volunteers to be disconnected for the entirety of the trip. No cell phones will be allowed once in country.
- **Insurance coverage** for all trip participants that includes evacuation with a medical escort in a worst case situation. Policy details can be provided upon request.
- A **Child Protection Policy** which includes background checks for all adults traveling in a group where minors are present.
- Courts for Kids may conduct a **behavioral background check** through a student's school and reserves the right to refuse a participant based on the information we receive.

Safety is a team effort and every trip participant is responsible for their behavior, must use common sense while traveling, and comply with Courts for Kids representatives and trip leaders at all times.

Contact Information

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<https://www.courtsforkids.org/>

Tax ID number- 20-8332371

Fundraising Help

Online Appeal

Personal Fundraising Page: Upon registration, you will receive a personal fundraising page and an email with instructions on how to customize it. Come up with a list of friends and family members to send it to (use the sample on the next page for an idea). Once somebody donates, it will show up immediately in your registration page.

Venmo Appeal

Courts for Kids is on Venmo. Be sure your donors include BOTH your name and what project you are on (name of your school and country you are going to). Please give at least a week for donations from Venmo to be updated to your registration.



venmo

Snail Mail Support Letters

- Not everyone feels comfortable yet giving online or via Venmo and this is a great way to reach those who don't.
- Come up with a list of friends and family members who might support you on this trip. Don't rule people out too quickly. You will be very surprised at who will support you. Get their addresses. .
- Type up a support letter for people to make a tax-deductible donation on your behalf (use the sample on the next page for an idea).
- Send the letter, pledge card and a return-addressed envelope (to your house) to everyone on your list.
IMPORTANT- Get this letter out ASAP to make sure you get your support raised in time.
- Make sure people give you checks made out to Courts for Kids. When you receive a check, make sure and send them a thank you card. Next send the check **and the response card** to Courts for Kids. (see page 6 for our address or look on our website).

Other ideas

- If applicable, see if your home church, service club, or other organization will sponsor you.
- Do a game night, movie night, adult prom, Zumba-thon, father –daughter dance, Bunco party or another fun event and sell tickets.
- Solicit donations you can sell in a garage sale, silent auction, online auction, or raffle.
- Make a craft, shirt, or food item that you can sell.
- Some companies have donation matching programs and will match donations employees make to nonprofits such as Courts for Kids. You can check if a company has a donation matching program here:
<http://www.matchinggifts.com/search/rit>
- Be creative, go online– there are many fundraising ideas out there!

(IT IS BEST TO REWRITE THIS LETTER ADDING YOUR OWN WORDS TO GIVE IT A PERSONAL TOUCH. USE THE FOLLOWING AS A GUIDE)

Today's Date

Dear *(personalize it by adding their name here),*

I am excited to share with you about an upcoming service project in *{insert country}* this upcoming *{month of trip}* through Courts for Kids. I need to raise *{amount needed to raise}* in order to participate so I am asking friends and family members to consider helping out with a tax-deductible contribution.

We will travel to *{insert country}* and make our way to *{insert a couple sentences of community information from the site details page of the packet}*. This community applied to Courts for Kids for assistance in building a multi-use athletic court, which is where I come in. I want to help make this vision a reality for the community but need some help. I am raising money not only for travel costs but also for construction materials, as well.

Our primary project will be to build this court, but we will also take part in other service and cultural learning activities as well. Our primary purpose for going is to serve the local community, but also to grow and learn as we get out of our comfort zone. We will be staying in relatively primitive conditions within the community and will be eating the local food the entire time. This is definitely not a touristy trip, but I am excited for the change I am sure will happen in my life and the impact we can have.

{If you have the space, enter a personal story of why this trip is significant for you}

Would you consider supporting me as well as the local community in this project? I need to raise *{amount needed to raise}* for this trip to be possible. If you are interested, please make a check out to **Courts for Kids** and return it in the enclosed envelope. Could you please return this envelope as soon as possible in order to make sure I hand everything in with enough time to spare? Your donation is **tax-deductible** and **100%** of what you give will go directly to this trip.

Sincerely,

{Your signature and name}