

Puentes/Bridges Agricultural Immersion Trips

Each late fall Puentes/Bridges takes a small group of U.S. farmers who have Mexican employees to Mexico to experience the food, language, culture, agriculture, and current concerns and problems of their employees and their families.

As the number of Mexican workers in the Midwest's dairy and other agricultural industries continues to swell, employers are more and more interested in learning to communicate better with their employees, and to understand their culture and concerns. Employees in turn are highly appreciative of these efforts, and it shows in better work relations and productivity. Dairy farmer and now Puentes board member John Rosenow said, "Since I went on the Puentes trip, my employees view me as someone who cares and is interested in them as people. They are doing their jobs better and they stay longer."

The 10-day trip includes a three-day family stay while taking intensive Spanish language classes; visits to a variety of farms, historical, and archeological sites; lectures from experts in Mexican culture, history, and immigration issues; and the opportunity to visit the families and communities of your employees. There's also the wonderful experience of seeing Mexico "off the beaten path," and enjoying the food, music, and people of rural areas and small towns. You'll learn to shop at a Mexican street market, see the tiny cheese factories that dot rural areas, talk with Mexican farmers about the daily problems they deal with, and get to know the people you're traveling with – other employers of Mexican workers who are also interested in understanding and helping their employees.

There's nothing else like it.

"The trip was a fun-filled, educational, and emotional 10 days . . . The Mexican culture is a beautiful mix of old and new and one from which we can learn much. This trip provided me with a unique experience that I will never forget." – Susan Nagy, 2003 Puentes/Bridges trip participant.

Depending on outside funding, the cost of the trip is approximately \$2,000 per person and includes air fare from the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport; all lodging, tours, lectures, and classes; and some meals. Donations from agricultural businesses and organizations have in the past made possible substantial reductions in this cost.

Participants fly into Mexico City and then travel by van to Cuernavaca, home of the Cemanahuac Language School, the home base for Puentes/Bridges in Mexico. This provides an easy jumping-off point for tours of the region's farms and historical sites, as well as language classes either at the school or at its satellite location in Buena Vista, about an hour away. The last few days of the trip are devoted to traveling to the home villages of participant's employees. The welcome received by trip participants from these families on previous trips has been overwhelming.

“They were waiting for us, dressed in their very best clothes, and they started taking pictures as soon as we stepped out of the van. We went down a steep bank to the house, where maybe two dozen parents, aunts, uncles, wives, kids, and neighbors seated us in the spotless house and served an elaborate meal . . . I couldn’t understand what they said, but there were some tears. Shaun said later they were saying how much they missed their sons and husbands, how grateful they were to John (who employed the men), and how the government gave them no help. Then we went for a walk, led by all the kids in their Sunday best . . .” – Ann Hansen, 2004 trip participant

For dates and additional information on upcoming trips, please contact Shaun Judge Duvall at Puentes by calling (608) 685-4705 or e-mailing shaunjd@tds.net.