

mrp

Participant Guide

Blue Creek, Belize 2025



maya

RESEARCH PROGRAM

For more information call 817-831-9011 or email mrpinquiries@gmail.com

Introduction to MRP

The Maya Research Program (MRP) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to advancing archaeological and ethnographic research across Middle America. Since its founding in 1992, MRP has spearheaded annual summer research initiatives, focusing on archaeological excavations in northwestern Belize and ethnographic studies in the community of Yaxunah, Mexico. Central to MRP's efforts is the Blue Creek Archaeological Project, which investigates several key Maya sites, including Blue Creek, Grey Fox, Nojol Nah, Tulix Mul, Tz'unun, and Xnoha. You can explore MRP publications here: <http://mayaresearchprogram.org/styled-3/MRP%20publications.html>

Since 1992, MRP has been instrumental in documenting, preserving, and interpreting numerous Maya sites in northwestern Belize. To date, more than 3,000 students and volunteers from around the globe have participated in its projects, contributing to groundbreaking discoveries and fostering a deeper understanding of Maya civilization. The current Blue Creek research team includes faculty members and graduate students from over a dozen universities worldwide, with institutional affiliation through the University of Texas at Tyler. The Blue Creek Archaeological Project operates under the permit of the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) of Belize.

The MRP boasts a diverse team of accomplished scientists, many of whom are recognized as leaders in their fields. MRP's work has garnered support from organizations such as the Archaeological Institute of America, National Geographic Society, National Science Foundation, Humanities Texas, Heinz Foundation, and American Council of Learned Societies. In recognition of its exceptional outreach efforts, MRP was honored with the Archaeological Institute of America's Excavation Outreach award.

A cornerstone of MRP's mission is its commitment to fostering participation from students and volunteers. The program welcomes individuals of all backgrounds—from aspiring archaeologists to curious lifelong learners—to engage in hands-on archaeological and anthropological research. Participants, ranging in age from 18 to over 80, come together to contribute to MRP's research goals while gaining invaluable field experience. Many return year after year, forming a close-knit, extended MRP family. Approximately half of the participants are university students under 30, while the other half includes professionals and retirees. While the majority come from the United States and Canada, MRP also attracts participants from Australia, Europe, Latin America, and Japan. Academic credit is often available for student participants, making MRP an ideal



opportunity for those pursuing formal education in archaeology or related fields.

MRP's impact extends far beyond the field. Many alumni have gone on to build successful careers in archaeology, anthropology, and related disciplines, often returning to MRP projects for their graduate theses and dissertations. For others, the program serves as a transformative educational experience, deepening their understanding of ancient cultures and the methodologies used to study them.

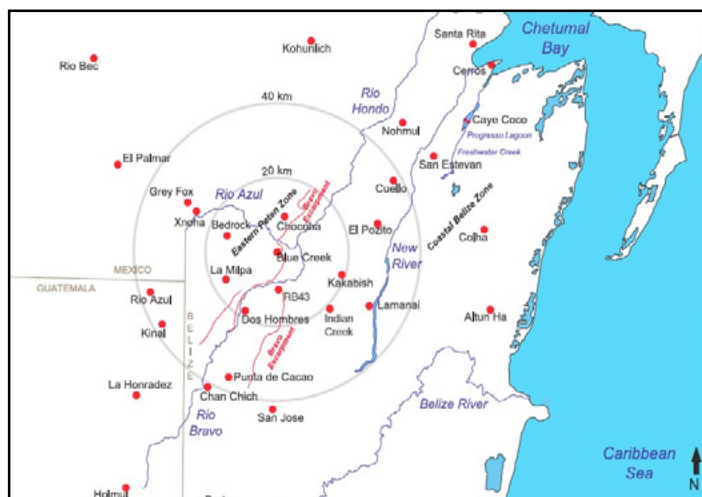
Through its unwavering commitment to research, education, and preservation, the Maya Research Program continues to make significant contributions to the study of Maya civilization. By inspiring and empowering the next generation of scholars and enthusiasts, MRP ensures that the legacy of the ancient Maya remains alive for future generations.

If you have any questions, please contact us by phone (817-831-9011) or email mrpinquiries@gmail.com. This season, we will limit each session to 25 student and volunteer participants, who will join our professional staff of about 10-15 people. This scale ensures our student to teacher ratio remains low and allows the staff to work closely with each participant.



Blue Creek Archaeological Project

This year, we celebrate our 30th anniversary in northwestern Belize, situated approximately 20 miles east of the Guatemalan border and just a mile south of Mexico. Blue Creek, home to around 800 Mennonite residents, serves as the heart of our operations, with much of our work centered in and around these agricultural communities. While not entirely remote, the area is far from urban. Nestled on the eastern edge of the Petén region, our permit area spans a forest-covered, 300-foot-tall escarpment that overlooks northern Belize, though much of the land is dedicated to agriculture. This region once thrived as a hub for the ancient Maya civilization, with its diverse environment supporting numerous significant sites. To the east, the low-lying coastal plain, where the Maya established major centers like Lamanai, relied on rivers and lagoons for sustenance and trade. Positioned at the intersection of these two distinct ecological zones, our permit area provides an exceptional opportunity to explore and understand the political economic, and religious systems of the ancient Maya.



What Will You Do?

At Blue Creek, you will be a full member of one of our excavation teams. These teams typically consist of at least one professional archaeologist and one graduate assistant, working with several students, volunteers, and local workers. Each team will work on a research project approved by Belize's Institute of Archaeology and aimed at understanding a specific aspect of the ancient past. Teams will also spend at least one day a week processing excavated materials in our well-equipped laboratory.



The Country of Belize and Logistic Information

Location: Belize borders Guatemala and Mexico. The capital, Belmopan, is in the center of the country. Belize City, the largest city, is on the coast and is where you will arrive by air. Our research station is located in northwestern Belize (on the border with Mexico) in the village of Blue Creek, Orange Walk District.

Weather: Belize is a tropical country, with hot and humid weather year-round. The rainy season runs from June to February. Expect brief rain showers, typically lasting 5-10 minutes, though tropical waves can pass through the area. The average daily maximum temperature is 90°F, but it can rise above 100°F. Nights are generally cool and comfortable, with an average minimum temperature of 71°F.

Language: English is the official language, but Spanish, Maya, and German are also spoken.

Electricity: U.S. Standards

Passport: It usually takes at least six weeks to process a U.S. passport application, so apply as soon as possible. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter Belize; the immigration officer will stamp your passport upon arrival.



Hazardous Animals and Plants: Belize has venomous snakes, centipedes, scorpions, spiders, and Africanized bees, though encounters are rare. Mosquitoes, flies, ticks, and chiggers can be annoying, especially during the wet season. Some plants can cause mild to severe dermatitis. Wear tall socks, long pants, and long-sleeved shirts to avoid contact with these plants and insects. Sturdy shoes or hiking boots are highly recommended. If you have specific allergies, follow your doctor's advice and note them on your enrollment form.

Medical: Please bring any relevant medications and insurance information with you. It is essential to inform us in advance of any medical conditions or concerns that we should be aware of. A COVID-19 vaccine (including applicable boosters) is mandatory for participation. A clinic is conveniently located just two miles from our base, and additional professional medical care is available in Orange Walk and Belize City. **Please be aware that all medical expenses are your responsibility**, so we strongly recommend verifying your insurance coverage for Belize and considering the purchase of travel insurance to cover any unexpected medical costs or emergencies.

Telephones/Rates: Using your cell phone in Belize can be expensive. Contact your carrier about international plans and roaming fees. AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile offer international rates, but additional fees may apply. The Linda Vista Shopping Center rents cell phones and sells Belizean SIM cards.

WiFi: Our research station has limited Wi-Fi, provided by satellite. The connection can be unreliable and slow, especially during rain.

Money Matters: Local currency is the Belize dollar with bills and coins in the same denominations as U.S. currency. The exchange rate is \$2BZ=\$1U.S. Everyone gladly accepts US currency and will likely give you Belize currency as change. There is no need to exchange US dollars for Belize dollars. There is also an ATM at the airport.

We recommend bringing at least two credit or debit cards, preferably from different banks to safeguard against potential issues like security breaches. In the past, some participants have had their cards canceled unexpectedly, leaving them without access to funds while abroad. To avoid disruptions, notify your bank and credit card companies of your travel plans beforehand. This ensures your transactions are protected and reduces the risk of your cards being blocked. Additionally, bring a personal check for emergencies, as we can assist in cashing it if needed. However, traveler's checks are not accepted in Belize due to concerns about theft and forgery.

Shopping and Cash Needs: The Linda Vista Shopping Center accepts credit cards, but keep in mind that internet connectivity—provided via satellite—can be unreliable, especially during inclement weather. To avoid inconvenience, bring enough cash to cover your expenses during your stay. You'll need cash for:

1. A \$56.25 USD departure tax (which is often included in the price of airline tickets).
2. Visa renewal fees (\$100 USD) if your stay exceeds 30 days.
3. Laundry services (\$1.50 USD per pound) and drinks purchased at camp.
4. Entrance fees to archaeological park of Lamanai on days off (\$5 USD).

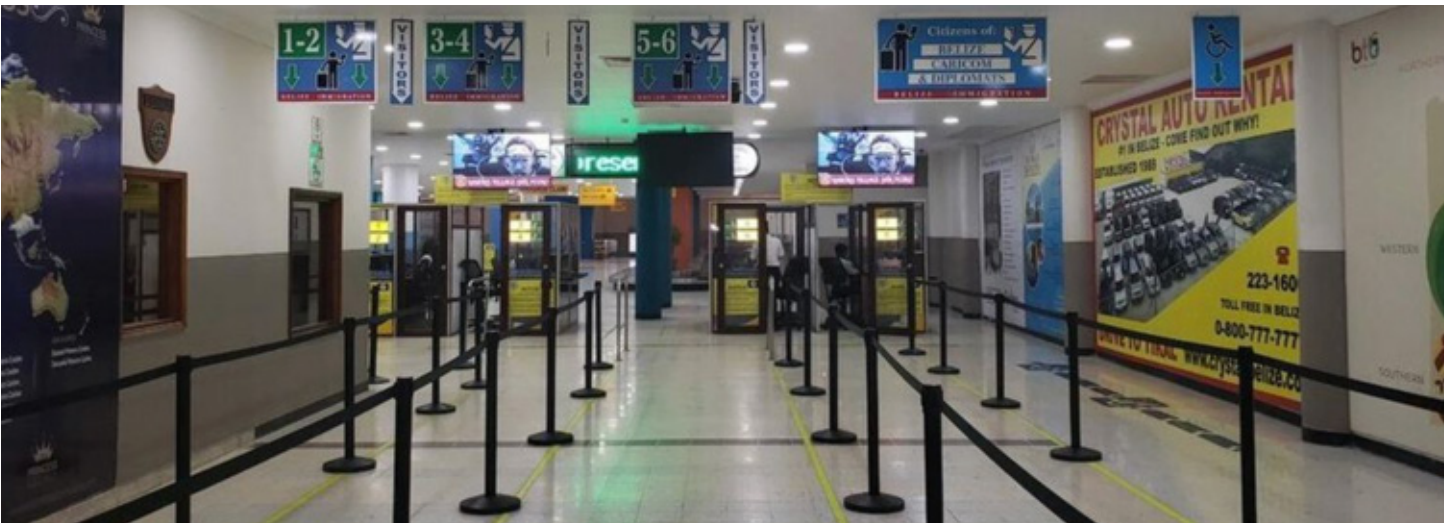
While these are the primary expenses, most participants also want extra cash for personal purchases like soft drinks, beer, and souvenirs. On average, \$350 in cash should suffice for a two-week stay.

Travel Information

Travel Arrangements: You are responsible for arranging your transportation to and from Belize. Please schedule your flight to arrive on the first day of your session before 3PM and if you depart the country on the last day of the session, you should not book a flight before 11AM and inform us of your arrival details so we can pick you up at the airport. Round-trip flights typically cost between \$600 and \$750 USD. The correct airport is Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport (airport code: BZE).



Arriving in Belize: Upon arrival, you will deplane onto the tarmac and walk to the terminal to pass through immigration. After collecting your luggage and clearing customs, we will meet you at the exit (please note the Belize airport is very small). We will be at the airport by 1 PM, and the bus will depart after the last flight clears customs on the first day of each session. It is approximately a 2-hour drive to our research station. (Again, so, please, arrange your flight to arrive before 3PM.) Once at base camp, you will be assigned a cabana and have time to settle in before dinner. The next morning, expect an early breakfast followed by orientation.



We will provide transportation back to the Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport (airport code: BZE) on the last day of the session. Please be sure your departure flight is not before 11 AM.

Traveling After Your Session: Many participants travel before or after their sessions. Advance internet reservations are not advised, as it is often more economical to make reservations in person or by phone once in Belize (the summer is the low tourist season in Belize). We are happy to make recommendations regarding travel arrangements.

Local People: We live and work in a region owned by Mennonite communities, who settled in Belize during the 1950s. These communities are known for their traditional values and modest way of life. As guests in their area, we ask that you respect their customs by dressing appropriately when visiting the Linda Vista Shopping Center—avoid wearing bathing suits or using inappropriate language. Your consideration helps maintain our positive relationship with the community.

Local Shopping: The Linda Vista Shopping Center serves the community of around 800 people. It carries a variety of items, including hardware, toiletries, food, clothing, soft drinks, and over-the-counter drugs. Credit cards are accepted, but connectivity issues may arise during the rainy season, so bring cash.



Living Accommodations

Our research station features a spacious two-story central house equipped with water and electricity, serving as the hub for daily activities. The main house's first floor includes the "people's" kitchen accessible to participants, complete with refrigerators, microwave, and storage cabinets. Additionally, the house offers a charging station, a library, a cooler room stocked with beer and soda, and a communal lounge area with couches and tables for relaxation. Other facilities on-site include a dedicated laboratory building, a shower/restroom building, a dining hall, a large palapa, as well as a separate kitchen where Ms. Alberta Cante prepares our meals (which is off-limits to participants).



Electricity is available in the main building and individual cabanas do have power. However, please note that power outages and brown outs do occur. As such, participants are advised to bring a reliable flashlight and an LED light for reading. The cabanas are cozy 8'x20' structures featuring four windows and two beds with simple foam mattresses. Though they are not air conditioned, the cool evening breezes ensure a comfortable stay.





Meals: Breakfast (around 6:15 AM) and dinner (around 5:30 PM) are served at the research station. Lunches are packed in the morning and carried to the field daily.

Water: We have excellent potable water from the community well system, and bottled drinking water is available.

Laundry: Laundry service is available for a small fee (approximately BZ\$3 per dry pound). It takes about two days and is not available on Sundays. Bring a laundry bag and be sure to put your name on it.



Schedule / Team Assignments

Daily Activities: Each morning, the sun and birds wake us around 5:30 AM. Breakfast is served at 6:15 AM. At 7:00 AM, we head to various excavation sites, where the work is physically demanding—involving lifting, carrying, bending, and excavating. While breaks are scheduled throughout the day, there is no time for napping. We return to camp by 4:00 PM, allowing time for laboratory work, showers, dinner, and unwinding. Evening lectures, often held under the palapa, offer opportunities for learning and discussion. Quiet hours in the main house begin at 9:00 PM, ensuring a restful night for all. Sunday is our day off, with trips to nearby ruins, such as Lamanai, providing a chance to explore and recharge.



Socializing: Archaeological excavation is demanding work—physically taxing, hot, dirty, and at times stressful. After a long day in the field, many participants like to relax with a cold drink, music, and lively conversation. However, we ask everyone to be mindful of quiet hours, which begin at 9:00 PM in the main house, and to respect those who may prefer a quieter atmosphere. To ensure a peaceful environment for all, please keep social activities confined to the palapa after 9:00 PM. This balance allows everyone to unwind in their preferred way while maintaining a considerate and harmonious camp atmosphere.

Departing: On your final day, you will depart by bus to Belize City around 8:00 AM to connect with your departing flights. To ensure a stress-free journey, *please avoid booking any return flights before 11:00 AM*. For those interested in extending their adventure, consider spending extra time exploring nearby ruins or unwinding on one of the picturesque islands off the coast. This is a great opportunity to enjoy some well-deserved relaxation before heading home.

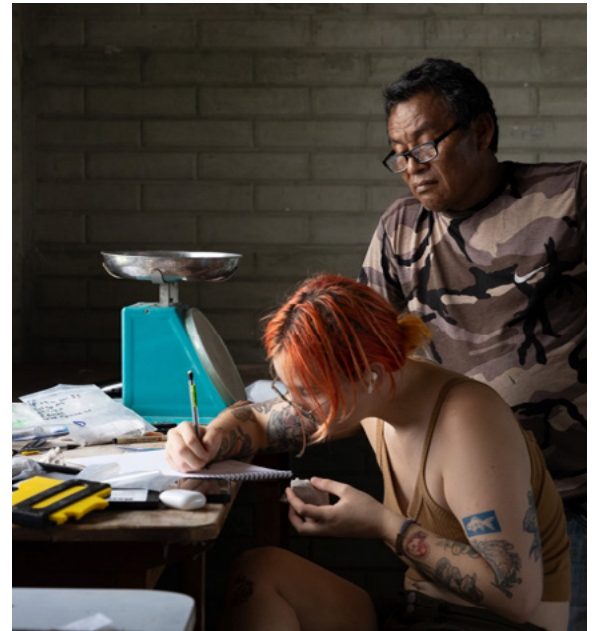


What We Expect of You

Participants are integral members of our team, and we rely on everyone to contribute both in the field and around the research station. Our work is demanding, and we expect all team members to pitch in with daily tasks. Given the isolated and close-knit living conditions, mutual respect and consideration for others are essential to maintaining a positive and productive environment.

Students receiving academic credit will have additional responsibilities, as outlined in agreements with their instructors, to ensure they meet their academic objectives.

Before your departure for Belize, we will provide you with an emergency contact number for use while in the country. Additionally, you can reach us by calling our U.S. number: 001-817-831-9011 and we will respond as quickly as possible to address any concerns or questions.



The use of illegal drugs is strictly prohibited at the camp, on-site, or anywhere else while you are associated with the MRP. Additionally, the possession, transportation, or export of antiquities is illegal under Belizean law. Under no circumstances should you purchase, accept, or collect artifacts, no matter how small or insignificant they may appear. Such actions could severely jeopardize the MRP, potentially leading to the revocation of our permit by the Government of Belize. If caught engaging in these activities, you may face severe consequences, including imprisonment and substantial fines. Violation of these policies will result in immediate removal from the program.

MRP Twilight Lecture Series

Evening lectures are offered on various specialized topics. Recent lectures include:

Geoarchaeology of Ancient Maya Agriculture, Drs. Tim Beach and Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach, University of Texas at Austin.

Ancient Maya Impacts on the Modern Forest, Dr. Nick Brokaw, University of Puerto Rico.

Looting the Maya Past, Dr. Donna Yates, University of Glasgow (Scotland)

Geochemistry and archaeological studies in Mesoamerican and Thailand, Dr. Duncan Cook, Australia Catholic University.

When the Sky Fell Down: The Chicxulub Impact. Dr. Eric Gaidos, University of Hawaii.

Three decades of understanding the Maya of Belize, Dr. Thomas Guderjan, University of Texas at Tyler.

What Not to Believe about the Maya, Dr. Elizabeth Graham, University College London (England)

Conserving the Stratfordshire Hoard, Pieta Graeves, Drakon Heritage (England).

Studying Maya Ceramics; A Matter of Time and Understanding Maya Calendrics, Colleen Hanratty, University of Texas at Tyler.

GIS applications in Archaeology, Dr. Samantha Krause, Texas State University.

Using Geoarchaeology to Observe the Ancient Human-Environment Complex. Dr. Sheryl-Luzzadder-Beach and Timothy Beach, University of Texas at Austin.

Tribal Approaches to CRM in Australia, Dr. Alex Parmington.

Excavations in Cuba, Dr. David Pendergast, University College London (England).

Bioarchaeology Topics, Dr. Hannah Plumer, Algonkian College (Canada)

Geochemical Signatures of Contemporary and Ancient Maya Activities in Plazas. Dr. Richard Terry, Brigham Young University

The Philosophy of Science and 3D imaging, Bob Warden, Texas A&M University.

Mapping the Maya World, Marc Wolf, University of West Florida.





Recommended Reading

Field Methods in Archaeology (2009) by Thomas R. Hester, Harry J. Shafer, and Kenneth L. Feder. Routledge Press. [A free copy of this textbook can be found here](#)

Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens (2008) by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube. Thames and Hudson Ltd. [A free copy of this textbook can be found here](#)

Construction of Maya Space (2023) edited by Thomas H. Guderjan and Jennifer Matthews. University of Arizona Press. [A free copy of this textbook can be found here](#)

The Nature of an Ancient Maya City: Resources, Interaction and Power at Blue Creek, Belize (2007) by Thomas Guderjan. University of Alabama Press. [A free copy of this textbook can be found here](#)

For more MRP academic articles, reports, and popular press articles, visit the book page on our website: <http://mayaresearchprogram.org/styled-3/MRP%20publications.html>

Suggested Packing List

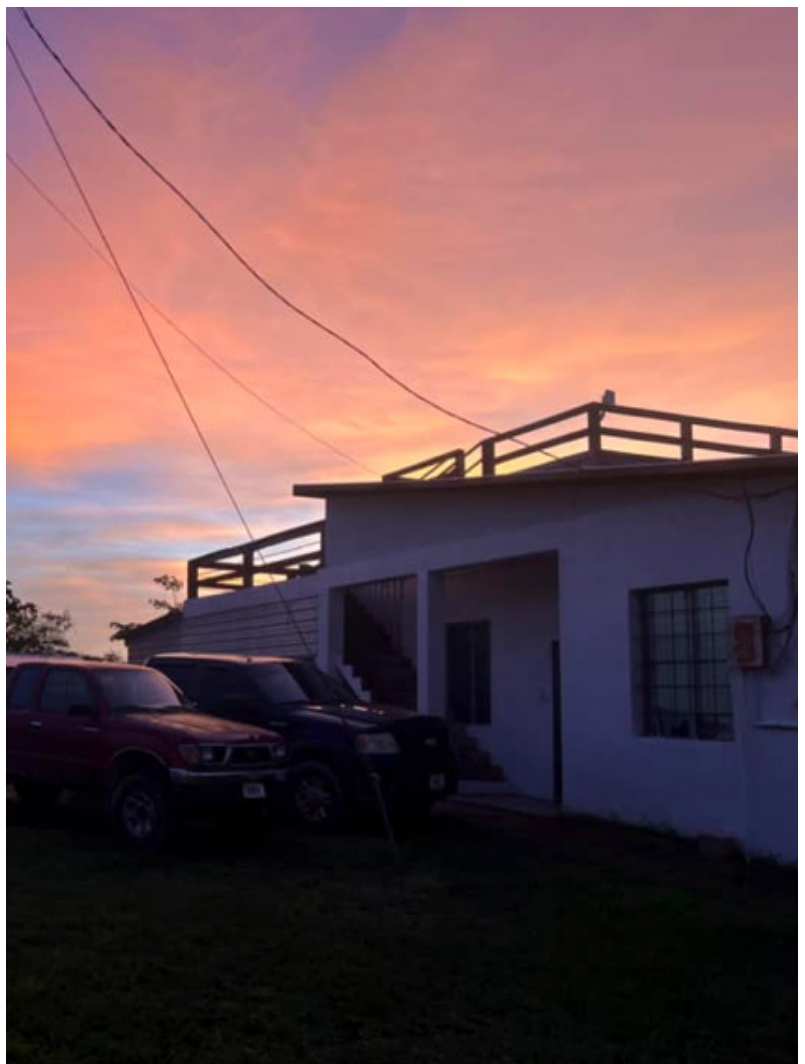
In addition to your usual travel items, consider the following:

- Hat (the Belizean sun is intense!)
- Sunglasses
- Bandana (for sweat and mosquito protection)
- Long work pants (at least two pairs)
- Shorts (for relaxing at camp, not for the field)
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirts (sun and insect protection)
- Raincoat or poncho
- Hiking shoes or sturdy boots
- Second pair of shoes for camp
- Socks (pack extra)
- Hoodie or light sweatshirt (cool evenings)
- Flip-flops (shower shoes)
- Swimwear (for trips to the cenote)
- Work gloves (if you use them)
- Small backpack for the field
- Water bottle or canteen
- Small flashlight (for camp at night)
- Small lantern (for your cabana)
- DEET mosquito repellent (30% or higher)
- Pillow (limited selection in Blue Creek)
- Sheet set (we provide a twin-size foam mattress)
- Towels
- Small waterproof case or ziplock bag (for valuables)
- Smartphone, tablet, or laptop
- Small excavation tools (if you have favorites, otherwise we provide what you will need.)

- *Copy of your passport's information page*
- *Books, games, puzzles, and evening pastimes*
- *Cash (U.S. dollars are accepted)*
- *Credit cards (notify your bank of travel plans)*
- *Cigarettes (if you smoke, bring your own – NONE are available in the village of Blue Creek)*

Things you can buy in Blue Creek

- *Wellington boots (rubber rain boots)*
- *Batteries (common sizes)*
- *Salty snacks, Gatorade mix, candy, and fresh-made ice cream*
- *Basic toiletries (shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, feminine hygiene products, etc.)*
- *Postcards and stamps*
- *Pens, pencils, notebooks*
- *Rental cell phones*
- *Basic pain relief and first aid items*
- *Some towels and pillows*
- *Beer and wine*



Academic Credit for Participants

Many students are interested in earning academic credit for their participation in the Blue Creek project. Although MRP is not a university, we facilitate academic credit through our partnership with the University of Texas at Tyler (UT-Tyler). UT-Tyler students can enroll directly in a course, but non-Texas residents should be aware that out-of-state tuition rates apply. If you are considering academic credit, please contact us well in advance to discuss the process and requirements.

Our program is an approved field school for students from the University of Texas at Tyler, the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, the University of Leicester, and numerous other institutions. Most participants arrange an independent study course through their home institution, and we can assist in identifying a suitable faculty member to sponsor the course. Typically, each two-week session is equivalent to a three-semester-hour class, meaning that a four-week stay at Blue Creek is regarded as a six-semester-hour field school. This structure allows students to gain valuable academic credit while immersing themselves in hands-on archaeological research.

Information for students taking the Field School for academic credit:

If you are receiving academic credit, we expect you to:

- *Master the essentials of field and lab techniques used to gather and process archaeological data.*
- *Understand the project research design and how the data being collected pertain to it.*
- *Keep a notebook of orientation and twilight lectures and discuss their relevance to the research design.*
- *Grades will be assigned by Dr. Guderjan, with input from supervisory staff.*



Scholarships

MRP is proud to offer the Welker Scholarship and the Maya Conlin Scholarship to exceptional students pursuing studies in archaeology or anthropology. These scholarships are designed to support highly motivated and talented individuals who demonstrate a strong commitment to the field and are prepared to take on increased responsibilities and workloads.

The Welker Scholarship honors the memory of Bill Welker, our late friend and colleague, and is generously funded by donations. Similarly, the Maya Conlin Scholarship, established by Tyler Conlin and named for his daughter, aims to inspire and support promising young scholars. Both scholarships encourage recipients to fully engage in the Blue Creek Archaeological Project, fostering their growth as future leaders in archaeology. Applications must be submitted by March 15th. These opportunities not only alleviate financial burdens but also recognize and nurture the potential of emerging scholars.





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UTTyler
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