



○ discovering NICARAGUA

Like other Latin Americans, Nicaraguans place great importance on family and personal dignity. This extends outward to a collective feeling of national pride among the Nicaraguan people. A lush and tropical country located in the heart of Central America, Nicaragua is rich with natural beauty and resources. Nicaragua has traditionally relied on agricultural exports to sustain its economy. But these benefited mainly a few elite families of Spanish descent, primarily the Somoza family, which ruled the country with U.S. backing between 1937 and the Sandinista revolution in 1979.

By 1990, when the Sandinistas were defeated in elections held as part of a peace agreement, Nicaragua's per capita income had plummeted and its infrastructure was in tatters.

Peace brought some economic growth, lower inflation and lower unemployment. But this was more than counter-balanced by the devastations of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which killed thousands, rendered 20 percent of the population homeless, and caused billions of dollars worth of damage.

Nicaragua, the poorest country in Central America and the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere, has widespread underemployment and poverty.

Note: Recognizing that information on Nicaragua is readily available on the Internet, we encourage you to learn as much as you can about the political background, history, geography, economics and culture of this amazing country. This document provides a general overview, with some specific information that will help short-term teams appreciate Nicaragua even more and understand our work. Going to Nicaragua as part of a short-term team is different from a leisure trip or traveling for business. The information provided here can help you prepare for a potentially life-changing experience. Sources used for some country facts include CIA: The World Factbook and BBC News.

QUICK FACTS

Full Name: Republic of Nicaragua

Area: 120,254 sq km (46,430 sq miles)

Population: 5.8 million (UN 2010)

Capital City: Managua

Major Religion: Roman Catholic

Life Expectancy: 72 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)

Major Languages: Spanish, English, indigenous languages

Monetary Currency: Cordoba

Main Exports: Coffee, meat, shellfish, sugar, tobacco, cattle, gold

GNI Per Capita: US \$1000 (World Bank, 2009)



WEATHER

Nicaragua has two seasons: dry and rainy. The dry season is from January through June. Once the rains come around in June or July, plants and trees start blossoming again. In August and September, it often rains once a day. Fortunately, it just rains for a short period of time. It rains more in the eastern part of the country than in the western part.

The work of Food for the Hungry is largely between Managua and the Honduran border on the western side of the country. The temperature varies roughly between 86° F at daytime and 72° F at night. In May, the temperatures can soar into the triple digits, so be sure to drink plenty of water and bring your sunscreen when visiting Nicaragua during this month.

PASSPORT/VISA

A valid U.S. passport is required to enter Nicaragua. Although there is a bilateral agreement that waives the six-month validity passport requirement, U.S. citizens are urged to ensure that their passports are valid for the length of their projected stay in the country before traveling. A visa is not required for

U.S. citizens; however, a tourist card must be purchased for \$10 upon arrival. Tourist cards are typically issued for 30 to 90 days.

A valid entry stamp is required to exit Nicaragua. Pay attention to the authorized stay that will be written into your entry stamp by the immigration inspector. Visitors remaining more than the authorized time must obtain an extension from Nicaraguan Immigration. Failure to do so will prevent departure until a fine is paid.

There is also a \$32 departure tax. Many airlines include this tax in the price of the ticket. If the tax is not included in the ticket, payment can be made at the airline counter upon departure.

For the most up-to-date information about travel from the United States to any foreign country, please visit the Department of State's website at www.travel.state.gov.



VACCINATION INFORMATION

In addition to applying for a passport, you will also need to research vaccination requirements for your trip well in advance as some vaccinations take time or need to be given in a series to be effective. The best advice regarding vaccinations and any other medications can only come from a qualified physician. Please make an appointment with your family doctor and share with him/her where you are going, how long you will be there and what activities you will be participating in. In consultation with your doctor, you can decide which vaccinations and/or medications will be best for you.

To better familiarize yourself with travel health, please visit the Center for Disease Control's website at www.cdc.gov/travel prior to your visit with your doctor.

FOOD

Food for the Hungry will be providing breakfast, lunch and dinner during the whole trip. Meals will be either at a restaurant or prepared by individuals selected by FH and are well versed in healthy methods of preparing meals. Almost all the meals will be Nicaraguan as there are limited international menu options outside of Managua.

Nicaraguan food has a good deal of variety, but the staples are gallo pinto (fried rice and pinto beans) and mondongo (tripe soup). Plantains are commonly used as a side dish for meals. Meat is sometimes served with dinner, but it is a luxury in Nicaragua. Food is often scooped up in tortillas instead of using cutlery. You'll notice that often there isn't a big difference between breakfast, lunch and dinner. Beans, rice and egg might be served at each meal, with the addition of fruits or other vegetables. Coffee is very popular, but it will be different than your local Starbucks brew.

Avoid eating foods that have not been provided or approved by Food for the Hungry staff. Eating something from a local vendor or street market could lead to sickness. If you have any food allergies or special dietary needs, please communicate those to FH/US ahead of time. Our field staff will need time to arrange other options for you.

Your Team Coordinator will also have a supply of bottled water for your team. Drink bottled water only. Also use it to brush your teeth and take medicines. If you are served ice in a drink, please verify that the water is okay by consulting with your Team Coordinator.

CLOTHING

Being that the weather is really warm in Nicaragua, there is a natural tendency to want to wear shorts, tank tops and sleeveless shirts. However, these are not the normal dress habits of Nicaraguans. The general rule of thumb for dress in Nicaragua is conservative. Wearing modest clothing will open the door for establishing good relationships with the people in the community. Our dress code is a sign of respect for the people we will be working with, as well as to convey a conservative Christian lifestyle.



While in the community, please do not wear tight or revealing clothing. It is preferred that team members wear long pants, long skirts, capris and loose-fitting T-shirts. Avoid wearing T-shirts with any questionable slogans or brand names. Please do not wear clothing with holes, rips or stains from previous work projects. Closed-toe shoes are required at all times.

During travel and recreation days, wearing modest shorts is okay. If your schedule permits time at the beach, ladies should wear one-piece bathing suits or a two-piece with tank top and shorts.

Out of respect for cultural sensitivity, we request your cooperation in submitting to FH's policy in regard to piercings, tattoos and radical haircuts. For more details about this topic, please talk to your team leader.

COMMUNICATION

You will likely be without telephone and/or e-mail access during your time in Nicaragua. While these services may be readily available, especially in major cities, your schedule will be packed with activities. This will help you to focus your energy and attention on the transformative work of the Lord and to help maintain a cohesive group dynamic. We encourage you to leave your cell phone at home and inform your family and friends that you will be unavailable until you return to the States.

If there is an emergency in the country or community where you are serving, your Team Coordinator will contact your family and appropriate people at your home church. Before you leave the U.S. you will be given a U.S. phone number and other details, which you will pass on to your family and close friends. If there is an emergency in the U.S. while you're on the field, your family member or friend may call that number. Your Field Liaison will assess the call and facilitate communication with you or the field staff as necessary.



TRANSPORTATION

The team will travel around the country mostly in mini- and full-size buses. All transportation will be provided by FH. Your drivers will either be an FH staff or hired by a reliable company that FH frequently uses.

Driving in Nicaragua may be a new experience for you. The roads are likely to be bumpy and winding. You may feel that the vehicle you are in is uncomfortably close to the vehicle or pedestrian beside it. Streets may seem overwhelmingly crowded. Traffic signs may not always be followed. Remember that you are in good hands. Your driver is a professional and used to the traffic conditions. Keep your hands, feet and belongings inside the vehicle at all times. If you experience carsickness, sit in the front or take an appropriate medicine for motion sickness.

LUGGAGE

Although the airlines may allow you to check two hefty bags, we advise you to pack and travel light. All team members will be responsible to carry their luggage. Also remember that vehicle space is limited, so be conservative when packing. We ask that you bring only one checked bag and one carry-on bag. While you are working in the communities, luggage will be safe at the hotel. We suggest bringing a backpack for water bottle, sun block, camera and snacks. Please refer to your teams training materials for a packing list.

miscellaneous

Time: Managua is in Mountain Standard Time (during daylight savings time)

Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, so adapters and transformers are usually not necessary for U.S.-style appliances.

Weights and Measures: Metric

MONEY

Once you arrive in the country, you will not need any money for team-related activities. You will only need money for souvenirs and shopping that you will do in-country and while traveling. A suggested amount for this purpose is \$100 to \$200. You may exchange money in the airport upon arrival, but there will be other opportunities to exchange money as well.

Bring bills no larger than \$20 and be sure that the bills are crisp and new (no more than 5 years old) to ensure acceptance. There are ATMs in Managua, but the fees can be large to withdraw cash. If there are problems with the ATM and your card cannot be retrieved, there are few options of remedying the situation. Credit cards are

accepted at some stores in the city, but do not rely on this method of payment. Traveler's checks aren't recommended because they can only be exchanged in limited locations and extra fees always apply

ELECTRONICS

You may bring cameras (disposable, standard or digital), iPods, cell phones and other small electronic devices. We want you to be able to take pictures and capture videos and share these incredible moments of transformation with family and friends back home. However, you assume all risks of damage, loss or theft of your belongings. Keep in mind that you will be kept quite busy, and there will not be a lot of time to use many electronic devices. Also, electricity may not always be available to recharge electronic equipment, including cameras and camcorders. Please bring extra batteries. When in public, don't display expensive electronic items or any items that may just appear expensive.

PHOTO POLICY

All photos or videos should be taken with utmost discretion. Upon arrival in the country, your Team Coordinator will explain the country's photo policy. Some considerations:

- Make sure the focus is on relationships and the ministry, not pictures.
- When possible, ask before taking pictures.
- Designate a photographer. Rather than taking the same picture on 12 different cameras, take the picture with one or two cameras and share when you get back.
- Be sure that any picture you take conveys dignity for the person in the picture. If you will not remember the names of the people in the story or the significance of the photo, re-consider the need for taking a photo.



FH HISTORY

In 1972, Food for the Hungry provided temporary aid and relief to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. In 1991, FH conducted a fact-finding visit to Nicaragua and set up a permanent presence in the country in 1994.

In August of 1999, various ministries gathered at a conference in Managua to discuss biblical worldview



and transformational development. About 200 people attended the conference, including pastors and community development workers.

As a result of the meeting, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, Food for the Hungry and Christian Reformed World Missions decided to combine offices and to continue to nurture the movement that had begun with the conference. The joint efforts gave birth to the founding of the Nehemiah Center in 2000 as a key strategy to bringing about transformational development through the community health evangelism program.

The focus was on training communities in biblical worldview and helping them apply biblical truths in all areas of life.

The collaboration has since expanded to include Missionary Ventures International, Worldwide Christian Schools, Medical Ambassadors International, Partners Worldwide and Christian Schools International.

A key component of the Nehemiah Center is the “Ezra” national training staff. The Ezra staff is composed of committed Nicaraguan Christian leaders who work to develop change agents within each aspect of society: family, church, education, business, government, arts and the media.

In 2009, Food for the Hungry began a transition for a facilitation focus (exemplified by the Nehemiah Center collaboration), to a more direct programming approach. This new focus has led to the development of new programs and involvement in a more focused geographical area and specific communities.

FH PROGRAMS

FH Nicaragua focuses its efforts on one integrated Child-focused Community Transformation (CFCT) program. This program includes four sections:

Education: Equips children with the right tools to become agents of transformation in their communities.

Child Development: Helps children, parents, churches and leaders understand biblical truths regarding children’s God-given identity, value and purpose.

Health: Builds within families and children an understanding of the importance of personal and public health.

Economic Development: Helps parents identify available resources to meet the needs of their children, without relying on their children to provide supplemental income.

Prayer Requests

- Pray that the national leadership of Nicaragua would ask God for wisdom and courage in running the country.
- Pray for FH’s activities in the country, that God would use these outreaches to lift Nicaraguans out of physical and spiritual poverty.
- Pray that our staff would have compassion, wisdom and sensitivity so they can effectively reach out to the poor and most vulnerable.

