

# Handbook for Nicaragua

## SHORT TERM MISSIONS

*“We tend to get a burden for people we’ve walked among, lived with and laughed with.”*

It’s hard to catch God’s heart for the world if you’ve known nothing but your own hometown. Short term missions are an effective strategy for mobilizing people and resources for world relief in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Short term missions can offer each participant enormous benefits, as they are stretched out of their comfort zone, and they may experience significant spiritual growth. It can build relationships within the group and cross-culturally, expanding our world vision and strengthening the worldwide body of Christ. The communities we work in are blessed. Team members also have the opportunity to develop significant relationships with these individuals. The communities benefit from the additional love and attention they receive from the team, leaving them with more joy in their heart.

Short term mission groups can be of any size, but typically consist of 10-25 people who work with a project for about 1 to 2 weeks. Such teams can engage in a variety of activities, including but not limited to one or more of the following:

- Construction of new facilities or refurbishing existing facilities.
- Ministry, sports, crafts, and other activities
- Medical/Dental missions, such as mobile clinics in communities (promoting health and hygiene), surgical intervention.
- Potable water in way of good wells, bio-sand filters and trained technicians to maintain.
- Source of light in the way of solar/battery operated led lights.
- Feeding and working with the children in the Chinandega dump.
- Visiting the Casa Hogar Orphanage (about 23 children).
- Feedings at the Rancho’s (over 100 children)
- Vacation Bible School
- Working with the Church in Chinandega and Pastor Francisco and Veronica.

**“Lack of preparation results in greater burdens for the staff in the host country and gives rise to difficulties, which could be avoided.”**

Proper preparation builds relationships between team members prior to working together in the field. Preparation is also important in helping team members anticipate what it will be like during the trip. It will help develop a better understanding of the people of Nicaragua and ways in which to effectively minister to them. It also helps develop cross-cultural sensitivities, brings a deeper understanding of the local history and culture, identifies what would be appropriate or inappropriate conduct (both at the Ranchos and in the communities) and helps plan the logistics of the trip.

### **Nicaragua**

Nicaragua is in Central America, bordered on the north by Honduras, on the east by the Caribbean Sea, on the south by Costa Rica, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean. Nicaragua covers 130,000 square kilometers.

The Nicaragua highlands cross Nicaragua from the Northwest to the Southeast. The Cordillera Isabelia, reaching elevations of more than 2100 meters or 6890 feet, is the highest of several mountain ranges. A chain of volcanoes, which is a contributory cause of earthquakes, rises along the Pacific coast. Nicaragua has 2 lakes in the West, Lago de Managua and Lago de Nicaragua, the largest lake in Central America; the Rio Tipitapa connects the two.

The coastal regions of Nicaragua have a tropical climate with a mean average temperature of 25-30C or 77-86 degree F. In the higher elevations in the interior, the temperature ranges from 20-25C or 68-77 degree F. The rainy season is from May to October, and annual rainfall averages 3,810 millimeters or 150 inches along the Caribbean coast.

## **Family**

The extended family exerts a major influence on an individual's life and decisions. It is not uncommon to have parents, aunts, uncles and cousins all living together. During Sandinista rule women were given a greater role in society. A new constitution promised them the right to participate more actively in family matters. Service in the military was common for women under the Sandinista Regime, and many women became involved in civic affairs. As in many Central and South American nations, a person has two family names. The last name is the mother's family name and the second-to-last name is the father's family name, which functions as the surname. Therefore, a person named Jose Munoz Gomez would be called Senor Munoz.

## **Marriage**

Traditionally, a girl formally enters social life at age 13-15, when a fiesta is held in her honor. Thereafter, she is allowed to attend dances, enjoy other entertainment, and have a boyfriend. Marriage is a valued institution, but the long tradition of machismo means that some infidelity among men is common.

## **Diet and Eating**

Beans and rice are eaten with most meals. Maize also forms an important part of the diet. Typical dishes include tortillas, enchiladas, tamales (spiced meat maize and vegetables wrapped in banana leaves) and babbo (meat, vegetables and plantains). Tropical fruits are usually very plentiful. Table manners vary but in general both hands (not elbows) should remain on or above the table at all times. The main meal is eaten at midday and is traditionally followed by a siesta (a practice not widely followed in the urban cities).

## **Transportation and Communication**

Years of fighting, economic mismanagement and chaos have damaged the transportation and communication systems. The national railway is largely inoperative, although they are in the process of building a new railway system. Most roads are not paved and many areas can be reached only by ox-cart trails. Postal, telegraph, and telephone services do not generally serve rural areas. Cell phone and computer access is on the rise in urban areas. The press is relatively outspoken and there are many newspapers.

## **Education**

Education improved over the years and was influenced by the Sandinistas, who cut teacher shortages by hiring Cuban instructors. School is compulsory and free for six years (in public schools). Most children

begin primary education, but only about half complete it. Most of these, however, proceed to the secondary level. There is no policing of school attendance. With the recent disasters, many children are working to help provide for their families instead of going to school. There are four universities – two state universities and two religious institutions.

## **Climate**

Temperatures during the dry season average from 30-40° C (86-104° F) during the day and 20-30° C (68-86° F) at night.

## ***Nicaragua at a Glance***

Official name:	Republic of Nicaragua
Capital:	Managua
Area:	130,000 square Kilometers
Population:	5,742,800 -2009
Population Density:	Roughly 44 persons per square kilometer
Percent Urban:	98 as of 2009
Percent Rural:	68 as of 2009
Life Expectancy:	54 in 1970 compared to 73 in 2008
Literacy Rates:	66 percent
Ethnic division:	Mestizo – 69%, European – 17%, African-Nicaraguan – 9% Native American – 5%
Religions:	Roman Catholic -70% Protestant -30%
Independence:	September 15, 1821 (from Spain)
Exports:	Coffee, sugar, bananas, soybeans, rice

## **Nicaragua Guidelines**

### **Vaccinations**

For trips to Nicaragua, team members are encouraged to see their physician about possibly getting the following vaccinations:

Tetanus, Diphtheria and Polio – Should be updated (check how frequent)

Hepatitis A – 2 shots are required (approx. 6 months apart)

Hepatitis B – requires 3 shots > day 1, one month and 6 months later. This combination should protect you for life.

Typhoid – 1 shot or a series of drinks (3 every other day) is good for 5-7 years.

Anti-Malaria Medication – Chloroquine is the malaria prophylaxis recommended for this area of the world. See your doctor for a prescription. It is taken by mouth once a week beginning 1-2 weeks prior to departure and ending approximately 4 weeks after your return home.

Flu shot – would be very beneficial

### **Clothes**

You need to be careful of your appearance when traveling to other countries. In Nicaragua we need to show sensitivity to their concept of proper appearance and dress, in order not to offend them or draw

undue attention to ourselves. Males and females need to display modesty, with conservative and neatness being the standards applied. Casual wear is fine. No beachwear (except for the beach). No shorty shorts or short revealing tops. In most places, longer shorts, capris, or skirts are okay for Ladies. Men will need to bring lightweight shirts and pants (or shorts). Denim jeans are not suitable to the hot climate, but you may need one long sleeved shirt/sweatshirt for the plane and possibly a cool night or morning.

## **Money**

In Nicaragua the currency is called Cordoba, which is traded at about 1 Cordoba to the U. S. dollar. Since rates always fluctuate, you may want to check the current trading prices. It is easiest to deal with U.S. dollars in small denominations. We recommend bringing \$10 and \$20 bills that are not ripped or worn. When changing to Cordoba, PLEASE change only a small amount at a time.

We do not recommend travelers checks as they are difficult to cash.

## **Toilets**

When you use indoor plumbing, you need to remember that the water pressure and plumbing systems are weak in most places. Unless directed otherwise, you will be expected to *put your used toilet paper in the garbage*, NOT in the toilet.

## **Water**

Contaminated water is the main source of illness and disease in many countries. We encourage these precautions:

- Avoid ALL tap water for ice, drinking, or brushing teeth. It's fine for bathing as long as it isn't swallowed. Many people are careful all day long and then absent-mindedly brush their teeth with tap water or rinse their mouth out in the shower.
- Bring and use a personal WATER BOTTLE. We will be purchasing purified water and it will always be available for your use.
- IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU DRINK LOTS OF WATER THROUGHOUT THE DAY!

Dehydration is a common occurrence. You will spend many hours working hard in hot conditions, so be wise. There will be ample opportunities to buy other drinks as well.

## **Food**

Most food is cooked at the Ranchos'. Our cook has been trained in cleaning and cooking especially for our mission teams. We will provide water, coffee and fruit for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

While in the city, you can expect to eat food fairly similar to what you are used to here in the U.S. When in rural areas, you might expect your diet to consist of mainly chicken, fish, bread, vegetables, beans, rice and a lot of fruit.

## **Health Care**

There is access to medical attention in the cities (hospitals).

## **Health Insurance**

Health insurance will be the responsibility of each individual team member.

## **Medications**

The most important preventive medicine will be your anti-malarial medication. Don't forget it! Take it once a week beginning at least one week before you leave, while you are in Nicaragua, as well as for 4 weeks after you return home. (The Malaria cycle allows the disease to remain dormant in your system for some time after it enters the body and you are not out of the danger zone until this critical period has passed). There may be some mild side effects to the medication. Ask your doctor if you have any concerns. If you will be taking other medications while taking the anti-malarial medication, please consult your physician to be sure the medication will not cause any complications.

To reduce your chances of getting traveler's diarrhea or "gripe" (flu), we recommend taking Pepto-Bismol (preferably in tablet form). Pepto-Bismol actually eliminates harmful bacteria from the stomach and has a minimal chance of causing an allergic or toxic reaction that may be caused by antibiotics. It is recommended that you take those tablets with meals to avoid an unsettled stomach. Check with your doctor about the use of Pepto-Bismol, if you are taking medication for any chronic medical condition.

If you are currently taking prescriptions or over the counter medications for a physical or mental condition, you should be sure to take an extra supply to allow for unforeseen extensions of your trip. Although optional, you might consider carrying an extra written prescription (both generic/trade name) from your doctor. Pack any medications you will require in your carry-on luggage in case your baggage goes astray. The team medical person needs to be informed what medications you are taking, preferably in writing.

Check to make sure that any medications you require are legal in a foreign country. If traveling with syringes for medical purposes, such as diabetes, it is essential that they are accompanied by a medical certificate. The certificate should be in the language of the country you are traveling to (as well as English) and clearly state that the syringes are in fact for medical purposes.

Contact lens wear may be uncomfortable due the high humidity and dust typically encountered. Eyeglasses are recommended. Packing an extra pair of glasses would be a wise precaution.

## **Finances**

The cost of your trip is outlined on one of the information forms. The amount will include accommodations, meals, water and transportation. You will only need to take money along for purchases you may wish to make, such as gifts, extra food & drink, etc. The trip cost does NOT include any costs for doctor exams, vaccinations, passports, food in transit (i.e. airports), health insurance or personal shopping. You can use a debit card in Chinandega. We encourage you to tip our Nicaragua staff. Make sure none of your money is torn. Torn currency is considered suspicious and may not be accepted.

## **Luggage**

**Please check with your airlines as to how many bags they allow.**

Delta Airlines allows TWO (2) check-in bags, which can weigh up to 50 lbs. each; the size is limited to 62 inches (that being the sum of the volume). Hockey bags are OK. ONE carry-on piece of luggage is

allowed, measuring 20cm x 40cm x 50cm, in addition to a small day pack style bag/pouch. (Luggage restrictions should be confirmed with the airlines beforehand).

WE HOPE TO USE AS MUCH OF THE CHECK-IN BAGS AS POSSIBLE TO TAKE PROJECT MATERIALS. PACK AS MUCH OF YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS AS POSSIBLE IN A CARRY-ON (some clothing, toiletries, medications, etc.). All essentials should be in the carry-on anyway, in case your luggage is delayed or misplaced. Certain items previously permitted in carry-on luggage will have to be checked, if they fail to meet current restrictions. We will request and provide updated information from travel personnel.

## **Documentation**

Buy a money belt, neck pouch or some other kind of storage for all your important documents. **KEEP THEM WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES!** These documents include your passport, visitor's visa, charge cards, other forms of picture ID and your plane tickets. Please **DO NOT** take any unnecessary pieces of ID such as your birth certificate or driver's license. Make **THREE** copies of all your important documents you are taking (leave one in your suitcase, one in your carry-on and one at home).

### **Documents Needed:**

- **PASSPORT** – best accepted evidence of citizenship. It will be needed for all custom and immigration inspections and for any number of legal transactions. **YOU MUST MAKE SURE THAT YOUR PASSPORT IS VALID FOR 6 MONTHS AFTER YOUR RETURN DATE!** Make **TWO** copies of the identification page of your passport (one to be left with your group leader and one for you to keep in your luggage).
- **EXTRA PHOTO ID** – only one is needed in case of a lost document.
- **PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS** – take only **COPIES** of your necessary health records, cardiograms, test results and list of current medications. Make two (2) copies of your vaccination record (one for team medical personnel).
- **DOCUMENTS FOR MINORS** – children under the age of 18 traveling on their own or with one parent are required to have notarized permission to travel.

While in the country we will collect (and keep in a safe place) your ticket, passport, important papers/cards and excess money, making them available when needed. Whether walking about or traveling by vehicle, never carry all of your important documents (i.e., passport, travel ticket identification, insurance cards, credit cards, etc.) together at the same time. Whether lost or stolen, being left without identification or funds should be avoided.

## **Airports**

You are required to arrive 2 to 3 hours before international flights and 1 to 2 hours before domestic flights. Never make any jokes about guns, hijacking, bombs etc. This is a federal offense and you can be detained, fined or even banned from flying with the airlines. At all airports, you will pass through a series of customs or inspection stations. Try to be relaxed and be prepared by having all your important documentation ready. On our flight to Nicaragua you will be given a custom form to fill out. Your group leader will inform you of the needed information for the form. Have \$10.00 cash with you to enter

Nicaragua, (again, no torn bills). On your return you can expect to go through customs and immigration. You will have to declare how much you've spent while overseas.

## **Photography**

If you are using a camera that requires film, we suggest one roll of film for every 2 days (this averages out to 18 pictures per day). If you are using a digital camera, we recommend bringing a minimum of 256MB memory card. Be sure that if you are bringing a 256MB memory card, you know your camera very well so you don't accidentally erase all photos. It may be advisable to pack an extra memory card in case one gets lost or damaged. Bring extra batteries for your camera and your camera battery charger.

*DO NOT TAKE PICTURES AT THE AIRPORT OR OF ANY MILITARY INSTALLATION OR INSIDE CATHEDRALS, UNLESS PERMISSION IS GRANTED.  
A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS: WHEN IN DOUBT – ASK!*

Be respectful of people's privacy and try to avoid having other people in the background of your photos. If you wish to take pictures of locals, always ask permission. You should also try to think of what story you want to a picture to tell people. Let your picture help you to tell that story. We strongly recommend that you keep a journal each day, as it's difficult to remember names, events and places. This journal will also be helpful in case you forget where a picture was taken or who a person was.

## **What to Bring**

- Bible
- Journal/notebook/pen/pencils/pencil sharpener
- Clothing
  - o Shirts, blouses, conservative T-shirts/tank tops/tunics, skirt, shorts, beach cover up, modest bathing suit, sun dresses, under garments, socks, hat with brim, light sweater/sweatshirt (one only).
- Shoes
  - o Tennis shoes (one pair), work boots (optional), sandals/slides, shower shoes
- Bedding
  - o Set of twin sheets (can take back home), self-inflating mattress (not required), and one SMALL pillow only.
- Toiletries
  - o General toiletries (unscented please, scent attracts bugs and can aggravate allergies), soap/detergent, shampoo, small beach towel and 2 face cloths, SUN BLOCK (SPF 30+), INSECT REPELLANT (needs to have a high percentage of deet to be effective), wet naps (a must), hand sanitizer, hair elastics, barrettes.
- Miscellaneous
  - o Hand held fan
  - o Headlamp or flash light
  - o Small personal music devices (for on the plane or to drown out noise while sleeping)
  - o Reading material
  - o WATER BOTTLE (a must!)
  - o Camera/film/memory card/extra batteries/charger
  - o Batteries for any electronic devices (e.g. 9v, AA, AAA)
  - o Waist pouch/small day pack/back pack
  - o Phrase book/language dictionary
  - o Prescription medication/glasses/sunglasses
  - o Passport/important documents

- Earplugs/travel clock/small mirror
- Breakfast bars/granola bars, dried fruit, crackers, juice crystals, candy, cookies

## **Language Learning**

Here are some tips that we hope will help you overcome some of the language barriers that you will encounter:

- Buy a pocket dictionary for the intended country (electronic dictionaries are more convenient)
- Learn some of the more common words or phrases (a phrase book would be useful in this case)
- Use the language as often as you can, the locals will greatly appreciate your effort to learn their language
- Practice your language skills with children, they love to listen and help you learn
- Listen to the locals speaking, in particular, watch for body language, intonation and pronunciation
- Compliment people on their ability to speak English, they will really appreciate the encouragement
- NEVER assume that you are surrounded by people that do not understand English

## **Emergency Communication**

There will be opportunities for you to contact family while we are there (phone and computer).

AN EMERGENCY LIST, HANDED OUT AT A GROUP MEETING, WILL BE LEFT WITH YOUR FAMILY THAT INCLUDES CONTACT NUMBERS BOTH AT HOME AND IN NICARAGUA.

Toney's cell number in Nicaragua is: 011-505-8886-0911

Toney's cell number in U.S. is: 770-560-9523

## **Anticipating Your Return Home**

You've been away from home – living in an exotic land, eating strange foods, meeting wonderful people. More importantly, you've also been experiencing the joy of serving, not only people in need but also Jesus Christ. But now it is almost time to return home, to return to the life you temporarily left behind – work, school or other responsibilities you may have. The transition from your mission experience back to home life is not always easy. To help you deal with the reverse culture shock you may likely experience, here are some antidotes to consider:

**REFLECT:** Spend time reflecting on where you are and what you're doing. Notice the obvious in your circumstances, feelings and questions. Then probe for deeper insight. Read over the journal entries you have made during your trip. Show God you are paying attention to the lessons He's teaching you. As your heart turns homeward, your journal will become a rich storehouse of insight for you.

**REEVALUATE:** Ask yourself questions about your changing attitudes. How am I growing and why? How have my values changed? How are my expectations different from when I first arrived? How will the changes I've made affect my situations at home? Is my self-image different? What's the biggest challenge I face going home?

**RECOMMIT:** Resolve to be active in world concerns – wherever you are. Decide now to continue studying and learning about the need of the world. Ask the Lord to keep you sensitive to cross-cultural ministry.

**REHEARSE:** Project yourself back into the future at home. Realize that many people won't be aware of where you've been. The inner changes you will likely feel won't show on the outside. Be as realistic as you can about what it means to "go back home".

## **DEBRIEFING**

Before you leave to return home, your group leader will lead you in a time of debriefing. Jesus knew the value of recapping events when He sat down with the seventy disciples, who had just returned from a short term assignment. He listened to their stories, recounted the highlights, explained some principles of what they had learned and led them in prayer- praising the Father for all they had experienced.

Debriefing is important. It allows for the opportunity to capture stories, underline lessons, apply experiences to daily life, and surrender everything to the Lord. Here are three signs of health to plan for:

1. **HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:** Your reentry will go smoother if you have a plan to reestablish the key relationships in your life. Plan ways to communicate with your family once you arrive. Look for creative ways to relate. If your family is not your primary spiritual support, get together right away with people who can help you deal with the changes, questions and conflicts you face.
2. **HEALTHY HABITS:** Most of us are creatures of habit. The sooner you reestablish routines and patterns at home, the sooner you will regain your emotional and spiritual balance. Plan and pray for your schedule as you return home. Trust God to equip and strengthen you for every task. Pray that He will grant you His perspective on people, circumstances, and the future.
3. **HEALTHY CHECK UPS:** Plan to give yourself a spiritual check up at regular intervals. Ask yourself if you sense the Lord's presence. Ask what things have made your love for the Lord grow. Ask yourself how you are demonstrating your commitment to world evangelism. Write down clear goals for spiritual growth and ways to measure your progress.

## **BACK AT HOME**

Returning home doesn't mean life "as usual" – the way it used to be. Your short term mission trip can change your life. Evaluating your mission experience and accepting it as a lasting part of your life will help you move back into your own culture with more ease. Here are some phases of a healthy reentry as you arrive home.

1. **ROMANCE PHASE:** Going home looks easy at first. You're eager to see your family and friends. You feel you can handle anything. This is the time for glowing reports of your trip and detailed sharing about your experience abroad.
2. **REACTIONARY PHASE:** Gradually, reality sets in. This time is often characterized by chaotic feelings like grief, ambiguity, personal aimlessness, exaggeration of problems. You wonder when you'll feel settled again.

3. **READJUSTMENT PHASE:** You begin to settle back into your home culture. This requires the same skills of observation you used abroad. Find a mentor who can listen, answer questions and give advice.
4. **REENGAGEMENT PHASE:** Now you regain a healthy sense of who you are. You become involved in life around you. You realize it is not wrong to enjoy your present settings. You work on relationships and commit yourself to service right where you are.

## Sharing Your Story

Unlike most experiences, your short term mission trip isn't over when it's over. It's important to prepare to tell the story many times without losing its meaning. Here are ten tips to point you in the right direction.

1. **BECOME A STORY TELLER.** Learn to tell short stories that capture your audience. Paint verbal pictures of the most intriguing sights, people and events of your trip. Edit out tight sayings and phrases too common to missionary reports.
2. **REFER BACK TO YOUR JOURNAL.** Create ways to share the feelings, thoughts and details you recorded on your trip. Go over one entry a day and ask the Lord to teach you something that can be communicated with others.
3. **CAPITALIZE ON THE IMMEDIATE.** Work on a communication strategy before you get off the plane. People will be most interested in your story in the first days and weeks after your return. Decide which people you want to reach right away. Take the initiative to arrange settings in which you can share your experiences with them.
4. **PREPARE A THIRTY-SECOND RESPONSE.** Think of a few sentences to capture your overall feelings and impressions. "It was a life changing two weeks", "I'd love to tell you about it when you have time", "How about it", "It was both exciting and stressful", "It changed my perspective on my church, my country and myself", "I'd love to tell you about it, if you'd like to hear".
5. **PREPARE A THREE-MINUTE RESPONSE.** This should be an extended version of your "thirty second" response. You'll want to open with a crisp sentence or two. Add a brief illustration or image. Then sum it up by inviting people to hear more.
6. **PREPARE A FIFTEEN-MINUTE RESPONSE.** Work on this the way you would a term paper with a theme, transitions, stories and illustrations. Your goal is to inform others about missions and to inspire them to participate. Tell stories about the people you met and worked with. Minimize the usual comments about travel, weather, food and insects. Be yourself and use humor whenever possible.
7. **REPORT BACK TO THE CONGREGATION THAT SUPPORTED YOU.** It may be impossible to thank all your supporters individually; therefore a formal time is best if the entire congregation was involved in sending you on your short term mission trip. Work with your group leader in perhaps organizing a time where your entire group can be involved in a presentation to your church or community.

8. **SEND A FINAL PRAYER LETTER.** If you sent out a letter for prayer and financial support (or even if you didn't), send an actual letter to the many people who knew you were going on this trip. In your letter describe events of your trip and how God has been working in your life. Include your best stories and pictures.
9. **WRITE A LETTER FOR PUBLICATION.** Your church/community newsletter, denominational magazine or local paper may be willing to feature a local person crossing cultural barriers. Describe your eye-opening experiences and the different customs you encountered. Include at least one clear black and white photograph.
10. **BE WILLING TO SHARE ANYWHERE.** With preparation and experiences, you can share your story anywhere, in front of your church, at a local school, before a civic group. Remember the work and the glory belongs to the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage and the words to say.