



# ViviendasLeón

Family Travel Packet

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Dear Families,

**Welcome!**

ViviendasLeón is an international development and global education non-profit organization made up of people from both the United States and Nicaragua who have been working in sustainable community development and global education travel for more than ten years.

Our mission is twofold: We provide human, community and economic development in the León region and promote positive relationships between U.S. students, teachers and families and our global community. Our travel programs have been developed to give students, faculty and families in the United States the opportunity to learn more about the world they live in, gain cross cultural competencies and put their desire to help others into practice.

This year in addition to our home stay option we are excited to offer hotel stays in Leon if you prefer. This will allow your family to stay in a relaxed environment with other families on the trip at a hotel located in the heart of downtown Leon. I encourage you to read more of our mission, history, staff and programs on our website: [www.viviendasleon.org](http://www.viviendasleon.org)

**A typical day**

Every morning we wake and have breakfast at our hotel. We gather in the lobby, talk about the day's activities and hear a brief talk by local experts on various topics. We depart on foot to nearby cultural and historic places in Leon. We have lunch in any number of restaurants in the center of Leon, and then depart for the Goyena community via bus or van transportation. In the afternoons we take part in the projects in the rural communities. Our return to Leon often includes a stop at a swimming pool to cool off after a day in the heat. Evenings are spent at dinner and afterward with the group for reflection time or activities. During Holy Week we attend a number of processions, go to key locations around the city where activities are taking place and visit some of the numerous churches that Leon is known for.

**Projects in the community**

The cornerstone of our program is time spent in the rural communities of Sutiaba, participating on development projects, side by side with community members. Our organizational philosophy is based on the idea that building relationships leads to successful outcomes. We work in a 4-year cycle of graduated development in a community toward shared development objectives. Projects, as a result, are long term and each volunteer plays a part in the success of a project. There are two pathways of development that recognize the immediate needs of adults and the long term goals of children and youth.

In 2011 we launched a multi year agro forestry program. The objectives are to provide food security, reforestation, and sources of agricultural products for market. Our micro business start up program creates businesses related to agriculture. In 2012 we began a housing construction and improvement program designed to alleviate the worst living conditions in the community and support improvements to houses over the coming years. Continuing projects include after school arts program, English reinforcement and computer lab at the Goyena Community Center. Projects that students routinely participate in include tree seed planting in nurseries, tree transplanting, vegetable garden construction and seed planting, building construction, and participation in the arts program. that is particularly great for younger kids, and our after school soccer program for youth from 8-18 years of age.

Projects you will participate in include tree seed planting in nurseries, tree transplanting, vegetable garden construction and seed planting, community center based programs such as the after school arts program and soccer program.

**The Sutiaba communities**

Numerous small communities are located in the indigenous region of León known as Sutiaba. This region extends west from the city to the Pacific Ocean. We currently work in Goyena and Troilo, two communities of more than 350 families each. Many of these households are occupied solely by mothers and their children. Fathers and sons are often working in neighboring countries such as Costa Rica and Panama due to lack of employment in Nicaragua.

**Environmental travel to Mirafior or Apoyo**

In 2011 we introduced environmental programs in the national cloud forest reserve of Mirafior, and the natural crater lake preserve of Apoyo. In Mirafior we learn about the cloud forest ecology and how family farming plays a role in preserving the environment while staying on coffee farms that have been designed as guest lodges. In Apoyo, students study the flora and fauna of this isolated volcanic crater, staying in lodges along the fresh water lake. Spanish language courses are part of the itinerary every morning, with afternoons spent hiking, swimming and exploring.

I really believe our program is a great way to introduce your family to the issues facing the majority of the world's peoples, while providing a cultural and community service opportunity that is both rewarding and fun.

We look forward to having you on the trip with us!

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Safety considerations while traveling in Nicaragua,

Below is an overview of the history and safety factors regarding travel to Nicaragua. I hope the travel packet and emergency procedures are also helpful. There you will find information on our protocols, and also actions a traveler would take in the event of a natural disaster in Nicaragua. These are not unlike what one would do here in the event of an earthquake. I hope you find this information helpful.

While it is natural to lump all countries together south of the border, particularly these days when there is so much news from Mexico and some other countries regarding drug trafficking and the violence associated with it, this is not an accurate depiction of many Latin American countries. Without exception, each country has a different history, and relationship to the U.S., that has contributed to the situation it finds itself in today. The violent crime we read about in the media can be found in many countries, however Nicaragua is not one of them. Neighboring countries like Guatemala and El Salvador, both experienced failed political transformations during the 1970's and 80's, and as a result, the violence associated with political repression or anti-democratic tendencies continues, whereas in Nicaragua this is not the case.

As many of us know, Nicaragua experienced a civil war known as the Sandinista Revolution, that occurred during the 1970's, culminating in the defeat of the U.S. backed Somoza dictatorship in 1979. Subsequently, the U.S. declared an unofficial war on Nicaragua, causing additional suffering that only subsided at the end of the 1980's. Since that time, Nicaragua has undergone a unique evolution as a Latin American democracy. The U.S. has contributed significantly to the development of a modern police force, demilitarized the country and supported development in various economic export sectors including coffee and beef production. There is a cultural commitment to democracy in the country, which has been challenged during this period by poor leadership and a history, since independence in 1823, of an unbalanced and occasionally violent shift in political fortunes of one political party or another. One can see the revolution of 1979 as a link in the chain of many moments of civil violence in the country's history.

Today Nicaragua remains one of the 3 poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere. Petty theft is a frequent occurrence, particularly in Managua, a city of 1 million inhabitants, many of whom are migrants from rural communities who have left the social structure of their homes and migrated to Managua in search of work, only to be abandoned in one of many shanty communities around the city. Leon is a different environment altogether. Families live and work in and around Leon. Rural communities in the region are historically established and even though poor and suffering from a variety of inter related challenges, are homes to 3/5 of the region's population. Political activity can cause occasional disruptions or more rare, violent demonstrations. This almost invariably occurs in Managua, the governmental capital.

ViviendasLeón is committed to introducing students and others to Nicaragua to build trusting and respectful relationships between people. It is in our interest to operate the safest educational travel programs we can offer. Our guidelines for the safety of travelers are designed for the conditions in Nicaragua. Students travel together with our staff during each day of a trip itinerary. Students stay in pairs or groups of 3 in home stays, all in the same neighborhood in Leon. Home stays are vetted by our organization and are families we have been working with for nearly 20 years. Students are not permitted to go out at night, unless they are out with one of our staff members or their home stay family and our staff know their destination. Our medical and emergency protocols are outlined in the attached information packet. Please review these and contact us with any questions you may have.

Regards,  
Evan Markiewicz

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## In and Around León

### **León Cathedral:**

As is true of many Latin American cities, the focal point of Leon is the cathedral. Views from the cathedral's roof affords the visitor tremendous views of the city and of the volcanoes beyond. Leonese routinely gather at the Cathedral not only for religious activities but to meet friends or just watch the world go by. Everyone in Leon seems to pass by the Cathedral at some point during the day. The central market for the city is directly behind the cathedral and the city's primary park fronts it. The Cathedral of León is known as one of the largest in Central America. Construction on the building started in 1746 and lasted roughly 100 years. The cathedral houses significant works of religious art that date from the mid-1700's to the present, including massive 10' high paintings for each of the stations of the cross. The cathedral is also the burial place for most of the country's prestigious political, intellectual and religious figures. One of these is the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío. It was selected by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2011.

### **El Museo de Tradiciones y Leyendas (Museum of Traditions and Legends)**

The Museo is located in a building that served as a jail for political prisoners from 1921 to 1979. The cells are now galleries dedicated Nicaraguan folktales and legends. One local folkloric art tradition on display is one that originated in Spain: giant puppets (*gigantonas*), which are paraded around the city during festivals in August and December. In the museum's courtyard are a large series of mosaic panels depicting the legends and traditions of Nicaragua, designed by noted Leon artist Daniel Pullido

### **Ruben Dario Museum:**

The poet Ruben Dario is perhaps Nicaragua's most famous literary figure. A poet, journalist, novelist and one-time Nicaraguan ambassador to France, Ruben Dario is regarded by many as the "spokesman of Latin American modernism." His poetry was known for its experimentation, complexity, and rhythm and engendered great pride among Hispanics. The Rubèn Darío Museum is located in the home where he spent his childhood and returned at the end of his life. The life history of Rubén Darío is portrayed on the walls and some of his belongings are on display, including his bed, his bible, and some of his writings.

### **Art Museum Fundación Ortiz Gurián**

The art museum of the Ortiz Gurián Foundation is located in two restored, colonial buildings that are excellent examples of Spanish Colonial architecture of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Each building houses different galleries containing paintings, sculptures, images, and contemporary arts of Latin America. The first building shows pieces of art chronologically, beginning with objects from the 16th century and ending with contemporary arts. In the second building one can find more exhibits of contemporary arts.

### **Revolutionary murals:**

Leon is famous for its murals depicting events leading up to and after the revolution in 1979. A walk in the historic center of town reveals a number of these including the depiction of the history of Nicaragua, the influence of the CIA in the Nicaraguan social reform project of the revolution, the site of a student demonstration and killings by national guard troops, and many others.

### **Leon Cultural Center:**

A visit to the local cultural center provides travelers with an introduction to Nicaraguan culture through the art displayed in the center, classes offered including Latin and folkloric dance, music, painting, mosaic and other classes, and performances by musicians and dance groups.

### **Sutiaba neighborhood:**

A visit to the Sutiaba neighborhood in Leon includes the **Sutiaba Cathedral**, **Sutiaba Archeology Museum**, and **Sutiaba Cultural Center**. The cathedral construction began in 1698, at the time of magistrate Diego Rodríguez Menéndez, and was completed August 24, 1710. In the war with El Salvador, in 1844, the dome that crowned the tower was destroyed and finally re-built in the early 20th century. The most notable aspects of the cathedral are the sun painting on the ceiling of the interior and the now lost figures of indigenous elders that were once placed in the church façade. The altar is said to be one of the largest and most well preserved in Central America. The archeology museum holds some examples of pottery found in the region and recreations of the painting style used to decorate pottery and other artifacts. The cultural center supports the community of Sutiaba with workshops in sewing and other skills, and a store selling locally made handicrafts.

### **Volcan Cerro Negro:**

Literally Black Hill, this volcano just 45 minutes from the center of Leon has been the most active in the chain that stretches from the northern to the southern borders of Nicaragua. It is small in comparison to the others and is characterized by its uniform black volcanic ash. Hiking to the top of the Cerro is a routine outing for student groups. From here one can see the entire volcanic plain that makes up the geography of the Leon region.

## **ORIENTATION**

ViviendasLeón was established in Leon, Nicaragua in 2003. We work with rural populations to improve their standard of living through a variety of aid and education programs. We bring travel groups throughout the year to assist us in our development goals through our Global Education Travel program. Students, travelers and volunteers are critical to the success of our work and we take their health and awareness of local health issues very seriously. As a result, we monitor health issues in Nicaragua and update our health recommendations on a regular basis.

### **Travel In Nicaragua**

Nicaragua is a beautiful country, and people are very friendly. In León, people are used to the comings and goings of people from the U.S. with ViviendasLeón. There are some things to be aware of when traveling in any foreign country, and particularly in a less-developed country. Please read the following advice on how to avoid illness, how to pack and cultural awareness. Remembering these guidelines while in Nicaragua will help you enjoy your stay.

### **Health recommendations for travelers 2016**

*Food and Water:* Because of the hot weather found throughout the year in the León region, dehydration is the most common ailment that travelers experience. This is avoided by drinking significant amounts of water throughout your stay. Recommendations:

- Do not drink tap water. Bottled water is provided in your home stay and in our transportation vehicles. Make sure to fill up your water bottle frequently and drink regularly throughout the day.
- If you experience diarrhea it is normally caused by a change of diet. If it persists it can contribute to dehydration. It is important that if you have this condition to speak to our staff so that they can monitor the condition and provide the medical care needed.

Eat food that is well cooked and kept hot. Only eat fresh fruit you can peel yourself, do not eat pre-cut fruit from the street vendors. Avoid raw fish and shellfish. Avoid salads unless you are eating at a restaurant suggested by the program director.

*Mosquito vector diseases:* The tropics and subtropics are known for mosquito-borne diseases (dengue, malaria, chikungunya). The most recent example is the Zika virus. Zika virus is transmitted to humans by the bite of the *Aedes* mosquito, a predominantly day-biting mosquito, which is present throughout Latin America. Relatively little is known regarding this virus, including risk factors for illness, and other potential modes of transmission. Those who become symptomatic with Zika may experience fever, rash, joint pains, and other symptoms. One area that has emerged of particular concern is the connection with viral illness during pregnancy and microcephaly in newborns. Additional concerns are the potential connection with a neurologic syndrome known as Guillain-Barre, though this has yet to be fully characterized.

At this time there is a low incidence of the disease in Nicaragua and identified cases have been located in Managua. Because of the risks in pregnancy, however, we recommend that pregnant women and women of child-bearing age to consider whether they should travel or not given this apparent connection, and consult with their healthcare provider. At this point (February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016), the CDC has not issued specific precautions to other individuals traveling to affected countries. We will continue to monitor this disease and provide updates as they become available.

It has been our experience with all mosquito-borne diseases that León presents a relatively low risk for acquiring these diseases. Over the last 23 years that we have brought groups to León, we are unaware of anyone having been diagnosed with mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue or malaria. Within recent years the Nicaraguan government has become proactive in reducing mosquito populations through various measures including education, trash collection and fumigation. It should be noted, however, that the situation with Zika virus is evolving, and we are unable to predict what the situation and risks for this particular disease will be in the coming weeks and months.

There is no vaccine or medicine that is available to prevent Zika. To guard against all mosquito-borne diseases we recommend the following measures to be taken:

1. Follow all CDC recommendations for the purchase and application of insect repellants:

**Which mosquito repellents work best?**

CDC recommends the use of products containing active ingredients, which have been registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use as repellents applied to skin and clothing.

Of the products registered with the EPA, those containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and some oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-menthane-diol products provide longer-lasting protection.

EPA registration means that EPA does not expect the product to cause adverse effects to human health or the environment when used according to the label.

**How often should repellent be reapplied?**

Repellents containing a higher percentage of the active ingredient typically provide longer-lasting protection. Regardless of what product you use, if you start to get mosquito bites, reapply the repellent according to the label instructions.

**What precautions should I follow when using repellents?**

Always follow the recommendations appearing on the product label. EPA recommends the following when using insect repellents:

- Apply repellents only to exposed skin and/or clothing (as directed on the product label). Do not apply repellents under your clothing.
- Never use repellents over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.
- Do not apply to eyes or mouth, and apply sparingly around ears. When using repellent sprays, do not spray directly on your face—spray on your hands first and then apply to your face.
- Do not allow children to handle or spray the product. When using on children, apply to your own hands first and then put it on the child. Avoid applying repellent to children’s hands because children frequently put their hands in their eyes and mouths.
- Use just enough repellent to cover exposed skin and/or clothing. Heavy application does not give you better or longer lasting protection.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water or bathe. This is particularly important when repellents are used repeatedly in a day or on consecutive days.
- If you (or your child) get a rash or other reaction from a repellent, stop using the repellent, wash the repellent off with mild soap and water, and call a local poison control center for further guidance. If you go to a doctor, it might be helpful to take the repellent with you.

*From [wwwnc.cdc.gov](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov) website. Most recent update: March 31, 2015*

2. Wear protective clothing including long, lightweight pants, socks and t-shirts.

*Medications and vaccinations:* At this time, we recommend the following vaccinations and medicines to be obtained 6 weeks before your trip. Check with your personal physician and the CDC for more information.

- Hepatitis A vaccine: a two-part vaccine. The second part is given 6 months after the first
- Update Polio and Tetanus vaccines if necessary.

Other optional medicines:

- Cipro 500mg antibiotic: Recommended for illness or diarrhea.
- Malaria medications: These are optional but are effective at reducing risk of malaria. They are sold under a number of names including Malarone. Please check with your physician regarding any Malaria medications, their use and side effects.
- Pepto bismol tablets. Very useful to moderate the effects of a new diet taken daily.

Be sure to bring enough of your personal prescription medications. Make sure all medicines are in original containers and properly labeled.

### **Travel Planning**

ViviendasLeon facilitates the coordination of travel among individual travelers in a group. We rely on each participant to research their own air travel options, and work with VL to coordinate with others. All travelers must arrive in Managua before noon on the first day of the trip, and depart after noon on the last day of the trip. There are 3 ways to get to Managua from San Francisco:

TACA/Avianca: Departs 1:00 AM, one stop in El Salvador and arrives in Managua at 9:30 AM the first day of the trip.

American: Departs in the morning from SFO the day before first day of the itinerary, one stop in Miami and arrival in Managua at 8:30 PM. Hotel stay in Managua required.

United: Departs in the morning from SFO the day before first day of the itinerary, one stop in Houston and arrival in Managua at 8:30 PM. Hotel stay in Managua required.

### **Travel Insurance**

We require that each traveler carry medical insurance. Allianz Travel Insurance, <http://www.allianztravelinsurance.com/> offers temporary travel medical policies for as little as \$75.00 per week and includes a variety of services. Please take the time to review the website or call them at 866 884-3556. If you choose not to purchase travel insurance we highly recommend you review your insurers requirements for travel outside the United States.

For flight insurance, Access America, <http://www.accessamerica.com/>, offers flight cancellation policies.

### **Beach safety**

The ocean in Nicaragua is very rough and not safe for swimming. We may schedule visits to the beach for an environmental excursion or relaxation however, ViviendasLeon does not permit travelers to swim in the ocean. There are swimming pools at the beach for this purpose. Please make a particular note of this as it is a requirement of the traveler to follow this guideline.

### **Weather & Clothing**

The weather in León is hot and humid most of the year (85-100 F) with frequent heavy showers during the rainy season from May to November. Lightweight clothing with high cotton content is suggested. Bring only what is easily hand washable. Jeans are difficult to dry. Dress is informal but neat and clean: looking nice is regarded as a measure of self-respect and respect for others in Latin American culture. Shorts are appropriate for all activities. Bring one nice set of clothes for going out in the evening.

#### Miscellaneous

- The electrical current is 110 ac/ 60 hertz. Electrical plugs are identical to those in the US.
- Letters sent to the U.S. will take, on average, ten days to two weeks.
- We recommend that travelers bring no more than \$50 per week of spending money.
- Be sure to close your handbags and fanny packs and always be aware of your surroundings.
- Time zone: Nicaragua is on U.S. Central Standard Time (2 hours later than California).

### **Reading**

There are a number of books we recommend to begin to understand Nicaragua from a travel, historical and economic perspective.

The best travel guide right now is Nicaragua by Moon Handbooks. It is available at most good bookstores and on line at Amazon.com.

The classic historical text on Latin America is Open Veins of Latin America by Eduardo Galeano. This is regularly assigned to high school students studying Latin American history.

A contemporary companion to the Galeano book, which I definitely recommend is out of print so may take some doing to find. It is Confronting Revolution by Morris J Blachman, et al. It is a political history of Central America, published by Pantheon Books.

Another addition to Latin American history is *The Buried Mirror* by Carlos Fuentes. It is a great historical book that helps us to understand how the past is reflected in the current situation.

An unusual book I really like marks a time in Nicaraguan history that is quickly disappearing. It is *The Murals of Revolutionary Nicaragua*, by David Kunzle, published by University of California Press, Berkeley.

For those interested in economic issues, there are two recent publications titled *The Mystery of Capital and The Other Path*, by Hernando De Soto, published by Basic Books and Harper and Rowe, respectively.

US Department of State

You may find it helpful to read the Consular Information Sheet on Nicaragua posted by the U.S. Department of State at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_985.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_985.html), as well as the Profile of Nicaragua posted by the U.S. Department of State at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm>.



## Packing list

### Required Items to Pack:

- \$10 per person for visa upon entering the country (cash)
- Toiletries
- Soap
- Toothbrush/Toothpaste
- Shampoo
- Towels (2)
- Lightweight bathrobe
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent-See instructions regarding repellent on page 2
- Band-aids
- Tissue packets (for restrooms with no toilet paper)
- Hat
- Hand sanitizer
- Prescription medications, in original containers
- Eyeglasses/contact supplies
- Wide mouth water bottle
- Small knapsack for day trips

### Required clothing (lightweight/cotton)

- 2 pair shorts, 1 pair of pants.
- 2-4 t-shirts
- 1 nice outfit such as a dress, or dress shirt and pants
- Sandals
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Underwear
- Socks
- Swimsuit

### Required Work Clothes (Construction)

- Sturdy shoes
- 2-4 pairs of socks
- 2 pairs of work shorts or pants
- 2-4 t-shirts
- Hat
- Work gloves

### If you are traveling to Miraflores:

- Boots
- Warm fleece or jacket
- 1 pair long pants

### Other items

- Camera
- Earplugs (it can be noisy at night)
- Sunglasses
- Bandana
- Hip sack or money belt
- Flashlight
- Travel alarm clock
- Writing materials, pen
- Spanish/English dictionary

### Gifts and donations

We are often asked what gifts are appropriate for home stay families and the rural community.

Here is our recommendation:

Home stay families: Spanish language books, used games and puzzles, photos of your family, hard candy.  
 Rural community: Spanish language books, used shoes and clothes, used soccer equipment and clothes.

## Useful Phone Numbers & Addresses

The León Office  
 ViviendasLeón  
 Semáforos Unión Fenosa  
 90 vrs al Este  
 León, Nicaragua  
 Central America  
 Telephone 2311-3511  
 Cell phone 8697-1475  
 outside of León 0 2311-3511  
 outside Nicaragua 505-2311-3511  
 from US 011-505-2311-3511  
 e-mail: indiana@viviendasleon.org

León Administrative Staff  
 Indiana Garcia, Director, Nicaragua  
 Carolina Galo, Accounting  
 Brenda Acosta, Bookkeeping  
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For collect calls:

ATT: dial 164. After a series of rapid beeps, an English-speaking ATT operator will come on the line. Give the operator the number you wish to call. Your options are either collect or phone credit card.

MCI: dial 166. Use procedure above.

SPRINT: dial 161. Use procedure above.

Other:

US CONSULATE/EMBASSY: 011-505-2252-7320, After hours: 011-505-2252-7100.

There is no roll-over dialing in Nicaragua. You must dial each number directly, if busy, dial the next number. Always speak in English, identify yourself as a US citizen and state the nature of the emergency as briefly as possible until you are connected to the consul or his/her representative in relation to the emergency. In cases when you are calling during non-business hours, ask to speak with the "Officer of the day."

AIRLINES:

American Airlines: (505) 2255-9090

Continental: (505) 2278-7033

Avianca/TACA Airlines: (505) 2276-9982

## Important Notes and Tips for Travelers

**Keeping Healthy:** Because of changes in living situation, diet, physical labor, and climate, you need to take precautions in maintaining your health during your trip. We maintain relationships with licensed health professionals and pharmacies in León who provide emergency care, medicines and medical treatment. Your own common sense health precautions are the most important part of staying healthy. The most basic are:

- Wash your hands before eating
- Eat well
- Drink only purified water
- Never go barefoot
- Take heat seriously; bring water everywhere; wear sun tan lotion
- Always use insect repellent
- Get plenty of rest
- Get the recommended inoculations.

**Conditions in Nicaragua:** Nicaragua is one of the poorest nations in the hemisphere. Keep in mind that you will be a guest of Nicaraguans whose economic status will be much lower than yours. A critical part of the trip is experiencing life as the poor experience it. You should approach this with understanding and humility.

**Rural Families:** Homes in the community where we will be working may have dirt floors, one or two rooms, and a separate kitchen. Cooking is usually done on a two burner gas camping stove or on wood burning fires. Many people may live in a small house. There are domestic animals, such as chickens, pigs, sharing the premises, as well as bugs. (See below for bugs!) Outdoor latrines may be the only facilities and often times there is no toilet paper.

**Donations and Gift Giving:** Nicaraguan host families love to see pictures of your family and where you live. If you can, bring a small group of pictures to share. We also encourage finding Spanish language books in used bookstores in the Bay Area to bring and give to family members of all ages in your host family. We also encourage you to bring sturdy shoes that you have stopped wearing and used sports equipment and clothing that can be given to children in the rural community.

**Food:** Food in Nicaragua revolves around certain staples, particularly rice, beans and tortillas. Generally, your hosts will try and supply some vegetable and fruit, but have no great expectations about variety. Meals may seem monotonous compared to your usual fare and you should be prepared for this. Meat is frequently offered. If you are a vegetarian, the trip coordinators will tell your host family.

**Noise:** Nicaragua is a vibrant and lively place. Nicaraguans like to listen to their music, television, and radio throughout the day and sometimes loud. Nicaraguans are also animated communicators! So if you throw a dog in with the neighbors' music, and young men playing in the street, it can make for an occasionally noisy environment. You may want to bring earplugs to wear at night to sleep.

**Bugs:** Nicaragua has lots of bugs and creepy crawlers that you may not be accustomed to. Among them are spiders, scorpions, cockroaches, and probably most dangerous of all, mosquitoes. However, in León, it is quite rare to run into most of these critters. Nonetheless, it is best to take precautions whenever possible, like checking in your shoes for spiders and the like before slipping them on. While working, it is best to wear long pants, gloves, and rugged boots with socks. During the day, wear sun tan lotion and insect repellent, and at night, sleep wearing insect repellent.

**Work:** Usually, the projects undertaken during a trip will vary from relatively easy to intensive, depending on a traveler's choices. Travelers may feel uncommonly tired during your stay due to working in the heat. Make sure to take rests while working and to drink lots of water (see below). Be sure to wear a sun hat, sun tan lotion, sturdy shoes, and to drink lots of water.

**Sun and Water:** The sun is very hot here and much more directly over head. Even on a pleasant day, when the sun doesn't feel hot, the burn factor is very high. It is best to always wear sunscreen and sun hat and glasses. Water is critical. You cannot drink enough while you are here and especially while working. Drink before you feel thirsty as dehydration sneaks up on you and can bring with it severe headaches and other symptoms. Always bring a full water bottle with purified water with you at all times. León's water is said to be fine for the local people, but it contains bacteria that travelers are not accustomed to and chlorine. We'll be buying purified water for the trip, so best to always drink this water during your stay. At restaurants, be sure to ask for drinks without ice, as the ice can be made with regular tap water.

**Group Consciousness:** Please strive for flexibility, patience, openness, and unity. We need to pay conscious attention to the well being of our group as a whole, respecting and being sensitive to each other. Should any issue arise which might merit the consideration of the entire group, whether problems, interesting experiences or opportunities for new delegation work, please raise them at appropriate times when the group is together say, in the morning before leaving for the project site, during lunch or at the reflection time at the end of the day.

**Money and Valuables:** Be careful with your money, While taking public buses and walking the streets, take every big city precaution. Wear bags in around the front and not dangling down your side and do not wear any jewelry. Keep possessions confined to your closed suitcase while living with a host family. We will occasionally cash personal money for your use during your stay, often \$20 at a time. At present the exchange rate is approximately \$1 = 27C\$ (Cordobas).

**Public demonstrations:** One of the many reasons travelers come to Nicaragua is for its political vibrancy. There are over twenty political parties spanning a very broad spectrum of political ideologies. One of the most important vehicles parties have for self-expression are public demonstrations. These are almost always well attended and peaceful. On rare occasions they can be less so, and over the last 20 years, there have been a few that have caused injury to participants. Demonstrations can occur in various parts of the country simultaneously if hosted by large national parties and can lead to disruptions in traffic and transportation. We recommend in these situations that visitors stay close to their homes and suspend travel plans until it is considered safe to travel. The staff in Leon will provide direction and information in any case where our travel itinerary is changed due to demonstrations.

**Have fun:** These impressions are meant to prepare you for some of the more difficult aspects of life in Nicaragua. You will also have fun, make wonderful friends, and share in some truly interesting and heartwarming exchanges with the people with whom you will live and work. Enjoy your time here. Nicaragua is a great place!

**Other Considerations: Photographing:** If you take photographs, respect the Nicaraguan's privacy and ask permission first. Most are happy to have pictures taken.

**What you can do when you return from Nicaragua:** Talk to people about your experiences. Plan a slide show. Try to disseminate information that your friends and family will never receive from the mainstream media. For many of us who have lived and worked in Nicaragua, the often heart-rending struggle of the Nicaraguan people for justice, peace, and social equality against incredible odds has been a source of inspiration, as well as anguish. We hope that you will also be inspired by this experience. Many people often feel that they want to continue social justice work when they return from their delegation experience. We will be glad to help you find ways to contribute.

## Helpful Phrases in Spanish

### Greetings

Buenos días, buenas tardes, buenas noches  
(*Bwaynohs deeyas.....tarhdess, .....nohchez*)  
Hola (*oh lah*)  
Cómo está? (*Cohmoh esstah*)  
Muy bien, gracias, y usted?  
(*Moo-ee be-ehn, grahsee us, ee oostehd*)  
Hasta luego (*ahstah loo way goh*)  
Adios (*Ah-dee ohs*)

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening

Hello  
How are you?  
Fine, thank you, and yourself?

See you later!  
Goodbye

### Introductions

Con mucho gusto; encantado/a  
(*Cohn moochoh goostoh/ ehncantahdoh/dah*)  
Yo soy \_\_\_\_\_; Me llamo \_\_\_\_\_.  
(*Yoh soy May yahmoh*)  
Soy estadounidense.  
(*Soy esstahdoh ooneedensay*)  
Soy estudiante  
(*Soy ehstooodeeyantay*)

Pleased to meet you.

I am \_\_\_\_\_; My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from the US.

I am a student.

### Feelings

Estoy cansado/a. (*Esstoy consahdoh/ah*)  
listo/a. (*leahstoh/tah*)  
enfermo/a. (*ehnfairmoh/mah*)  
contento/a. (*cohntentoh/tah*)

I am tired.  
ready to go.  
sick.  
happy; satisfied.

Tengo hambre (*ahmbray*)  
(*Tango*) sed(*said*)  
sueno (*swehnyoh*)

I am hungry.  
thirsty.  
sleepy/tired.

### Emergency

Ayúdame! / Ayudo! (*Ahyoodahmay! Ahyoodoh!*)  
Necesito ayuda (*Nessesseetoh ahyoodoh*)

Help me! / Help!  
I need help.

### Directions

Dónde está

**el Hermanamiento ViviendasLeón?**

(*ermahnahmeyentoh*)  
el mercado central?  
(*ehl marecahdoh centralh*)  
el hospital? (*lah ohspeetahl*)  
un telefono?  
el baño?

Where is the...

ViviendasLeon office?  
central market?  
hospital?  
a telephone?  
the bathroom?

### Expressions

Mire! (*me ray*)  
Vamos. (*vahmohs*)  
Lentamente, por favor.

Look! (to get someone's attention)  
Let's go.  
Slowly please.

# ViviendasLeón

## Emergency Protocols

## CONTENTS

This packet contains all emergency policies, procedures and priorities for the emergency site, inventory of emergency packs, organizations to be contacted and instructions on how to do so.

### DEFINITIONS

**VL**– ViviendasLeón

**PD**– Program Director

**Visitors**–Travel group members

**Emergency**–Any unexpected natural or man-made event that causes widespread destruction or danger.

### POLICIES:

- I. Copies of the emergency policies and procedures will be kept in the VL office.
- II. Emergency policies and procedures will be reviewed and modified according to need at the end of each calendar year.
- III. First Aid kits will be kept in the VL vehicle.
- IV. Development will be the first priority for donations given through VL unless the LD can determine that a particular donation will result in immediate reduction of suffering for the victims of a disaster.

### ROUTINE MEDICAL PROCEDURES

- I. Leon is home to the national medical university. As a result, we enjoy the best medical care in Nicaragua. There is a teaching hospital, an emergency clinic next door and numerous private clinics with state of the art medical equipment in Leon. There are also many pharmacies in Leon that are accessible 24 hours a day. We work with a doctor in Leon, Dr. Mariano Caceres, who I have seen for ailments and who is an excellent physician.
- II. Our health and safety protocol: When someone is discovered to be ill, or there is an injury, the group coordinator contacts Indiana Garcia who coordinates all health related situations. If it is an illness, the traveler is recommended to stay at home and be monitored for 24 hours. If it is an injury, or after 24 hours it is determined the traveler needs medical assistance, Indiana would meet the parent, if it is a child, or teacher, if it is a school group and traveler at either the home stay, location of the traveler or medical office of Dr. Caceres, or if it is more urgent, at one of the private medical clinics we use, Clinica San Jose, or Clinica La Fraternidad. Both of these are modern medical group practices very much like anything you would find in the United States. During this initial phase of determining the medical needs of the traveler, the family of the student would be contacted by phone and notified of the situation. After arrival at the clinic and examination by the physician, a second call would be made to the family. If a medical procedure is required, the teacher, staff member and family would discuss by telephone the options for the traveler.

If there is a medical emergency that cannot be addressed by the clinic, we would go from the clinic to the Hospital. The traveler would, again be accompanied by the parent if it is a child, coordinator and VL staff member. At all times, if there is a parent or adult that is part of the group, they would be transported with the traveler, coordinator and Indiana. If there is a health situation that requires medical attention beyond the capability of the Hospital, the traveler's family would be consulted and a discussion regarding appropriate steps would be undertaken. If the traveler has insurance that covers emergency medical procedures and evacuation, the insurer would be contacted. Solutions may include returning the traveler with one of the adults to the U.S. for treatment.

- III. Normal health related occurrences: Our normal list of ailments are diarrhea, stomach upsets and minor dehydration. These are easily recognizable and very treatable. All travelers are encouraged to monitor their bathroom habits, drink lots of bottled water and inform VL staff members of any illness they experience during their time in Nicaragua.

Evan Markiewicz  
Executive Director

1585 Folsom Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
415.255.2920

evan@ViviendasLeon.org  
www.ViviendasLeon.org

## DEMONSTRATIONS

- I. In the event of emergencies involving demonstrations or other civil disturbances, visitors are advised to stay at home, and await information and instructions from ViviendasLeon staff. If in the downtown area or near areas where groups form, visitors are advised to walk toward the neighborhood where they are living, and away from the demonstration. In the event that demonstrations have caused roads to be closed temporarily, or to become unsafe for any reason, visitors should stay in their homes and await instructions from ViviendasLeon staff.

## PROCEDURES IN CASE OF NATURAL DISASTER

- I. Visitors should remain in or near their home or work site, whichever appears to be the MOST LIKELY place to be found at the time of the emergency.
- II. The PD and other permanent staff will immediately report to the office to access the feasibility of using it as a control center.

The office address:     **ViviendasLeón**  
                                  Iglesia Releccion,  
                                  1 cuadra al norte, media cuadra abajo  
                                  León, Nicaragua C.A.  
                                  505 2311-3511

- III. Alternative sites in order of priority:
  - (a) Fountain at the Central Plaza
  - (b) City Hospital
  - (c) City Cemetery
- IV. As soon as possible the PD will go to each of the homes or work sites, whichever seems most logical at the time and inform visitors of the course of action to be taken. Visitors with known physical disabilities or chronic health problems will be prioritized. Should the visitor not be present at the expected location, the PD will expect a note to be left with the visitor's whereabouts.
- V. All visitors not accounted for within 4 hours of the disaster will be sought at the following locations IN THIS ORDER:
  - (a) Fountain at the Central Plaza
  - (b) City Hospital lobby
  - (c) City Cemetery entrance



## **PRIORITIES AT EMERGENCY COORDINATION SITES:**

### Delegate Tasks

- I. Shut off electricity. Check system before turning it back on. Secure natural gas tank. In case of earthquake, secure heavy furniture and other items in preparation for aftershocks.
- II. Check everyone for physical injuries and emotional shock.
- III. Secure potable water (1gallon per adult per day for at least 3 days).
- IV. Secure food source.
- V. Put on appropriate clothing.
- VI. Secure sanitation location.
- VII. Communicate situation to U.S. office as soon as possible.

### Inventory emergency supplies

- I. Flashlight with batteries
- II. Radio with batteries
- III. Tools (hammer, screwdriver, pliers, duct tape, tarp)
- IV. Toilet paper and other sanitary items
- V. First aid
- VI. Potable water
- VII. Diesel fuel

## **CONTACTS:**

ViviendasLeón US office: 001 415 255-2920  
[evan@viviendasleon.org](mailto:evan@viviendasleon.org)

Director: Evan Markiewicz 415 846 4623(cell)

ViviendasLeón Leon office: 011 505 2311 3511  
[Indiana@viviendasleon.org](mailto:Indiana@viviendasleon.org)

Program Director: Indiana Garcia: 8697-1475 (cell)

## **CALLING THE U.S.**

You may use any of these services WITH OR WITHOUT a card

AT&T: 164 Speak in English

MCI: 166 Speak in English

SPRINT: 161 Speak in English

UNITED STATES CONSULATE: Always speak in English and identify yourself as a U.S. Citizen.

505-2252-7320 After hours: 011-505-2252-7100

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[www.ViviendasLeon.org](http://www.ViviendasLeon.org)

## **EMERGENCY INSTRUCTIONS IN CASE OF NATURAL DISASTERS**

- I. Take care of your own injuries first. Take the time to gather your thoughts. REMEMBER: You are no good to anyone if you are injured or panic-stricken.
- II. Do not move from your location at the time of the accident or disaster, unless:
  - (a) it is absolutely necessary
  - (b) it will increase the chances of the León Director finding you.

A lot of valuable time could be lost just looking for each other. If you feel ok, try to help other people at your site.

- III. If you MUST leave your location, THINK.

**Leave a message on the largest, most secure and most logical place of the location.**

**SAMPLE NOTE:** On or near the main entrance of the site:

I am not injured but found this site to be insecure. I have gone to \_\_\_\_\_ by the following route \_\_\_\_\_. Sign your name.

I am injured and will attempt to get to Central Hospital by the following route \_\_\_\_\_. Sign your name.

- IV. If you are well and no one comes for you 4 hours after the initial disaster, attempt to get to the coordination site.

If the site is not secure and there is no sign indicating the coordination site has been moved, go to the telephone company or any place where you can use a phone.

Call the U.S. consulate: 505-2252-7320, After hours: 505-2252-7100

Always speak in English and identify yourself as a U.S. citizen. State the nature of the emergency as briefly as possible until you are connected to the consul or his/her representative in relation to the emergency.

If you are calling during non-business hours, ask to speak to the officer of the day.

### **BE PREPARED**

Keep 3 days worth of any essential medication with you at all times. It should be in a container that is clearly marked with content, and dosage.

If you are in a building during an earthquake, find the nearest STURDY table and get under it, or go outside. (It is not a bad idea to identify such a table ahead of time!)

If trapped under debris, PROTECT YOUR LUNGS. This can be done by placing a wet cloth loosely over your nose and mouth. TAP on metal or wood in a constant rhythm. This will help you conserve energy while increasing your chances of being found.

If you are in water, any article of clothing that can trap air can be made into a life vest. The best way to be seen in water is to splash.