

ViviendasLeón

SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES
CONNECTING CULTURES



ViviendasLeón

School Travel Packet

Evan Markiewicz
Executive Director

1585 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
415.255.2920

evan@ViviendasLeon.org
www.ViviendasLeon.org

Dear Educators and Parents,

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 community development and student travel for more than ten years. Our mission is twofold: we alleviate poverty by providing human, community and economic development in the León region and promoting 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 and put their desire to help others into practice.

I encourage you to read more about our mission, staff and programs on our website: <http://www.viviendasleon.org>.

Preparing for your trip

This travel packet of materials includes a registration form that you will fill out and return to the trip administrator at school. Use the remaining materials in this packet to prepare for your trip. Basic deadlines are found on the FAQ page.

A typical day

Every morning we wake and have breakfast with our host family. We depart from our homestay neighborhood and visit cultural and historic places in and around León. We have lunch in any number of restaurants in the center of León, and then depart for the Goyena community, where in the afternoons we take part in the various ongoing projects there. Our return to León often includes a stop at a swimming pool to cool off after a day in the heat. Evenings are spent at dinner with homestay families and with the group at meetings or attending presentations by local experts and speakers.

Home stays

Students stay with host families in León. The host families live in a neighborhood on the periphery of León that is about a 30-minute walk from the center of the city. The families we work with have been hosting travelers from around the world for many years and have a unique desire to develop good relationships with visitors from other countries. The Nicaraguan people are extremely warm and gracious and time spent with host families always turns out to be some of the fondest memories travelers have of their stay in Nicaragua. Host families provide breakfast and dinner each day, and a very comfortable place to stay.

Projects in the community

The cornerstone of our program is time spent in the rural community of Goyena, 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 spend a generation in a community working toward shared development objectives. Projects, as a result, are long term and each traveler plays a part in the success of a project.

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. The program is coordinated with our micro business start up program that creates businesses related to agriculture. In 2012 we began a housing construction program designed to alleviate the worst living conditions in the community and provide nearly 100 houses over the coming years. Continuing projects include construction of a community center, and participation in an after school arts program at the Madre Tierra arts center. Projects that students routinely participate in include tree seed planting in nurseries, tree transplanting, vegetable garden construction and seed planting, building construction, and participating in the arts program.

The Goyena community

Goyena is located in the indigenous region of León known as Sutiaba. This region extends west from the city to the Pacific Ocean. The community has five neighborhoods with more than 350 families. 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 Miraflores or Apoyo

In 2011 we introduced environmental programs in the national cloud forest reserve of Miraflores, and the natural crater lake preserve of Apoyo. Students spend 3 days in Miraflores learning about 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 students from the US to the issues facing the majority of the world's peoples, while providing them with a 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 Gudián

The art museum of the Ortiz Gudián Foundation is located in two restored, colonial buildings that are excellent examples of Spanish Colonial architecture of the 17th 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.

Regional Excursions

Excursions to places outside of Leon are intended to introduce travelers to the incredible geography and biodiversity of Nicaragua. A few of the possible eco-excursions are listed below with many more possible. We are able to tailor excursions, both urban and rural, to the interests of your travel group.

Juan Venado Estuary:

The Isla Juan Venado Nature Reserve is a coastal wetland region protected by the barrier island of Juan Venado, near the beach of Poneloya, only fifteen minutes from Leon. The island is a thin strip of sand located next to the Pacific coastline where it forms a sheltered saltwater habitat home to a mangrove forest inhabited by numerous species of fish, bird and reptiles. The island serves as nesting ground for the endangered Olive Ridley sea turtle and is an important nursery for fry and juvenile fish that seek refuge from predators among the mangrove roots.

Leon Viejo:

Leon Viejo is the second oldest and most well developed historical Spanish settlement in the Americas. Due to the volcanic eruption in 1610 that buried the city in ash, Leon Viejo remained preserved for 350 years until it was discovered in 1966. Its ruins are an outstanding example of towns of the Spanish Empire in the 16th century and provide archeological evidence of the material culture of one of the earliest colonial settlements. Leon Viejo reveals how colonists adapted European architectural and planning concepts to the material potential of another region. Since the unearthing of the town, eighteen buildings or structures have been identified. Because of its archaeological richness, Leon Viejo was named a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2000.

Regional Excursions:

Esteli and Miraflores:

To the North and east of Leon is Estelí. The city and surrounding region is well known throughout Nicaragua as one of the most influential places in the revolutionary history of the country. It has a markedly cooler weather than Leon and natural sites combining eco-tourism, coffee and organic food farming, native orchids and cheese production. Miraflores is rich in waterfalls, rain forests, bird watching, and a variety of flora and fauna characteristic of the region. Students stay on local coffee farms set up to host travelers from where they explore the local ecology and culture.

Masaya:

To the south of Leon, along the route to Granada is Masaya, a town known for its traditional handicrafts. The central market of Masaya is located in an historic building dating from the 19th Century. Here one can find crafts made by local artists. Every Thursday night are the Verbenas, Nicaraguan live music played by local musicians with their *marimbas*, a traditional Latin/Caribbean instrument.

Volcan Masaya:

En route to Granada is the Volcán Masaya National Park. Nicaragua's first National Park established in 1979, it has an area of 54 sq km, including two volcanoes and five craters. It is the only volcano in the western hemisphere where you are able to drive to the rim. In the Santiago crater is an underground tunnel which was formed by lava flows, where one can find bats and parrots, and look inside and observe the glowing lava in the dark crater mouth of the volcano. There are walking tours of the craters and a visitor center where guides explain volcanic activity as well as the animals and plants that make their home in the craters.

Laguna de Apoyo:

Nicaragua's cleanest lake is a body of water inside the crater of the Apoyo Volcano. Its walls are thickly vegetated with green forest and a network of trails, most of which exist as a protected nature reserve in this tropical dry ecosystem. The flora and fauna consist of numerous species of plants, tropical dry trees, a large variety of orchids and numerous mammals, howler monkeys and reptiles. Over 200 species of birds, 65 species of migratory birds and various species of butterflies are present. Apoyo lagoon also contains a variety of fish including four species of mojarras, found exclusively in the lagoon. The lagoon has various attractions such as dark sand beaches for swimming, and hiking in the surrounding forest. Recently, petroglyphs and artifacts of indigenous peoples have been found in the reserve.

Granada:

Granada is a colonial city similar to León. Here students can visit colonial houses, churches, museums and the central plaza where very frequently one can find food stands, live music and horse car rides. Granada also offers unique environmental locations including Lake Cocibolca where there are boat tours of Las Isletas, islands resulting from an ancient eruption of Volcan Mombacho that support a variety of animals and birds. The volcano is also a natural reserve where there are eco-tours, hikes and coffee farming tours, all in a rain forest that has unique flora and fauna.

Mombacho Rain Forest:

One of Nicaragua's most important cloudforests drapes the slopes of the inactive Mombacho Volcano, southwest of the capital city of Managua and near the shores of Lake Nicaragua, also known as Lake Cocibolca. Mombacho is a 2,500-acre reserve, surrounded by coffee plantations and small farms. The park has an amazing variety of orchids and birds and is home to howler monkeys, along with the Mombacho Salamander and Mombacho butterfly, two species found nowhere else on Earth. The protected area is carefully managed by the Cocibolca Foundation, a local conservation group that is helping coffee growers develop sustainable agroforestry methods.

Travel FAQ and Deadlines

Make sure all passports will have at least 6 months remaining on them from the date of departure.

Document packet:

This packet includes the Student Health and Info form you need to fill out and return to the school administrator responsible for trip coordination. There are other documents you will use to prepare for the trip. Please read all of the enclosed documents carefully.

Payments and deadlines:

The Student Health-Information form document is due 3 months before departure. Please make sure to include a photo where indicated on the form.

Travel itinerary and cost:

The trip itinerary is either included in this packet, posted separately on the trip page for this trip on our website, or will be sent to the teacher coordinating the trip at your school. Please contact the trip administrator for this information.

Preparing for the trip and weather in Nicaragua:

Nicaragua is always very warm. Light clothing is all that is required. We will be walking, swimming, hiking and working in the community. Therefore a variety of clothing will be needed. A full list is included in this packet. A fleece is desirable for time spent in the mountains.

Medical preparation:

All travelers should make sure they have a current tetanus booster and Hepatitis A vaccine. Other medications should be taken at the recommendation of your doctor. Make sure to visit your doctor or traveler's clinic at least six weeks before departing for the trip, so that any medications recommended can be taken.

Taking care of yourself while in Nicaragua:

Common ailments in Nicaragua are food and water related. The combination of a change of diet and the heat can often cause our most common ailment, dehydration and diarrhea. We make sure that everyone has plenty of bottled water and has access to the most hygienic food possible. Make sure to wash your hands frequently and do not drink tap water (not even in the shower!).

Home stays:

A central part of the experience is staying in family's homes in Leon. We have been working with the same families in the same neighborhood for fifteen years. They are very warm and generous. We typically eat breakfast and dinner in the homes, and eat our lunches in restaurants around the city. At least two students stay together with each host family.

Projects in the community:

The other key component to our trip is working in a rural community. Typically we travel by bus each afternoon to the community, about 45 minutes from Leon. We spend our time working on projects and then return to Leon for the occasional swim, then dinner and evening activities. There will be a variety of projects that are appropriate for the age of the students.

Miraflor:

For groups traveling to the Miraflor nature preserve, the climate is much cooler than in Leon. Days will be spent in Spanish classes, hiking in the forest and swimming. Make sure your child brings long pants, boots and a warm jacket or sweater for this portion of the trip.

ViviendasLeón Rural Development Program

Through a process of ongoing work with the community leadership, ViviendasLeón creates projects and programs that aggregate to address the various challenges confronting the rural community of Goyena, Nicaragua and lead to lasting improvements in their standard of living. Many of these are being done in partnership with other NGOs, institutions and non-profit organizations.

A guiding principle in our ongoing support of the community is to respond to the needs articulated by the community: the need for both immediate and lasting improvements to K-12 education, for jobs development, adult education and skills training and for improvements in the quality and quantity of food.

In the process we are forming an integrated sustainable development model that will transfer to other communities and other countries.

Our current projects and programs include:

Field projects:

Community center project (implemented: July 2008)

Construction projects are frequently built using rammed earth construction methods. This allows unskilled participation in the project and reinforces our emphasis on sustaining the environment and local building traditions.

Transitional housing project (implemented: July 2012)

Based on an intensive field study of the Goyena community in 2011, nearly 200 families in this community are living without basic housing. This project is designed to provide very low cost and secure housing for this population over the next number of years. Designed in partnership with the USF School of Architecture, the first house was built in July 2012. Additional homes are scheduled to be built as school groups participate in the global education program.

Reforestation/Agro-forestry (implementation: February 2011)

Small-scale food production (implementation: February 2012)

Composting (implementation: January 2011)

This multi-phase project is designed to teach environmental awareness, bring local food production to the community and provide protection of the local environment. Student participation involves garden construction and planting, tree planting and crop harvesting.

Micro business development (implementation: January 2010)

This program is designed to launch small local businesses and provide much needed employment in the community. It is envisioned to coordinate with the agro-forestry program to create businesses from agricultural products including honey manufacturing, fruit, citrus and row crop production.

Human capacity training (implemented: September 2011)

This is an ongoing project carried out primarily by our Leon staff to provide leadership training, problem solving and adult education in basic subjects.

Arts education (on-going)

Supports the important work of the Madre Tierra Arts Center with youth and teens in the community, providing after school fine arts and performing arts education.

Student support programs (on-going)

These programs include donor funded tuition assistance for high school students and after school support for primary school students.

Organizational partners:

Construction projects: USF School of Architecture

Agro-forestry, food production, and farm products: Trees for the Future

Micro-business development: USF School of Business

Arts education and youth development: Madre Tierra Arts Center

Public health and health education: USF School of Nursing (Pending)

Student support programs: New Haven León Sister City Project

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 3rd, 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 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, 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
 Lesbia Alvarado, Agro forestry programs
 Brenda Bustamante, Arts education program
 Analucila Baldizón, Travel programs

ViviendasLeón US Office
 ViviendasLeón
 1585 Folsom Street
 San Francisco, CA 94103
 415-255-2920

VivendasLeón U.S. Staff
 Evan Markiewicz, Executive Director evan@viviendasleon.org
 Brianna Russell, Programs and organization director Brianna@viviendasleon.org

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.

ViviendasLeon

Emergency Policies and 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 accident, the group coordinator contacts Indiana Garcia who coordinates all health related situations. If it is determined the traveler needs medical assistance, Indiana would meet the parent, if it is a child, coordinator and traveler at either the 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. 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 Indiana. 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: The worst thing that has happened in 15 years has been someone cut their knee when they fell requiring stitches. They were attended to at the emergency clinic at the Hospital. Our normal list of ailments is diarrhea, stomach upsets and minor dehydration. These are easily recognizable and very treatable.

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

Director: Evan Markiewicz 415 846-4623(cell)

ViviendasLeón Leon office: 011 505 2311-3511
Indiana@viviendasleon.org

Program Director: Indiana Garcia: 011 505 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

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.

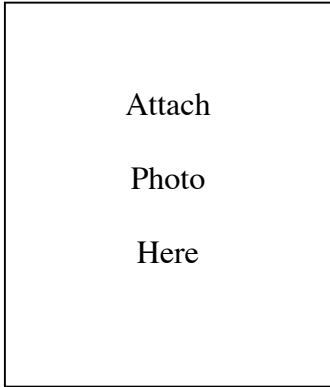
Student Application

Please complete the form below and return to your trip administrator.

Student Name: _____
Address _____

Phone number: _____
School: _____
Parent name: _____
Parent email: _____

2nd Parent name: _____
Parent email: _____



1. Name and contact information of a contact person in case of emergency:

Name: _____
Address: _____

Email Address: _____
Home phone: _____
Work phone: _____
Relationship: _____

2. Name of health care provider or emergency service you and your family use:

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE: _____
HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY #: _____

ARE YOU CURRENTLY TAKING ANY MEDICATIONS?

YES NO

IF YES, LIST THEM: _____

DO YOU HAVE ANY ALLERGIES ESPECIALLY TO MEDICATIONS, FOOD OR INSECTS?

YES NO

IF YES, LIST THEM: _____

IN THE LAST YEAR, HAVE YOU BEEN TREATED FOR A MEDICAL PROBLEM?

YES NO

IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE PROBLEM: _____

IS THERE ANY OTHER MEDICAL INFORMATION THAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

YES NO

PLEASE EXPLAIN: _____

All applicants must hold a valid U.S. passport with more than 6 months remaining prior to departure.

___ Check here to receive vegetarian meals throughout your stay in Nicaragua.

Evan Markiewicz	1585 Folsom Street	evan@ViviendasLeon.org
Executive Director	San Francisco, CA 94103	www.ViviendasLeon.org
	415.255.2920	