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What is Comunidad Connect?

Comunidad Connect is a non-profit based in San Juan del Sur with a vision of unity, communication, cooperation, and support between local Nicaraguan residents and foreigners living in or visiting Nicaragua. By bringing together these two communities, Comunidad Connect capitalizes on their individual strengths and addresses their individual needs in a way that is mutually beneficial. Comunidad Connects community development initiatives began in 2006 with the renovation of the sports park in San Juan, and have since expanded to other sectors of development and other parts of the country. CC specializes in organizing volunteer trips as a revenue generation model that also supports their community development efforts.

Comunidad Connect’s community development initiatives include:

**Clean Water Initiative: Nica Agua**
Nica Agua provides ceramic water filters to rural Nicaraguan households in exchange for 16 hours of community service and educational workshops. We continue to track filter usage and rates of waterborne illness for one year following the family earning the filter. Since beginning in Los Robles, Jinotega in March 2011, Nica Agua has expanded to communities in the departments of Tola, RAAS and RAAN.

**Nicaragua Community Health Connection (NCHC)**
NCHC is a collaboration between Comunidad Connect and Emory University’s Social Enterprise Center @ Goizueta. NCHC works with the community of Los Robles to develop preventative health programs and run a rural health clinic called “Clínica Los Robles”, which will begin operations in 2014.

**Parque Deportivo**
Parque Deportivo (sports park) is a community sports and events space in San Juan del Sur. We provide recreational activities for Nicaraguan and foreign youth and adults through sports leagues and special events. Each year our basketball and soccer leagues draw over 500 participants.

**Campo Verde**
Campo Verde (Green Countryside) started as the first municipal recycling program in San Juan del Sur and has grown into Comunidad Connects portfolio of environmental projects. Current projects include EcoGigante, which promotes environmental awareness along the coast of Tola, and El Carizal, which supports residents of a rural community in social enterprise projects and English classes.
General Packing Recommendations

- Nicaraguans generally wear pants instead of shorts, even in the summer. This is true for men and women. Wear what you are comfortable in, but also be respectful of the more conservative norms.
- We will not be doing laundry on the trip.
- Do not bring any flashy jewelry and be conscious of expensive electronics and sunglasses. Do not bring anything you could not stand to lose.
- Bring ONE large traveler’s backpack or suitcase and a smaller daypack.
  Note: backpacks are better if your whole trip will be in a rural location or if you will be traveling on public transportation.

Essential Items:
- Valid Passport
- Photocopies of passport stored separately
- Copy of insurance card
- ATM card, credit card, and/or extra spending money
- Water bottle!!
- Any medications (if applicable)
- Eye-glasses or contacts (if applicable)
- Merriam Webster’s Pocket Spanish-English Dictionary (cost $2.96) *note electronic dictionaries usually need internet/data
- Headlamp or small flashlight with spare batteries (very important)

Clothing
- Shirts - cotton or light synthetic
  - 2 work shirts that can get dirty
  - 2-3 short-sleeved shirts with collars or polos
  - 3-5 t-shirts or tank tops for girls.
- Pants (3+ pair) – Nicer jeans and older cotton/light synthetic pants for work
- Shorts (2+pair) - for daily wear
- Underwear
- Socks - 4 or 5 pairs of cotton, 1 or 2 pairs of wool for hiking
- 1-2 Sweatshirts (ESPECIALLY if you are going to be in Jinotega)
- Light Raincoat
- Footwear:
  - Closed toe sturdy tennis shoes for projects
  - Flip-flops for showering and the beach
  - Sandals
  - Rubber boots (if you will be in Jinotega or Esteli)
- Swimwear
- At least one nice outfit for going out depending on the length of your stay
- If you’re going to be working in the schools please bring enough trousers or light dresses to look clean and professional each day.
Other important items:
- Small daypack or backpack for day excursions
- Toiletries - Soap, Shampoo, Conditioner, Toothpaste/brush, floss etc. Antibacterial hand gel
- Towel
- Sunscreen 30 spf (waterproof)
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunglasses (not expensive)
- Small packet of tissues
- Baseball cap or bandana
- A small travel alarm clock or wrist watch

Optional Items:
- Camera
- Ziploc plastic bags for toiletries and wet clothes
- Book/s, Kindle, Notebook and Pen
- Money Belt – These can be worn inside clothing, either around the neck or around the waist. A small amount of money should be kept in your front pants pocket, but keep larger amounts of money and your passport in the money belt.
- Small gift for your home stay family (school supplies, toys/games, bath supplies for women, hats, something representative of your home and culture, postcards, deck of playing cards, etc)
- Cards, chess, other small games
- Snacks (granola bars, dried fruit)
- Ipod (do not bring if concerned that it will get broken or lost)
- If you are with us for an extended stay or will be in areas where you are connected feel free to bring your computer if your project requires it.
Trip Guidelines

We hope you have a great time in Nicaragua. In order to make the trip a success for yourself and your group, please keep some things in mind.

- Bring you best self! Come with an open mind and patience
- When in doubt, dress conservatively
- Always carry a water bottle!
- Tell your CC guide and group leader when you are not feeling well, we cannot help you if we do not know.
- When entering some ones home be conscious that you are a guest, be sure to say Gracias!
- Participate! Participate! Participate! Community development is not a spectator sport.
- Ask people before you take pictures of them and be sensitive of the situation when you are taking pictures.
- Not all Nicaraguans speak English, but they will understand your tone and body language.

Remember, you are representing your country, your organization and Comunidad Connect, and whether you like it or not you are a role model for local youths.

In case of an emergency, medical, environmental or personal contact your Comunidad Connect guide immediately. If you cannot reach your guide, contact Comunidad Connect’s director, Dariel Potoy: 8706-2762.

If you trip is dry, no alcohol will be tolerated at any time.

If your trip is not dry, you are welcome to have a few drinks while in Nicaragua, but it is not ever appropriate to be drunk. Do not drink in your homestay. Remember that this is a service and learning trip, your decisions one night may impact your desire to participate the following day. Take advantage of your short time in Nicaragua with a clear mind!

All drugs, including marijuana are illegal in Nicaragua and are never appropriate. Please do not bring any drugs or paraphernalia with you to Nicaragua. Do not buy drugs; you can easily end up in jail if caught. Comunidad Connect has a strict zero tolerance policy for volunteers buying or using marijuana and other drugs. If you are caught you will be sent home at your own cost with no reimbursement. If you are caught with drugs by law enforcement, Comunidad Connect will be unable to offer any support legal or otherwise.
Arrival Info

Arriving at the airport in Nicaragua can be exciting, overwhelming and a bit nerve-wracking. Take note of these points to ensure a smooth trip.

- When you go through immigration you will have to pay a tourist tax of $10 USD
- In baggage claim and outside of the airport there will be many men offering to help you with your bag. Do not accept their help as we cannot guarantee the safety of your belongings in their care, and they will expect to be tipped for their services.
- When you leave the baggage claim area to go through customs you will need to show your baggage claim number (this was given to you by the airline when you initially checked your bag).
- After you pass through customs you will see a Comunidad Connect representative waiting for you with a sign.
- Do not change money in the airport, as the exchange rate is bad. You can take money out of ATMs in the airport, big towns and cities.
- You should carry some extra US dollars on you when you enter Nicaragua. US dollars are accepted in San Juan and other large towns.
Meet the Comunidad Connect Team

Alejandro, Anielka, Samuel, Yarisleidy, Dariel, Sarah, Alicia, Jon, Gina, Mara.

Jon Thompson – Founder/Board President

Born and raised in Atlanta, GA, Jon graduated from Centre College in Danville, KY in 1997 with a B.A. in History. He first visited Nicaragua in 1998 and returned every year thereafter. In 2002, Jon obtained his Masters of Social Work with a concentration in Community Development from Georgia State University. He began his social work career at Travelers Aid and United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, where he created and managed asset development programs focusing on small business development, first time homeownership and financial education for low-income households. Jon and his Nicaraguan wife moved to live in San Juan del Sur full time in 2005, where Jon met Roman Yavich and founded Comunidad Connect in 2006. After working as volunteer Executive Director for 5 years, Jon has recently moved on to serve as Board President. He also currently manages the organic coffee farm Finca El Peten in Jinotega, Nicaragua.
Roman Yavich: Founder/Treasurer
After studying business and economics at the Univ. of Colorado, Boulder, in 2006 Roman received a Fulbright Grant to study the impacts of tourism development on the local community economy and environment in Nicaragua. He spent a year in San Juan del Sur, during which he founded Comunidad Connect with Jon Thompson. After another year in Nicaragua in an administrative role, Roman has remained active on the Board of Directors, and currently serves as the treasurer. He is originally from Ukraine and holds a Masters in Public administration from Syracuse University and a Masters in Environmental Science from SUNY-ESF.

Dariel Potoy: Executive Director
Dariel was born in 1984 in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. He moved to Costa Rica at age 15 to study business administration and later earned a scholarship to continue his studies in Mexico City in 2000. Following his time in Mexico, Dariel returned to Nicaragua and began work as a supervisor for a professional training company in the capital, Managua. Dariel was hired in 2006 to facilitate the building of the Sports Park in San Juan del Sur. As Comunidad Connect's first employee Dariel has continually shown his commitment to the organization and development of Nicaraguan communities. Responsible for much of the success and growth of Comunidad Connect over the years, the Board of Directors unanimously promoted Dariel to Executive Director in January 2012. He represents the best of Comunidad Connect and continues to move the organization forward by expanding programs, motivating staff, and cultivating partnerships with the public and private sectors in Nicaragua and beyond.

Alejandro Jose Noguera Castro: Sports Park Program Manager
Alejandro was born in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua in 1979 and is currently finishing his degree in Business Administration. After 7 years of playing in the amateur baseball leagues, he started his professional baseball career and eventually became a member of the national team. With the national team Alejandro represented Nicaragua as a pitcher and traveled to Venezuela, U.S.A., and Holland to play against the world’s best teams. After a career-ending injury in late 2006, he now manages all youth/athletic programs for Comunidad Connect and serves as president of the Municipal Little League Commission in San Juan del Sur.

Yarisleidy Cortez: Coordinator of Environmental Projects
Yarisleidy was born and raised in San Juan del Sur and graduated from high school as valedictorian, after having presented her thesis entitled "The Ecological Culture of Nicaragua". Currently she is at the top of her class at UPOLI University studying towards a degree in Business Administration. Yarisleidy coordinates all of Comunidad Connect’s environmental projects, including over seeing Nica Agua and Eco Gigante. Yarisleidy aspires to speak English fluently and obtain a graduate degree in Project Planning and Implementation.

Sarah Grossberg: Los Robles Community Coordinator
Sarah was born and raised in Simsbury, CT with a strong desire to explore the world. She first traveled to Latin America as a volunteer when she was 18 and fell in love with the region, culture, its people, and development work. Sarah attended Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR where she earned a BA in
International Relations, with a concentration in Latin American Studies. While at Lewis and Clark she took advantage of all opportunities to be in Latin America, including a semester in Havana, Cuba and work on community development and academic projects in Argentina and Mexico. Sarah began working with NCHC in June 2012 to investigate the feasibility of the clinic project in Los Robles. Currently she is the coordinator of the NCHC, Nica Agua, and Sustainable Tourism in Los Robles, Jinotega.

**Anielka Galan: Office Coordinator/Accountant**

Anielka Galán was born in 1987 in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. She studied economics at the Iberoamerican University for Science and Technology (UNICIT). She also studied English and Spanish at the Ave Maria College in San Marcos, Nicaragua. In 2009 she traveled to El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica to participate in a conference of universities of Central America on Marketing and Publicity. Before her work with Comunidad Connect, she was working as Spanish language teacher. She aspires to receive a postgraduate degree in marketing in the near future. In 2011 she began to work with Comunidad Connect as an accountant and office coordinator.

**Samuel Munguia: Administrative Assistant**

Samuel was born and raised in San Juan del Sur, and came on board with Comunidad Connect in February 2012 to increase our administrative capacity. Samuel was a top student in high school, excelling in math, received a scholarship from the Jean Brugger Foundation (where he first met Jon Thompson during his tenure as Executive Director). While studying at UPOLI Samuel maintained the highest grade point average of his university for all four years. Samuel is an invaluable asset to the Comunidad Connect team.

**Alicia Harvey: Sustainable Tourism Coordinator**

Alicia Harvey was born in Boulder, Colorado, and raised overseas in England, Germany, and The Netherlands. She graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in Environmental Policy in 2010. After university Alicia joined the Peace Corps as an Agriculture and Food Security Coordinator, arriving in Nicaragua May of 2011 and living and working in a rural community in the department of Jinotega. After completing her 27-month Peace Corps service, Alicia joined Comunidad Connect as our Business Development Coordinator in September 2013 and communicates with Universities in the United States and groups that come to Nicaragua on behalf of Comunidad Connect’s Sustainable Tourism program.

**Nerys Blandon: Community Outreach and Education Coordinator**

Nerys is a resident of Los Robles, the community of 2,000 subsistence coffee farmers in the mountains of northern Nicaragua. Her mother was the founding member of the local health volunteers who have been the heart and soul of Comunidad Connect's work in Los Robles over the last 4 years. Nerys has followed her mother's lead and has been instrumental in the implementation of Nica Agua, which now provides clean drinking water to 90% of Los Robles. Today Nerys is currently the Community Outreach Coordinator for NCHC, in charge of the growing network of brigadistas and the community projects associated with the Los Robles Health Center.
FAQ’s

What are safety concerns in Nicaragua?

Nicaragua has the lowest crime rate of any Central American country. Most people who come to Nicaragua do not have any problems, and the ones that do usually experience petty theft. It is a good idea to be well prepared and use your common sense to stay out of trouble. Common sense things include not walking alone at night, asking locals for advice on safety, not buying drugs, and not being drunk. It is also not advisable to flash your wealth, including expensive clothing, sunglasses, jewelry, stacks of cash, or camera. When in public keep good track of your belongings. Managua has the highest crime rate, in rural areas most people are friendly and helpful, but you should always use your instincts.

A money belt, worn under your clothes, is a good place to keep your passport, credit cards, and large bills. You should put a copy of your passport, a back-up debit card, a little extra cash, and phone numbers to cancel your credit cards in a separate place in your bag. When going out at night only bring a copy of your passport and just as much cash as you think you will spend. Bringing a camera out at night is a risk, but many people do it. We recommend to not bring anything you could not stand to lose.

What medical issues should I be aware of?

In general there is nothing to worry about when it comes to health in Nicaragua. Unless you are in the jungles of the northeast of Nicaragua, there is little risk of Malaria. Most people do not take Malaria pills, as the medicine is very strong. The ultimate decision rests with the traveler. Another disease is dengue fever, which has no preventative treatment, but again, your chances of getting it are about as low as getting the West Nile Virus in the US. To limit your risk, wear long sleeves and pants at dusk (when mosquitoes are most active), use mosquito repellent, your fan at night, and a mosquito net. It is highly advisable to get vaccinations for Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus, and maybe Rabies.

The most common illness experienced by travelers is diarrhea. Not drinking water from the faucet and washing your hands often will limit your chances of being affected. Bring your water bottle so that you can re-fill from the large purified water jugs instead of buying plastic water bottles. You can brush your teeth with tap water, and eat veggies washed in tap water. It simply has a lot of chlorine. Comunidad Connect trains host families in food preparation and cleanliness, and the establishments we visit are notoriously clean. Some travelers take a longer time to adjust to the Nicaraguan diet because the food is very greasy.

Medicine for most illnesses is readily available without prescriptions. Healthcare, including emergency treatment, is very cheap. Private hospitals and clinics cost slightly more but provide a higher quality service and have shorter waiting times than public hospitals. If you have special medical needs, it is wise to bring items that might not be available in Nicaragua.

Other dangers and annoyances include scorpions, whose stings are similar in pain and danger to those of wasps. Simple anti-histamine medicine is effective against scorpion sting allergic effects. Snakes, spiders, ticks, and fleas are also present, but the chances are you will not come into contact with any of them unless you venture into the wilderness.

Do I need a visa?
Nationals of most countries receive a tourist visa for 90 days when they enter Nicaragua. You do not need to make any prior arrangements, but be prepared to pay $10 at the airport to receive your tourist card.

*What’s the weather like?*

There are only two seasons in Nicaragua. In the southwest of the country, the dry season is from December to May and the wet season is May through November. In the north the dry season is from March-April. In some years one season might be longer than usual. In the dry season it almost never rains. In the wet season it may rain for a few hours during the day and there might be long stretches of rainy days, especially in October. The temperatures range between the mid-80s and the mid-90s for most of the year. March, April and May are the hottest.

*What conditions should I be aware of?*

- There will be times when electricity goes out for no reason. This is common in the developing world. In most cases electricity will be out only for a couple of hours. Take this time to sit with neighbors and friends on the front porch, like Nicaraguans do. Some businesses and hotels have backup generators, while most families do not.

- There will be times when your house will not have water. Most businesses and some families have water storage tanks and/or wells. Water is another problem in the developing world.

- Do *not* throw toilet paper in the toilet, because it can clog it. Instead you will see trash cans for used toilet paper.

- Women should be aware of the machismo culture in Nicaragua, which means more attention, cat calls, “I love you” etc. Ignore these, like Nicaraguan women do. Look at what Nicaraguan women are wearing and remember the less clothes you wear the more negative attention you will get.
  - On a side note, men and women are rarely just friends in Nicaragua. If you are spending time with a person from the opposite sex, it is understood that you are interested in them. The same is true if you acknowledge a cat call even by simply making eye contact and smiling.

- All visitors should be aware of local characters that seem too friendly. If a person seems shady (untrustworthy) they probably are. If a person seems drunk or high, they probably are.

*What do I need to know about money in Nicaragua?*

The Nicaraguan córdoba to the US dollar exchange rate is about 25 to 1. The US dollar is accepted as legal tender everywhere, including banks and street stalls. If you pay in dollars, you will get change in córdobas. You can exchange money at any bank. Do not exchange money in the airport, it is the worst rate you can get. Several ATMs are located in the airport. An ATM card is the best way to get to your money in Nicaragua. Credit cards are accepted in some of the nicer hotels and restaurants.
Tipping is usually about 10% of the bill and is sometimes included. The bill will say “Propina Voluntaria” or PV. Do not confuse this with the 15% IVA (Value Added Tax) which is also sometimes included on the bill, but goes to the government and not the waiter. You do not need to tip taxis.

Do not flash stacks of cash, especially dollars, in public places. At best, you are making people around you envious and at worst asking to get robbed. It is best to keep your money separated in different pockets and not go around with too much cash. $20-30 should be enough for a night out or a free time activity in the day.

*How can I communicate with family and friends in the States?*

The cheapest way to communicate is through Skype. This service is available in most internet cafes. Talking computer to computer is free. Calling the US is 2 cents per minute, and calling Nicaragua is 25 cents per minute. In either case it is the cheapest way to call. There are also call centers in San Juan del Sur. Your group leader will have a Comunidad Connect issued cell phone which works to call the US (dial 001 then the area code) for about 5 cents per minute, and receives local and international calls for free. Internet connections are also plentiful in San Juan del Sur but scarce in Jinotega.

*How can I put money “saldo” on my Nicaraguan Cell phone?*

In all small towns (including rural areas) there are corner stores that sell phone minutes (also known as Saldo) these small corner stores are referred to as ventas/pulperias in Nicaragua and they are usually on the side of a home. To call the states you will need to buy at least 2 dollars worth of saldo. To buy saldo you say: “Quiero comprar cincuenta cordobas de saldo para Claro” and then you give them your number (pasted on the back of your phone). Most pulperias charge 10% of the saldo quantity you buy. So if you ask for 50 Corodobas of Saldo your total payment will be 55 Corodobas. You should get a text message from Claro confirming that you received a money charge on your phone. To dial the United States you dial 001-area code- the number.

*What is transportation/travel like in country?*

Nicaragua has very accessible public bus transport that reaches out to the most rural areas. Most buses are converted school buses and are sometimes referred to as “chicken buses”, they are cheap and tightly packed with people, sitting and standing. If you are traveling with a group you will not travel by public transport, but rather by, pre-arranged private transportation for convenience and safety. If you are traveling between the north and the south expect a good bit of vehicle time, roads can be bumpy and distances are often long.

*What are the important cultural and language differences to be aware of?*

- Nicaraguans are very open, talkative, friendly, and hospitable. Sometimes they will try to talk to you even if you are not interested, but their curiosity is sincere.
- Nicaraguans do not hold grudges against Americans in spite of the long political history between the two countries. They differentiate Americans from the American government.
- To “save face” Nicaraguans will often invent an answer when they in fact don’t know it. This is common with directions. Ask more than one person.
- Nicaraguan families are large and the family bonds are strong. Young adults rarely move out of their parents’ house, even after they are married.
- People in Nicaragua get married and have children at a young age, often before 18, and often in reverse order.
- Many of the differences between American and Nicaraguan cultures can be attributed to machismo, a cultural standard that dictates how men should act around each other and around women. Machismo is especially prevalent in rural communities.
- Nicaraguans generally have very neat haircuts, facial hair, and clothing. Even poor, rural Nicaraguans take much care to look as neat as they can. Outside of San Juan del Sur, people generally do not wear shorts.
- The concept of time is more flexible in Nicaragua. People are often late and live life at a more relaxed pace than in the States or Europe.
- The word gringo is not derogatory. It is used to describe a foreigner. Also used is the word “chele” for both foreigners and light skinned Nicaraguans.
- The word adios is used both as “hello” (only in some cases) and “goodbye.”
- Important body language includes pointing with your lips, as if puckering for a kiss, waving your hand palm down to ask someone to “come here,” and scrunching your nose when you don’t understand something and want the speaker to repeat or explain.
- Respect for elders is very important in Nicaragua. Use usted with anyone you do not know and with everyone older. Older people are often referred to as don (men) or doña (women) and their first name. Saying con permiso (excuse me) is appropriate when leaving the room or the table, passing someone, or taking a seat.
- A handshake is appropriate when meeting someone for the first time. With a group of people it is appropriate to shake everyone’s hand when arriving and when leaving. With women who you already know well, a kiss on the cheek may be appropriate, and the woman will let you know so by extending her cheek toward you.
- Table manners in Nicaragua are very casual. People often eat with their hands, wipe with their shirt, and never wait for the whole table to be served before digging in at a restaurant.
Accommodations

*All of our locations provide purified water and ice.

Granada

**Casa San Martin:** Casa San Martin is a beautiful authentic colonial house from the early xx century. The house was fully restored in 1999 and after turned into a colonial city hotel in 2004.

Casa San Martin is located in a privileged location in the center of Granada. The hotel is located in the famous calle la Calzada. From the hotel you are only a few blocks from the best restaurants in town, tour operators, museums, entertainment centers and only 5 minutes from the GREAT Lago de Nicaragua.

Address: Calle "la Calzada". De la catedral 1c al este.
Phone: (505) 2552-6185
Website: http://www.hcasasanmartin.com

**Hotel Pergola:** Hotel La Pergola is an antique colonial house built in the XIXth century that we have restored conserving the characteristic of the wonderful houses of Granada.

Hotel La Pérzola is located in the historic center of Granada, known as the “Gran Sultana “, an easy three blocks walk to the “Parque Central “ and only four blocks from the “ Gran Lago “. The street which feature most popular restaurants by our guests. The walking street La Calzada is also just one block away.

Address: Calle el Caimito, de la Alcaldía Municipal, 3 cuadras al Lago . Granada, Nicaragua .
Phone: (505) 2552 – 4221
Website: http://www.lapergola.com.ni/

**Hotel con Corazón** is a boutique hotel in the city center of Granada. Located 2 blocks off the central park, it has 15 comfortable rooms, a swimming pool, a friendly local staff and according to their guests the best breakfast in the region and many of our groups enjoy a delicious 3 course dinner using local ingredients. Each room has A/C, private bathroom with hot shower, cable, and a safe. There is WI/FI.

Hotel con Corazón means Hotel with a heart in Spanish, it’s business model helps Nicaraguans build a brighter future by investing 100% of their profits in education.

Address: Calle Santa Lucia 141, Granada
Phone: 2552 8852
www.hotelconcorazon.com
Managua

Managua Hills Bed and Breakfast is a relaxing, tropical oasis in the middle of bustling Managua. Located in Las Colinas, one of the safest and cleanest neighborhoods in all of Managua. The hotel has a spacious indoor and outdoor common area, WiFi, and pool. Their private rooms include AC, hot-water showers (although sometimes you have to be patient), cable TV and local telephone service. For high school and some undergraduate trips, they provide a mixed 8 beds dorm with fans and two bathrooms. All guests enjoy a hearty Nica breakfast.

Managua Hills is a family-owned, locally operated business. The owner speaks fluent English and is always happy to host us.

Address: Primera Entrada a las Colinas, 2 cuadras al este y 2 cuadras al sur
Phone: 2276-2323 or 22762319
www.managuaills.com

Jinotega

Finca El Peten, or Finca Java is a working organic coffee plantation. The old stables and barn have been renovated into an eco-lodge and dining hall. Located on the shores of Lake Apanas, the eco-lodge offers great views of the lake and the close by mountain ranges. Rooms are comfortable but rustic, each includes 2 single beds, a fan, bathroom, and porch. Hot showers are not always available. There is no Wi-Fi at the eco-lodge, but there is phone signal that can be used to call the US. During your stay we will enjoy traditional Nicaraguan meals prepared by the Finca Java hospitality staff.

Address: Finca El Peten, Los Robles, Jinotega
Phone: 8420 5378 or 8543 8698
www.fincajava.com

Matagalpa

Hotel Lomas de San Thomas is overlooks the city of Matagalpa and the hills that surround the area. In addition to the superb view, the hotel also offers spacious and well-equipped rooms, making it one of the most comfortable hotels in town. The tranquil and relaxing environment ensures a great setting for families and business travelers. Hotel Lomas de San Thomas also has two conference rooms and a stylish restauant and a bar.

Address: Hotel Lomas de San Thomas, Matagalpa, Matagalpa
Phone: 2772-4189 / 2772-3539

Sontule, Esteli

Sontule is a beautiful community located in the mountains of the Nicaraguan north. Due to its elevation of more than 3000 feet above sea level, the temperature is cooler, especially at night, than in other parts of Nicaragua. The home stay accommodations will be rustic, with outdoor latrines, no running water, and little electricity. To experience this lifestyle and exchange cultures with the residents of this community has been one of the most powerful experiences for past groups.

The community has a tourism cooperative mostly made up of women who share resources and profits from hosting groups like ours. Members of this cooperative, along with other community leaders, have decided on the service project that we will be doing and will be in charge during the project. This has been
a very successful model of operation for us, because the community residents know their needs better than any outsiders. Because the project is designed and managed by the community, it is largely their project and not ours. Therefore, this work leads to ownership rather than dependence, which can be a problem when outsiders simply give handouts. It is important to keep in mind that we are there to learn more than to teach and that the process of the project (the cooperation and cultural exchange) is more important than the purpose (the actual construction).

In addition to the service work, we will tour the coffee farm which serves as the major source of income in this area, have a clay-making workshop with a local artist, and visit several lookouts with incredible views. Other activities may include milking cows and bird watching. We will generally eat with our home stay families, but they will not always join us at the table as Nicaraguan families do not have a tradition of eating together at the same time. Rural Nicaraguans usually eat in the kitchen area and not in the dining room.

**San Juan del Sur**

**Hotel Villa Mar** is a family owned hostel located on Playa Marsella, 8 kilometers outside of San Juan. The rooms are doubles and triples with private bathrooms. The rooms are air-conditioned. The large patio overlooks the ocean where we will enjoy many of our meals.

Address: Playa Marsella
Phone: 86630666.
https://www.facebook.com/hotel.villamar

**Homestays**

No matter what part of the world you are from, life in Nicaragua will be a lot different from what you are used to. Staying with a family is an excellent way to experience this difference.

Nicaraguan families are generally larger and closely knit. Nicaraguan families are very hospitable and you can expect your hosts to treat you with respect, but they will likely be shy. It can be difficult living with strangers in a foreign country who don’t speak your language, but it is also an incredibly rewarding experience. Just remember, a smile is the same in every language.

**Amenities**

The house itself might be equipped with fewer luxuries than you are used to at home. All of your rooms will have doors that lock, a fan, and purified drinking water. Most homes do not have hot water; In San Juan all homes have normal showers. In other parts of the country you will use a bucket bathing system instead of showers. At times during the day there will be no water in the house, due to town or even countrywide shortages. Most houses have tanks to store water in for this occasion, and some have wells. Power outages are common in Nicaragua. You should bring a flashlight. All families have either candles or rechargeable lamps to use during these times.

If you are staying in the south, your room will be equipped with a fan and maybe a mosquito net. The mosquito net provides protection from insects, which are plentiful in the rainy season (May-December). In the north you will have a mosquito net and not need a fan because it is much cooler.

Bathroom set-ups differ depending on a family’s resources. The most common systems in rural areas are outhouses or latrines. In San Juan del Sur all homestays have flushing toilets. If you do not see toilet paper near the toilet/latrine ask your family.

**Socializing**
You might find that the family does not take their meals with you. It is common for people to eat separately in Nicaragua and your family might be trying to give you extra privacy. If you would like them to eat with you, ask when they take their meals and ask if you may take them at the same time.

Communication is key in a homestay. Tell your family what time you like to eat, what you like to eat, what is going well and what needs to be changed. If something is off, it is most likely because of a miscommunication or a lack of understanding. CC staff can help you communicate with your family as well.

One favorite pastime all over Nicaragua is sitting on the porch. Many houses have rocking chairs just for this purpose. Join your family on the porch with all the neighbors and friends to chat about town rumors, news, and events. Also, feel free to help your family with chores around the house. This is a good way to earn respect and give back for the hospitality.

Your family will respect your privacy and you should respect their house. In San Juan del Sur’s homestays it is perfectly fine to go out at night and come back late, as long as you aren’t partying in the house at 2 am, it is not appropriate to bring home guests after 9 or 10pm. While it is fine to drink alcohol, it is not appropriate to be drunk in the house. If you are staying in the countryside the rules are very different. You should not be out of your house past sunset, you should not drink unless your host family offers you something, do not walk around scantily dressed (even to the shower area) and be ready to wake up early. Remember, you are representing your country and, whether you want to or not, you are a role model for local youths. Act accordingly.

*Volunteer Precautions*

The communities we visit are very safe towns. Nevertheless, take the following precautions:

- The sun goes down between 5:30pm and 6:30pm when you are staying in rural community you want to be inside by the time the sun goes down. People are no longer out and about and it is not safe to be out.
- Do not walk outside at night alone (not even on the beach) There are rarely street lamps this is especially true for women.
- It is best to walk in groups or at least with one other person at night
- If you are drunk, you are putting yourself at greater risk
- In cities be aware of cars and bikes, which sometimes drive too fast for the small streets and at night often, have drunk drivers.
- In San Juan Del Sur stay away from the area to the east of the Cangrejo Loco disco. The disco is fine, however.
- If you are hiking up to the cross in Jinotega or the Cristo in San Juan it is best to go in a group.
Contact Info in Nicaragua

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Hours: 7am-430 pm
km 5.5 Carretera Sur, Managua
Phone: 505-2252-7100
Marine Guards (for Emergency only): 505-2252-7634

Hospital Metropolitano Vivian Pellas
Carretera Masaya Km 9.75, 250 Meters West, Managua
Phone: 505-2255-6900

Hospital in Jinotega:
Hospital Victoria Motta
Gasolinera UNO central 2c al Sur Jinotega, Jinotega
Phone: 2782-2626

To Call Nicaragua from the US: You can call to Nicaragua from an international phone plan or by adding money to a skype, or google voice account. You must dial 011-505-number of the phone you wish to call

To Call the US from Nicaragua: on any phone dial 001-area code-number