

HOPE CLINIC INTERNATIONAL –MISSION TRIPS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT
TRAVEL TO NICARAGUA

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Is it safe?

Nicaragua is considered by many sources as the safest country in this hemisphere. Very little violent crime occurs there and the police (although slightly corrupt) are very well trained and maintain order in the communities without violence.

There are, however, many more precautions that one must take.

a. Nicaragua is a very conservative society although sometimes the dress of the younger generations may make it not seem so. Social interaction between men and women, if treated with respect to the culture, is usually conducted formally.

b. Women walking around alone will be heckled by men on the street. This behavior is best just ignored.

c. Social drinking is not customary in many parts of Nicaragua.

d. Petty theft is common in many areas of Nicaragua. Some Nicaraguans consider “what is mine is yours”. This can go for anything at anytime. Always guard all personal possessions carefully. **The best rule of thumb is not to bring anything that you could not afford to lose.**

What should I pack?

Most things can be found in Nicaragua that are essential to life. There are, however, a few things that you may want to bring to make travel a little easier.

a. Bug repellent or fabric softener sheets like you would use in the dryer. Mosquitoes are not bad in parts of the country and are horrific in others. They also change in intensity depending on the time of year.

b. A good flashlight that is small enough to fit in a backpack and works off of AA batteries. Power outages are common and streets and houses are not always well lit. Bring a good supply of extra batteries as well as good quality ones are expensive and not so easy to find outside of cities.

c. Comfortable shoes are a must. The roads in all parts are categorized in three ways: Not so great, awful, or non-existent. It is common to walk much more in Nicaragua than visitors are generally accustomed.

d. Prescription medication, if you require something specific. Although prescription medications are fairly available in Nicaragua without a prescription

e. Basic travel size first aid and sewing kits are handy. It is fairly easy to find things, but sometimes the work schedule does not accommodate getting to a store.

f. Electricity is the same as the US and most plugs are grounded. There is no need to bring adaptors.

g. A long-sleeved shirt or a sweater. No matter what time of the year, or what part of the country, it is a good idea to pack at least a long sleeve shirt or sweater. Even in the hottest parts of the country, it can get chilly at night, especially if you get sunburned during the day.

h. Umbrellas and/or raincoats are always a good idea. The umbrella will be used in the dry season for shade and in the rainy season it can rain extremely hard. If traveling in the rainy season, it is a great idea to bring an entire rain suit.

i. Sunscreen. It is best to bring a good supply with you as the sun is extremely intense all year. It is a good habit to apply it regularly throughout the day.

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j. A water Bottle (Nalgene type) Bottled water is readily available, but when in a group of people you will set your bottle down and it will look like everyone else's. If you have something to pour it in with a top that will close, you will waste less drinking water.

What will I need at immigration?

As soon as you get off the plane, you will be guided directly to immigration, then through baggage claim, then customs. Immigration will check your passport and will ask for US \$10.00 and will stamp a small piece of paper and place it in your passport. This is your tourist visa and you should keep this with you throughout your trip. Generally this is given for 90 days, but be sure and check the details.

PLEASE CHECK ALL REQUIREMENTS IMMEDIATELY BEFORE TRAVELING.

How is the weather?

In many cities such as Managua, Leon, San Juan del Sur, and Granada it is always hot-hot-hot. But in the mountains (Estelí, Jalapa, Jinotega, Matagalpa, etc.) it can be quite cool and sometimes even cold.

May through October is the rainy season. November through April is the dry season. April is the hottest month, December is the coldest.

Rainy season is divided into two specific categories "primera" and "postrera" The "primera" category occurs from May through August and means that generally hard rains occur once or twice a day and the storms move quickly and do not last long. The "postrera" type means that generally slower moving rains occur which sometimes last through the day and night.

How should I dress?

Generally speaking, dress conservatively but comfortably for hot weather. Cleanliness is very important in Nicaraguan culture and well maintained clothing is considered to be a sign of pride. Shoes well kept are a sign of care.

Do not wear flashy or expensive jewelry, especially around Managua. Leave anything in your home country that you can't part with. It just isn't worth the worry while you are here.

Shorts are generally only worn around the house or in beach communities except by teenagers and visiting "gringos". Local men generally do not wear shorts unless they are playing a sport or in a beach community. Our Mission Teams will be wearing hospital scrubs as our uniform during working hours.

You can acquire these at second hand clothing stores or Uniform stores. Green or Blue is fine.

There is a double standard. Nicaraguan women will oftentimes dress very provocatively, especially in the younger generations. But, foreigners that do so will be inviting problems. It is very strongly suggested by experienced travelers no tank tops or strapless t-shirts, no short shorts, and resist the urge to show a lot of cleavage. It is best to wear cotton woven fabrics because they breathe better. Knit tops are very hot in this climate. Knee length loose fitting pants or skirts made of cotton or linen fabric are more comfortable.

Best rule of thumb is to always realize that you are being observed by the local community and that your outward image is their first impression. Dress professionally, but come prepared for the climate.

How do I get around?

HCI will arrange all transportation while you are in country. We will primarily travel by bus to our Clinic sites and to the hotels we will be staying at

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Where will I stay?

HCI uses the following hotels:

Hotel Las Mercedes, Managua <http://www.lasmercedes.com.ni/>

Hotel Hex Managua

Hotel Don Vito, Estelí <http://www.hoteldonvitoesteli.com/>

We normally eat at the hotels or at restaurants nearby that are safe.

What about tipping?

Tipping for services such as bellhops, grocery bag carriers, security guards in parking lots, etc. is common. Generally one or two dollars per bag is usual. Cabs are not tipped generally unless it was exceptional service.

Restaurants will include the tip in the bill at the bottom called “propina” which is usually 10 to 15 percent. Make sure to look and to ask if it is included before leaving a tip. If you choose to leave a little extra for excellent service it is generally only a few córdobas.

Will I get sick?

You may experience travelers diarrhea because you do not have immunities to the local pathogens. This is true whenever you travel to another part of the World. The best prevention is to not eat street food, wash hands often and avoid uncooked or unpeeled fruits and vegetables. Do not drink water from the tap but always drink bottled water even in restaurants. If in doubt ask your team leader if the food is safe to eat.

What vaccines/ preventative medicines should I get?

There are no required vaccines to visit Nicaragua although it is a good idea to make sure your general shots are updated (tetanus, hepatitis, etc.) Please check with the CDC for any of the latest possible needs.

Tropical diseases that exist in the country.

Malaria. The types of malaria that exist are not deadly and are not resistant to the medication most commonly used to prevent and treat it called Chloroquine. Chloroquine phosphate prevents the development of malaria parasites in the blood. Doctors use it to both prevent and treat malaria.

To prevent some strains of malaria, you take Chloroquine phosphate once, 1 to 2 weeks prior to travel to an area where malaria is present, and then weekly while you are in the area, and weekly for 4 weeks after you depart from the area.

Dengue Fever. This is the counterpart to Malaria. The mosquito that carries Malaria is out at night and the one that carries Dengue Fever is out in the day. It is not common, but is more common than malaria.

Dengue fever is the most common cause of fever in travelers returning from the Caribbean, Central America, and South Central Asia. This disease is caused by four similar viruses (DENV-1, -2, -3, and -4) spread through the bites of infected mosquitoes. Usually dengue fever causes a mild illness, but it can be severe and lead to dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF), which can be fatal if not treated. People who have had dengue fever before are more at risk of getting DHF.

No vaccine is available to prevent dengue, and there is no specific medicine to cure illness caused by dengue. Those who become ill with dengue fever can be given medicine to reduce fever, such as acetaminophen, and may need oral rehydration or intravenous fluids and, in severe cases, treatment to

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support their blood pressure. Early recognition and treatment of severe dengue with impending blood pressure failure can reduce the risk of serious complications.

If you return from a trip abroad and get sick with a fever, you should seek medical care. Be sure to tell the doctor or other health care provider about your recent travel.

Mosquito Protection

Travelers can reduce their risk of getting dengue fever by protecting themselves from mosquito bites. The mosquitoes that spread dengue usually bite at dusk and dawn but may bite at any time during the day, especially indoors, in shady areas, or when the weather is cloudy.

To protect yourself from both Malaria and Dengue Fever, keep your skin covered, and sleep with a mosquito net when in areas where it is common.

Use a repellent:

- Look for a repellent that contains one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin (KBR 3023), Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus/PMD, or IR3535. Always follow the instructions on the label when you use the repellent.
- In general, repellents protect longer against mosquito bites when they have a higher concentration (percentage) of any of these active ingredients. However, concentrations above 50% do not offer a marked increase in protection time. Products with less than 10% of an active ingredient may offer only limited protection, often no longer than 1-2 hours, but they, and the fabric softener sheet trick mentioned earlier, will help. Don't worry if you do get bit by a mosquito. The odds of contracting either disease are very slim.

Is prophylaxis of travelers' diarrhea recommended?

CDC does not recommend antimicrobial drugs to prevent traveler's diarrhea (TD). However, studies show a decrease in the incidence of TD with use of bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto Bismol). Several studies show that bismuth subsalicylate taken as either 2 tablets 4 times daily or 2 fluid ounces 4 times daily reduces the incidence of travelers' diarrhea. Use of bismuth subsalicylate should be avoided by persons who are allergic to aspirin, during pregnancy, and by persons taking certain other medications (e.g., anticoagulants, probenecid, or methotrexate). In addition, persons should be informed about potential side effects, in particular about temporary blackening of the tongue and stool, and, rarely, ringing in the ears. Because of potential adverse side effects, prophylactic bismuth subsalicylate should not be used for more than 3 weeks.

Do - keep yourself hydrated if you should develop diarrhea. Drink water, or a diluted Gatorade

Do Not- assume that what caused your illness was the last thing you ate. Some ailments take a few days or sometimes weeks to gestate.

As your body develops immunity to the local pathogens (bugs) your stomach problems will resolve, normally within a few days.

How does the money exchange work?

The local currency (córdoba) is pegged to the US dollar. This means that inflation is controlled and is elevated at a set monthly rate. These days dollars and córdobas are interchangeable in most instances. It is, however, important to have local currency or small US dollars, i.e. one and 5 dollar bills when in more rural areas. You may not be able to purchase something simply because the seller does not have change.

Our recommendation is for you to bring cash for small personal expenses but no more than \$200

What will I eat?

Most of the diet of Nicaragua consists of grilled or fried chicken, beef, or pork with rice, beans and boiled vegetables and/or some sort of plantain. Often times, meals include a small amount of cabbage salad and a corn tortilla.

The food is usually very well prepared and is much more natural than found in many other countries. Vegetarians are not common in the culture so outside the larger cities it may be challenging to get a true vegetarian meal.

Places that are accustomed to tourist or volunteer workers want repeat business, so they will go to great lengths to insure the food is prepared well.

Can I drink the water?

We recommend not to drink tap water. Filtered or bottled water can be purchased almost anywhere in the country and is very inexpensive.

How are the people?

Nicaraguans are the most warm, friendly, grateful and generous people that can be found anywhere. It is customary for a Nicaraguan to give generously to anyone that is willing to be involved in their lives, and they want to show you their country. Their language is Spanish, but many people speak English or at least understand it..

There are beggars everywhere. Some are desperate, and some are professionals. In Managua, people will wash car windows at traffic lights (sometimes forcefully) and try to sell anything they can find. Many times you will see children in the street asking for money, or selling something. Be careful not to fall for the tricks. These children are generally in the street working for their parents or someone else. Although the urge is to give money to help the situation, it will only perpetuate the problem.

If volunteers would like to make donations, we give money to our in-country partners for them to distribute to needy people, because they know who those people are.

What is the political/religious situation in Nicaragua?

Primary religion is Catholic, but many evangelical Churches are well established and thriving in country. The current political party in power is the “Sandinista”, and socialist.

As an organization, we are ecumenical, and we do not advocate for any political party.

How to I stay in touch with family?

It is fairly easy to stay in touch with people at home. Pre-paid phones are inexpensive and easily re-chargeable. The fees to call the US are affordable. Also, people from the states can call for a relatively reasonable rate. Phone calls from the United States would be as follows 011-505-8-123-4567. (011= international call, 505= country code, 8=cell phone, 123-4567= telephone number.)

Internet is available at the hotels where we stay, you can Skype or make calls from the hotels.

What if I get injured?

Please purchase traveler’s insurance with your ticket, unless you have some sort of international health insurance plan. The best hospital in the country is called “Hospital Metropolitano Vivian Pellas”. It provides excellent service and many of the physicians that practice there were trained in the US; it is also very affordable.

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How can the U.S. Embassy help me?

The U.S. Embassy has an effective system to assist in case of natural disasters as well as minor accidents. HCI registers the groups at the U.S. State Department [website](#).

What if there is a natural disaster?

Nicaragua is called “The Land of Lakes and Volcanoes”. This is a beautiful name and very true. Lakes and volcanoes are a large part of what makes the country so amazing to visit. However, volcanoes also mean a constant threat of natural disasters with possible unpredictable eruptions and more commonly earthquakes.

As with any travel there are always risks, HCI has many in country partners as well as connections with the US Embassy in case we need help with evacuation plans.

Your actions matter!!!

Your actions also will affect those that follow. If you come into town and give everything away without consideration for sustainability, those visitors who arrive after you may be viewed as “Santa Claus” and will have a difficult time achieving their work because of the assumption they also will give everything away. It is very important to always know that your interaction in a country is part of a larger picture and may have a lasting effect, both positive and negative.

With all this said, will I have fun?

YES! Understand that your adventure to Nicaragua will be a life-changing experience, and promises to be one of the most positive opportunities in a lifetime. It is a country that usually gets into peoples’ hearts and they find it hard to stay away. Almost everyone I know that has visited for even a short time has come back.