



# Predeparture Program Guide

TOLA, NICARAGUA

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2017

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# FSD VALUES

At the center of the internship experience are the core values, vision, and mission that make FSD the organization that it is. We ask that as an FSD participant, you understand and remember these tenets throughout your time abroad, in order to make your program a meaningful experience for both you and the communities in which you serve.

## MISSION

FSD achieves community-driven goals through asset-based development and international exchange in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

## VISION

FSD envisions a world where all people have the opportunity and capacity to direct economic, social, and environmental resources toward sustainable outcomes that improve lives and communities.

## CORE VALUES

- **Start with Assets, Not Problems:** We take an asset-based approach to development work. We begin by listening to the priorities set by our community-based partners at our international program sites. We then identify and utilize existing assets and capacity to address those priorities.
- **Motivate Community Ownership:** We partner with leaders, organizations, and stakeholders committed to change, action, and social justice. We stress community ownership and participation before launching initiatives, especially in our volunteer programs.
- **Generate Enduring Results and Impact:** We ensure the outcomes of our support have long-lasting benefits for our partners. We think hard about how to participate appropriately and effectively in development, and on how to become redundant so that our initiatives outlast our involvement.
- **Focus On The Site Teams:** We are headquartered in California, but our International Site Teams direct our programs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America on the ground, 365 days a year. These teams build partnerships based on trust, respect, efficacy, and alignment with an asset-based approach.
- **Build Capacity:** We strengthen the skills, competencies, and abilities of the leaders of our community based partners and of our students and professional volunteers. We educate and train, facilitating the sharing of best practices across all of our stakeholders to support our partners' priorities.
- **Be A Bridge:** We relentlessly build a network of students, professionals, and passionate advocates for our community-based partners to access. We connect this network of assets and volunteers with the work of our partners through our international exchange and grantmaking programs.
- **Change Perspectives:** We share our experiences and learning about the complexities of development with friends, family, and colleagues. We promote cultural exchange and sensitivity, encouraging a reflective approach to navigating cross-cultural issues, confusions, and tensions.
- **Promote Reciprocity:** We operate on our founding principle that producing strong community outcomes must be the priority. We base all partnerships, strategies, and decisions on the Fair Trade Learning concept that we must be ethical and reciprocal in our planning, implementation, and outcomes.

# LETTER FROM FSD

Congratulations again on your acceptance to the Foundation for Sustainable Development's program! For many of you this experience will spark a lifelong interest in development. For others, it will be a chance to gain insights into other cultures that can only be obtained through direct experience. For all of you it will be a chance to make a lasting impact on people and communities in your host country, and an opportunity that will make a lasting impression on your life.

Many challenges await you. It is likely that the most difficult obstacles you face will not be the ones that test your technical skills or knowledge. More often it will be the difficulty of gaining the cultural competencies necessary to do successful work in a community. It will be learning to see the problems facing a region from the eyes of a community member rather than through the eyes of an outsider. Remember that culture, community, and language should guide your work as much as your own knowledge.

During your program you will represent both yourself and FSD in your community. Many people in the region that you will work in have had very little experience with people from outside their country. As such they will develop opinions of you and the work of FSD through their interactions with you or what they hear about you. We ask that you take your visibility into consideration when you make decisions about your actions in your host country.

It is the intention of FSD to provide you with a broad support network to best position you for success, but at the end of the day, it is your effort that will most influence the success of your experience with FSD. You will need to take initiative and put yourself in situations that stretch your comfort levels. You will have to work within cultural contexts that can cause extreme frustration. Many other challenges await, but at the same time you face these challenges you also have an incredible set of opportunities. Go into the experience with the willingness to listen and learn. You will find that through this willingness you will increase your ability to give to your community.

This guide has been developed to help make clear what FSD expects of our interns and volunteers and what you can expect of us. We look at your internship or volunteer program as a partnership. It is our hope and belief that clear expectations are the foundation for a solid working relationship. Please read this guide thoroughly; it contains information that is crucial to the success of your experience and our partnership.

Above all, you should feel comfortable contacting us at the US based headquarters if you need any additional support or have any questions.

Good luck!

# GEOGRAPHY OF TOLA

We hope that the following information will help you visualize the rural FSD site of Tola, Nicaragua! Our site has an expansive territory, including Pacific Coast line, interior mountains, and cities like Rivas and San Jorge. In order to clear up what exactly this means, please see the maps and their details below!

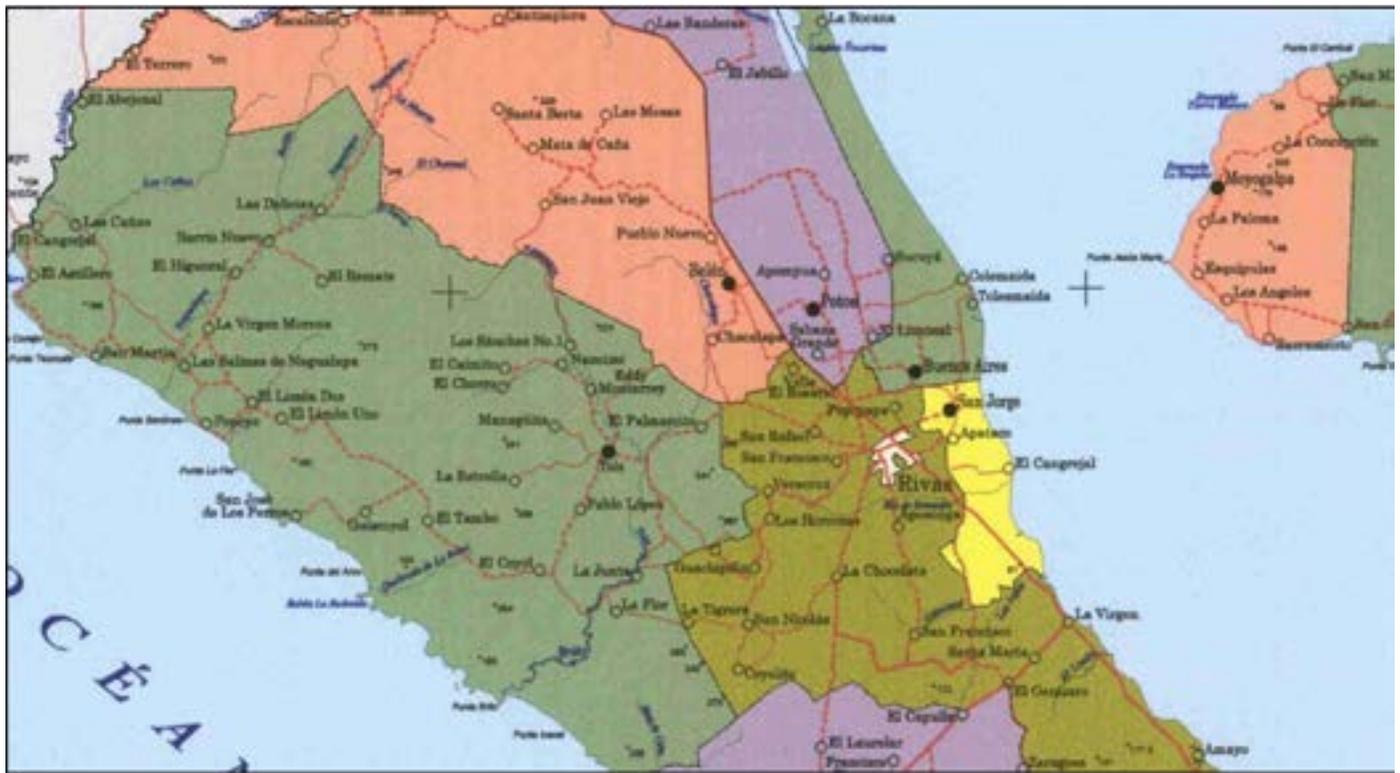
Please note that the intern’s host community is selected by the priorities expressed by FSD-Tola’s host organization partners. FSD’s thorough application process ensures that the FSD-Tola Site Team when arranging host organization and host family placements considers the intern’s interests and concerns.

## MAP OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RIVAS



The above map shows the department (like a state) of Rivas. The departmental capital (like a state capital) shares the same name, Rivas. Rivas city is where you will find access to the majority of desired goods and services; there are banks, supermarkets, doctors' offices, clinics, markets, many store fronts, restaurants, Internet cafes and more. The city of San Jorge is adjacent to Rivas city, easily reached by bus or taxi in 5-15 minutes. The municipality of Tola is also located in the department of Rivas, and is the most north western of its municipalities. As you can see, Tola is a geographically expansive municipality, with over 180 square miles. However, being very rural, the population is very low relative to its geographical size; it has the third lowest population density of the municipalities in the department.

### Now let's look at a map of Tola



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The center town of the municipality of Tola is defined on the map by a filled black dot and denoted “Tola”. This part of Tola is considered the casco urbano or “urban center”, but this is misleading! While Tola hosts the town hall, a public health center, several eateries and storefronts, internet cafes, a bank branch, among other goods and services, very quickly the paved streets turn into dirt tracks, and within close proximity you find farm land. Interns living in Tola town still rely on Rivas city for many necessary personal items and also for project work shopping; travel time between the town center of Tola and Rivas city is approximately 15 minutes by taxi and 30 minutes by bus. While there isn’t a lot of entertainment in Tola town, interns have the benefit of being located closer to Rivas, which is the transport hub of the department and the jumping off point to destinations further afield, such as San Juan del Sur, Ometepe and Granada.

FSD Tola also works with organizations in the cities of Rivas and San Jorge (also visible on the above map, the core city of Rivas is denoted by a white area, while San Jorge by a black dot). Interns placed in these cities have the benefits of city conveniences, with easy access to goods, services, and transportation. The municipality of Rivas has a population of over 150,000 but the city core is much smaller, with approximately 50,000 inhabitants. Rivas is considered a small city by Nicaraguan standards. San Jorge is an even smaller city, but with the highest population density given its small municipal territory. The entire municipality hosts about 8,000 inhabitants. San Jorge borders Lake Cocibolca with beaches, hotels, bars and restaurants along the coast of the lake. The town also has important religious significance among Catholics nationwide. Finally, San Jorge is also the jumping off point to Ometepe Island, about an hour by fast boat from the ferry dock. The FSD Program Director is the closest staff member to interns placed with organizations in the cities of San Jorge and Rivas.

In addition to Tola, Rivas, and San Jorge, this map shows many of the municipality’s 60 rural communities, denoted on the map by an unfilled dot. Following the road north of Tola center, you reach the community of Nancimi, where FSD-Tola works and places interns, approximately 3 miles from the town center of Tola and about 10 to 15 minutes by bus. The center of Nancimi has a central park, several small stores, and a public health post. Small mountains that span parallel to the coastline characterize the area in and around Nancimi, but as is the case with Tola town, Nancimi is isolated from the tourism industry. Around Nancimi there are many hiking



opportunities and plenty of wild life, including packs of howler monkeys!

Heading towards the coast, approximately 15-20 miles Tola town, are the communities of El Limón Dos, Las Salinas de Nagualapa and El Astillero, where FSD works and places interns. The road from Tola is paved for about 10 miles (and is currently under construction for expansion), becoming a dirt road until reaching El Astillero at the very tip of the municipality. El Limon 2 is just 2 miles from Las Salinas and El Astillero is another 5 miles onward. This area is experiencing a boom in tourism, with many popular nearby beach destinations. Nonetheless, the small communities feel far removed from this reality, despite their proximity to the ocean (Limon 2/Las Salinas are 1 mile from the ocean, El Astillero borders the ocean). Just another 5 miles north of El Astillero is Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, which is one of the four most important sea turtle nesting sites on the Pacific seaboard in the Americas. Trips into Rivas city are often necessary for both personal reasons and project shopping, which takes about 2 hours by bus. In these communities, you find basic goods and services, such as health posts, beachside restaurants/hotels with WIF access, basic foodstuffs and toiletries. The closest bank branch is in Tola town and the closest ATM is near the entrance to Hacienda Iguana Beach and Golf Resort about 6 miles from El Limon. Interns often rely on a bike to access the beaches, hot springs, and other nearby communities.

*Please note that the number of interns in any given community is determined by the priorities expressed by FSD-Tola's partner organizations and the number of participants enrolled. During summer session (C1, C2) it is more likely that another FSD intern will be living relatively close by; however, during winter, spring and fall sessions (A,B,D), it's not uncommon for you to be the only FSD intern in your community.*



# TOLA TEAM



**Maria de Jesus Zepeda** | Program Director

Licensed social worker and psychologist, Maria has served as FSD's program director in Nicaragua since 1998. She is also responsible for the Department of Social Work in the Hospital Ciudad Sandino. One of her functions is increasing attention to and working to prevent domestic violence. She develops projects in the areas of public health and community health, holding workshops in the community of Ciudad Sandino for people such as health educators, midwives, and volunteers that work with projects to prevent diarrhea and malaria. With FSD she is developing projects involving training others on the prevention and attention to domestic violence to health workers in Ciudad Sandino. With the help of FSD volunteers, she is working to help organizations improve the quality of life in Nicaragua.



**Alexandra MacPhee** | Senior International Program Coordinator

Born in the Netherlands and raised in a Canadian diplomatic family, Alexandra grew up traveling abroad to Europe. A three-month backpacking trip to Central America in 2008 first sparked Alexandra's interest in living in Latin America. She returned to Nicaragua in 2009 to volunteer, which confirmed her commitment to working in the non-profit sector. After graduating with a B.A. in International Development Studies from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, she embarked on a 13-month internship in community development in a Nicaraguan town. The following year, Alexandra landed a position in fundraising at a microfinance institution in Honduras, which took her to rural areas across the country. While this experience was very rewarding, Alexandra jumped at the opportunity to join FSD as the International Programs Coordinator in Tola, Nicaragua, and moved to the rural community of Las Salinas de Nagualapa in September 2012. Alexandra's experiences in the non-profit sector and the growing tourism industry in Tola inspired her to purchase land in Las Salinas in hopes of building a tourism establishment with the mission to support local community initiatives.



**Devin Graves** | International Program Officer

Devin discovered the power of social change when he learned that he shared a birthday with Nelson Mandela. Studying about Mandela's life gave him the determination to impact the world, and because of this desire, he pursued a Master's degree in Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. As part of his studies, he focused on sustainable project design with an emphasis in monitoring and evaluation. Before joining FSD, he spent two years designing and implementing development projects among Mayan communities in both Mexico and Guatemala, and in the eastern districts of Uganda. Previous to living abroad, he worked in international education.

## FSD STAFF ROLES

**Program Director:** FSD's program directors are local experts in the field of community development. Their experience and strong community ties make them a great resource to support you in your in-country project work. The program director develops and maintains FSD's relationships with our host organizations and is heavily involved in the process from the time you apply to FSD to the end of your term of service.

**Program Coordinators:** Your program coordinator(s) provides ongoing support to you, FSD's host families and our partner organizations. During the application process, they advise the program director and San Francisco staff about your placement. Once you're in the field, they serve as a bridge to the local culture and language and as lifeline when culture shock inevitably sets in. They are also available to advise you as you develop your program workplan.

**Program Officer:** FSD's program officers coordinate the work done at FSD sites in different regions of the world. They manage program logistics and design, corporate and university partnerships, and programmatic issues. Program officers are also your U.S. based emergency contact.

### FSD Headquarters Contact Info

- Office Hours: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. PST
- General Inquiries: [info@fsd.org](mailto:info@fsd.org)
- Office Phone: 415-283-4873
- Emergency Phone: 415-828-8414

# SAFETY & SECURITY

The safety and security of our program participants and staff is our first priority. Our safety and security protocols meet international standards and have been developed over 20 years of operation, and from the practical experience of our staff. We have rigorous and conservative safety and security procedures, including triaged security measures for students (such as restricted travel, curfews, and buddy systems) should any emergent or potentially emergent event occur. Every site has an emergency evacuation plan (supported by our travel insurance partner) that identifies safe houses, on-call transportation, and provides a variety of options for moving participants out of unsafe areas via land and air routes.

For each site, we have identified physicians, health centers, and hospitals for routine and emergency care that meet standards of care for foreigners, including the locations of and contact for relevant embassies and consulates. These procedures are supported by duty officer training of our support staff in San Francisco who monitor an emergency call line 24/7. But the most critical components of our safety and security system are our local staff, who are also on call 24/7, and our network of community partners at each of our program sites. Our local staff have the best knowledge regarding the potential of local events to become critical, and they have a network of community members to turn to for safety information.

While working abroad, there is always a potential risk that emergencies may occur, and we have experience dealing with a variety of issues, from localized civil unrest and natural disasters to total evacuation of programs. The US office is in constant communication with our program sites through a variety of communications channels, including biweekly phone calls and reporting on each participant, and we also monitor international media for emerging events.

All of our program sites are in safe areas. However, similar to the US, certain common-sense safety measures must be taken. These will be reviewed extensively during orientation, when every participant receives a safety briefing. We emphasize that the most important ways to stay safe are to exercise good judgment, to have a strong network of local contacts, and to have an awareness of the potential for harm.

FSD will do its utmost to provide a safe environment and a responsive support system to you throughout your experience. To ensure a safe and successful experience for everyone involved, we depend upon our staff to serve as a barometer of the local political, social and economic climates, and to use that knowledge to maintain a safe and secure environment for FSD participants. We depend on our participants to act prudently and be receptive to instructions and suggestions regarding safety and security.



## **FSD RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Ensure a safe and secure host community. Our host organizations and programs are run by FSD staff and trusted colleagues who live locally and often have years of experience with FSD. While the political climate varies by location and timing, we feel that partner organizations provide us with a good barometer of the climate in relation to the safety of foreign volunteers.
- Inform you about safety and security in your host community through materials like this predeparture guide. We equip you with the information and tools to be aware of the realities of your host community, to avoid situations that would put you at risk, and to manage these situations should they arise.
- Send you an electronic proof of insurance card.
- Direct you to a preferred medical facility in the case of an emergency.
- Support you logistically and emotionally through any medical or emergency situation.
- Contact your emergency contacts in the case of a major emergency.

## **YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Learn about the history and current events of your host country and community.
- Secure all recommended vaccinations.
- Secure legal and visa requirements for your stay.
- Follow the directions of your site team and host family.
- Register with the US State Department or equivalent.
- Avoid volatile or risky situations. Travel with someone you know, and avoid being out alone after dark.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Walk purposefully and act as though you know where you are going.
- Notify your site team of any incidents of harassment, illness, accident, or any other serious event as soon as possible.
- Review your insurance coverage to determine whether you want to purchase an enhanced package. FSD program insurance ensures that adequate support is available to you in the case of a major emergency. There is a US \$250 deductible for which you are responsible. The illnesses and medical issues you are more likely to encounter may require medical consultations and prescriptions. Beyond taking all necessary precautions to prevent illness and accidents, please plan financially for these types of expenses. Hospitals and clinics may require payment up-front for services; please bring cash and/or a credit card (Visa or Mastercard) for emergency medical expenses and seek reimbursement directly from the insurance provider. FSD is not responsible for medical fees.

# HEALTH PREPARATIONS

As an FSD participant, it is your **full responsibility** to identify and take all necessary health precautions prior to, during, and following the program. Please start your health preparations early, as some vaccinations must be taken eight weeks or more before departure. Providing detailed medical advice is beyond the expertise of FSD staff so it is very important to consult the resources below as well as medical professionals or local travel health clinic.

## Topics to talk to your doctor or local health clinic about:

- Anti-malarial medications and mosquito repellent
- The symptoms of the most common illnesses contracted by travelers, and the appropriate treatment
- Medicines and supplies for preventing and treating common illnesses and maladies (diarrhea, dehydration, sunburn, food poisoning)
- Dengue fever
- Chikungunya
- Food and water-borne diseases
- Nutrition (especially for those with dietary restrictions)

## What happens if I get sick?

- For serious illness, there are public and private clinics and hospitals available in most areas. If you should become sick, please alert the FSD site team and your host family immediately and they will ensure that you receive appropriate medical care.

# HEALTH RESOURCES

## Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Recorded information about health risks and precautions for international travelers: 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747)

## Traveler's Health for Nicaragua

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/nicaragua>

**Malaria Hotline**  
404-332-4555



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Tola  
Predeparture Guide

# VISA INFORMATION

The recommendations provided here are subject to change at any time. As an FSD participant, it is your full responsibility to secure the appropriate visa and ensure the full legality of your stay in the host country during the program. You should consult the resources listed below and check with a Nicaraguan consulate or embassy for the most current information.

U.S. citizens traveling to Nicaragua can get a tourist visa upon arrival for US \$10. Bring \$10 cash in new, undamaged U.S. currency. A 90-day tourist visa may be renewed during your stay for an additional 90 days at \$15 per 30 days. After 180 days you must leave the country for 3 days and return starting the tourist visa process again. There is a \$2/day fine for overstaying your allotted period. Please make sure that you receive the 90-day visa before leaving the airport.

Participants who have traveled prior to countries with Yellow Fever presence are now required to present international certification of vaccination upon entry to Nicaragua. For more information consult the resources below.

# VISA RESOURCES

## **Embassy in Nicaragua**

Kilometer 5.5 Carretera Sur  
Managua, Nicaragua

ConsularManagua@state.gov  
Telephone: +(505)2252-7100  
fax: 202-726-1727

<https://ni.usembassy.gov/>

# PACKING & LUGGAGE

## RECOMMENDED PACKING LIST

### Clothes

- Several pairs cotton underwear and socks
- Light waterproof jacket & umbrella during the rainy season (May-Nov)
- Long-sleeved top(s) (to fend off mosquitoes, protect from sun or use during cooler evenings)
- Long pants/capris (1 to 3)
- Shorts (1 to 2)
- Skirts, knee-length or longer for women (1 to 3)
- Light sports attire if you plan on, running, hiking, sports, etc.
- Multiple shirts; appropriate for work, leisure, travel
- At least one nice outfit for special occasions
- Sneakers and sandals/flip-flops (“nice” footwear optional)
- Bathing suits, sarong, and other beach gear
- Modest sleepwear
- Hat for sun protection (baseball caps are common for men)

### Health and Hygiene

- A supply of hand wipes and/or anti-bacterial hand lotion (some restrooms will not have running water)
- Your medications, in their original containers, with a copy of your prescriptions
- Personal hygiene products—soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tampons, floss, etc. (These can be purchased locally to save room in your luggage, but you should pack travel sizes to use until you can go to the store the first week)
- Strong insect repellent and Calamine lotion or other itch-relief cream (you will get bitten by insects at some point during your stay)
- Vitamins
- Antibiotics for travelers’ diarrhea
- Sunglasses
- Contact lens solution and eye drops (prohibitively expensive in-country)
- Feminine hygiene products (sanitary pads are widely available, tampons are not)

### Practical Supplies

- Steel or plastic water bottle
- Travel alarm clock
- Towel (families may not have them, and they are useful for beach days)
- Medium-sized pack for day and weekend trips
- Flashlight/headlight (power outages are relatively common)
- Earplugs (notably if you have trouble sleeping with noise)

- Lock for luggage (can also be used at lockers in hostels if traveling)
- Money belt (around the waist is more secure than around the neck)
- Utility knife

### **Documents and Money**

- Airline ticket
- Passport
- Vaccination booklet
- Insurance card
- Visa or Mastercard
- Photocopies of all documents
- Cash (US \$100 is good to begin with)

### **Other**

- Spanish-English dictionary
- Reading materials
- Small gifts for your host family (optional)

# LUGGAGE FAQ

## **What kind of luggage should I bring?**

Don't overdo it—pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. Think in terms of a backpack, duffel bag, or moderate-sized suitcase and a daypack. Bags with shoulder straps are preferable to suitcases because they're easier to carry. Check the airline luggage limit to avoid baggage fees.

## **What should I bring in my carry-on luggage?**

We recommend that you carry all valuables (money, credit card, passport, identification, immunization booklet, camera, insurance card, etc.) and a complete set of clothes in your carry-on luggage in case your checked bag is temporarily lost or delayed.

## **What documents should I bring?**

You should bring your passport, a vaccination booklet (does not need to be official, but at the least write out a list of your shots and dates that you had them), your insurance card, and a list of FSD contacts in Nicaragua (phone numbers for your program director, program coordinator, host family and/or trip leaders). Please bring two photocopies of each of these documents. During the program, store the originals and one copy in your suitcase and keep the other copy on your person at all times.

## **What are some items especially difficult to get in Nicaragua?**

Exotic spices, spicy sauces, American candies, tampons, contact lens solution, natural bug repellents, and books in English are all things that will be particularly difficult to find during your stay. We encourage you to bring some from home if you think you will need them.

# CLOTHING FAQ

## HOW ARE CLOTHES WASHED?

Host families will wash all of your clothes except your underwear. Washing machines will not be available: your clothes will be hand-washed and line-dried. Please note that because clothes are washed and dried outside they will probably endure some wear and tear. The climate is so humid that it can often take days to get clothes fully dry; keep this in mind while packing and opt for lighter-weight clothes that will dry quickly. You will wash your personal items by first soaking them in powdered detergent and then washing them by hand, using detergent soap.

## WHAT TYPE OF CLOTHES SHOULD I PACK?

Keep in mind that darker colors are easier to keep clean, and consider what kind of work you will be doing. For example, if you'll be working in a rural area, it is likely you'll need to wear sneakers for going out to the campo, whereas an urban school or microfinance organization will require dress shoes or nice sandals. Lightweight clothes that will breathe in the heat are highly recommended.

## WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

To avoid uncomfortable stereotypes and feel safe (this is especially important for women), dress somewhat conservatively; politically-oriented T-shirts, skimpy tanktops and mini-skirts are not appropriate for work.

## AT WORK

Many Tola partners are grassroots organizations and as such standards for office wear are flexible. In general, bring neat, presentable clothes for work. Jeans for men and women are the norm, but you may find them hot, so alternatives like cotton pants, leggings, khakis, capris, etc. will be more comfortable. For women skirts/dresses that are knee length or longer are also appropriate. For tops, blouses, tanks with thick straps, t-shirts with collars are acceptable. For men, a nice pair of khaki shorts is also acceptable for work, but take care to bring some long pants for field trips in rural areas and pants for community meetings, special events, etc. Polo shirts, nice T-shirts, and button up shirts are all appropriate for work. For both genders, bring at least one nice outfit for nighttime occasions, since Nicaraguans dress up for dancing and the numerous festivals that occur throughout the year. Be sure to bring comfortable closed toe walking shoes. For women nice sandals are appropriate for work.

## AT HOME

Shorts and rubber flip-flops, for both genders, are usually worn at home or for informal activities such as sports or going to the corner store. Please bring a pair of modest pajamas to sleep in.



# ELECTRONICS

## **ADAPTERS**

Voltage in Nicaragua is 110–120 Volts (same as the US and Canada). Although North American interns will not require a converter, an adapter may be useful depending on the items you are bringing, since many electric outlets cannot accommodate three pin plugs or those with one taller pin (grounded plugs).

## **LAPTOPS**

The advantage of bringing a laptop is the ability to work on documents at home without paying for internet/computer time. You can then save your work to a USB drive and email/print it at a ciber (internet cafe). If you do decide to bring your laptop, please take the necessary precautions! It should be in your carry-on bag to take on the plane and you should keep it at your host family's home. Many participants choose to bring their laptops to facilitate project work and communication with home, but taking a laptop entails the risk that it could be lost, stolen or damaged. FSD is not responsible for your possessions.

## **OTHER ELECTRONICS**

Bring rechargeable batteries plus charger if you need them; we do not recommend purchasing batteries in Nicaragua because they are expensive and extremely short-lived. Finding brand-name batteries can be difficult. If you bring your camera, remember to bring memory cards and a cord for uploading photos. Smartphones are popular among Nicaraguans, but even still be discreet when using Ipads, smartphones and music players, and we recommend not using them when visiting cities or otherwise traveling.

Note: The above are recommendations only; all electronics are brought at your own personal risk. As with your belongings in general, FSD staff takes precautions to ensure that they are transported safely to and from host family homes and families are required to provide a space where your valuables can be locked. Nonetheless, electronics that you will be carrying on your person for work or personal use are at risk of wear and tear (hot/humid/dusty conditions, etc) and theft, although this has thus far not been an issue on any level for our site.

# FOOD & WATER

## **Can I drink the tap/well water? Where can I get safe water?**

NO. Do not drink tap or well water. For your ensured safety, please only drink bottled water or water that has been boiled or filtered. Your host family will always have purified water available for you. When visiting other families or communities, bring your own bottled water with you at all times, and when in doubt, drink a bottled beverage. Bottled water is widely available in any pulperia or venta (small family stores). All ice served in homes or informal restaurants will likely be frozen tap water. Be aware that many places serve ice in all of their beverages by default.

## **What is typical food?**

The main staples of the Nicaraguan diet are beans and rice, commonly fried together and known as gallo pinto. Both crops are harvested in country and serve as the daily meal for all Nicaraguans. You will likely eat gallo pinto as least once a day, possibly with eggs and/or salty cheese. Gallo pinto is typically a breakfast and/or dinner food, while beans and rice served separately and accompanied by meat, eggs, and/or vegetables is served in a larger portion at lunch. Also, Nicaraguans generally expect a meal to be “accompanied” by boiled guineo (a starchy, non-sweet banana), a thick corn tortilla or fried plantain (tostones). Other principal foods include plantains, yucca, and tamales. The food tends to be greasy and salty; salads are a rarity.

## **What do most people drink?**

Refrescos are fresh juices made from fruit that are both made at home and served in restaurants, and they tend to be very sugary. Have caution when drinking these outside of your host family’s home as they can be made with unpurified water. Heavier, grain-based refrescos are traditional, sweet beverages that may be made from cacao, corn, oatmeal and other grains or seeds. Coffee is nearly always of the instant variety (unlike exported brands), and locals nearly always drink their coffee black and extremely sweet. Soda, or “gaseosa,” is considered a treat and not standard in most Nicaraguan homes. If milk is in the home, it is usually in powdered form, or is fresh and un-pasteurized. Beer and rum are the alcoholic drinks of choice.

## **How vegetarian-friendly is the local cuisine?**

Meat is a big part of Nicaraguan culture and celebrations. However, families can always accommodate a vegetarian diet and many, due to low incomes in general, consume little meat in any case. Please be specific about your preferences (i.e. whether you eat chicken but no red meat, or no animals, no dairy, etc.) and let the

FSD staff know beforehand so they can alert your host family.

In Tola communities access to fresh fruits and vegetables is more limited and while host families make an effort to include these nutrients in your diet, being conscious of the situation is important.

### **What foods should I avoid?**

- Avoid uncooked food and street vendors that have not been recommended by FSD Site Team
- Do not eat fruits or vegetables that have been washed with water unless they are peeled or the water was treated beforehand
- Eat pork with caution to avoid the risk of acquiring schistosomiasis
- Eat lightly upon arrival and stay away from milk that has not been pasteurized
- How should I express my preferences, or turn down unsafe food that is offered to me?

In many places food is an important form of hospitality and it is cultural practice to offer food and drink as a welcoming, friendly gesture. Never put yourself at risk, but please be diplomatic in expressing your needs. Take care not to offend your hosts with negative comments or facial expressions. Your host family will be notified of what you can and cannot eat or drink, but you should also be sure to tell your family what your preferences are. Politely ask your family for food to be less greasy or salty, to put salt on the side, to include more fruits or vegetables, or to be given more or less food.

### **Are there any US-style restaurants?**

Major U.S. fast food restaurants (TGIF, Subway, McDonald's) are in Managua. The bigger towns offer hamburger, hot dog and pizza places.



# COMMUNICATION

*Staying in touch with your family and friends back home is important. You'll be eager to share your experiences and accomplishments while gaining reassurance and comfort by communicating with them. Here are some ways in which this will be possible during your stay in Nicaragua.*

## **What is the best way for friends and family at home to reach me?**

Email is probably the most reliable way to be in touch with your friends and family at home. You can also call your friends and family easily from internet cafés, or try using a free computer-to-computer chatting programs like Skype. Local cell phones can make and receive calls to and from North America.

## **Are cell phones available?**

FSD provides participants with an inexpensive cell phone during their program. The phone is topped off with minutes at the beginning of your program, and then you are responsible for recharging minutes on your phone. Friends and family can call you on your phone at your expense. Calls to and from cell phones can be expensive.

## **Can friends and family call me?**

You can receive calls from friends and family on your cell phone. The majority of host families do not have house phones and instead rely on cell phones. Never make any long distance calls from your host family's or organization's phone without permission (if you use a calling card and ask permission from your family this could be OK). Note that phone communication is often interrupted by bad weather, local technicalities or electricity outages, and sometimes lines are cut in the middle of a call. Let your friends and families know about this with the understanding that it is best not to schedule international calls at exact times.

In case of an emergency, your family can call the FSD site team and leave a message for you. Please note that the program director and host families generally do not speak English. You may call the program coordinator any time or the US emergency cell phone.

## **Is there access to internet and email?**

You will have occasional access to internet cafes (called cibers). Internet access is also available at restaurants/bars, data plans on smartphones (you may choose to purchase a local sim card for your smartphone for \$6 if you prefer to have access to local data plans) and through USB modems. Some host organizations have wifi internet access.

**How do I call the US?**

To call the US, dial 001, the area code, then the 7-digit number. Internet cafés are the cheapest option for calling the US: it's about 1.5 córdoba/minute to call the US, even though it costs 5 córdobas/minute to call anywhere in Nicaragua.

**How do I make a call within Nicaragua?**

You can call anywhere in Nicaragua simply by dialing the 8-digit number. Landlines start with the number 2 and cell phone lines with the number 8. There are no area codes in the country. You can make local or national calls for 5 córdobas (US\$0.25) from any internet café.

**Can I receive packages from the US?**

If participants wish to receive packages, they should have them sent to the FSD office. Packages containing important and/or valuable items should be sent only via FedEx to ensure a safe delivery. Packages not sent by FedEx are unlikely to arrive in a timely fashion and are not guaranteed to arrive at all. Typically, packages sent via regular post will take between three and six weeks to arrive from the United States.



# MONEY

## How much cash should I bring with me?

You should plan on bringing US\$100 to \$200 in cash, an ATM card, and a credit card for emergencies. Smaller bills that are in good condition are more convenient and can be used for purchases following arrival. There is no need to exchange money at the airport.

## How much money should I plan on spending in country?

FSD covers all of your necessary expenses, including room and board, in-country transportation, orientation and debriefing sessions. You may want additional money, however, for entertainment, snacks, books, gifts, newspapers, weekend excursions, additional transportation and health emergencies. As an estimate, you should budget for about US\$3/day and about \$50 for a weekend trip. Bring more if you plan to go out often or buy gifts. Never carry a large sum of cash on public transportation; if you must, please do so with caution.

## How can I get cash?

ATM machines are recommended because they are accessible, secure and get a good rate of exchange. There is a bank branch located in Tola town, and in rural communities (Limon 2/Salinas) there are now two ATMs that are reliable most of the time. In Rivas City there are also several bank branches and places where you can exchange money, which will be pointed out by the Site Team during Orientation.

## Are credit cards accepted?

Credit cards are only accepted in expensive shops and restaurants. Bring Visa or MasterCard since they are the most widely accepted. You may want to notify your bank or credit card company of the dates you will be in Nicaragua so that your ATM or credit cards are not blocked.

### Monetary Unity & Exchange Rate

#### Monetary Unit

Córdoba

#### Exchange Rate

The current exchange rate is approximately 29.5 Córdobas to the US Dollar, but check it again before you leave.

## What is the local attitude towards bargaining?

Negotiating a discount is part of the culture, but often once you receive a “rebaja” or reduction in price, the seller is at their bottom line. This is especially true at markets or stores. Since Tola is a more tourism-oriented area, local people assume that foreigners have a lot of money and often offer prices 2-3 times what a Nicaraguan would be offered. Investigating prices with your host family, host institutions or the FSD site team will help you avoid paying more than you should.

# TRANSPORTATION

## **When should I arrive in-country?**

Participants will meet with at least one member of the site team at the airport on the program start date. Look for someone with a sign saying “FSD” after exiting the baggage claim area. The group will usually travel by taxi to a hostel in Managua for the night, and early the next morning the group will head to the site to begin orientation.

## **How far is the orientation site from the airport?**

The average travel time from Managua to the orientation site depends on the whether the orientation site is in Tola or in the communities of Las Salinas/Limon. Average travel time by bus to Tola is between 3 and 4 hours. Travel to Las Salinas/Limon takes an additional 1 ½ to 2 hours. Two weeks prior to your session start date, the site team will send you an orientation itinerary with detailed information.

## **If I cannot meet the group for the scheduled pickup how do I get to the orientation site?**

Contact your site team to coordinate your arrival as they will give you directions and tips to help ensure your safety and comfort. If you choose to arrive before the program start date (one day later is not an option), note that you will be responsible for covering the expenses of a taxi from the airport and the night's stay in Managua (about \$30 USD total) You will meet the rest of the group at the hostel on the program start date. In this case, the site team can suggest a trusted taxi driver; they can also ensure your hostel reservation.

## **What time should I book my return flight?**

Return flights should be booked either in late afternoon/evening on your program end date (if planning on staying or traveling independently, participants may select other travel dates). Another option is to select a morning departure on the day after your program end date, however you will be responsible for covering lodging expenses for the extra night at a hostel in Managua. In this case, the site team will still make all arrangements and ensure your arrival at the airport.

## **Are there any other tips for arrival?**

The site team will send you arrival information one week prior to your start date. This will have the site team's contact information; please keep this information on you at all times so if you are delayed or have any questions you can easily contact them. If you are not able to arrive on the specified start date or if you will be arriving earlier, make sure to contact your site team.

# IN-COUNTRY TRANSPORTATION

## **What are the most common modes of transport and are they expensive?**

Most areas in your host community are a walkable distance. For trips or to get to other communities you can take the bus, and the site team will provide a schedule. Those staying longer may consider purchasing a bicycle, which gives them more mobility than the somewhat restrictive bus routes and schedules. Bikes in Rivas cost around \$100 USD used, \$150-200 new.

## **Can I take taxis?**

Yes, many people travel by taxi. If you take a taxi, make sure that there is a red/white license plate on the back of the taxi and that the driver's 6-8 inch cedula (ID photo) is on the front window. Always determine the price before getting in ("Por cuanto me lleva a [destination]?") and be ready with an idea of what you are willing to pay. For short trips between Tola and Rivas, there is an established route where "Collectivos" depart frequently.

## **Is it safe to go out at night?**

Consult with your host family about safety information specific to your community. It is safer not to be out alone after about 8 p.m. There are long stretches of uninhabited road between rural communities and the outskirts of Tola. Dogs become more aggressive at night, meaning that if you walk late at night you should be prepared to be barked at by packs of dogs (and throw rocks in their direction if they get too near). Nicaragua is one of the safest Central American countries and if you exercise caution, it is unlikely you will run into any trouble.



# HOMESTAY IN NICARAGUA

Communities in the Tola area are small and virtually everyone knows each other. Nicaraguan families are typically large; until the last couple of generations it was common for women to bear 8-15 children (and in several cases more). Cousins, brothers, and sisters live in the same house or close by and interact on a daily basis, and a family member will typically only leave the area if they marry someone from outside or if they are forced to seek work elsewhere. Family allegiances by far transcend other relationships and independent considerations. Parents generally cannot stand to be far away from their children and grandchildren, and consider cultures where parents and children live relatively independent lives to be very curious. It is very common for family members to sleep in the same bed, no matter what their ages. Essentially, physical closeness is built into the culture, regardless of whether or not it is by necessity. People show their love and support for each other by simply being with each other... words are not as important as presence.

The families are very excited to meet you! We know from feedback evaluations that the host family experience is always one of the highlights of living in Nicaragua. You will learn a great deal about Nicaragua through the people who live there, so cultivate a habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.

## **What are Nicaraguan homes like?**

The vast majority of Nicaraguan homes are square brick-and-concrete structures, although the poorest families have homes made of wooden planks and branches. Houses are constructed such that there is a space between the roof (generally comprising sheets of zinc metal) and the walls, which helps with ventilation and for heat/humidity to escape, but the temperature will generally still be high enough that most opt not to be indoors during the hottest hours of the day. A downside of this type of construction is that dust and insects make their way indoors much more easily, thus requiring a constant cleaning effort. Homes have no air conditioning and the heat of the tropics can at times be frustrating. There will probably be days when you spend most of your hours in front of a fan. Host family homes will have electricity although this service is occasionally interrupted.

Tola homes have differing access to water; sometimes there is no running water so consequently, it is common to shower with buckets of water that are drawn up from a well. Some Tola households have wells on their property and a pump which provides running water 24/7 unless the electricity goes out. Other households need to bring in water from wells outside their property and therefore there is never running water. Many households keep livestock animals (pigs, chickens especially) and while they are not encouraged to get into the house, they often do. Dogs are the

most frequent “pet”, but are often meant for protecting rather than petting. Families may have other “pets” or animals, like rabbits, birds, or cats.

### **What will my host family provide?**

Your family is required to provide you with a private room, access to a bathroom and shower, three meals a day, purified water, a fan, and weekly hand-washing of your clothes. Toiletries and a towel are not provided; you must bring your own.

### **What are the living accommodations like?**

Living accommodations are basic by U.S. standards. Host families have electricity, but this service is occasionally interrupted. There are few communities in Tola that have access to running water, and if they do, the service is only available for so many hours a day. Consequently, it is common to bathe with buckets of water that are drawn up from a well or stored from when the water was running. Ants, mosquitoes, geckos, spiders, praying mantises, scorpions, and small rodents can creep into the house ... Please don't be alarmed! Your family can help prevent these unfortunate visitors, so let them know if you see something! Keeping your room clean and storing food in its place will make a big difference.

In the rainy season, rainstorms can be alarmingly low to the ground and deafening, due to rain pounding against the zinc roofs and thunder booming in close proximity. You will become accustomed to a fair amount of night sound, including traffic, animals, rattling of zinc roofs in the wind and rain, and loud music. Ear plugs can help.

### **How are families structured in Nicaragua?**

Many Nicaraguan families consist of parents, grown children, and grandchildren in the same home. Children in Nicaragua, like children anywhere, can be both adorable and annoying, but try to maintain your patience with them in order to integrate smoothly into the household. Sometimes young children will be afraid of you for the first few weeks because you are a stranger and you look and act differently than the people they're used to. Please don't take this personally and be patient—they'll warm up to you with time.

### **Do I need to help out with chores?**

We ask families to treat you as another member of the family, which means you will pick up after yourself, keep your area neat, and help out with the cooking and cleaning as appropriate. On the other hand, most families will probably be uncomfortable with you doing any substantial amount of housework, so don't insist if a family seems to be unwilling to let you do certain chores.

### **Is it safe to bring and store valuables at my host family's house?**

As a general rule, you should not bring many valuables with you. We require that you

keep items of value locked in your luggage at all times. This is extremely important because friends and relatives are often in and out of the house. However, there have been incidents when a student thought something was stolen only to find that s/he had misplaced it. This kind of “scandal” is hard on the host family who take great care to protect you and your things. If something unusual of this nature does happen, please speak with your host family and/or the FSD site team immediately.

### **What are standard meal times?**

Lunch is at midday; however, breakfast and dinner are served a bit earlier than you may be used to, generally because people both arise and go to bed earlier. Family members often eat at different times. Many families watch the news or “telenovelas” (soap operas) during lunch and dinner. Don’t be surprised if the family serves you before or after their own meal. Families often do not eat together, but serve themselves and often eat from an available chair near the TV or outside rather than at a dining table.

### **How should I tell my family that I’d like less food, or different kinds of food?**

Don’t be shy about asking your family to adjust the type or amount of food you are given. Vegetarian food is always available. You should tell your family what you do and do not like to eat. Politely and directly ask your family for food to be less greasy or salty, to put salt on the side, or to give you more or less food.

### **How much time should I spend with my host family? What should we talk about?**

You will likely spend a lot of time in the evening and weekends hanging out with your host family members. They are your best and primary link to Nicaraguan culture, so feel free to ask questions! The first questions someone will usually ask you relate to your family, whether or not you have a boyfriend or girlfriend and if you have kids—so go ahead and ask them questions also. Be sensitive to the feelings of others and embrace the different viewpoints, lifestyles, and experiences that your family provides. Host families are eager to get to know you and learn about your American life, so be ready to talk about your interests, culture, family and plans. Pictures and stories from home are always entertaining.

### **How often should I check in with my host family?**

You are entrusted to the family’s care and just like your own family, they will worry about you if you don’t check in, especially since they know you are a foreigner in a new country. Please advise your family in advance if you do not plan to be home for a meal, as otherwise they will prepare food for you needlessly. Likewise, be sure to notify your family in advance of any weekend excursions. Communicate with your family as much as possible about how and when you will come home so that they know you understand how to return safely.

**Can I have visitors come over to the house?**

Please advise your family before you invite anyone to the house, especially someone of the opposite sex. Overnight guests are NOT appropriate and are unacceptable during the program. Protect your family’s safety and privacy. Do not give out their phone number. Remember: Even though you will be treated as part of the family, you are still a guest in their home and must be respectful of their rules.

**Will I receive my own set of keys?**

With most host families, you will receive your own keys to the house so that you are free to come and go as needed. Please communicate with the family and the site team. We have some families that are an exception to this rule; however, they understand perfectly that you should be able to enter and exit the house as needed and are happy to accommodate in their own manner.

**How do people spend their free time?**

Most commonly people will sit around outside and chat. Weekends are often filled with sports, and community playing fields fill up with competitive intra-community baseball and soccer games. Evenings are almost guaranteed to find family members in front of the TV. Sometimes families take you on weekend excursions to a neighboring town or to visit extended family.

**Can I go out at night?**

Yes. If you do make plans to go out at night, please advise your family of your transportation, who will be accompanying you, your return time, and arrangements for getting home and into the house. Exercise good judgment. As anywhere, it is best to go out with family members, co-workers or friends. You should never be out alone after 8 p.m. Also keep in mind that families in Nicaragua tend to go to sleep early and rise early in the morning. If you stay out late, they may stay awake and worry about your safety. Please be sensitive to your family’s schedule and expectations.

**How should I handle requests for money?**

FSD program fees subsidize all of your room and board expenses, so there is no need for you to discuss money with your family. They should not ask to borrow money from you, and if this happens, tell them it is against your program rules to lend money. Always let your site team know about the incident.

**What types of gifts are appropriate to bring for my host family?**

We suggest that you bring small and modest gifts for your host family as a token of goodwill and gratitude for their hospitality.



# REFLECTION ON NICARAGUA

**By, Cristina Tono**

*Cristina Tono partnered with Biblioteca Puertas del Saber in Limon 2, Tola. The focus of her internship was environmental education.*

“What am I supposed to do?” Upon arriving in Limon 2, Tola, Rivas, Nicaragua, a small community of 500 inhabitants on the coast of Nicaragua two hours south of Rivas, I found this question frequently creeping into daily conversation with the FSD Site Team. My voice itched with anxiety as I felt orientation abruptly coming to an end, simultaneously marking my official release into the community and the start of my project: encouraging environmental awareness and establishing alternatives to burning trash by implementing a recycling center and reusing trash to produce crafts. This included making piñatas and cultural masks with paper, knitting with plastic bags, and making jewelry with recycled trash, all supported and taught through my host organization Biblioteca Puertas del Saber (Library Doors to Knowledge).

Every day was a new adventure that followed a similar routine, but ultimately brought me closer to my project goal. At my homestay I would usually wake up to the roosters outside my window at around 5:30 in the morning, but after developing immunity to the ruckus, sometimes I slept until 7:00. At first I felt out of place without a role in the daily routine of the house. But I caught on quickly, drinking coffee and eating the infamous Nicaraguan Gallo Pinto (mixed rice and beans) every morning, enjoying a brief period of relaxation before a long but productive, tiring yet fulfilling, sunny day.

I would always report back to Sonia, my supervisor at my host organization, but most days I would venture off making my own connections and starting my personal list of contacts. Nearly everything I did involved either Sonia or one of the librarians at my host organization, ensuring the sustainability of the project. One of the most amazing things to see by the end of the project was not only the groups we had formed and the different activities that the children at the library would do with trash, but also hearing how the librarians and Sonia would talk about the project and about the benefits of reusing trash. Through the process of completing the project, the librarians and Sonia had developed a new perspective on trash themselves and grew an appreciation for all the things they could do with

it instead of burning.

For the first time in my life everything felt right. I was completely focused on a goal that was bigger than myself, and bigger than philosophical qualms that typically consume my young adult thoughts. I was working towards a project where I and my host organization were equally invested and passionate about building environmental awareness in the community of Limon 2.



# CULTURAL PRACTICES

For the most part, you will gain insight into Nicaraguan culture through your own experiences, but here are a few common questions that are likely to arise:

## **How important is punctuality in Nicaraguan culture?**

The concept of “being on time” is definitely different. You will find that people consistently arrive late to meetings; when someone wishes to specify punctuality, they may note that the get-together is “hora inglesa” (British time). Thus, when someone shows up an hour later than planned for a workshop, which will happen, or your bus never comes, which will happen, you can choose to get frustrated and infuriated with the bus, the person, or the culture OR you can accept the situation as an opportunity to learn about how things work in your host community.

In spite of local concepts about punctuality, FSD interns will be expected to be on time to work, group meetings and any other host organization-related appointments. This will reflect well on the intern’s reputation as a dependable and sincere volunteer. The pace of life in general is significantly slower than what you are used to, particularly in small towns. People do not react with urgency to issues unrelated to family or work routines. Friends and neighbors are used to dropping by each other’s houses simply to chat, with no set plan or activities.

How do people in Nicaragua feel about privacy?

Your room can always serve as your home base for getting some time to yourself, but in general Nicaraguans are used to being around others all day: in the evening, family and friends hang out in rocking chairs (“abuelitas”) on the front porch or in front of the television. Feel free to tell your family that you need some space and they will respect that wish.

## **How do people in Nicaragua greet and say goodbye to each other?**

When walking down the street, strangers or friends commonly say “adios” (goodbye) to each other instead of “hola” when in passing. It is appropriate to say this to everyone, but women should note that saying it to male stranger is seen as flirting; it is not rude not to greet men under these circumstances. Similarly, young men often draw out the word “adios” as a form of catcalling women. Other than this, all of the usual greetings and farewells are utilized.

## **What are some common non-verbal gestures and body language to know?**

- Nicaraguans kiss one another once on the cheek when being introduced and upon seeing family and friends. For formal introductions, grasp the person’s

right hand while also kissing their cheek. To get one another's attention, people make a "tst-tst" sound with their tongue.

- To refer to someone or something in conversation, tilt your chin toward the indicated person or thing. Nicaraguans sometimes also use their lips to point at objects.
- For emphasis in conversation (very good or very bad), people shake their fingers in a snapping sound.
- Women often walk together hand-in-hand or arm-in-arm; if men do this, they are assumed to be gay.
- Babies are communally loved and cared for: feel free to make faces at them and compliment their parents.

### **How do Nicaraguans feel about romantic relationships?**

Nicaragua's population is very young—one third are under 15 years old, with a median age of 22—and romantic relationships begin early. A third of young women have had their first baby before they turn 20, but don't necessarily stay with the father. An unfortunate consequence is a high prevalence of single mothers or "broken" families. Especially in cases where couples have children young, it is common for them to be considered a pair by families/communities and live together with their children but never get married. There is definitely a prevalence of "machismo" among men; however, both men and women are aware of it and joke (or complain) about its emotional consequences in relationships.

### **How do Nicaraguans view household animals/pets?**

Many Nicaraguans have at least one dog, cat or bird; however, the concept of pets ("mascotas") is very different from what you may be used to: they are usually not seen as life companions, but as utilitarian animals. For example, cats can get rid of pests such as cockroaches and rats, whereas dogs are almost always kept chained up in order to guard the house and ward off potential intruders. Skeletal street dogs are everywhere. Don't touch them.

### **What is religion like in Nicaragua?**

While the majority of Nicaragua is Catholic, a growing percentage of the population is converting to a variety of Christian denominations (commonly referred to as "evangelismo"). In general Evangelical families tend to be more socially conservative and often do not approve of alcohol, or dancing and music outside the church. Catholic families tend to be more socially liberal. The population and culture on the whole is founded upon a belief in Jesus and God, regardless of the particular branch of religion and the degree of adherence by any one individual to church practices (essentially no one is atheist). Phrases such as "gracias a Dios" and "si Dios quiere" are added to almost every statement.

# MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

An important part of ensuring you have a positive experience in Nicaragua is to manage your expectations from the very beginning. Remember that you are arriving to learn and be a small step in the overall sustainable development process. It is normal to feel lost and perhaps even without purpose at the beginning. Our suggestion is to follow the 3 Ps:

## BE PROACTIVE

- Good relationships lead to good projects, not the other way around. Take the initiative to begin to form relationships in your organization and with other people that you meet in Nicaragua.
- Your supervisor will often not give you specific tasks. You may feel you are without direction. Take a moment and think of something you can be doing or working on. Think of possible obstacles and solutions in advance. Accept that you may have more free time than you are used to; relax and do something for you.

## BE PERSISTENT

- You may need to ask for things you need more than once. You are your own best advocate. Even if it takes a few tries, don't give up on asking for what it is you need.
- Things may not work out on the first try (or second, or third, etc). Analyze what did and did not work and try again.

## BE POLITE

- No matter how frustrated or confused you are, always be polite. Remember that you are not at home and that rash reactions can often offend. Learn a few stress management techniques and see which works best for you. Learn the difference between being firm and being rude.

Development is often a painfully slow process. Take the time before you arrive to mentally prepare yourself for a different pace of life and work. Keep in mind you may need to change your definitions of productivity and success. Even small accomplishments and projects require significant amounts of time. Be prepared to be frustrated at times; adjustment and adaptation can be difficult, especially at first. If you ready yourself for these realities before you arrive, the process will be easier once here.



# RACE, SEXUALITY, & GENDER

How you interact with others will initially have a lot to do with preconceptions. You'll feel more comfortable once the inevitable "getting to know you" period is over, but keep some of these cultural norms in mind.

## **RACE AND ETHNICITY**

In Nicaragua, you may not encounter the same level and/or kind of awareness and sensitivity surrounding race relations and conceptualizations of heritage as you may be accustomed to. If you have features associated with an Asian heritage, kids and adults will shout out, call or greet you as "Chino/a" or "Japones/a." If you have dark skin or features associated with an African heritage, people may refer to you as "Negro/a," or "Moreno/a." If you have fair skin, people may refer to you as "Gringo/a" or "Chele/a". If you have features associated with a Middle Eastern heritage, you may be referred to as "Arabe". If you have features associated with an Indian or South Asian heritage, you may be referred to as "Hindu." In most cases, these names are not derogatory terms; many people use them simply because your skin color or features are unusual or intriguing within that context. In some cases, it may be valuable to engage the people you meet in a conversation about the specificity of your heritage.

## **SEXUALITY**

Sexual orientation or preference is not openly discussed in Nicaragua. In Masaya it is not unusual to see two men holding hands or dressed in drag; however, it is less "tranquilo" in other areas and discrimination does happen. Please realize that any affiliation or experiences you have at home (especially in the LGBT community) may not be regarded with the same understanding or sensitivity. Please do your best to take this into consideration when discussing such issues with your host family or other members of the community.

## **GENDER**

Expect to get a lot of unwanted attention. If you are a woman, men will whistle and talk to you in the street. Do not be surprised if men often try to start conversations with you on the street, on the bus, waiting in line, or while shopping. Use your common sense. The best thing to do is to ignore them, although this may feel unusual at first. Do not give out your phone number to people you don't know. You can explain that you are living in someone else's house and are not allowed to receive calls or visitors. If you are a man, you may find that you get a lot of female attention as well, given that it is generally considered advantageous to date or marry a "gringo." Please note that such relationships are not simple or frivolous

affairs in the local context, for either men or women, and can seriously affect your work, how you are viewed in the community, and ultimately the reputation of FSD as well. This topic will be further discussed during orientation.

## **DISCRIMINATION**

The previous three sections are not written to validate or excuse discriminatory behavior. In Nicaragua, when someone refers to you as Chino/a, or Gringo/a, the majority of the time they are not doing so in a discriminatory fashion, but more out of lack of understanding regarding diversity. Not only is there a lack of awareness regarding diversity of race, gender, and sexuality, you may also find a lack of awareness in regard to religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. This lack of understanding/awareness does not always translate into discrimination.

However, if at any time you feel discriminated against at your host family, host organization, or during your interactions within the community, please inform the FSD site team immediately so we can help. We will work with you to ensure that you are able to enjoy your time with FSD to the fullest without worrying about discrimination.



# LANGUAGE GUIDE

## PRACTICE

Speaking a language is the best way to learn, so don't be afraid to practice your Spanish with as many people as possible. Your best resource in learning the local language will be your host family and coworkers at your host organization. Depending on your language ability, this may be extremely frustrating at times. Relax and remember that the key to learning (or improving your skills in) a language is the ability to laugh at yourself.

## DICTIONARIES AND PHRASEBOOKS

These can be expensive and difficult to find once you are in Nicaragua, so we recommend getting one before you leave. Oxford and Collins produce good pocket ones, and you can often get older copies free from a school or public library.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- [StudySpanish.com](http://StudySpanish.com)
- [Translate.Google.com](http://Translate.Google.com)
- [RosettaStone.com](http://RosettaStone.com)
- [WordReference.com](http://WordReference.com)
- [Ethnologue.com](http://Ethnologue.com)

## TUTORING

If you are interested in tutoring, let your site team know. They will set you up with a tutor (at your own expense). Sessions usually cost between \$5 - \$10 US/ hour.

## LANGUAGE SCHOOLS & TUTORING

If you are interested in tutoring, let your site team know. They will try to find you a local tutor (at your own expense). Sessions usually cost between \$5 - \$10 US/ hour.

Please note that FSD is not affiliated with any language schools in Nicaragua; the schools and tutors listed below are for reference only.

- **Hijos del Maiz:** Located in rural Largartillo in north-east Nicaragua, this is a Spanish school with a focus on small farming communities. Students can live with host families and participate as volunteers in projects with campesinos.
- **Proyecto Ecologico:** Set on the banks of a volcanic crater lake near Masaya called Laguna de Apoyo, the school's teachers are local residents who incorporate ecotourism activities and active conversation into their classes.
- **Mariposa Spanish School & Eco-hotel:** an environmentally friendly Spanish

school located in a small town outside of Masaya. The school offers a variety of packages including homestays and volunteer work in addition to Spanish classes. Profits go to support a diverse array of community and environmental projects.

- **Casa Xlalteva:** a language school and non-profit organization for underprivileged youth and children in Granada. Offers homestays and volunteer work, and proceeds go to support education programs.
- **Popoyo Spanish:** an inexpensive one on one tutoring option in Tola. Ideal option for participants wishing to study Spanish during their FSD internship in Tola. For students interested in pre-program tutoring, homestays are available or you can opt to stay at a beachside hostel/hotel.

### VOCABULARY AT WORK

Before arriving in Nicaragua, familiarize yourself with the vocabulary you'll need at work. Bringing a dictionary with you is vital, but a list that addresses terms specific to your organization (health, microfinance, education, etc.) can help a lot.



# FILM GUIDE

**La Yuma (2009)** — This is the story of Yuma, a strong-willed and rebellious girl from the poor neighborhoods of Managua. Yuma wants to be a boxer. In her poor neighborhood, gangs fight for control of the street. In her home, lovelessness is the name of the game. She dreams of the ring, energy, and agile feet and hands. They are also her only options.

**De Niña a Madre (2005)** — At the beginning of the story, Kenia, Blanca and Viviana were between 14 and 16 years old. They were pregnant and gave birth. After the camera followed them through that stage, their lives went on. Now, we pick their stories back up and accompany them to learn how they are. How are they raising their children? Did their dreams come true? Did they get pregnant again? Do they have support from their partners, their families, society? These aren't love stories with a happy ending. They are stories to make you think.

**Hot for Profit (2005)** — Hot For Profit is a documentary about poverty in the so-called Third and First Worlds. It analyses both societies from the perspectives of the NGOs, the media, the education, the politicians and the religion, and it challenges the UN's eight objectives for the new millennium. Hot For Profit will make you think about your attitude and the potential for change that a single individual may have. The documentary was filmed in Nicaragua and Barcelona.

**El Inmortal (2005)** — A formidable documentary about the disastrous Nicaraguan civil war in the 1980s between the US sponsored Contras and the socialist Sandinistas. The movie confronts two brothers who fought against one another in this civil war. One was recruited as an adolescent by the Contras, the other fought with the Sandinastas. The main reason for the fighting was the deep chasm between a small group of haves and the mass of have-nots. The movie shows clearly how the US tries to influence national politics via religion.

**Pictures from a Revolution (1991)** — No one captured more powerfully the suffering, sacrifice and finally celebration that accompanied the Sandinista victory than Susan Meiselas, the award-winning photojournalist who covered the Revolution for The New York Times and London Times. In Pictures From a Revolution, Meiselas returns to Nicaragua a decade later with co-directors Richard P. Rogers and Alfred Guzzetti to track down the people—guerrillas, Socistas and bystanders—pictured in her original photographs. The people share their feelings about how their lives have changed, for the better and for worse, in the years since the conflict and recall the circumstances surrounding those moments of their lives captured by Meiselas' camera.

**Alsino y el Condor (1983)** — Alsino, a boy of 10 or 12, lives with his grandmother in a remote area of Nicaragua. He's engulfed in the war between rebels and government troops when a US advisor orders the army to open a staging area by the boy's hamlet. Alsino tries to be a child, climbing trees with a girl, looking through his grandfather's trunk of mementos and trying to fly; he goes to town to sell a saddle, has his first drink and is taken to a brothel. But the war surrounds him. The US advisor takes Alsino on a chopper flight, but he's unimpressed. The soldiers' cruelties awake rebel sympathies in Alsino, and after an army assault backfires, the lad is fully baptized into the conflict.

# RECOMMENDED READING

**El Güegüense, by Anonymous** — In the seventeenth century, somewhere in the streets of a small colonial Nicaraguan city governed by the Spanish authorities and inhabited by indigenous and mestizo people, a comedy play of high cultural value was born. Expressed in the play was a rejection of the Spanish domination in a mocking, ingenious, and creative way. Over time this theatrical piece transformed into a national symbol for its protesting character that identified the Nicaraguan people. Three centuries later the UNESCO declared this work “Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.” This historical play, by a unanimous author, is “El Güegüense o Macho Ratón,” the first literary Nicaraguan work, pertaining to the Nahuatl culture.

**Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea, by Sergio Ramirez** — In 1956 in a cafe in León, a group of literati gather, dedicated, among other things, to the rigorous reconstruction of the legend surrounding Darío—but also to conspire. There will be an attempt against dictator Somoza’s life, and that little girl with the fan a half-century before will not be a disinterested party. In *Margarita, How Beautiful the Sea*, Sergio Ramírez encompasses, in a complete metaphor of reality and legend, the entire history of his country. The narrative moves along paths fifty years apart, which inevitably converge. The story becomes a fascinating exercise on the power of memory, on the influence of the past, fictitious or not, in the finality of reality.

**The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey, by Salman Rushdie** — In this brilliantly focused and haunting portrait of the people, the politics, the land, and the poetry of Nicaragua, Salman Rushdie brings to the forefront the palpable human facts of a country in the midst of a revolution. Rushdie went to Nicaragua in 1986, harboring no preconceptions of what he might find. What he discovered was overwhelming: a culture of heroes who had turned into inanimate objects and of politicians and warriors who were poets; a land of difficult, often beautiful contradictions. His perceptions always heightened by his special sensitivity to “the views from underneath,” Rushdie reveals a land resounding with the clashes between history and morality, government and individuals.

**The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War, by Gioconda Belli** — Until her early twenties, Gioconda Belli inhabited an upper-class cocoon: sheltered from the poverty in Managua in a world of country clubs and debutante balls; educated abroad; early marriage and motherhood. But in 1970, everything changed. Her growing dissatisfaction with domestic life, and a blossoming awareness of the social inequities in Nicaragua, led her to join the Sandinistas, then a burgeoning but still hidden organization. She would be involved with them over the next twenty years at the highest, and often most dangerous, levels. Her memoir is both a revelatory insider’s account of the Revolution and a vivid, intensely felt story about coming of age under extraordinary circumstances.

# RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

## History

- [General overview, from ESPANICA](#)
- [Nicaragua: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1978-1990](#)
- [NOW with Bill Moyers: Echoes of War](#)

## Health

- [Ministerio de Salud de Nicaragua](#)
- [World Health Organization \(in Nicaragua\)](#)
- [Centro de Servicios Educativos en Salud y Medio Ambiente](#)

## Race, Ethnicity, Gender & Sexuality

- [Movimiento de Mujeres Marian Elena Cuadra \(MEC\)](#)
- [Puntos de Encuentro](#)
- [Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua \(WCCN\)](#)

## Environment

- [Ministerio del Ambiente/Recursos Naturales de Nicaragua \(MARENA\)](#)
- [El Porvenir](#)
- [Grupo Fénix](#)

## Youth and Education

- [UNICEF news article and video: “David’s Store: life and learning at a child-friendly school in rural Nicaragua”](#)
- [Federación Coordinadora Nicaragüense de ONG’s que trabajan con la Niñez y la Adolescencia \(CODENI\)](#)
- [Revista Envío article about youth groups, 2002](#)

## Human Rights

- [Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos \(CENIDH\)](#)
- [NicaNet](#)
- [Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign](#)
- [Quixote Center – Quest for Peace](#)
- [Coordinadora Civil](#)

## Microfinance and Microenterprise

- [Asociación Nicaragüense de Instituciones de Micrafinanzas \(ASOMIF\)](#)
- [Pro Mujer Nicaragua](#)
- [Cooperativa Maquiladora Mujeres de Nueva Vida](#)
- [Planet Finance](#)
- [CGAP](#)