

Volunteer Handbook

Nicaragua

Dear Friends,

We're so glad that you're joining us for a cross-cultural service trip to Nicaragua!

Without question, the Bridges travel experience is challenging – intellectually, physically and spiritually. We want our volunteers to be fully exposed to and engaged with the realities and struggles of a materially poor community in one of our host countries. Because much of our work takes place in communities without much infrastructure, you will be sleeping on cots, eating staple foods prepared by community members and working hard in warm temperatures. Our simple belief is that, without this level of engagement, there is no real opportunity to learn from and be in solidarity with brothers and sisters living in radically different contexts.

This Volunteer Handbook is designed to answer most of your questions and help you prepare appropriately for your trip. If at any time you have questions about your trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office 914-923-2200 or at info@bridgestocommunity.org. We want to do all we can to help you have an enriching experience.

With gratitude for your willingness to make a difference.

The Bridges Staff

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A Brief Historical Overview: Why Bother with Nicaragua?

As we move into the 21st century, Nicaragua is a long way from most people's minds. We remember vaguely about a revolution in the 1980s. But the Cold War is over and, unfortunately, so is our collective concern for this small Central American country.

Yet perhaps the Nicaraguan situation calls for a different response -- one which takes into account our country's intense political and economic involvement which has contributed to Nicaragua's present state. Throughout the 20th century, the United States' foreign policy has had a negative impact on Nicaragua. Our participation has ignored the grinding poverty of the masses as well as the rights of a people to determine their own future.

For over 50 years, the United States backed the Somoza dynasty while they manipulated their own economy for personal gain. By 1979, the dynasty had only enemies and, therefore, fell without much of a fight to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Without question, the FSLN made mistakes. They were a group of socialist visionaries with only limited political experience. In the early '80's, they were not without blame. Nonetheless, we must not forget that they had a national dream which made space at the table for the poor. They designed literacy campaigns, built schools and clinics, and offered land to the peasant masses. Many of their accomplishments were commendable.

The political administration of the United States in the early 1980s had a Cold War mentality that defined everything accordingly. The Sandinistas were in the wrong ideological camp; they were the bad guys. Thus through largely illegal channels, the U.S. government financed a covert war against the Sandinista government. In the mid-1980's, the World Court found the United States guilty of interfering in the affairs of a sovereign nation. The court ordered our government to pay billions in war reparations. Those payments were never made.

The Sandinista government could not afford a civil war. With the decline and fall of the Soviet Union, Nicaragua became increasingly isolated. Exhausted by nearly ten years of war and all of its many detrimental consequences, Nicaraguans voted the Sandinistas out of office in 1990.

The national choice was Violetta Chamorro, leader of a large coalition of anti-Sandinista, moderate and conservative parties. In a brilliant political move, the coalition (UNO) chose Chamorro because she was the widow of one of Nicaragua's most beloved martyrs, Pedro Chamorro – murdered in the late 1970's by Somoza. Politically liberal and economically conservative, she seemed the perfect figurehead. Her platform was simple – end the war, restore relations with the United States, and rebuild the economy. Unfortunately, Chamorro's term in office proved to be a nearly impossible balancing act as she struggled to be responsive to outside pressures and internal demands. During her six years in office, peace predominated while the economy went nowhere.

In 1996 Arnaldo Aleman won the national election. As the mayor of Managua during Chamorro's administration, Aleman established his credibility as a "doer." With close ties to old money, many middle and upper class citizens viewed him as the perfect person to cure the country's economic woes. However after his election, the president's popularity crashed. Although he increased the influx of

foreign capital into the country, he also courted the influence of top Somoza-era exiles. In both his policy-making and his appointments to strategic posts, many Nicaraguans smelled despotism and corruption. And so once again, the poor masses faced a daunting future.

To complicate matters further, Nicaragua suffered a severe set back in the fall of 1998. In early November, hurricane Mitch swept through southern Honduras bringing torrential rains and devastating winds. Although the hurricane did not pass directly through Nicaragua, the northern provinces of Chinandega, Esteli, Leon, and Jinotega were severely affected, while the entire country suffered damages. Villages disappeared; bridges washed away; and lives were lost as over-worked mountain farmland collapsed into mudslides. The Nicaraguan and Honduran governments reported over 10,000 deaths, and hundreds of thousands left homeless. The damages were estimated to have set both countries back twenty years.

In early 1999, Bill Clinton became the first US President to set foot on Nicaraguan soil since 1968. His visit was certainly appreciated, and his promises of aid and possible debt forgiveness were gratefully received. But the challenges ahead are monumental. Arnoldo Aleman's presidency was a disaster. To further complicate matters, Nicaragua continues to suffer with drought conditions and most recently the price of coffee on the international market crashed. With an agricultural economy and coffee as the number one export, these realities have been devastating.

In early November 2001, Nicaraguans went to the polls to elect their new president. Daniel Ortega (FSLN) lost; Enrique Bolanos (Liberal Party) won. In November 2006, new elections were held. After sixteen years out of power, Daniel Ortega won the majority of the vote and was again re-elected president. After initially stating that Nicaragua could lose much needed American aid if the Nicaraguan people chose Mr. Ortega, the US has now indicated that it can work with Mr. Ortega and his government. Only time will tell if this relationship can help benefit Nicaragua and its citizens. As the second poorest country in the western hemisphere and no easy solutions to its many problems, Nicaragua needs this support. In fact, there has never been a better time for collective concern and response so that the future can be brighter than the past.

Background on Nicaragua

The Bridges to Community staff is often asked, "Why Nicaragua, and not some other place?" It is a good question with no definitive answer. Nonetheless, our organization believes that citizenship impels us to be concerned about the poorest of the poor. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in our hemisphere. That is the single greatest reason behind our efforts to bring hope to that corner of the world.

Nicaragua is in the midst of a complex process of political, economic, demographic and epidemiological transition. Despite recent advances, the country remains one of the poorest in Latin America: more than half of the population lives on less than one US dollar a day.

The Government has made progress in improving budgetary imbalances and controlling inflation. Economic growth has been relatively high in the last few years, but the annual per capita income remains very low – less than US \$500. The recent economic growth has been financed mainly by foreign

capital, and there is a high dependence on international assistance. Economic growth continues to be very imbalanced, though, with the poorer segments of society missing out on the benefits of economic expansion.

The high level of poverty, around 50 per cent of the population, is an obstacle to sustainable development and to consolidating the country's fragile democracy and the emerging rule of law. The weakest and most vulnerable group, are women and children, living in rural areas. These areas are characterized by less education, less access to basic social services, higher fertility and maternal and infant mortality rates. In addition, this group has fewest options and opportunities.

Nicaragua has a current population of around 5.5 million inhabitants. Its annual growth rate of 2.9 per cent is one of the highest in the region. Its total fertility rate of 5 children per female is double the Latin American average. The adolescent fertility rate (139 per 1,000) is the highest in the region and represents a third of the total births in rural areas. As a consequence, the population is very young, and there are 84 dependents for every 100 people of productive age.

Contraceptive use is already moderately high, but it is expected that the rate of use will rise less rapidly in coming years. It is likely that the unmet demand for family planning will continue to drop as a result of current efforts. Such efforts will be targeted at young women between 15 and 19 years of age, less educated women and women in rural areas.

Life expectancy at birth in Nicaragua is one of the lowest in Latin America – 66 years for men and 70 years for women. Infant mortality, although falling (40 per 1,000) is still higher than the Central American average. Meanwhile, malnutrition is a severe problem, with approximately 20 per cent of those under 5 years of age affected by chronic malnutrition.

Determining accurate maternal mortality is very difficult. Although estimated at 133 per 100,000 live births, this figure may be even higher due to the poor conditions for attending to obstetric emergencies. To compound this, adequate priority has not been given to address the main causes of maternal death. This means more women's lives are being put at risk. During the last decade though, there were some advances made in obstetrics: significant increases in pre-natal care, more institutional births and more women attended by trained personnel. However, these improvements have not extended to the most vulnerable populations, and there are still huge deficiencies in the quality of care available.

According to official figures, there is a very low incidence of HIV infection in Nicaragua. This has been justified by the country's isolation during the 1980s and by the (questionable) assumption of limited drug trafficking and consumption. Even if this information were to be accurate, the health authorities are failing to capitalize on this favorable situation, by implementing a comprehensive HIV/AIDS strategy. To date, no systemic prevention campaign has been put in place, HIV/AIDS care has not been linked to the reproductive health program, and for those infected, the services provided are inadequate at best and non-existent at worst.

Domestic violence is an endemic problem. Almost a third of Nicaraguan women in union have been abused. Often occurring in the presence of their children and even when they were pregnant. Fortunately, the visibility of the problem has been increasing due to the efforts of women's

organizations and to the consolidation of the national network of Women's and Children's Offices run by the National Police.

In the area of education, the main problem is that 45 per cent of the population under 18 does not attend school. Children either drop out early or they were never able to enter the system in the first place. Currently, only 29 of every 100 students that enter primary school actually finish; in the end, only 2 per cent complete higher education. Subsequently, levels of illiteracy are high. On average, Nicaraguans spend just under 5 years in education, a figure that drops to 2 years among the rural poor.

The Government has recognized that the rapid rate of population growth limits its capacity to provide basic social services and reduces the effects of economic growth on poverty reduction. Thus, while the GDP increased by an average of 4.3 per cent a year in the 1990's, the per capita GDP increased by only 1.2 per cent. Furthermore, while the rates of poverty and extreme poverty both fell slightly during the same period, the absolute numbers of both groups increased.

As part of the eligibility process for entry into the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC), the Government of Nicaragua in 2005 completed a Reinforced Poverty Reduction Strategy (RPRS). This strategy was developed through an extensive consultation process involving both the public and the donor community. In the RPRS and other official documents, the Government recognizes the negative impact of the rapid population growth on achieving sustainable development. Thus, it has embraced the need to increase access to better sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, particularly among the poorest sectors of the population.

Cultural Sensitivities

Bridges to Community, Inc. attempts to work respectfully and sensitively with local communities. We stand with them on level ground. Whether we are male or female, religious or not, rich or poor, Nicaraguan or North American, Republican or Democrat: we work, eat, and live together. We strive **not** to be intrusive or arrogant, and we are constantly reminded that we have much to learn across cultural divides. Bridges' groups have a responsibility to be attuned to local habits and customs, and to behave in an appropriate manner. Issues to bear in mind:

Daily Schedules: In most areas outside of Managua, Nicaraguans live by the sun, i.e. they get up very early and go to bed very early. It is imperative that we are conscious of these routines. When we are up later than the community, the group is expected to be quiet.

Time: Nicaraguans do not live by linear time, i.e. strict schedules. In rural areas, the infrastructure is generally non-existent ... making it impossible for local people to rely on communication or transportation systems. For North Americans, this can be frustrating. Of course, we will try to be good stewards of our time but we ask our volunteers to be flexible and patient.

Privacy: On a Bridges trip, privacy is a challenge. Much of the time, everyone knows when you are going to the bathroom or taking a shower. Furthermore, local children are often omnipresent ... fascinated, curious and excited about the group's presence. They will be close-by from sun-up to sundown. As the week wears on, this can be wearing. Please be tolerant of their presence and conscious of your actions.

Religion: Many, if not most, Nicaraguans consider themselves to be religious, whether Catholic or Protestant (more commonly known as Evangelical in Latin America). Volunteers will not be expected to participate in any ceremonies that might compromise their personal beliefs. However, our intention is to demonstrate an open, ecumenical spirit. As a result of the religious frame of reference, certain issues surface repeatedly. First, women are expected to follow a certain dress code -- no "short" shorts or bathing suit tops at any time; and for formal gatherings or worship, a skirt is considered most appropriate. Second, romantic involvement and/or sexual contact are not considered to be casual matters. Particularly in rural areas and small towns, there is no such thing as "dating." Thus, we will not tolerate romantic involvement or sexual interaction between volunteers and members of the local community during a trip.

Pena: ("pe- nah") is a good word to know. The concept behind the word is helpful in understanding people in Nicaragua. It can mean timidity, shyness, or faintheartedness. It means keeping a low profile or wanting to always present your best self. Examples of how Nicaraguans show "pena": 1) They often ask for time to clean up and change their clothes before their picture is taken. 2) Men would rather not be photographed in flip flops ("chinelas"). 3) A man would never go shirtless or shoeless because it usually indicates that he is drunk. 4) Nicaraguans generally don't shout unless they are playing baseball. They love to laugh, but they laugh best when all are laughing.

Please be conscious of people's comfort level before taking their picture. It is always appropriate and right to ask permission first.

Food: Think before you pile the food on your plate. Take a little and come back for more...or go a little hungry. 60% of Nicaraguan children don't eat more than twice a day. Be sensitive as you drink a Coke or eat snacks that you've brought with you. These are luxuries that usually others in the community where you are staying don't have. Your plane ticket alone costs the equivalent of the average annual salary in Nicaragua. For a point of reference: you come from a country that spends ten billion dollars a year on pet food. That's four billion dollars more than the estimated total needed to provide basic education world wide.

Inclusion: In the midst of a Bridges trip, it's easy to gravitate towards people in your group that you know well or feel comfortable around. However, the goal of a Bridges trip is to stretch ourselves...and our capacity for inclusion. You are only in Nicaragua for a week, so make the most of it. Take time to get to know and bond with Nicaraguans...the work crew, the cooks, the local community. Be careful not to spend so much time with your group that you leave without making a Nicaraguan friend. Be sure to invite and include your Nicaraguan friends in any games or activities that you do.

Language: As you know, volunteers are not required to know Spanish to participate in a Bridges to Community trip. However, it certainly adds to the richness of one's experience if you can communicate with the local community more easily. Time and time again, volunteers say to our staff, "I just wish I knew more Spanish! Next time I'll take a class before I come." If you do have the time to take a Spanish class or read some beginner textbooks, you won't be disappointed. Enclosed is an abbreviated guide available for anyone that wants to learn some basic phrases.

Bridges Policies

Drugs: **Use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated.** Individuals found to be using or in possession of drugs will return home immediately. Fees associated with returning home will be charged to the individual.

Alcohol: **The use of alcohol is prohibited during our stay in the community.** After our time in the community, we strongly encourage moderation and discretion if you do choose to have alcohol. **For anyone under 21, there is a NO alcohol policy at all times.** The Bridges experience is about building relationships and trust within a community. Excessive alcohol use by volunteers only serves to create a negative image of North Americans, undermine the intentions of our work, and contribute to destructive behavior.

Gift-giving: Gift-giving is a universal phenomenon. Because of our relative wealth, it can be a temptation to pass along gifts to individuals within the local community. Nonetheless, **we strongly discourage individual gift-giving** because it can create divisions in the community at large. Our primary purpose is always to work on a project that benefits the entire community. Gift giving between individuals ignores the greater community and creates a tension between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

Another way to think of it is this: Don't give anything to a Nicaraguan that they cannot give back to you. A story, a song, a game...these are things that can be shared. If you give a gift that cannot be re-paid, you are reminding the community of the difference between our material wealth rather than celebrating our commonalities.

Sample Service Trip Itinerary

Saturday

7:45 p.m. Flights arrive at MGA International Airport
8:45 p.m. Check into the Hotel El Raizon
9:15 p.m. Dinner at the Hotel

Sunday

8:30 a.m. Breakfast at El Raizon Hotel
9 :30 a.m. Orientation by Bridges Staff
12:00 p.m. Lunch in the community/move into dormitories
2:00 p.m. Meet the families you are building a house for
3:00 p.m. Tour the Community you will work in
6:00 p.m. Dinner in the community
8:00 p.m. Overview of the upcoming week

Monday-Thursday

7:00 a.m. Breakfast prepared by Bridges Staff
8:00 a.m. Work with Bridges construction crew
12:00 p.m. Lunch & Siesta
2:00 p.m. Work with Bridges construction crew
5:30 p.m. Free Time
7:00 p.m. Dinner prepared by Bridges Staff
8:00 p.m. Evening Activities organized by Bridges Staff

Friday

8:00 a.m. Breakfast prepared by Bridges Staff
9:00 a.m. Dedication of Homes
11:00 a.m. Farewell lunch with the community
12:30 p.m. Depart for El Raizon Hotel
2:00 p.m. Visit the Masaya Market
4:00 p.m.. Tour San Juan de Oriente/Catarina
6:30 p.m. Dinner at Azteca Resturant

Saturday

7:30 a.m. Breakfast at El Raizon Hotel
8:30 a.m. Visit Volcan Mombacho
12:30 p.m. Lunch at Dona Conchi's Resturant
2:30 p.m. Tour Lake Nicaragua
4:00 p.m Visit the Cities of Granada or Leon
5:00 p.m Depart for El Raizon Hotel
7:00 p.m. Dinner at the Hotel
8:00 p.m. Closing Ceremony conducted by Bridges Staff

Sunday

5:00 a.m. Leave for airport
8:00 a.m. Flights depart for USA

Health and Safety

With regards to health/safety issues, Bridges to Community has an excellent track record. We have traveled with more than a hundred groups and thousands of volunteers since 1992 and, never, had a serious incident. On every trip, we do a combination of things to ensure a safe experience -- a pre-trip mailing about health considerations, a thorough orientation once in-country, chlorination/testing of our water sources, supervision of the cooking/cleaning process and, of course, a well-stocked medical kit with both prescription and non-prescription drugs. In addition, we carry travel insurance for all trip participants ... in the unlikely event that emergency evacuation is necessary.

Many individuals who have not previously traveled to Central America have questions and concerns about Nicaragua. Without going into great detail, here is a quick note on the political/economic/social situation. Most experts would describe Nicaragua as one of the safer Central American countries in the late 90's. There is widespread poverty which in some respects creates social instability. (Hurricane Mitch did not help by creating tens of thousands of homeless persons.) Yet, there has not been any "organized or sustained" violence since the 1980's. Back in 1990, the Nicaraguan people voted out the Sandinistas because they were tired of war. To this day, that sentiment runs deep. Furthermore, Nicaragua has never had the same problems as some of the other Central American countries with death squads and kidnapping. Almost universally, Nicaraguans will embrace Americans with warmth and appreciation.

To each person who travels with us, we simply ask that you adhere to the necessary pre-trip precautions and, then on your trip, pay attention to what is going on around you. Here are some basic but important guidelines:

- ✓ Only drink water that has been OKed by trip leaders.... Avoid ice!
- ✓ Do not eat uncooked foods (unless you can peel them) or dairy products.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently using hand sanitizer!!
- ✓ Be conscious of the sun and heat.... Apply sunblock!
- ✓ Use insect repellent as needed for ants and mosquitoes and sleep under the net provided.
- ✓ Do not run or walk alone while in Managua or on site.
- ✓ **Report all illnesses to your trip leaders!**

Special Health Considerations when traveling to Nicaragua

The following summary is to acquaint you with the general health considerations of travel to Nicaragua and the preventative measures which are recommended to help reduce the chance of illness or injury during the trip. Please read this information carefully and plan to receive the appropriate immunizations and malaria medication prior to your departure. All individuals who participate on a trip are strongly encouraged to seek the advice of a physician or other expert in the field of travel medicine in preparation for the trip.

While in Nicaragua, you may be exposed to potentially harmful diseases from a number of sources including: insects, contaminated food and water, or close contact with infected people. Using a combination of pre-travel immunizations, prophylactic medication against malaria, personal protective measures, and common sense will greatly minimize the risk of becoming ill during or after travel to Nicaragua.

Immunizations:

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends immunizations against the following diseases for a short-term (less than one month), rural travel in Nicaragua.

- **Hepatitis A:** a viral infection of the liver that may be transmitted by water or food contaminated by human waste or directly between people. Hepatitis A vaccine can provide protection at least two weeks prior to travel.
- **Hepatitis B:** Although suggested primarily for health professionals**, we prefer everybody to be vaccinated since this is the only blood borne disease that can be prevented thru vaccination. Most children are now routinely vaccinated for both A & B. Check with your health care professional regardless. A combination Hepatitis A & B shot is now available.
- **Typhoid:** a bacterial illness that may be transmitted by food or water contaminated by human waste and directly between people. Typhoid vaccine can provide protection three weeks prior to travel.
- Boosters of **tetanus-diphtheria, measles, mumps, and rubella.** (If applicable depending on individual's age and vaccination history.)
- Healthcare providers and long-term travelers should consider Hepatitis B vaccine. Hepatitis B is a viral illness transmitted by sexual contact, contaminated needles/medical equipment, and blood products. It is not transmitted by casual contact, food, water, or insects.

In addition, **Malaria** is a parasite that is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. These mosquitoes bite from dusk to dawn. Malaria can be a very serious illness and if left untreated can cause severe complications, including coma and death. It is very important to take the appropriate anti-malarial prophylaxis recommended by your doctor to help prevent infection. Anti-malarial medications are taken before, during, and after travel to regions where transmission is possible. With the appropriate use of anti-malarial medications and personal protective measures to avoid mosquito bites, infection is unlikely.

There may be side effects and contradictions to the above mentioned vaccines and malaria medication. Individual recommendations may vary based on age, medical/health history, previous immunizations, and exact itinerary.

Personal Protective Measures:

You will have a health seminar as part of your orientation in Nicaragua. At that time, we will discuss in detail these personal protective measures. We will review with you the signs and symptoms of potential illnesses that should be reported to a trip leader. Below is a brief outline of points that should be taken into consideration:

- Avoid ice, salads, uncooked vegetables, and dairy products. Foods containing meat, vegetables and rice should be eaten hot. Peel fruit immediately before eating (avoid pre-sliced and prepared fruit salads).
- Avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes, flies, fleas, ticks, and lice. There are many diseases (most are extremely rare in travelers) that can be transmitted by insects. Wear appropriate clothing, use insect repellents containing DEET (20-35%), and sleep in screened-off rooms or use mosquito netting. Please refer to your “packing list” for details.
- Avoid swimming in all fresh-water lakes, streams, and ponds. Swim only in well-maintained, chlorinated swimming pools and non-polluted ocean beaches.
- Use caution and common sense when driving or using public transportation. Road and traffic accidents are common because of poor road and vehicle conditions, overcrowded buses, and minimal safety regulations.
- HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, and other blood borne diseases are transmissible through sexual contact, infected blood products, and contaminated needles/medical equipment. In Central America sexual transmission accounts for the majority of cases of HIV and Hepatitis B. Transmission is **not** possible through casual contact, air, food, water, or insects.
- Animals should not be approached or handled. Rabies is common in domestic and some wild animals. Report any bites or licks from an animal immediately to a trip leader.

The summary of CDC information was prepared jointly by Dr. Warren Licht, (Bridges’ previous Medical Director), and Traveler’s Medical Service of New York. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the health considerations for travel to Nicaragua, you may contact our current Medical Director, Dr. Claudia Martinez at (646) 752-7763 or at: claudia@skymd.net.

You may also contact the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for a more detailed summary of health risks and disease prevention for Central America. CDC voice/fax travel information is available at (404) 639-3311 or (800) 311-3435. Request document #220160 (Central America). You can also find current traveler information on the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/travel

Packing Guide for Nicaragua

Bring a carry-on bag with enough essentials for 2-3 days in case there are delays in retrieving baggage. **This can happen—be prepared!** Pack no more than you can carry and use canvas or nylon duffel bags rather than hard luggage. American, Delta, and Continental airlines all permit passengers to take one carry-on bag and one personal item as well as two checked bags. Checked bags must be 50lbs per bag or less and no more than 62 linear inches (length + height + width). Bags over 50lbs will be charged an additional fee. *Please note: For all volunteers traveling to Siuna, total weight of all bags must not exceed 50 lbs per person.* Baggage restrictions on La Costena only permit 50 lbs per customer.

Critical

Passport (valid for at least six months after departure)

Sleeping

Single bed, top & bottom sheet and sleeping pad for extra comfort while sleeping on cots.
Small camping pillow.

Clothing (As estimated for a 8-10 day trip)

- 2 pairs of jeans or light weight work pants
- 1-2 shirts (long sleeve)
- 3-4 quick dry T-shirts
- Cotton socks/underwear
- Flip-flops or sandals for the shower
- 1-2 pairs of shorts
- Raingear (if trip falls between May and October)
- Swimsuit
- Work or Hiking boots (comfortable)
- 1 long skirt (for women, optional)

Personal effects

- Flashlight/headlamp with extra batteries
- Toilet paper & small tissue packets
- Camera with Batteries
- Hat(s) and /or Bandana(s)
- Towel and washcloth
- Journal and pens
- Sunscreen/lotion
- Antibacterial handi-wipes
- Toiletries and small mirror
- Hand sanitizer
- Tampons or sanitary napkins (if needed)
- Sunglasses
- hair and body soap
- Work Gloves
- Insect repellent (w/ 20-35% DEET)
- Ear Plugs
- Water bottle (please write your name on it)
- Alarm clock
- Pictures of you, your family, your town, etc
- Laundry bag
- Liquid soap for showering

Corrective vision wearers should bring an extra pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses/case/solution.

*For those who are interested, members of the local community usually offer inexpensive laundry service.

Cameras, CD players, MP3 players, cell phones, jewelry, etc

Though bringing a CD player, MP3 player, expensive camera, cell phone or some other item may seem like a basic essential when traveling, we encourage volunteers to only bring items that they cannot live

without! We take many precautions to assure that volunteers' belongings are well protected. However, there have been a few incidents of things "disappearing." We ask you to be aware of the wealth that you both represent and bring with you and pack simply. Please do not bring anything that will be sorely missed – Bridges to Community will not take responsibility for any lost or stolen items.

Things for the local children

We strongly **encourage** all volunteers to bring games and toys to share with the local children. They are extremely friendly and eager to play. Soccer balls, Frisbees, bubbles, paper and crayons, crafts, playing cards, or any simple children's games are great things to share as a group.

We strongly **discourage** individual gift-giving such as clothing, radios, flashlights, etc. Please review "Bridges Policies."

Donations

We encourage all participants to trust their instincts to be generous and bring items to donate to the people of Nicaragua. **However, while in country all donations should be given to the Bridges to Community staff and not handed out to individuals in the community. Many volunteers continue to donate once they return home. Upon your return, feel free to donate additional funds to Bridges!**

Please keep in mind the following things when collecting items to donate:

Clothing: Nicaraguans are generally petite. Clothing for adults should be regular or petite length (not tall) in sizes S, M, or L. All sizes of clothing for children are welcome and needed. Any clothing should be in good condition with no stains or tears. Because Nicaragua is a tropical climate, winter clothing is *not* needed (sweaters, coats, long sleeved shirts, etc).

School supplies: pencils, pencil sharpeners, crayons, markers, coloring books, construction paper, drawing paper, writing paper, notebooks, rulers, solar calculators, Spanish books...

Sports equipment: Baseball is the national pastime in Nicaragua, any gently used equipment is warmly received (cleats, shin guards, mitts, uniforms, balls) along with soccer balls, Frisbees.

**Please note: the Bridges to Community office often receives donations and needs volunteers to help transport duffel bags of donations to Nicaragua. If you are traveling from the NY area and would like to take a bag of donations to Nicaragua for us, please let us know!

Food & Treats

Some people find the local diet bland; you may want to pack snack foods such as granola bars, dried fruit, nuts, peanut butter, salsa, etc. Please be aware that ants are common in and around the living areas and may eat through plastic bags and wrappers. All food needs to be stored in sealed plastic containers. Gatorade is excellent for re-hydration purposes.

Spending Money

\$150-200 for Spending Money; **\$5 entry fee** (need in cash in US dollars)

Cash is best for your spending money. In the village, \$1 bills can be used, but nothing larger. In the market, \$1, \$5, and \$10 are best. All bills should be in good condition – not ripped or torn. If you want to change dollars into Cordobas, currency will be exchanged for you by the staff or with local moneychangers. We do not recommend bringing travelers' checks. They can be very problematic. If you choose to bring a credit card, MasterCard or Visa can be used at some locations.

Problems on the day of travel

Though we anticipate an uneventful travel day and a safe experience in-country, it is important to consider the following scenarios:

What to do if you miss your flight:

Check in with the desk at the airport. In most cases, they will probably try to put you on the next flight. In any event, you will need the modified flight information before making the necessary phone calls. If possible, call your group/trip leader immediately to make them aware of the situation.

If you have overslept, encountered bad weather or traffic, or face an unexpected emergency, you must try to contact the airline *before* the scheduled departure time. If you call them after the departure time, they may not make arrangements to help you, and according to policy are not required to reimburse you.

If you booked your ticket through Bridges, call the travel agency listed on your itinerary to find out the best way to proceed:

**Tzell Travel: contact Harold Silverman.
His cell phone number is: 201-919-3116
Home: 914-234-5696.**

What to do if your flight is delayed and you miss your connecting flight:

Talk with the agents at the airline to see what arrangements they can make to accommodate you. If the delay is due to mechanical problems or weather, they should help you make arrangements to get to your destination (an overnight hotel stay, a later flight, etc). If you miss your connection for another reason, they may not be as willing to help you.

If the agents at the counter aren't helpful, try calling Tzell Travel (phone number above).

Call Rusty Pedersen on his cell phone at: 845-304-2002.

Emergency Contact Information

If someone needs to get in touch with you while you're in Nicaragua, please have them call the Bridges to Community office at 914-923-2200. We are able to get in touch with our staff in the field very quickly, since volunteers do not have access to phones or email while they are in the village. If you need to reach

someone after hours or on the weekend, **please call Rusty Pedersen, Assoc. Executive Director on his cell phone at: 845-304-2002.**

Medical Situations and Emergencies

Minor medical issues/situations:

We never intentionally put volunteers in dangerous or risky situations, and in ten years of operation have had only 2-3 incidents that required staff attention. To ensure safety, we carry the medical kit with us at all times and always have an emergency vehicle on site. Occasionally, volunteers do have minor allergic reactions to insect bites, cuts, rashes, etc. While most of these situations can be easily addressed by our staff, some require care by a licensed physician. In those cases, we take volunteers to local municipal clinics or the hospital in Managua. Bridges to Community assumes the cost for these services.

Serious medical problems:

If a volunteer should develop a major medical problem or have a serious injury, we would take them immediately to the hospital in Managua and/or evacuate them from Nicaragua to a properly equipped medical facility. We provide emergency medical evacuation insurance for all participants who would like to enroll. Enrollment is automatic unless a volunteer elects not to be covered. Coverage is not mandatory.

Emergency Evacuation Insurance

For all volunteers on all trips we carry emergency evacuation insurance. Though we have never had to use it, this policy would cover all serious illness or injuries to volunteers. The coverage is provided by Travel Assistance International and Specialty Risk International. For more information, please visit their website: www.travelassistance.com The benefits of the plan we use is as follows:

Emergency Evacuation & Reparation	\$50,000
Accident/Sickness Medical Expense	\$25,000
Accidental Death & Dismemberment	\$25,000
Lost Baggage & Personal Effects	\$1,000
Travel Delay	\$ 500
Baggage Delay	\$100