

Nicaragua

Frequently Asked Questions

For ODFL's Summer Service Trip



Prior to Departure

Q: What are the travel requirements for minors traveling to Nicaragua?

A: All travelers must have a passport. Please remember that the U.S. Department of State recommends that travelers ensure that their passport has at least six months of validity beyond their dates of international travel. A Tourist Visa is also required but is purchased upon arrival in Nicaragua. ODFL covers the Tourist Visa fees.

Q: What if I am not a US citizen?

A: Please notify Cathy Dwulet if you do not carry a US Passport.

Q: What items should I collect to donate?

A: Seeds of Learning will provide a list of priority items prior to departure.

Q: How many students are allowed on the trip?

A: Due to lodging and local transportation restrictions, the maximum number is 18

Q: Who are the trip leaders?

A: All ODFL trips are chaperoned by credential teachers who have been involved with ODFL. Each trip will have one male and one female chaperone.

Q: Are the trip fees tax deductible?

A: No but any donations that you make directly to a project that ODFL supports are deductible. 100% of what you donate goes to a project. ODFL does not take any administrative fees from donations.

Q: Can I fundraise to cover the trip costs?

A: Absolutely! We encourage students to raise funds and can help with suggested ways to do so. We find that those students who have actively helped pay for the trip are more invested and committed to the goals of the trip. Our partner, Seeds of Learning, also offers scholarships to those in need. Their scholarship application can be found on their website: [SOL Scholarship](#)

Q: Can I fly independently from the group?

A: We discourage traveling separately from the group however it may be allowed with prior approval from ODFL. SOL may impose extra fees if a separate arrival or departure time needs to be accommodated.

Q: Does the trip count for community service hours for school?

A: Yes, a portion of your work during the trip can count towards community service hours. Please contact Cathy Dwulet for more details.

Q: What are the age requirements to travel on an ODFL trip?

A: We allow high school students of any age as well as an occasional college student who had prior involvement with ODFL.

Q: Can parents accompany their child on the trip and/or act as a trip leader?

A: No, ODFL does not allow parents to accompany their child on ODFL trips.

Q: Is it a requirement that I speak Spanish?

A: It certainly helps to speak some Spanish and will allow for the traveler to interact more with the local people, but it is not a requirement to go on the trip.

Q: How can I learn more about Nicaragua?

A: It is well worth the time and effort to learn about the rich history of Nicaragua. Once you have been chosen to go on the trip, you will be assigned some reading and homework.

Getting There

Q: When and where do I arrive and depart from Nicaragua?

A: Depending on where you originate from, you may fly from San Francisco or Los Angeles via Mexico or El Salvador to Managua, Nicaragua. Your specific flight details will be provided once the group has been selected.

Q: Who will meet us at the airport?

A: Our Nicaragua partners who work with Seeds of Learning will meet the group. For those traveling to Matagalpa, their names are Mina Close and Chamba Acosta. They will help load the bags into the van and drive you directly to the Principessa Hostel in Matagalpa, a three-hour drive. For those traveling to Tipitapa, your hosts are Julian Guevara and Casey Callais.

Q: Who is your partner in Nicaragua?

A: We have been working with our partner, Seeds of Learning, for eight years now. Here is their website: [SOL](#)

Health and Safety Tips

Please review Seeds of Learning's Volunteer Packet for more information. This packet will be made available to you once you are selected to participate on the trip.

Q: What vaccinations are required to visit Nicaragua?

A: We follow the Center for Disease Control's recommendations that can be found here: [CDC Nicaragua](#) It is important that you let your doctor know you are traveling to Nicaragua and make an appointment at least 4-6 weeks before your trip. This allows for adequate time to get new immunizations and ensure that others are up-to-date.

Q: What are the principal health risks?

A: We strongly recommend you consult your own physician, public health clinic and/or travel clinic for detailed travel health information. In the seven years that we have been going to Nicaragua, the only health problem we've encountered has been traveler's diarrhea. You may want to bring along some Pepto Bismol and consider asking your physician about a prescription for Cipro. The key to staying healthy is to WASH YOUR HANDS, keep your hands away from your face and don't share water bottles, food or utensils.

Q: Do I need any special insurance for the trip?

A: Regular medical doctor visits are inexpensive and can be paid out-of-pocket. If an injury or accident required hospitalization, your US medical insurance typically will reimburse you for out-of-country expenses. Please check with your medical carrier to see what their specific policy is. Seeds of Learning provides emergency medical evacuation as part of their program and is included with this trip. The information for that insurance can be seen here: [Insurance](#)

Q: Is the water safe to drink?

A: No, it is not recommended to drink unfiltered water anywhere in Nicaragua. There is plenty of filtered drinking water at the lodging and we bring water to the worksite so please pack at least one reusable water bottle. Ideally, your water bottle will have a covered mouthpiece which helps keep it clean.

Q: What measures are taken to ensure the safety of the group?

A: Safety is the NUMBER ONE priority of ODFL. The group is never without adult supervision and in addition to the ODFL chaperones, the Seeds of Learning representatives are with the group at all times. The group only goes to areas where our partners are known and have established relationships.

Food and Lodging

Q: What is the lodging that is provided?

A: For those traveling to Matagalpa: The lodging is called the Principessa Hostel [Principessa website](#) and is located in downtown Matagalpa. It has a total capacity of 20 people and we have the entire hostel reserved for the ODFL group. There are 8 different bedrooms with various combinations of bunk beds or double beds and there are 6 bathrooms for the group to share. Travelers will be separated into rooms based on gender. Once the group is in for the night, there is a night watchman who locks the main door so that no one is allowed to leave on their own.

For those traveling to Tipitapa: The lodging is called the Mundo de Fe Retreat. The facility was originally built for a church retreat and can house large groups. The ODFL group will reserve a couple cabins so our participants will be separated by gender.

Each building has 2-3 bathrooms and 2-4 rooms with bunk beds. The facility also has a pool, restaurant and volleyball court.

Q: What is the electrical power?

A: The power outlets are identical to those in the US so no special adapter plugs are needed. However if you bring any devices with a three-prong plug, you will need an adapter to convert it to a two prong.

Q: Can special diets be accommodated?

A: Yes, there will always be a vegetarian option available. For other special needs, please indicate on the ODFL Medical Form so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Q: What is the local cuisine?

A: Rice and beans are the staple of most meals in Nicaragua. Meals are varied from American style pancakes, to eggs with rice and beans for breakfast. Fresh fruit is available for breakfasts, as well. Lunches typically come with rice and beans and some source of protein.

What should I pack?

We recommend packing one suitcase (med sized wheeled luggage or duffel) and a carry-on that can double as a daypack. If we can get the airlines to allow a second bag free of charge, many of you will also be carrying another large duffel bag with donated items. You will be transporting your gear in vehicles with limited space so pack lightly. Be sure to mark your belongings with your name. Delicate items, such as medications or cameras should be packed in your carry-on daypack. It is important that you leave all expensive jewelry, watches, etc., at home. These items are all considered signs of wealth and can draw unwanted attention.

Q: What will the weather be like?

A: Hot, wet and humid. It is important to stay hydrated at all times.

Packing List:

1	Travel backpack or duffel bag	Be sure you can carry your own baggage. The maximum weight allowed per bag is 50lbs.
1	Day pack/travel pack	Small backpack to take personal items to the work site.
1	Jacket/rain coat	The rainy season is May-Aug, so waterproof is best.
2	Long sleeve cotton work shirt	Lightweight, light colored shirt for protection from sun and bugs and sun.
4-5	Work tshirts	Cotton is ok; tops must cover the shoulders. No spaghetti straps!
2	Work pants/shorts	Quick drying nylon or synthetic work best. Jeans are hot and heavy.
2	Sets of after-work clothes	This should be comfortable; Don't forget to wear your ODFL t-shirt to the airport.
2	Shorts	Not too short

1	Nice outfit	To wear for the welcoming and dedication ceremony; this should be modest and comfortable
	Pajamas	
?	Underwear (sports bras)	Enough underwear to keep you happy. Modest colors and styles are encouraged.
1	Swimsuit	
1	Pair work shoes	These will get dirty
1	Pair comfortable shoes	Comfortable footwear (tennis shoes?) for vehicle and down time.
1	Rainboots	Boots or other waterproof shoes
1	Pair sandals or flipflops	
4-6	Socks	
1	Sun Hat	Baseball cap or other wide-brimmed hat to keep the sun and rain off.
2	Water Bottles	With lid to protect the area from which you drink. Wide mouth is best. A Camelback is a good alternative.
1	Flashlight	Or headlamp with extra batteries. Keep it small & light.
1	Sunglasses	A sports strap to hold them on is helpful.
1	Small bag of toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, etc. (Ladies - new environments and activities may alter cycles. Bring an extra supply of feminine products. Leave make-up at home.)
2	Sets of medications	Medications may be hard to replace in Nicaragua. For critical meds we recommend giving an extra set to your trip leaders in case one gets lost.
1	Pair of work gloves	Try them on to be sure they are the right size
1	Sunscreen/lip balm	SPF 30+.
1	Insect Repellent	Avoid aerosol cans, 30-35% DEET
1	Bandana	Used for a variety of things including marking your bags, washing up, kerchief, etc.
2-3	Wet-Ones/Handy Wipes	Small, travel-sized soft packs.
	Travel first aid kit	With bandages, antiseptic wipes, antibiotic ointment, pepto bismol or acidophilus, hydrocortisone cream, nail clippers, aspirin...
	Ear plugs	
	Travel alarm clock	
	Hand Sanitizer	
	Plastic ziplock bags	Can cover your pack, hold dirty shoes, clothes, etc.
	Umbrella	
	Optional:	
	Journal and/or book	Record hard names to remember, stories, etc.
	Money belt	This is better than an "around the neck" money holder
	EmergenC or Airborne Rehydration powder	
	Luggage lock or zip-ties	Locks must be TSA approved
	Spanish dictionary	

Power converter	If your electronics have three prongs, you'll need an adapter to convert to a 2-prong outlet
Mini-photo album	Pictures of family, home, community, etc
School supplies	See suggestions in the SOL volunteer packet
Snacks	Peanut butter, granola bars, trail mix, etc.
Pocketknife	Leatherman/swiss army – must be packed in checked luggage
Simple games or crafts	Playing cards, origami, jump rope, bubbles, etc to share with community at the Learning Resource Center (LRC)
Small gifts	Token gifts for children/community

Laundry

Q: Is there a washing machine and dryer available?

A: No, however laundry can be done very inexpensively and/or you can plan to wash your clothes in the sink and hang them to dry.

Money

Q: What money do they use in Nicaragua?

A: The local currency is called Córdoba. The current exchange rate is 29 Cordoba = \$1 US Dollar. Bring your spending money in at least two of the following forms: credit cards, ATM cards, or cash. Your hosts will help you change some US dollars into Cordoba. We also recommend that you do not bring traveler's checks because they are difficult to cash. Visa credit/debit cards are much more widely accepted than any other type but cash is the easiest. It is best to carry small bills because change is often hard to come by in rural areas. Personal spending money is required for extra beverages, gifts, and souvenirs. Depending on how much shopping you wish to do, \$100 total spending money should be plenty.

Q: How are my valuables kept safe?

A: The lodging has a safe that you may use. We recommend, upon arrival, that you give them your passport and money to store until needed.

Communications

Q: What if I need to reach my child and/or the chaperones during the trip?

A: You will be given the direct phone numbers for Seeds of Learning as well as the chaperones. The chaperones will be in frequent communication with the parents during the trip. They will send emails giving details of how the trip is going as well as post photos on Facebook.

Q: Will Internet service be available?

A: The lodging does have wifi but we discourage our participants from using the internet and we typically do not give out the wifi password.