

Project Schoolhouse Adventure Service Travel

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About Us

Mission

Through community partnerships, Project Schoolhouse builds schools, water systems, and provides high school scholarships.

History

Founded in 2004, Project Schoolhouse built its first school in 2007 and will complete its seventh in 2014. In 2009 we expanded our mission to include community water systems and high school scholarships.

Our Philosophy

Project Schoolhouse responds strictly to 'voiced need'. We believe that the communities we work with already know exactly what they need in order to develop. We listen to them and provide the resources and assistance they need to complete school and water projects. In 2009, based on community input, we expanded our school building program to also include community water systems and high school scholarships.

By focusing only on what we are asked to do, we have built a strong reputation in the region for facilitating successful, grassroots projects. It isn't easy to facilitate development projects in small rural communities, but by focusing strictly on the needs of the community (rather than any individuals) we mobilize the community to achieve its own goals.

Our approach is strictly community based. As a rule, our projects don't benefit any one person. In fact, we demand a very high level of participation from the community. The recipient community is always the biggest donor in their own projects. They provide 80% of the labor as well as food and housing for the visiting workers.

We are not associated with any religious cause or institution and do not allow proselytizing of any kind. We have a code of conduct that includes cultural and political sensitivity. The issues surrounding respect of cultural norms are a part of moderated group discussions during the trip.

What we do

Since the beginning, the focus has been on rural communities that lack electricity, running water, and traversable roads. Typically, we work with communities of 30-60 families composed mostly of entrepreneurial farmers living in isolated rural areas.

Where we work

Our work is concentrated in the region surrounding Rio Blanco, Nicaragua, located in the central part of the country. An ancient volcano, nearby Mount Musún, dominates the region and provides much of the water we harness for our community water projects.

The physical beauty that surrounds our schools is breathtaking. Lush forests stretch from the top of the imposing Mount Musún down into the lowlands. Farmers toil plots of land by hand throughout the region. The most common form of transportation is walking or by horse. There are roads into the region, but they are slow going, and although bus service is regular, it is not frequent.

We do a follow-up survey with community members following a trip to get feedback about the volunteers, their behavior, and the impact of the group visit on the community. This survey is a verbal and qualitative in nature consisting primarily of a series of questions posed to a subset of the community members that most interacted with the group during its visit. Feedback is also requested continuously during the trip to make sure we are in tune with the needs of the community. This is extremely important because our work is sensitive and the goodwill and positive synergy of the community is crucial to the long term success of the project because all local labor is donated. We go to great lengths to ensure that our interaction with the community is positive and harmonious and we ask that all volunteer travelers keep this in mind during your time in community.

Travel to Nicaragua

How to Prepare

Spanish is the common language in Nicaragua. The more of it you speak the more you will be able to interact with the community you are visiting. Take some time to learn the basics.

You will be walking a lot and you will be glad you decided to take a few strolls around the block to get ready.

Review and make sure you are current on all immunization guidelines at the [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) website.

Passports are required but visas are not.

What to Pack

When packing for Nicaragua, it is a good idea to take as little as possible. Below are guidelines for what you should pack. Each person is different and will find that they need different things during their trip, so you should tailor this list to your personal needs.

Luggage

- Backpack: Rolling luggage is not suited to dirt roads and hiking.
- Small daypack

Clothing

- Pants: It is a good idea to pack loose fitting, quick-dry pants. Tight-fitting jeans are likely to be very uncomfortable with the heat and humidity.
- Cotton shirts: a couple of lightweight long-sleeved shirts to protect yourself from the sun and insects.
- Rubber boots: Make sure that they are comfortable.
- A lightweight sweater: sometimes evenings can be cool.
- Socks: 4-5 pairs. You can wash them there.
- Underwear
- Flip-flops or sandals
- Comfortable shoes you can walk in.
- Hat
- Rain jacket
- Swimsuit: You can also swim in shorts and a shirt if you'd like, which is what Nicaraguans prefer.
- Work gloves (optional)
- Bandana (optional)

Personal Care

- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Shampoo
- Soap and wash rag
- Towel
- Bug spray
- Prescription medications, if necessary

Travel Documents, Journals, etc.

- Passport
- Copy of your passport (separately packed in luggage or wallet)
- Journal and pen

- Entry tax – US\$10 payable upon arrival in Managua – have a crisp, new US\$10 bill to pay this fee at Immigration – only cash accepted.

Miscellaneous

- Camera
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Plastic bags to protect belongings in case of rain
- Light-weight Blanket or cover sheet
- Stuff sack or pillow case
- Deck of cards or other small games to share with the children (optional) – the card game UNO is always a hit!
- Baseball equipment (optional)
- Children’s books in Spanish or English/Spanish (optional)
- Maps and other educational materials (optional)
- School supplies (optional)
- While all volunteers are encouraged to bring school supplies and baseball equipment on their trip, we have a strict donation policy that prohibits gifts to individual adults or children and donations must only be suitable for group school activities

What not to bring

- Provocative clothing
- Fancy equipment
- Jewelry
- More than you can comfortably carry for an extended hike

Sample Itinerary – 7-8 day trip:

- Day 1 –
 - depart US on an early morning flight, generally connecting through Houston or Miami, into Managua, Nicaragua to arrive by mid-day
 - be sure to eat a late breakfast/early lunch on the plane
 - Project Schoolhouse trip leader will meet arriving travelers at the airport in Managua and waiting for you.
 - Board van and depart from the airport as soon as all travelers have gathered and cleared customs and immigration.
 - Drive to Rio Blanco, Nicaragua – approximately 5 hours, where you’ll spend the night in our office/dorm rooms
- Day 2-4
 - Travel into rural community where current year project work is on-going
 - Home stay with host family for 3 nights
 - Work on assigned projects - examples include art projects at the school, assisting with survey work, participate in community meetings
 - Possible day trips from host community, based on traveler interests– visit neighboring community to see/inaugurate completed projects; tour local farms and learn about local agriculture and environment; nature hikes with local guide;

- Day 5
 - Return to Rio Blanco – stay overnight
- Day 6-7
 - Optional trip to the beach, colonial city of Granada or coffee-growing region of Matagalpa
- Day 8 – return flight out of Managua

What to Expect

Living

Project Schoolhouse works in some of the most remote and rural areas of central Nicaragua. The living conditions in the communities are generally very basic. Most people live in wooden houses with dirt floors, no plumbing, and, for the most part, no electricity. Chickens and other animals tend to roam in and around the house. Meals are cooked over a wood-burning stove, and, in the communities where no water system has been built, water has to be fetched from a spring and carried back to the house in 5-gallon buckets. Travelers will sleep on either cots or hammocks.

When visiting the communities, there might be an initial period of adjustment. You might feel uncomfortable, not know how to do basic things like bathing yourself, or the food might taste different. This is all completely normal and the good news is that you'll get over it quickly! The important thing is to have an open mind and view it all as a learning experience, which it is. By stepping out of your comfort zone, you'll give yourself the opportunity to gain invaluable insight into life in rural Nicaragua.

Environment

Nicaragua is a tropical country, which means that it is humid and hot. There are two seasons: the dry season, which usually runs from February to May, and the rainy season, which stretches throughout the rest of the year (roughly May through January). Luckily, it usually rains in the afternoons, but it is a good idea to always be prepared with a rain jacket and plastic bags to protect your valuables. There is also plenty of sun in the rainy season, so you should be prepared for that, too, with a hat and sunscreen.

The tropical climate also means that there are plenty of bugs in Nicaragua. To protect yourself, you should wear long sleeves and pants.

Money

The national currency in Nicaragua is the *Cordoba*. One US Dollar is roughly equivalent to 35 Cordobas.

Getting local currency:

In the communities, there aren't any stores, so you won't generally need money. But if you plan on buying snacks or any other items, you will need local currency. The

easiest way to get *Cordobas* is to get them from an ATM. There aren't any ATMs in the communities, only in Rio Blanco or at the airport. All ATMs in Rio Blanco accept Visa, and one or two accept MasterCard.

Prices:

Prices for goods are generally lower in Nicaragua than in the US, but you should still be prepared. Below is a price list of common items that you might buy while in Nicaragua:

Bottle of water- C\$15-20

Bottle of soda- C\$30-40

Snacks (bag of chips, candy, etc.)- C\$ 2-10

Sunscreen- C\$300-350

Meal in a restaurant- C\$40-60

Bottle of shampoo- C\$150

Bus fare- C\$50-100

Taxi: in Managua- C\$100; in Rio Blanco C\$10

Safety:

As always, when traveling, it is important to use common sense to protect oneself from theft. It is not advisable to carry large amounts of money or to put your money on display.

Emergencies

Project Schoolhouse 24-hour US emergency contact number is 512-810-122 - this will get you to a Project Schoolhouse representative who can immediately troubleshoot any issues. In-country emergency protocol is trip-specific and will be shared with trip leaders upon arrival in Nicaragua.

Food

In the communities, the basic staples are red beans, rice, tortillas and *cuajada*, a fresh, salty cheese made from cow's milk. Chicken stews made with *yuca* (aka cassava) and other starchy roots are also common. Popular beverages are coffee (with plenty of sugar), *pinolio* (a sweet beverage made from ground corn, cacao, and cinnamon), or *avena* (a sweet drink made with oats). Thanks to the prevalence of rice and beans, vegetarians should have no problems eating in Nicaragua.

Activities

Your days will be filled with working on the current school, water or garden construction projects, leading lessons in the classrooms in areas of particular interest to you (art, reading, etc), playing baseball or soccer with the children during school breaks, kitchen or clean-up activities. There is also plenty of time in between structured activities to sit and read, catch-up on your journal or play games with the children who will cherish their time with you.

Volunteers are expected to participate in daily journaling exercises and leader-facilitated group discussions. Topics of group discussions center around issues such as grassroots economic development in rural communities, the complexities of cultural interaction when cultures are far apart in terms of socioeconomic levels, and so forth.

During the volunteer experience, visits are made to previously completed projects in order to demonstrate what a completed project looks like and the profound effect it has on the community both socioeconomically and in terms of self-identity. A trip is also made to a prospective community so students can witness how we work with potential recipient communities

Lasting Impact

There are countless ways to help build this project and multiply the impact you've already had. Many people who have traveled with Project Schoolhouse have returned to host parties, music festivals, art sales, movie showings, and more. Your unique personality and talents will show you the way. Additionally, we conduct a survey/evaluation of volunteers about their experiences following the trip so please be prepared to provide feedback on how we can improve the experience for future volunteers!

Spread the Word

First of all, remember that enthusiasm is contagious, capitalize on it as soon as you return.

- Talk about and share pictures of your trip with any and every one.
- Write about your experience and email it with a link to Project Schoolhouse.
- Pass out information cards.
- Think of groups that would appreciate such an authentic experience and ask if you can talk to them.

Fundraise

- Instead of gifts (Birthday, Christmas, etc), ask that people honor you with a donation.
- Give a donation in someone else's name instead of a present.
- Host a fundraiser

Organize a Trip

Travel to Nicaragua is one of the most powerful ways to support our projects. Did you love your experience? Organizing another trip is a great way to have a lasting impact. Project Schoolhouse can help with fundraising literature, development of

personal fundraising sites and other fundraising ideas – contact us at info@projectschoolhouse.org.

Keep Connected

We have an active following of former travelers and volunteers who meet for dinner and other fundraising events – keep an eye on the Project Schoolhouse website and Facebook page for upcoming events. We also host an annual volunteer appreciation event to thank past volunteers and give all a chance to share their travel experiences.

Internships

We are always looking for volunteers to help us on a short-term or long-term basis. We need help in the USA as well as in Nicaragua, and this experience provides not only valuable assistance but gives volunteers the opportunity to work with our highly-engaged board of directors who are leaders in their respective fields of development and finance. If you are interested in getting more involved with Project Schoolhouse please get in touch with us at info@projectschoolhouse.org.