Notes for New Teachers from North America

Nicaragua

Land Of Lakes And Volcanoes

Nicaragua is a small country located in the heart of the Americas with a population of 5.7 million people. It is called the land of lakes and volcanoes. The eleven volcanoes and several large lakes provide an abundance of natural beauty. The Nicaraguan people are warm and caring in spite of the fact that they have suffered much in recent years.

Managua is the capital of Nicaragua with a population of just over 1.5 million people. Beautiful beaches along the Pacific coast are less than an hour’s drive from Managua. Northern Nicaragua is mountainous and contains the largest intact rain forest in Central America. The Atlantic coast is home to several ethnic and indigenous groups.

Matagalpa is about two and a half hours drive from Managua. It is a region rich in agriculture. Much of the coffee from the country is grown in the hills of Matagalpa. There are roughly 450,000 people who live in the department. Matagalpa is a growing city situated in the side of the rolling hills and bordered by the Rio Grande of Matagalpa. Just about anywhere you walk in the city you will find yourself walking uphill.

The climate is warm and tropical with cool mornings and evenings. There are only two seasons: rainy and dry. Between May and December, it rains for an hour or longer almost daily. This is the prettiest and coolest part of the year. The temperature can range from 60-90 degrees Farenheit. March and April are the hottest months with temperatures over 90 degrees.

History

Statistically, Nicaragua is considered the poorest Spanish-speaking country in the world (second overall to Haiti in our hemisphere). Yet, even the statistics do not reveal the depth of pain and suffering that the people of Nicaragua have experienced over the last several decades!

In 1972, an earthquake destroyed 90% of the downtown Managua area, killing hundreds of people and leaving thousands homeless. As the country attempted to recover, opposition arose to the harsh Somozan dictatorship. The people overthrew Somoza through a popular revolution in 1979. The Sandinista party, under Daniel Ortega, monopolized power and led the country toward a socialistic economic and political system. Several opposition groups went into exile and began a fierce civil war. The United States backed one group commonly called the *Contras* and later imposed a complete economic embargo on Nicaragua. The Sandinistas held elections in 1990 and were defeated by a coalition party led by Violeta Chamorro. The 1996 election provided the first case in the history of the country where one democratically elected president took over from another. Since then, Nicaragua has had peaceful transitions of power, but Nicaragua is still very politically divided.

In 1998, Nicaragua experienced Hurricane Mitch, which took many lives and destroyed thousands of homes and acres of land. Hurricane Mitch forced many people from their homes and land in Matagalpa due to mudslides and structural damage. Hurricane Felix hit in 2007 and caused more widespread damage. It will take time and a lot of effort, but all of this suffering has created a nation of people starving for the answers that only those who are “called according to His purposes” can give them. In the midst of the war, tragedy and poverty, God’s people continue to proclaim the Good News. Each year there are signs of hope, reconstruction and reconciliation. It is an exciting time to be in Nicaragua and there is openness to the Gospel message.

Nicaragua Christian Academy

School History

Nicaragua Christian Academy began as the result of three evangelical missionary families who made a commitment to pray together for God’s leadership in seeking educational alternatives for their children while serving in Nicaragua. The school began in the fall of 1991 with two teachers and seven MK’s (missionary kids) of the Palmer, Ross and Drummond families. A young couple, Ken and Teresa Nicely, were asked to come from the United States for two years and teach the children. In the following year, three more missionary families joined the “homeschool co-op”, bringing the enrollment to 15 students. At the end of the second year, several Nicaraguan families requested entrance for their kids in the “school”, and the 12 parents voted unanimously to allow them to apply. After two more years of renting bigger houses, the school board decided to buy property and build a real school. Loans were secured, and the first three classrooms were built in 1995. With the property and construction loans and an operating deficit of roughly $40,000 in the first year at the new site, the debt reached nearly $200,000. At that point, the board hired a business manager and made a commitment to balancing the budget and paying off the debt using the entrance fees paid by new enrollees. The school continued to grow as God supplied the resources, and the final payment on the debt was made in July 2003.

In 2001, NCA Interntational went through the long and challenging accreditation process and became the first accredited school through the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in Central America. The school’s motto is “Academic Excellence with a Christian Foundation”.

In the following years, the school board sensed an increase in the demand for Christian education of academic excellence in Nicaragua, but many of the classes were full at their class caps of 18 or 20 students per class. In addition, many new applicants were not able to meet the English-language requirements or afford the cost of tuition. A new school was proposed as a mirror image of the original campus, with the same goal of educating young people with a Christian worldview and a heart of service to God and humankind, but in the Spanish language and at a much lower cost. In February 2005, NCA opened its second school, NCA Nejapa, and began with 55 students in grades 1-7. The school grew quickly to include preschool and high school, with the first high school graduation in December 2008.

In 2011, the association began assessing the need for more schools like NCA Nejapa in the outlying departments of Nicaragua. Land was found and purchased in Matagalpa and construction began at the end of 2011. A development committee was organized made up of pastors, teachers, university professors and potential parents. Construction was finished and NCA Matagalpa began serving students and families in February 2013. The school began with 44 students in grades 1-7. The school continues to grow quickly and has expanded to preschool and intends to grow one grade level each year.

Today, the English campus has reached a size of over 300 students and 35 teachers, and NCA Nejapa has over 400 students and 30 teachers while NCA Matagalpa has over 140 students and 16 teachers. All three schools are evangelical, non-denominational, non-profit preschool, elementary, and secondary educational institutions governed by a common school board made up of parent representatives named by the General Assembly of NCA.

Mission and Identity Statement

Our mission is to partner with Christian parents in forming active disciples of Jesus Christ, equipped to impact society through the development of their spiritual discernment, moral courage and academic excellence.

Nicaragua Christian Academy schools are evangelical, non-denominational, non-profit preschool, elementary, and secondary educational institutions. The ministry of NCA Matagalpa is to equip future Nicaraguan leaders, providing an education authorized by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education.

Church denominations represented in our school include Assembly of God, Baptist, Brethren, Catholic (Christian), Christian Reformed, Lutheran, and Presbyterian.

Instructional Levels and Areas

NCAM has classes from Kindergarten through 10th grade. All regular academic subjects are taught in Spanish, and students receive English daily. In the future there will be separate teachers for art, music, physical education and technology.

Student Body Make-Up

A primarily Nicaraguan student body.

Campus/Facilities

The campus of NCA Matagalpa is located just 3 km south of the cit of Matagalpa at Km 125.5 on the highway to Managua. It presently consists of 2 pavilions consisting of classrooms, the main office, a library and teacher workroom. There is also a small cafeteria kiosk, a multi-use sport court and a sports field. There are many plans for future phases of construction that consist of more classrooms for high school, preschool and a future vocational school.

Resources

Office equipment: full-featured copy machine (networked), paper cutter,

Computers: We are currently have 1 set of 25 laptops for student use. We ask teachers to bring their own computer

Audio/visual equipment: There are various projectors and speaker sets available for check-out on campus.

Athletic equipment: Sports field, Sports Court for basketball and volleyball.

Teacher Expectations

School Calendar

NCA Matagalpa follows the Nicaraguan school calendar. Teachers typically start with in-service in mid-January and school usually begins in the first week of February and ends in late November. There are 2 weeks off in July and 1 week off at Easter. Teachers are free to travel back to the States or around Central America during these long breaks. There are other days off for national holidays during the year. There will be a full calendar on the school website.

Curriculum

NCA Matagalpa uses combination of different curriculum that is available locally. We are always looking for more resources to add to our collections for both teachers and students.

Chapel and Faculty Devotions

Every teacher has additional responsibilities besides teaching. Chapel services are held each Wednesday morning. A different teacher is responsible for planning and leading chapel each week. This may include teaching, orchestrating students in skits or songs or asking a guest speaker to share a message. Also, from 7:00 to 7:15 each morning the faculty meets for devotions. It can be a time of singing and prayer, or can be centered on a theme for the week or a time of learning new spiritual truths. Each chapel and week of devotions is different depending on the abilities, talents, and desires of each teacher. A schedule is distributed at the beginning of each school year for planning purposes.

Extra Curricular Activities

The extracurricular activities vary each year depending on the willingness and skills of parents and teachers and the interests of students. Teachers organize the school celebrations and activities for the holidays around the year. Teachers should consider their abilities and pray about how God can use them in offering students other opportunities for growth.

Living in Nicaragua

Housing

Housing can be found in Matagalpa. There is a possibility of teacher housing located on campus based on availability. In addition, former teachers often leave behind some of their furnishings to be given to or purchased by new teachers. Teachers may choose to live with a Nicaraguan family or rent a house, if desired.

Money Issues

NCA is a private school and each student pays tuition to attend. However, we try hard to maintain tuition costs as low as possible to continue its affordability to middle-class families in Nicaragua. The cost of school supplies, textbooks, security, utilities and personnel is tremendous. The school does not cover medical insurance or airfare to and from Nicaragua. Do not bring traveler’s checks or money orders – they cannot be cashed in Nicaragua. US currency will **NOT** be accepted at any location if it is ripped, marred or defective in ANY way.

A single teacher can live comfortably on an average of $600 a month for in-country living expenses. Other expenses to keep in mind are travels (plane tickets home and bus fare around Central America), medical expenses and insurance, classroom supplies, loan payments and incidental shopping (clothes, souvenirs, etc.). A spreadsheet of approximate living expenses for single teachers, married couples, and families is available for financial planning. To request it, e-mail [matagalpa@nca.edu.ni](mailto:matagalpa@nca.edu.ni).

Transportation

The bus system within Matagalpa is very easy to use although often crowded. It is easy to get buses from just outside the school to the city until early evening. Taxis in and around the city are safe and fairly affordable as well.

Traveling by bus to other parts of the country is a possibility from the bus stations in the city. It is always safer to travel by day than by night and to have a plan for where to go upon arriving at your final destination. Bus stations are prime targets for theft.

For families, we would recommend that you consider purchasing your own vehicle for your time in Nicaragua. Used vehicles in Nicaragua are much more expensive than in the States. SUVs (5-7 passengers) are much more common because there are many places you might want to go, including the beach and many other tourist destinations, that are only accessible by dirt roads, often in poor conditions. However, a used SUV that is over 10 years old starts at around $9,000, and may not have a good mechanical history. A more realistic budget for a used SUV in good condition is $10,000 to $15,000. If you are on a tighter budget, you may be able to find a used car for around $4,000 to $6,000, but it may limit some of your destinations. Many missionaries advertise vehicles and available housing through a mailing list that is hosted by ICF (International Christian Fellowship), the church that meets on NCA’s campus. To subscribe, visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/icfmanagua>.

Banking

ATM and debit cards may be used to access your accounts from the States for cash withdrawals, although banking fees and daily limits may apply. Stateside checks may be cashed in Managua, although it takes about 6 weeks.

Taxes

U.S. citizens must report income from NCA when filing U.S. income taxes. When teachers achieve residency status during an entire tax year, they are entitled to a Foreign Earned Income Exclusion of up to $90,000 per year on money earned in Nicaragua. A detailed document on how to file U.S. taxes is available at <http://teacher.nca.edu.ni/taxes>. Nicaraguan income taxes are paid by NCA for all North American teachers.

Safety

Teachers should use caution and common sense in and outside their home and school. Doors should be kept locked at all times. One should exercise discretion in wearing jewelry, flashing money or walking outside after dark. When teachers plan to leave Matagalpa or be away for a long period, they should let other friends know where they are going and the approximate time of return. More information is available at the State Department Travel Website (<http://travel.state.gov>).

Health

Medical and dental services in Nicaragua are good. In almost all medical specialties, there are doctors who have training in the United States or Europe and who speak English in Managua. The Baptist Hospital and the new Metropolitan Hospital are both large facilities with modern equipment and trained professionals. Several other clinics, including English-speaking doctors, are readily available in Managua. Medical insurance should be cleared with the hospital before the time of incident. Health care is relatively inexpensive in Nicaragua (a dental examination may cost less than $25). Most standard medicine is readily available at pharmacies in Nicaragua at a cost lower than in the States.

Although NCA does not provide medical insurance, many teachers purchase major medical insurance from one of the many agencies that insure missionaries and travelers. We can recommend the “Global Mission Medical Insurance” plan for missionaries from International Medical Group (IMG) ([www.imglobal.com](http://www.imglobal.com)).

For Canadian teachers: Since Canada uses a socialized health care system, we recommend that you give up your provincial health care and pay into something else. One recommended heath care insurance company is Viator Health Care. (www.viatorinternational.com).

There are no immunizations that are required by the World Health Organization for travelers going to Nicaragua. We recommend that teachers are up to date on their routine vaccines (such as tetanus, diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella, and polio). In addition, the Hepatitis A and typhoid fever vaccines are recommended for all travelers. Malaria and Dengue Fever occur in Nicaragua and are transmitted through mosquitoes. There is a higher risk in rural areas, but they can also occur in the city. Taking malaria pills (chloroquine) is not recommended due to the low risk and potential side effects for long periods of use. The best prevention is the liberal use of insect repellant with at least 30% deet. Mosquitoes are most active during the morning and evening hours. Consult the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at [www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm) for up-to-date information.

It is common for people traveling from a developed country to a developing country to experience Traveler’s Diarrhea, due to the adjustment in climate and contaminated food and water. Although Nicaragua’s municipal water is well treated and probably safe, there is risk of undergoing loose stools during a 2-3 day period as your body adjusts to the food and water here. If you do get sick, it is best to let it pass naturally if possible. Diarrhea is your body’s way of flushing out the bad stuff, so constipating medicines like Imodium-AD are not recommended unless you will not have close access to a bathroom. And be sure to drink lots of water.

Sending Mail

Letters may be mailed from Nicaragua to the United States by two different methods:

* + Send it with someone traveling to the States (usually every month or so)
  + Apartado mail (Nicaraguan postage), may take up to three weeks to arrive

Receiving Mail

For regular mail and packages, the use of our Apartado address is recommended. The sender pays international postage rates, and there is no fee for receiving letters and a small fee (less than $3.00) for receiving packages. Service may be slightly less reliable for packages. Books can be sent using a book rate, but this may take 3-4 months. Envelopes generally mail faster than boxes.

The Apartado address is: Your name  
c/o Nicaragua Christian Academy  
Apartado 17  
Matagalpa, Nicaragua

Telephone

To call a phone number in Nicaragua from the States, the international prefix (011) and country code (505) must be dialed first. To call the school office, the number is 011-505-2775-4368. Making calls to the States costs about $0.35 per minute. Basic cell phones may be purchased here for $25-$50. For fully-featured phones, it may be cheaper to purchase them in the United States as long as they are “unlocked.” Cell phone rates are more expensive here – about $0.30 per minute for local calls. Common VOIP services such as Skype of GoogleVoice are good options for you to consider for phone communication to the US.

Preparing to Come — What to Bring

Keep in mind that normal luggage allowances permit two suitcases and a carry-on bag. Most airlines allow 50 lbs for each checked bag for international flights; you should check the requirements before packing. If extra luggage is expected, teachers should call the airlines and ask about extra charges. All luggage should be labeled with the school’s address.

Clothes

The weather is a big factor when considering what clothes to bring. It is a combination of cool and warm in Matagalpa – usually between 60° and 95°F, although sometimes above 100°F in other parts of the country. The school is not air conditioned but there is a nice breeze that flows constantly. Bring sturdy, cotton clothes that can breathe and be used in layers as the mornings and evenings are cool and the mid-day is warm. Comfort and coolness are essential in the teaching environment. There are certain guidelines teachers should follow in choosing teaching attire. You will have NCA Polo shirts to wear during the week but for special days or activities please consider the following.

* Men are to wear professional but casual shirts with slacks and closed toed shoes (no sandals or flip-flops). Shirts should be tucked in at all times while teaching.
* Women should wear dresses, skirts, slacks or capris. Dresses and skirts may be no shorter than knee length. Leather sandals are permitted, but no flip-flops may be worn. No sundresses or tops with low cut fronts or backs are allowed, and straps should be at least 3 inches wide. The legs of the pants are to be full and flowing.
* The requirement for staff dress will be no less than what is required for students. When teaching, T-shirts, shorts, athletic wear (except PE teacher), cargo pants and flip-flops are not permitted. Modesty in hair style and jewelry are expected. Visible tattoos are not permitted, and the only acceptable visible piercings are earrings on female teachers.
* On “color days” (most Fridays), students and teachers may wear casual clothes, but should still be neat and professional. The following items, although not permitted on normal days, may be worn by teachers on color days: blue jeans, dress shorts (knee length), nice T-shirts, and school-appropriate sandals (for men). Flip-flops and athletic wear are not permitted even on color days.

When packing clothes and shoes think of teaching attire, athletic wear, rain gear, beach attire, and casual clothes. Also, bring a pair of slip on shoes to wear around the house. During the rainy season in the mountainous regions and Matagalpa it can get cool. Bring several sweater/sweatshirts or long sleeve-shirts and a raincoat.

Tourist Visa

Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need to secure a visa before entering Nicaragua. A 90-day tourist visa will be given to you upon arrival and costs $10.00. An additional 90 day visa can be purchased before the expiration of your first visa. After 180 days in Nicaragua you must leave the country for 72 hours in order to renew your visa. This is possible through travel by plane to the US or by bus or car to a neighboring country.

Personal and School Supplies

Because some supplies may be more difficult or expensive to obtain, the following list may help you know what is easily available in Nicaragua and what you should consider bringing with you. Keep in mind that although some supplies may be available in Nicaragua, the quality may not be as high or they may be more expensive. Also, if you would like to have a classroom supply of an item, you may want to communicate with the current teacher before assuming it is available in bulk in Nicaragua. Some basic supplies will be supplied by the school including construction paper, chart paper, whiteboard makers, paper clips etc.

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| Available in Nicaragua | | Not readily available | |
| 3 hole punches  Contact paper  Index cards  Paper clips  Pens, pencils  Plain erasers  Rulers  Velcro  Sharpies  White-board markers | Binder dividers  Brown paper lunch sacks  Construction paper  Decorated pencils, erasers  Masking, packing, scotch tape  Notebooks and folders  Popsicle sticks (reg., colored)  Staples, scissors, white-out | Brads  Bug boxes  Laminating sheets  Overhead markers  Stickers  Transparencies  Cardstock  Full meter sticks  Supplemental DVDs | 12x18 construction paper  3 brad pocket folders  Books, games, puzzles for the classroom (in English or Spanish)  Bulletin board borders  Library cards, pockets  Manila drawing paper  Posters for classroom  Quality sports equipment (more expensive)  Wide variety of whiteboard supplies (limited colors, etc.) |

Other personal supplies you may consider packing include:

Sheets, pillow U.S. stamps Books, music, videos  
Towels Small first aid kit Laptop/tablet and   
Camera Flashlight Photos to show new friends  
Tampons Contact solution Spanish/English dictionary Sunscreen Hair dryer Curling iron  
Bug spray Water bottle Games or cards

Laptop speakers

Small kitchen appliances  
Chocolate Favorite shampoos, toothpaste, etc (expensive or not available)  
Cell phone – *basic cell phones may be purchased here for $20-$40. For fully-featured phones, it may be cheaper to purchase them in the States as long as they are “unlocked.”*

In addition, new teachers should contact former teachers to learn about specific classroom needs. E-mail addresses of current and former teachers can be requested from the school director.

Airports and Arrival

Purchase a ticket through a local travel agency or on the Internet. Main airlines to check include United, American Airlines, Delta and Taca. It would be wise to get a frequent flyer number for all the airlines you fly. Round trip tickets must be purchased with the return trip scheduled during Christmas vacation, since immigration law does not permit the entry of non-residents without a return itinerary. Most North American teachers travel back to the States for the Christmas vacation (see calendar on school website).

Upon arrival in Managua, have your passport and customs form (handed out on the plane) ready. You will have to stand in line to see a customs agent. The 90-day tourist visa will cost you $10.00. After you pay and have your passport stamped, you may claim your baggage. The last step at the airport is to pass through luggage inspection. You do not need to exchange money in the airport. We will be excitedly waiting for you at the airport!

Questions and Answers

1. Do I need a power adapter?

No, Nicaragua’s electricity is the same as North America (110V, 60Hz). The phone system is also the same. No adapters are necessary.

2. Should I bring a laptop computer?

Yes, it is a requirement for the job. If you plan to have internet in your apartment (about $45/month).

More Information

For more information, please visit the school website at <http://www.nca.edu.ni/matagalpa>

Contact the school director by e-mail ([cfranklin@nca.edu.ni](mailto:cfranklin@nca.edu.ni)), by Skype phone during the school day (972-924-5333), or by cell phone (011-505-8535-3985).

*We look forward to having you as part of the Nicaragua Christian Academy Matagalpa team!*

**Appendix A: Nicaraguan Consulates**

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| **Washington D.C.**  Consulate General of Nicaragua 1627 New Hampshire Ave NW Washington, DC 20009  Phone: 202-939-6531 | USA Jurisdiction: Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington D.C., West Virginia  Canada Jurisdiction: Labrador, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Yukon Territory |
| **Los Angeles**  Consulate General of Nicaragua 3550 Wilshire Blvd, #200 Los Angeles, CA 90010  Phone: 213-252-1170 | USA Jurisdiction: Alaska, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Utah  California Jurisdiction: Bakersfield, Fresno, Orange, Palm Spring, Pomona, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Ana, Santa Barbara, San Fernando, Ventura  Canada Jurisdiction: Alberta |
| **Miami**  Consulate General of Nicaragua 1332 W Flagler Street Miami, FL 33135  Phone: 305-265-1415 | USA Jurisdiction: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina |
| **San Francisco**  Consulate General of Nicaragua 870 Market St, #1050 San Francisco, CA 94102  Phone: 415-765-6821 | USA Jurisdiction: Idaho, Washington State, Wyoming  California Jurisdiction: Eureka, Monterrey, Napa, Oakland, Redding, San José  Canada Jurisdiction: British Columbia |
| **New York**  Consulate General of Nicaragua 820 2nd Ave, #802 New York, NY 10017  Phone: 212-986-6562‎ | USA Jurisdiction: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin |
| **Houston**  Consulate General of Nicaragua  8989 Westheimer Rd, Suite #103 Houston, TX 77063  Phone: 713-789-2762‎‎ | USA Jurisdiction: Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas |

Updated list available at: [www.consuladodenicaragua.com](http://www.consuladodenicaragua.com)