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# Preparing for the Mission Field

## Tipitapa, Nicaragua

Nicaragua Address:

*Barrio Yuris Ordoñez del templo bautista*

*Que se llama Camino a Emaús 1 cuadra abajo, Tipitapa, Nicaragua*

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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Message from the Staff.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About Tipitapa, Nicaragua.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Getting Ready to Leave .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Packing List.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>While in Tipitapa.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FAQ's.....</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Safety Rules and Procedures.....</b>	<b>9-13</b>
<b>When You Return.....</b>	<b>14</b>

# Message from the Staff

Dear Prospective Team Members,

Hello! We are so excited to partner with you in God's work here in Nicaragua! That's right—God is already here in Nicaragua! We are blessed to be a part of the Kingdom efforts that are already taking place. You are about to embark on an adventure of a lifetime! Be prepared to be stretched physically and emotionally, to do without, and to be BLESSED! . While there can be tremendous blessings, there will be challenges too. During your missionary trip to Tipitapa, you will be living amidst abject poverty and the extreme social ills that come with such poverty and poor education. The weather is hot and there is no air conditioning. You will see people in need everywhere. It will be a lot to take in. Rest assured, however God is doing a work in you.

The giving of your time, effort, and love in a foreign country is a great challenge, but it is also a great calling. So be assured, you can find your strength in the Lord and have a truly blessed experience of ministry and personal growth in faith if you will turn to Him moment-by-moment in times of trials and joy. The Lord will supply all your needs. In this manual, you will find valuable information about the ministry and culture in Tipitapa, in order to help you prepare. Please take time to read this manual in its entirety. We have attempted to anticipate some of your questions, but *please* feel free to e-mail us with any further questions at [info@kosmosministries.org](mailto:info@kosmosministries.org).

May God grant you wisdom and peace in your tie of preparation; strength, courage, and love in your time of service.

In His Service,

Staff, Kosmos Ministries, Inc.

# About Tipitapa, Nicaragua

## Weather

Tipitapa is a tropical climate area, so weather is hot and extremely humid year-round. There are two kinds of seasons in Tipitapa. There is the rainy season, which starts some time in May and ends sometime in November and then there is the dry season, which is from November until May. Daytime temperatures are typically in the 80's or 90's. Nighttime temperatures are only slightly cooler.

## Terrain

Tipitapa is lower in altitude than the surrounding area and therefore is more hot and humid. The nearby capital of Managua has been the victim of numerous natural and human disasters. Hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes floods, and civil war have shaken the once thriving metropolitan capital city. Tipitapa, however, is about 20 minutes from the capital and is influenced less by human disasters, such as political unrest. The road conditions are rough at best, consisting of anything from poorly paved roads strewn with potholes to dirt roads with large ditches, here and there.

## Politics

The political situation in Nicaragua has always been shaky at best. There are two major political parties here in Nicaragua: The Communist Sandinistas and the Liberal Party. Recently, there was political unrest in November 2008 over disputed election results. Kosmos Ministries does not get involved in the politics of Nicaragua. We do encourage Nicaragua citizens to pray, register, and vote.

## Currency

The Nicaraguan currency is in cordobas and centavos. Most business will accept U.S. Dollars in addition to local currency.

- 100 centavos = 1 cordoba
- 22 cordobas = 1 US dollar (depends on fluctuating exchange rate)

# Getting Ready to Leave

## Sleeping Accommodations

Our mission teams stay in host homes while in Tipitapa. This will normally be the home of our Nicaraguan Kosmos Representatives (Marvin and Grethell). Grethell is the pastor of our partner church (*Cristo Nuestra Roca* or Christ our Rock) This will provide a total immersion experience and allow you to interact with local families. Female mission team members and youth team members generally stay in the same home.

## Medical

We recommend that you talk to advise your personal physician of your travel plans and destination. No immunizations are mandatory to enter Nicaragua. However, it has been recommended by the CDC (Center for Disease Control, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) to get tetanus, typhoid, hepatitis-A and -B immunizations. Malaria immunization is not a necessity in Tipitapa. Mosquito repellent with 25% DEET is recommended, or some sort of natural repellent made from plant extracts would be best to repel possible carriers of malaria and Dengue. Any personal medication must be in the original bottle and clearly marked.

## Visa/Passports/Documentation

All visits require a valid passport. A passport should be valid for at least a year beyond your anticipated departure date. An arrival tax of US\$10.00 is charged when you go through customs at the Managua airport.

## Support

We strongly urge all visiting missionaries to offer their church family the opportunity to participate in their trip as financial and prayer supporters.

## Prayer Support

This is HUGE! You will be doing God's work down here – and Satan does not like that! Make specific prayer requests known to your family, friends, and congregation. All team members are also encouraged to have a commissioning service in a worship service with their local congregation prior to departure as well.

## Airport/Flight

You will be arriving at the Managua airport, as it is the only international airport in Nicaragua. There are only six gates in the airport, making it easy to navigate.

# Packing List

Please ask yourself the following questions as you pack. If you answer “yes,” to any of them, then DO NOT BRING IT!

1. Do I care if this item is stolen?
2. Will this contribute to the "rich American" stereotype, potentially distancing me from the people I want to reach out to?
3. Will this negatively affect my witness to the Nicaraguan people?

Again, if the answer is “yes” to any of these questions - DO NOT BRING IT! If there is any doubt, PLEASE ASK US! In addition, if you want to pack clothes that you are willing to leave behind in Tipitapa—that would be great!

## Essentials

- Bible, notebook, pen
- One prepared devotional to share with team members
- Water bottle, clearly identifiable
- Emergency contact names and numbers
- Passport & Extra Spending Money kept in a thin money belt or other secure location
- One outfit for each day of the trip, plus extra shirts (you will sweat!) Do not wear red with black as bold primary colors because this color combination has political implications that could cause you problems.
- Comfortable shoes; do not wear high-heels
- One nice outfit for church (dress or nice pants for girls, collared shirts for guys)
- Modest swimsuit in case we go to a beach or pool
- Hat/cap for outside; never wear hats during church
- Toiletries (shampoo, deodorant, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, 1 roll of toilet paper, etc.) Make sure all items are in non-pressurized containers. All liquids and creams must be in 3-ounce containers or less (Homeland Security travel regulations).
- Sunscreen; Insect repellent (must have DEET in it)
- Personal medication in original, labeled bottles for inspection
- Towel & wash cloths
- Shower shoes
- Flashlight (will come in very handy)

## Other suggested items

- Pictures of your family to share
- Spanish/English dictionary
- If doing heavy construction, bring heavy work gloves, earplugs, etc.
- Simple snacks
- Extra Bibles, toiletries, clothing, etc

## Team First Aid kit

In the interest of space and to make sure everyone will have access to the following items, Kosmos will provide a first aid kit containing the following: Diarrhea medicine Band Aids/Bandages, Aspirin and Ibuprofen Rubbing Alcohol, Hydrogen Peroxide, Lice Shampoo (RID). If you feel the need to bring more items, please pack them in your suitcase or contact a Kosmos Leader.

## Not Needed

- Water filters
- Electrical adapters are not needed in Nicaragua

## Avoid Bringing (*unless absolutely necessary*)

- Most jewelry, especially expensive items
- Traveler's checks (- hard to cash in Nicaragua, but maybe useful in the USA airport)
- Money in bills over \$20 – VERY IMPORTANT. Most will accept small American bills...but rarely will they have change for a \$20.
- Non-conservative clothing
- Any exclusively red & black combination (clothes, luggage, backpacks, etc.) This represents favor toward the Sandinista Communists and could cause problems.

# While in Tipitapa

## Ministry Opportunities

There are many ministry opportunities open to you here. In terms of outreach rules, we do ask that you do not distribute any materials (i.e. candy, bible tracts, other written materials, or toys) unless given permission by the team leaders.

## Schedule

We work with the church leaders in Tipitapa prior to our arrival to put together a tentative schedule. Typically, there will be a free day for shopping in a tourist area or visiting one of the beautiful sights in Nicaragua.

## Quiet Time

We cannot stress enough the importance of quiet time here! If you do not fill up, you will not have anything to pour out. With this in mind, please prepare or bring one short devotional to share with the team members. And, of course, DEFINITELY bring your Bible!

# FAQ's

## Do I need to speak Spanish?

No. Any knowledge of Spanish is very helpful and valuable. A list of helpful Spanish phrases is included in this booklet. It is fine to attempt to greet others in Spanish, even if you are not familiar with the language. Kosmos will ensure that team leaders have an adequate knowledge of Spanish or provide translators when needed.

## How much money should I bring?

Bring as much as you feel comfortable with. It might be a good plan to purchase a neck bag or a traveler's money belt before you arrive, for your safety. Bring money that is in good condition. No tears or writing. It may not be accepted if it is in bad condition.

## Should I try to bring cordobas (the Nicaraguan currency)?

No. We will assist you in changing your money upon your arrival in Nicaragua if desired. For the most part, everyone accepts American money (as long as it is small bills).

## Will I be able to shower?

Please plan to take military style showers (get wet, turn the water off, lather up, rinse-off). With the hot weather, you will be thankful for the lack of hot water! Bring shower shoes (flip-flops). There is a limited supply of water and it may run out occasionally. Please use sparingly...one shower per day.

## What should I do with my passport and money?

All team members younger than 18 must turn in their passports to the team leaders upon arrival in Nicaragua (after clearing customs.) We will be happy to hold any one else's as well. There are no safes in the homes, so place them securely in a suitcase or keep them with you.

## Should I bring a camera?

If you do bring a camera, you must keep a very close eye on it. Digital cameras are ok; just do not leave it lying around. We will be happy to burn a CD with all of the pictures taken from different cameras for you to have. Be aware that children love digital cameras because they can see themselves in the screen. They have a tendency to grab at the cameras from your hands, but they are not trying to steal them...they just want to see the photo.

## Are mosquitoes a problem?

Although mosquitoes are more common in outlying areas, there are mosquitoes in Tipitapa. Therefore, we suggest that you bring mosquito repellent. (See medical section.)

## What are the bathrooms like?

The bathrooms are the same as in the states. The only difference is that toilet paper must be thrown in the wastebaskets – not the toilets. The plumbing pipes are old and delicate. Most of them will be outside the home as well. You will need a flashlight to go out at night.

## What about water?

All meals and beverages we provide will be safe for consumption. We recommend that you bring a clearly marked water bottle. DO NOT DRINK TAP WATER! Drink bottled water only! This includes food or drink items which could be made with tap water (items purchased on the street, etc.). Brush your teeth with the bottled water as well. Generally, the tap water is fairly harmless if consumed in small, very periodic amounts, but it is not worth the risk. If you do consume some tap water by accident, you do not need to go right to the hospital.

## What about food?

The food will be very basic. You can expect to have rice and beans with every meal...even breakfast. If you are not fond of those two foods, please make sure you have plenty of snacks. There will be sandwiches for lunch and typically a chicken dish for dinner. If you have any food allergies please let us know as soon as possible.

## Communication

Kosmos Team leaders will provide access to a local Nicaraguan cell phone from which members can call home to the States. We ask that you keep your usage short and infrequent. We want you to be able to contact your loved ones at home, but we must limit the time in consideration of costs and other team members.

# Safety Rules and Procedures

Please enjoy your time in Nicaragua. We have many important rules that are for the benefit of everyone, even though they may seem strange. These rules may not make sense to a newcomer, but there is an important reason for each one. These rules come to us through the mistakes of past missionaries, and our own experiences as well. These rules are appropriate and very important. Please trust us and help us with this.

- 1) **Getting Around:** Team members should never travel alone when outside of secure lodging (in vehicles, walks, trips to the store, etc.) Always use the “buddy” system, and never travel without a local host. Team leaders should ensure that team members always travel in at least groups of two.

Do not wander off exploring by yourself! Make sure one of your team leaders is aware of where you are at all times! This is very important. If you feel the need to leave the group for any reason while we are outside our host homes, then consult the team leader first. Even though you may be an adult, you are in a foreign country. Foreigners (in any country) are routinely targeted as victims of crimes. You can eliminate much of this risk by following these rules and the guidance of your team leaders.

- 2) **Safe Zone:** Our missionary lodging is considered a “safe zone” or “secure lodging.” All doors should remain locked when not in use. Under certain circumstances (i.e. mild team member sickness), a team member may be allowed to stay at the lodging without

any other team members. However, a local host representative should always be present.

- 3) **Driving:** Team members are prohibited from driving on the mission field. Kosmos will ensure that team members have adequate transportation through the hiring or rental of vehicles and drivers.

While it may seem attractive to drive in another country, leaders should remind team members that American laws have no effect on local driving enforcement. For example, in Nicaragua, if a person is involved in serious injury or accident he/she is subject to arrest and detention for up to 48 hours without cause. Foreigners may be held longer. This decision is not based on regulation, but on local police discretion which often involves corrupt practices.

- 4) **Public Transportation:** Private transportation (hired/pre-arranged) drivers and vehicles should used at all times. Team members should not take public transpirations (i.e. the bus) unless exigent circumstances arise (vehicle breakdowns, emergencies, etc). The bus systems in other parts of the word, such as Nicaragua, are unsafe for foreigners and sometimes even for locals.

Taxis are permissible when circumstances require it, provided that all team members must have an English speaking Nicaraguan host with them at all times. Only take taxis clearly identified with official markings. Beware of unmarked cabs.

- 5) **Consuming Alcohol or Tobacco:** All team members are prohibited from consuming alcohol and/or tobacco products while on the mission field. Even though moderate consumption of alcohol may be socially permissible in America, it is not in other parts of the world. In Nicaragua, for example, most Christians live in poverty, and have a conservative view of alcohol consumption. Alcohol and tobacco use is common among youth and gang members. In order to not confuse or give inappropriate impressions, let us heed the advice of the apostle Paul who said:

*“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall” (1 Corinthians 8:9-13).*

- 6) **Traveling Alone or Without a Local Host:** Team members are never allowed to travel alone – No exceptions. This includes a short walk down to the store or any travel away from the group. Team Members should always travel in at least groups of two.
- 7) **Absolutely NO promises:** Do not promise to give anything (letters, shoes, etc). The promise of prayer may be acceptable but please do not even commit to pray for someone unless you are sure you will be faithful to do it. The people remember everything and get hurt easily. Many gringos say they will come back or write or send something, but never do and thus give gringos, missionaries, or all Christians a bad reputation.

- 8) **Do not give any money to individuals:** Do not give any money to individuals. If you want to bless someone, let the staff know and we will help you do in it in a way that will not cause the person to stumble. We need to be prayerful and follow the leading of the Spirit in our giving. There are several things to do when you are asked for money. For anything larger than a Cordoba here and there, we have a rule that missionaries are not permitted to give money to anyone. You can and should tell the person that we have directly told you that you cannot give money to anyone.
- 9) **Giving gifts or giving away your things:** Please talk with a team leader or staff member before materially blessing the people. Please do not give individual gifts of money, food or clothes to children. If you feel strongly about helping a particular person, speak to one of the leaders about it first. Some children are manipulators, and know how to get things from people (especially foreigners) and it isn't fair to the children who behave better to learn that sitting and waiting patiently doesn't pay. If you have extra money, and want to help, you could think about donating to the church. We can assure you, the church you will be serving is an excellent steward. Every penny you donate will be used wisely. Be lead by the Spirit for all acts of kindness and generosity, but please do not give away any of your things without first asking the staff.
- 10) **Do not bring in stray animals:** There are many animals that look in poor condition here. This is a sad situation, but please do not bring the animals back to the church or a host home. Many times these animals have many diseases that we do not want to bring into the church.
- 11) **Help us be good stewards:** Please help us conserve by shutting off sinks, turning off lights and fans, taking reasonable showers, etc.
- 12) **Food:** Please limit the purchase of junk food. If you have to eat it and there is not enough to share with everyone, please be discrete (not in front of the kids). Also, please avoid eating any special foods you buy for yourself in front of kids, unless you share.
- 13) **Toilets:** Please do not place any toilet paper in the toilet. Any paper products clog the pipes, and that stinks! Toilet paper, sanitary waste etc all goes into a basket beside the toilet. PLEASE make an effort to remember this, because pipes block easily with tissue paper and this will result in an excavation job to get to the pipe, open it and unblock it.
- 14) **Men:** Please keep your shirts on at all times. No bare chests. No military style clothing/camouflage pattern clothing should be worn, or clothing which advertises heavy metal/rock music. For church services, it is acceptable to dress casually (khakis and polo).
- 15) **Women:** There are no specific clothing regulations such as knee-length skirts etc but discretion should always be foremost when selecting appropriate clothing. Mini skirts or short shorts are not acceptable, and tops should have reasonably high necks and ideally cover the shoulders. Spandex shorts and low cut tops are not acceptable. Please do not wear clothing that exposes your midriff. Slacks and jeans are acceptable

16) **Tattoos:** If you have Tattoos, please make every reasonable effort to conceal them while in Nicaragua. In most cases, there is not an issue. In some conservative parts of Nicaragua, however, tattoos are exclusively associated with gang membership and may be offensive.

17) **Remember to keep your devotional life:** Many times Satan will try to distract you. Keep up on your devotions and quiet time. If it means getting up early or going to bed later, do so. Participate in church meals and meetings: The services are a must during your time here – not only will you benefit from being there but the church members need to see your example. Making disciples is the ultimate focus of the work here. You are an important example to the many little eyes and many older curious eyes. While the services in Spanish can be challenging for English speaking missionaries, is important that you join in as well as you can while you are here. Even though the local people may not understand your words, your body language (clapping etc) can convey good messages. We will have translators at the services.

18) **Be Gracious:** If you are given a meal or are offered a special gift, rejecting it could be considered rude. We need to be careful what we eat for health reasons, but also remember that God is in control. Remember that Westerners are wasteful compared to Nicaraguans. Try not to waste things like food or even plastic bags. Some of them treasure Ziploc bags & reuse them. Always say: “por favor” – please, “gracias” - thank you, and “de nada” - you are welcome. Don’t express shock/disgust/criticisms of living conditions.

Above all, let us adhere to the admonitions of the Apostle Paul when he said, “*We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God*” (2 Corinthians 6:3-7)

19) **Safe Travel:** Team members should be aware of the following precautions to be taken when traveling in Nicaragua.

- a. Use the same common sense traveling overseas that you would at home. Be especially cautious in (or avoid) areas where you may be more easily victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and crime-ridden neighborhoods (Most neighborhoods in Nicaragua are indeed crime ridden).
- b. Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly lit streets.
- c. Avoid walking at night whenever possible.
- d. Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.
- e. Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations, crowds, or arguments.

- f. Street corners often contain individuals who are consuming alcoholic beverages or drugs. Many times these persons may be intoxicated and boisterous. Not only should groups not respond to communication (verbal or non verbal) for such individuals, but they should take alternate routes whenever possible to avoid contact.
- g. Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers.
- h. Avoid scam artists by being wary of strangers who approach you and offer to be your guide or sell you something at bargain prices.
- i. Do not accept anything from a stranger unless a local host has approved it.
- j. Beware of pickpockets. They often have an accomplice who will: jostle you, ask you for directions or the time, distract you (i.e. point to something spilled on your clothing), or distract you by creating a disturbance.
- k. Beware of groups of vagrant children who could create a distraction to pick your pocket.
- l. Many children are trained to approach foreigners and ask for things. They may look pitiful or in need, but generally we suggest refraining from engaging with, or offering items to, these children. There will be plenty of time for serving those in need. The danger lies in creating a tense situation due to a missionary's inexperience or unfamiliarity with the indigenous culture.
- m. Wear your shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers.
- n. Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. Try to ask for directions only from individuals in authority.
- o. If you are confronted, don't fight back -- give up your valuables immediately.
- p. Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Criminals have been known to drug food or drink offered to unsuspecting and potential victims. In addition, these items can contain bacteria or contaminants that can cause sickness or death. Only eat prepackaged food items (candy bars, bread, etc), items prepared in the host homes or by hosts, or at acceptable restaurants. Consuming food items on the street hospitalized a previous team member.

# Suggestions for After the Trip

## Back Home - “Nica Night”

After debriefing among yourselves as a team in Nicaragua, share your experience with your supporters! Please send thank you letters to all who helped make the trip possible. You can invite them to the church for an evening of fellowship and sharing. Bring your souvenirs to decorate the room and have pictures available. Be sure to check your church staff to avoid scheduling conflicts.

Remember, Christians at home may have a hard time understanding the things you have seen. Be gentle and kind with them, as you seek to share your experiences in love. Nevertheless, by all means, share, so that the Gospel will continue to flow through you!