



Nicaragua: Pre-Trip Guide

Created 2015



About Nicaragua

- Major tourist areas include: Leon, Granada, Isla de Ometepe, and San Juan del Sur.
- Nicaragua has a rich culture, but still experiences effects from the Revolution that occurred from 1960-1990 (known as the Iran Contra War/Affair or the Sandinista movement). You'll see remnants of the Spanish colonial period in the city centers and cathedrals, and fragments of the "civil" war in murals around towns.
- Machismo:
http://web.stanford.edu/group/womenscourage/Repro_Latin/ekobash_HIVmachismo_Latin.html
- Nicaragua has the most volcanoes in Central America - great for hiking! There are also many cloud (or rain) forests.

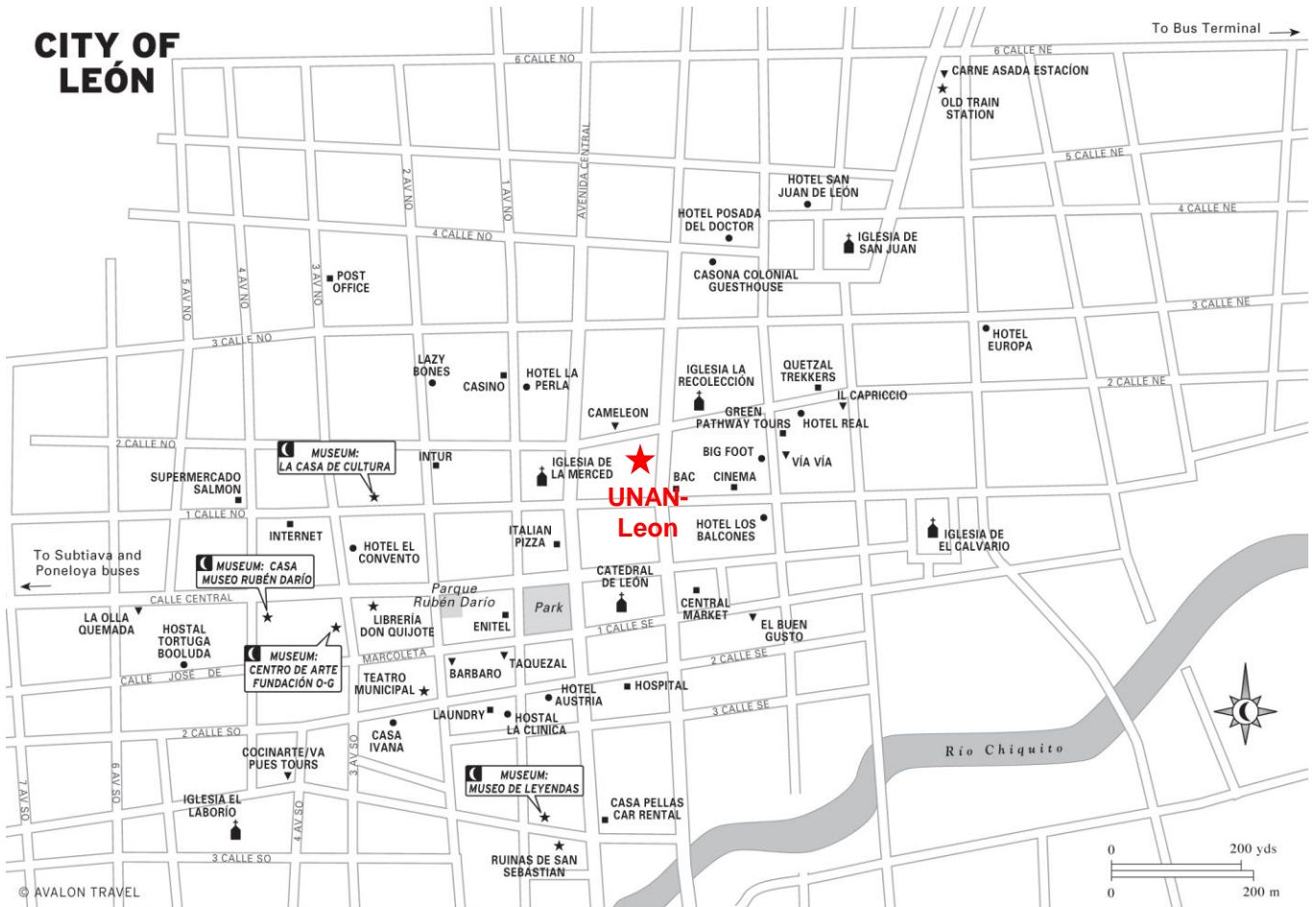


About Leon

- With just over 200,000 people, it is the second largest city in Nicaragua.
- Points of interest:
 1. **León Viejo** (old Leon): León was originally founded in 1524 but after a series of earthquakes, was abandoned in 1610. The ruins of old Leon are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
 2. **Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption of León:** This is a typical colonial baroque building built between 1747 and 1814. It is the largest cathedral in Central America. The famous poet and diplomat, Rubén Darío, is among illustrious people buried in the cathedral's crypts.
 3. **Volcanoes:** Surrounding Leon are Momotombo and Cerro Negro.
 4. **Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, León** (UNAN-León) is a state-funded public university that was established in 1812 and is the oldest university in the country.



Map of Leon



Before You Leave

- Health Information for Travelers to Nicaragua. Most travelers should obtain Hepatitis A and Typhoid Vaccinations. Other suggestions include: Hepatitis B, Malaria and Rabies. Check the CDC website here: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/nicaragua>
- Obtain and fulfill prescription for malaria prophylaxis, if deemed necessary (check with your doctor as some malaria prophylaxis will require that you begin taking them prior to leaving the US).
- Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond the time you plan to return and that you have at least two blank pages.
- Ensure you have travel health insurance. Vanderbilt has a group plan with HTH Worldwide Insurance and you can purchase short-term coverage. Find more information here: https://webapp.mis.vanderbilt.edu/studioabroad/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent_ID=E83863BD-9A32-7CA0-B92DCF0450860B55&Link_ID=C8CB82A5-C1FE-003A-1004174A4A63A5FD&pID=11&IID=70
- Make copies of your passport, health insurance, and other documents. Take your originals and one set of copies with you, and leave one set of copies with someone in the US.
- Ensure you have at least \$50 in US cash for Visa fees. The Nicaraguan embassy indicates that there will be fees for US citizens upon entry, but this is often not fulfilled. More information found here: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/nicaragua.html>
- Note the maximum length of stay in Nicaragua is 90 days.

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- The US Embassy in Nicaragua is located at: Km 5 ½ Carretera Sur Managua, Nicaragua. Telephone: (505) 2252-7100. After-hours Telephone: (505) 2252-7171.
- ATM cards: Visa is widely accepted. Most international credit and debit cards are also accepted. You can purchase International Visa cards that can be preloaded and used at ATMs around the world (these are available at most grocery stores).
- The Nicaraguan Cordoba is approximately 27 units to \$1.00 US. Wait to exchange any currency. You can likely get better exchange rates when you arrive in-country.
- Please do not bring gifts and donations to Nicaragua unless you have checked in with your site supervisor.



Packing Suggestions

- Please consider the culture of Nicaragua and the people you will be working with when choosing your dress. Aim to dress conservatively: bring pants and longer skirts and shorts. In hospitals, plan to wear full scrubs or the scrub top and jean. Bring both professional and casual clothing. **Jeans are very popular in Nicaragua. Shorts are fine to wear in tourist areas like Granada and Leon, but will cause unwanted attention in rural areas and Managua.**
- Pack for both sun and rain. Nicaragua has a tropical climate and can have unpredictable weather. The rainy season is generally during our summer and the dry season during our winter.
- Plain, nice cotton clothes. You will have the opportunity to do laundry or have it done for you.
- Sunblock, hat, umbrella, and other warm-weather clothing
- A raincoat or poncho
- Sturdy closed-toed shoes and sandals
- Exercise clothes (if you plan on going on a jog, etc.)
- Jacket (if you plan on hiking volcanoes or going into the mountains)
- Hiking boots (if you plan to go on hikes)
- Please bring an extra supply of any prescriptions including glasses and contact lenses. While most over the counter medications can be found at local pharmacies, you will often not be able to find specific prescription medications.



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- Bring a small day pack. You will be grateful not to take your large luggage on a weekend excursion or day trip.
- Bring a water bottle. Tap water is safe to drink in Managua.
- Note: Nicaragua has 120 Volt outlets. North American plugs will work just fine. No need for an adaptor.
- A bath and face towel.
- Flip flops for the shower. Be prepared for cold showers - hot water is rare.
- Toilet paper and hand sanitizer – many shops, restaurants, and places may not have toilet paper and/or soap/running water. Travel rolls and bottles are available in the travel sections of US grocery stores. *Note: the septic systems in many areas do not handle toilet paper well, therefore, it is customary to put the toilet paper in a basket next to the toilet. Ask your host what is appropriate so as not to break the plumbing.
- Feminine products – sanitary pads are relatively easy to find but tampons may be hard to find in stores so pack accordingly
- Miscellaneous: Camera, journal, money belt, games or cards, DVDs to watch on laptops, books, other toiletries and items for which you prefer a particular brand (stores will have many of the common items that you use in the US, however, the varieties may vary)

What NOT to Bring

- White clothes as they will get dirty very quickly.
- Clothes made from nice fabrics or anything that is special to you.
- Unnecessary electronics - Kindles, e-Readers, DVD players, iPods, and smart phones are great to bring for your downtime, but only use them in your living area and don't bring them out in public areas. Also, don't count your money out in the open when on the bus, market, or other public place.
- Anything that is expensive or flashy.



Medications to Have on Hand

- **You will be able to find almost anything in the pharmacies (over the counter).**
- Cipro (ciproflaxin) - a broad spectrum antibiotic that would be especially good for intestinal bacteria, GI symptoms. Usually you would take one pill, twice a day, for three days. (In the US, prescription is necessary). You will be able to find other similar medications in-country.
- Laxatives or some fiber supplement.
- Pepto Bismol for mild symptoms and some prevention.
- Imodium AD, for diarrhea. Lomotil is a prescription med for “bowel urgency”
- Cold medicine
- Topical ointment for insect bites, rashes, etc.
- A small bag of Band-Aids and antibiotic ointment.
- Feminine health and hygiene products/medications

Previous Student Travel Advice

- Typical foods include: vigoron, gallo pinto (rice and beans), kujada (similar to cheese), queso seco, corn tortillas, enchiladas (much different from Mexican enchiladas), nacatmales, tajadas (thin, fried plantains usually served with fried cheese), platanos fritos/cocido
 - The Nicaraguan diet consists of a LOT of fried foods. If you are living with a host family, I would be prepared for this.
- Nicaraguans are usually quite knowledgeable about the buses - if you are confused, just ask! Buses travel between cities, picking up people along the roadside as they go. The destination of buses are written on the front of the bus. If you are stationed in Managua, it is really easy to travel on the weekends! Main travel hubs in Managua include Mercado Israel (where you can catch a bus to Leon), La UCA (from here you can travel to Granada and many other places), Mercado Huembes (to travel to Isla de Ometepe).
- Using buses for daily travel (in Managua): I personally loved using the “chicken buses.” Basically, you will see a group of people waiting for the bus on the side of the road- join them and catch the bus (usually a simple flick of the wrist will tell the driver you want to get on). When you want to get off the bus, just go to one of the doors and ask the driver or attendant to stop (bus stops are flexible). Generally bus fares are 2-3 cordobas (if you are traveling in the city). If you are leaving Managua to go to a tourist destination expect to pay from 30-75 cordobas (depending on how far, this is still only 2 to 5 USD)
- Sandinista Day is on July 19th. If you are in Managua, things can get pretty crazy and all of the buses will be off their normal schedules. Experience the local culture and join in the celebration.
- My favorite places were: Isla de Ometepe, Somoto Canyon, Matagalpa, Leon, and Granada.
- If you do not speak Spanish: please travel with someone who does! There are few people outside of really touristy areas that speak English.
- I never experienced any problems with safety. However, as a solo woman who lived in a fairly rural community, I would get heckled a lot by men. If you are a girl walking alone- I would be prepared for this. Also- if you are a solo girl- I would avoid walking alone at night. Like I said- Nicaragua felt quite safe to me and the people are very friendly!