



## DELEGATE INFORMATION PACKET

### *Welcome*

*Thank you for choosing CoCoDA for your upcoming trip to Nicaragua. Our goal is to make your visit a positive and life changing experience. While visiting another culture is never completely comfortable, we want to relieve any concerns, worries or fear you may have. We want you to be able to focus on engaging, learning, reflecting and growing. We want you to have fun!*

*This packet is intended to help you prepare for your visit. It explains our unique approach to delegations, the necessary preparations before you come to Nicaragua and guidelines for having a great experience while in Nicaragua. While we are always available to answer your questions, most of what people ask is answered within these pages. **You will be asked to sign a confirmation that you read this manual.***

*Again, thank you for deciding to leave your comfort zone!*

*Sincerely,*

*Jim Mulholland  
Executive Director*

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Program Director*

*Yunior Gomez  
Delegation Director*

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# CoCoDA Delegation Overview

## -- About CoCoDA

**Mission.** Companion Community Development Alternatives (CoCoDA) is a non-profit organization with offices in Indianapolis, Indiana and Suchitoto, El Salvador. Our mission is to cooperate in projects for democratic, community-based economic and social development in Central America, and to promote awareness and social responsibility in the United States for more just relations with Latin America. For more information, please visit [cocoda.org](http://cocoda.org).

CoCoDA is not a travel agency. We assume those who travel with us are looking to be more than tourists, that they wish to immerse themselves in another culture. The fees you pay CoCoDA cover more than simply the logistics of your trip. They cover a myriad of supportive services in our host communities both before and after your visit. While someone can certainly travel to Central America more cheaply than with CoCoDA, they cannot do so AND contribute to the advancement of the host country.

**History.** Founded in 1992, CoCoDA has cooperated in a variety of community development projects with grassroots organizations in El Salvador. In 2015, we also began working in Nicaragua. We sponsor water, sanitation, health, education, communications, economic development, and empowering women, as well as emergency relief efforts following disasters. Most funding for these projects has come from individuals and community-based organizations in the U.S. who send participants on CoCoDA delegations and then do education and fundraising upon their return from Central America.

Over the past 24 years, CoCoDA has taken more than 100 delegations from churches, clubs, high schools and universities in the United States to visit Central America. We have also coordinated many speaking and cultural tours in the United States featuring community leaders from Central America.

## -- The Purpose of CoCoDA Delegations

**Purpose.** CoCoDA Delegations provide people in the United States with the opportunity to visit Nicaragua not as tourists, saviors, experts or critics, but as guests of organizations and communities that are working to improve social and economic conditions in their country. These visits allow delegation participants to learn first-hand about Nicaraguan history and current realities from the perspective of Nicaraguans themselves, and to experience Nicaraguan culture through activities, meetings, excursions and day-to-day informal interactions with local residents. This cultural and educational experience helps people in the United States to better understand the world and the role of the United States in the world, as seen from outside our own geographic, political and cultural boundaries.

## -- What Do CoCoDA Delegations Do?

**Description.** Every CoCoDA delegation is customized and organized based on the passions and interests of the delegation participants as well as the needs and priorities of the host organizations and communities in Nicaragua. Most delegations last from 7 to 21 days, although we can facilitate shorter and longer visits. Every delegation begins with educational meetings and visits in the capital city. Delegations then travel to a Nicaraguan community where they learn, work and play. This visit includes

staying with a host family. One or two days are usually set aside for relaxation either at one of Nicaragua's beautiful beaches or in the mountains. **(For a sample itinerary, review Appendix A.)**

**Projects.** Most delegations seek some tangible way to contribute to community development projects in the host communities, such as financial or material aid, technical assistance and training, and physical labor. Often delegations set fund raising goals to support projects as a follow-up to their delegation visit. Some groups plan annual visits over the course of several years to see the progress of the projects they support and to maintain friendships with people in Nicaragua. CoCoDA incorporates project fees into the cost of every delegation. On rare occasions, when a project is especially ambitious, a delegation may be asked to raise additional monies for a project.

It is important to understand that completing your project is not the purpose of the trip. Central Americans can usually do what you are doing better, more quickly and more affordably. Allowing you to collaborate on their project is their gift to you. The project is the context for you to have a cross-cultural experience. The money and labor you bring to the project is compensation for the experience and learning you will receive from your host community.

## **-- What Services Does CoCoDA Provide?**

**Coordination.** CoCoDA provides all in-country (Nicaragua) logistical planning and coordination, as well as pre-trip preparation materials. In most cases, the co-sponsoring organization and/or each participant is expected to arrange round-trip travel to and from Nicaragua, ensure timely payment of delegation fees and complete CoCoDA registration and waiver forms. We also ask co-sponsoring organizations to provide a delegation organizer to work with CoCoDA staff and coordinators. **(For a full list of specific roles and responsibilities, review Appendix B)**

**Logistics.** Once you arrive in Nicaragua, we handle every detail of your trip. We will provide orientation, arrange all meals and lodging, supply all transportation and deal with any emergencies. While many groups handle their own reflection times, we can assist with these as well. Our coordinators are bilingual and can interpret whenever necessary. They will accompany your delegation throughout your visit. While you may want to bring some cash for snacks, extra sodas, alcoholic beverages and souvenirs, all other expenses while in country are covered by your delegation fee.

## **-- CoCoDA Delegation Orientation**

**Guidelines.** Upon arrival to Nicaragua, the CoCoDA coordinators will lead an orientation. Besides briefing you on the current situation in Nicaragua, reviewing expectations and going over your itinerary, the orientation gives you an opportunity to review situations you might face on the trip and get to know others in the group. **This orientation will also include a review of the Confirmation of Understanding you signed prior to arriving in country. (See Appendix G)**

**History and Culture.** Even more importantly, the orientation will help you understand the unique history and culture of Nicaragua. Our orientations are active and participatory, with visits to important sites in Managua, museums, and national offices. You will meet many wonderful and inspiring people. You will also hear stories from people who participated in the revolution and fought against oppression. Hearing these stories helps to convey the Nicaraguan reality.

**Customized Experiences.** In addition, depending upon the focus of your delegation, CoCoDA will create specific orientation experiences for each delegation. If you're focusing on culture, we may visit a Mayan

archeological site or if you focused on environmental issues, we may visit a deforested area. Our goal is to connect you with Nicaraguans who share your interests and passions.

## -- Homestays

One of the key components and highlights of a CoCoDA delegation is living with a Nicaraguan family. Though delegates are often apprehensive about the homestay, this is often identified as the highlight of the trip. There is no better way to know a culture and people than by living with them.

**Host Homes.** Participants stay in humble homes. While most homes have electricity and running water, these services can be intermittent. Though you may not have the privacy you are accustomed to having, your host family will offer you the best they have to offer, often giving you the best room in the house. Simple pit latrines are standard. Usually animals such as dogs, cats, poultry, etc. are around the homes.

**Sleeping.** Host families provide beds, mosquito netting and fans for delegates, but you may want to bring these items:

- sheet or light blanket
- small pillow / sweatshirt to fold into a pillow
- earplugs if you are a light sleeper

**Bathing.** Most homes have one washing area for bathing, where the family also washes dishes and clothes. Bathing is rustic and may be a more public experience than you are used to. Delegates sometimes bathe in make-shift shower areas, dumping water overhead with small containers (guacales).

**For non-private bathing: a bathing suit/sports bra & shorts or long t-shirt for women; shorts for men.**

**Meals.** Participants eat meals together in a central location in the host family community. Corn tortillas, rice, beans, beef, chicken, fish, eggs, cheese and a wide range of tropical fruits and fruit juices are staples of the typical Nicaraguan diet. Participants drink purified water brought in for their stay. **Brushing your teeth with purified water is highly recommended.**

Those with special dietary needs or requirements should communicate these to CoCoDA prior to the trip. While we can usually accommodate these needs, sometimes this will require the delegate bringing or purchasing supplemental foods. Unfortunately, we cannot accommodate picky eaters.

## -- Is It Safe In Nicaragua?

**Travel Warnings.** Nicaragua is one of the safest countries in Central America and is not under a United States State Department Travel Warning. CoCoDA works in the safest areas in the country. In 23 years of taking delegations to Central America, we have had only two incidents of robbery on CoCoDA delegations, and in neither case was anyone physically injured. We carefully monitor and avoid areas where there has been persistent crime. For more information, you are encouraged to read the US State Department notes on Nicaragua.

**Precautions.** CoCoDA takes precautions for the safety of delegations, such as traveling on known roads with drivers we know and trust, and lodging in guest houses with responsible managers in secure residential areas in the city, and staying with local residents who provide hospitality in rural areas. Those who abide by our simple, common sense safety guidelines are as safe in Nicaragua as they would be in North America.

**Health.** There are health risks in Nicaragua, such as intestinal illnesses and mosquito-borne illnesses such as zika, chikungunya and dengue. Most delegations that take recommended precautions outlined later in this packet enjoy their trip to Nicaragua without sickness, although an occasional upset stomach is fairly common on delegations.

**Emergencies.** In the event that medical attention is required in Nicaragua, CoCoDA has a small reserve fund to pay for medical emergencies (most medical centers in Nicaragua require cash payment for treatment). Participants are required to acquire CoCoDA's designated health/travel insurance (through [International Medical Insurance](#)) unless covered through a university plan. They will be required to refund CoCoDA for any medical expenses made on their behalf. Upon return, CoCoDA will assist the delegation member with any claim that must be presented to the Insurer beyond the agreed deductible.

In the medical emergency, security issue or natural disaster, CoCoDA has developed protocols for quickly reviewing the situation, determining a course of action with the delegation leadership and removing a delegate or the entire delegation quickly and safely. **(For more detail on our emergency policies, please refer to Appendix F.)**

## Logistics

### -- Passports, Tourist Cards and Visas

**Passports.** **Your passport is your MOST important legal document while traveling overseas.** Make sure that your passport is still valid beyond your return to the US. **For the purposes of travel to Nicaragua, passports expire 6 months PRIOR to the expiration date listed.** We have learned this the hard way – delegates have been left at the US airport because they were trying to travel in the 6-month window before the stated expiration date.

For US citizens, getting a new passport usually takes about three weeks, longer near the holidays. Your nearest passport office is usually in the main Post Office or Federal Building. To apply, you'll need:

- An official copy of your birth certificate (issued from the city, county, or state where you were born) or other proof of U.S. citizenship.
- A current photo ID plus another form of ID with your signature
- Two identical 2" x 2" passport photos (1 3/8" from bottom of chin to top of head).

If you tell the passport agency that you are leaving in less than two weeks, they will put a "rush" on your application, but it will still take about 10 days. If you are applying by mail, it's also possible to speed it up by asking that the passport be returned to you via express mail, but there are no guarantees on the amount of time it will take. **There is an extra fee for a rush order.**

For more passport information, please see the [US State Department Passport website](#).

**Make three copies of your Passport.** Leave a copy with your Emergency Contact, carry a copy with you at all times and provide one to the delegation coordinator.

**Tourist Cards** are required for US and Canadian citizens. They cost \$10 and are purchased *upon arrival* at the Managua airport. **(This cost is your responsibility.)** If you have a passport from another country, please let CoCoDA know early so we can assist with visa application if needed.

When you are filling out tourist card paper work, you will be asked where you will be staying. List the following address: **Lost Inn Managua, KM 4.5 Carretera a Masaya Del Restaurante TIP Top, 2 Cuadras al Oeste, #25, Managua, 14034, Nicaragua. (505)2278-0155.**

When asked the purpose of trip, keep it simple - tourism or vacation is sufficient.

***You need to carry a copy of your passport and the Tourist Entry Card (received upon arrival at the airport) at all times while in Nicaragua.***

## **-- Entrance into Nicaragua**

**Step 1: Immigration & the Tourist Card.** Upon exiting the airplane, proceed to Immigration. When it is your turn, you will be asked to present your passport and appropriate forms, and the immigration official will ask you to pay \$10 to buy a Tourist Card. Give the Lost Inn Managua address as your destination and vacation as your purpose.

**Step 2: Pick up your luggage.** If your luggage is missing, make a claim with the airline, giving them the Lost Inn Managua address and the following phone number: 2278-0155.. **Send everyone who has their luggage through customs immediately. Do not hold up the entire group.**

**Step 3: Customs.** Go through the customs with the form you filled out on the airplane. In this line, you may or may not be asked to run your luggage through an x-ray machine. Do not be surprised if you are randomly selected for customs inspection. Make sure you have your luggage tag, you may be asked to show it to prove you are carrying your own luggage.

**If you are selected for Customs inspection.** You will need to open up your bags or boxes to be searched. Generally they will ask you to open up your luggage and will just check around the sides. Should you be bringing donations like computers or other electronic devices, they should be identified for personal use.

**Step 4: Exit building and look for CoCoDA Coordinator.** We will be waiting for you just outside as you exit Customs and holding a CoCoDA sign. If you do not see the CoCoDA Coordinator, gather the group further away from the doors and wait to be contacted by CoCoDA staff. We will find you.

## **-- Staying Connected in Nicaragua**

**Group E-mails.** Your CoCoDA coordinator will assist your delegation in composing and sending group e-mails to friends and family. This saves the time and effort of every delegate having to find internet access and time. Often, we attach pictures of the group. This allows you to assure friends and family of your safe arrival.

**Cell phones.** We do not recommend using your cell phones to make telephone calls while in Nicaragua. International calling plans are very expensive. Smart phones can still be used to connect to the internet. However, we encourage delegates to be careful when and where they use their phone.

**Internet access.** The internet is actually very good in Nicaragua when accessible. It is the most reliable and cost effective method of communication while in Nicaragua. Access is available at the Guest House in Managua and in many restaurants. Internet cafes are available at low cost. Smart phones, iPods, mini iPads, mini Tablets work best. **Internet access is usually not possible during the homestay.**

## -- Currency, Credit Cards and ATMs

**Currency.** The Cordoba is the legal tender in Nicaragua. Nonetheless, many establishments will accept dollars as well, though you need to remember that 100 Cordobas is the equivalent of about \$4. Many establishments will not accept large bills. We recommend bringing \$5 and \$10 bills. **DO NOT BRING Travelers Checks.** They are extremely difficult if not impossible to exchange. We recommend delegates use a money belt to secure money and passport. In general, we do not recommend bringing large amounts of cash. Unless you are here for several weeks, most delegates have trouble spending \$100 while in Nicaragua. Remember, most of your expenses are covered in country.

**Credit/Debit Cards.** Most credit cards can be used in most commercial/tourist sites. However, it is **STRONGLY** recommended you do not depend solely on these options. Cash always works. **Photocopy the FRONT & BACK of all credit cards/Driver's License, etc. Bring a copy with you and leave one at home. If lost, you will have what you need.** We also recommend calling all your credit/debit card company with dates you will be in Nicaragua so your card isn't blocked.

**ATMs.** ATMs are available in Managua and in many smaller towns. Some may not recognize or dispense money from your card. Expect higher fees for using the ATMs.

## -- Health preparations and recommendations

**Overview.** The healthier you are during and after your trip to Nicaragua, the better the experience will be. Following are common recommendations for travelers to Central America. Other preparations may be necessary depending on your health history and needs. We have compiled some recommendations, taken from the CDC's website, and included some perspectives from past experience with delegations.

However, we suggest that you contact your health care provider or nearby international health center at least 4-6 weeks before your trip for perspectives on these recommendations. Ultimately, the preparations you make and your health in Nicaragua are your responsibility. More in-depth information can be obtained from the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](http://www.cdc.gov).

### **Before You Go**

"\*" indicates CoCoDA recommendations, the others are general recommendations of the CDC.

- 1.\* Be sure you have an up-to-date Tetanus booster (you should get a new one if you haven't had one in the last ten years). If uncertain, get a tetanus booster.
2. \*Hepatitis A vaccine or Immune globulin: This will boost your immunity to hepatitis A, a viral infection of the liver transmitted by the fecal oral route, through direct person-to-person contact, from contaminated water, ice or shellfish, or from fruits or uncooked vegetables contaminated through handling. Symptoms include fatigue, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, dark urine, jaundice, vomiting, aches and pains, and light stools.
3. Hepatitis B vaccine, particularly recommended for travelers who will be providing health care and have a reasonable risk of exposure to blood or body fluids containing blood should be vaccinated. Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver.
4. Chloroquine is often recommended as prevention of malaria, a serious parasitic infection transmitted to humans by a mosquito, which is a risk in rural areas. However, not everyone takes them and to

date we've not had any cases of malaria on our trips. The weekly dosage for an adult is 500 mg once a week. These tablets are taken one week before arrival, weekly in the country and for four weeks after departure. Even more important than the tablets will be using effective insect repellent while in the communities, particularly in the early morning and at night.

5. Typhoid fever vaccine is recommended for travelers to Central America, especially when traveling to smaller cities, villages, or rural areas. Typhoid Fever is a bacterial infection transmitted through contaminated food and/or water, or directly between people.

## **While In Nicaragua**

**Gastrointestinal problems.** You may get some type of digestive distress during or after your trip to Nicaragua because of the changes in diet and general conditions of hygiene. Travelers' diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which are found throughout the region and can contaminate food or water.

**Food Safety.** Being careful about choosing what you eat and drink can save you unnecessary illness. CoCoDA only uses restaurants with a proven record of cleanliness and proper food preparation. In the villages, our food workers have been trained as well. In general, hot foods are safe. When in doubt, pass. Most illnesses come from people ignoring the following recommendations:

- Avoid vegetables and fruits that were likely cleaned with local water. Especially avoid pre-sliced or peeled fruits or fruit drinks and juices.
- If you eat fruit and vegetables, wash and peel it before eating.
- Drink only bottled water or soda. Avoid ice cubes.
- Avoid street vendors.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water.

**Hand Washing.** Along with cautious food selection, **thorough and frequent hand washing with soap and water is one of the most important** steps in avoiding gastrointestinal illness. More eating is done with the hands in Nicaragua than in the U.S. Contaminated hands are a common way that travelers are exposed to microbes that make them sick. Anti-bacterial hand sanitizer is useful for keeping hands clean in the communities.

**Mosquitos.** While we have little trouble with mosquito borne diseases, Nicaragua does have incidents of malaria, zika, dengue fever and chikungunya. You will be supplied with a mosquito net and should use it at night. To reduce mosquito bites, travelers should take insect repellent with them to use on any exposed areas of the skin. According to the CDC, the most effective compound is DEET.

## **After You Return Home**

It is not uncommon for people returning to the U.S. after visiting Central America to have gastrointestinal problems. If you experience this for more than a week, you should see a health care provider (HCP). If you become ill, even as long as a year after your return, be sure to inform your HCP where you have traveled.

## -- Health / Travel Insurance

Many universities and organizations carry health and travel insurance. If this is the case, please inform CoCoDA of the coverage and expectations of that insurer. However, you will be expected to handle all insurance matters in Nicaragua and upon your return to the US.

Health / Travel insurance is mandatory in all other CoCoDA's delegations. This insurance, provided through [International Medical Group \(IMG\)](#) is your responsibility unless CoCoDA has contracted to handle these costs as part of the delegation fee. The good news is that delegates have very seldom needed to use this insurance.

Please familiarize yourself with the Benefits, Exclusions, Deductibles and Coverage. Unless otherwise indicated, all delegation participants should have a \$250.00 deductible with \$100,000.00 Maximum Policy Coverage.

## -- What To Pack and Wear

**Appearance.** Your appearance is important. During your stay in Nicaragua, men and women should wear comfortable, nice slacks, shorts, shirts and t-shirts. However, women should dress to limit drawing attention to themselves. Lots of jewelry attracts thieves, etc. Women should be aware that not wearing a bra or wearing sheer dresses or skirts without a slip will likely draw unwanted attention.

**Comfort.** You should dress comfortably. Clean, neat, casual clothes are fine. Don't expect to wear shorts everywhere. The weather will be warm (80-90 F) in the daytime. Women may be cooler in a skirt or dress, but pants and shorts are fine and recommended in the countryside. When you pack, think about what would be the easiest to wash by hand. In the evenings, in the mountains, and the period from June to December, it gets cooler, so bring a lightweight sweater or jacket. Good walking shoes are important. Work or hiking boots are highly recommended.

**Packing.** In general, bring the least luggage possible. Do not bring anything valuable or irreplaceable. We recommend bringing everything in your carry-on. Most delegates bring far too much. If you choose to bring more than a carry-on, we recommend that you pack a change of clothes, vital toiletries, and any medication in a carry on bag in the event that your luggage arrives late or is lost. **(See Appendix D)**

**Photographs and Videos.** Whether you use your smart phone or a camera, before taking photos or videos, be sure to ask permission. Respect the people you want to photo or record.

## -- Upon Your Return

**Adjustment.** Sometimes returning home can be uncomfortable. Your point of view has forever shifted. Expect to notice both positives and negatives in your own culture. Don't feel guilty about where you live. Instead, see your experience in Nicaragua as mind and heart expanding. Become an advocate for those in less prosperous countries.

**Advocacy.** We hope that you share your experiences in Nicaragua with others upon your return to your home country, and that what you have learned will be incorporated into efforts for justice, human rights, sustainable development and grassroots democracy, whether you take a domestic or international solidarity focus. We also encourage you to support CoCoDA by supporting our projects and partners.

Annual contributions from former delegates (ranging from \$25 to over \$1,000) account for 50% of CoCoDA's operating budget.

**Evaluation.** Shortly after your return home, you will receive an e-mail with a link to an evaluation survey. Please take the fifteen minutes necessary to offer your input. We take your suggestions seriously and continually adjust our delegations based on these evaluations.

**Staying Connected to Host Families.** We encourage people to stay connected with their host families via Facebook, e-mail and even phone. **However, we highly discourage financial support while in country and especially after you return.** Your host family is compensated for hosting delegates. They will be hosting other delegates throughout the year. Your financial gifts can actually have negative consequences, especially if some host families are receiving financial gifts and others aren't. If you are asked for money by a host family while in country, please inform your CoCoDA coordinator. If this happens upon your return, please inform us at [info@cocoda.org](mailto:info@cocoda.org) before sending money.

## **Conditions and Guidelines**

### **-- General Conditions**

**Overview.** Nicaragua can be uncomfortable at times. The weather is very hot and humid (air conditioning is rare and so rooms can be stuffy), and pollution is wide spread. Long walks in hot weather may be necessary. Other times, you will experience long rides down very bumpy and dusty roads. Sometimes there are limited food choices. At times, you may be without running water or electricity, and if you go to the countryside there may be nights where you'll sleep on the floor, with just a thin mattress or floor pad, and with very little privacy. These conditions can create some stress when combined with busy days, new food, and the work of learning a new language and living in a different culture. Be prepared for long and hot days.

**It is important that you be prepared physically and psychologically to deal with these conditions.**

If you feel uncertain, or have a history of recurring physical and/or psychological problems, talk with us before deciding to participate in the delegation. Discussing potential difficulties now can help; not doing so can create problems. Once in Nicaragua, if you find you are having difficulties, don't keep that to yourself. Talk to your delegation coordinators.

### **-- Security and Safety**

**Keeping risks to a minimum.** CoCoDA cannot guarantee your safety, but we can provide you with a list of guidelines that, if adhered to, will help you assimilate Nicaraguan culture and greatly reduce dangerous situations.

- **Stay alert.** Pay attention to everything going on around you -- in the airport, restaurants, on the street, in busses, offices, buildings, out in the country, at the beach. If you look vulnerable, you are more likely to be robbed.
- **Be careful crossing the street.** The most common safety risk you will face is crossing the street. Cars and buses have the right of way over pedestrians. They will not stop for you! Traffic rules may not be the same as those to which you are used to.

- **Stay under the radar.** Do not call attention to yourself. Travel with as little flash and cash as possible. Do not count money or pull out large amounts of money in public; even if there is a security guard nearby. Thieves will follow you to where you are out of security guard's sight.
- **Limit bling.** Do not wear fancy jewelry/wedding rings.. Leave things you cannot bear to part with at home.
- **REMEMBER,** if robbed do not argue; give the thieves what they ask for.
- **Transportation.** Participants are required to ONLY USE transportation provided or approved by CoCoDA. Under no circumstances, should you drive a vehicle in Nicaragua or travel in a vehicle other than approved CoCoDA transportation. This includes recreational vehicles and motorcycles. Failure to comply will result in an immediate return to the US at the participant's expense.
- **Limit excessive drinking.** Excessive drinking reflects badly on you, the delegation and CoCoDA, and can result in an error of judgment and security risk. CoCoDA prohibits delegates from drinking in the host family community. In the city, or at the beach, please act responsibly. **Please verify your delegation's restrictions concerning alcohol consumption.**
- **No drug use.** Use of illicit drugs is grounds for **immediate return to the US at the delegate's expense.** If arrested for drug use in Nicaragua, CoCoDA has no power to assist you.

## -- Going to the Beach

Beaches in Nicaragua are beautiful and can be enjoyed if given proper respect.

**Be aware of riptides.** Nicaragua has strong rip tides that can drag a person out and knock you out if you try to swim to shore and against the current. CoCoDA asks that people do not go into the ocean above their waists to prevent being pulled out by the tide.

**What to do if caught in a rip tide.** Most importantly, DO NOT go in after the person or you will be pulled out too. If you get caught in a riptide swim parallel to the shore or out with the current until you can find a place to swim in where the current is not so strong. If you swim into the current that is pulling you out, you will be running against a treadmill and run out of energy quickly and more likely drown. Do not scream for help or panic as your energy will wear out faster.

**Personal safety.** Women should not walk alone on the beach and nor should anyone leave backpacks, sandals, etc. on the shore unprotected as they will get stolen.

## -- Earthquakes

**Don't panic.** In the event of an earthquake, you should not panic. Buildings do not fall down until rocked for some time—so if you are alert and quick you can escape heavy things falling on you.

**Seek safety.** If indoors, it is safer under a doorframe, desk or bed. If you have access to a patio, garage, or other area where heavy things will not fall on you, move immediately to that safer place. Beware of going out into the street in the city, as electrical lines falling can be more dangerous than a roof tile.

## -- Cultural Guidelines

**Be sensitive.** Norms and standards in other countries are different. Some of our customs offend Nicaraguan values. CoCoDA delegates should respect these differences and not be culturally arrogant. Be

open and take suggestions from Nicaraguans rather than imposing your views; however, feel free to engage in discussion around issues and give opinions.

**Be flexible.** The schedule of political and cultural events may change. Nicaragua does not have the communications and transportation infrastructure you may be used to. Be flexible and expect delays and changes. And remember, the concept of time in Nicaragua may be different from your own. "Time is relative."

**Be well groomed.** It is respectful to Nicaraguan culture to be neat and clean. Nicaraguans almost always wear clean and pressed clothes no matter how poor they are. You will not see Nicaraguans wearing shorts for the most part and never in the work place or formal settings. You will need business casual clothing for any formal meetings such as visits to Historic sites, Municipal Governments, Churches, etc. Otherwise non-wrinkled, neat, casual summer clothing is fine.

Nose-rings are not common in Nicaragua, so if you use one during your stay, expect stares. The same goes for tattoos. Nicaraguans commonly associate tattoos with gang members.

**Romance.** Cross-cultural romantic relationships are not recommended during your time in Nicaragua. They can jeopardize the objectives and credibility of your delegation, group dynamics, and lead to serious misunderstandings due to different cultural norms.

**Machismo.** Machismo an integral part of Nicaraguan culture and there is a double standard . Your actions may be interpreted differently than they would be at home. For example, going out alone with someone will not be seen as getting to know each other (maybe to be friends); it will be seen as a date. Often, married Nicaraguan men approach women to start a relationship without mentioning that they are seriously involved with someone else. Sadly, instead of reflecting poorly on the man, this reflects negatively on the woman.

## -- Group Guidelines

**Courtesy.** Respect the other delegation members. Sexist, homophobic, racist, and other oppressive attitudes are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Evaluate everything you do and say in terms of its effect on others. Avoid actions that attract attention. Think before you act or speak.

**Don't Wander.** Stay with your group when group activities are planned. Please do not leave the group without talking to the coordinators first. If the coordinator says you are in a situation where the security risk is serious, you must follow his or her directions and ask questions later. **Follow the coordinators instructions regarding security at all times.** Some of these instructions may seem unreasonable to you, however coordinators' do carry a responsibility for helping ensure the safety of delegation participants, and their instructions in this respect are meant to keep you safe.

**Obey Your Coordinator.** Respect the decisions of the CoCoDA coordinators and Nicaraguan hosts. They are responsible for your well being and the program. If you strongly disagree with a decision, raise your concerns with a member of the Coordination team.

**Participate.** Delegation members are expected to attend all group meetings and activities, unless other arrangements are made with delegation coordinators. While we will try to accommodate any health issues, accessibility concerns, dietary preferences, or religious or personal convictions, delegates are expected to fully engage in all the activities of the delegation.

## -- Miscellaneous

**Do not throw toilet paper in toilets, but in waste paper baskets beside the toilet.** Nicaraguan plumbing is not consistently modern. Don't always expect there to be running water; most neighborhoods are without water for some period of time every day. The pipes leading out from toilets are smaller in diameter than in other countries, and are easily plugged up. Put toilet paper and other foreign objects in the wastebasket, not in the toilet. If there isn't running water, you can flush the toilet by dumping a bucket of water into the toilet bowl.

**Latrines.** Many toilets in the countryside are simple pit latrines. If some are built a few steps off the ground, they are most likely dry composting latrines, which are environmentally friendly, if used correctly. They are anatomically built to separate liquid from solid waste, so the waste can be used for fertilizer afterward. You can throw toilet paper in the solid waste side and there are generally ashes or lye that you can throw in afterwards to cut the odor. Make sure ONLY LIQUID WASTE goes in the liquid side or you will clog the latrine and make a very difficult and messy job for the family.

**Washing up & Showers.** Running water is not guaranteed in the city or the countryside. Only cold water is available. Homes around the country generally have a big sink (**pila**) filled with water. You scoop clean water out with a bowl (**guacal**) to wash up, wash clothes, or take water to flush the toilet. Water in the pila should remain clean—don't throw your dirty clothes into it or wash your hands under the faucet with water falling into the clean water supply. In the city, showers are available; water often only runs in the morning. Generally there is a barrel of water available and a bowl (**guacal**) to sponge bath and rinse off. In the countryside, bathing areas in homes are often public; you may want to take a swimsuit or bath at night for more privacy.

**Electricity.** Same as US: 110 volts at 60 Hz. American-style plug-ins are normal although the 3-prong styles are not common so an adapter may be needed.

**Diet.** Many vegetarians and vegans have participated in this program with few problems; however, in most places your meals will have little variety. Many restaurants serve some vegetables. Vegetarians may want to bring granola bars or similar foods to supplement meals.

**Gift for Host Family.** It is customary to give people with whom you stay a small gift, something relatively inexpensive, ideally conveying something about you or your community. Ideas: photographs of you; t-shirts; baseball caps; stuffed animals; crayons; colored pencils, coloring books, and other art supplies.

## -- CoCoDA Nicaraguan Partners

### **Institute For Development and Democracy (IPADE)**

The Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE) is a non-profit civil organization, established in March 1990, in order to promote sustainable development and democracy in Nicaragua. For 25 years, it has administered projects and organized communities in the poorest and most vulnerable regions of the country.

The IPADE mission is to improve the conditions and the quality of life of vulnerable and excluded people, transforming institutional conditions and raising capacities of social groups and citizens, creating sustainable development and a democratic society. IPADE annually engages with over 20,000 Nicaraguans.

IPADE works in a wide variety of areas, dependent on the needs and priorities of their partner communities. They've worked in public policy, leadership formation, rain forestry, seed banking-storage, farm diversity, agro forest systems, business management, community based education, human rights, support of indigenous

populations, environmental risk management and adaptation to climate change, community entrepreneurship and fair trade, community organization, voting rights, electoral observation and electoral system reform.

For more information about IPADE, visit their website at [ipade.org.ni](http://ipade.org.ni).

# APPENDIX A

## Fourteen Day Sample Itinerary

(All itineraries are customized to meet the interests and passions of the delegation.)

### Arrival Day 1/Usually Sunday

12pm Arrive in Managua  
1:30 Lunch  
3pm Check in hotel  
6pm Dinner  
7pm General Orientation  
8pm History of Nicartagua

12:30 Lunch  
1:30 Siesta  
2:30 Project/Community activities  
6 p.m. Dinner  
7pm Group Reflection  
8pm Evening with host families

### Day 2/Monday

7am Breakfast at hotel  
8am Visit National Palace, Revolution Plaza  
10:30 National Museum  
12:30 Lunch  
2pm Visit the Market Roberto Huembes  
3pm Tiscapa Lagoon  
6pm Dinner/ Typical Nicaraguan meal  
7:30 Reflection time

### Day 7- 8/ Saturday-Sunday

Educational, Cultural and Recreational Activities

### Day 9-12

7am Breakfast  
8am Project  
12:30 Lunch  
1:30 Siesta  
2:30 Project/Community activities  
6 p.m. Dinner  
7pm Group Reflection  
8pm Evening with host families

Day 12:Community Going Away Party

### Day 3/Tuesday

7am Breakfast at hotel  
8am Visit supermarket for essentials  
8:30 Travel to Ocotal  
12:30 Lunch in Ocotal  
2pm Meet IPADE staff  
3pm Leave for host community  
5pm Welcome in community, meet host family  
6:30 Dinner

### Day 13

Day at Beach or Scenic area

### Day 4-6/Wednesday- Friday

7am Breakfast  
8am Project

### Day 14

7am Breakfast  
Travel to the Airport  
1 p.m. Leave for the US

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

In order to assure all the parties in creating a CoCoDA delegation understand their roles and responsibilities, this list outlines the responsibilities of delegation organizers, CoCoDA, the host families and the delegation member.

#### **Delegation Organizers (YOU)**

- Recruit, screen and select all delegates
- Collect all fees from delegates
- Purchase or assist delegates in purchasing airline tickets
- Provide CoCoDA with a Delegate Information Form and waivers for each delegate
- Provide pre-delegation orientation to all delegates, using this manual as a resource
- Coordinate with CoCoDA in customizing the itinerary and program details
- Provide CoCoDA with feedback based on program evaluations

#### **Delegation Members**

- Pay the delegation program fee on time
- Pay for airfare
- Obtain or renew passport, if necessary
- Participate in all orientations, programs and projects unless ill
- Avoid all food/drink other than that provided/approved by CoCoDA
- Use CoCoDA provided/approved transportation ONLY
- Engage in conversation with the host family
- Know your medical insurance policy and how to access services
- Bring prescribed medications to cover the length of the trip
- Report any concerns about safety, health, or logistics to CoCoDA staff immediately
- Pay for personal items, snacks, extra sodas, alcoholic beverages, and souvenirs.
- Bring or purchase a small gift to leave with your host family
- Complete a CoCoDA evaluation after your visit

## **CoCoDA (US)**

- Provide delegates with lodging, meals, transportation to and from all events during the delegation
- Provide a bi-lingual coordinator to accompany the delegation during all aspects of the visit
- Provide cultural and recreational options for weekends when requested
- Create, schedule and lead historic, political and cultural orientation for all delegates
- Offer translation and interpretation at all activities other than homestays
- Coordinate with all Nicaraguan partners and providers
- Provide each participant with a mosquito net and fan (when necessary)
- Provide delegation leaders with a local cell phone
- Handle all emergencies and special needs

## **IPADE (OUR PARTNER IN NICARAGUA)**

- Coordinate with CoCoDA in the selection and training of host families
- Coordinate with CoCoDA in selecting a project that meets the needs of the community as well as the passions of the delegates
- Coordinate with host families and the police to assure the safety of delegates

## **Host Families**

- Provide a clean, safe room and bed for delegates
- Spend time talking with the delegates, aiding in the language skills development
- Assistance with the washing of clothes
- Inform delegates of dangers, customs, or other information necessary for a successful visit
- Report any concerns about the delegate to CoCoDA staff immediately

## Appendix C:



### DELEGATE INFORMATION

Every delegation organizer will be supplied with a Delegate Information Excel Spreadsheet. Please collect the following information from each delegate and input this information into the Spreadsheet. **The spreadsheet should be supplied to CoCoDA no less than two weeks before arrival in Nicaragua.**

Name (as it appears on passport): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ (Non-university e-mail preferred)

Passport Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Country of issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Health Issues:

Allergies:

Dietary Issues:

Spanish Fluency?

None

Beginner

Intermediate

Fluent



## Acknowledgment of Risk and Waiver of Liability

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have voluntarily chosen to participate on a delegation to Nicaragua coordinated by Companion Community Development Alternatives, Inc. (referred to hereafter as "CoCoDA"). I am aware of a number of risks to my personal safety, all of which are beyond the control of CoCoDA, including but not limited to: the incidence of armed robbery and other criminal activity; public and private transportation, roads, and traffic conditions that do not meet the safety standards to which I am accustomed; sub-standard medical care; the absence of telephones or other means of prompt communication in the communities where I will be visiting; long distances that may separate the community where I am visiting from emergency services; lack of sanitation and exposure to parasites and diseases; and other substandard conditions that may be encountered in a "developing nation" environment.

**I understand that I am responsible for health / travel insurance and will be responsible for any costs should a health or emergency issue develop. I will provide CoCoDa with proof of insurance prior to my arrival in Nicaragua.**

I have read and understood the "Safety Advisory for Delegates", and I expressly assume the responsibility for educating myself and others whom I deem appropriate about the risks of travel to and in Nicaragua and, as against CoCoDA, its officers, board members, employees, advisors, agents and representatives, I expressly assume all such risks, both known and unknown.

I, my heirs, assigns, representatives, executors, and administrators hereby release and promise to hold harmless CoCoDA, its officers, board members, employees, advisors, agents and representatives from any liability that may arise from any bodily or mental harm, injury, loss, or illness (including but not limited to death) that may result from my participation in this activity, in all travel to, within, and from Nicaragua, and prior to my departure and following my return, and in all activities in any way related to my association with CoCoDA.

CoCoDA publicizes activities, including delegations, in its newsletter, website, etc. I give CoCoDA permission to use photographs in which I may appear for these and similar purposes. If I do not wish to appear in CoCoDA photographs I will so inform CoCoDA in writing prior to departure.

I have read the foregoing and sign this as an act of my own free will.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If the delegate is under the age of 21, this waiver must be signed by a parent or guardian:

I have read the foregoing, understand the risks, and give permission for my son or daughter to participate:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent / guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## SAFETY AND HEALTH ADVISORY FOR DELEGATES

There are health and security concerns that should be considered before traveling to Nicaragua. People interested in participating on a CoCoDA delegation should read the most recent U.S. State Department travel recommendations as well as pertinent warnings from the Center for Disease Control.

CoCoDA coordinators take safety precautions and the cooperation of all delegation participants is important. All CoCoDA delegates should have some type of health/travel insurance. CoCoDA recommends Patriot International Group Coverage health/travel insurance purchased through International Medical Group for each delegation participant if not otherwise covered by another insurance plan, although this insurance coverage is limited in amount and it does not cover all risks to which delegation participants may be exposed.

Mosquito borne viruses like chikungunya and zika are present in Nicaragua. CoCoDA will provide mosquito netting at night and recommends constant application of insect repellent. Those who abide by these protocols are low risk for infection. **We do not presently recommend travel to Nicaragua for pregnant women or women seeking to get pregnant.**

CoCoDA does require that every participant sign a waiver of liability prior to traveling with a delegation. Everyone under 21 is also required to have the permission and approval of a parent or guardian.

CoCoDA reserves the right to either turn down an individual's application to participate or to send a participant home early at his or her expense if CoCoDA coordinators' determine that the person may pose a risk to themselves or to other delegates.

## Appendix D:

### Recommended Packing List

*Remember, there are two kinds of luggage: carry-on and lost.*

Most people over pack. The following is a list of the **maximum** amount of stuff you should ever need to carry around (all of it—except for what you'll be wearing—ideally fits into 1 carry-on-size bag). Remember, your host family can and will wash clothes for you. When you begin to pack, put everything you think you'll need on your bed. Now, randomly throw half of it onto the floor. Pack what is left on the bed.

#### TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Health Insurance documents
- Copy of passport, credit cards, etc.
- Copies of prescriptions

#### EQUIPMENT AND NECESSITIES

- Daypack
- Camera, charger
- Alarm clock, watch
- Headlamp, flashlight
- Nutrition/power bars

#### HEALTH AND MEDICINE

- OTC medications: Tylenol, Pepto, Allergy
- Prescription medicine in original bottle
- Insect repellent – High DEET content
- Menstrual supplies
- Sunscreen
- Hydration powders
- Protein source for vegans/vegetarians

#### PERSONAL ITEMS

(Many items can be purchased in Nicaragua)

- Bio- degradable soaps and shampoos
- Contact lens solution
- Sun glasses, extra pair of glasses
- Towel
- Sleeping bag or sheets/light blanket
- Small pillow

#### MISCELLANEOUS

- Earplugs
- Sun hat, cap
- Reading materials
- Pictures from home
- Small gift for host family
- Work gloves

#### CLOTHING

- 2 pairs of pants or skirts
- 2 pairs of shorts
- 1 nice shirt
- 2-3 casual shirts
- 2-3 pairs of underwear
- 1-2 pairs of socks
- Light sweater, sweatshirt
- PJs for non-private sleeping
- Closed toe walking shoes/hiking boots  
(Sandals are not recommended)
- Flip flops for bathing
- Swimsuit
- Poncho

Light clothing that can be hand washed and quickly dried is recommended. Dress casually and modestly. Weather is warm (80-90 F), though cooler at night

# Appendix E

## Helpful Links and Resources

*Begin learning about Nicaragua before you travel. Below are websites with useful information to better prepare you for your experience.*

CoCoDA presently sends delegations to two locations in Nicaragua: Ocotal and Masaya.

[Ocotal](#) is the capital of the Nueva Segovia region. It is mountainous and very beautiful, but the infrastructure is fairly basic, especially once you leave Ocotal. Temperatures in Ocotal are in the 70s and 80s.

Masaya is about 45 minutes south of Managua. Masaya is a fairly densely populated area just south of Managua. It is near to many natural and historic sites. Temperatures in Jinotepe remain in the 80s and 90s all year around.

[The Trans-Americas Journey](#) website/blog contains lots of information about traveling in Nicaragua

[U.S. Department of State, Country Specific Information on Nicaragua](#) provides an overview of country specific information.

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) provides information to prevent illness and injury when traveling abroad.

[La Mariposa Spanish School & Eco Hotel](#) is CoCoDA's partner for Spanish Language instruction. La Mariposa offers intensive Spanish instruction with our medical students attending class Monday – Friday, 1:30 – 5:30pm. If your delegation involves Spanish instruction, you may want to visit their website.

### **Suggested Reading & Viewing Materials**

#### **Readings**

- [William Walker](#) is an interesting figure in Nicaraguan and Central American history and an example of how the United States and US citizens have often negatively impacted Nicaragua.
- Stephen Kinzer, [Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua](#) (Harvard Press, 2007)
- Gioconda Belli, [The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War](#) (Anchor, 2003)
- John A. Booth, [Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change](#), John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade, Thomas W. Walker, eds. (Westview Press, 2009).
- William Leogrande, [Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992](#) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 3-103. Pages 149-282

#### **Films**

- [Under Fire](#) (1983) 2 h 8 min. Set during the last days of the Nicaraguan revolution that ended the Somoza regime in 1979, this film stars Nick Nolte, Gene Hackman and Joanna Cassidy. Though the film is largely fictional, it was inspired by the murder of ABC reporter Bill Stewart and his translator Juan Espinoza by National Guard forces on June 20, 1979. ABC cameraman Jack Clark was shooting "incidental" footage, and caught the entire episode on tape. The footage was shown on national television in the United States and became a major international incident, undermining what remained of President Somoza's support. The

incident was the final straw for the Carter Administration's relationship with the Somoza regime. **FREE ON YOUTUBE**

- [\*Nicaragua: A Nation's Right To Survive\*](#) (1983). 52 min. This documentary investigates the involvement of the US in Nicaragua in the years before and after the 1979 Sandinista revolution. The revolution put an end to decades of a corrupt US backed Somoza dictatorship. **FREE ON YOUTUBE.**
- [\*Sandino\*](#) (1991) 2 h 15 min. This Spanish language movie narrates the life of Augusto Cesar Sandino (1895 - 1934) who led the Nicaraguan resistance to the US occupation of Nicaragua between 1927-1933 and his eventual success in forcing the US Marines to leave Nicaragua. **FREE ON YOUTUBE, but only in Spanish.**
- [\*Pictures From A Revolution\*](#) (1991) 1 h 33 min. Ten years after publishing a photo book on the Sandinista revolution, Susan Meiselas returns to Nicaragua to look for and interview the people in the original photos. This fascinating documentary examines the many diverse stories and opinions on the impact of the revolution on Nicaraguan culture and life. **Available for view through Docurama for \$2.99.**
- [\*School of Assassins\*](#) (1995). Maryknoll World Productions. Documentary narrated by Susan Sarandon. Describes the military assistance and training that the United States provides to Latin American countries at the U.S. Army School of the Americas. All too often the graduates of the school have used their training in attacks against their own people. Human rights advocates would like to see the school closed. . **FREE ON YOUTUBE.**
- [\*Walker\*](#) (1987) English. 1 h 24 min. The film is based on the life story of William Walker (1824–1860), the American filibuster who invaded Mexico in the 1850s and made himself President of Nicaragua shortly thereafter. Directed by Alex Cobb and starring Ed Harris and was filmed in Nicaragua during the Contra war. **Only available for purchase through Amazon.**
- [\*Carla's Song\*](#). (1996) 2 h 7 min. This British movie, set in 1987, tells the story of George, a Scottish bus driver, and Carla, a Nicaraguan woman living in exile in Glasgow. Searching for her past, Carla returns to a war-torn Nicaragua with George and is thrown into the thick of the US sponsored Contra insurgency. **Only available for purchase through Amazon.**

# Appendix F

## CoCoDA Health, Safety and Emergency Policy

While - to date - CoCoDA delegations and delegates have not been targets of violence, been present when an act of violence occurred, been victims of serious illness or accidental injury, or been negatively impacted by a natural disaster in Central America,

CoCoDA is prepared to respond to the following possible emergencies:

1. Violence against a CoCoDA delegate.
2. Violence against any person while a CoCoDA delegate is present.
3. Violence against any person in a location where CoCoDA delegates regularly visit.
4. Serious illness or accidental injury.
5. A natural disaster (earthquake, volcanic eruption, hurricane, flooding, etc.)

Should any of these circumstances occur;

1. CoCoDA will immediately insure the health and safety of the delegation or delegate. Those with health issues will immediately be seen by a physician and hospitalized if deemed necessary.
2. CoCoDA will immediately inform the delegation partner of the situation to determine with the partner whether immediate removal of the delegation or delegate is warranted.
3. If immediate removal of the delegation or delegate is judged as unwarranted, CoCoDA will determine the appropriate action in consultation with the delegation partner. In security issues, a temporary cessation of delegation activity may occur. With health issues, CoCoDA will coordinate with local healthcare workers to assure the best medical treatment.
4. Regardless, within in 24 hours, CoCoDA will investigate the situation with the local authorities, healthcare workers and/or the US Embassy and report their conclusions to the delegation partner.
5. Upon reporting, CoCoDA and the delegation partner will determine if health and safety has been seriously or permanently jeopardized and choose one of the following responses:
  - Withdraw the delegation or delegate from Nicaragua.
  - Adopt stricter health and safety measures.
  - Reemphasize the present health and safety measures.
6. Once such a determination is made, CoCoDA will immediately assist the delegation partner in instructing delegates in any new course of action concerning health or safety requirements.

# Appendix G

**(All participants are required to sign this document prior to arrival in the host country)**

## Confirmation of Understanding

The success of any delegation requires a shared understanding by the participants of the purpose and expectations for that delegation. A prepared and informed participant will have a better experience and contribute to a positive experience for others. CoCoDA requires all delegation participants to acknowledge the following understandings:

Purpose:

1. I understand that I am required to have read the CoCoDA Delegation Packet prior to traveling to Central America and to have asked for clarifications on any items that I did not fully understand.
2. I understand that I am not coming to Central America as a tourist, savior, expert or critic. I am coming as a learner. My teachers – if I choose to let them – will be every person I encounter. I understand that I will not always like these lessons and what they reveal about me.
3. I understand that the project I work on is not the purpose of the trip. Central Americans could do what I will do better, quicker and more affordably. Allowing me to work with them is their gift to me. The project is simply the context for me to look, listen and learn from another culture.
4. I understand that CoCoDA is not a travel agency. CoCoDA is a non-profit community development organization whose mission is to cooperate in projects for democratic, community based, social and economic development and to foster awareness and social responsibility in the USA for more just relations with Latin America.
5. I understand that the fees I pay cover far more than the logistical costs of my trip. While I could probably travel to Central America more cheaply, I could not do so AND contribute to the advancement of the host country.
6. I understand that cultural humility is prerequisite for a successful cross-cultural experience. My brief trip to Central America will not equip me to critique CoCoDA, their Central American partners, the communities or the people with whom I interact. Publicly complaining or criticizing is the behavior of an “ugly American” and undermines the process of solidarity. If I have concerns or suggestions, I will bring these to the CoCoDA coordinators privately.
7. I understand that flexibility is essential for a successful delegation. Events and schedules can and will be altered. Learning how to adapt to another culture’s understanding of time and priority is part of my learning experience.

Expectations:

8. I understand that I am forbidden from traveling in or on any transportation that has not been provided or approved by CoCoDA. This includes taxis, public transportation, personal vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, recreational vehicles, bicycles and horses.
9. I understand that I cannot drink alcohol with my host family or with host community members. While alcohol consumption is not prohibited at other times, I understand that becoming intoxicated is a serious safety risk and that public intoxication will result in my being sent home.

10. I understand that drug use is illegal in Central America. I understand that being caught by local authorities will result in my arrest and incarceration. I understand that should I be caught possessing and/or using illegal substances, by CoCoDA coordinators or others on the program that I will be immediately sent home at my own expense. Being arrested for drug use is not the cross cultural experience I want.
11. I understand that my health and diet are my responsibility. If I have special health and dietary needs that require accommodation, this must be acknowledged prior to my trip. I understand that I should bring any necessary medications or dietary supplements with me. I understand that trying and eating the food of another culture is part of a cross cultural experience.
12. I understand that I should not eat food that has not been prepared by or approved by CoCoDA. I also understand that I should only drink bottled water. I understand that ignoring these recommendations will increase my risk of illness.
13. I understand that I may become ill during my visit. If so, I will inform the CoCoDA coordinator of my symptoms immediately. I understand that they will assist me in obtaining appropriate medical attention.
14. I understand that romantic or sexual relationships with Central Americans while visiting the host country are almost always exploitative and are highly discouraged.
15. I understand that I should not give my host family or other Central Americans money. CoCoDA has carefully arranged culturally and financially equitable arrangements with my host families, communities and organizations. My “gift” can disrupt these arrangements. If I am solicited for money, I will inform the CoCoDA coordinators immediately. (A small gift of appreciation to my host family is acceptable.)
16. I understand that I should avoid making any personal promises or promises for my organization to my host family or other Central Americans. Raising money or sponsoring a project upon returning home is encouraged. Promising something that I will never fulfill is discouraging and erodes the trust CoCoDA have built with their community partners.

I understand that the violation of any of the above mentioned understandings could be grounds for removal from the delegation and a return flight home at my expense.

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Name

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Date