

**Program: *Guardians of the River: Climate Justice in Nicaragua***

**Frequently asked questions**

**1. What will our itinerary be like?**

Our itineraries vary slightly depending on the length of our stay and availability of partners, but generally we will be in Nicaragua for seven days/nights. You will be provided with a detailed itinerary about two weeks before your trip; each day will include centering and reflection, meetings with various partners, and time to process what we’re learning. Sometimes hands-on service will be part of our journey, depending on the time of year.

**General outline:**

**Day 1:** Arrivals to Managua, settling in, orientation, covenant.

**Days 2&3**: Managua. Orientation to the country and its challenges, visit with religious, environmental, human rights, and/or feminist leaders, and have a tour of Managua.

**Day 4:** Matagalpa (2+ hours away). Meet with feminist and religious leaders, learn the regional history and political challenges, get further orientation to specific political struggles.

**Days 5&6:** Rancho Grande (2+ hours from Matagalpa). Meet with the Guardians of the River and learn about their struggle against the gold mine. Walk to the Yaoska River for a ceremony and worship service. Visit with families in the area who will offer us home hospitality.

**Day 7:** Debrief, reflection, action plans; return to Managua

**Day 8:** Departures.

**2. What sort of housing and food can we expect?**

In Managua, we are generally housed in dorm-style rooms with an organization called CEPAD (Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua). In Matagalpa and other small cities, we will be in hostels or small hotels, usually with 2-3 beds per room. Housing in Managua and other cities includes hot and cold running water, flush toilets, and sometimes (though not always) air conditioners or fans.

In the *campo*, or countryside, housing is through home hospitality. Our hosts are deeply generous but very poor people – subsistence farmers -- and therefore these conditions are very rustic by general U.S. standards. Your bed will be a low platform, often with a thin mattress; we generally use sheets and towels that participants bring with them. **Usually there is no indoor plumbing or running water**. Most of these homes have outdoor latrines, or outhouses, located a short distance behind the house.

Nicaraguan food is simple but delicious! Rice and beans accompany nearly every meal. Fresh seasonal fruit, cooked vegetables and potatoes, and tortillas are also very common; chicken, pork or beef will be part of most dinners and lunches. UUCSJ provides bottled water throughout the program, and participants are urged to NEVER drink water from a tap nor the commonly prepared juices, or *frescos,* unless these are made from bottled water.

**3. Can a vegetarian or vegan diet be accommodated?**

The staples of rice and beans can be counted on for every meal, and are usually not prepared using any meat products. Cooked vegetables such as potatoes, carrots and beans are often available, along with fresh fruits. However, you may wish to bring along a supply of protein bars to supplement what is provided during meals.

**4. Are there safety concerns I should know about?**

Nicaragua is a very safe and stable country, despite many political challenges and an increasingly restrictive government; unlike its neighbors to the north (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico) there has been very little drug violence in Nicaragua.

By far the most common illness for visitors is “traveler’s diarrhea”, which can be caused by unfamiliar food and water; this is rarely serious but is uncomfortable and inconvenient. The best preventive is to NEVER consume water, ice, or drinks made from water unless it is bottled water, nor unpeeled fruits or vegetables that are not cooked.

There are diseases in Nicaragua that you should be aware of, especially if you have a compromised immune system. Zika virus is present in most parts of Nicaragua, as are diseases borne by the same kind of mosquito such as malaria and yellow fever. For up-to-date information about recommended vaccines and prophylactics, please visit the website of the Center for Disease Control: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/nicaragua>

**5. What about emergency medical care?** There are good private hospitals in Managua and in the larger cities such as Matagalpa. In the case of an emergency, these would be the first destination. In Rancho Grande and the countryside throughout Nicaragua **there is no easy access to good emergency care**. The nearest hospital may be several hours away.Please be aware of this, and if you have a compromised immune system or frequent medical needs, we do not recommend this program for you.

**6. Is the program accessible if I have mobility challenges?**

This program is accessible to those who need extra time or assistance in navigating steps or rough pathways, and we will do all that we can to support you. However, **we do not recommend this program for those in scooters or wheelchairs, or for those who have balance challenges on rough terrain.** In the countryside and in Rancho Grande, the conditions of roads and pathways are rough and extremely vulnerable to weather conditions. The lack of indoor plumbing means that latrines are some distance from houses, often down rough pathways and often raised up on small platforms (to make them less vulnerable to rain and mud) which require steps. Houses themselves are often accessible only by walking up steep or rocky pathways, and the homes are very small and simple.

**7. How should I prepare for this program?**

Every UUCSJ program is designed to inspire and sustain justice activism once participants return home, and each program is framed by our UUCSJ Study Guide: <http://uucsj.org/study-guide/>. This resource is updated frequently, to include the most recent videos or articles that will help you understand Nicaragua and its current struggles as well as the long history of U.S. imperialism there. The more time and attention you give to advance study, the richer your short time in Nicaragua will be!

On the logistics side of things, we will provide you with a complete packing list as a part of your orientation materials. Aside from any specific prescription medicines you need, you will not need to make extra purchases in order to be well-equipped for this program. Along with the usual clothing and toiletries, you will bring a sheet and light towel for use in the countryside; sturdy walking shoes; and clothing that will keep you comfortable in rain or cool weather as well as a hat for the heat.

**8. What support people will be with us?**

Two UUCSJ Program Leaders will be assigned to lead your group (sometimes one of these is a staff member). They play various roles during the program, including leading reflections and worships, helping to manage group dynamics, ensuring CSJ policies and procedures are met, leading a taking-it-home workshop, working with on-the-ground partners on logistics, etc. The Program Leaders will also be in contact well in advance of the program to lead you through the preparation process and working through the Study Guide.

In addition, UUCSJ works with a Nicaragua Consultant who is an expert in organizing delegations in Nicaragua. She will travel with the group, provide cultural translation and context, and help keep logistics running smoothly. As a long-time resident of Nicaragua, she also serves as a key informant for participants.

Other support people during this program include at least one Spanish language interpreter, usually the same person throughout the duration of the program. In addition, the Nicaragua consultant and at least one Program Leader will assist in translation. We also contract with a transportation company, and a driver will accompany us to the countryside and be with the group for most of the week. Usually this person does not speak English, but with an interpreter by your side you will find our drivers to be lively, engaged and very knowledgeable about their country!

**9. Will there be challenges because of language differences?**

Nicaraguan people are famous for their warmth and hospitality (as well as their humor and the widespread love of poetry). Even if you find yourself without any words in common with your hosts, you and they will find ways to communicate!

Although having Spanish-speakers in the group certainly deepens the experience, our programs are designed with the expectation that many/most participants don’t speak Spanish. Translation is provided for any group conversation or educational experience, and we do our best during homestays to try to make sure Spanish speakers are well distributed and available for translation. That being said, sometimes you will need to communicate the best you can without Spanish ability, especially in the homestays. This is part of the cultural exchange experience!