



La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School

Volunteer Guidebook 2011





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Introduction

Dear volunteer,

La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School would like to welcome you and thank you for wanting to support and share your experiences with us, and above all with our students.

This guidebook provides the key information that you will need for your voluntary stay in our school. If you have any queries or questions we are here to help!

We hope that you enjoy your time at the Project. Many thanks and welcome to our team!

Programme

La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School, run by la Fundación de Educación y Emprendedurismo Rural (FEER; *the Foundation for Rural Education and Entrepreneurship*), is an educational centre that was launched in 2009 following the “education that pays for itself” model promoted by Teach A Man To Fish (www.teachamantofish.org.uk). In addition to offering an education to youngsters from low-income families the goal is that by 2014 the school will be 100% self-sufficient through its eight small businesses:

- Dairy production
- Egg production
- Pig-rearing
- Coffee and reforestation plants
- Beekeeping
- Vegetable garden
- Bakery
- Eco-lodge www.bastillaecolodge.com .

We currently have three school years with students aged between 14 and 21, with 60 students in total, 45 of whom live in the boarding school. The school follows the national Technical Certificate Sciences and Humanities with Honours in Agriculture and Agribusiness curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education (MINED). Whilst theory is an essential part of the education we offer, there is greater emphasis on practical classes under the “learning-by-doing, learning-for-earning” methodology. For more information about the technical school please visit <http://www.bastillaecolodge.com/colegio.php?lang=en>.



As a large and growing project, there are several opportunities for volunteers with a wide range of backgrounds and preferences. The areas where we would currently appreciate the most support are:

Education

Depending on your level of Spanish and experience you could:

- Give motivational talks
- Give classes on current national and international affairs (politics, the economy, and culture)
- Design a nutrition programme: observe local habits and give recommendations incorporating simple and economical, yet healthy, recipes
- Physical education
- Give English conversation lessons (to complement the grammar classes the students already receive) focussing on tourism-related vocabulary and themes

In certain instances there are limited possibilities to support the primary and regular secondary school in Las Colinas community. If you are interested please send us information about your qualifications and experience, in addition to a summary of the activities that you would like to carry out and we will try to coordinate them.

Agriculture and Farming

Depending on your preferences, qualifications and your preferences, as a volunteer you can:

- Participate in the practical classes with the students e.g planting fruit and vegetables in the gardens; cultivating coffee and reforestation plants, tending and feeding the pigs and chickens; or helping to milk cows.
- Support the Production and Assistant Production Manager e.g suggest new techniques and make other suggestions if you have the relevant qualifications or a specialist in any of the school's business areas. One area where we are currently looking for the most assistance is in beekeeping.



Environment and Eco-tourism

La Bastilla is a farm with great environmental commitments and is certified by Rainforest Alliance (www.rainforestalliance.org). Volunteers can:

- Participate in, and help expand environmentally-friendly activities already carried out e.g worm composting, recycling; in addition to suggesting new measures
- Making organic soap for use at the ecolodge with flavours of natural resources found at the farm e.g coffee pulp, fruit, honey
- Assist with the creation of flora and fauna inventory (if you are a specialist) in the area surrounding the ecolodge and the touristic nature trails
- Help the Manager of La Bastilla Ecolodge to develop an eco-tourism programme and a related marketing campaign at both the national and international level.

Business / Sales and Marketing / Entrepreneurship

This area would suit creative individuals with experience in commerce and business. The key tasks will involve:

- Suggesting measures to improve and the administrative and organisational capacity of the businesses, as well as the academic area and boarding school



- Helping to design marketing campaigns and making recommendations about sales strategies in the local market, emphasising what distinguishes our products the most – above all their social and educational purpose.
- Conducting local market research to assist in the identification of new income streams and / or potential businesses for the school.

Community Work: Basic Business Skills Training and Public Health

A capacity building programme in Las Colinas community was launched at the end of 2009. Recently small business committees have been formed to increase the income of resource-poor families and to raise funds to invest in the community's primary and regular secondary school. Working alongside the Community Liaison Development Officer volunteers can:

- Support the small businesses by training the community members – the majority of which neither have a high level of formal education nor previous business experience
- Develop an health-related awareness programme e.g in hygienic practices, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health

We offer volunteers the opportunity to immerse themselves more in daily life in Las Colinas community by staying and working with a local family for 1 - 3 nights. Please see the 'Additional Options' section on page 9 for more information.

In reality a voluntary position at La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School could involve a mixture of all of the above, from market research to getting your hands dirty in the field – in addition to other activities not highlighted in this guide.

How to Apply for the Programme

If you are interested in the programme please send your CV with a covering letter (both in Spanish) explaining the main areas that you like to assist in, your reasons for wanting to be a volunteer at La Bastilla and the objectives and expectations you have from your voluntary experience with us, to Yelba Valenzuela (contact details on page de 21).

Support During the Programme

Upon arrival you will have an introductory meeting with a designated member of staff who will explain about the school and discuss in more detail which areas or activities you can provide assistance with. You will also be introduced to the rest of the staff and the students, be shown the facilities, the business areas and your accommodation.



Whilst volunteers are often independent and proactive, you can count on our constant support during your time at the school. If at any time whilst you are volunteering with us you have any queries or concerns please let us know. We want your experience with us to be as enjoyable as possible.

Working Hours

Working abroad, and in a developing country, often requires adapting to working hours which are not necessarily the same as you are used to, so, it is important to be flexible. At La Bastilla during most of the year there is electricity from 8 – 11.30 am, and 5.30 – 9p.m. Therefore, people often work with computers during these times and Schedule other activities (e.g. do fieldwork or give classes) when there is no electricity. However, during the coffee harvest season (November – March) there is electricity during the entire working week.

Requirements

Language: an intermediate level of Spanish is required since none of the students nor staff speak English.

Minimum age: 18

Minimum stay: 2 weeks

Cost of the programme

What is included in the price

- Accommodation in volunteer dormitory within boarding facilities at La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School
- Three meals per day in the boarding school
- Programme administration .

All revenues generated by the project go towards covering the operational expenses of the school and raising its financial self-sufficiency.

What the Price Does NOT Include

- Flights and visa



- Travel and health insurance
- Transport to La Bastilla
- Local and national independent travel
- Extra or independent activities not included in the programme

Price and Payment

- GBP £115 per week.
- GBP £105 per week for 10 weeks or more voluntary service.

**Supplement for transportation to La Bastilla upon arrival in Jinotega US\$ 25 (optional). Please specify if you require this service.*

**Supplement for transportation to La Bastilla upon arrival at Managua International Airport US\$ 120 (optional). Please specify if you require this service.*

We kindly ask that volunteers make a bank transfer for the full amount at least 14 days before arrival.



Additional Options

(Can be paid for upon arrival)

Accommodation at La Bastilla Ecolodge
www.bastillaecolodge.com



\$13 for one night's accommodation in dormitory. Breakfast, lunch and dinner between \$3 and \$9.

\$20 for one night's accommodation in deck camping. Breakfast, lunch and dinner between \$3 and \$9.

\$40 for one night's accommodation in cabin with breakfast included. Lunch and dinner between \$5 and \$9.

with Accommodation with a

Host Family in Las Colinas Community

\$20 per night with three meals included.

Spanish Course

We offer a conversation and grammar course for volunteers who would like to increase their command of, and confidence in Spanish.

- ✚ Personalised one-to-one classes. 10 hours per week (Monday-Friday)
- ✚ US\$ 125 per week

If you are interested please advise us in advance since the teacher works part-time.



Living at La Bastilla Coffee Estates and School






Accommodation and Meals

Our volunteers live in dorms especially for them, at the boarding house of La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School which is based within La Bastilla Coffee Estates www.bastillacoffee.com. Life on the plantation is very peaceful, there is a great spirit of solidarity and security issues are very rare. During the coffee harvest season (November – March) it is very busy at the site, with many farmers arriving to work. Whilst, the area is generally very safe, there is a dedicated team of security guards who patrol the entire farm 24/7 throughout the whole year for additional security.

Volunteers are immersed in the daily activities of the school and boarding house, for instance, they accompany the students and teachers for three meals per day. The food that is served in the boarding house follows the typical diet of the region – with rice and beans as the staple foods. However, cassava, potatoes, soups and produce of the school such as our fresh eggs, sweet milk and vegetables grown by the students are also served. Three meals in the boarding school are included in the volunteering packet. However, volunteers are also free to purchase special dishes from the tourist menu offered at the eco-lodge, if they prefer, for an additional \$2-6 depending on the dish. Please advise us in advance if you have any allergies or special dietary requirements.

Extra-Curricular Activities at the School

Here are a few examples of how we usually let our hair down at the school during our spare time:

-  Play sports (baseball and football are the most popular)
-  Enjoy music (there is a choir and guitar on site)
-  Watch DVDs
-  Go for leisurely walks or go hiking
-  Enjoy the nature, beauty and tranquillity of La Bastilla and the nature reserve.



Communications

Internet

The best means of communication at the farm is the internet. There is wireless connection, however, the internet is only available when there is electricity (refer to “Working Hours” on page 7). Please be aware that we only have a couple of computers and they are mainly for the use of the students. If you do not have a laptop you are free to use a computer from the study hall when the students are in class.

Mobile Phone

The dialling code for Nicaragua is +505 followed by the respective 8 digit telephone number. Being located in a nature reserve Las Colinas community does not have landline connection. If you bring your mobile phone from abroad you must ensure that it is unblocked i.e. that it is compatible with SIM cards from other countries (including Nicaragua). You can buy a SIM card from Jinotega or other cities for approximately US\$ 10. The two main mobile phone networks are Claro and Movistar. Please be aware that there is mobile phone coverage in only some parts of the reserve. However, there is usually acceptable connection in some areas near the boarding house and eco-lodge.

NB the postal service does not cover many rural areas such as La Bastilla. Therefore, if during your stay your friends or family would like to send you something by mail, please let us know and we will give you an alternative address of one of our partners in Jinotega city.



Weather and Clothing

There are only two seasons in Nicaragua: summer (November – April) and winter, aka the rainy season (May – October). Being located in a mountainous region in the North of the country, the weather in Jinotega is cooler and often more favourable (between 20-28°C depending on the season) than other popular cities like Managua, Granada y León where it is usually a lot hotter.

It is necessary that you bring comfortable, casual and conservative clothing since you will be at a school based on a farm. It is also recommended that you bring tough shoes and / or Wellington boots, as well as a raincoat or waterproof clothing and clothes for cold weather (e.g jumpers) at night and in winter.

How to Get to La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School

The cost of the journey to Jinotega is not included in the volunteering packet. Volunteers usually organise their own journey to Jinotega once they arrive in Nicaragua (please refer to the “Travel Documents, International and Domestic Travel” section on page 15 for more information and links to useful web pages). However, if you would like some help coordinating your journey to Jinotega, for example, to be collected from Managua International airport please contact us. Volunteers are responsible for arranging the relevant travel insurance.

From Managua you can take an *expreso* (direct) bus from Mercado (market) Mayoreo to Jinotega. If you are travelling from the airport a taxi to Mercado Mayoreo should not cost more than C\$ 60 (~ US \$2.86). If you arrive in Managua at night it is recommended that you stay in a hotel or hostel overnight. There are 10 direct buses or expresos daily from Mercado Mayoreo. A ticket costs C\$75 (approximately US \$3.50). The journey should take about 3 hours and you will arrive at the Cotrán (bus station) in Jinotega. Please advise us in advance so that we can arrange to pick you up from the Cotrán to La Bastilla.



Checklist of Useful Things to Bring With You

- Passport and other travel documents. It is necessary for volunteers to ensure they have travel and medical insurance
- A first-aid kit including medicine for bad stomachs and rehydration tablets (since the school is some 20km from a pharmacy)
- A torch
- An alarm clock
- Wellington boots / tough shoes
- Raincoat / waterpoofs
- Insect repellent
- Comfortable, casual and conservative clothes, in addition to warm clothes for cold wather (at night and winter)
- Electrical adaptors(please refer to the “Electricity” section on page 16)
- Sun protection
- Books / magazines for your spare time
- Money for your spare time and additional activities (please refer to the “Money” section on page 16 for a guide on how much you could need per day)
- Camera and charger
- Laptop – depending on the length of time you will be staying and the type of work you would like to focus on whilst you are volunteering with us. If you do bring a laptop consider bringing a few DVDs for your spare time
- A Spanish-English dictionary.
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Information About Nicaragua

Capital	Managua
Currency	Córdoba
Languages	Spanish (official), English and Indigenous languages
Borders	Honduras is to the North, Costa Rica is to the South, the Caribbean Sea is to the East and the Pacifica Ocean is to the West of Nicaragua
Population	5.7 million (UN 2009)
Size	130, 668 km ² (approximately the same size as Greece or New York state)
Climate	Tropical
Temperature	Ranges between 20°C and 33°C. A rainy season (May – October) and a dry season (November – April).
Time zone	Nicaragua shares a central time zone with the United States (-6h GMT).
International dialling code	+505 (followed by the respective 8 digit telephone number)
Head of State	President Daniel Ortega Saavedra
Net National Income per capita	\$1080 (World Bank 2008)
The five most important exports	Coffee, meat, seafood, sugar, tobacco.

Sources: Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) brochure

Lonely Planet Central America on a Shoestring 2007

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1225218.stm



Travel Documents, International and Domestic Travel

Travel Documents

It is necessary that you have a Passport that has at least six months left before expiration when you arrive in Nicaragua. Most foreigners do not need a visa, but have to pay US \$5 for a Tourist Card, which will give you the right to remain in the country for up to 90 days, upon arrival into Nicaragua. The list of countries whose citizens require a visa can be found on the following website: www.visitnicaragua.com. It is recommended that you always carry with you at least a copy of your ID whilst you are in the country.

Please bear in mind that visitors who leave the country from the airport have to pay a US \$25 exit tax, or US \$2 to leave by land.

International Transport

There are several airlines such as Aeroméxico, American Airlines, Continental, Copa, Grupo Taca y Delta that fly to the Augusto Sandino International Airport in Managua. These airlines offer connections from Europe and direct flights from Atlanta, Houston, Miami and other Central American countries, from which you can also enter by land. Here are some links for website where you can compare budget plane tickets:

www.kayak.com

www.ebookers.com

www.expedia.com

www.opodo.com

www.cheapflights.com

www.travelsupermarket.com

www.statravel.com

There are numerous international bus services daily between Managua and other Central American countries. The main international bus companies are:

- Tica Bus www.ticabus.com
- King Quality www.kingqualityca.com



- Trans-Nica www.transnica.com

Domestic Transport

The most common way to travel in Nicaragua is by bus. Inter-city buses leave from the main markets. The most convenient and direct way to travel is with *expresos* – express service buses. However, there are also *ordinarios* – inter-city ordinary service buses – which are indirect and a little bit cheaper. Please refer to the section “How to Arrive at La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School” on page 12.

Money

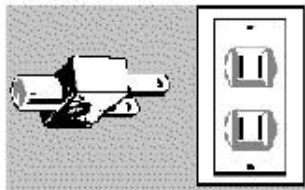
The official currency of Nicaragua is the Córdoba. However, the US Dollar is commonly accepted throughout the country. Therefore, it is easier to find places that exchange Córdobas with Dollars than with other currencies. At the time of writing (November 2010) the official exchange rate was US\$ 1 = C\$ 21.79. For the most recent exchange rate please consult the Central Bank of Nicaragua’s website:

http://www.bcn.gob.ni/estadisticas/mercado_cambios/index.html?&val=1#

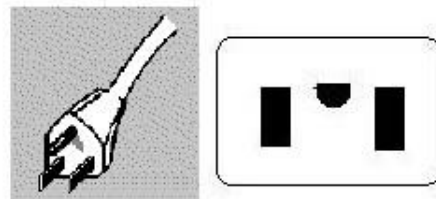
Credit cards are recognised and used in several establishments and banks across the country. However, Travellers Cheques can only be cashed in certain places. Visitors can live on a budget of US \$15 - \$50 per day for regular expenses such as food, accommodation and local transport.

Electricity

Nicaragua uses the 120V, 60Hz electricity system, so it is compatible with the US, Canada and the majority of countries in the Americas and the Caribbean.



Plug Type A



Plug Type B

Health and Safety

It is necessary to consult with your Doctor before travelling to Nicaragua regarding the vaccinations and medications that you may need. The following websites may also be useful:



<http://www.vianica.com/nicaragua/9-salud-y-seguridad.html>

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/nicaragua.aspx>

Volunteers are responsible for organising their own medical insurance to cover their stay in the country. If you feel unwell at any point whilst you are at the school please let us know and we will take you to a clinic.

Nicaragua is not as dangerous as some other Central American countries. There are more problems with crime in the capital than in other places and travelling by taxi is recommended in large cities. It is not advisable to walk through the streets with many valuable items or a lot of money. Generally, life in rural areas like La Bastilla is very peaceful and quiet.

For More Information About Nicaragua

Tourism, Culture and General and Useful Information for Visitors

www.intur.gob.ni

www.visitnicaragua.com

http://www.roughguides.com/website/travel/destination/content/?titleid=90&xid=idh178031816_0475

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/nicaragua>

Country Profile and Government Travel Advice

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1225218.stm

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/north-central-america/nicaragua>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm>

<http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Paises/ArbolPaises/Nicaragua/Recomendacionesdeviaje/Paginas/recoNicaragua.aspx>

National Press

<http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni>

<http://www.laprensa.com.ni>



Information About Jinotega



Jinotega is the nearest city to the school.

It is 20kms or 45 minutes or so from the plantation by car.

The department of Jinotega is located 168 kilometres North-East of Managua. With an approximate size of 9,222.40 square kilometres, it is one of the largest departments of



Nicaragua and is composed of 8 municipalities. According to the Eighth Population Census of the Population and the Fourth Housing Census carried out in 2005 the department has a population of 331,335 inhabitants, of which 30% live in the city with the same name – Jinotega.

The Jinotega department is known for its fresh climate (“city of mists”) and for being a mountainous, fertile agricultural region – being one of the most important areas in the country for coffee cultivation. Despite being an area that is rich in primary resources, according to the Nicaraguan government in 2001, the department had one of the highest positions in the country in terms of the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty (37%).

Despite the economic situation, Jinotega stands out for its picturesque landscape – with primary forests, fast-flowing rivers and the artificial Apanás lake (one of the major attractions of Jinotega) and the beautiful Datanlí El Diablo nature reserve where La Bastilla is located.

What There Is To Do At the Weekends in Jinotega

Restaurants, Bars and Clubs

Whilst being quite a small city there several places where you can eat out (there are numerous food vendors in street and *fritangas*), have a beer or go dancing in Jinotega. Here are some of our favourites (they are around the main street – ask people for directions):

- Soda El Tico:** this restaurant that serves typical Costa Rican and Nicaraguan dishes in addition to hamburgers and fries, is undoubtedly the best option in Jinotega. It is clean, with excellent service and delicious and reasonably priced dishes (à la carte and buffet) which start from en C\$75 (~ US \$3.50).
- Hotel Café:** another excellent restaurant with an elegant interior and attentive. There is even a gigantic plasma television. A typical dish can cost approximately C\$ 180 (~ US \$8.50) or more.
- Jinocuba:** this Cuban restaurant and bar (with a few Nicaraguan touches) is simple but has a good environment and personality. The owner is also very sweet and generous (especially to foreign volunteers).
- Karaoke Kids:** known as “the best karaoke bar in Jinotega”. This is an excellent place to have fun. It does not matter if you sing or simply prefer to observe.



- **Conceptos:** a very popular club, especially at the weekends. It has good security too.

Places of Interest in Jinotega and the Surrounding Departments

Known as the Coffee Route of the Land of Cowboys, the Northern mountainous departments of Jinotega, Matagalpa and Estelí have plenty to offer tourists.

Jinotega: amongst the activities to choose from the most popular are climbing up to la Peña de la Cruz (a hill overlooking the city and which has a Crucifix at the summit) or visit the Apanás artificial lake and hydroelectric power plant. For more information about places of interest please visit:

www.jinotega.com (Municipal Tourism Office)

www.jinotegalife.com

Matagalpa: larger than Jinotega, it is the Nicaraguan coffee capital – it even has its own Coffee Museum which offers the local product to taste. Apart from being a lively city there is plenty to do in the countryside, for example, exploring highlands and hiking trails. The Coffee Museum is also a tourist office. Matagalpa is an hour by bus from Jinotega and buses leave every half an hour from Cotrán in Jinotega. A trip costs C\$25 (~US \$1.20).

Estelí: a lovely, peaceful place. It is famous for growing tobacco, el Salto de la Estanzuela (a 36m waterfall) and Miraflor and Tipsey nature reserves. Estelí is 2 hours away from Jinotega and buses leave from the market in Jinotega. There are 5 direct buses daily and a ticket costs C\$ 50 (~US \$2.40).

Consult the websites under “Tourism, Culture, General and Useful Information for Visitors” on page 17 for more information about places of interest in Jinotega, the neighbouring departments and those further afield.



Useful Contacts and Addresses

School Contacts

Address Colegio Técnico Agropecuario La Bastilla,
Finca La Bastilla,
Comarca Las Colinas, Jinotega,
Nicaragua.

Yelba Valenzuela Manager of La Bastilla Agricultural Technical School
yelbavalenzuela@yahoo.com

011 505 8 654 6235

Skype: yelba.valenzuela

US Embassy

Kilometer 5 1/2 (5.5) Carretera Sur, in Managua, Nicaragua.

Embassy Telephone: + (505) 2252-7100
Consular Section phone: +(505) 2252-7888
Consular fax: +(505) 2252-7304
Consular E-mail: consularmanagua@state.gov

British Honorary Consulate (the nearest British Embassy itself is in Costa Rica)

Avenida Bolívar # 1947, del hospital Militar 1 cuadra al Lago,
Managua, Nicaragua

Switchboard: + (505) 254 5454 / 3839
Phone: + (505) 254 5454 / 3839
Fax: + (505) 254 5295
Website: <http://ukincostarica.fco.gov.uk/en/nicaragua/>

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