

VOSH Nicaragua 2009
San Juan Del Sur

Group travel: 01/04-01/17

Mission dates: 01/11-01/15

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Team members (in order on photo from left to right):

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Group travel destinations:

Granada, Las Isletas, Mombacho, Ometepe, San Juan del Sur

General Report

In our yearly collaboration with VOSH Connecticut, our small group of UCBSO students prepared to travel to Nicaragua. It was a strong group effort and every team member played a role in working to bring enough equipment, ensuring that we had proper immunizations and coordinating travel arrangements. The mission went smoothly although we had an incident in downtown San Juan del Sur where a camera bag with money and expensive camera equipment was taken from one of our team members.

Travel

A group of us traveled in the country prior to the start of clinic. We started in the colonial town of Granada where we experienced a bustling city that was a mix of the old world and the new. We took a boat tour of Las Isletas--a group of 365 tiny islands in Lake Managua where wealthy Nicaraguans can buy an island and develop real estate.

Nicaragua's landscape is rich with volcanoes so our group hiked in one of the world's cloud forests at the top of Mombacho volcano in search of howler monkeys and other wildlife. We also ventured half way up Ometepe volcano, an island formation in the middle of Lake Managua.

Clinic

Our last stop in Nicaragua was the beach town of San Juan del Sur where we set up clinic. The entire UCBSO group met up here and reported to duty on January 11,

2009. Clinic was one of the most exhausting yet rewarding experiences of our lives. Two buses transported people from more rural areas to have their eyes examined. On the first day we worked for 10 hours. Many of us took a short lunch break because of the high demand to finish seeing everyone who showed up before the closing. There was only one day when we saw all our patients before dark. Most rooms at the clinic facility had no electricity and restrooms with running water were located off site.

Even though we were short staffed in comparison to previous years, we saw 200+ more patients than last year's mission. Our clinic of six optometrists from VOSH Connecticut and eight UCBSO students along with a team of translators and dispensers saw 2,674 patients over 4 days. Many patients had never had an eye exam before. With the help of our translators we worked through language and cultural barriers to give comprehensive exams. This included, but was not limited to, visual acuities, retinoscopy, trial frame refractions, direct ophthalmoscopy, optic cup evaluations, presbyopic exams, diagnosis of cataracts and glaucoma, and treatment of infections. Patients with glaucoma were given a year's supply of medication. Drugs were donated by Alcon Laboratories, Inc. and Allergan Pharmaceutical. The clinic also gave out eyeglasses, sunglasses, medications, lubricating drops, readers, hats, and clothes.

This was VOSH Connecticut's 11th year continuing the mission in Nicaragua. Berkeley optometry students have collaborated with them on this trip for all 11 years. Many of the locals at San Juan del Sur help out every year with catering, facilities, security and translation. It is a strong community and mission members are like a family. Being a part of this effort helped us understand the growing need for healthcare in developing countries. This mission allowed us to witness the natural beauty of Nicaragua and to experience the heart of its people and culture.