

## Travel Alive Partner Bio

*Grupo Fenix is one of our important Nicaraguan partner organizations. You can read even more about Grupo Fenix by visiting their website [www.grupofenix.org](http://www.grupofenix.org). You can also learn more about donating to support their good works.*



### **Grupo Fenix**

The small rural community of Sabana Grande, Totogalpa is becoming a model for the research, production and promotion of renewable energy technologies and sustainable living in Nicaragua. If you drive by their newly built adobe center, located about 15km south of Ocotol on the main highway, you will see a sea of blue boxes with shiny lids (solar cookers), solar dryers, a solar water pump and of course solar panels that are all generating energy using one of the most abundant natural resources...the sun! The organization behind this exciting set of projects is Grupo Fenix, which is Nicaraguan - based and maintains its central office in the National Engineering University (UNI) in Managua.

### **History**

In the year 1996, in response to a crippling energy deficit and high levels of unemployment in Nicaragua, a group of enthusiastic engineering students at the UNI and Professor Susan Kinne began working with the theme of renewable energy. After choosing the name Grupo Fenix, receiving inspiration from the mythical bird of Egyptian sun worship, which is forever renewed, they started experimenting with renewable energy technologies and learning from opportunities that came their way. They installed solar pumps, solar drip irrigation systems, a micro-hydroelectric system, PV battery charging centers and hundreds of photovoltaic systems in various rural communities. They built solar dryers, solar water heating systems, biogas digesters, dozens of solar ovens, hundreds of photovoltaic panels and a hand full of miniature solar cars. From their efforts they were able to create various entities based in renewable energy; an academic program within the university, a business (Suni Solar), an NGO and two rural production centers.

In 1999, after working with various communities on many projects, they came to further appreciate and recognize the importance and challenge of social aspects in the transfer of technology. Taking advantage of lessons learned they determined that in order to advance the methodology of technology transfer and create the ability to develop sustainable lifestyles, they needed to focus on the experience and process of one community. They began working in Sabana Grande with a project from Falls Brooke Center in New Brunswick, Canada, supporting job creation in solar energy for land mine victims, and with a women's group that had been organizing. Community members have demonstrated extraordinary enthusiasm, proactive leadership and responsibility, which has been key in Grupo Fenix's success.

## **Goals and Projects**

Grupo Fenix's primary goal is to research, develop and apply appropriate, renewable energy technologies in Nicaragua and has the following objectives:

- To conduct practical research into appropriate energy technologies
- To support community self-determination and local responsibility for projects
- To increase the technical skill level and employability of local people
- To improve health and living standards of families and communities

A few of our current projects include:

- Organization of the Solar Cooker Construction Workshop
- Purchase new tools and materials for building solar cookers
- Continue with design improvements
- Create a marketing campaign for solar cookers
- Continue community outreach and education of solar culture
- Promote the women's group, as well as their work with and use of solar cookers
- Develop local artisan shop to sell homemade arts, crafts, food and coffee
- Learn more about preparation and packing
- Research and develop plan for export of dried foods, solar coffee, etc.
- Research for grants and funding to support continued construction of buildings and facilities for the Solar Center
- Green Store Improvements
- Research sustainable sources of income and goods to maintain a steady flow of supplies for the Green Store
- Creation of a suggestion box or book so that the store items better reflect the desires of the women's group
- Improved advertising campaign
- Build more relationships with universities and continued course development
- Continued research on permaculture, further forestry projects and ongoing maintenance of plants in center
- Maintain and monitor existing bio-digester in working condition and seek funding and partnership for the construction of a new bio-digester in the solar center.

## **Funding and Volunteering**

Projects are funded through the offering of different hand-on workshops and courses on renewable energy to national and international students, professors, engineers, solar enthusiasts, development workers and just about anyone interested in the work Grupo Fenix is doing. The Solar Culture Course held in January and July allows participants the unique opportunity to live and learn in Sabana Grande while working alongside local community members as well as spending a few days exploring Nicaragua.

Another integral part of the organization is the volunteer program. Over the years Grupo Fenix has had the pleasure of working with a variety of hearty, energetic volunteers and is intent on continuing this tradition. The program provides the opportunity for people to learn a great deal about renewable energy, sustainable development work, and Nicaraguan culture. **Travel Alive** volunteers have the opportunity to enjoy short and long term stays in the community working on a wide range of projects. Grupo Fenix matches volunteer's interests and skills with current organizational needs.