



NICARAGUA



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Central America.

Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR)
Hotel Intercontinental, 1 cuadra al Oeste y 1 cuadra al Sur, Managua, Nicaragua
Tel: 222 2962 or 222 3333. Fax: 222 6610.
E-mail: promocion@intur.gob.ni or intur@intur.gob.ni
Web site: <http://www.intur.gob.ni>

Embassy of the Republic of Nicaragua
Vicarage House, Suite 31, 58-60 Kensington Church Street, London W8 4DB
Tel: (020) 7938 2373. Fax: (020) 7937 0952.
E-mail: emb.ofnicaragua@virgin.net
Web site: <http://www.freespace.virgin.net/emb.ofnicaragua>
Opening hours: 1000-1600 Monday to Friday.

British Embassy
PO Box A-169, Reparto Los Robles, Entrada principal, 4ta Casa a Mano Derecha, Managua, Nicaragua
Tel: 278 0014 or 278 0887 or 267 4050. Fax: 278 4085.
E-mail: britemb@ibw.com.ni

Embassy of the Republic of Nicaragua
1627 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 939 6570. Fax: (202) 939 6542.
Also deals with enquiries relating to Canada.

Embassy of the United States of America
Apartado 327, Km 4.5, Carretera Sur, Managua, Nicaragua
Tel: 266 6010. Fax: 266 3865.
E-mail: parisms@state.gob
Opening hours: 0730-1615 Monday to Friday.

Note: The Canadian Embassy in San José deals with enquiries relating to Nicaragua (see the Costa Rica section).

Country dialling code: 505.

2 GENERAL

Area: 130,668 sq km (50,451 sq miles); 9240 sq km (3568 sq miles) of lakes.

Population: 4,807,000 (1998).

Population Density: 40.0 per sq km.

Capital: Managua. Population: 1,000,000 (1994).

Geography: Nicaragua borders Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south. To the east lies the Caribbean, and to the west the Pacific. In the north are the Isabella Mountains, while the country's main feature in the southwest is Lake Nicaragua, 148km (92 miles) long and about 55km (34 miles) at its widest. The island of Ometepe is the largest of the 310 islands on the lake. These islands have a reputation for great beauty and are one of the country's main tourist attractions. Lake Managua is situated to the northwest. Volcanoes, including the famous Momotombo, protrude from the surrounding lowlands northwest of the lakes. The country's main rivers are the San Juan, the lower reaches of which form the border with Costa Rica, and the Rio Grande. The Corn Islands (Islas del Maiz) in the Caribbean are two small beautiful islands fringed with white coral and palms. They are very popular as holiday resorts with both Nicaraguans and tourists. The majority of Nicaragua's population lives and works in the lowland between the Pacific and western shores of Lake Nicaragua, the southwestern shore of Lake Managua and the southwestern sides of the range of volcanoes. It is only in recent years that settlers have taken to coffee growing and cattle farming in the highlands around Matagalpa and Jinotega.

Government: Republic since 1987. Gained independence from Spain in 1821. Head of State and Government: President Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo since 1997.

Language: Spanish. Along the Mosquito Coast (Costa de Mosquito) there are English-speaking communities in which African or mixed African and indigenous Indians predominate.

Religion: 85% Roman Catholic.

Time: GMT - 6.

Electricity: 110 volts AC, 60Hz.

Telephone: IDD is available. Country code: 505. Outgoing international calls may be made via the international operator or through direct dialling.

Mobile telephone: TDMA network is operated by NicaCell, and is not compatible with GSM handsets.

Internet/E-mail: Cybercafés in Nicaragua provide public access to internet and e-mail services. ISPs include IBW Internet Gateway (web site: <http://www.ibw.com.ni>).

Telegram: Facilities in Managua.

Post: Airmail to Europe takes up to two weeks. Poste restante services are available in Managua. Post offices are open 0900-1730 Monday to Saturday.

Press: All newspapers are in Spanish. The main publications are La Prensa, Nuevo Diario and La Tribuna.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz15.229.5906.1955.975

Voice of America:

MHz15.309.5906.1305.995

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	No	Yes
Australian	Yes	Yes	Yes
Canadian	Yes	Yes	Yes
USA	Yes	No	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	No	Yes
Japanese	Yes	Yes	Yes

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for at least 6 months from the date of arrival required by all.

VISAS: Required only by nationals of the following countries:

Afghanistan, Albania, Bolivia, China (PR), Cuba, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Haiti, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Korea (Rep. of), Lebanon, Libya, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

All other nationals can obtain a Tourist Card on arrival for approximately US\$10 for touristic stays of 1-3 months, provided they are holding valid travel documents and, in the case of business travellers, a letter from their employer and/or company in Nicaragua.

Types of visa and cost: Tourist and Business: £18.

Validity: 1 month from date of issue. Visas can be extended in Managua.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section for details. Tourist Cards can be obtained on arrival.

Application requirements: (a) Valid passport. (b) Completed application form. (c) 2 passport-size photos. (d) Fee. (e) Onward or return ticket.

Working days required: Confirmation for visas takes 4-6 weeks as special authorisation from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Foreign Affairs is required.

Temporary residence: Enquire at Embassy.

4 MONEY

Currency: Nicaraguan Gold Córdoba (C\$) = 100 centavos. Notes are in denominations of C\$100, 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1, and 50, 25, 10 and 5 centavos.

Currency exchange: Foreign currencies can be exchanged at the airport, at banks and at official bureaux de change in major cities.

Credit cards: MasterCard, Visa, American Express and Diners Club are accepted on a limited basis. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travellers cheques: Accepted in a number of places.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movement of the Nicaraguan Gold Córdoba against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date May '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 £1.00=18.53 17.49 18.67 18.84 \$1.00=12.48 11.66 12.90 12.90

Note: Frequent adjustments to the traded value of the Córdoba, and the various exchange systems that have been used, make it impossible to make meaningful comparative assessments over successive years.

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on the import or export of currency.

Banking hours: 0830-1700 Monday to Friday, 0900-1200 Saturday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following items can be imported into Nicaragua without incurring customs duty:

200 cigarettes or 500g of tobacco; 3 litres of alcoholic beverage; 1 large bottle or 3 small bottles of perfume or eau de cologne.

Prohibited imports: Canned or uncanned meats, leather and dairy products. A licence is required for firearms.

Prohibited exports: Archaeological items, artefacts of historical or monetary value, and gold.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Dec 31 2000-Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Apr 11 Holy Wednesday. Apr 12 Maundy Thursday. Apr 13 Good Friday. May 1 Labour Day. Jul 19 Liberation Day. Sep 14 Battle of San Jacinto. Sep 15 Independence Day. Dec 8 Immaculate Conception. Dec 24-26 Christmas. Dec 31 2001-Jan 2 2002 New Year. Mar 27 Holy Wednesday. Mar 28 Maundy Thursday. Mar 29 Good Friday. May 1 Labour Day. Jul 19 Liberation Day. Sep 14 Battle of San Jacinto. Sep 15 Independence Day. Dec 8 Immaculate Conception. Dec 24-26 Christmas.

Note: A considerable number of local holidays are also observed.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	No	1
Cholera	2	-
Typhoid and Polio	Yes	-
Malaria	3	-
Food and Drink	4	-

1: A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from all travellers aged one year and over arriving from infected areas.

2: Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is not a condition of entry to Nicaragua. However, cholera is a risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination, as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. See the Health appendix.

3: Risk of malaria, predominantly in the benign vivax form, exists throughout the year in 119 municipalities. In the other 26 municipalities, in the departments of Madriz, Carazo and Masaya, transmission risk is low or negligible. Malaria risk is higher during the rainy season.

4: All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk in rural areas may be unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix. Hepatitis A and visceral leishmaniasis occur.

Health care: Nicaragua has 27 public hospitals. The Nicaraguan government is currently carrying out a broad programme of renewal and development of the health system, with extensive funding from various development agencies. There is an extensive network of health posts and health centres in rural areas, however, their resources can be limited. International travellers are strongly advised to take out full medical insurance before departure.

Travel - International

AIR: Nicaragua's national airline is Nicaraguenses de Aviación, NICA (6Y). Other airlines serving Nicaragua are American Airlines, Canadian Airlines International, Compañía Panamena de Aviación, Continental Airlines and Iberia. Services are available to El Salvador, Canada, Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Spain and the USA.

Approximate flight times: From London to Managua is 31 hours including stopovers in Toronto and Miami; from Madrid is 13 hours; from Miami is 2 hours 30 minutes.

International airport: Managua (MGA) (Augusto Cesar Sandino) is 12km (7 miles) from the city (travel time - 15 minutes). A taxi service runs to the city. Airport facilities include a bank, duty-free shop, refreshments and car hire (Budget).

Departure tax: US\$25 on all departures; children under two years are exempt.

SEA: Major ports are Corinto, Puerto Sandino, El Bluff and Puerto Cabezas, which are served by shipping lines from Nicaragua, as well as Central American, North American and European countries.

ROAD: The Pan-American Highway runs through Nicaragua via Esteli and Managua. Bus: There are daily bus services between Managua and most Central American capitals. Services are

provided by Nicabus, Ticabus and Transnica. Tickets are sold up to five days in advance, and all border documentation must be completed before the ticket is issued.

Travel - Internal

SEA: A twice-weekly boat service runs between Bluefields and the Corn Islands. It is also possible to visit the 300 or so islands on Lake Nicaragua, which are very beautiful.

RAIL: There is no passenger rail service at present.

ROAD: There is a network of 18,447km (11,463 miles) of roads of which 1749km (1087 miles) are paved. Traffic drives on the right. Bus: There is a service to most large towns. Booking seats in Managua in advance is advisable. Taxi: Available at airport or in Managua. Prices should be agreed before departure. A map of each area in the city determines taxi prices. Car hire: Available in Managua or at the airport. This is often the best way of travelling, as public transport is slow and overcrowded. Documentation: National licences are only valid for 30 days.

URBAN: The bus and minibus services in Managua are cheap, but they can be both crowded and confusing.

JOURNEY TIMES: The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Managua to other major cities/towns in Nicaragua.

Road
Granada 1.00
Masaya 0.30
Esteli 2.15
Chinandega 1.30
Matagalpa 1.45
Jinotega 2.30
Rivas 1.30

8 ACCOMMODATION

Many of the hotels were destroyed in the earthquake of 1972, although new hotels are gradually being opened in Managua. Several have been built along the highway that bypasses the old part of the city, but there is still a shortage. A 15% tax is levied on all hotel bills. There are motels along the Pan-American Highway and modern resort hotels along the west coast, offering a good **standard of accommodation. Grading:** Hotels in Managua have been divided into three categories: upper, middle and lower, to provide an indication of price and standard. For more information, contact the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR); see address section.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Watersports: Beaches on the Pacific coast offer safe swimming as do those on the Caribbean, including the popular Corn Islands. Often the better beaches have a small entrance charge. Many of the better hotels have pools open to non-residents. In the volcanic crater lagoons there is also safe swimming. Bathing in Lake Managua should be avoided due to contamination, although steps to clean up the lake are being taken. Bathing is possible in the

Laguna de Tiscapa. El Velero beach or Pochomil on the Pacific coast are ideal for surfing as are a number of other beaches along the west coast. There are a number of good fishing spots along the country's waterways and seashores. Baseball is the national game.

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Restaurants, particularly in Managua, serve a variety of cooking styles including Spanish, Italian, French, Latin American and Chinese. Local dishes include gallopinto (fried rice and pinto beans) and mondongo (tripe soup). Plantain is used in many dishes. Other specialities include nacatamal, indio viejo, quesillo, vigorón and roquillas. Food is often scooped up in tortillas instead of using cutlery. Roast corn on the cob is sold on the streets. Seafood is also available. Drink: There are a number of cheap but good restaurants/bars (coreders) where beer, often the cheap local brand, is available. Imported beverages are available but shortages may occur in some areas. Multicoloured fruit drinks made from fresh tropical fruit are superior to bottled soft drinks. At the other end of the scale, the few plush hotels have sophisticated restaurant/bars with a choice of international cuisine and beverages.

Nightlife: Managua has several nightclubs, some offering live music. There are also cinemas with French, Spanish and English films. Other cities, such as Granada, Masaya, León, Matagalpa and Rivas, also offer nightlife entertainment.

Shopping: Local items include goldwork, embroidery, shoes and paintings. Traditional crafts are available, particularly in Masaya, at the handicrafts market. Shopping hours: 0900-1800 Monday to Friday and 0900-1300 Saturday.

Special Events: For a list of events taking place in 2001, contact the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (see address section).

Social Conventions: Dress is informal. Photography: Avoid photographing military sites or personnel. Tipping: 10% of the bill is customary in hotels and restaurants. No tip is necessary for taxi drivers but porters expect a small tip.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: Agriculture is the main economic activity, with cotton, coffee, sugar, bananas and meat as the principal exports. Maize, beans and rice are grown for domestic consumption. The principal manufacturing industries are food, drinks, the production of chemicals and oil refining. There is also a small mining industry working deposits of gold, silver, lead and zinc. Some key industrial operations were nationalised following the 1979 Sandinista revolution but the bulk of the economy was left in private hands and remains there. During the 1990s, Nicaragua implemented a Structural Adjustment programme supervised by the IMF. The results were mixed but, during the same period, the Nicaraguans did have considerable success developing new export markets in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, the former USSR and Canada; they also attracted some economic aid from some of these sources. Some of the aid was provided as emergency assistance in the wake of a series of natural disasters - successive floods and droughts - which have done considerable damage to the agricultural economy. Nicaragua's largest trading partners are the USA (over one-third of the total), Germany, Spain, El Salvador and to a lesser extent,

Nicaragua's other Central and South American neighbours. Nicaragua is a member of the Central American Common Market and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Business: Businessmen wear business suits with ties, or long-sleeved shirts and smart trousers; businesswomen wear business dresses. A knowledge of Spanish is an advantage, although some business people speak English. Enquire at the Embassy for interpreter services. The best time to visit is November to March. Office hours: 0800-1700 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: Cámara de Comercio de Nicaragua, Rotonda Gueguense, 300 Mts al Sur, detras de American Airlines, Managua (tel: (2) 683 505; fax: (2) 683 600; e-mail: comercio@nicarao.org.ni); or Servicio Información Comercial, Centro de Expertaciones e Inversiones, Hotel Intercontinental, 1 cuadra al abacho, 3.5 cuabras al sur, Managua (tel: (2) 683 860; fax: (2) 683 878; e-mail: cei@tmx.com.ni).

12 CLIMATE

Tropical climate for most of the country. The dry season is from December to May, and the rainy season is from June to November. The northern mountain regions have a much cooler climate.

Required clothing: Lightweight cottons and linens are required throughout the year. Waterproofing is advisable during the rainy season. Warmer clothes are advised for the northern mountains.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: From the 16th century, Nicaragua was ruled by Spain. On September 15, 1821, the country became independent from Spain. US troops were invited into the country in 1912, but withdrew in 1933, following a 6-year guerrilla struggle to evict them, led by Augusto César Sandino. The role of the US forces was taken up by the National Guard, led by General Anastasio Somoza Garcia, who seized power in 1935 and whose family ruled Nicaragua in an increasingly brutal, despotic and corrupt manner until 1979. In that year, after a 17-year guerrilla war, the last Somoza was overthrown by the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN). The 'Sandinistas' established a Junta of National Reconstruction, and began a programme of agrarian reform, nationalisation of industry, and massive health and literacy schemes. However, in 1981, following the election of Ronald Reagan as US President, the USA began a programme of destabilisation in Nicaragua, helping the 'Contra' guerrilla forces in Honduras and Costa Rica and mounting an economic boycott. The Contra war caused severe problems for the FSLN government, and persistent attempts by neighbouring countries to establish a peace treaty foundered on US opposition until the 1989 agreement with Honduras. Following this agreement, which was a considerable diplomatic coup for the Sandinistas, the US-backed war in Nicaragua appeared finally to be over. Elections in February 1990 showed how much Sandinista popularity suffered during the years of turmoil and austerity. Violeta Chamorro, widow of the publisher Pedro Chamorro (who was killed by the Somoza regime), defeated Ortega when she stood on behalf of the combined opposition UNO Alliance representing 14 of the 21 opposition parties in Nicaragua. Once in government, much of Chamorro's energy was consumed by holding together the fractious UNO coalition. The President herself had little to do with the day-to-day business of government, which is mostly in the hands of her son-in-law Antonio Lacayo Oyanguren. Under Chamorro, Nicaraguan relations with the US did not proceed as smoothly as either party would have liked. Bilateral aid was the major sticking point, with the US Congress imposing a series of

obstacles to the \$100 million annual subvention; but Nicaraguan diplomacy proved enough to avoid the suspension of aid. At home, the instability and perceived lack of action on the part of the Chamorro government led to a series of armed uprisings in the remoter parts of the country by disaffected ex-soldiers (from both Contras and Sandinistas) whose land claims had been ignored. UNO has since been pushed out of ministerial office by Chamorro, who has replaced their representatives with members of the newly-formed Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN) and the Grupo de Centro, a faction composed of centrist UNO dissidents. While the disintegration of the anti-Sandinista UNO coalition was less than surprising, the split in the traditionally disciplined Sandinistas was unexpected. In the summer of 1995, a moderate faction led by ex-Vice President Sergio Ramirez, broke away leaving Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega in charge of the rump. Ortega's fortunes have since deteriorated further: although he was once more re-elected Sandinista leader at the party's May 1998 Congress, his future political prospects have been put in serious jeopardy after he was accused of sexual molestation by his stepdaughter. This case has yet to be resolved. The FSLN was still unable to recover its former position at the elections of October 1996. Although Ortega recorded almost 40% of the poll, he was defeated by Arnoldo Aleman Lacayo leading an alliance of liberal and centrist parties. The Alianza Liberal also became the largest party in the Asamblea Nacional following simultaneous legislative elections, albeit falling short of an absolute majority. The issue of land reform continued to dominate Nicaraguan politics, with numerous disputes dating back to the Sandinista era and before. Following the passage of carefully worded legislation and the disarming of the 'Rearmados', rural guerrillas still pursuing some of these claims at the beginning of 1998, the issue - the cause of much bitterness and conflict in Nicaragua - now seems to have been settled.

Government: The President, who is elected for a 5-year term, wields executive power assisted by a deputy and Cabinet of Ministers. Legislative power rests with the National Assembly, whose 92 members (reduced from 96 in 1990) are popularly elected by proportional representation. Under the terms of Constitutional amendments adopted in July 1995, the President's and legislature's mandate was established as five years.

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