

NICARAGUA



Hello! My name is Julio and I'm Nicaraguan. Recently, while in class I researched my country. I'm happy to present to you some of the things I learned! Pick a topic and start exploring Nicaragua!



The **Country Fact Sheets** series is presented to you by the Réseau In-Terre-Actif and produced with the support of the government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
développement international



COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

My country Nicaragua is the biggest country in Central America. It has a surface area of over 129,494 km! Of course, Nicaragua is a small country in comparison to Canada, but for where I'm from, it's big!

The word **Nicaragua** is originally an indigenous word from around the time of the Spanish conquest. It was given to the narrow territory that separated Lake Nicaragua from the Pacific Ocean, and comes from the name of the indigenous chief *Nicarao* who ruled the territory when the Spanish conquistadors arrived.

As you can see from the map, Nicaragua is located south of Honduras and north of Costa Rica. It is bordered to the east and west by two large bodies of water. To the left lies the Pacific Ocean, and to the right lies the Caribbean sea.

The scenery in my country is spectacular! An impressive chain of 25 volcanoes crosses Nicaragua from north to south (on the Pacific coast). Some of the volcanoes are still active. If ever you visit my country, you'll see that it's possible to climb some of the volcanoes. The view from the peaks of these volcanoes is unforgettable and this is part of the beauty and charm of my country!

Coffee, peanuts, bananas, sugar cane, tobacco, beef, and fish are my country's main exports.






My country's capital is called Managua and the main cities are León, Granada, Masaya, Chinandega and Estelí.



Did you know that?

Managua doesn't have a downtown section? Managua's downtown was destroyed by the earthquake of 1972 and the difficulties of the time delayed reconstruction efforts. With time, numerous small city centres popped up, and now no one is interested in rebuilding the original downtown Managua. Thus, the ruins of the downtown core remain as testament to the destructive power of the earthquake.



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|  | Surface Area | 129 494 km ² |
|  | Climate | Tropical. Rainy season lasts from May to October. |
|  | Temperature | On the coasts the temperature is 26°C, whereas in the interior, temperature varies between 15 and 27°C. |
|  | Relief | Highlands in the interior of the country. Mountain chains cut across the country from left to right, and through a 72km large coastal plain in the east. |
|  | Natural Resources | Coffee, peanuts, bananas, sugar cane, tobacco, beef, fish, etc. |

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

Population

Even though my country is the biggest country in Central America, with just over 5 million inhabitants it also has the fewest people.

The great majority of Nicaraguans, about 90% of the population, are concentrated on the seashore and the land just off of the Pacific coast. The Atlantic coast makes up 55% of Nicaragua's total coastline, and it is inhabited by 400 000 people (close to 10% of the population). This goes to show that certain regions of my country are almost uninhabited.

In Nicaragua, almost 8 out of 10 inhabitants are métis. A person who is métis is someone whose parents are from different races. In my country, the Spanish conquerors and their descendants mixed with the dominant indigenous groups and sometimes with the minority population of African slaves. The rest of the population is made up of Indigenous, White, and Black people.

Widespread poverty and the armed conflicts that raged during the 1970s and 1980s have resulted in the fact that today, about one in every two Nicaraguans are less than 18 years old! Children represent the future of my country!



Population

Facts at a Glance

Did you know that?

Nicaragua's address system is unique. Some street names exist, but almost no one knows or uses them. In my country, people find their way by means of the four cardinal points relative to a common landmark. For example, my address is written as follows: the Church, three streets south, towards the lake.

Finally, here are a few words in Spanish with their pronunciations. Thus, you'll be able to greet people if you visit Nicaragua.

Hello : Buenos dias
(boo-eh-nose dee-as)

Good evening : Buenas noches
(boo-eh-nas not-cheys)

How are you doing? : Como esta?
(Coh-moh es-tah)

Thank you : Gracias
(Grah-see-as)

 **Number of Inhabitants** 5,5 millions (2005)

 **Density (number of people per Km²)** 42 inhabitants/km² (2005)

 **Life Expectancy** 70 (2005)

 **Purchasing Power** US\$ 3300 (2004)

 **People Without a job** 50% (2003)

 **People who can read and write** 77% (2004)

 **Mortality rate under 5 years of age** 38 per 1000 children (2004)

 **Human Development Index (HDI)¹** 112th out of 177 countries (2003)

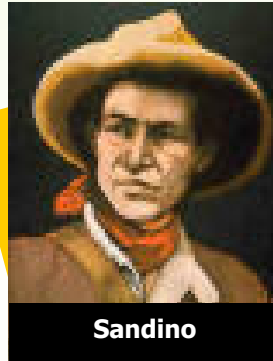
 **Ecological Footprint²** 1,1 (2001)

History

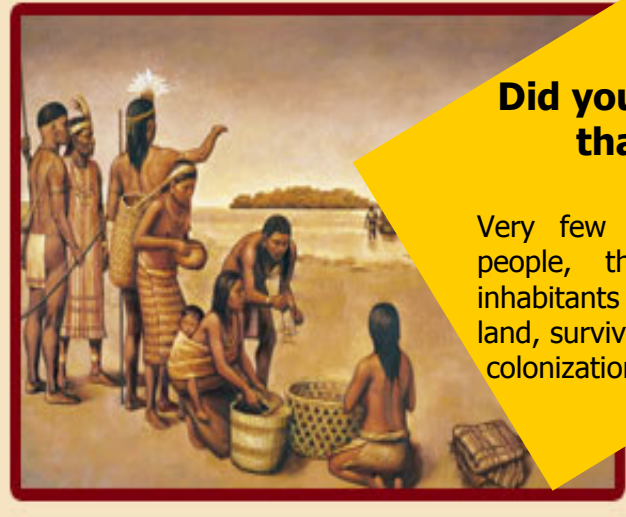
There has been much conflict and unrest throughout the history of my country! Let me give you a general outline.

Almost 500 years ago, around the year 1520, Spanish colonizers established themselves in my country on the Pacific coast. They came to take possession of our riches and send them back to Spain. This is why we are Spanish-speaking and Catholic today. On the Atlantic coast, my country was also influenced by the English.

In 1821, we gained our independence from Spain. Unfortunately, since then my country has experienced much instability. This is largely due to violent struggles between political parties fighting to rule the country. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the United States has undertaken a number of military interventions in my country. Our national hero Augusto César Sandino and his troops chased the United States' military forces out of my country. However, Sandino was assassinated and the dictator Anastasio Somoza and his sons took control of Nicaragua for almost 45 years with the support of the American government.



Sandino



Did you know that?

Very few Indigenous people, the original inhabitants of my land, survived Spanish colonization.

FSLN



Anastasio Somoza

Do you know what a dictatorship is? It is when all the power in a country is exercised non-democratically by one individual, one family, or one political party. My father lived during the time of the Somoza dictatorship. He explained that liberty was restricted, and that people lived in fear. Somoza's army, the National Guard, kept a close watch over them and many people were imprisoned and tortured.

A rebellion army led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front came together and overthrew the dictator and his National Guard in 1979. Sadly, this civil war lasted many years and resulted in thousands of deaths.

The political system that the Sandinista Front put into place confiscated American land, making the American government angry. A civil war was triggered during the 1980s, resulting in thousands of victims and heavily indebting the country. It is sad. Even though peace has returned to Nicaragua since the 1990s, the majority of people in my country live in poverty. I can't wait for my people to enjoy better days!

History

Culture

The Roman Catholic faith is an important influence in my country. La Purísima, celebrated on the 8th of December, is a religious festival that honours the Virgin Mary. The Christmas holiday is the most important celebration of the year in my country.

Equally, on the 15th of September we celebrate our country with **piñatas**, parades in the street with music, costumes, dancing, etc.

Every Saturday morning, I attend folklore courses. We practice traditional dances while wearing beautiful, brightly coloured traditional costumes. Our teacher teaches us about the customs and history of my country. She even taught us a few verses from one of the most famous poets in Nicaragua: Ruben Dario. Are you able to recite any poems from your country?

Our national sport is baseball. Each large city has its own team. My brother plays football a lot. I think you call this sport 'soccer' in your country.



Nacatamale is our national dish. It is made up of chicken, red fava beans, citrus fruits, corn, potatoes, bananas, and rice cooked in a banana leaf. Another popular dish is *gallo pinto*. It is a meal made up of rice, onions, and red beans. It is very popular with people who are less fortunate.

To hear the Nicaraguan national anthem, you can visit this website, you'll also find the national anthems of a host of other countries...

www.david.national-anthems.net/ni.htm



Did you know that?

Handicrafts from my country are very popular with tourists. High quality hammocks are produced along with other crafts in the city of Masaya. I love relaxing in a hammock, do you?



Culture

Did you know that?

Nicaragua suffers from natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and drought). When I was born in 1996, a terrible hurricane called Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua and resulted in a great deal of damage and many deaths.



Challenges

Each day in Nicaragua, most people face numerous problems that make their life difficult. You must know that my country is the second poorest country in the Americas after Haiti. One child in three suffers from malnutrition in Nicaragua.

Poverty and inequality are serious challenges here. Imagine, 2.3 million people in Nicaragua are poor; that's almost half of our population. Many children have to work to help their family. *UNICEF*, the international organization dedicated to helping children, has counted 167 000 working children or young adolescents. It is deeply troubling.

With regards to education, Nicaraguan students are on average 10.3 years old once they finish their six years of mandatory primary-level studies. Many students in my class are older than me, and in my neighbourhood many families don't have enough money to send their children to school.

My father told me that there is an unequal distribution of wealth in my country. Let me explain myself: the best land and the biggest companies belong to a minority of people and the benefits go to only a few people. Salaries are very low and the unemployment rate is very high for the rest of us. Many people are looking for work.

For some time now, street violence, domestic violence, the sexual exploitation of children, and drug addiction have been on the rise in Nicaragua. Despite all these problems we try to remain hopeful, and many people are working to build a better Nicaragua.

Despite these difficulties my people are full of spirit, and are warm and welcoming. I hope you will visit us one day.

Challenges

Solutions

Despite the many challenges that we live with here in Nicaragua, we try to stay hopeful that things will change for the better. Towards this end, many people are working towards a better Nicaragua for all of us. International cooperation projects are underway: Let me tell you about one such project, funded in part by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

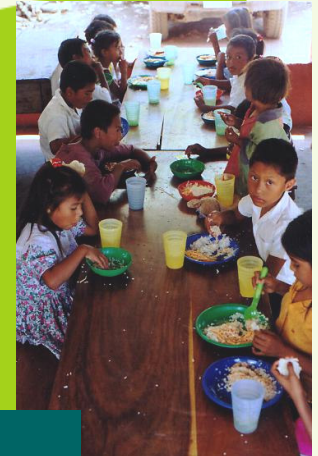
Recently, a Canadian co-operant was working for a number of months filming children who work in my country's **rural** regions. She was sent to Nicaragua by a Canadian non-profit organization called *SUCO*, an organization that has been working in my country for many years.

Equipped with her video camera and a microphone, she created images of children working to meet all sorts of daily needs such as drawing water, collecting firewood, working in the farm fields, and taking care of the animals, amongst other work.

She researched, filmed, and edited her movie with the help of a Nicaraguan organization called *Instituto de Promoción Humana*. This organization has been working for years to help ensure that children are not economically exploited.

The documentary is now used to educate the Nicaraguan population with regards to the plight of rural child workers; workers who are often overlooked. It is shown to mayors and representatives from various ministries and local organizations. It is expected that it will be shown on national television.

Furthermore, someone told me that this educational tool can also be used to show people in your country, especially Canadian students, the realities of child workers here in Nicaragua. The documentary is thought-provoking and makes you want to work towards international solidarity. It's great! You can also inform yourself further about child workers by watching the documentary on this website: www.suco.org (visit the section "nos actions").



Did you know that?

The *Canadian International Development Agency* has also financed educational kits regarding, among other things, the exploitation of child labour. Visit what the *Réseau In-Terre-Actif* has produced on the subject at:

www.in-terre-actif.com/english/extension/exploitation_travail/anglais/accueil.html

Solutions

Glossary

Piñata :

A decorated vessel (as of papier-mâché) filled with candies, fruits, and gifts and hung up to be broken with sticks by blindfolded persons as part of especially Latin-American festivities (as at Christmas or for a birthday party).



Rural :

Refers to the countryside, peasants, their way of living.

Purchasing Power¹:

Purchasing power is the capacity to buy goods and services with a given income.

Human Development Index² :

The Human Development Report issued by the UN, which classifies 177 countries according to life-expectancy, education, literacy, and income.

Ecological Footprint³ :

It measures how much land and water area is necessary to provide one person's sustenance.

Glossary



Don't forget that you can do something to improve our world. You and your friends in school can get involved. Become aware of the important issues around the world. All together, we can change things for the better!

To learn more about Nicaragua, check out the following web sites:

- ✓ www.in-terre-actif.com/english
- ✓ www.ethiquette.ca
- ✓ www.equiterre.org/en
- ✓ www.amnesty.org
- ✓ www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-12882713-HSK?OpenDocument

Memory game: Fair trade

Most of the products that we buy come from southern countries. These products travel a long way and go through many intermediaries who make money off the small producers' backs. This is what we call conventional commerce. Fair trade would like to correct this situation...

This game has three sets of cards: The first set presents problems related to conventional commerce. The second set represents the seven principles of fair trade that offer solutions to those problems. The third set illustrates each of those principles.

Cut out the 21 pieces and place them upside-down. Then turn the cards over and try to match each problem with the proper solution and match it with the piece that illustrates the solution.

Problem:

Producers would like to start a cooperative but they don't have enough money to buy the necessary material and seeds.

Problem:

The director of a group of coffee producers decides to invest the sales profit for the construction of a community school without consulting the other producers in the group.

Problem:

The price received for selling bananas in the market is lower than what it cost the farmer to produce them; therefore they are losing money.

Problem:

As consumers, it is impossible for us to know the living conditions of the small producers in southern countries.

Problem:

In order to minimize production costs, producers are forced to use pesticides to avoid losing their harvests.






Problem:

The products made by a small producer have to pass by 10 or so intermediaries before reaching our tables.

Problem:

Producers do not know if they will find a buyer this year for their products at the right value.



| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  <p>4</p> |  <p>7</p> |  <p>2</p> |  <p>3</p> |
|  <p>1</p> | <p>Democratic management:</p> <p>2</p> <p>Producer groups have to share the profits in a fair manner and every worker should voice his opinion when a decision has to be made.</p> | <p>Public information:</p> <p>4</p> <p>Consumers have access to information concerning producers and the need for an alternative trade.</p> | <p>Direct trade:</p> <p>6</p> <p>Fair trade organizations buy directly from cooperatives. They are equal partners that help one another.</p> |
| <p>Long-term commitment:</p> <p>7</p> <p>Cooperatives can count on the fact that fair trade organizations buy their products in a consistent manner, permitting producers to plan their operations more effectively.</p> | <p>Credit:</p> <p>1</p> <p>A credit with a low interest rate is offered to small producers. Often a part of the order is paid for in advance.</p> | <p>Environment protection:</p> <p>5</p> <p>Fair trade organizations stand by producers who respect the environment.</p> | <p>Right price:</p> <p>3</p> <p>Producers have to make enough of a profit to provide for all of their needs.</p> |