



Nicaragua

Travel Guide

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions, and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip. Be sure to check the reading listing included here for more information.



"It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end."

~ Ursula K. LeGuin ~

Managua ~ Elevation: 164 feet / Latitude: 12 09N / Longitude: 086 10W

Average Temperature

°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	79	81	83	84	84	82	81	81	81	80	80	79

Average Number of Days With Precipitation

Days	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	4	2	2	2	10	16	15	16	18	15	8	5

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.

CLOTHING

Dress is informal. Lightweight cottons and linens are required throughout the year. Waterproofs are advisable during the rainy season. Warmer clothes are advised for the northern mountains.

Laundry can be done at the major hotels at the appropriate charges imposed by the hotels. There are no laundry facilities in remote areas or on cruise vessels.

PASSPORTS / VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest Nicaragua consulate.

Important: Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

TIME ZONE & FLIGHT TIME

Time Zone: GMT - 6

Flight times (approximate): From Miami the flight time to Nicaragua is 2 ½ hours.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

On Arrival: Upon your arrival, proceed through Customs and Immigration, obtain your luggage, and exit the airport. If you have booked a complete package with Big Five tours, a representative will be holding a sign identifying you or him/her. If you have not made hotel and transfer arrangements with Big Five Tours & Expeditions, then please follow the instructions in your final itinerary. We recommend you change money at airports, hotels, or local banks.

Nicaragua Customs: The following can be imported into Nicaragua without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes or

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

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

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

Int'l Departure Tax & Airport Taxes: US\$25 on all departures; children under two years are exempt.

U.S. Customs: Your personal exemption is \$800. There are limits on the amount of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products you may include in your duty-free personal exemption.

Regulations frequently change. For more information, please contact your nearest Customs office, visit the Customs & Border Protection website at www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml, or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

LUGGAGE

Traveling light is always the first and best rule!

We recommend passengers limit their luggage to one medium-sized soft bag per person or two small duffel bags. In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations.

Generally speaking, from the US, economy class passengers are allowed to check in two (2) normal size pieces of luggage (each piece measuring no more than about 62 linear inches, which means length plus width plus height), and not exceeding 70 pounds per bag.

Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions apply for charter flights. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final documents.

Most airlines now allow only one carry-on bag in addition to one personal item such as a laptop or handbag. Most bags within the 22 x 14 x 9 (or, a total of 45 linear inches) size restriction will be considered legal carry-on size by major domestic U.S. airlines. Many US airlines check-in desks have sizing boxes within which your bag must fit. Obviously, no knives or cutting instruments are allowed in carry-on baggage.

All luggage should have identification inside as well as secure baggage tags on the outside.

Please note that the US National Transportation and Safety Board now suggests that you do not lock your checked luggage. If a screener has to open your bag, the locks may have to be broken. This applies to flights within the US and international flights originating in the US.

This, however, does not address other international travel issues. We suggest that you lock your luggage and

bring a couple of spare locks in the event one or more are cut off. But the choice is up to each individual traveler to make.

CAMERAS & FILM

Always approach people with an attitude of respect and ask permission before taking photographs. Do not take anyone's picture without permission. Many times it is necessary to negotiate a fee beforehand. The same general rule about asking permission also applies to photographing places of worship, religious festivals, and rural homesteads. Never take any photos of airports, police or government buildings, military installations, or borders.

Equipment: Bring cameras and lenses you are comfortable using. If you get new equipment before you go, do so as far in advance as possible. Shoot and develop at least a dozen rolls before departure to work out problems. And, don't forget your camera operation manual, filters, and a flash unit. Cameras should be packed with good cushioning. The roads are sometimes rough, and vibration can do damage. Make sure you have lens caps for all your lenses. Clean your equipment frequently. Bring along a puffer brush and lens cleaning tissues.

Lenses: A combination of fixed and/or zoom lenses with focal lengths from 28 mm to 200 mm is a good for general travel photography, although you can take excellent photographs with only a 50 mm lens. Zoom lenses such as 35-80mm, 70-210 mm, or 100-300 mm will help you capture the sights in a variety of different settings. A macro lens is helpful for shooting close-ups, but a good set of extension tubes will work well. A 2x converter is also a handy. Point and shoot cameras are nice for a group or indoor shots, but leave something to be desired when photographing animals, scenics, and nature. Bring a small cleaning kit and blower brush to keep equipment clean.

Film: It is always best to bring whatever film you need with you. Film is generally more expensive abroad and it may be hard to locate. You'll be surprised at how much film you use when you are trying to capture all those special moments. Even those not all that interested in photography will probably shoot a couple of 36-exposure rolls per day, and enthusiastic shooters will easily double or triple that amount. Be sure film is fresh and, when possible, keep it refrigerated. A film speed of ASA/ISO 64 is an excellent choice for color slide film. Use this speed when possible rather than higher speed films. There is a noticeable difference in quality that it is worth the extra effort to keep your camera steady at a somewhat slower shutter speed than you would otherwise use. For color prints, there are several good choices, including Kodak and Fuji films (ASA/ISO 100 & 200) for daylight photography, ASA/ISO 400 & 1000 are good for lower light and nighttime situations.

It is helpful to set up a numbering system for your film, marking each roll with masking tape and numbers or letters, before leaving home. This way you can code the rolls of film and where they were shot. It's quite a job to sort through hundreds of pictures with no clue where or when they were taken.

Avoid airport x-ray machines whenever possible and request a hand search of your film. While security people are often obliging, some are not, so allow a little extra time. X-rays are cumulative on exposed and unexposed film so the more times film is x-rayed, the more risk of damage. This is especially true with older machines found in many countries. Lead bags for film are available for purchase and

are worth the small investment. Do not have film in your camera because it may be opened for inspection.

Note: Recent news reports warn that new explosive detectors used in more than 100 US airports to scan checked baggage will ruin unprotected, unexposed film. This technology will eventually be in place at all airports worldwide. Experts suggest carrying your film in your carry-on luggage and placing film in safety, lead-lined bags to prevent X-ray damage.

Video: If you are planning to shoot video on a safari, be sure to bring plenty of tape and batteries with you. Do not plan to buy videotape in abroad. Videotape is not affected by airport x-ray - only magnetic fields or prolonged exposure to heat will damage videotape. Your battery charger should be capable of automatically adjusting to 240 volts. You will probably have no problem finding a plug in most of the lodges and larger tented camps, but be prepared with plenty of batteries.

Batteries: Put fresh photo-quality batteries in your camera and other electric equipment before you leave and bring at least two sets of spare batteries with you. Your camera will be useless without them, and batteries tend to be expensive

HEALTH

The current health risks in Nicaragua include cholera, dengue fever, hepatitis, malaria, rabies, and typhoid fever.

Please keep in mind that these requirements this information changes frequently. Tour members should consult their personal physicians and / or the Center of Disease Control in Atlanta, for any recommended general and/or specific health measures at the time of travel.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta has a fax information service with updated travel information. To receive these documents, call 404-332-4565 and follow the prompts. You can also go to their website www.cdc.gov/travel.

Health care: Nicaragua has 27 public hospitals. The Nicaraguan government is currently carrying out a broad program 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 centers in rural areas, however, their resources can be limited. International travelers are strongly advised to take out full medical insurance before departure.

General Recommendations:

- Do not drink tap water at all.
- Do not drink your beverages with ice.
- Always drink bottled mineral water and soft drinks (diet soft drinks are not always available).
- Avoid any raw foods while traveling in the continent, except in recommended restaurants and hotels, where you may do so if you wish. Always choose cooked food.
- If you wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, it is advisable to bring an extra pair and cleaning fluid.
- In places of altitudes above 8,000 feet, you may suffer digestive problems, light dizziness or headache. We recommend that you only eat light foods the first day or two, and avoid alcohol.
- Sudden dietary changes, from your daily consumption at home to exotic dishes, especially on the first day or two, may result in digestive problems, often leading to

headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Please be careful.

DEALING WITH JET LAG

With the joys and adventures of international travel come certain unavoidable inconveniences such as occasional lost luggage or bouts of jet lag. In fact, studies reveal that as much as 90% of long distance travelers experience a degree of jet lag.

Jet lag describes that out-of-sorts feeling associated with long flights, particularly those across time zones. Symptoms and severity vary but may include drowsiness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, headaches, insomnia, and swelling of the extremities.

The number of time zones crossed affects the severity of jet lag. The internal body clock follows circadian rhythm, which is controlled by the hypothalamus that processes nerve signals. That clock is designed for regular cycles of light and darkness. Depending on the number of time zones crossed, it may take several days for that rhythm to be restored.

But that is not the only influence. Other factors include cabin pressure, stale air, lack of humidity, and your overall physical condition at the beginning of your trip.

Although jet lag can not be completely avoided, there are some simple things you can do to help minimize its affects.

Consider the following for your next scheduled trip:

- Start your trip rested with a good night's sleep prior to departure.
- Drink plenty of fluids -- water and juices will help you to stay well hydrated. Seasoned travelers recommend that you carry drinking water with you and drink eight ounces every hour.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine, however, just before and during flights. Both possess diuretic properties that promote dehydration. Alcohol also causes drowsiness and contributes to feeling sluggish.
- Once comfortably onboard, reset your watch to the time zone to which you are traveling. This small act helps you begin adjusting to your destination's local time.
- As much as possible, create a dark environment on the plane. Bright lights have been shown to have a strong effect on individuals' body clocks. If necessary, try eye shades and earplugs to help block distractions and convince your body that it is nighttime. Closing window shades and turning off overhead lights may also help. Sleep on the plane if your flight has an early morning arrival time.
- Loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes will help in the event you experience mild swelling. Experienced travelers often bring lightweight slippers to wear during flights.
- Get adequate rest before starting on your journey to help minimize the amount of catching up you'll have to do when you arrive at the destination. Once home, try to schedule a day of rest before returning to work.
- Although not always feasible, look for opportunities to walk around while in flight. Do simple isometric exercises (contracting and relaxing as many muscle groups as possible) in your seat. These will improve circulation, help promote increased alertness, and reduce chances of swelling.

- If you arrive in the morning, plan to stay awake. If possible, wait until the local bedtime to sleep. Many people swear that this is key in determining how quickly they adapt to local conditions. You will sleep better and will be less likely to suffer insomnia than if you nap upon arrival.
- During extended stopovers, showers are sometimes available. Trans-Pacific pilots report that taking a shower helps them recover more quickly from the general effects of jet lag after the flight.

SAFETY

Common sense safety precautions you normally observe when traveling anywhere should be followed to minimize the risk of personal injury or property loss.

Leave jewelry at home! Do not leave cash, traveler checks, airline tickets, etc. in an unattended room, even in a locked suitcase. Most of the lodges, hotels, and camps have safe deposit facilities at the front desk for your valuables. Use them. Be careful when carrying purses or cameras. Do not carry large amounts of currency or valuables. Do not walk around unfamiliar cities alone at night. Be wary of entering into conversation with unknown people on the street. These are the same precautions a visitor would observe in North American cities. Common sense is the best defense.

Don't carry a lot of packages at once. Purses should be zippered and have short shoulder straps so you can protect them with your upper arm. Wallets and passports should not be carried in your back pocket, and expensive watches, chains and jewelry should not be worn. Don't leave cameras or binoculars in sight of any open window. Do not leave any valuables or money unattended in your hotel room. If you follow these precautions, you probably won't have any trouble. Common sense is the best deterrent to theft.

Carry Your Passport. Please ensure that you carry your passport or tourist card at all times. Never go anywhere (not even the Post Office) without your passport or tourist card. Should you ever be asked, you should be able to present your identification, your passport, tourist card, or visa. Not having it with you could mean a trip to the Police Station.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page: <http://travel.state.gov>.

TRAVELER'S ETIQUETTE

In addition to looking out for one's own safety, the conscientious guest has the obligation of treating his hosts with respect and courtesy. An effort to speak the local language, no matter how rudimentary, is always appreciated as are good manners and discretion in the use of cameras. Above all, one must remember that the polite guest, in a country no less than in a private home, is obliged to learn from and adapt to the ways of his hosts, rather than expecting them to accept his customs.

Travel necessitates being a good-natured realist as well as a romantic, and requires an agreeable acceptance of situations as they exist, not as each of us might prefer them to be. A good attitude makes for an enjoyable travel experience. If you are this appreciative traveler, we want you with us because we know you'll be a wonderful companion and have the time of your life.

Political unrest is an unfortunate reality in the world today, and sometimes changes to your final itinerary may be necessary to ensure your safety while traveling.

A concern for conserving the remaining natural wonders, boundless beauty, and diversity of our small planet is necessary, and always appreciated.

You are entering the blissful and rejuvenating world of discovery; be open to the experience. Our tours are dedicated to the individual with an inquiring mind. This is a time for you to escape the stresses and strains of your everyday life

Smoking: We suggest that passengers refrain from smoking in public areas, sightseeing vehicles, and when aboard any cruise vessel while in the cabins, the dining area, or community areas. There are designated areas for smoking on cruise vessels. Please dispose of cigarette butts in the appropriate receptacles / ashtrays. Do not throw cigarette butts on the ground or overboard.

CURRENCY / BANKING

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

Traveler's Checks: Accepted in a number of places.

Personal Checks: Not accepted

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 specialties include nacatamal, indio viejo, quesoillo, 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.

There are a number of restaurants/bars (coreders) where beer, often the cheap local brand, is available. Multicolored fruit drinks made from fresh tropical fruit are superior to bottled soft drinks.

SHOPPING

There is a VAT (value added tax) of 15% nationwide in Nicaragua.

Local items include gold work, embroidery, shoes and paintings. Traditional crafts are available, particularly in Masaya, at the handicrafts market.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks and Exchange Bureaus: M - F 8:30-17:00,
Sat 8:30-11:30.

Business Offices: M - F 8:00-17:00.

Shops and Commerce: M - F 9:00-19:00, Sat 9:00-18:00.

Restaurants: Varies

TIPPING

Tiping is solely at your discretion.

Most Nicaraguans do not leave tips in inexpensive restaurants. In good restaurants you could leave up to 10% of the bill. Some restaurants include a service charge with the bill, and this is usually clearly shown. No tip is necessary for taxi drivers but porters expect a small tip.

Your professional, licensed guide and driver, who accompany you, work very hard. They ensure that you receive the best BIG FIVE service, tour quality, and satisfaction. If you wish to reward them for their work, we suggest the following:

- \$5-\$10 per person per day for services rendered by any licensed guide / naturalist.
- \$2-\$4 per person per day for services rendered by driver.

INTRODUCTION TO NICARAGUA

Constitution and Government: Nicaragua is a republic that gained independence from Spain in 1821. The current Head of State is President Enrique Bolanos Geyer since 2002. The President, who is elected for a five-year term, wields executive power and is 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 and legislature's mandate was established as five years.

Location: Middle America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Costa Rica and Honduras **Note:** largest country in Central America; contains the largest freshwater body in Central America, Lago de Nicaragua

Population: 4,938,000 (1999).

Religion: Eighty-five per cent Roman Catholic.

HOLIDAYS

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Apr 8	Holy Thursday
Apr 9	Good Friday
May 1	Labor Day
Jul 19	Liberation Day
Aug 1	Fiesta Day
Sep 14	Battle of San Jacinto
Sep 15	Independence Day
Nov 2	All Souls' Day
Dec 8	Immaculate Conception
Dec 25	Christmas Day

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

COMMUNICATIONS

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

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

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

Internet: Internet cafes in Nicaragua provide public access to Internet and e-mail services.

ELECTRICITY

110 volts AC, 60Hz - Visitors from Europe and some other countries will need both a converter and an adapter with two parallel flat pins (as the used in North America) for any appliances they plan to bring along.

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.

ECONOMY

Nicaragua's economic travails during the last 20 years have left it one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Agriculture is the main economic activity, with cotton, coffee, sugar, bananas and meat 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 nationalized following the 1979 Sandinista revolution but the bulk of the economy was left in private hands. Since then, state-controlled industries have reverted to private ownership, but the period of Sandinista rule brought economic decline largely as a result of domestic mismanagement, Western economic sanctions and civil war. During the 1990s, Nicaragua implemented a Structural Adjustment program supervised by the IMF. The results were mixed but, during the same period, the Nicaraguans successfully developed 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 caused considerable damage to the agricultural economy. Nicaragua has a huge foreign debt and was a beneficiary of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in 2001. The same year, the country was consumed

by an economic crisis triggered by drought, financial instability (the private banking sector has all but collapsed) and exceptionally low commodity prices. 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 neighbors. Nicaragua is a member of the Central American Common Market and the Inter-American Development Bank.

HISTORY

The earliest traces of human habitation in Nicaragua are the 10,000-year-old Footprints of the Acahualinca - prints preserved under layers of volcanic ash of people and animals running toward Lago de Managua. Around the 10th century AD, indigenous people from Mexico migrated to Nicaragua's Pacific lowlands, and Aztec culture was adopted by many Indians when Aztecs moved south during the 15th century to establish a trading colony.

The first contact with Europeans came in 1502, when Columbus sailed down the Caribbean coast. In 1522, a Spanish exploratory mission reached the southern shores of Lago de Nicaragua. A few years later the Spanish colonized the region and founded the cities of Granada and León, subduing local tribes. Granada became a comparatively rich colonial city; León became a hotbed of liberalism. The inhabitants of the heavily populated area around Managua put up a fierce resistance to the Spanish invaders, and their city was destroyed. For the next three centuries Managua was but a village.

Nicaragua gained independence from Spain in 1821, along with the rest of Central America. It was part of Mexico for a brief time, then part of the Central American Federation, and finally achieved complete independence in 1838. Soon after, Britain and the USA both became extremely interested in Nicaragua and the strategically important Río San Juan navigable passage from Lago de Nicaragua to the Caribbean. In 1848, the British seized the port at the mouth of the Río San Juan on the Caribbean coast and renamed it Greytown. This became a major transit point for hordes of hopefuls looking for the quickest route to Californian gold.

In 1855, the liberals of León invited William Walker, a self-styled filibuster intent on taking over Latin American territory, to help seize power from the conservatives based in Granada. Walker and his band of mercenaries took Granada easily and he proclaimed himself president. He was soon booted out of the country (one of his first moves was to institutionalize slavery) but showed almost absurd tenacity as he repeatedly tried to invade; his efforts set a precedent for continued US interference in Nicaragua's affairs.

In 1934, General Somoza, head of the US-trained National Guard, engineered the assassination of liberal opposition rebel Augusto C Sandino and, after fraudulent elections, became president in 1937. Somoza ruled Nicaragua as a dictator for the next 20 years, amassing huge personal wealth and landholdings the size of El Salvador. Although General Somoza was shot dead in 1956, his sons upheld the reign of the Somoza dynasty until 1979. Widespread opposition to the regime had been present for a long time, but it was the devastating earthquake of 1972, and more specifically the way that international aid poured into the pockets of the Somozas while thousands of people suffered and died, that caused opposition to spread among all classes of Nicaraguans. Two groups were set up to counter the regime: the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, also known as the Sandinistas) and the

UDEL, led by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, publisher of La Prensa, the newspaper critical of the dictatorship.

When Chamorro was assassinated in 1978 the people erupted in violence and declared a general strike. The revolt spread and former moderates joined with the FSLN to overthrow the Somoza regime. The Sandinistas marched victoriously into Managua on July 19, 1979. They inherited a poverty-stricken country with high rates of homelessness and illiteracy and insufficient health care. The new government nationalized the lands of the Somozas and established farming cooperatives. They waged a massive education campaign that reduced illiteracy from 50% to 13%, and introduced an immunization program that eliminated polio and reduced infant mortality to a third of the rate it had been before the revolution.

It wasn't long before the country encountered serious problems from its 'good neighbor' to the north. The US government, which had supported the Somozas until the end, was alarmed that the Nicaraguans were setting a dangerous example to the region. A successful popular revolution was not what the US government wanted. Three months after Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the USA announced that it was suspending aid to Nicaragua and allocating US\$10 million for the organization of counter-revolutionary groups known as Contras. The Sandinistas responded by using much of the nation's resources to defend themselves against the US-funded insurgency.

In 1984, elections were held in which Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinistas, won 67% of the vote, but the USA continued its attacks on Nicaragua. In 1985, the USA imposed a trade embargo that lasted five years and strangled Nicaragua's economy. By this time it was widely known that the USA was funding the Contras, often covertly through the CIA, and Congress passed a number of bills that called for an end to the funding. US support for the Contras continued secretly until the so-called Irangate scandal revealed that the CIA had illegally sold weapons to Iran at inflated prices, and used the profits to fund the Contras.

In 1990, Nicaraguans went to the polls and elected Violeta Chamorro, leader of the opposition UNO and widow of martyred La Prensa editor Pedro Chamorro. Chamorro's failure to revive the economy, and her increasing reliance on Sandinista support, led to US threats to withhold aid, but the civil war was over at last. Daniel Ortega ran for president in October 1996, apologizing for Sandinista 'excesses' and calling himself a centrist, but he was defeated by the ex-mayor of Managua, anticommunist Liberal Alliance candidate, Arnoldo Alemán. President Alemán was sworn in January 10, 1997.

In November of 1998, Hurricane Mitch trampled the Atlantic coast of Central America, leaving disaster in its wake. The hurricane washed out roads and destroyed bridges throughout the region. In Nicaragua, heavy rains following in the wake of the storm kicked off a mudslide at Volcán Casita that buried several villages. Over 10,000 people died as a result of the hurricane, one of the nastiest this century. The tragedy prompted several nations to cancel Nicaragua's debt in late 1999, and the country is slowly rebuilding.

REGIONS OF NICARAGUA

Nicaragua has three main eco-regions: Pacific, Central and Atlantic; the Pacific region is home to volcanoes, lakes, tropical forests, beaches and mangrove systems; the Central region is home to mountains, rivers and agricultural areas; and the Atlantic region contains rainforests, marine lagoons,

mangrove systems and coral reefs. Tourists are well catered for in these areas.

Managua: The capital's center was completely destroyed by an earthquake in December 1972 and there was further severe damage during the civil wars of 1978-1979. The Government has now decided that it will rebuild the old centre, adding parks and recreational facilities. In the old centre of Managua, one can still see examples of colonial architecture in the National Palace and the Cathedral. There are several museums of note in Managua, one of the most interesting of which is Las Huellas de Acahualinca which houses the site where 9000-year-old footprints were found, testimony to Nicaragua's pre-historic past.

There are several volcanic crater lagoons in the environs of Managua – centers of water sports and residential development with boating, fishing and picnicking facilities. Laguna de Xiloa is the most popular of these lagoons. Boats can be hired on the shores of Lake Managua for visiting the still-smoking Momotombo volcano and the shore villages. On Tiscapa Lagoon, there is a recreation center.

León: This is the 'intellectual' capital of Nicaragua, with a university, religious colleges, the largest cathedral in Central America and several colonial churches. A number of projects are currently underway that will highlight the historical and cultural roots of the city.

Granada: Located at the foot of the Mombacho volcano, Granada has many beautiful buildings and has faithfully preserved its Castilian traditions. The cathedral has been rebuilt in neo-classical style. Also of interest are the Church of La Merced, the Church of Jalteva and the fortress-church of San Francisco.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

In addition to the many comprehensive and readily available guides, there are many books relating to Nicaragua. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. These books may be obtained through most bookstores or on the World Wide Web.

HUMMINGBIRD HOUSE by Patricia Henley

A finalist for the National Book Award, this novel tells the story of once-idealistic Kate and her American friends who struggle against political and economic oppression during the 1980's. Kate is exhausted from her years of midwifery and nursing in Nicaragua and Guatemala, of the deaths she has known, of the love she has lost, and wants to return to the United States. She travels to Antigua, which she hopes will ease the transition to the safety and opulence of the U.S., but finds herself caught, unwilling to stay, unable to return to a world she had left. She and her friends try to forge small platforms of stability in love and friendship, but the overbearing presence of their political causes and the danger they face threaten to destroy what small pleasures they have.

THE STARS AT NOON by Denis Johnson (Author)

Stars at Noon presents the story of a female journalist caught in a murky labyrinth of a world in Nicaragua of the 1980's. She attempts to escape and in the process, becomes mixed up with "the Englishman" and other shadowy characters. The mood is dark and the action somewhat confusing and hard to follow. The atmosphere is steamy and jungle-like, reminiscent of Conrad's classic story, "The Heart of Darkness."

UNCLE NACHO'S HAT: EL SOMBRERO DEL TIO NACHO
by Harriet Rohmer, Veg Reisberg (Illustrator),
Rosalma Zubizarreta (Translator)

Grade 3-6: Two bilingual folktales rooted in the African-American tradition of the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua. Tricky Brother Anansi goes into the cattle business with

Brother Tiger, who has won a large amount of money in a lottery, and they become very successful. After some years, Brother Anansi decides it is time to put one over on Brother Tiger, and he offers to divide the animals and mark them. Needless to say, he will come out ahead.

CLOTHING / PACKING CHECKLIST

Check the items below to be taken with you on your trip. Additional items may be added in the blank spaces provided. This is not intended as an all-inclusive list, but only as a suggested packing guide.

CLOTHING - WOMEN

- Comfortable outfit for air travel
- Sandals or casual shoes
- Walking shoes or tennis shoes
- Rubber thongs (shower)
- Hat
- Windbreaker or jacket
- Pullover sweater or sweatshirt
- Long pants *
- Shorts *
- Socks
- Short sleeve shirts *
- Long sleeve shirts *
- T-shirts
- Pajamas
- Light-weight robe/cover-up
- Swim-suit/cover-up
- Casual slacks/skirt
- Blouses
- Belt(s)
- Underwear
- Scarves
- Costume Jewelry

CLOTHING - MEN

- Comfortable outfit for air travel
- Sandals or casual shoes
- Walking shoes or tennis shoes
- Rubber thongs (showers)
- Hat
- Windbreaker or jacket
- Pullover sweater or sweatshirt
- Long pants *
- Shorts *
- Underwear
- Socks
- Short sleeve shirts *
- Long sleeve shirts *
- T-Shirts
- Pajamas
- Light weight robe/cover-up
- Swim trunks
- Casual slacks
- Shirts
- Belt(s)

TOILETRIES

- Anti-malarial pills
- Vitamins
- Aspirin/Tylenol
- Motion sickness pills
- Short-acting sleeping pills
- Decongestant
- Antibiotic
- Lomotil / Pepto-Bismol
- Antacid
- Antibiotic ointment
- Insect repellent
- Sun screen/Sun block
- Lip balm
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Prescription medications
- Band-Aids
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste & toothbrush
- Feminine Hygiene supplies
- Dental floss
- Mouthwash
- Hairbrush/comb
- Razor
- Q-Tips/cotton balls
- Nail clippers
- Nail file
- Tweezers
- Make-up
- Hand lotion

CAMERA EQUIPMENT

- Extra Batteries/Charger
- Camera/Lenses
- Stick-on labels for film
- Plenty of film
- Lead Protective Film Bags
- Camera bag
- Lens filters
- Cleaning Fluid/Tissues
- Lens Brush/Puffer
- Flash & Flash batteries
- Zip-lock bags
- Camera instruction book
- Video camera / Charger
- Blank Video Tapes

SUNDRIES

- Passport
- International Certificate
- Vaccinations-Health Card
- Airline tickets/vouchers
- Money Pouch
- Credit Cards
- Travelers Checks
- Small calculator
- Sunglasses
- Prescription glasses
- Eyeglass case
- Converter/plug set
- Small Alarm Clock
- Binoculars
- Small flashlight
- Sewing kit
- Small scissors
- Kleenex
- Handi-wipes
- Zip-lock bags
- Travel clothes line
- Pillowcase for dirty clothes
- Small notebook or journal
- Pen
- Deck of cards
- Books/Magazines
- Address book for postcards
- Photocopy of passport & Airline tickets
- Hard candy
- Bandana
- Extra small, collapsible bag
- Neck pillow for airline travel

OTHER

** Clothing should be comfortable*

NOTES