

# Country Profile

## Nicaragua sheds new light in export processing industry

**N**icaragua, land of lakes and volcanoes, is located at the center of the isthmus, linking North and South America. It is the largest country in Central America, covering 50,451 square miles.

The country has three distinct geographic regions: The Pacific lowlands are the most densely populated. This fertile and narrow volcanic belt is dominated by Lake Nicaragua, the largest lake in Central America, covering 5,067 square miles.

The northwestern highlands are an ecological haven surrounded by peaks rising above 3,281 feet. Oaks, pines, moss, ferns, orchids and coffee plantations are plentiful in the massive cloud forests. Major cities are Matagalpa, Esteli and Jinotega.

The Atlantic lowlands are sparsely populated and largely made up of untouched rainforests. The climate is predominantly hot and humid.

### CLIMATE

Nicaragua has two distinct seasons, the timing of which varies from coast to coast. The Pacific lowlands are always hot, but the air is fresh and the countryside is green during the rainy season (May to November), while the dry season (December to April) brings trade winds that sweep the country from coast to coast. The Caribbean coast is hot and humid. The mountains of the north are much cooler than the lowlands, while the Pacific coast is less humid.

### ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Nicaragua is divided into 15 provinces (Pacific Coast) and 2 autonomous regions (Atlantic Coast).

### POLITICAL SYSTEM

Nicaragua is a constitutional democracy with executive, legislative, judiciary and electoral branches of government. The President and Vice-President are elected on the same ticket for a five-year term.

### POPULATION

Nicaragua has a population of 5 million, 65% of which is under 25 years of age.

The Nicaraguan economy is based primarily on agriculture. Forty percent of the population lives in the rural areas. Population density is 87.2 inhabitants per square mile. Two-thirds of the population lives in urban areas and 65% lives on the Pacific coast.

### CAPITAL

Managua, the capital city, is spread along the southern shore of Lake Managua. It has an altitude of 70 meters above sea level and an average temperature of 87.5°F. Relative humidity ranges from 56 to 85 degrees and rainfall varies between 1,650 mm (66") and 700 mm (28"). About 27% of the country's population (over 1 million) lives in or around Managua.

### ECONOMY

Nicaragua's economy relies heavily on agriculture. It is the backbone of the economy, accounting for 25 percent of GDP, 36 percent of employment nationwide and 60% of total exports.

Nicaragua has the most arable land in Central America – 12.1 million acres – of which 8.9 million are ideal for farming and 3.2 million for ranching.

Main crops are sugar, bananas, beef, tobacco, sesame, coffee, rice, corn, cotton, beans and sorghum. Agriculture and livestock account for 70.5% of total exports, yielding approximately US\$670.5 million annually.

Nicaragua has eight gold and silver mines. Its soil is rich in gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, cadmium, bismuth, platinum, zinc, magnesium, chrome and titanium. It also has non-metallic mineral deposits, such as gypsum, limestone, bentonite, marble, clay and quarry stones.

The Atlantic continental shelf is one of the largest sources of lobster, shrimp and fish in the world. Both the Atlantic and Pacific coast have vast reserves of grouper, tuna, clams and mackerel. The estuaries in the Pacific – 96,371 acres – are ideal for commercial shrimp farming.

### TRANSPORTATION

Given its ideal geographic location, Nicaragua is a strategic place with direct access to international markets. It is a passageway in Central America, offering good roads and easy access to US ports on the east and west coast.

Nicaragua's roadway system comprises 15,478 kilometers, connecting Central America through the Pan American Highway, which cuts across the country from north to south. There are also plans to pave the 300-kilometer Rio Blanco-Puerto Cabezas road, which will connect the Atlantic and Pacific coast.

### PORTS

Puerto Corinto, Central America's best natural port on the Pacific, was recently dredged and modernized. Puerto Cabezas, located on the northern tip of the Caribbean coast, is Nicaragua's second most important seaport. It was recently privatized in order to expand and modernize the port facilities. Other important ports and harbors are Puerto Sandino, San Juan del Sur and El Rama, among others.

### Nicaragua's Basic Facts

Area:	130,688 sq. km.	
Borders: North	Honduras	
South	Costa Rica	
West	Pacific Ocean	
East	Atlantic Ocean	
Official language:	Spanish	
Average Temperature	78° F	
Administrative Division	15 provinces; 2 autonomous regions	
Population (2001)	5,071,700	
Density	87.2 per sq. mile	
Population growth	2.9%	
Active population	3,439,400	
EAP (1999)	1,935,170 (35%)	
Open unemployment	13.2%	
Underemployment	36.5%	
Work force		
▪ Skilled workers	24.8%	
▪ Intermediate technicians	12.9%	
▪ High-level technicians	6.4%	
▪ Professionals	7.7%	
Population (20-34 yrs)	1,195,363	
▪ Males	574,961	
▪ Females	620,402	
Urban population	60%	
Pacific Coast	65%	
<b>Managua population:</b>	<b>1,200,000</b>	
<b>(20-34 yrs)</b>	<b>325,915</b>	
▪ Males	146,641	
▪ Females	179,274	
Literacy:	85%	
Life expectancy:	65.8 years	
<b>Major cities, distance from Managua and population</b>		
City	Population	Travel distance
Leon	182,000	93 kilometers
Masaya	140,000	29 kilometers
Chinandega	136,000	132 kilometers
Granada	110,000	45 kilometers
Matagalpa	110,000	130 kilometers
Esteli	100,000	148 kilometers