

Language

Spanish is the official language in Nicaragua and is spoken by most people. It is very likely that you will encounter a language barrier in communicating with your sponsored child, as the majority of the children do not know enough English to write a letter. Those who do not know English will be assigned community workers or volunteers who will explain your letters and help the children compose their responses.

Here are a few phrases in Spanish that you might want to use in your correspondence with your sponsored child:

- ☀️ **Hola**
Hello
- ☀️ **¿Cómo está usted?**
How are you?
- ☀️ **¿Cómo está su familia?**
How is your family?
- ☀️ **Feliz cumpleaños**
Happy birthday
- ☀️ **Hasta luego**
See you later

Holidays

Celebrations are very important to your sponsored child and family. The most important ones have religious and political significance:

- ☀️ **January 1**
El Año Nuevo (New Year's Day)

- ☀️ **March/April***
Easter
- ☀️ **May 1**
Labor Day
- ☀️ **September 15**
Independence Day
- ☀️ **November 1**
All Saints' Day
- ☀️ **December 25**
Navidad (Christmas)

**date varies*

Religion in Nicaragua

Eighty-three percent of the Nicaraguan population are Christian (59 percent are Catholic, and 24 percent are Protestant).

Christians are followers of Jesus, a carpenter and a Jew from the city of Nazareth in present-day Israel. Christians believe that Jesus is the only son of God, born of a virgin woman (Mary) in a stable in Bethlehem. His story is told in the New Testament of the Christian holy book, the Bible. The Christian symbol—the cross—reminds the faithful that Jesus died for them, for the forgiveness of their sins. Christian holidays include Christmas, which celebrates the birth of Jesus; Good Friday, which commemorates the death of Jesus on the cross; and Easter, the most holy of Christian sacred days, which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his death.

Additional sources include the CIA World Factbook and State Department websites.



NICARAGUA

Population	6 million
Capital City	Managua
Official Language	Spanish
Per Capita Income	US\$1,650/year
Youth Literacy Rate	85% male/89% female
Access to Safe Water	98% urban/68% rural
Under 5 Mortality Rate	24/1,000 live births

Source: The State of the World's Children 2014 (UNICEF)

Nicaragua, slightly larger than the state of New York, is the largest country in Central America. It is said that Nicaragua gets its name from an Indian word meaning “here, along the shore.” The country is located in a tropical climate with two seasons. From May to December, the rain falls and planting takes place. The remainder of the year is dry and warm, with an average temperature of 80°F. Managua, the capital city, lies in the western portion of the country. It was largely destroyed by the 1972 earthquake and has not been substantially rebuilt, since it lies on a fault line.



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A Brief History

For centuries, the area that became Nicaragua was inhabited by indigenous tribes. In 1502 Christopher Columbus claimed the land for Spain, and introduced a new way of life and the Spanish language. Independence was won from the colonial rule of Spain in 1821. Around the turn of the century, the United States developed an interest in the area as a possible canal site from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. During the process, business relationships began by which the U.S. loaned money to the Nicaraguan government in exchange for the right to collect customs and own the country's banks. Nicaraguans objected to the agreement, and U.S. Marines were stationed in the country to protect various interests. Eventually, a rebellion led by Augusto Cesar Sandino and his soldiers, the Sovereign Defense Army (later known as the Sandinista army), rose to defeat the U.S. occupation. The Marine force left the country, leaving the Somoza family to rule the National Guard. The family's power was often used to gain personal wealth at the expense of the people of Nicaragua. During the '60s and '70s, war erupted in Nicaragua. Victory went to the Sandinistas, who promised a government designed to serve the needs of the people. However, civil war continued as counter-revolutionaries, called contras, opposed this government. The destructive war that resulted severely affected the lives of all Nicaraguans. In 1990, the first democratic elections were held, and Violeta Chamorro was elected president. Today, free elections are held in Nicaragua every six years, and a new spirit of optimism has arisen.

Plan's work in Nicaragua covers the following key areas:

- ☀ Children in a healthy environment
- ☀ Quality education for children
- ☀ Household economic security
- ☀ Child protection and participation
- ☀ Building relationships

Children in a healthy environment

Plan works to improve health care and wider access to health services for children and their families. We also work with children and adolescents to promote responsible and safe sexual and reproductive health.

Quality education for children

Plan strives to enhance access to quality education for children in Nicaragua through a number of initiatives, including early childhood care and development programs and teacher training.

Household economic security

Plan works to improve the economic capacity of households so that they can become more resilient to shocks—such as the loss of a job, death of a family member, or natural disaster—and plan for the future. This program helps to improve food security for children and ensure that family members develop skills so that they have alternative means of income.

Child protection and participation

Plan works with some of the most marginalized and vulnerable children in Nicaragua, including street children and sexually exploited children. We also promote Plan's "Universal Birth Registration" campaign. A birth certificate provides children with easier access to health and education services, as well as protection from child trafficking and child labor. We work with children and their communities to identify problems and develop solutions.

Building relationships

We work to build effective alliances that are focused on children's rights. We seek to promote cooperation between people with few resources and those who can help them: between children and adolescents; between



families, communities, and local governments; and between children and their sponsors.

Diet and Nutrition

The most typical Nicaraguan meal is called *gallo pinto*, which is a simple plate of mixed red beans and rice. Nicaraguans also eat a lot of corn tortillas, cheese, and plantains. The specialty of Nicaragua is *nacatamales* (cornmeal, meat, and vegetables stuffed and wrapped in a cooked banana leaf). The people of Nicaragua drink lots of coffee, fruit juices, and some drinks made of cocoa and cornmeal. The alcoholic beverage of choice is rum, called *flor de cana*.

Economic Security

Nicaragua is ranked as the second-poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean, after Haiti. Today, agriculture is one of the mainstays of the country's economy. The principal cash crops are coffee, cotton, sugar cane, and bananas. High-quality coffee is grown in the central portion of the country and exported to the United States and Europe. Corn, beans, and rice are the principal food crops grown by farmers on small plots of land. Many farmers in Nicaragua struggle with the problem of land tenure and spend their time tending the land of large landowners with little compensation.

Family Structure

As in many Central American cultures, there is a strong sense of family among the people of Nicaragua. Typically, families consist of five to seven members. It is not uncommon for the members of the extended family—including the grandparents, cousins, and other relatives—to live in the same house. Many Nicaraguan families also take on additional children who might not have a home or whose parents might live in another town or city. There is a male-centered influence within the home, yet the woman of the family holds tremendous influence over the children and monetary issues. Many women are very visible and vocal in Nicaraguan society, holding positions of responsibility in community organizations or various governmental groups.

Ethnic Diversity

As in other Latin American countries, the culture of Nicaragua reflects Spanish cultural patterns, influential since the colonial period, combined with an ancient Native American heritage. Nicaraguans hold many colorful celebrations to commemorate local saints' days and ecclesiastical events. The *marimba* is extremely popular, and ancient instruments such as the *chirimía* (clarinet), *maraca* (rattle), and *zul* (flute) are common in rural areas.