

Country Handbook: Nicaragua



Introduction

Travelling to see the work of Compassion and our local church partners firsthand is an unforgettable experience. On this trip, you'll see for yourself how children are known, loved and protected by their church communities and are being released from poverty in Jesus' name.

This Country Handbook is designed to start preparing you for your trip to Nicaragua. Please read it before you depart, and we'd also recommend that you keep it handy for easy reference.

We pray that God will bless your time in Nicaragua!



Country Information



The largest country in Central America, Nicaragua is known as the 'Land of Fire and Water' because of its numerous volcanoes and lakes. Jaguars, sloths, toucans and howler monkeys are just some of the diverse wildlife that call this country home. Despite being the poorest country in Central America, Nicaragua is forward-thinking: producing 70 per cent of its energy from renewable resources. Another interesting fact to note is that Nicaragua doesn't use street names—landmarks are the best way to navigate.

Main languages:

Spanish

Climate:

Tropical, and quite hot year round

Main religions:

Roman Catholic (50%),
Evangelical (33%)

Currency:

Nicaraguan Córdoba (NIO)



Compassion in Nicaragua

Compassion has been working to release children from poverty in Jesus' name in Nicaragua since 2002. 24.9 per cent of people live below the national poverty line.

Compassion's Child Sponsorship Program is tailored to be age-appropriate for each child.

Children **AGED 1 TO 3** receive home-based care and attend one group activity at the Compassion centre each month.

Children **AGED 4 TO 12** attend their local Compassion centre for six to eight hours a week across three days.

Students **AGED 12 AND OLDER** attend the centre for four hours twice a week to learn vocational skills.



For more information on Nicaragua, scan the QR code or visit: compassion.com.au/where-we-work/nicaragua

Compassion assisted children in Nicaragua typically attend program activities at their local child development centres. Here is an example of what a typical program day looks like:

Devotional time - Children learn to pray.

Spiritual lessons - Children sing songs and learn Bible stories.

Break time - Children can play in a safe environment and develop friendships.

Social-emotional lessons - Children learn conflict resolution skills and how to develop healthy self-esteem. Many children come from challenging home environments and are taught social and personal skills.

Lunch and social time - Children usually receive a meal consisting of rice, meat, tortilla and natural juice, tea or cereal. Children sometimes receive a snack of fruit salad, rice with milk or a thick hot drink made from cornmeal.

Health lessons - Children learn practical health and hygiene tips.

Letter writing and career planning - Older children work with local staff to identify their strengths and interests and set goals for their future.

The children also enjoy camps, sports, field trips and art. Students can participate in vocational training workshops in music, computer literacy, sewing, carpentry, baking, hair styling, entrepreneurship and handicrafts. Parents and caregivers meet monthly.

Cultural Considerations



Clothing

- **Men:** The dress style in Nicaragua is similar to Australia, but please avoid wearing shorts to church. Shirts and t-shirts are acceptable.
- **Women:** Please dress casually and modestly, avoiding shorts and thin strap tops.
- It is best to wear closed-in shoes when visiting local church partners or children.

Body language and conversation

- Nicaraguans are known for their welcoming nature and warm smiles. They use a lot of body language when communicating and value closeness and physical touch, especially when communicating with close friends and family.
- 'Saving face' is an important part of Nicaraguan culture, and Nicaraguans will go to great lengths to avoid embarrassing themselves or others. You might notice Nicaraguans avoid or talk around sensitive subjects rather than addressing them directly.
- Most Nicaraguans prefer to interact and talk with each other rather than to sit alone. They may think you are strange for wanting to spend time alone reading, writing or thinking.
- When speaking with men, it is best for women to be reserved with their body language and eye contact to avoid any confusion about their desire for a romantic relationship.
- Nicaraguans may refer to you by the colour of your skin ('chele' or 'negro') or by your body type ('gordo' or 'flaco'). Please be mindful that this is not intended as an insult.
- Avoid beckoning people with your index finger alone, as this can be considered rude and aggressive. Instead, wave towards yourself using your entire hand.

Greetings

- Men in Nicaragua typically greet other men with a handshake, and women might smile and say an informal 'hola' (hello) or 'mucho gusto' (nice to meet you). A hug and kiss are common greetings among friends and family.
- When at church, 'dios le bendiga' (God bless you) is a commonly used.
- Although 'adiós' is the Spanish word for 'goodbye', Nicaraguans use it to casually greet friends and family as you pass by them on the street.

Language

- Useful Spanish phrases:

Hello: Hola

Goodbye: Adios

Good morning: Buenos dias

Good night: Buenas noches

Thank you: Muchas gracias

Please: Por favor

Excuse me: Perdon

How are you? Como estás?

I don't understand: No entiendo

I'm sorry: Lo lamento

Yes: Si

Eating and drinking

- Nicaraguan cuisine has many similarities to Mexican cuisine, as well as Honduran and Guatemalan influences. Gallo pinto—rice and beans—is a staple and is generally served as part of all three meals. Patacones (fried green banana (plantain) chips), nacatamales (corn dough with meat, rice and vegetables, boiled in banana leaf) and tropical fruits are also commonly enjoyed in the Nicaraguan diet.
- It's customary to use utensils for most dishes but tortillas can be used to scoop up some foods, and in some areas of the countryside, food is eaten with your hands. It's best to follow the lead of your hosts.
- At the start of a meal, it is the custom to say 'buen provecho' (enjoy your food) to everyone.

Security

Please ask permission before you photograph any local people. This can include photos taken from a moving vehicle, so be sure to check with your driver or Trips and Visits Specialist first.

Emergency contact information:

Local emergency number: 118

Compassion Nicaragua office: 011-505-2278-1515

Australian Embassy, Mexico: +52-55-11012200

Australia does not have an embassy in Nicaragua. Instead, travelling Australians can obtain full consular assistance from the nearest Australian Embassy in Mexico.



Key Challenges and Prayer Points

From 2000 to 2017, Nicaragua was making progress: its economy was growing steadily and it had largely avoided the cartel and gang-related crime racking its northern neighbours, El Salvador and Honduras. However, between 2018 to 2019, Nicaragua experienced a period of social and political unrest after social security reforms were proposed. This crisis, combined with frequent natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, led to an economic downturn and a rise in poverty.

Barriers for Nicaraguans seeking to rise above poverty include frequent natural disasters and high unemployment, especially in rural communities. Chronic malnutrition is a serious concern affecting nearly one in five local children, and over a quarter of the population lack access to basic sanitation facilities. Pray for Compassion's work with children and families living in these difficult conditions.

Please pray for our church partners as they coordinate initiatives to bring hope and lasting change to their communities, including empowering youth and caregivers with entrepreneurial skills, strengthening family relationships and fighting childhood malnutrition.



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