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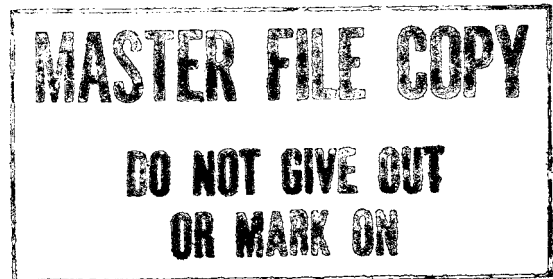


Nicaragua: Major Towns and Other Important Features

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Nicaragua: Major Towns and Other Important Features





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This paper was prepared by 
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Nicaragua:
Major Towns and Other Important Features

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Nicaragua is the largest of the Central American republics, comparable in size to Iowa. Its population of 2.6 million, however, is less than half that of Guatemala, Central America's most populous state. Most of the people, predominantly Spanish-speaking mestizos, live on the more highly developed Pacific side of the country, especially in and around Managua. The central highlands are less densely settled, and the eastern lowlands—mostly rain forests, pine flats, marshes, and swamps—are only sparsely inhabited. Zelaya Department, which includes a portion of the highlands and almost all of the eastern lowlands, is a vast, isolated region long noted for its separatist tendencies. It has a total population of about 200,000—including new arrivals from western Nicaragua, most of them in the highlands; English-speaking descendants of West Indian blacks, principally along the coast; and Miskito and other Indians on the coast, along major streams, and in interior relocation sites away from the Honduran border.

Populated Places

The following cities and towns are the most important populated places in Nicaragua. The figures in parentheses are based principally on Government of Nicaragua population estimates drawn from the 1980 *Anuario Estadístico de Nicaragua*. They are only approximations; no census has been conducted in Nicaragua since 1971.

Bluefields -G10- (20,000), an east coast port on the Bahía de Bluefields, is the capital of sparsely populated Zelaya Department. Its predominantly black population and strong Protestant influence contrast sharply with the typical mestizo villages of western Nicaragua. Antigovernment demonstrations occurred in 1980 over the introduction of large numbers of Cuban teachers, medical personnel, and construction workers. The port has limited facilities and handles primarily local traffic; it exports timber and agricultural produce and supports a small but growing fishing industry.

Boaco -F6- (9,500), capital of the department of the same name, is in a sparsely settled semiarid portion of the central highlands. Coffee and cattle are produced in the surrounding region. Boaco is linked by paved road to the Rama Road, which connects the Rama river port in the Caribbean lowlands to the western departments.

Chinandega -F3- (50,000), capital of Chinandega Department, serves the rich agricultural region in which most of the country's important sugar and cotton exports are grown. Road and rail lines connect the city with the main port at Corinto and with other major urban centers to the south. El Regate, a major Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) installation, is southwest of town.

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Corinto -F3- (18,000), Nicaragua's principal port, is on a Pacific coast island at the northwestern terminus of the nation's rail system. Deepwater berths are capable of handling both conventional and container vessels. Corinto serves as the maritime outlet for the leading agricultural area and handles more than four-fifths of the country's oceangoing commerce. Railroad causeways and highway bridges linking Corinto to the mainland are subject to flood damage.

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Diriamba -H5- (19,000), on a rolling plain in the cool highlands south of Managua, serves the surrounding coffee growing region as a processing and marketing center.

Esteli -E4- (29,000), is strategically located on the Inter-American Highway halfway between Managua and the Honduran border in a cattle and coffee producing area. Media accounts indicate that the city suffered extensive damage during the 1979 civil war. Although some reconstruction has taken place, many of the shops remain closed and the town's commercial importance is in decline. A departmental capital, Esteli also serves as headquarters of Military Region I.

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El Bluff -G10- (400), the principal Caribbean port, is on a peninsula across the bay from Bluefields. Fishing and fish processing dominate the local economy. The port has facilities for berthing small oceangoing vessels. Larger ships must anchor offshore and transfer cargo to shallow-draft vessels for shipment to the river port of Rama (Arlen Siu). Access to port facilities is limited by a controlling depth of about 3 meters in the entrance channel.

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Granada -H5- (63,000), is the country's third-largest city, principal lake port, and southeastern terminus of the national rail system. It is the major commercial center and market for the surrounding agricultural region. Founded in the 1520s, Granada is the traditional cultural rival of Leon, the country's second-largest city.

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Jinotega -E5- (15,500), capital of Jinotega Department, is located in a highland valley north of Matagalpa. At an elevation slightly over 1,000 meters, it is the country's highest city. Extension of a paved road to Jinotega in the early 1960s greatly increased its importance as a commercial outlet for livestock and coffee. Nearby, on the Rio Tuma, is an important hydroelectric facility; its reservoir, Lago de Apanas, is a tourist attraction. Eastern Jinotega Department has been the scene of considerable anti-Sandinista activity.

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Jinotepe -H5- (23,000), capital of the densely populated Carazo Department, is located along the Inter-American Highway in the highlands southwest of Managua where much of the country's coffee is produced. It serves as a processing and marketing center for the surrounding region.

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Juigalpa -G6- (15,000), capital of Chontales Department, is on the country's main east-west highway in a cattle producing region.

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According to Nicaraguan press reports, the government has recently taken steps to reactivate a gold mine at La Libertad, about 25 kilometers northeast of Juigalpa.

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La Rosita -C8- (800) is in the gold- and silver-mining triangle of northern Zelaya Department along the recently constructed Matagalpa-Puerto Cabezas road.

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La Tronquera -B9- (700), a small lumbering settlement in the sparsely populated northeast, is near the seasonal road that connects Puerto Cabezas on the coast and Leimus on the Honduran border.

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Leon -G3- (91,000), Nicaragua's second-largest city, is considered its intellectual and cultural capital. It serves as the transport hub for a densely populated cotton and cattle region. Founded by Spanish conquistador Hernandez de Cordoba in 1524, it was moved in 1610 after an earthquake destroyed the original site near Volcan Momotombo. Intense fighting took place here during the 1979 civil war. Press reports indicate that the USSR has offered to conduct extensive surveying in a 4,000-square-kilometer area around an old gold mine, La Cruz de la India, in the eastern portion of the department. The government hopes to reopen the mine and thereby significantly increase the country's gold production. Leon now serves as headquarters of Military Region II.

practiced. The city's main industrial facility is a Nestle powdered milk plant. The town is linked to the Inter-American Highway at Sebaco by paved road. Matagalpa was an anti-Somoza stronghold during the civil war.

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Montelimar -H4- (500), the site of a former Somoza sugar plantation and refinery near the coast southwest of Managua, has been converted to the Sandinista Popular Army's major training installation and, will serve as the headquarters for Air and Air Defense Forces.

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Managua -G4- (615,000), the nation's capital and chief commercial and industrial center (producing chemicals, textiles, and metal products), is on the southern shore of Lago de Managua. It has twice been destroyed by earthquakes and was heavily damaged during the 1979 civil war. Much of the central part of the city is empty, but since the 1972 earthquake a number of commercial developments have grown up along transport arteries to the south. Present-day Managua houses an estimated one-fourth of the nation's population. The city is the hub of the nation's rail and road system and of the growing military infrastructure.

Ocotal -D4- (13,500), a former gold mining town, serves as the capital of Nueva Segovia Department. It is located on a plateau about 20 kilometers from the Honduran border and is the first sizable settlement south of Las Manos border crossing. The town is linked by paved road with the Inter-American Highway to the southwest; a bridge over the Rio Coco to the south of town was damaged in March by anti-Sandinista forces, who are active throughout the department.

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Prinzapolka -D10- (7,500), formerly important for shipping forest and agricultural products, is situated along the Caribbean coast on a hot, humid, poorly drained site at the mouth of the Rio Prinzapolka. Puerto Isabel, a minor port with limited facilities, is 5 kilometers south of town.

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Puerto Cabezas -C10- (7,500) is a regionally important market town in a predominantly Miskito Indian area. It was the site of considerable anti-Cuban violence in early 1981. Locally milled lumber is shipped from the port,

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Masaya -H5- (54,000), which suffered severely during the 1979 civil war and has a tradition of rebelliousness, was the site of recent antigovernment protests by Catholic secondary students and local residents. It has a large Indian population and is famous for its folklore observances and indigenous industries—tapestries, pottery, and other handicrafts. The city is linked by rail, road, and close economic ties to Managua. It is the capital of a department of the same name.

Matagalpa -F5- (30,000), the principal commercial center for an extensive area, is in a relatively densely populated part of the highlands. Its hinterland is one of the country's most important coffee producing regions; cattle raising and general farming are also

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[Redacted]

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Puerto Sandino -G3- (1,500), formerly Puerto So-
moza, is a small but strategically located Pacific coast
seaport 70 kilometers from Managua. A pipeline from
the port carries crude oil to an Esso refinery in
Managua, the only petroleum refinery in the country.
Embassy reporting indicates that Nicaraguan plans
call for repairs to port facilities and dredging opera-
tions in the harbor. [Redacted]

Rama (Arlen Siu) -G9- (3,500) is a river port on the
Rio Escondido about 100 kilometers upstream from
Bluefields. It is at the eastern end of the road network
linking the isolated Caribbean lowlands to the Pacific
core area. The port's limited facilities include a short
ramp used to service Nicaragua's small roll-on/roll-
off vessels. Rama is an important transshipment point
for arms and is sometimes closed to commercial
shipping. Rama is a major port for transatlantic/
Caribbean shipping, the river and highway network to
western Nicaragua serving as an alternative to transit
through the Panama Canal. Colonization by mestizos
from Pacific departments is taking place along the
highway to the town and to the south at Nueva
Guinea, according to academic studies. [Redacted]

Rivas -I 5- (18,000), capital of a department of the
same name, is an important commercial center; many
small villages dot the farming and cattle growing
region surrounding the town. It is located just off the
Inter-American Highway, 35 kilometers from the
Costa Rican border. [Redacted]

San Carlos -I 8- (4,000), the capital of Rio San Juan
Department, is at the southern end of Lago de
Nicaragua near the head of the Rio San Juan; it is a
lake port and a commercial and recreational fishing
center. [Redacted]

San Juan del Sur -I 5- (4,000), a minor Pacific coast
lighterage port near the Nicaragua-Costa Rica bor-
der, handles fish, sugar, coffee, and lumber exports.
Nicaragua recently concluded an agreement with the
USSR for the construction at the port of a repair
facility to service the Soviet Pacific fishing fleet,
according to Nicaraguan press reports. Plans call for
the construction of a drydock and the leasing of
warehouse facilities. The USSR has no repair bases in
the eastern Pacific. [Redacted]

Somotillo -E3- (3,000) is a small town in the north of
Chinandega Department on what was, until the recent
flooding, the most heavily trafficked commercial
route between Nicaragua and Honduras. It is the last
town before the Rio Guasaule border crossing. Earlier
this year it was isolated from the rest of the country
when a bridge over the Rio Negro south of town was
destroyed by anti-Sandinistas. Floods destroyed both
the earth-road bypass over the Rio Negro and the
bridge over the Rio Guasaule, diverting cross-border
traffic, at least temporarily, to El Espino on the Inter-
American Highway. [Redacted]

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Somoto -D4- (8,000), capital of Madriz Department,
is strategically located in the northern part of the
central highlands on the Inter-American Highway
just east of the Honduras border. It is the commercial
center for the surrounding subsistence agricultural
region and the country's pitch pine industry. The
border area to the west has been a focus for anti-
Sandinista activity. Somoto Army Headquarters, a
major military facility, is located nearby. An addi-
tional road to the Honduran border intersects the
Inter-American Highway near Somoto. [Redacted]

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Villa Nueva -E3- (2,000) is a small town in a sparsely
populated portion of Chinandega Department. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] A spur road links the town
with the major cross-border route to the west.
[Redacted]

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Waspam -B9- (300), which was the largest border
town in Miskito Indian territory, is one of the last
inhabited villages in the eastern Nicaragua-Honduras
border zone. The removal of the Indian population
from the zone has been part of the government policy
to prevent infiltration and Miskito cooperation with
anti-Sandinista guerrillas. [Redacted]

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being built with Cuban assistance, will facilitate deployment of troops to the northeast for counterinsurgency operations. [redacted]

Transnational Rama Road, the country's main east-west route, runs from the river port of Rama, in the Caribbean lowlands, to San Benito where it connects with the Inter-American Highway. It was opened in 1966. [redacted]

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Pacific Railroad of Nicaragua is a narrow-gauge government-owned railroad with a trunk line running from the port of Corinto through the country's industrial and agricultural heartland to Granada; branch lines go to Rio Grande in the highlands and to Puerto Sandino on the Pacific coast. Seasonal lines extend into the coffee-producing highlands near Diriamba and the farming region southwest of Chinandega. Although the railroad serves only a small area, most of Nicaragua's principal exports depend heavily on it for transportation. [redacted]

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Other Important Features

Lago de Managua -G4- drains into Lago de Nicaragua via the Rio Tipitapa. A freshwater lake, its contamination has been a public health problem since the early 1960s. Volcan Momotombo, on the northern shore, is the site of a 35,000-kW geothermal power plant scheduled to begin production in late 1982. [redacted]

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Lago de Nicaragua -I 6- drains into the Caribbean via the Rio San Juan. The lake is dotted with islands, many of which—including Isla Ometepe—are inhabited. Transport on the lake has declined with improvements in the road net. [redacted]

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Rio Coco -B8- forms more than half of the Honduras-Nicaragua boundary. It is the largest river and principal transport artery in the northeast. Until their forced removal, many Miskito Indians lived along the lower Rio Coco. [redacted]

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Rio San Juan -J8- forms the southeastern boundary between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Once important as a transisthmus route, it is now used mainly for local traffic. Nicaragua exercises sovereignty over the entire river, but Costa Rica has treaty rights to free navigation. Nicaraguan interference with Costa Rican traffic—to curb alleged anti-Sandinista activity—has strained relations between the two governments. [redacted]

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Major Transport Routes

The Inter-American Highway, extending from El Espino on the Honduran border to Penas Blancas on the Costa Rican border, is the country's major north-south highway; it is completely paved. Important spur roads intersect the highway near Somoto and Sebaco in the central highlands and near Managua in the lakes basin. [redacted]

Matagalpa-Puerto Cabezas Road, an improved all-weather road, connects western Nicaragua with Puerto Cabezas on the Caribbean. The road, which is

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