

Facts about Nicaragua, "Land of Fire and Water"

- Nicaragua is the **largest country in Central America**. Its area is about 50,000 square miles, which is close in size to the state of Virginia (Virginia is about 43,000 square miles).
- The capital of Nicaragua is **Managua**.
- Nicaragua is known as the **land of fire and water** because it has numerous volcanoes and lakes, as well as two coastlines.
- There are 19 active and extinct **volcanoes** on the Pacific side of the country.



See web cam images and animations of some of Nicaragua's volcanoes:
<http://web-geofisica.ineter.gob.ni/webcam/>

- Spanish is the **official language** and is spoken by most people in Nicaragua. English and some native languages are spoken on the Caribbean coast.
- Nicaragua is the **second poorest country** in the Americas. Most people in the country work hard, but many struggle to have enough to take care of all their basic needs.
- The **school year** in Nicaragua is from early February through late November. Because of a limited number of teachers, schools, and resources, the school day is divided into two shifts and all students attend either in the morning or the afternoon.

- About 4 out of every 10 children in Nicaragua stop attending school by the age of 15, most often because they need to work to help support their families.

- The **country flag** has three horizontal stripes: a white stripe in the middle with a blue stripe above and below it. In the center is the national seal, consisting of a triangle which represents equality and justice. Within the triangle are: five volcanoes representing the five Central American countries that gained independence from Spain in 1821; a rainbow symbolizing peace; water symbolizing the two oceans that border Nicaragua; and a red cap symbolizing freedom.



Image source: Wikipedia

(For Spanish speakers and learners: Muppets explain the colors and symbols on the Nicaraguan flag in Spanish in a video linked to from this site, <https://www.mined.gob.ni/index.php/biblioteca-interactiva-educacion-primaria/>. Click on "Simbolos patrios" under "Conociendo mi mundo". "Mis Caminos Capítulo #12" explains the flag.)

- There are **two seasons** in Nicaragua. The dry season is roughly from November through April. It is referred to as "verano", which means summer in English. The wet season is from May through October and is called "invierno" which means winter in English.



- **Baseball is the most popular sport in Nicaragua.** Soccer is played there, but it is not as popular as it is in many other Latin American countries.

- One of the most **popular foods** in Nicaragua is called *gallo pinto* in Spanish. It is made with rice and beans. Photos and recipes for other Nicaraguan foods can be found on these web sites:

<http://www.whats4eats.com/central-america/nicaragua-cuisine> (in English)

<https://www.mined.gob.ni/mapainteractivo/> (in Spanish)

- About **700 species of birds** live in Nicaragua for all or part of the year. That is an amazing number for a country about the size of Virginia, especially when you consider that there are about 900 bird species in all of North America (not including Mexico). The number in Virginia is about 470 species.
- **We share about 120 species of migratory birds with Nicaragua.** These migratory species are in Nicaragua from about November through March, and in the US and Canada during the other months of the year.



- The Nicaraguan **national bird** is the turquoise-browed motmot (*Eumomota superciliosa*), or “guardabarranco” in Spanish. The Spanish name translates to guardian of the ravine, which comes from the fact that this species nests in holes built in the banks of ravines.

Photo by Stephen Turner, Creative Commons

Ometepe Island

- The **largest lake** in Nicaragua, and in all of Central America, is Lake Nicaragua (also called Lake Cocibolca). It contains over 350 islands. One of these islands is called Ometepe, which is where many of our “Bridging the Americas” partner classes are located.
- The island is 100 square miles in size. It is about 20 miles long, and 3 to 6 miles wide.
- The word Ometepe means “two peaks” in the native nahuatl language, which refers to the two volcanoes that make up most of the island. The Concepcion volcano is active and is 5,250 feet high. The Maderas volcano is dormant, with a beautiful lake in its crater, and is 4,600 feet high.
- About 35,000 people live on the island.



◦ Each year about 40,000 tourists from around the world visit Ometepe. It is a popular place to visit because of the kindness and hospitality of the people who live there and because of its natural beauty.

◦ Although not common, **bull sharks** occasionally enter Lake Nicaragua by swimming up the San Juan River, which connects the lake to the Caribbean Sea. There have not been any deaths or injuries to people due to sharks since 1944.



Two bull sharks caught in fish nets in 2000. (Photo credit: Anna Maria Adamo/Hacienda Merida.)

◦ Nicaraguan musician and composer Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy wrote a song called *Ometepe*. Lyrics to this song and a couple links to internet recordings of it are on the pages that follow.

PowerPoint presentations about Nicaragua and Ometepe Island are available on the Migratory Bird Center's web site at www.si.edu/smbc in the Bridging the Americas online teacher resources section (password is BTA4teachers; scroll to the bottom of this list of resources to find the PowerPoint presentations).

Sources:

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/central_america/nicaragua/

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

<http://www.vianica.com/nicaragua>

www.visitaometepe.com, <http://www.ometepenicaragua.com/index.php>

https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC%20NEP_Nicaragua.pdf

Ometepe – music and lyrics by Luis Enrique
Mejia Godoy**

Bajo el cielo azul de Nicaragua

en el mar dulce del Cocibolca

hay una isla con dos volcanes

un paraíso verde de paz

un día que llega siempre regresa

en donde el cacique Nicarao

de su belleza se enamoró.

Ometepe, tierra prometida

Ometepe, oasis de paz. x2

La playa blanca de Santo Domingo

bajo la luna parece un mar

donde sus aguas tibias y buenas

entre el Maderas y el Concepción

y el dulce lago en noches de febrero

donde el isleño ofrece su mano

y que respeta su tradición.

Ometepe, tierra prometida

Ometepe, oasis de paz. x2

Lugar sagrado de barro y clave

de los abuelos que la fundaron

como mandaba la profecía

donde tallaron en piedra dura

su historia llena de maravillas

nuestro mestizo que aun perdura

y que amalgama su identidad.

Ometepe, tierra prometida

Ometepe, oasis de paz. x2

Chico largo en charco Verde su leyenda

un misterio matizado con amor

y un milagro en el paisaje de la punta

la paloma acuarela solo pintada por Dios

Ometepe de sonaja y ocarina

amuleto de obsidiana en mi canción.

Ometepe, tierra prometida

Ometepe, oasis de paz. x2

Moyogalpa y Altagracia son los ojos

de esta india que se baña bajo el sol

y su pecho que se mira de San Jorge

son los volcanes Madera y Concepción

Ometepe es sonaja y ocarina

amuleto de obsidiana en mi canción.

Ometepe, tierra prometida

Ometepe, oasis de paz.

** Recordings of *Ometepe* by Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy can be found on the internet. For example:

<http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/canciones/40> (music only)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHc7uNcjhbc--> (photos of Ometepe set to the music—teachers should note that at 3:50 there is a mildly inappropriate photo which may be noticed by kids and be a distraction!)