

The student from Nicaragua

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Let me introduce to you. My name is Yessenia Valverde Guevara, and I have been in Japan for almost 3 years. Amid the studies and all the challenges encountered while I have been abroad, I can say that this it sure will be an experience to remember.

Where do I come from? I come from a country located just in the center of Central America. It's curious.... because most people in especial those from Asia used to think that I was from South America. My country is Nicaragua. If you look to the map you would say that it is pretty small, in fact it is one of the largest countries in Central America. It is surrounded by both oceans, and it is the only one which is called the land of lakes and volcanoes. It is a pleasure for me to tell you a little bit about it, and to explain to you the meaning of its name and what are the things that are mainly important from it.

Nicaragua? Does it really mean something? Well, it has been a matter of debate. In one theory, it is stated that the name was adopted after the Spanish conquerors

defeated the chief of the indigenous people who was called Nicarao. In another theory, it is stated that the name comes from the indigenous language spoken before the colonization period. This language is called Nahuatl. Only indigenous people spoke this one, but at the present time some of these words are mixed with Spanish, and are considered part of the Spanish slang spoken in my country. Needless to say is that in Nicaragua, Spanish is spoken as in most of the countries in Latin America, with the exception of Brazil. Therefore, Nicaragua could mean in Nahuatl "surrounded by sweet water" or "sweet sea".

Nicaragua was discovered on September 12 of 1502, by Christopher Columbus during the conquest period. He was the first European that visited this land. During his fourth travel to the Americas, he was lost with all of his crew after a difficult storm in the sea. According to the journey notes, it is said that the storm was devastating and they thought they couldn't find the way to be back in land again. After having many problems, Christopher Columbus and his crew saw from far the piece of land that they called, "Thanks to God"

Key; because they could manage to get out of the storm and finally stepped on ground. This key is located Northeastern Nicaragua.

In pre-Columbian times, in what is now known as Nicaragua, the indigenous people were part of the Intermediate Area, between the Mesoamerican and Andean cultural regions. It was the point where the Mesoamerican and South American native cultures met. All of this is confirmed by the archaeological evidence, mainly in the form of ceramics and statues petroglyphs made of volcanic stone, such as the ones found on the island of Zapatera in Lake Nicaragua and on Ometepe island.

After its discovery by Christopher Columbus, Gil Gonzales Davila conquered Nicaragua. The land was parceled out to the conquistadors, who were most interested in the western portion. They enslaved many indige-



Some indigenous migrated to Nicaragua from central Mexico after 500 B.C. Nevertheless, some indigenous came from cultures derived from Aztecas or Mayas, there are no pyramids in Nicaragua.

nous to work in mines in northern Nicaragua, some were killed in warfare. The great majority were sold as slaves, whipped, and shipped to other Spanish colonies in the New World, at a significant profit to the newly landed aristocracy. Many of the indigenous people died as a result of infectious disease, compounded by neglect by the Spaniards, who controlled their subsistence.

In 1536, the Viceroyalty of New Spain was established. By 1570, the southern part of New Spain was designated the Captaincy General of Guatemala. This territory was extended from Chiapas peninsula to Costa Rica. This made an establishment for different colonies. The area of Nicaragua was divided for only administration “parties”.

Nicaragua’s independence became a fact in September 1821. The inhabitants of the Spanish province of Nicaragua, as well as people from other colonies in this region, felt it was time for complete independence. The bloody independence wars in other regions of the continent and other factors evoked the following dream: the birth of a new, small nation, free and sovereign.

The flag of Nicaragua was adopted in August 1971. When Nicaragua got its independence of Spain in 1821 it joined the then existing federation of the



United Provinces of Central America. Seventeen years later, however, the federation began to dissolve and Nicaragua was left as an independent state. The blue and white pattern found on the Nicaragua flag is a common element of most Central American countries. Each of the members of the federation differentiated their own flag slightly. As an example, Costa Rica put a red stripe in their flag, Nicaragua and El Salvador have their coat of arms on their flag, Honduras put five stars on their flag and the blue and white stripes were turned vertical on the Guatemalan flag.

The blue stripes of the Nicaragua flag represent two oceans: the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The white stripe in the middle is symbol of peace. The coat of arms in the white strip of the Nicaragua flag is made up of an equilateral triangle that stands for equality. Five volcanoes inside the triangle represent the five parts of the federation. Also inside the triangle is a red Phrygian cap, white rays and a rainbow. All this is symbolic of liberty and peace.

Nicaragua has a population of 5,891,199. It's very little compared to Japan. The population is 84% urban. The majority of the Nicaraguan population, 86% is either Mestizo or White. 69% are Mestizos (mixed Amerindian and European) and 17% of European origin, the majority of Spanish, German, Italian, English or French ancestry. Mestizos and Whites mainly reside in the western region of the country.

About 9% of Nicaragua's population are black, and mainly reside on the country's sparsely populated Caribbean or Atlantic coast. The black population is mostly composed of black English-speaking Creoles who are the descendents of escaped or shipwrecked slaves; many carry the name of Scottish settlers who brought slaves with them. Therefore it could be stated that Nicaraguans speak Spanish and English as their native language but this differs from the Atlantic and Pacific regions.

The most populous city in Nicaragua is the capital, Managua, with a population of 1.8 million (2005) and an estimated 2.2 by 2010 and more than 2.5 million for the metro area.

Nicaragua as a country has three distinct regions: the Pacific lowlands, fertile valleys which the Spanish colonists settled, the Amerrisque Mountains (North-central highlands), and the Mosquito Coast (Atlantic lowlands). The low plains of the Atlantic Coast are 60 miles wide in areas. They have long been exploited for their natural resources.

Nearly one fifth of the territory is designated as protected areas like

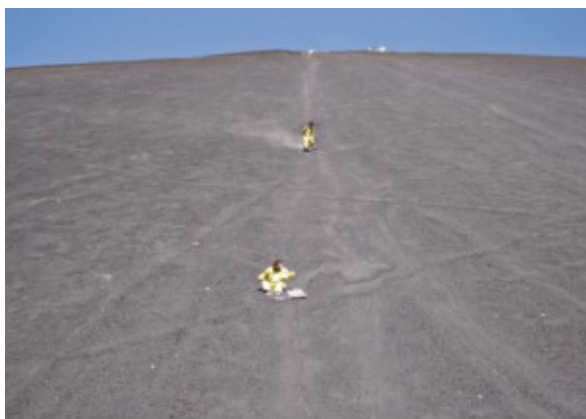


This is a picture of Nicaraguan women.

national parks, nature reserves, and biological reserves.

The Pacific lowlands consist of a broad, hot, fertile plain. The Pacific coast is characterized by the Volcanoes region, the lakes and rivers, and the beach coast. There are about 16 volcanoes in the region, however only 5 are active. Two of the most important ones, are Masaya Volcano, Mombacho volcano, and Cerro Negro. The latter, has served for the practice of volcano boarding where tourists and locals practice or slide downhill by using snow boards. Masaya volcano and Mombacho have been used as national parks.

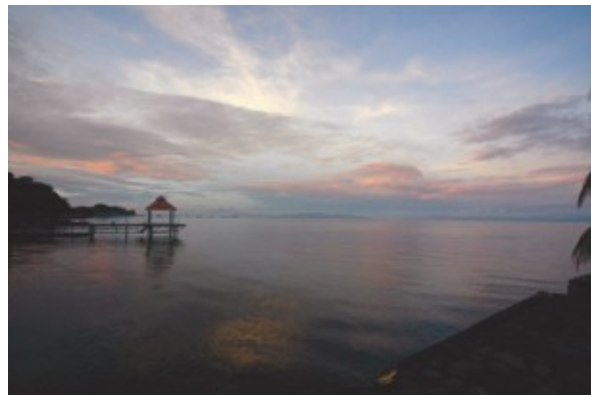
Besides the volcanoes, in the Pacific coast there are two of the largest lakes of the country.



Cerro Negro Volcano. (My friend sliding downhill during volcano boarding.)

Managua and Nicaragua Lake. Nicaragua Lake is a vast freshwater-lake of tectonic origin. With an area of 8,264 km², it is the largest lake in Central America and the 19th largest lake in the world (by area) and the 9th largest in the Americas. It is slightly smaller than Lake Titicaca. With an elevation of 32.7 metres (107 ft) above sea level, the lake reaches a depth of 26 metres. This lake is very important and it is unique because it has around 365 small islands or islets where people live and two large islands where two of the largest volcanoes sit. The lake is rich because of its varied fauna. Including the sweet water sharks. Kayak and sailing are common practices in the lake.

The Pacific coast and Atlantic



Nicaragua Lake during the sunset



My sister and my good friend. After doing kayak.



San Juan del Sur Bay. The beach and the town.

coast differs greatly, especially because in the Atlantic coast it is common to see white sand and crystal water sea. On the other side, the pacific coast is characterized by dark sand and high waves beaches. Along the pacific coast there are plenty of beaches and some still virgins. The pacific coast beaches are good for sailing, surfing, and practicing snorkeling. The fauna is varied and in the south it is common to see the Paslama Tortoises. San Juan del Sur bay, is one of the most famous beaches.

The area of northern highlands has a cooler climate than the Pacific lowlands. About a quarter of the country's agriculture takes place in this region, with coffee grown on the



A toucanet.

higher slopes. Oaks, pines, moss, ferns and orchids are abundant in the cloud forests of the region. Bird life in the forests of the central region includes Resplendent Quetzal, goldfinches, hummingbirds, jays and toucanets.

What about the traditional food ? We are basically called "sons of corn"

Since its origin, the fundamental basis of Nicaraguan gastronomy has been corn. Thus, its wide usage and derivatives constitutes the culinary inheritance left by indigenous tribes that lived in the area. This fact explains the similarities between the typical Nicaraguan food and those of other countries in the Central American region and Mexico. We all were sons of corn.

Corn, as ingredient, has many different uses: lots of drinks are made from corn, such as *Chicha* and *Pinol*; as well main dishes such as *Nacatamal*, *Indio Viejo*, and *Sopa de Albondiga*; and snacks and sweets such as *Atolillo* and *Perrereque*.

Music and Culture ?

Nicaraguan music and culture is mixture of indigenous and European,



especially Spanish, influences. Musical instruments include the marimba and others common across Central America. The marimba of Nicaragua is uniquely played by a sitting performer holding the instrument on his knees. Nicaragua enjoys a variety of international influence in the music arena. Bachata, Merengue, Salsa and Cumbia have gained prominence in cultural centers.

Nicaragua is primarily an agricultural country; agriculture constitutes 60% of its total exports which annually yield approximately US \$2.0 billion. In addition, Nicaragua's Flor de Caña rum is renowned as among the best in Latin America, and its tobacco and beef are also well regarded. Nicaragua's agrarian economy has historically been based on the export of cash crops such as coffee, beef and tobacco. Light industry (maquila), tourism, banking, mining, fisheries, and general commerce are expanding. Nicaragua also depends heavily on remittances from Nicaraguans living abroad, which totaled \$655.5 million in 2006.

Despite of the fact that Nicaragua

is an agricultural country, it is among of the poorer countries in the Americas. 48% of the population in Nicaragua live below the poverty line 79.9%. As in many other developing countries, a large segment of the economically poor in Nicaragua is women. In addition, a relatively high proportion of Nicaragua's homes have a woman as head of household: 39% of urban homes and 28% of rural homes. According to UN figures, 80% of the indigenous people (who make up 5% of the population) live on less than \$1 per day. According to the FAO, 27% of all Nicaraguans are suffering from undernourishment; the highest percentage in Central America.

How about the literature ?

The literature of Nicaragua can be traced to pre-Columbian times; the myths and oral literature formed the cosmogonic view of the world of the indigenous people. Some of these stories are still known in Nicaragua. Like many Latin American countries, the Spanish conquerors have had the most effect on both the culture and the literature. Nicaraguan literature has historically been an important

source of poetry in the Spanish-speaking world, with internationally renowned contributors such as Rubén Darío, who is regarded as the most important literary figure in Nicaragua. He is called the “Father of Modernism” for leading the *modernismo* literary movement at the end of the 19th.

Music, food, landscapes and literature made of a Nicaragua a very beautiful country that still have so much to offer. It is characterized by hard working people in spite of the hard times and wars that it has suffered during the time.

Here is a piece of the poem **To Margarita de Bayle**, written by Ruben Dario. This poem was also translated into Japanese and many other lan-

guages.

*Margarita, how beautiful the sea is :
still and blue.*

*The orange blossom in the breezes
drifting through.*

*The skylark in its glory
has your accent too :*

*Here, Margarita, is a story
made for you.*

*A king there was and far away,
with a palace of diamonds
and a shopfront made of day.
He had a herd of elephants,*

*A kiosk, more, of malachite,
and a robe of rarest hue
also a princess who was light
of thought and beautiful as you.*



Traditional dress which is called Mestizaje



School of Marimba, and their students.