

## Nicaragua Culture Orientation

### 1. Greetings & Farewells

- a. it is customary to greet everyone in the room individually
- b. handshakes are appropriate for both sexes
- c. cheek-to-cheek with kissing sound is also common (not romantic)
- d. when introduced to someone, say “mucho gusto” (nice to meet you)
- e. in church it is appropriate to say “Dios le bendiga” (God bless you)
- f. it is polite to bid farewell to everyone in the room individually
- g. (there is some laxity in these customs where gringos are concerned)

### 2. Assumptions & Impressions

- a. Evangelicals in Nicaragua tend to be more legalistic/conservative than us
- b. Nica Evangelicals frown on body piercing
  - i. it's better to take your piercing out (don't be a stumbling block!)
- c. Latinos have the impression that American girls are “easy” / promiscuous
  - i. culturally, Americans are more talkative. Latinas act more shy
- d. It is culturally common for men/boys to stare, make cat-calls, gestures
  - i. staring
  - ii. pursed lips (sort of kissing-lips)
  - iii. raised eyebrows
  - iv. cat-calls / whistles / horn-honking
- e. It is also a cultural rule that “nice girls” never respond in any way.
  - i. ignore them—as though they don't exist
  - ii. resist the urge to look a couple of seconds later
- f. girls are taught from a young age to sit with knees / legs together
  - i. important that we follow their example here

### 3. Water

- a. Tap water is safe to drink in Managua
- b. Stick to bottled water outside of the city
- c. Ice is probably okay—if concerned, drink fast before the ice melts!
- d. Avoid food from street vendors
- e. Bagged water from street vendors is purified and safe to drink (and fun!)

### 4. Toilet Paper

- a. **Do not flush TP, tampons, etc.** Use the little trashcan next to the toilet
- b. To ensure a good flush, it is a good habit to hold the handle down until you hear the gurgle at the end of the flush (this means max. flush power)

### 5. Food

- a. Food is precious—don't waste it and never throw it away
- b. When served food (usually at a church event):
  - i. be a good sport and try everything
  - ii. eat more than you feel like eating (for politeness)
  - iii. when you're done eating, set the plate down on a table or chair
  - iv. if there are hungry people around (on the periphery) you can give your plate to them

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### 6. Economy

- a. Nicaragua is the poorest Spanish-speaking country in the world
- b. Nicaragua is the 2<sup>nd</sup> poorest country in the western hemisphere
- c. Jobs are scarce
- d. Beggars are common—to give them something is Christ-like and Biblical
- e. But “never” give money to beggars—give crackers or something instead
- f. A typical day’s wage for unskilled labor is the same or less than 1 hour @ U.S. minimum wage—around \$5 or less
- g. **Don’t talk about your collection of CDs or DVDs, or your flat-screen TV.** They’re lucky if they just have an FM radio.

### 7. Space Issues

- a. Latins are less territorial. No such thing as “personal space”
- b. Latins have a different sense of respecting property or “right of way”
- c. Americans are trained from early age to look at things from the perspective of the other person (space or ideas). Not so in Nicaragua. What appears to us as rude & inconsiderate is normal here. We must resist the impulse to take it personally. (This is hard—culture clash!)

### 8. Scarcity vs. Plenty

- a. Americans are taught and learn that there is always “enough for everyone”. We are taught to “wait your turn” and we learn that it’s true: even if we’re the last one served, there’s always enough to go around. It’s not fun to be last, but we can accept it without worrying about missing out. We live in an atmosphere of “Plenty.”
- b. Nicaraguans live in an atmosphere of “Scarcity.” The fact is that there isn’t enough to go around. If you don’t get there first, you might not get any. Therefore lines are often broken or “bucked.” You’d buck the line too if life had taught you that people who stand in lines usually miss out.

### 9. The American Dream

- a. What do you want to do/be when you “grow up”?
- b. The American dream promises us that you can decide your future—your fate—what you want to do for a living, how much money you want to make, where you want to live. Life is full of options and choices and the only real limit to your ability to achieve your dreams is you. And it’s largely true in the United States.
- c. But it’s not true in Nicaragua. There simply aren’t many options and many things are practically unreachable for young Nicaraguans.
- d. This goes to the very heart of the culture. What we might see as laziness or lack of motivation is simply a recognition of the hard facts of life here.
- e. Be careful before you draw quick conclusions about people and their values or motivations...