

# NICARAGUA

## *Travel and Enjoyment Guide*

A person in a wetsuit is seen from behind, standing in the shallow ocean waves. They are holding a large, dark surfboard vertically. The background is a vibrant sunset with a bright orange sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the water and sky. The person's silhouette is dark against the lighter water and sky.

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## GEOGRAPHY

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Nicaragua is situated in Central America between Honduras and Costa Rica. It is conveniently located less than two and a half hours away from Miami or Houston by plane, making it ripe for U.S. tourists and expats.

It takes about five and a half hours to go from the North to the South of the country by car along the Pan-American Highway. Travel from West to East is easiest by plane.

Here's what's remarkable: 20% of Nicaragua's mainland is pure, protected wilderness. National parks, nature reserves — preserved, pristine. And the beauty is that they're open to visitors, many within reach by car or even public transportation. It's nature on a grand, yet accessible, scale.

Nicaragua's geography is interesting and unique in several ways. For starters, the country is virtually split in half by a rain forest, which has created a Spanish speaking half on the Pacific coast and an English speaking half on the Atlantic coast.

And Nicaragua — just a touch bigger than Pennsylvania — is actually the largest country in Central America after Mexico. But what's striking is how it feels like three different worlds: the Pacific Plains, the Central Mountains, and the Atlantic Plains, each with its own vibe, its own rhythm.





## CUISINE

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Modern day Nicaraguan cuisine is a mix of indigenous and European influences. Though there are shared similarities, Nicaraguan cuisine can easily be separated into a west coast cuisine and an east coast cuisine. The main difference being that the west coast's cuisine was influenced by the Spanish and the east coast's cuisine has Caribbean influences.

## FAMOUS DISHES

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### **GALLO PINTO**

Of course, gallo pinto is the most common dish in Nicaragua. Even if you ordered another dish, it will probably come with a side of gallo pinto. If you ask any Nicaraguan about their traditional foods, this will probably be the first one to come up. It is essentially rice and red beans, however, it can be mixed with many kinds of vegetables, cheeses, and herbs as well.

### **NACATAMAL**

This dish is similar to the tamales of Mexico, except instead of being packed into corn husks, it's packed into plantain husks. The ingredients are dough, corn, meat (beef, pork, or chicken), and an assortment of vegetables.

### **VIGORÓN**

This dish is very popular among locals and, supposedly, its best iteration is at a kiosk called El Gordito in Granada. The kiosk is aptly named, as the proprietor is quite "gordito" and always sits outside welcoming guests. The dish consists of a cabbage salad, boiled yuca, and chicharrones (fried pork rinds), wrapped in a banana leaf.

## **INDIO VIEJO (OLD INDIAN)**

Indio Viejo is a stew prepared with beef, onion, sweet chili, garlic, salt, corn flour (masa), sour orange, and peppermint. It is an original indigenous dish that has a funny story behind the name. Apparently, in the time of the conquistadors, a group of hungry traveling Spaniards approached a group of Amerindians who were cooking. The story goes that in order to get the Spaniards to leave, the Amerindians told them that the dish they were preparing was an old Indian who had just died. Immediately, the Spaniards left them alone.

## **QUESILLO**

This dish is simply a soft Nicaraguan cheese wrapped in tortilla with diced onion and cream. The Nicaraguan cheese is also used in many other iterations where it is fried and put on top of other ingredients.

## **SOPA DE MONDONGO**

A popular dish among the locals, it is a soup of boiled cow stomach with a large array of vegetables, herbs, and legumes. The taste is somewhere between a meat stew and a vegetable soup with added spices. It is usually served with avocado and cheese. Salads accompany it occasionally. It originates from Masatepe, Masaya.

## **BUÑUELOS**

Buñuelos are a dessert made of fried cheese and cassava balls with honey on top. They could be considered Nicaragua's version of deep fried Oreos since they're just as addicting.







Nicaraguan food feels like home on a plate. Take gallo pinto, a warm, savory mix of rice and red beans — you'll find it at every meal, maybe with a splash of sour cream or a side of eggs. And then there's the nacatamal, the king of comfort food here: corn dough stuffed with tender pork or chicken, veggies, a hint of olive, all wrapped in plantain leaves and steamed. Each bite, earthy and rich, feels like tradition, like the heart of Nicaragua itself.







## **CAJETA DE COCO**

It starts with coconut water, boiled down until it's thick and golden, turning into a rich, almost buttery caramel. Then there's this candy — dulce — a kind of raw sugar that melts right into the mix. It's poured over strips of coconut and tender yucca, and what you get is... well, it's like a sweet, sticky dessert salad. But here's the twist: cajeta de coco isn't just a dessert you eat on its own; it's like a finishing touch, a layer of sweetness you might scoop onto rice or over another dish, where it seeps in, adding a little island warmth to whatever it touches.

## **RONDÓN**

Rondón is a dish from Nicaragua's east coast, particularly from Bluefields. It's hearty, rustic, and unforgettable — a stew of turtle, fish, beef, or pork, simmered with peppers, onions, banana, and a kick of chili. Imagine a pot brimming with local flavor, rich with spices, vegetables, and the sea. Not everyone dives into it — turtle is, after all, endangered. But for those who do, rondón is Bluefields in a bowl, the flavors of the Caribbean coast simmered down to their essence.

## **CARNE ASADA**

Nicaraguan carne asada is a mouthwatering dish that showcases tender cuts of beef marinated in a zesty mix of citrus, garlic, and local spices, then grilled to smoky perfection. It's a beloved staple found in fritangas, those lively street food spots where locals gather to enjoy hearty meals. At these casual eateries, carne asada is often served alongside gallo pinto, crispy fried plantains, and a fresh cabbage slaw, creating a vibrant plate full of flavor. It's the kind of dish that invites friends and family to share in the experience, making every bite a celebration of Nicaraguan culinary tradition.



## PLACES TO VISIT IN NICARAGUA

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This list does not even come close to gathering all there is to see and do in Nicaragua, nor will you be able to partake in all the wonders that “the land of lakes and volcanoes” has to offer in just one visit. However, some of these sites should most assuredly be included in your itinerary. Have fun discovering Nicaragua!

### **MANAGUA**

Managua was made the capital in 1855 as a compromise during a power struggle between Granada and León. Since around the beginning of this century, Managua - Nicaragua's capital - has seen an economic boom, as has much of the country. This economic growth has been followed by an increase in construction that has caused Managua to expand at a breakneck speed. In a way, they are trying to recuperate after the devastating earthquake of 1972 that leveled most of the city, especially the city center. A lot of the construction is being done in a way that expands the city instead of building over the old downtown area, and Managua has developed into a city without a real center or downtown. Instead, there are popular business areas scattered throughout the city. Consequently, even though over a million people live in the city, it does not look like a typical capital city. Cautionary measures after the earthquake meant that very few high-rises have been built.

After a short drive or walk through Managua, you will immediately notice the stark contrast between the newer modern buildings and the older more traditional ones. Through most parts of the city you can easily find traditional houses and restaurants right next to massive, ultra-modern malls, offices, restaurants, etc. Do not take this to mean that the city has fully recovered, because the city center still bears marks of the earthquake.





In the heart of the Plaza de la Revolución, the Old Cathedral stands as a silent witness to the passage of time, its interior off-limits due to structural instability, hinting at the stories it could tell if only walls could speak. Flanking this historical gem are two other notable buildings: the Palacio de Cultura, which bravely weathered the 1972 earthquake, and the Casa Presidencial, a more modern addition that rose in its wake. While the Casa Presidencial is closed to visitors, the Palacio de Cultura opens its doors to you, inviting you into the National Museum. Here, you'll find a captivating exhibition that traces Nicaragua's history from the fiery birth of its land by volcanic activity to the present day. And for those with an eye for artistry, the museum boasts one of the world's finest collections of Amerindian pottery, each piece a testament to ancient craftsmanship. But perhaps most striking is the homage to Rubén Darío, the beloved poet of Nicaragua, where you can explore exhibitions showcasing his personal belongings, connecting you to the literary heart of the nation.

Just a stone's throw from the city center, you'll discover Lake Xolotlán, where a new waterfront restaurant and entertainment strip invites families to come and play. It's a place that buzzes with life, laughter, and the promise of a good time. But if history calls to you, don't miss the nearby UNESCO World Heritage site of Acahualinca. Here, you can step back in time, where human remains dating back 6,000 years tell stories of the earliest inhabitants of the Managua province. It's a striking reminder of the depth of history beneath your feet, mingling with the vibrant present at the lake's edge.





## OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS OF MANAGUA

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### THE CHILTEPE PENINSULA

The Chiltepe peninsula, about 45 minutes northwest of the center of Managua, has some of the most spectacular scenery of Nicaragua. It is a peninsula that dips into Lake Xolotlan and it contains a large nature reserve and two large, clean volcanic lagoons. The lower one is called Xilola, while the one higher up on the volcano is called Apoyeque. You can swim in both of these geothermally heated lagoons that contain large amounts of fish that you can spot with the scuba diving equipment offered in the area. They are in a nature reserve so there is very little development around them, but there are a couple tastefully built restaurants overlooking the Xilola lagoon which offer a must see experience. Some of these restaurants even have direct access to the water by either jumping off a platform or climbing down some stairs to rentable kayaks or boats. Camping options are also available.

**Note:** *The only way to access Apoyeque is by hiking the mountain paths.*

### Montibelli and Chocoyero National Parks

These parks are located about 30-45 minutes outside of Managua. Both have incredible vistas and if you are an animal lover you will be able to see several kinds of rare animals. Thriving populations of butterflies, deer, snakes, lizards, monkeys, hawks, and chocoyos live in these reserves. You will be able to find many of them on your own but with the help of a guide you can find the more reclusive ones. Both offer camping opportunities, but the true difference between them is that the Chocoyero has two waterfalls which one can hike to the top of, offering fantastic views of the surrounding landscape and nearby cities (including Managua). Montibelli's unique trait is that there is an eco-hostel there that grows several fruits such as pineapple, cactus fruit, and passion fruit using environmentally safe techniques. While there, you can drink and eat some of the freshest fruit juices and meals you have ever had.



## BEACHES WITHIN THE PROVINCE OF MANAGUA

If you want to visit some beaches during your stay in Managua, there are three within the same province. An hour and a half by car lie these small beach towns: Pochomil and Masachapa. They're like neighboring cousins, sitting close together on Nicaragua's coast, and each one has that classic beachy charm.

Pochomil has a gentle vibe, and it's perfect for dipping your toes into the surf – no need to be a pro to enjoy the waves here. Masachapa, just a stone's throw away, has a different energy. You'll find fishing boats pulled up on the sand and a touch more of the local community's rhythm, which gives it that intimate, lived-in feel.

These spots aren't just for laying on the sand. You'll find cozy places to stay, restaurants where you can linger over seafood, maybe even a place to try surfing or horseback riding along the shoreline. It's easy to get there, too. Hop on a bus or microbus from Managua, and you'll be on your way – though you might have to make a quick connection, depending on the route. The beauty here is that, despite all they have to offer, Pochomil and Masachapa remain largely under the radar for most tourists. It's quieter, calmer, and if you go during the week, you might just have that shoreline almost to yourself.

For those seeking a more exclusive beach experience, you can head to Gran Pacifica, a spectacular beach resort only one hour from the capital. With 3.5 miles of pristine oceanfront, Gran Pacifica is the perfect spot to experience beach life in a tranquil, unspoiled setting. There, you can lounge by the pool, walk along the expansive beach, or explore the waters - the beauty of this area is yours to enjoy.





## LEÓN

León is the kind of place that feels like it's hiding something timeless just around every corner. Walking through this city, you're surrounded by colonial architecture that's unmistakably Nicaraguan but also a little Spanish—a reminder of its past under the Spanish crown. Towering churches dot the landscape, each one a marker of history that, somehow, is still alive. It's easy to feel as though you're stepping back into a time when life moved a little slower, and every building told a story.

But León isn't just about its past. Just outside the city, nature steps in to add a whole new layer. There are nature reserves, places where you can feel the land breathing, and if you're up for a little adventure, some of Nicaragua's most awe-inspiring volcanoes are waiting. These are landscapes that take you by surprise—whether you're sliding down or just standing still, taking it all in.





## GRANADA

Granada, like León, traces its roots back to 1524, founded by Hernandez de Cordoba. But Granada carries an extra weight of history, like an old photograph that's been tucked away and preserved. It's seen its share of turbulence—parts of it have been destroyed more than once—but Granada has a way of staying put. The city's layout is almost identical to the original, as if every street and plaza still remembers the hand that first traced them.

What makes Granada different, though, is its color. Everywhere you look, vibrant, colonial hues bring the past to life. Some buildings have been carefully reconstructed, but others are the real deal, the very walls that have seen centuries go by. Architecturally, Granada has hardly aged since Spanish rule, and if you know the old Spanish crown and shield, you'll catch glimpses of it—right above doorways, tucked into façades, like a wink from the past.

## MASAYA

Masaya is a relatively small, highly populated town that is a worthwhile stop. Masaya and the other smaller towns of its province have a strong Amerindian culture and still preserve adaptations of many of the traditional dances and parades. From pottery and paintings to large handmade hammocks, the Masaya market has everything you could need souvenir-wise. Fort Coyotepe can be seen looming above Masaya on a hill top. It was built in the early 20th century and was a very important strategic outlook to see if any opposing armies were nearby. It was also very hard to attack due to the surrounding terrain. Other attractions within the city include authentic restaurants and a small port. Nearby, there is also the Masaya Lagoon, where you can still see ancient petroglyphs on its shores left thousands of years ago. Lastly, if you are here on a Thursday you will be able to catch the Jueves de Verbena festivities, with traditional dances and local specialties to savor.





## RIVAS

Though Granada may be Nicaragua's most famous city, Rivas Province is most likely the most touristic region of Nicaragua due to its abundance of beaches, resorts, expats, and natural wonders. In the city of Rivas itself, there isn't much to see, but it is a great city to use as a base camp. It's clean and relatively close to all of the sites within its province. There are decent hotels and restaurants as well as a community that is very welcoming to tourists. There is also public transportation from the city to all of the sites in the province.

### La Flor Nature Reserve

About 15 to 20 minutes south of San Juan del Sur, you'll find the La Flor Nature Reserve. Now, Nicaragua is home to a lot of nature reserves, and they all boast an impressive array of plants and animals. But La Flor? It's something else. Part of it is right on the beach, which means you get to visit a completely untouched, protected beach. No crowds, no disturbances, just raw, unspoiled nature.

If you plan your visit between July and January, you're in for something truly remarkable. This is when the "arribadas" happen. It's a phenomenon where thousands of turtles haul themselves ashore to nest. And not just a couple of nests—each time an arribada happens, the beach fills with turtles digging holes and laying about 100 eggs in each one. It's like nature's way of throwing a big party, and everyone's invited. And here's the kicker: about 50 days later, you can come back, and if you're lucky, you'll witness one of the most heartwarming sights: baby turtles hatching and scrambling their way to the ocean. It's a reminder that, sometimes, the most beautiful things in life happen when we step away from the noise and let nature do its thing.



## Ometepe Island

The name "Ometepe" comes from two Nahuatl words: Ome, which means "two," and Tepetl, which means "hills." And if there's ever been a name that perfectly captures the essence of a place, it's this one. Ometepe is exactly what you'd expect—an island formed by two towering volcanoes, perfectly aligned to create the shape of the number 8. One of them, Concepción, is an active volcano, while Maderas is extinct—but together they form the heart of the island, separated by a river that runs through the narrow strip of land that connects them. Ometepe isn't just a place for postcard pictures; it's an adventure waiting to happen. You can spend your days meandering along nature trails, or enjoying a peaceful swim on the island's calm, sandy beaches. But for those with a thirst for something a little more exhilarating, the Maderas Volcano offers a challenging hike with an incredible payoff: a refreshing swim in the lagoon nestled inside the extinct crater. Whether you're in the mood to unwind or to push your limits, Ometepe offers a little bit of everything, and a lot of unforgettable moments.

## Charco Verde

After visiting Moyogalpa and Concepción, the next stop on your journey through Ometepe is likely Altagracia. But here's a little insider tip: make sure you carve out some time to visit Charco Verde Nature Reserve, which sits along the southern stretch of NIC-64 on your way. If you're in the mood to slow down a little, there are a handful of cozy hotels near Charco Verde,. But even if you're just passing through, the reserve offers some incredible experiences. The main draws here? A pristine, semi-private beach that feels like your own little paradise and the Devil's Viewpoint, perched up a nearby hill. From there, you get sweeping views of the island's rugged coastline. And here's the kicker: the area around the viewpoint is teeming with families of howler monkeys. If you take the hike up to the viewpoint, you'll almost certainly hear their distinctive calls echoing through the trees. And if you're lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of these curious creatures swinging from branch to branch.



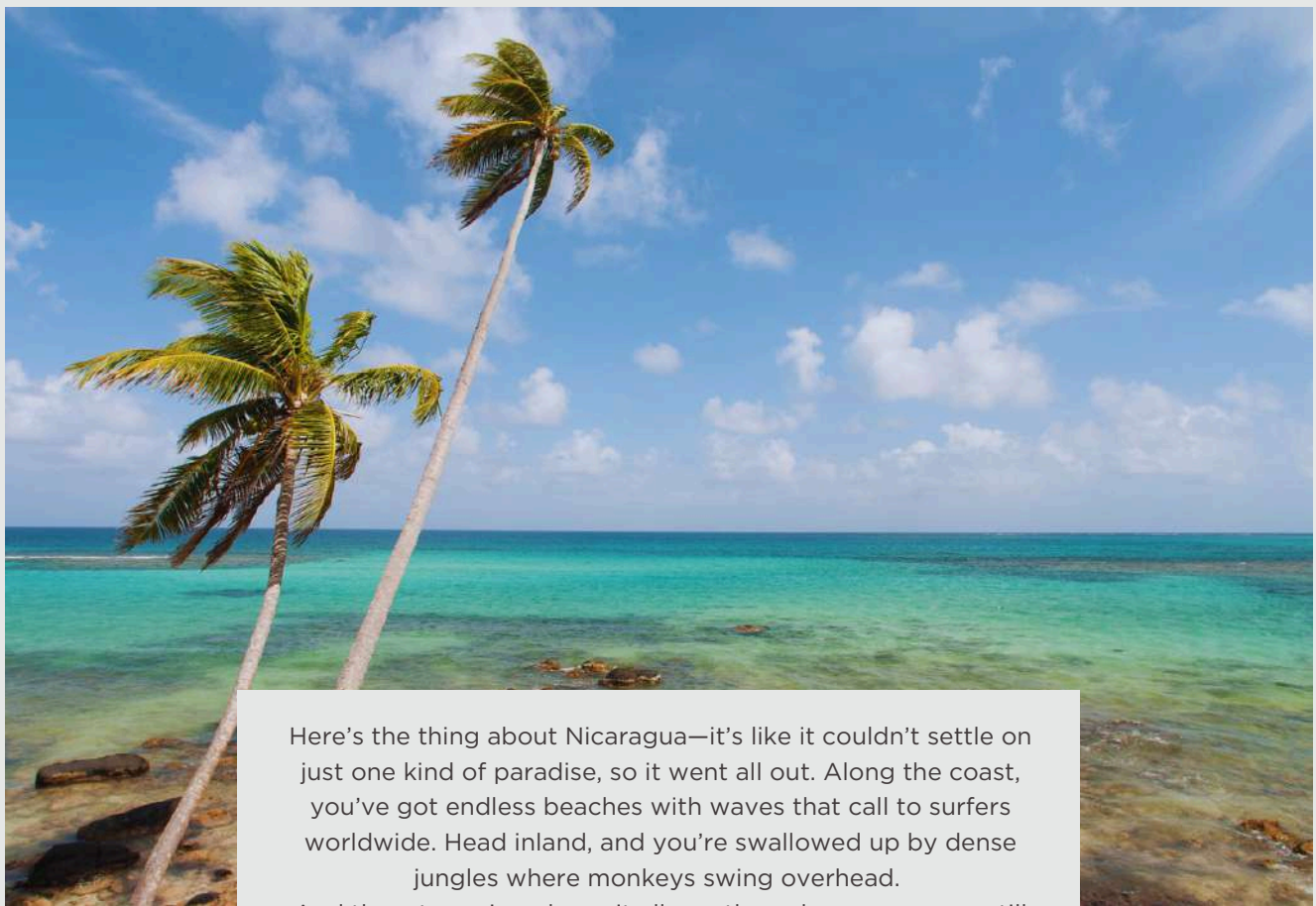


## CHINANDEGA

Chinandega is more than just the capital of its region—it's a vital economic hub for all of Nicaragua's northern regions. And when you step into the city, you'll quickly realize this isn't your typical small-town Nicaragua. It's a bustling, fast-paced place, far more active and lively than its colonial counterpart, León. While Chinandega may not be steeped in as much history, it makes up for it in energy. Much of the city's colonial architecture was either destroyed or badly damaged during the 1928 bombardments. That said, one significant relic from the past still stands: the Our Lady Santa Ana Parish. Though parts of it have been restored, it remains an impressive example of colonial design. Chinandega also boasts a range of neo-colonial buildings that are well worth exploring. The El Calvario Parish, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Saint Anthony Church all date back to the mid-19th century, and each brings its own charm.

### Flor de Caña Rum Tour

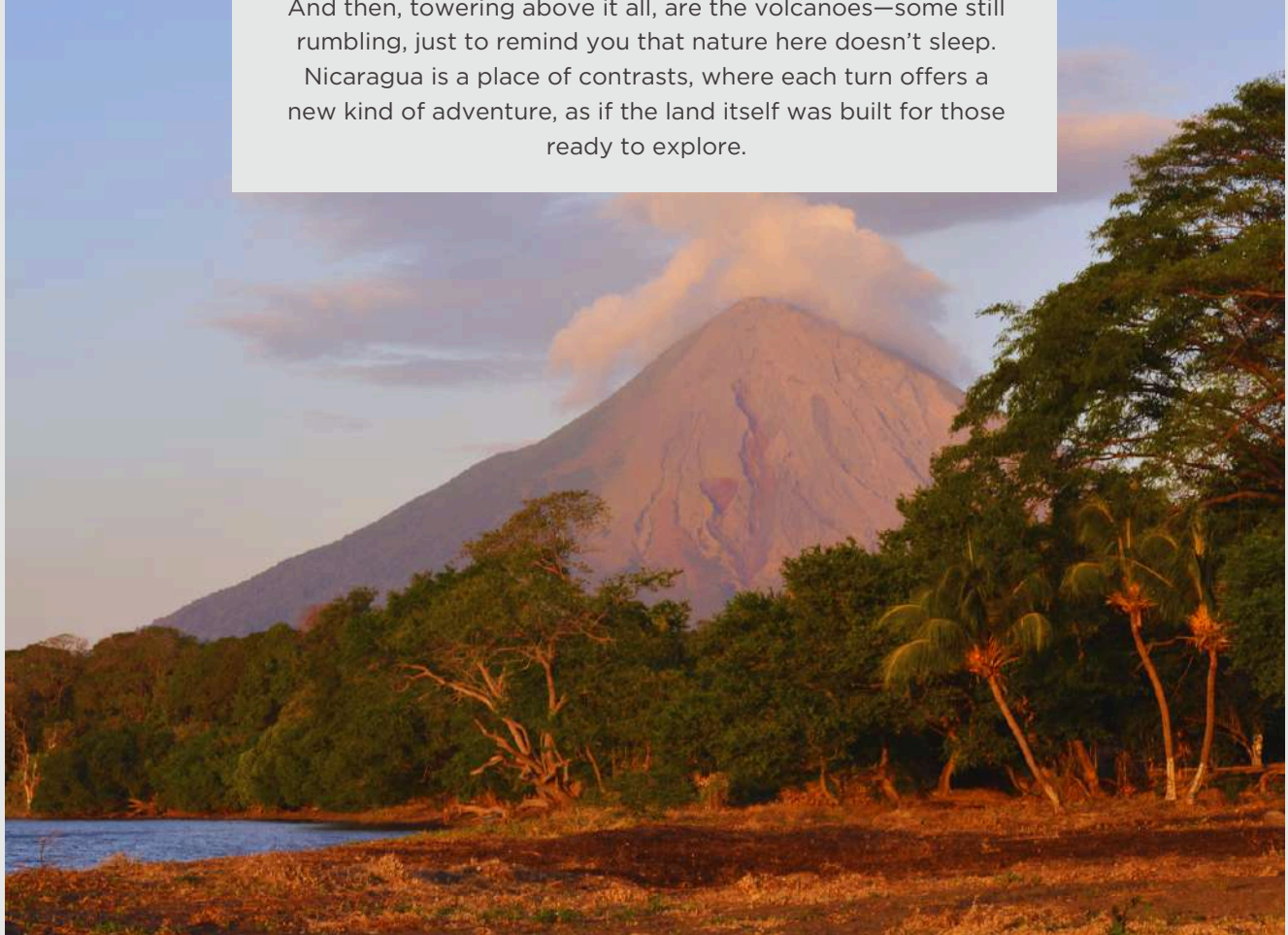
Chinandega is a place where you'll find everything you need to feel at home: restaurants, accommodations, and all the tourist amenities you could wish for. But if you happen to enjoy a good Nicaraguan rum, here's something you won't want to miss. A short drive away, in the town of Chichigalpa, is the home of Flor de Caña—Nicaragua's iconic rum brand—and its very own factory and museum. For just \$10 USD, you can take the standard tour, where you'll get a deep dive into the rum's history, the production process, and—of course—plenty of tastings along the way. If you're looking for something a bit more special, the VIP tour offers an upgraded experience for \$100 USD. You'll enjoy a more intimate look at the facilities, exclusive tastings, and a personalized Flor de Caña bottle to take home. Whether you're a casual sipper or a serious connoisseur, it's an experience that will leave you with a little extra flavor—and a great souvenir to boot.



Here's the thing about Nicaragua—it's like it couldn't settle on just one kind of paradise, so it went all out. Along the coast, you've got endless beaches with waves that call to surfers worldwide. Head inland, and you're swallowed up by dense jungles where monkeys swing overhead.

And then, towering above it all, are the volcanoes—some still rumbling, just to remind you that nature here doesn't sleep.

Nicaragua is a place of contrasts, where each turn offers a new kind of adventure, as if the land itself was built for those ready to explore.







## CARAZO

Carazo may be one of Nicaragua's smaller provinces, but it's brimming with natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage. Located between the Pacific coast and the mountains, the province is known for its green landscapes, coffee plantations, and charming rural communities. While it may not have the same fame as some of Nicaragua's larger provinces, Carazo offers a peaceful yet vibrant escape, making it an ideal spot for those looking to explore the quieter side of the country.

Diriamba, the second-largest city in Carazo, is the province's heartbeat. It's a place where you can get a real sense of life in a small rural city. The city's central park is often alive with locals chatting, kids playing, and vendors selling their goods—offering a window into the everyday rhythm of life here. Diriamba is also known for its local traditions, like the annual San Sebastián celebration.

While Diriamba may not have the historical landmarks of larger cities, it's a lively and welcoming place with its own unique appeal. If you're planning to explore Carazo, it makes a great base camp. There are a few comfortable hotels in town, and the city is well-connected to the surrounding areas, including nearby natural attractions like the jagged peaks of the Chocoyero-El Brujo Nature Reserve and the picturesque town of San Marcos. If you're interested in hiking, learning about local culture, or simply enjoying the pace of life in a Nicaraguan rural city, Diriamba offers a lot more than meets the eye.



## MATAPALGA

Located in Nicaragua's North-Central region, which is mostly rural and sparsely populated, Matagalpa stands out as a city full of life. It's actually the second most populous province in the entire country—a fact that may surprise you when you think of the wild, untamed wilderness that surrounds it. The area is a patchwork of history and cultural influences, thanks in part to the wave of Northern European families who moved here during the coffee boom of the 1800s. These settlers brought with them their own traditions and way of life, leaving a lasting mark on the province. But that's just one layer. Matagalpa also has deep indigenous roots. In fact, the city itself was once home to a large indigenous community that thrived until the early 1900s.

But what really makes Matagalpa stand out is its incredible juxtaposition of urban and wild. It's one of the few places in the world where you can experience a thriving urban life, with its busy markets, vibrant street life, and cozy cafes, and within a half hour, you can be in some of the most celebrated nature reserves in the rich forests, protected wildlife, and expansive ecological estates.

It's a surreal contrast: city streets that hum with life one moment, and then total wilderness, where the sounds of birds and rustling leaves are all you hear, the next.





### Nicaragua's Most Famous Coffee and Eco-Plantations

Some of Nicaragua's most well-known coffee is grown in the Matagalpian Mountains, where the high altitude, humid weather, and volcanic soil create the perfect conditions for coffee plants to thrive. These unique factors contribute to the region's distinctive coffee, celebrated for its rich flavors, balanced acidity, and aromatic profile.

For a glimpse into the region's coffee heritage, visit the Coffee Museum in the city of Matagalpa. The museum houses exhibits that trace the history of coffee production, from its roots in Pre-Colombian times to its role as one of Nicaragua's most significant exports today. You'll discover how coffee shaped the economy and culture of the area, with artifacts, historical tools, and fascinating stories that bring the past to life.

For a deeper connection to the coffee-making process, venture to Selva Negra, a world-renowned eco-lodge and working coffee farm perched in the heart of the Matagalpian highlands. A tour of Selva Negra offers a hands-on experience of sustainable coffee farming, from planting and harvesting to the art of processing beans. You'll gain insight into eco-friendly practices that ensure a harmonious relationship with the environment. Afterward, relax with a freshly brewed cup of Selva Negra's own coffee, served on the lodge's veranda overlooking the verdant forests and misty mountains.



## JINOTEGA

Jinotega. It's big—one of the largest provinces in Nicaragua. And it's rugged, too. Situated in the northern part of the country, it borders Honduras, which gives it this unique sense of being at the edge of everything. For all its size, it is sparsely populated - outside the main city, it is a land of small, tucked-away rural towns and endless, dense jungle.

If you're looking for a glimpse of wilderness, this is it. The Bosawas Reserve, the largest protected tropical rainforests in Central America, stretches down from Matagalpa into Jinotega, covering vast areas of the province. It's the kind of place where nature takes center stage and everything else, including the human presence, feels like a mere footnote.

But Jinotega's story doesn't just belong to its wild lands—it also belongs to its people. This province has significant historical and cultural importance for indigenous communities. In fact, Jinotega, along with part of Matagalpa, is one of the westernmost regions in Nicaragua that still has a notable indigenous population. That gives it a rich cultural heritage that you can feel when you're in the area, a deep connection to the land and history that's hard to ignore.

And while the land is wild, it's also productive. Jinotega is the heart of Nicaragua's coffee industry, producing about 80% of the country's coffee. But don't expect to wander through the plantations like you might in Matagalpa. These coffee farms are much more commercial, so the experience of visiting them is less accessible.





## ESTELÍ

Estelí is Nicaragua's third largest city, but it doesn't feel like the typical urban hub. Surrounded by small towns and thick jungles, it has a certain isolation that gives it a unique charm. Yet, despite its surroundings, Estelí is actually one of the most modern and progressive cities in the country. It's known for many things, but perhaps most notably for its thriving bar and club scene. This vibrant nightlife has helped establish Estelí as the music festival capital of Nicaragua, drawing young people from all over, especially from the western regions, to travel here for a weekend of music and energy.

Part of what makes Estelí stand out is its modern architecture. The city is a clear example of resilience and regeneration. During the revolution against Somoza, much of Estelí was destroyed. The devastation could have marked the city permanently, but instead, it became a catalyst for change. With a strong economy and determined people, Estelí rebuilt itself from the ground up. The rubble was cleared, and new buildings emerged where the old ones had once stood. This process not only restored Estelí but allowed for a modern city layout, with a blend of functionality and style that sets it apart from many other Nicaraguan cities.

## World-famous Tobacco

When the Cuban revolution took place, many people who worked in the Cuban cigar industry fled to Estelí, seeking refuge from political persecution. They brought with them not only their expertise but also prized Cuban tobacco seeds. The combination of these seeds with Estelí's rich soil and ideal climate created a perfect storm for cigar production. The result? A tobacco so good that it became renowned in its own right. In fact, before the U.S./Cuban embargo began to be lifted, many of the Cuban cigar brands found on U.S. shelves—like the iconic Cohiba—were actually rolled in Estelí. This small city, far from the heart of Cuba, had quietly become the center of the cigar world.



## MADRIZ

Madriz is one of Nicaragua's smaller provinces, tucked away in the far northwest corner of the country. While its size might be modest, its charm lies in its quiet, rural villages and the rich local traditions that have been preserved for generations. The province is less visited by tourists, which adds to its appeal—offering a glimpse into a way of life that remains untouched by the usual crowds. At the heart of Madriz is the capital, Somoto, a tranquil city that, while not bustling with activity, holds its own unique attractions. Somoto is surrounded by stunning natural landscapes, including the famous Somoto Canyon, which is a popular spot for adventurous visitors who want to explore the river's crystal-clear waters and dramatic rock formations. The region's blend of serene landscapes, local culture, and hidden gems makes Madriz a quiet yet captivating destination.

## Somoto

Somoto started out as an indigenous town that was founded by Aztec immigrants who moved south from Mexico into northern Nicaragua. Their original name for it was Tepesomoto (Valley of the Geese), which is what the nearby volcano is still called. The goose population has diminished greatly since those days, but it is still possible to see some if you go to the city's main attraction: Somoto Canyon. This canyon is one of the most scenic in Nicaragua. It has high rock walls that rise between 120 and 150 meters (394-492 feet) on either side as they guide the Coco River along its course. Thick jungle and brush covers the upper sides, but on the river's shores it is sparse enough that you can walk along the sides. There are also incredible views both down the river and towards the sky, framed by the two mountain peaks. You can also hire a local fisherman, or boat owner, to take you on a trip up and down the river. Somoto also has one of the oldest church buildings in all of Nicaragua.





## NUEVA SEGOVIA

Nueva Segovia, once a larger province that included what is now Madriz, was split off less than a century ago, creating the distinct regions we know today. The towns in Nueva Segovia have a character all their own. For instance, the town of Ocotal, the provincial capital, is a perfect mix of historical significance and modern-day liveliness. Ocotal has a colonial charm, with its cobblestone streets and traditional whitewashed buildings, while also embracing newer infrastructure.

But this province isn't just about quiet towns and infrastructure; it's also home to the stunning Cerro San Cristóbal, a mountain with panoramic views of the surrounding region. The summit provides panoramic vistas of the surrounding landscapes—lush green valleys, distant mountain ranges, and the small towns below. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the Honduran border, which feels a little surreal.

And if you're into history, you'll love the fact that Nueva Segovia was once part of a major route for the Spanish colonizers. In the 16th century, the area became a crucial site for the settlers' agricultural production. In fact, the province's name, Segovia, comes from the Spanish city of Segovia, a nod to its historical ties. The region has a rich mix of colonial architecture and modern-day living, making it an intriguing mix of old and new.

So, whether you're wandering through the charming town of Ocotal or exploring the beautiful hills and valleys, Nueva Segovia offers a slice of Nicaragua that's a little quieter, a little more historical, but still full of surprises.



## CARIBBEAN COAST

Many people around the world don't even realize that the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua exists. Most people only know about the Pacific side and just assume that the Caribbean side is the same. However, this is far from true.

### Corn Islands

So you've found yourself on the Corn Islands, right on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. These islands aren't your typical overrun tourist destination—there's no wall-to-wall beach resorts here. Instead, they've got incredible, untouched beaches and local culture that's still very much alive.

Great Corn Island is where locals live, where you'll find most of the amenities, with plenty of nature beyond the beaches, too. Mount Pleasant is a must—there's a tower up top where you can look out over the whole island and even across to Little Corn.

Little Corn Island is for the purists. Fewer hotels, fewer places to eat, no phones, no TVs, no cars, and electricity that's not always there. It's rustic, but it's beautiful—untamed beaches and jungle paths that feel more like challenges than trails. Among the island's hidden gems is Little Corn Beach and Bungalow, a charming eco-resort offering cozy beachfront cabanas and a commitment to sustainability. Here, you can enjoy fresh, locally sourced meals at their renowned Turned Turtle Restaurant, sip cocktails with your toes in the sand, and wake up to breathtaking views of the turquoise Caribbean waters—all while experiencing the island's unique, off-the-grid charm.

And then, beneath those waters, there's another world. Both islands offer some fantastic scuba diving, where you'll see plenty of marine life up close. Just off the coast lies a 16th-century Spanish galleon, resting in only 15 feet of water. Here's the kicker: nobody's really studied it yet. All you can do is swim by and see the cannons, the anchor, the whole ship, just sitting there in the sand. The Corn Islands used to be a hot spot for pirates, so who knows?





## BASIC TRAVEL INFORMATION

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Travelers can enter Nicaragua via various land, sea, and air routes, offering flexibility and accessibility no matter your starting point:

### **By Air**

The primary gateway to Nicaragua is Augusto C. Sandino International Airport, located in Managua. This modern airport connects Nicaragua to major international hubs such as Miami, Houston, Panama City, and Mexico City. Several airlines operate routes to Managua, making it a convenient entry point for travelers from North America, Central America, and beyond.

### **By Land**

Nicaragua shares borders with Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south. Popular Border Crossings:

- From Honduras: El Espino and Las Manos are frequently used by travelers entering Nicaragua from the north.
- From Costa Rica: Peñas Blancas is the busiest and most developed crossing, located near the Pacific coast, while San Carlos provides access closer to the Caribbean.

### **By Sea**

Nicaragua's Pacific coast and Caribbean coast both offer maritime entry points for adventurers arriving by sea.

- Pacific Coast: Cruise ships and private yachts often dock at San Juan del Sur. Other smaller ports, such as Corinto, also welcome international vessels.
- Caribbean Coast: The Corn Islands—Big Corn and Little Corn—are a popular destination for travelers arriving by private boat.



## BASIC TRAVEL INFORMATION

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### GENERAL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

For most visitors, the process of entering Nicaragua is relatively straightforward. Here's what you typically need:

- **Valid Passport:** Visitors to Nicaragua must have a valid passport that remains valid for at least six months beyond the date of arrival.
- **Tourist Card:** Upon arrival in Nicaragua, all visitors (regardless of nationality) are required to pay a tourist card fee. This fee is typically around \$10 to \$15 USD and is collected at the immigration checkpoint. The tourist card grants visitors a stay of up to 90 days.
- **Proof of Return or Onward Travel:** Immigration authorities may ask for proof that you plan to leave the country at the end of your stay, such as a return flight ticket or a ticket to another destination.
- **Sufficient Funds:** Immigration officials may ask for proof that you have enough funds to support your stay in Nicaragua. This can include bank statements, cash, or credit cards.

*NOTE: It is legally required that all visitors carry their passport on them during their stay in Nicaragua. Until recently, state IDs were accepted, as were photocopies of your passport. However, a new law has been made where technically the only valid form of ID they will accept is your actual passport.*





## BASIC TRAVEL INFORMATION

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### TOURIST VISA

The standard tourist visa for Nicaragua allows visitors to stay in the country for up to 90 days. Here are key details:

- **Duration:** The initial tourist visa is granted for 90 days. However, this can often be extended for an additional 90 days by leaving the country and re-entering. Many travelers use a short trip to a nearby country, such as Costa Rica or Honduras, to reset their visa status.
- **Application Process:** Most nationalities can obtain a tourist visa upon arrival at the airport or land border. However, it's important to check if your nationality requires a visa in advance. If you are from a country that requires a visa, you will need to apply through the Nicaraguan consulate in your home country or a nearby country. The process generally involves submitting an application form, passport-sized photos, proof of financial means, and a round-trip ticket.
- **Visa Extensions:** If you wish to stay longer than the 90 days allowed by your tourist card, you can apply for an extension at the Nicaraguan Immigration Office. The process is straightforward but requires submission of supporting documentation such as proof of financial stability and an itinerary.



## BASIC TRAVEL INFORMATION

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### **COMMUNICATION**

The country code is +505, followed by the eight-digit telephone number. Nicaragua's two largest cell phone providers are Movistar and Claro. Claro is also the provider for domestic land lines. In order to call Nicaragua from abroad, dial 011 plus the country code (505) and the eight-digit telephone number. In Nicaragua, to make a call to the U.S. you just add 001 to the nine digit U.S. number.

### **INTERNET**

Every year, the internet network in Nicaragua spreads to more places and becomes faster. Many large urban areas have 4G internet for mobile devices and internet cables that are hooked up to the houses. The prices are relatively inexpensive for internet when compared to the U.S. There are also internet cafés in large cities where you can surf the internet for as cheaply as \$1 an hour.

### **TIME ZONE**

Nicaragua currently observes GMT-6 hours as its standard time. Daylight Savings Time (DST) is not observed. The time corresponds to U.S. Central time in non-DST periods, and U.S. Mountain time during DST.





## BASIC TRAVEL INFORMATION

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### **GOVERNMENT CUSTOMS**

Firearms and animals must be declared. A declaration of money and valuables must be made on arrival. Canned meats and dairy products are prohibited imports, as well as medication without accompanying prescriptions.

### **PAYMENT METHODS**

Although U.S. dollars are generally accepted everywhere, foreign currencies can be exchanged in banks and authorized businesses. American Express, VISA, and Master Card are widely accepted, including at ATMs.

### **DRIVING PERMITS**

Visitors can use their driver's license from their country of origin for thirty days after entry to Nicaragua.

### **WORKING HOURS**

Most government offices are open to the public from Monday to Friday, between 8:00a.m. and 12:30p.m., and again from 1:30p.m. to 5:00p.m.

Private businesses are usually open from around 9a.m. until 8p.m. during the week, and later on weekends. These hours, of course, can change depending on the business.

Banks are open from 8:30a.m. till 4p.m. during the week, and from 8:30a.m. to 12p.m. on Saturdays.

### **GRATUITY**

There will usually be a 10%-15% tip included in your bill at most restaurants, but you can always leave a larger tip if you want to. Taxi drivers do not expect tips, but it is obviously welcome.



## WANT TO DISCOVER MORE?

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Take the guesswork out of moving and living abroad. Details on entry requirements, second residency, schools, hospitals, hotels, restaurants and real estate ownership in Nicaragua, are all available in one complete guide.

For the low price of \$19.99, you can own a complete copy of the Nicaragua Handbook. Detailed information on topography, its people, cultures, as well as relevant travel information within and around the country can be found throughout the Nicaragua Handbook.

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