

# Granada



Granada drips with photogenic elegance, a picture postcard at every turn. Its mix of travelers, locals and expats has created a culture unlike any other in the country. Peek behind carved wooden doors into the lush courtyards of restored mansions and you'll find a blend of old and new – hotels with colonial flourishes alongside every conceivable mod-con, restaurants blending traditional foods with international flavors, and a contained yet lively nightlife.

Granada is Nicaragua at its most comfortable: a clean and compact, relatively safe city offering many of the services and conveniences of Managua without the drama, noise and pollution. It's no wonder many travelers use the city as a base, venturing out into the countryside by day and returning to its welcoming folds at night.

Just out of town are the natural wonders of Las Isletas and the Peninsula de Asese, both an easy half-day trip. Extending your reach will get you to the sporadically active Volcán Mom-bacho, with walking trails, a canopy tour, a butterfly sanctuary and hot springs dotted around its foothills. Also nearby are the traditional villages of La Granadilla, La Nanda and Nicaragua Libre, where friendly locals welcome visitors as part of a community-based tourism project.

With a little planning and a little more effort, archaeology and nature buffs won't be disappointed either – Parque Nacional Archipiélago Zapatera is home to one of the most impressive collections of petroglyphs and statues in the country, while Reserva Silvestre Privada Domitila protects important swaths of endangered dry tropical forest and the birds, monkeys and butterflies that call it home.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Cruising through the narrow waterways of **Las Isletas** (p120), where luxury holiday mansions cast shadows on humble fishing shacks
- Taking a Granada city tour with an **opera-singing tour guide** (p124)
- Feasting on some of Nicaragua's most innovative cuisine in Granada's **restaurants** (p127)
- Shifting down a few gears and visiting small villages offering community-based tourism, such as **La Granadilla** (p134)
- Biking out along the **Peninsula de Asese** (see the boxed text, p122) to secluded swimming beaches



■ POPULATION: 107,000

■ ELEVATION: 40M

## HISTORY

Nicknamed 'the Great Sultan,' in honor of its Moorish namesake across the Atlantic, Granada was founded in 1524 by Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, and is one of the oldest cities in the New World. It was constructed as a showcase city, the first chance that the Spanish had to prove they had more to offer than bizarre religions and advanced military technology, and it still retains an almost regal beauty, each adobe masterpiece faithfully resurrected to original specifications after every trial and tribulation.

A trade center almost from its inception, Granada's position on the Lago de Nicaragua became even more important when the Spanish realized that the Río San Juan was navigable from the lake to the sea. This made Granada rich – and vulnerable. Between 1665 and 1670, pirates sacked the city three times (see the boxed text, p117).

Undaunted, Granada rebuilt and grew even richer and more powerful, a conservative cornerstone of the Central American economy. And, after independence from Spain, the city chose to challenge the colonial capital (and its longtime rival and Liberal bastion), León, for leadership of the new nation.

Tensions erupted into full-blown civil war in the 1850s, when desperate León contracted the services of American mercenary William Walker (see the boxed text, p29) and his band of 'filibusterers.' Walker defeated Granada, declared himself president and launched a conquest of Central America – and failed. Walker was forced into a retreat after a series of embarrassing defeats, and as he fell back to his old capital city, he set it afire and left in its ashes the infamous placard: 'Here was Granada.'

## ORIENTATION

Granada is not actually on the Interamericana (Pan-American Hwy), but instead is linked to the Costa Rican border and Managua by two spur roads. The town's layout is a logical Spanish grid, centered on the cathedral and the parque central. Calle La Calzada runs eastward from the park about 1km to Lago de Nicaragua and the ferry terminal. South of the dock, a lakefront park extends toward the docks where day cruises depart for Las Isletas.

Calle Real Xalteva is the principal road heading west of the parque central, past three important churches to the old Spanish fortress. Calle Atravesada, one block west of the parque central, is the main north–south artery,

connecting the Mercado Municipal (close to the Rivas- and Masaya-bound buses) at the southern end of town with Parque Sandino, the old train station and the main highway to Managua, just north of the city.

## INFORMATION

### Bookstores

**Mavericks** (Map p118; Calle El Arsenal; BanCentro, ½c E; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sat, 10am–noon Sun) A solid selection of new magazines and used books in English and other languages.

**Mockingbird Books** (Map p118; Calle La Libertad; Hotel Alhambra, ½c N) A good range of used and new fiction and non-fiction in a variety of languages. Has a couple of shelves dedicated to guidebooks and children's books in Spanish and English.

### Cultural Centers

**Fundación Casa de los Tres Mundos** (Map p118; ☎ 2552 4176; www.c3mundos.org; Av Guzmán; int Casa de los Leones; adult/child US\$0.70/0.30; ☎ gallery 8am–6pm) Offers classes in music, painting and print-making alongside art exhibits, free movies and cheap musical and theatrical performances.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (Cruz Roja; ☎ 2552 2711) Red Cross.

**Police** (☎ 2552 2929)

### Internet Access & Resources

Those colonial adobes are packed with internet cafés, most charging about US\$0.70 to US\$1 a minute, less if you get away from the plaza.

**Find It Granada** (www.finditgranada.com) A somewhat complete guide to the city's business, restaurants and hotels.

**InterKa@fe.net** (Map p118; Calle La Libertad; frente Hotel Colonial; per hr US\$0.80; ☎ ) Very air-conditioned, with some of the fastest machines in town.

### Laundry

Your hotel will almost definitely offer laundry services, and may just send your clothes to one of the following.

**Fernanda Laundry Service** (Map p118; Calle La Calzada; parque central, 2½c E; per 1-5kg US\$2.50) Fast and friendly.

**Laundry Olga Padilla** (Map p118; Calle Consulado; parque central, 1½c 0; per load US\$4) Convenient for those staying out west.

### Medical Services

**Hospital Amistad Japonés** (☎ 2552 2719; Calle La Inmaculada; Esso, 2km 0) The most frequently recommended private hospital is out of town, on the road to Managua.