

# Directory

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

Ranging from five-star resorts to windowless shacks with shared latrines, you really have your choice of accommodations in developed A-list destinations like Managua, Granada, León, San Juan del Sur and the Corn Islands. Top-end places start to thin out a bit as you head for the interior.

### BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out [lonelyplanet.com/hotels](http://lonelyplanet.com/hotels). You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

## PRACTICALITIES

- *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario* are Nicaragua's most respected, widely available daily newspapers.
- For English-language publications, look out for the weekly *Nica Times* and the quarterly *Between the Waves*, both widely available.
- DVDs on sale use the NTSC image-registration system.
- Electrical current and prongs are the same as in the US and Canada: 110V AC, 60Hz, in outlets accepting two flat-pronged plugs.
- Nicaragua officially uses the metric system, but *libras* (pounds) may still be used in markets. The archaic Spanish measurement of *varas* (0.70m or 33in) is often used in directions.

Hotels in this book are listed by price – cheapest to most expensive. In larger towns these are broken down into three categories: Budget, Midrange and Top End.

Being that the large majority of hotel rooms in Nicaragua have their own bathroom, we stipulate when the bathroom is shared; otherwise you can assume that you'll have your own, except of course in dorms where the bathroom is always shared.

Absolute peak season in Nicaragua is really only two weeks or so – Christmas and Easter, when entire towns book out and prices skyrocket. Outside that, many hotels maintain prices year-round. If there is a high season, it's somewhere between November and March – outside the rainy months. Prices in this book are for normal/high season, not absolute peak.

Luxury accommodations, where they exist, can be a good deal – the most expensive resort in the country (p165) clocks in at US\$250 to US\$300 per person, which certainly isn't for everyone, but is a steal compared to Costa Rica. Boutique hotels (with doubles going for US\$80 to US\$120), concentrated in Managua,

generally have fewer than 10 rooms, and are creatively decorated with lots of little luxuries; **Small Hotels** ([www.centralamerica-smallhotels.com](http://www.centralamerica-smallhotels.com)) has a list of great options. Tour agencies may be able to get discounts in top-end and midrange hotels – be sure to ask.

There's a good midrange option, with clean, modern rooms, private bathroom, 24-hour electricity, running water and a nice setting or neighborhood, in every major town – even in isolated spots like Las Minas and Nueva Guinea. They tend to cost US\$20 to US\$35 for a double; tack on US\$10 to US\$15 for an A-list destination. Solo travelers usually get a 20% discount, tops, in this category. Also note that hotels in the midrange and top-end categories have a 15% tax added to the cost.

The budget hotels, sometimes called *hospedajes*, are inexpensive compared to the rest of Central America. You can almost always get your own clean wooden room, with a window and a shared bathroom, for under US\$6 per person per night. Double that and you get a bigger room and a private bathroom; prices are higher in A-list destinations, where there are always cheap dorm beds (US\$5 to US\$8 per person) if you're on a shoestring. In less-developed regions, you may be using bucket-flush toilets and bucket showers in this price range. Budget travelers should always bring candles and flashlight (torch), just in case. If there's no mosquito net, just ask.

In rural areas, there may not be signed guesthouses, but almost all small towns have families who rent rooms. Ask at the *alcaldía* (mayor's office) for leads on weekdays, or any open business on weekends. Some communities have formalized homestays through Spanish schools (you don't need to be a student – just ask at the school) or as part of community-based alternative tourism, such as at Área Protegida Miraflores (see p208 and p25).

Camping is available in a few private and natural reserves, and is also allowed free on most less-developed beaches.

## ACTIVITIES

Nicaragua has almost unlimited opportunities for outdoor activities but few places to rent or buy equipment, so come prepared. Well-established sports include canoeing and kayaking, diving and snorkeling, hiking, fishing, and surfing. Sports with particular promise for development (once there's money invested) include windsurfing, parasailing and

kitesurfing. See the Outdoors chapter, p63, for more on activities in Nicaragua.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Most official government offices, including Intur, Marena and all *alcaldías*, your three main sources of tourist information, are generally open from 8am to noon and 1:30pm to 5pm; Intur is sometimes open until noon Saturday and very occasionally Sunday as well. Many other businesses, including corporate offices and many stores, also take an extended lunch hour. Banks, shops and most tourist-oriented businesses stay open through the lunch hour.

Restaurants have widely varying hours, but in general, simple *comedores* (basic and cheap eateries) are open from about 6am until 8pm. Restaurants generally only serve lunch and dinner (although there are many exceptions) and may close from 3pm to 5pm. Cafés in tourist towns open for breakfast around 8am and close at 7pm. No matter what time a steam-table buffet is officially open, it's best to go in just as meal time begins (around 11:30am or 5pm). Discos usually don't get going until at least 9pm, later in Managua. Exceptions to these hours are noted in individual listings.

If a museum, cultural center or other office isn't open when it 'should' be, ask around to see if anyone in the neighborhood knows where the caretaker is.

## CHILDREN

Nicaragua, like all Latin American countries, is relatively easy to travel around with children, despite the lack of infrastructure. Parents rarely pay extra for hotels, transportation or other services for youngsters small enough to fit in a lap comfortably, and even complete strangers will make an effort to accommodate and entertain children.

## Practicalities

Some top-end (and very few midrange) hotels will be able to arrange a cot if you ask ahead. Otherwise the assumption is that the child will share your bed or use a single. Similarly, major car-rental companies can organize car seats if given enough notice, but don't count on it or expect one at the last minute. Car seats for Nicaraguan toddlers tend to be mom's lap, even on a motorbike... Dedicated diaper-changing facilities are available in some of Managua's shopping malls but are pretty