



Nicaragua

505 / POP 5,869,859

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Tercer Ojo (p463)
- ➔ Cevicheria El Chino (p502)
- ➔ Café-Arte Tipiscayán (p494)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Surfing Turtle Lodge (p489)
- ➔ Playa Hermosa Beach Hotel (p481)
- ➔ Hotel Los Arcos (p493)

Why Go?

There are few places that are everything for everyone. But Nicaragua has just about all you could ask for in a tropical paradise.

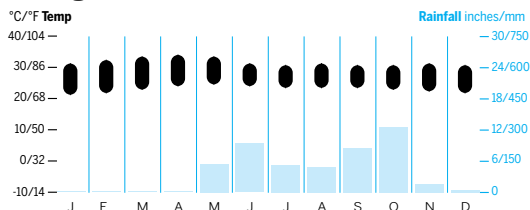
Want 90-octane waves and beach-blanket-bohemian days on lost beaches? Nicaragua's got you covered with two long coastlines of peaced-out surf camps, hippie enclaves and remote fishing villages that are only now entering the tourist game.

Or are you thinking about diving into history, tromping through colonial villages and exploring the region's unique cultural patrimony? Well, Nicaragua's got that, too. Colonial cities like León and Granada offer crimson-hued snapshots of the past, while remote Caribbean fishing villages provide glimpses into present-day life in this diverse, proud and optimistic nation.

Beyond that there are volcanoes to be climbed (and surfed down), lagoons to be explored, islands to be Robinson Crusoe'd, and spirited locals to take you there and beyond.

When to Go

Managua



Nov–May High season means dry weather, sunny days, but slightly bigger crowds.

Mar–Nov It's rainy, but green, and you get the biggest, brawniest waves for Pacific Coast surf safaris.

Sep–Nov Hotels are cheaper, but the tail end of hurricane season can screw up your plans.

Connections

Nicaragua's border with Honduras can be crossed at Las Manos, El Espino or El Guasaule. From Costa Rica, you can enter by road at Peñas Blancas or by boat via Los Chiles. From Potosí, you can hop on a small boat to El Salvador. For more detailed information, see the Survival Guide on p525.

FIRST TIME IN NICARAGUA

If you've got limited time in Nicaragua, a trip through the southwest is big on awesome and small on hours in the bus. Kick off your trip in charismatic **Granada**. Spend three nights taking in the wonderful street-scapes and visiting the museums and churches. From here, you can head out for day trips or overnights to the lush crater at **Laguna de Apoyo**, the characterful artisan-villages known as **Pueblos Blancos**, or to the **Mombacho** and **Masaya** volcanoes and protected wild preserves.

Next head down the highway to San Jorge, from where you'll take the ferry across to the out-of-this-world **Isla de Ometepe** with its twin volcanoes and endless outdoor activities. From there, it's across the isthmus to the **Southern Pacific Beaches**. Most people begin and end their beach time in the funky-out international beach village of **San Juan del Sur**, but definitely plan on spending a night or two on the surf beaches north and south of here. If you are headed north, you won't want to miss a stop off in **León**.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Where to eat** Budget eateries – generally *comedores* or *cafetines*, *fritangas* and market stalls – serve a limited range of filling dishes and set meals from US\$2 to US\$5.
- ➔ **What to eat** *Gallo pinto* (mixed rice and beans) is a staple. On the coasts, you can sample wonderful seafood, while the interior has some of the best grass-fed beef in Central America. Be sure to keep an eye out for local specialties, including *nacatamles* (banana-leaf packed with cornmeal and other goodness), *baho* (steamed beef, plantains and yucca), *rondón* (coconut seafood stew served in the Caribbean) and *quesillo* (mozzarella and onions wrapped in a tortilla and topped with sour cream).
- ➔ **What to drink** Flor de Caña is the national rum; local beers include Toña and Victoria, both light pilsners.

AT A GLANCE

Nicaragua is considered one of the safest countries in Latin America. Spanish is spoken throughout much of the country. On the Caribbean Coast you'll find English is more common. You can get by on US\$20 to US\$30 per day. Visas are pretty straightforward here for most nationalities for up to three months. Nicaragua is on GMT minus six hours (no daylight savings).

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 129,494 sq km (approximately the size of Greece or New York State)
- ➔ **Capital** Managua
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎115 (fire), ☎118 (police), from cell phones ☎911

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Hostel Bed** US\$8-20
- ➔ **Evening Meal** US\$2-5
- ➔ **Bus Ticket** US\$1-3

Resources

- ➔ **Vianica.com** (www.vianica.com/traveling)
- ➔ **Intur** (www.visitnicaragua.com/ingles)
- ➔ **Latin American Network Information Center** (www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/nicaragua)