

# 4 easy-to-use sections

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

### Your planning tool kit

Photos & suggestions to help you create the perfect trip.

1

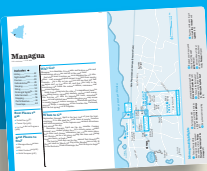


## ON THE ROAD

### Your complete guide

Expert reviews, easy-to-use maps and insider tips.

2



## UNDERSTAND

### Get more from your trip

Learn about the big picture, to make sense of what you see.

3

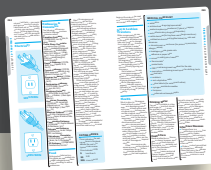


## SURVIVAL GUIDE

### Your at-a-glance reference

Vital practical information for a smooth trip.

4



## How to Use This Book

Look for these symbols to quickly identify listings:

Sights

Beaches

Activities

Courses

Tours

Festivals & Events

Sleeping

Eating

Drinking

Entertainment

Shopping

Information & Transport

**All reviews** are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

**Sights** are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

**Eating and Sleeping reviews** are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

These symbols give vital information for each listing:

Must-visit recommendation

Sustainable or green recommendation

**FREE** No payment required

Telephone number

Opening hours

Parking

Nonsmoking

Air-conditioning

Internet access

Wi-fi access

Swimming pool

Vegetarian selection

English-language menu

Family-friendly

Pet-friendly

Bus

Ferry

Tram

Train

For symbols used on maps, see the Map Legend.

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# Nicaragua



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Alex Egerton  
Greg Benchwick

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

Welcome to Nicaragua ...	4
Nicaragua Map .....	6
Nicaragua's Top 15 .....	8
Need to Know .....	16
First Time Nicaragua ...	18
If You Like .....	20
Month by Month .....	22
Itineraries .....	24
Nicaragua Outdoors ...	32
Regions at a Glance ...	36

## ON THE ROAD

### MANAGUA ..... 40

Pacific Beaches .....	61
Ticuantepe .....	63

### MASAYA & LOS PUEBLOS BLANCOS... 65

Masaya .....	67
Parque Nacional Volcán Masaya .....	73
Nindirí .....	74
Reserva Natural Laguna de Apoyo .....	75

### Los Pueblos Blancos ..... 76

Catarina .....	76
San Juan de Oriente .....	77
Diriá & Diriomo .....	78
Niquinohomo .....	78
Nandasmo .....	78
Masatepe .....	78
San Marcos .....	79
Carazo .....	80

### GRANADA ..... 83

Reserva Natural Volcán Mombacho .....	102
Nicaragua Libre .....	103
La Granadilla .....	103

La Nanda & Aguas Agrias .....	103
Reserva Silvestre Privada Domitila .....	103
Parque Nacional Archipiélago Zapatera ...	104

### SOUTHWESTERN NICARAGUA ..... 105

Rivas .....	108
San Jorge .....	111

Isla de Ometepe .....	112
-----------------------	-----

### Pacific Beaches ..... 125

Tola & the Tola Beaches .....	125
Refugio de Vida Silvestre Río Escalante- Chacocente .....	127
San Juan del Sur .....	127
Beaches North of San Juan del Sur .....	134
Beaches South of San Juan del Sur .....	136

### LEÓN & NORTHWESTERN NICARAGUA ..... 138

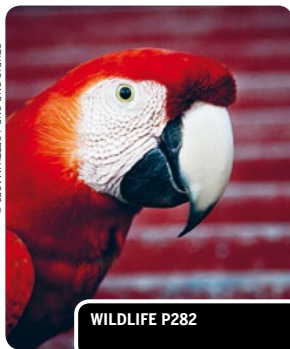
#### León ..... 139

Pacific Beaches Near León .....	155
Volcanoes .....	158
San Jacinto .....	159
El Sauce .....	160
Chinandega .....	160
Cosigüina Peninsula Beaches .....	165
Reserva Natural Volcán Cosigüina .....	168

### NORTHERN HIGHLANDS ..... 169

#### Estelí ..... 172

Área Protegida Mirafior .....	177
Área Protegida Cerro Tisey-Estanzuela ...	179
Condega .....	180
Somoto .....	181



WILDLIFE P282



SURFING P33

# Contents

## UNDERSTAND

Nicaragua Today .....	260
History .....	262
Nicaraguan Way of Life .....	271
Arts & Architecture ...	276
Land & Wildlife .....	281

## SURVIVAL GUIDE

Directory A–Z .....	290
Transportation .....	298
Language .....	303
Index .....	312
Map Legend .....	319

## SAN CARLOS, ISLAS SOLENTINAME & THE RÍO SAN JUAN..... 241

<b>San Carlos .....</b>	<b>244</b>
San Miguelito .....	246
Islas Solentiname.....	247
Refugio de Vida Silvestre Los Guatuzos .....	251
Río San Juan.....	251

Ocotal .....	183
Dipilto .....	184
Jalapa .....	186
Jinotega .....	188
Reserva Natural Cerro Datanlí–El Diablo .....	192
Lago de Apanás .....	193
Matagalpa .....	194
San Ramón .....	200
Selva Negra .....	201
La Dalia & Peñas Blancas .....	201

## CARIBBEAN COAST ..... 204

<b>Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) .....</b>	<b>205</b>
Miskito Keys .....	213
Waspám & the Río Coco .....	213
Managua–El Rama Road .....	216
El Rama .....	221
Bluefields.....	222
Pearl Lagoon.....	226
Corn Islands .....	231

## SPECIAL FEATURES

<b>Nicaragua's Top 15 .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Itineraries .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Off the Beaten Track... ..</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Nicaragua Outdoors ... ..</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Land &amp; Wildlife .....</b>	<b>281</b>



# On the Road



# Nicaragua





0  
0

50 km  
30 miles



### Pearl Keys

Personal-size paradise islands (p230)

### Little Corn Island

Dive the crystal-clear Caribbean (p237)

Corn Islands  
(Islas del Maíz,  
Nicaragua)

### Islas Solentiname

Isolated archipelago of artisans (p247)

### Río San Juan

Cruise an epic jungle river (p251)



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Alex Egerton

**Coordinating Author, Northern Highlands, Caribbean Coast, San Carlos Islas Solentiname & the Río San Juan**

A journalist by trade, Alex has been based in Nicaragua for almost a decade while working as a travel writer throughout Latin America. After exploring the villages, nature reserves and back roads from Nueva Segovia to Río San Juan, Alex moved to the Caribbean, bought a boat and settled down in Pearl Lagoon where the patchy internet is compensated by the fresh breeze and fantastic food. When not on the road writing, he spends his spare time exploring Nicaragua's nature reserves on foot and by kayak. Alex also wrote the Plan Your Trip and Understand Nicaragua chapters of this book.



### Greg Benchwick

**Managua, Masaya & Los Pueblos Blancos, Granada, Southwestern Nicaragua, León & Northwestern Nicaragua**

Greg first traveled through Nicaragua in 1995 with an empty notebook and a backpack full of dreams. Since then he's written dozens of guidebooks to countries throughout Latin America, supported UN missions in Nicaragua and beyond, and discovered lost beaches and new stories one street over.

Read more about Greg at:  
[lonelyplanet.com/members/gbenchwick](http://lonelyplanet.com/members/gbenchwick)

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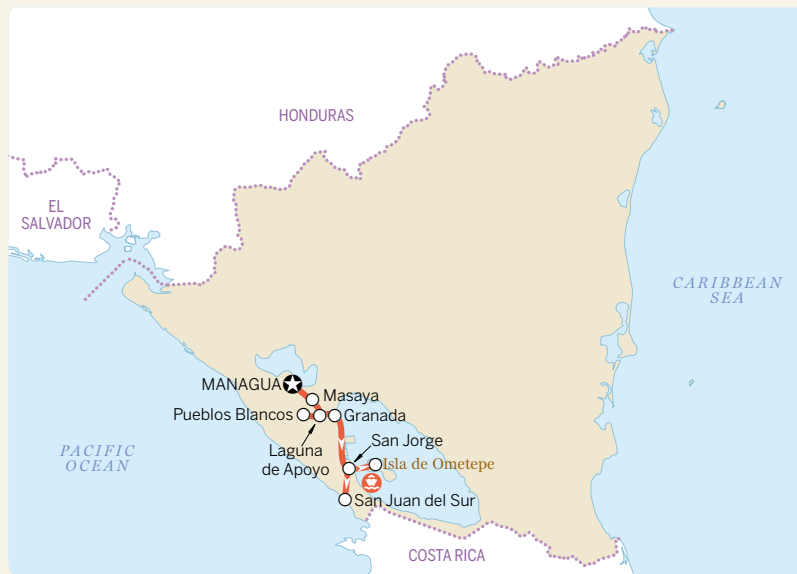
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## Plan Your Trip

# Itineraries



10  
DAYS

### Stunning Southwest

If you've got limited time in Nicaragua, a trip through the southwest is big on awesome and small on hours in the bus. The region is a condensed wonderland of barreling surf, volcanoes, crater lakes, colonial towns and artisan villages that includes many of Nicaragua's must-see highlights.

Fly into **Managua** (p40) and take in the view across town from Sandino's silhouette on the Loma de Tiscapa before heading south and descending into the lush crater at **Laguna de Apoyo** (p75) for the

night. Spend the next day swimming in the rich sulfuric waters or spotting birds and howler monkeys in the forest, before enjoying the spectacular night sky.

The following morning, visit the artisan workshops of the nearby **Pueblos Blancos** (p76), including the pottery cooperative at San Juan del Oriente.

Then head 30 minutes down the road for some colonial splendor in charismatic **Granada** (p83). Spend three nights taking in the wonderful streetscapes, visiting the museums and churches, and dining in the fine restaurants. While you're here make



Cascada San Ramón, Isla de Ometepe

day trips to kayak through the islets just offshore and hike among the cloud forest atop Volcán Mombacho.

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** (p112) with its twin volcanoes and endless outdoor activities. Spend one night among the howler monkeys at Reserva Charco Verde and another at the base of Volcán Maderas, from where you can hike to the crater lake surrounded by cloud forest.

Then head across the isthmus to the surfing capital of **San Juan de Sur** (p127),

where you'll spend three days lazing on the splendid surrounding beaches or surfing some of the many excellent breaks in the area. Take a day trip to the charming fishing village of El Ostional or, if you're lucky, to watch sea turtles arrive en masse at Refugio de Vida Silvestre La Flor. In the evenings, work your way through the happening beachfront bars and restaurants.

On your way back to Managua, stop off at **Masaya** (p67) to shop for souvenirs and gifts in the excellent Mercado Artesanías (National Artisans Market) and visit the hammock workshops.





3  
WEEKS

## Northern Loop

Rich in nature and revolutionary culture, northern Nicaragua serves rugged and refined equally. In one trip you'll go from sipping organic coffee at the source to surfing an active volcano. Charge your batteries, you'll want to take plenty of pictures or no one will believe you when you get home.

Upon arrival skip through **Managua** (p40) and head for the crumbling colonial beauty of **León** (p139) to give Nicaragua the fantastic introduction it deserves. Spend three days exploring this endearing city on foot, visiting fascinating museums, spacious mansions and glorious churches. If you're feeling energetic, hike one of the nearby volcanoes or surf the slopes of Cerro Negro.

From León head out west to the beach at **Las Peñitas** (p156) and find a spot in a sand-floor beachside bar for the spectacular sunset. In the morning make an early start to travel north to **Jiquilillo** (p166) and spend a couple of days soaking up the ambience in this pretty fishing village and paddling through the mangroves of the nearby Reserva Natural Estero Padre Ramos.

Then travel across the Maribios Volcanic chain and into the mountains to **Estelí** (p172), where you can visit cigar factories and check out the revolutionary murals. After a couple of days head into mountains in the **Área Protegida Miraflores** (p177) for two days of horseback riding, wildlife-spotting and farm-culture immersion.

Move on to **Somoto** (p181) and to Monumento Nacional Cañon de Somoto to swim, jump and rappel your way through the canyon.

Next morning travel to **Matagalpa** (p194) for a few caffeine-fuelled days picking coffee beans and hiking on local plantations. Continue climbing higher into the mountains, stopping at the gorgeous Selva Negra coffee estate, before arriving in **Jinotega** (p188), gateway to the cloud forests of Reserva Natural Cerro Datanlí-El Diablo. Spend a day in town to climb Cerro la Cruz and then spend a couple of days hiking in the reserve.

Give your muscles a break with a boat cruise on **Lago de Apanás** (p193) before continuing on to **San Rafael del Norte** (p187) to visit one of Nicaragua's most magnificent churches or fly through the pine forest on a zipline. On your way back to Managua call in at **Chagüitillo** (p202) to view the pre-Columbian petroglyphs.



MARIO LOPEZ/EPICORIS ©



LATITUDESTOCK - TTL / GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Monumento Nacional Cañon de Somoto  
Bottom: Iglesia de La Recolectión, León

2  
WEEKS

## Cruising the Río San Juan

PLAN YOUR TRIP ITINERARIES

The southeast corner of Nicaragua is an unparalleled playground for nature lovers of all dispositions, boasting both comfortable eco-retreats and more strenuous adventures among lush wetlands and towering rainforests that are filled with fascinating ruins, colorful reptiles and first-class birdlife.

From **Managua** (p40) fly or bus it to **San Carlos** (p244) or pick up the ferry in Granada or Ometepe. Dedicate a morning to checking out the old Spanish fort and waterfront before taking the afternoon boat over to the enchanted archipelago of the **Islas Solentiname** (p247). Spend a night on both Isla San Fernando and Isla Mancarrón, following jungle trails to in situ petroglyphs, swimming in the clear waters and visiting local artist workshops.

From Mancarrón, charter a boat to the **Río Papaturro** (p251) in the Refugio de Vida Silvestre Los Guatuzos, stopping to spot the amazing birdlife at some of the smaller islands on the way. Hike through the thick monkey-inhabited forest or kayak in the wetlands before heading out on an alligator safari in the evening.

Next take the public boat back to San Carlos to pick up a riverboat down the Río San Juan to **Boca de Sábalo** (p252), a small river town surrounded by steamy jungle. Take a tour to a local cacao plantation and chocolate factory or simply relax on your hotel balcony and spot aquatic birds on the banks of the majestic river.

After two nights in Sabalos, continue downstream to **El Castillo** (p254), where an imposing Spanish fort looms over the rapids. Spend two days here riding horses through the rolling green hills and feasting on giant river shrimp.

The following stop is the **Refugio Bartola** (p256) biological station, with a network of trails through towering old-growth forest and kayaks to paddle up the narrow jungle-clad Río Bartola to crystal-clear swimming holes.

Continue the journey by picking up a riverboat heading downriver to **San Juan de Nicaragua** (p257), where the Río San Juan pours into the Caribbean Sea. Give yourself three days to explore the ruins of Greytown, spot manatees in hidden lagoons and head up the Río Indio into the heart of the Reserva Biológica Indio-Mafz. From San Juan fly direct back to Managua.

LARRY LARSEN / ALAMY ©



PAUL KENNEDY / GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: El Castillo fort overlooking the Río San Juan  
Bottom: Capuchin monkeys





## Off the Beaten Track: Nicaragua



### SALTO EL ROSARIO

At the end of one of the worst roads in Central America you'll find this spectacular 100m-high split-level waterfall that makes every bump, ditch and pothole seem insignificant. (p186)

### DELTA DEL ESTERO REAL

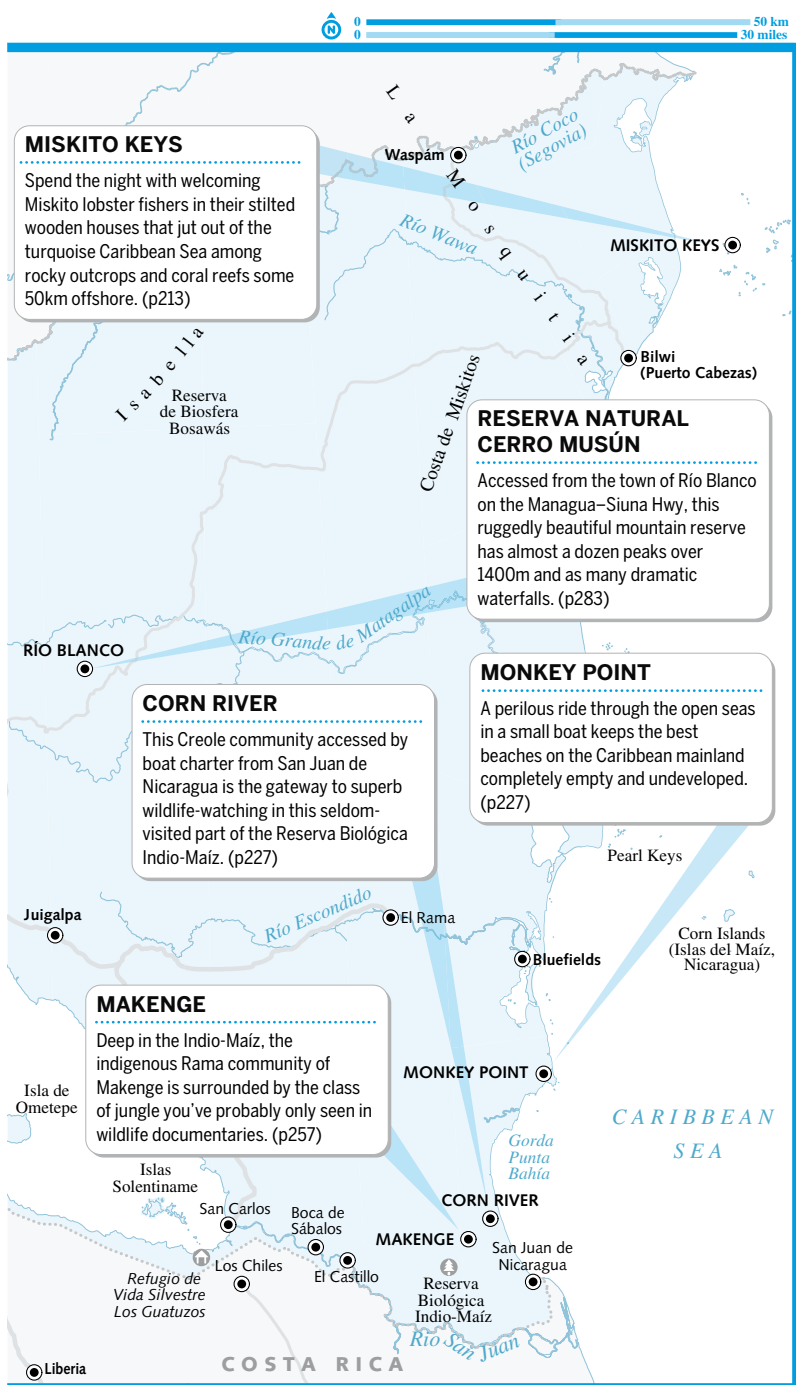
Take a boat ride through these vast wetlands close to the Honduran border to spot alligators and migratory birds backed by the magnificent Volcán Cosigüina. (p164)

### EL SAUCE

On the back roads between León and Estelí is this sleepy mountain town cut straight from an old Western movie. The surrounding mountains are strewn with waterfalls and hiking trails. (p160)

### DESCENDING THE RÍO COCO

The ultimate remote river adventure takes you from Wiwili in the northern highlands all the way to the Waspam in the Caribbean stopping in tiny Miskito villages along the way. Only hardcore adventurers need apply. (p215)



### MISKITO KEYS

Spend the night with welcoming Miskito lobster fishers in their stilted wooden houses that jut out of the turquoise Caribbean Sea among rocky outcrops and coral reefs some 50km offshore. (p213)

### RESERVA NATURAL CERRO MUSÚN

Accessed from the town of Río Blanco on the Managua–Siuna Hwy, this ruggedly beautiful mountain reserve has almost a dozen peaks over 1400m and as many dramatic waterfalls. (p283)

### MONKEY POINT

A perilous ride through the open seas in a small boat keeps the best beaches on the Caribbean mainland completely empty and undeveloped. (p227)

### CORN RIVER

This Creole community accessed by boat charter from San Juan de Nicaragua is the gateway to superb wildlife-watching in this seldom-visited part of the Reserva Biológica Indio-Maíz. (p227)

### MAKENGE

Deep in the Indio-Maíz, the indigenous Rama community of Makekenge is surrounded by the class of jungle you've probably only seen in wildlife documentaries. (p257)

COSTA RICA



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