



Northern Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ El Pullaso (p199)
- ➔ La Vita é Bella (p199)
- ➔ El Pescamar (p199)
- ➔ Café-Arte Tipiscayán (p176)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ La Bastilla Ec lodge (p193)
- ➔ La Sombra Ec lodge (p202)
- ➔ Selva Negra (p201)
- ➔ Hotel Café (p190)

Why Go?

You've officially escaped Central America's backpacker superhighway and arrived in a place where colorful quetzals nest in misty cloud forests, and Nicaragua's best coffee and tobacco are cultivated with both capitalist zeal and collective spirit. With a little time and commitment you'll duck into ancient, crumbling cathedrals, get pounded by countless waterfalls, explore recently discovered canyons, and pay tribute to the pirates, colonists, revolutionaries, artists and poets who were inspired by these fertile mountains and mingled with the humble, open-hearted people who've lived here for generations.

On either end of the region are two up-and-coming cities; hardworking Estelí buzzes with students, farmers and cigar moguls, while Matagalpa is slightly hipper, and better funded, thanks to nearly a century of successful coffee cultivation. All around and in between are granite peaks and lush valleys dotted with dozens of small towns and infinite caffeine-fueled adventures.

When to Go

The northern highlands' stunning landscapes are at their best from May to October when the wet season brings out vibrant shades of green and the many waterfalls are at their best. If you plan on hiking, consider visiting from November to February when the weather is fairly dry yet mild and the scenery is still lush. This is also the height of the coffee harvest, which gives visitors the chance to not only drink endless cups of the stuff but also pick and sort your own beans. The region's other cash crop, tobacco, is harvested from March to April and cigar fans are able to follow the leaves from the fields to the rolling tables.

Northern Highlands Highlights

- 1 Pick coffee beans beneath the towering cloud forest of **Reserva Natural Cerro Datanlí–El Diablo** (p192)
- 2 Scramble, swim and float through the magnificent **Cañon de Somoto** (p182)
- 3 Hike through the **Área Protegida Mirafior** (p177) to secluded swimming holes
- 4 Visit the cigar factories of **Estelí** (p173)
- 5 Scramble up Cerro la Cruz in **Jinotega** (p189) for breathtaking mountain views
- 6 Get civilized and overcaffeinated in **Matagalpa** (p194)
- 7 Rappel down spectacular waterfalls shrouded in old-growth forest in **Reserva Natural Macizos de Peñas Blancas** (p201)
- 8 Cruise the high-altitude waters of **Lago de Apanás** (p193) with local fishermen
- 9 Explore the cavernous abandoned gold mines around **San Ramón** (p200)

