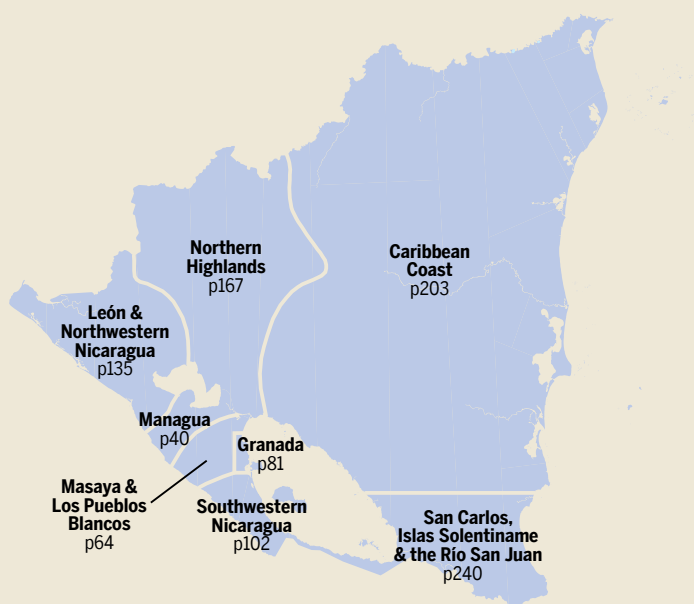




Nicaragua



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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EL CASTILLO, RÍO SAN JUAN
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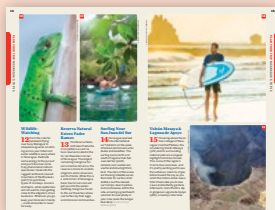
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Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



10
DAYS

Stunning Southwest

If you have 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** 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** for the night. Spend

the next day swimming in the rich sulfurous 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**, including the pottery cooperative at San Juan de Oriente.

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





Laguna de Apoyo (p99)

kayaking day trip through the islets just offshore, and hike among the cloud forest atop Volcán Mombacho.

Next head down the highway via **Rivas** to **San Jorge**. From here take the ferry to the out-of-this world **Isla de Ometepe** with its twin volcanoes and endless outdoor activities. Spend a night among the howler monkeys at Reserva Charco Verde and another at the base of Volcán Maderas, from where you can hike to the emerald-green crater lake surrounded by cloud forest.

Next head across the isthmus to the surfing capital of **San Juan del Sur**,

where you'll spend three days lazing on the splendid surrounding beaches or surfing some of the excellent breaks in the area. If you can drag yourself off the beach, 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 at **Masaya** to shop for souvenirs and gifts in the excellent Mercado de Artesanías (National Artisans Market) and visit the hammock workshops.



3
WEEKS

Northern Loop

Rich in nature and revolutionary culture, northern Nicaragua is equally rugged and refined. 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** and head for the crumbling colonial beauty of **León** 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 west to the beach at **Las Peñitas** 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**. 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**, where you can visit cigar factories and check out revolutionary murals. After a couple of days head into the mountains in the **Área Protegida Miraflores** for two days of horseback riding, wildlife spotting and farm-culture immersion.

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

Next morning travel to **Matagalpa** for a few caffeine-fueled 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**, 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** before continuing on to **San Rafael del Norte**. Here you can visit one of Nicaragua's most magnificent churches or fly through the pine forest on a zip line. On your way back to Managua call in at **Chagüitillo** to view the pre-Columbian petroglyphs.



ROB FRANCIS/NOBERTHARDIN/GETTY IMAGES ©



MARIE FOLTZER/GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Río Coco (p213), Monumento Nacional Cañon de Somoto
Bottom: Making tortillas, Jinotega (p188)



Cruising the Río San Juan

The southeast corner of Nicaragua is an unparalleled playground for nature lovers of all dispositions. It boasts 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** fly or bus it to **San Carlos** or pick up the ferry in Granada or Ometepe. Spend a morning checking out the old Spanish fort and waterfront before taking the afternoon boat to the enchanted archipelago of the **Islas Solentiname**. Spend a night each on 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** 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. Pick up a riverboat down the Río San Juan to **Boca de Sábalos**, a small river town surrounded by steamy jungle. Among the many excursions on offer here is 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 Sábalos, continue downstream to **El Castillo**, 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.

If you have a day to spare, detour north on a day trip to **Refugio Bartola** 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.

Otherwise, continue the journey by picking up a riverboat heading downriver to **San Juan de Nicaragua**, 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-Maíz..

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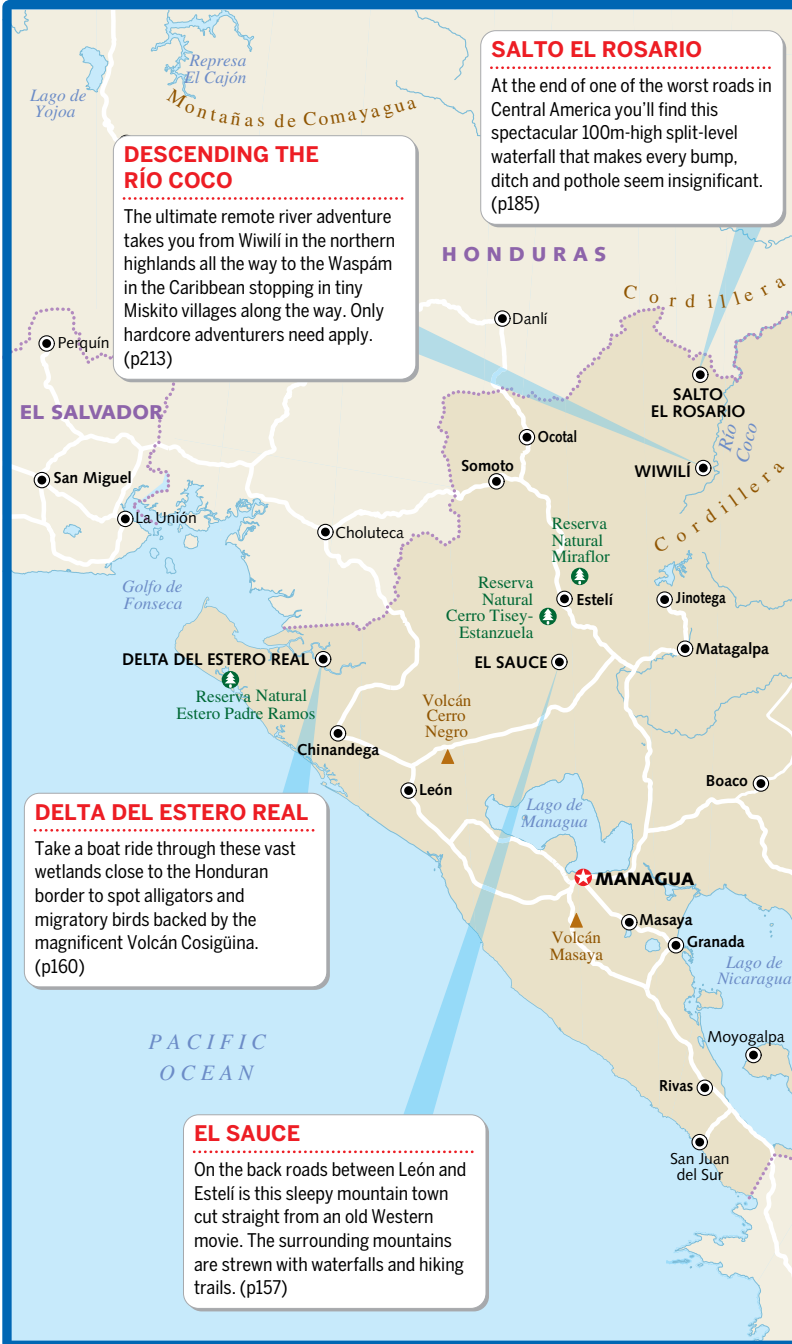
PETER GUTTMAN/GETTY IMAGES ©

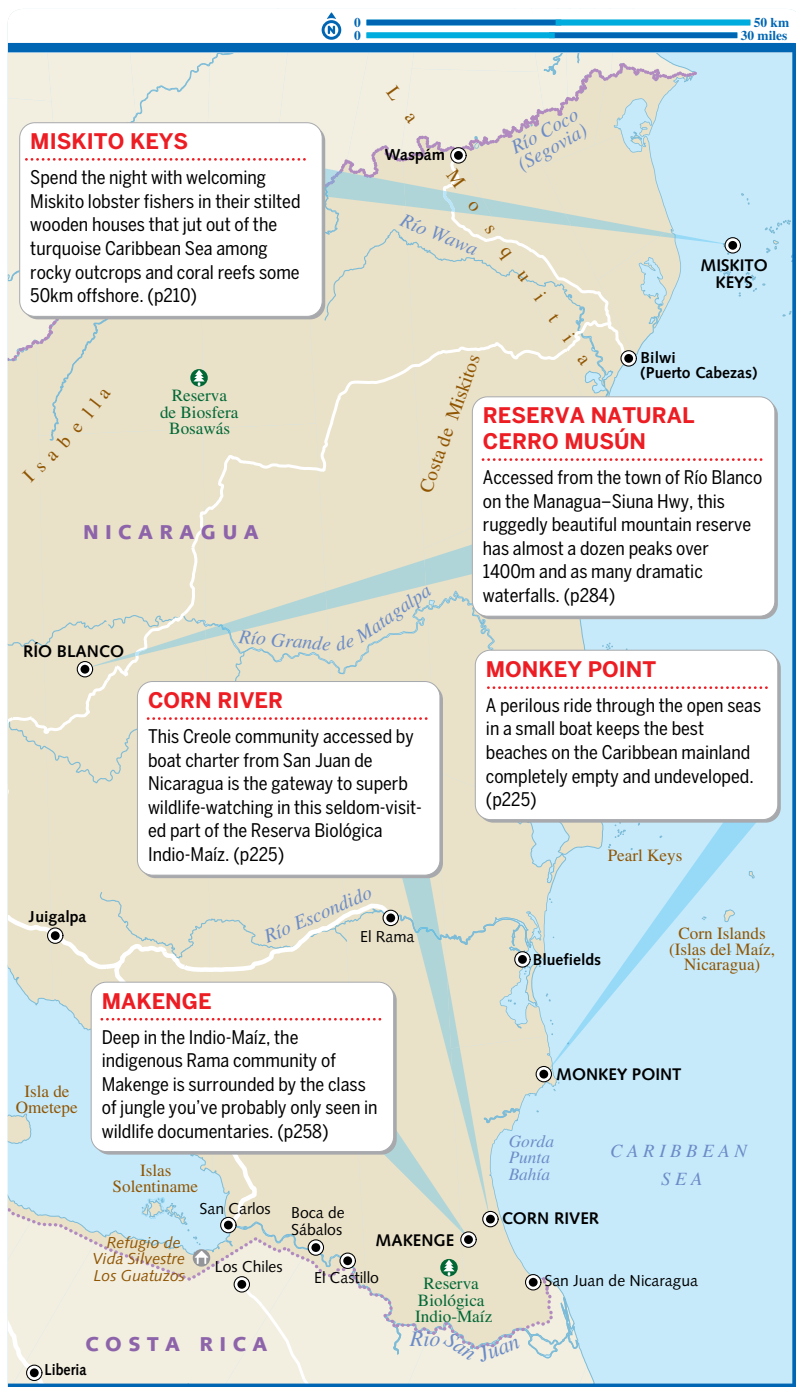


Top: El Castillo (p253), Río San Juan
Bottom: Pineapple vendor, Managua (p40)



Off the Beaten Track: Nicaragua





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. (p210)

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. (p284)

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. (p225)

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. (p225)

MAKENGE

Deep in the Indio-Maíz, the indigenous Rama community of Makenge is surrounded by the class of jungle you've probably only seen in wildlife documentaries. (p258)

COSTA RICA

Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Bridget Gleeson

Managua, Masaya & Los Pueblos Blancos, Granada, Southwestern Nicaragua, León & Northwestern Nicaragua Based in Buenos Aires, Bridget is a travel writer and occasional photographer. Her first experiences in Latin America were in Nicaragua. She lived, worked, and learned to speak Spanish in Granada before moving on to South America; this assignment was a welcome opportunity to return to the place where the great adventure started. Bridget also researched the Plan Your Trip and Understand chapters.



Alex Egerton

Northern Highlands, Caribbean Coast, San Carlos, Islas Solentiname & the Río San Juan A journalist by trade, Alex has been visiting Nicaragua for more than a decade and has spent many periods based in the country while working as a travel writer in Latin America. He has explored villages from Nueva Segovia to Río San Juan, paddled through the remote rivers in the Bosawás, eaten tons of

gallo pinto and ridden on the roof of countless chicken buses. Alex still visits Nicaragua regularly, especially the Caribbean Coast, which keeps luring him back with the simple pleasures of cold beers, warm soup and hot dancehall tunes. Alex also researched the Survival Guide chapters.

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