



León & Northwestern Nicaragua

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Pan y Paz (p149)
- ➔ Quesillos Guiligüiste (p158)
- ➔ Cafe La Nicaragüita (p149)
- ➔ Costa Azul (p163)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Bomalu (p154)
- ➔ Surfing Turtle Lodge (p153)
- ➔ Rancho Tranquilo (p164)
- ➔ Paz de Luna Bed & Breakfast (p148)

Why Go?

This is Nicaragua at its fieriest and most passionate. The regional capital of León is – and will always be – a hotbed of intellectualism and independence. The city has nourished some of Nicaragua's most important political and artistic moments. Less polished but somehow more profound than its age-old rival Granada, the city is beloved for its grand cathedral, breathtaking art museum, hopping nightlife and spirited revolutionary air.

Just out of León, more than a dozen volcanic peaks wait to be climbed (or surfed). This region has some of the best beach accommodations – and gnarliest surfing – in the country. And the virgin wetlands of the Reserva Natural Isla Juan Venado are not to be missed.

Further afield, you'll find the biggest mangrove forest in Central America, awe-inspiring beauty at Reserva Natural Volcán Cosigüina and unique windows into everyday Nicaraguan life in the little towns along the way.

When to Go

➔ December is good for cooler-than-usual temperatures. This is the hottest part of the country; daytime temperatures are just above 30°C (86°F) almost year-round, spike in sweltering April and dip into the relatively cool mid-20s°C (mid-70s°F) in December.

➔ October and November are the peak months to see nesting turtles at the Reserva Natural Estero Padre Ramos; the whole season lasts between July and December. This is also a good time to think about volunteering as a beach warden or visiting Reserva Natural Isla Juan Venado.

➔ Semana Santa is held in late March to early April – Easter week is a Technicolor dreamscape in León. There are sawdust 'carpets' in colonial suburbs, and a sand-castle competition at a nearby beach.

León & North-western Nicaragua Highlights

1 Maribios chain

(p155) Climbing a spectacular volcanic peak then enjoying the thrill of sandboarding down its slopes.

2 Playa Jiquilillo

(p164) Getting away from it all in a beachside cabin.

3 Reserva Natural

Isla Juan Venado

(p154) Going for a peaceful swim and watching nesting turtles in action.

4 La Paz Centro

(p157) Feasting on savory *quesillos* in the town of their origin.

5 León

(p138) Mixing with the university crowd and taking in some politically charged street art in this vibrant city.

6 Las Peñitas

(p153) Riding a chicken bus to the white sandy beaches of this paradise.

7 Reserva Natural

Estero Padre Ramos

(p164) Kayaking through Central America's largest mangrove forest.

8 Volcán

Cosigüina

(p165) Soaking those aching bones in Potosí hot springs after climbing this volcano.

