



Managua

POP 2,223,375 / ELEV 90M

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Doña Pilar (p52)
- ➔ Cocina Doña Haydee (p53)
- ➔ La Casa de Los Nogueras (p54)
- ➔ La Terraza Peruana (p53)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ La Posada del Arcangel (p50)
- ➔ La Bicicleta Hostal (p52)
- ➔ Hotel Contempo (p52)

Why Go?

Simply put, Managua is a shambles. It is chaotic and broken, poetic and mesmerizing, all at the same time.

And while most travelers are now skipping the city altogether – instead arranging quick airport transfers from nearby Granada – stay a day or two and you will see that big, bad Managua ain't so bad after all, and that this truly is the heartstring that holds the nation's culture and commerce together.

Aside from diving into the whirl of a magnificent beehive of honking horns, sprawling markets, garbage and rancor, this low-rise city with improbable trees, remarkable street art and spirited monuments also gives you easy access to nearby lagoons, the nature reserve of Chocoyero-El Brujo, a smattering of fun beaches like Pochomil, and the hot springs at El Trapiche.

When to Go

➔ September through April is the best time of year for birdwatching. It's also good for turtle tours at nearby beaches and wild encounters in the lagoons and natural attractions just outside the city.

➔ December through April are the dry months. Visiting at this time makes plying the city's streets easier, market days drier and chance encounters just a little more pleasant. Hotels can be a bit pricey now and during Semana Santa, so book ahead.

➔ The best festivals happen around the Day of the Revolution on July 19 or the Festival of Santo Domingo, during the first 10 days in August.

History

A fishing encampment as early as 6000 years ago, Managua has been an important trading center for at least two millennia. When Spanish chronicler Fernández de Oviedo arrived in 1528, he estimated Managua's population at around 40,000; most of these original inhabitants fled to the Sierritas, the small mountains just south, shortly after the Spanish arrived. The small town, without even a hospital or school until the 1750s, didn't really achieve any prominence until 1852, when the seemingly endless civil war between Granada and León was resolved by placing the capital here.

The clever compromise might have worked out better had a geologist been at hand: Managua sits atop a network of fault lines that have shaped its history ever since. The late 1800s were rocked by quakes that

destroyed the new capital's infrastructure, with churches and banks crumbling as the ground flowed beneath their feet. In 1931 the epicenter was the stadium – dozens were killed during a big game. In 1968 a single powerful jolt right beneath what's now Metrocentro mall destroyed an entire neighborhood.

And on the evening of December 23, 1972, a series of powerful tremors rocked the city, culminating in a 6.2 quake that killed 11,000 people and destroyed 53,000 homes. The blatant siphoning of international relief funds by President Somoza touched off the Sandinista-led revolution, which was followed by the Contra War, and the city center, including the beautiful old cathedral, was never rebuilt. Rather, it was replaced by a crazy maze of unnamed streets, shacks that turned to shanties that turned to homes



Managua Highlights

- 1 Parque Histórico Nacional Loma de Tiscapa** (p44) Taking in views over the city while standing in Sandino's shadow on a volcano's rim.
- 2 Malecón** (p42) Strolling along the newly revamped waterfront and stopping for a bite at a traditional Nicaraguan eatery.
- 3 Plaza de la Revolución** (p43) Marveling at the crumbling colonial grandeur.
- 4 Huellas de Acahualinca** (p47) Following in the footsteps of Managua's early inhabitants.
- 5 Antigua Catedral** (p42) Taking in the eerie sight of the once grand, hollowed-out shell of a cathedral.
- 6 National Assembly Pedestrian Walk** (p43) Brushing up on modern Nicaraguan history while you stroll.
- 7 La Casa de los Mejía Godoy** (p54) Catching live folk music while knocking back a few cocktails.