



Masaya & Los Pueblos Blancos

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Why Go?

Nicaragua's *meseta central* (central plateau) offers a picturesque patchwork of lagoons, steamy volcanic peaks and sleepy colonial villages. Not many people stay here for more than a short day-trip from nearby Granada, leaving plenty of room for exploration and singular encounters with the region's remarkable natural, cultural and artistic imprint.

While trawling Masaya's well-stocked artisan market is obligatory, real fans of the craftsmanship on display should get out to the Pueblos Blancos, where each town or village has its own specialty, from decorative pottery to handcrafted wooden furniture.

Towering over all of this is mighty Volcán Masaya, where hiking trails take you to lava-filled craters and bat-infested caves, and parakeets nest in the crater walls.

Sloping down from the *meseta* are the Carazo towns – pleasant stopovers on the way to a wild and remote stretch of coast.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Mondongo Veracruz (p76)
- ➔ Hotel El Casino (p80)
- ➔ La Casona (p79)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Centro Ecoturístico Flor de Pochote (p76)
- ➔ La Mariposa Spanish School & Eco Hotel (p79)
- ➔ Hotel Mi Bohio (p77)
- ➔ Myrinamar B&B Hotel (p80)

When to Go

- ➔ Thursday evenings rock in Masaya with the Jueves de Verbena (p67). Stay the evening to sample local food, watch folkloric dances, and stroll through the large crafts market and museum.
- ➔ December through August is the dry season. Coming around this time makes hiking around Volcán Masaya all the better. Come early in the season for green everywhere.
- ➔ Sunday is the traditional market day throughout the region. It adds a brimming energy you won't feel other days of the week. There's also a good chance you'll find yourself smack-dab in the middle of a religious or cultural festival.



Masaya & Los Pueblos Blancos Highlights

- 1 Mercado de Artesanías** (p66) Shopping till you drop at the country's most famous handicraft market.
- 2 San Juan de Oriente** (p75) Watching history in action as the potters of these workshops continue the centuries-old craft of ceramics production.
- 3 Catarina** (p74) Peering into the magnificent Laguna de Apoyo from this spectacular lookout.
- 4 Volcán Masaya** (p72) Driving to the 'gates of hell,' then taking a full-moon hike up the tempestuous mountain.
- 5 La Boquita** (p80) Pioneering virgin waves in this lost beach town.
- 6 Masatepe** (p76) Sampling regional specialties – from traditional sweets to *mondongo* (tripe stew) – in hole-in-the-wall shops and eateries.