



Northern Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ El Pullaso (p197)
- ➔ La Vita é Bella (p196)
- ➔ Rincón Pinareño (p174)
- ➔ Restaurante Tipiscayán (p174)
- ➔ La Casa de Don Colochó (p190)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ La Bastilla Ecolodge (p192)
- ➔ Montebrisa (p196)
- ➔ Selva Negra (p199)
- ➔ Hotel Los Altos (p173)
- ➔ Finca Esperanza Verde (p198)

Why Go?

You've officially escaped Central America's backpacker super-highway and arrived in a place where colorful quetzals nest in misty cloud forests, and where 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 affords you the chance to not only drink endless cups of the stuff but to also pick and sort your own beans.
- ➔ The region's other cash crop, tobacco, is harvested from March to April; cigar fans visiting then can follow the leaves from the fields to the rolling tables.

Northern Highlands Highlights

1 Reserva Natural Cerro Datanlí–El Diablo (p191)

Picking coffee beans beneath the towering cloud forest.

2 Cañon de Somoto (p180)

Scrambling, swimming and floating along a magnificent gorge.

3 Área Protegida Mirafior (p175)

Riding horses through magnificent countryside to swimming holes.

4 Jalapa (p186)

Soaking in piping-hot thermal waters surrounded by forest.

5 Estelí (p170)

Visiting the tobacco fields and hand-rolled cigar factories.

6 Jinotega (p188)

Scrambling up Cerro la Cruz for breathtaking mountain views.

7 Matagalpa (p193)

Getting over-caffinated in the Northern Highlands' most urbane city.

8 Reserva Natural Macizos de Peñas Blancas (p200)

Rappelling down spectacular waterfalls shrouded in old-growth forest.

9 Lago de Apanás (p192)

Cruising the high-altitude waters with local fisherfolk.

10 San Ramón (p197)

Exploring cavernous, abandoned gold mines and authentic rural villages.

