

NORTH AMERICA · BEACHES · ADVENTURE · HIKING · HISTORY · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Nicaragua

Nicaragua offers Central America's big-ticket experiences in a compact, affordable country: twin-volcano Ometepe in a vast freshwater lake, colonial Granada and León, volcano boarding down Cerro Negro and Pacific surf around San Juan del Sur. The Caribbean Corn Islands add reef snorkelling, and prices remain among the lowest in the region.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Nicaragua and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Managua	 CURRENCY Nicaraguan córdoba (NIO) £1 ≈ NIO 49.11	 LANGUAGE Spanish, Miskito Nicaraguan Creole English	 BEST TIME Dec–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 15h 30m via Miami, Houston or Madrid ~£700–£1,250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-6 standard time

Nicaragua's Pacific side holds almost everything a first trip needs, within a few hours of Managua's airport. The usual route runs from colonial León and its volcanoes in the north-west, past Masaya's smoking crater and craft market, to Granada on the shore of Lake Nicaragua. From the port of San Jorge a ferry crosses to Ometepe, and the surf beaches around San Juan del Sur lie a short drive south. Two weeks suits that loop; extra days buy a flight east to the Corn Islands or a boat down the Río San Juan to the Spanish fortress at El Castillo.

Travel is cheap and informal: repainted school buses, hammock-strung hostels and plates of gallo pinto for a couple of pounds. Tourism fell sharply after the 2018 unrest and has been slow to rebuild, so sights that would be crowded in Costa Rica are often quiet. It suits backpackers, surfers and hikers more than luxury travellers, though Granada and the coast have fine boutique hotels. Visitors are often struck by the heat of the Pacific lowlands, the warmth of rural Nicaraguans and the chain of volcanoes running down the country's western side.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Ometepe Island

Two volcanoes joined by a lowland isthmus rise from Lake Nicaragua: climb cone-shaped Concepción (1,610 m) or cloud-forested Maderas, then cycle to the Ojo de Agua spring and the island's petroglyph sites.
- 2

HISTORY

Granada

Founded in 1524 on the shore of Lake Nicaragua, Granada has pastel colonial streets, a yellow cathedral and the Convento San Francisco museum; take a boat around Las Isletas, a cluster of small volcanic islands.

3

ADVENTURE

Cerro Negro

Central America's youngest volcano, born in 1850, is a black cinder cone near León; hike up for around an hour carrying a wooden board, then sled down its steep gravel slope at speed.

4

NATURE

Masaya Volcano National Park

An easily reached active volcano where you can drive almost to the rim of the smoking Santiago crater; evening visits, when conditions allow, may reveal the glow of lava far below.

5

BEACH

Little Corn Island

A car-free Caribbean island about 70 km off the coast, reached by panga from Big Corn: palm-fringed beaches, reef snorkelling and diving, and lobster dinners in Creole-speaking villages.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Managua

≈ 1.3 million people

A sprawling, low-rise capital rebuilt after the 1972 earthquake. Most travellers pass straight through, but the lakeside Malecón, the old cathedral's shell and the Tiscapa lagoon fill a morning.

2ND LARGEST CITY

León

≈ 177,000 people

A hot, intellectual university city with Central America's largest cathedral, whose white roof you can walk on, plus revolutionary murals and day trips to Cerro Negro and the Pacific beaches.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Masaya

≈ 141,000 people

Known for its handicraft market and hammock workshops, with Masaya Volcano National Park on the doorstep and the warm crater lake of Laguna de Apoyo a short taxi ride away.

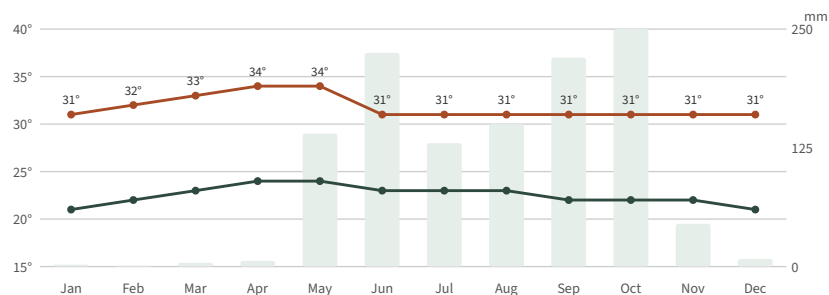
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Nicaragua

Best time: **Dec–Apr.**

**Average climate in Managua**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)

**Festivals & events**

Mar–Apr

Semana Santa

Easter week brings religious processions through León and Granada while much of the country decamps to the beaches; book coastal rooms and transport early.

Aug	Fiestas de Santo Domingo Managua's patron-saint festival, from 1 to 10 August, carries a small statue of Santo Domingo through the streets amid dancers, oil-blackened revellers and fireworks.
Dec	La Gritería On the night of 7 December crowds visit altars to the Virgin Mary, shouting '¿Quién causa tanta alegría?' and receiving sweets and small gifts; León's celebrations are the liveliest.

How much does Nicaragua cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ NIO 1,473 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ NIO 3,438 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £160 per person / day ≈ NIO 7,858 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Gallo pinto

Rice and red beans fried together with onion and sweet pepper, eaten at almost every meal, usually with eggs, fresh cheese, sweet plantain and tortillas.

Vigorón

Granada's street-food classic: boiled yuca topped with crunchy chicharrón pork crackling and a sharp cabbage-and-tomato salad, served on a banana leaf.

Nacatamal

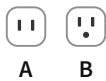
A large tamal of corn dough filled with pork, rice, potato and mint, wrapped in plantain leaves and steamed; traditionally a weekend breakfast with coffee.

Getting around

Most travellers use chicken buses (repainted US school buses) and quicker express minibuses between Managua, Granada, León, Masaya and Rivas; private shuttles link tourist hubs door to door. Ferries cross Lake Nicaragua from San Jorge to Moyogalpa on Ometepe in about an hour. La Costeña flies from Managua to Big Corn Island and Bluefields. Taxis are cheap but unmetered and often shared, so agree the fare first.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

DIALLING CODE

+505

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

TIPPING

Restaurants often add a 10% propina to the bill, which you can decline but rarely should; tip guides and hotel staff a few dollars, but not taxi drivers.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **911** (ambulance, fire, police)

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC-6 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

ETIQUETTE

Greet with 'buenos días' or a simple 'buenas', dress modestly in churches, and avoid discussing politics with people you don't know well; villagers may say 'adiós' as a passing hello.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Augusto C. Sandino International Airport (MGA), Managua

Visas & entry for Nicaragua

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Nicaragua for up to 90 days without a visa. You may be refused entry if you do not have an onward ticket.

Check with your travel company or nearest Nicaraguan embassy what the policy is for entry at the Nicaraguan border.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in Nicaragua: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria in Managua: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Nicaragua

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 8 Dec 2026	Immaculate Conception
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 25 Mar 2027	Maundy Thursday

Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 30 May 2027	Mother's Day
Mon 19 Jul 2027	Revolution Day
Tue 14 Sep 2027	Battle of San Jacinto Day
Wed 15 Sep 2027	Independence Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Spanish

ENGLISH	SPANISH	SAY IT
Hello	Hola	OH-lah
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
Excuse me	Disculpe	dees-KOOL-peh
How much is this?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAN-toh KWES-tah

Know before you go

- Read the FCDO travel advice before booking, steer clear of political discussion and demonstrations, and leave drones at home — customs can confiscate them on arrival.
- US dollars are widely accepted but change comes in córdobas; carry small notes, as ATMs are scarce on Ometepe and the Corn Islands — bring enough cash for Little Corn.
- Hire a licensed local guide for volcano climbs such as Concepción and Telica — guides are compulsory on some — start before dawn to beat the heat, and carry plenty of water.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.