

Nicaragua

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Overview and Map

Nicaragua, frequently mentioned as a "favorite" country among travelers and students familiar with Central America, is the largest country in Central America. In contrast to the familiar images prompted by a conflictive and controversial past, today Nicaragua presents images of wide-open sandy beaches, colonial cities, coffee farms, and friendly people along with the numerous lakes and volcanoes that define the landscape throughout the most populated and visited areas of the country. Sharing the regional stigma of economic disparity and high poverty levels associated with developing countries, Nicaragua stands out as being one of the safest countries in Central America. Nicaragua is taking advantage of this opportunity by increasing tourist offerings and promoting a variety of activities and destinations including coffee tours, nature reserves, community tourism, vacant beaches, and treks, making it a country with perhaps the brightest outlook to prosper from tourism in the region.



Although Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America two of the three distinct geographic regions claim the majority of the population and attractions. The Pacific Lowlands are home to such well-known sites as the colonial wonder Granada, oldest colonial city in the Americas; Lake Nicaragua, the largest freshwater lake in C.A., and home to the world's only species of freshwater shark; and the tropical paradise Río San Juan. The North Central Highlands boast coffee routes of organized coffee cooperatives and rolling agricultural and cattle lands in a cool, refreshing climate. Whether relaxing on the coast, living the past in a colonial town, or learning about coffee production in the highlands, visitors are in for some great memories. Also, the people of Nicaragua stand out as being some of the most open and friendly in Central America. Get to know the people and the country and maybe you'll want to find yourself among the many expat and international inhabitants calling Nicaragua home.

Headquarters: Granada – “The Great Sultan of the Great Lake”



Nearly two hundred thousand people live in this small department, home to one of the oldest cities in North America. Francisco Hernández de Córdoba founded Granada, nestled on the northwestern shores of Lake Nicaragua, in 1524. Granada was historically considered the sister capital to Central America to Antigua, Guatemala. Today, Granada is considered the tourism hub of Nicaragua. The city's rich colonial history can still be seen in the architecture and layout, but is not the only reason the region attracts visitors. Outlying trails and other outdoor offerings allow trekkers an opportunity to enjoy breathtaking views and beautiful scenery. The growing presence of international inhabitants ensures an abundance of creature comforts far from home. A walk through the center of town promises incredible colonial architecture, outdoor restaurants and cafes, bars, stores, internet centers and hotels. The walk continues to the shores of Lake Nicaragua where a boat can be hired to explore the Islets of Granada, formed by over 300 tiny islands. Granada's colonial splendor and beautiful surroundings offers something for everyone.

Satellite Site: Masaya - “City of Flowers”



Located halfway between Managua and Granada is the city of Masaya. Known as the “City of Flowers” it is the capital city of the department of Masaya and is home to approximately 140,000 residents. Masaya is a culturally rich city, which has established itself as “The Cradle of Nicaraguan Folklore” and was declared ‘Cultural Legacy of the Nation’ in 1989 and ‘Capital of National Folklore’ in 2000. The city is known for the vibrant artisan market where handmade crafts and clothing from all over Nicaragua can be found. The city is a point of departure for two magnificent natural attractions. Volcan Masaya and la Laguna de Apoyo can be reached by taxi or bus from the city. Volcan Masaya boasts five active craters and tour operators offer night visits leading you through empty lava tubes. La Laguna de Apoyo is a lake formed in the middle of a five-mile wide crater. Several restaurants line one small section of coast and you can easily enjoy a full day of good food and fun in the water.

Satellite Site: Matagalpa - “Pearl of the North”



Located in the northern region of the country, the department of Matagalpa offers fresh temperatures, high elevations and different vegetation from the Pacific Lowlands. Nearly five hundred thousand people live in the region making it the second most populous behind Managua. The region has come to be known as Nicaragua's coffee-capital. Following gold prospecting in 1850, German immigrants planted the first coffee plants and their descendants still live in the area today. More recently, Matagalpa has become a base for visitors seeking to explore the coffee-route, which promotes local farms and teaches visitors about coffee production from start to finish, as well the locally-employed organic and sustainable. The region also boasts attractions such as waterfalls, nature reserves, old gold mines, and Ciudad Darío the birthplace of the famous Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío.

Satellite Site: León - “The Intellectual Center of the Nation”



It is no wonder the department of León calls the attention of any traveler planning a trip in Nicaragua. Within its ten municipalities, attractions include coastal villages along the Pacific, wide open sand beaches, hot springs, volcanoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site in León Viejo. The city León, departmental capital, maintains a colonial feel and houses a collection of famous churches, such as La Merced and El Calvario, which visitors are encouraged to visit. The original city was moved to its present location due to volcanic activity in the early 1600's. León's history also includes a devastating pirate attack in 1685, and continuously competed with Granada for national capital status until neutral Managua finally assumed the position. León is the second largest city in Nicaragua, and is known as a lively and intellectual place thanks to its large university presence and radical political history.