

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: Boaco – *“City of the Two Stories”*



After the Spanish arrival, Boaco gradually developed into an agricultural and cattle region famous for its cheese and milk. Pristine agricultural areas mark the rolling hills and natural beauty of the region where tourist attractions are many, but tourists are not. With a population of over three hundred thousand, a quarter of the country's agricultural production and dairy products come from the Boaco department. Nicaragua's oldest petroglyph, majestic canyons, and forest reserves can all be found in Boaco as well as a renowned "milk fair" held during July every year. Boaco, the capital city, aptly nicknamed the "City of the Two Stories" due to the staggered landscape, is located 80 km from the capital city, Managua.

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 descendents 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.

Satellite Site: San Juan del Sur - *“The Quintessential Nicaraguan Fishing Village”*



San Juan del Sur is a small ocean village situated in the southwestern corner of Nicaragua, just kilometers from the Costa Rican border. With volcanic hills to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west, San Juan del Sur offers a unique feel, friendly environment and plenty of opportunity to relax and enjoy the beach. Surfers find the area to be an excellent spot that is considered to be relatively "unspoiled" in comparison to Costa Rican beaches. Many locals earn a living fishing in the ocean waters and inlets, but the increase in tourism in recent years is an important source of income. San Juan del Sur is one of the most frequented destinations by travelers, and inhabitants recognize the positive economic impact of the tourism industry. They are, thus, quite open and welcoming to visitors.