

Explore

Big Sky SPECIAL SECTION

Travel



Your guide to getaways

Nicaragua

Discover Central America's hidden gem

The Emerald City

Where to eat, stay and play in Seattle

Back 40

Helpful tips for Airbnb hosts

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Explore
Big Sky SPECIAL SECTION

'Tranquilo'

Discovering Nicaragua, Central America's hidden gem

BY S. JASON MOORE
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

The deal was done late at night, standing on a beer-soaked floor in an old tavern on the Jersey Shore among the closest of friends: Someday, somehow, we would have glasses raised to a tropical sunset after a day of trading waves in perfect, warm water surf.

Where, and exactly how, this pact would materialize proved elusive for more than two decades, but a promise is a promise. Welcome to Nicaragua amigos.

With its pristine beaches on both the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, rich cultural history, jungles and volcanoes, Nicaragua is the perfect place for close friends and travelers alike to settle into the calm, the peaceful, the "tranquilo."

What keeps us coming back isn't just the secluded, world-class surf or discovering the intricacies of a point break. What gets in your blood is the fact that Nicaragua hasn't been found by the masses; it's freedom in its most raw form, bathed in equal parts adventure and relaxation. It's no secret that seasoned travelers will go to dramatic ends to find truly authentic experiences, and Nicaragua oozes authenticity.

We found ourselves succumbing to the rhythm of the country without even trying, and were immediately hooked.

The basics

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, bordered by Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south, is roughly the size of New York state and home to approximately 6 million people. Spanish is the official language and is spoken by more than 90 percent of the population, with English and indigenous languages spoken on the Caribbean coast.

The capital city Managua is home to about 1 million people, and has a defined resilience after enduring both a devastating earthquake and a civil war within the last 50 years. Visitors are met with breathtaking monuments, museums, galleries, public promenades and nightlife. The international airport reveals its recent expansion and upgrades allowing for truly comfortable and efficient travel. Not to say it's all easy going, as the traffic, construction, street vendors and brightly colored tree replicas lining the thoroughfares, all compete for your attention.

Politics

With the Sandinistas and Iran-Contra headlines long past, Nicaragua is enjoying a period of stable economic growth, as well as increasing foreign investments. In 2016, the country's robust economic growth, coupled with one of the lowest homicide rates in Latin America—roughly 40 percent less than that of neighbor Costa Rica—helped President Daniel Ortega win his third consecutive term.

Terrain

Nicaragua's geography consists of Pacific and Caribbean coastal plains that meet in the central highlands. Nearly 20 volcanoes dominate the western slope of the country with the 4,255-foot Momotombo, near the city of León, erupting as recently as 2016. Aside from the mountains, which reach nearly 7,000 feet in elevation, Nicaragua also boasts rainforests and the large freshwater lakes of Lago de Managua and Lago de Nicaragua (Lake Nicaragua).

The largest lake in Central America, Lake Nicaragua occupies more than 3,000 square miles and reaches a depth up to 200 feet. It's the nation's largest source of fresh water and home to a variety of wildlife typically found in saltwater, including tarpon, sawfish and sharks. In addition to the lofty volcanic islands of Ometepe and Zapatera, Lake Nicaragua is home to more than 400 smaller land

masses covered in dense vegetation and animal life. This could also someday be the site of a controversial shipping canal much longer and deeper than the Panama Canal, linking the Caribbean and Pacific.

Climate

The dry season extends from January into June when lowland vegetation withers and your primary goal will be swimming in, or sipping on, something refreshing. With the start of the rainy season, rain can be a daily occurrence but the showers are mostly brief and welcomed.

Daytime temperatures can reach the mid-80s F in most lowland areas with the central mountains being up to 15 degrees cooler.

Economy

Nicaragua blends both a contemporary and a colonial flair, which is impressive considering that behind Haiti it's the second poorest country in Latin America. Although the vast majority of the Nicaraguans live on less than \$3 per day, Nicaragua has maintained economic growth levels above that of both, Latin America and the Caribbean largely due to sound economic policies and increasing foreign investment.

Recent World Bank statistics show a steep decline in the country's poverty rate over the past decade, coupled with a steep increase in the country's gross domestic product over the same period. Despite positive indicators, much of Nicaragua is still poorly developed with significant needs, especially for rural infrastructure.

The economy of Nicaragua is based primarily on agriculture followed by tourism, mining and manufacturing. The advent of ecotourism coupled with the international appeal of pristine beaches, impressive natural beauty, and colonial history all contributed to a more than 20 percent growth in tourism revenues from 2015 to 2016.

The growth in tourism isn't surprising when you consider how much there is to experience here: coffee plantations in the hills outside of Matagalpa; the cigar factories of Estelí; tarpon fishing on the Rio San Juan outside of Boca de Sabalos; a swim in a freshwater caldera at Apoyo Lagoon Natural Reserve; the chance to stare into an active volcano at Masaya Volcano National Park; the classic colonial cities of Granada and León; and the not-to-be missed sunsets on the Pacific Coast are just the beginning.

León

Located a dozen miles from the Pacific along the Río Chiquito, León is truly colonial at heart while being liberal in flavor. The city is home to impressive architecture, galleries, nightlife and multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the Ruins of León Viejo and the Cathedral of León.

If exploring the cobblestone streets is more your speed, enjoy a wide array of restaurants, cafes and art galleries with a free and easy feel, thanks to the artists and



A howler monkey caught in the act at Mukul Resort. PHOTOS BY ALLEN KENNEDY

students who call León home. Nearby, the Cordillera de Los Maribios mountain range looms and features Cerro Negro—one of the few places on the planet where you can “volcano board” down the flanks of an active volcano (think snowboarding, but on volcanic rock).

Granada

Located on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, the colonial architecture, archeological ruins and Mombacho volcano all vie for your attention while visiting this classic Nicaraguan city. You don't need to be an architect or even particularly religious to be inspired by the Church of Guadalupe or the Granada Cathedral, as the colonial architecture is enough to take you back in time.

The trail to petroglyphs on nearby Zapatera Island, as well as the island of Ometepe, hold archaeological remnants of the pre-Columbian past and are accessible by boat from Granada. On Ometepe, a hike up the dormant Maderas volcano or the more daunting—and active—Concepción volcano awaits those with good shoes and an even better sense of adventure. After a day of exploring the oldest city in Nicaragua, the Calzada awaits—this restaurant- and cafe-lined cobblestone street offers a wide array of local fares, fine dining possibilities and truly indulgent options “de postre,” aka dessert.

Caribbean coast

Classic Caribbean and named after the Dutch pirate Blewfeldt, the quintessential port town of Bluefields lies on the southeast coast of Nicaragua. Besides being home to the endangered hawksbill turtle, the town serves as a jump-off point for the local rainforests, the Corn Islands and Monkey Point. With the pervasive sound of reggae in the background, Bluefields knows how to throw a party. Each year, the May Pole festival, or El Palo de Mayo, not only celebrates fertility, but marks the beginning of the rainy season and is a celebration not to be missed.

When visiting Bluefields, get there early, as the “pangas” to shuttle you on the Escondido River fill up quickly. Still relatively secret, the Pearl Cays are a Nicaraguan gem. With their palm trees, great diving and turquoise water they're as idyllic as they are threatened. Suffering the plight of many of the world's most



A surfer strolls Mukul Resort's Manzanillo Beach at sunset.

tranquil and tiny islands, rising sea levels are slowly drowning out the keys. Just off the coast lie the better-known Corn Islands, where dense jungle, fresh lobster, and quintessential beachside cabanas await.

Nicaragua has what most of the world's best places have already lost: unspoiled natural beauty, ideal surf, and that feeling every time you come that you've tapped into a secret. Standing salt-crusted after another day of trading barrels in perfect surf, pleasantly oblivious to the pace of the lives we've left behind, we celebrate the sunset and raise a Macuá.

Ah yes, the Macuá, the national cocktail, named after a native bird remains, arguably, one of the finest rum drinks on the planet and may just be reason enough to visit Nicaragua.

A version of this story was first published in the summer 2017 edition of Mountain Outlaw magazine.



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The Emerald City

Seattle, Washington

EBS STAFF

Seattle is one of the great cosmopolitan cities of the West, and with a direct flight leaving Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport early Friday morning and returning late Sunday night, it's great for a long weekend getaway. With authentic dim sum in the International District, some of the best sushi restaurants in the country, and bistro-style bar fare at many of the city's trendy pubs, Seattle is a gastronome's dream.

Getting here:

Drive – 10 hours west, but for a long weekend, it'd be silly not to fly.

Fly – Alaska Airlines has a direct flight that gets you to Seattle on Friday morning when many businesspeople are still on their commute to work.

Dining: Salumi

Founded by Armandino Batali, father of renowned chef Mario Batali, Salumi showcases its cured meats in the heart of Seattle's historic Pioneer Square. Salumi's artisan meats are cured in the back of their tiny storefront deli, drawing inspiration from the traditional Italian salumeria. Numerous cold sandwiches and three hot sandwiches are featured daily, with their signature salsa made of olive oil, breadcrumbs, garlic, parsley and capers. Salumi is open for lunch on Monday (takeout only) from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., but plan to show up early. At 10:45 a.m. on a drizzly mid-October day there was a line of 15 people waiting for the door to open.

Tip: Get the hot Porchetta sandwich: "Pork butt stuffed with meatball mix and braised for a long time." Enough said.



Salumi has a faithful following of Seattleites and tourists alike. Be prepared to stand in line, but its artisan cured meats are worth the wait. PHOTO BY TYLER ALLEN

Lodging: The Ace Hotel

Located in the heart of Belltown and a short walk to the Space Needle, Pike's Place Market and the Seattle waterfront, The Ace Hotel is where you want to rest your head. A former mariners' hotel and some of the cheapest accommodations in downtown, The Ace is a boutique hotel with lofted ceilings and hardwood floors. Standard rooms feature a sink and vanity, large windows and a minibar, with a shared bath down the hall. Deluxe rooms offer large beds, a private bath and original artwork on the walls. However, you may not have time to enjoy your weekend abode, as it could take weeks to try all the restaurants and bars in happening Belltown.

Featured activity: Pike's Place Market

There are many parks and paths to explore around the city, but it rains often in Seattle so be prepared to seek shelter. Pike's Place Market, with its covered walkway, is the perfect spot to enjoy the bountiful harvest of the Pacific



The Ace Hotel has affordable, well-appointed rooms in the heart of Belltown. PHOTO COURTESY OF ACE HOTEL

Northwest and its fresh seafood, flowers and apple cider from Washington orchards. The market is a tourist destination, but for good reason. Get a coffee at the original Starbucks if you're willing to stand in line or just enjoy the antics of the street performers; you may see a guy balancing a guitar on his chin while singing and solving a Rubik's Cube.

Tip: Take a break from strolling the market and hit the Tasting Room Seattle, a stone's throw up the hill. It features some of Washington's most celebrated wines and offers a number of flights to choose from; the sparkling flight is perfect for a mid-afternoon respite.

A vertical advertisement for Livingston, Montana. The top half has a blue background with white and yellow text. The text reads: "Visit LIVINGSTON MONTANA OUR HISTORIC DOWNTOWN IS 100% OPEN FOR BUSINESS DURING THIS CONSTRUCTION SEASON. Come see us!". Below the text is a photograph of a town nestled at the base of snow-capped mountains under a blue sky with white clouds. At the bottom of the image, the website "DiscoverLivingston.com" is written in white text.

This summer go whitewater rafting and celebrate our Wild and Scenic rivers

There are many options when it comes to regional rivers to explore, but a trip with Boundary Expeditions down the Middle Fork of the Salmon river is hard to beat. This remote and rugged stretch of river runs for 104 miles through the heart of Idaho's Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, a shifting landscape of alpine forests, high mountain desert and the third deepest rock-walled canyon in North America. Along the way are many opportunities to soak in natural hot springs, fish, and spot bald eagles, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats and river otters.

The Middle Fork of the Salmon was one of the original eight rivers included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2018. One of the most sought-after whitewater experiences in the world, with a strictly regulated permit system, it is also one of the most difficult to attain.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOUNDARY EXPEDITIONS

Visit boundaryexpeditions.com for dates and rates.

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO HIT THE TRAIL

GRAB IT AND GO AT

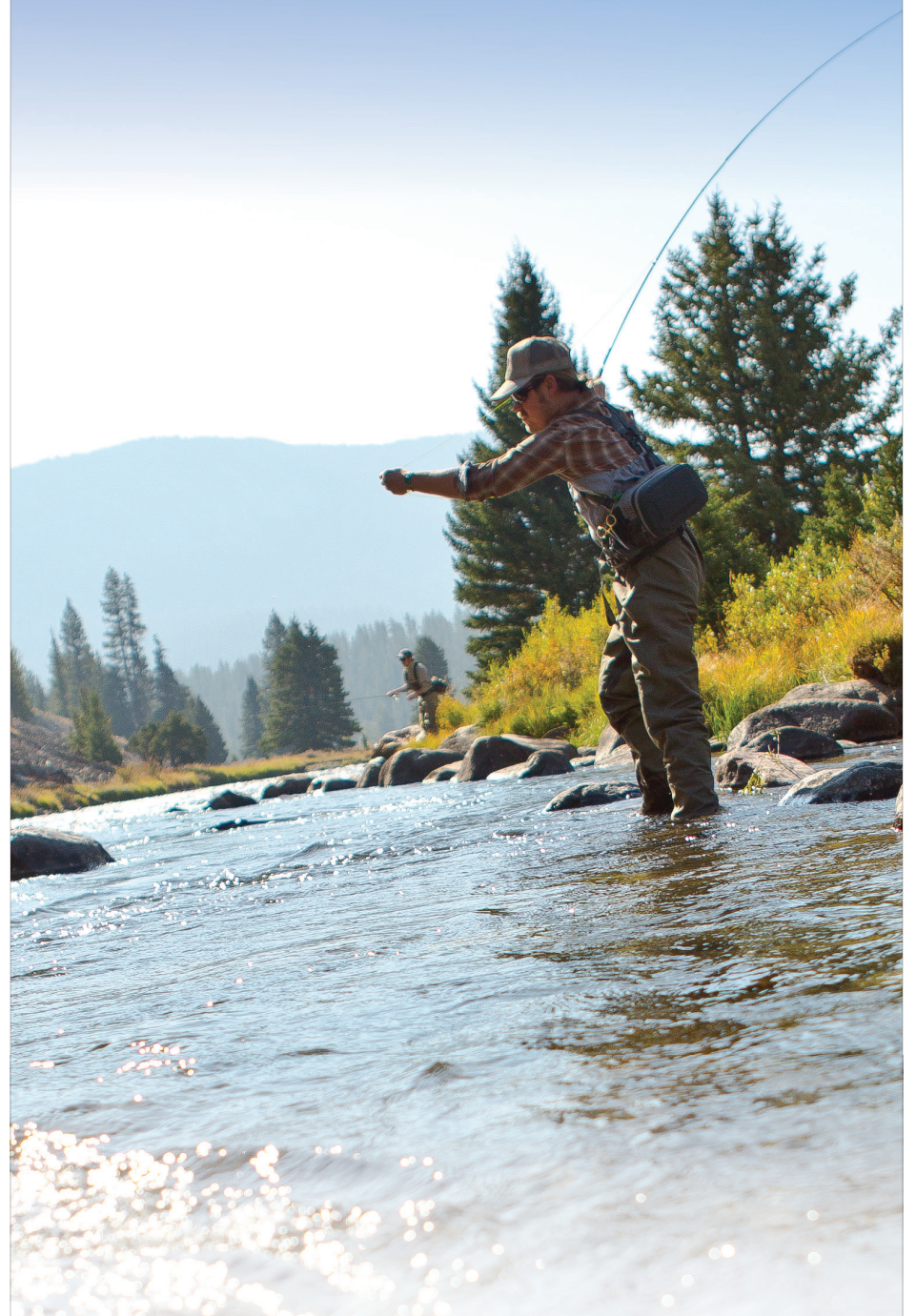
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Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport to repair runway

Afternoon and evening flights rescheduled

BOZEMAN YELLOWSTONE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport will rehabilitate its main runway between the hours of 12:30 p.m. and 11 p.m., April 30 through May 19. As this is the main runway, flights have been re-scheduled during this timeframe to operate prior to 12:30 p.m. and after 11 p.m. Smaller aircraft and cargo operations will not be impacted because they can utilize the recently constructed shorter parallel runway.


“Runway rehabilitation is required about every 15 years and while we cannot escape the impact on airline operations, we are pleased that the impact will be minimized by scheduling this during the slowest time of the year and in such a way that we can continue to have airline arrivals and departures every day during the rehabilitation,” said Airport Director Brian Sprenger.

Many of Bozeman’s airline partners will be utilizing larger aircraft to offset the loss of approximately three departures per day, so the negative impact on available seats departing Bozeman will be minimal. The airport will maintain non-stop service to all markets normally served in May. Additionally, Delta will operate Saturday service in May to and from Atlanta for the first time.

For a complete schedule of flights, visit bozemanairport.com.

Updated departure schedule

To	Airline	Departs	Frequency
Atlanta	Delta	12:30 pm	Saturday Only
Chicago O’Hare	United	12:00 pm	Daily
Denver	United United	6:58 am 10:05 am	Daily Daily
Dallas/Ft. Worth	American	11:45 am	Daily
Las Vegas	Allegiant	12:13 pm	Sundays/Thursdays
Minneapolis/ St. Paul	Delta Delta	5:50 am 11:10 am	Daily Daily
Phoenix/Mesa	Allegiant	10:56 am	Mondays/Fridays
Portland, OR	Alaska	10:14 am	Daily
Seattle/Tacoma	Alaska Alaska	6:10 am 11:44 am	Daily Daily
Salt Lake City	Delta Delta	5:50 am 11:10 am	Daily Daily





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- APRIL 1 Totally Tubular Party
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- APRIL 14 7th Annual Pond Skim
- APRIL 14 Teton Adaptive Fundraiser & Race
- APRIL 21 - 22 5th Annual Crazy Horse Snowmobile Hillclimb

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BACK40

For Explore Big Sky, the Back 40 is a resource: a place where we can delve into subjects and ask experts to share their knowledge.

Noun: wild or rough terrain adjacent to a developed area **Origin:** shortened form of “back 40 acres”

Special Advertising Section

5 hacks for hosting on Airbnb

HEADWATERS HOSTING

- 1. Create a house manual.** Like fitting into your favorite pair of worn jeans, some of the most successful Airbnb properties are imperfect. These quirks bring personality to a house but also need to be explained to guests. Creating a detailed house manual that clearly spells out everything someone needs to know about your property will help answer a lot of questions before they ever reach your phone.
- 2. Don't provide white linens.** When it comes to linens, all white is too stagnant for the Airbnb lifestyle. I like paisley patterned sheets, houndstooth designed pillowcases and an assortment of vibrant colored towels. Having multi-colored towels will help guests reuse their same towel instead of just grabbing a fresh white one every time they shower. This will reduce the amount of laundry for turn-over and free up some time to do what you love.



Our Airbnb lifestyle is exemplified through our western heritage

- 3. Have an extra set of linens.** One of the most time consuming duties associated with having a short-term rental is doing all the laundry. Having a second set of clean linens and towels ready to reset the house will prevent you from having to wait for laundry to finish before clearing the house for your next check-in. For extra free time, outsource your laundry services to a local linen provider.
- 4. Create a self check-in option.** Getting people checked into your home can be frustrating, when guests are coming from out of town you may be on standby for hours waiting for their arrival. Create a self check-in option by securing a lockbox with a house key somewhere easy to find outside your home. Ta-da, you just saved yourself a bunch of future headaches.
- 5. Underprice and over-deliver.** For the best Airbnb reviews, underprice and over-deliver. You want good reviews, and countless numbers of them. One element you have direct control over is pricing. Although it is tempting to get the highest price per night for bookings, underpricing is the easiest way to generate better reviews.



It's all about the details when creating the perfect Airbnb. PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEADWATERS HOSTING

Another big helper is over-communicating the inconveniences of your property. No house is perfect—spell this out clearly in the listing description and again in your house manual. People are less likely to complain when they have read the downfalls beforehand. For extra credit, offer a free-cancellation policy. Not only will it give potential guests an added piece of mind, it will increase your ranking on Airbnb's SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Being flexible and less greedy will lead to better reviews and an overall more successful Airbnb property.

If all this hacking still sounds like too much work, maybe it's time to consider outsourcing your Airbnb property management. There are a handful of local companies dedicated to getting your place booked, and providing your guests with a hotelier level of hospitality, all while potentially earning you more money.

Headwaters Hosting works with homeowners, property managers and hosts to provide a turn-key service for running Airbnbs in Big Sky.

Visit headwaters.host for more information.



Our properties encourage guests to live like a local rather than travel like a tourist.