

Nicaragua: Affordable Vacation Hotspot for Seniors

Text and photos by Ron Stern

While Nicaragua is still refining its tourism infrastructure and service, it is poised to re-introduce itself and share its natural treasures with the world.

Recovering from years of civil war and a major earthquake in 1972 that caused widespread damage in Managua, Nicaragua has seen its share of toil. Now, with concerted help from the government and private sectors, the country is emerging as an affordable and diverse tourist destination. In fact, many call this Central American destination and undiscovered vacation paradise.

Sandwiched between Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south, Nicaragua is bordered by two oceans: the Pacific to the west and Caribbean to the east. With more than 6 million inhabitants, it is the largest country in the Central American Isthmus and easily accessible from major airports.

This was my first visit and American Airlines offers convenient flights that connect through Miami for a short two-hour hop to the capital, Managua. Ameri-

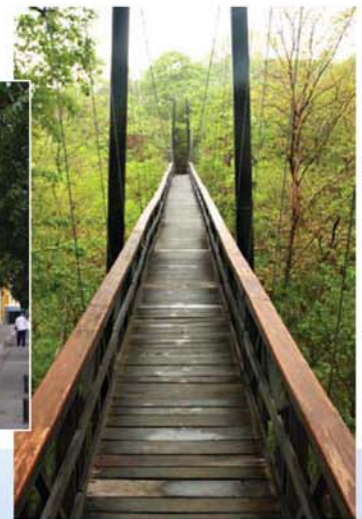
cans flying into the country don't need a visa but do need to pay \$10 for a tourist card.

Tourism has been on the increase in recent years and in 2010, Nicaragua received over one million foreign visitors. It's not hard to see why. With an abundance of sunshine and natural beauty, there are many areas to see and explore that offer travelers an alternative to the usual high-priced destinations.

By far, the most popular city for visitors is Granada, located on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, the 19th largest lake in the world. This locale was founded in 1524 by Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, and the country's currency (córdoba) is named in his honor. In fact, you but an affordable steak dinner with all the trimmings for around \$15 U.S. which is the equivalent of 330 córdobas.

Remnants of this colonial city are clearly seen in the colorful

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homes and storefronts that radiate out from the cathedral and central park area. At night and on weekends, these areas as well as those along the popular Calle la Calzada come alive with activity as tourists enjoy eating at the many sidewalk cafes and restaurants, strolling or listening to local music.

There are many other areas to explore, of course, including Ometepe Island. Spending time here is

worth the effort as one can visit its volcanoes, Concepcion and Maderas, or the many beaches that dot the coastline.

(All travel and accommodations were sponsored by the AA and the Nicaraguan Tourism Board)

For more information: American Airlines www.aa.com; Nicaragua Tourism Board www.visitnicaragua.com/ingles