

## Nicaragua

The dollar goes a long way in Granada—and the breathtakingly beautiful landscape doesn't hurt either.

by: Barry Golson | from: AARP The Magazine | September/October 2010 issue



From left: House in town center, Granada; A cathedral in Nicaragua. — Left: SIME/ESTockTravel; Right: SIME/ESTockTravel

Nicaragua? One of Central America's poorest countries, where the U.S.-backed Contras once battled Daniel Ortega and his revolutionary Sandinistas? Retire there? Well, yes. In few other Latin countries does the dollar stretch further. Here, without doubt, you can live comfortably on Social Security.

A lot has changed in Nicaragua since the '80s and Iran-Contra. The capital city, Managua, while still rundown, squat, and ugly, now has shopping malls, casinos, and SUVs. And according to Tim Rogers, editor of Managua's English-language paper, Nica Times, "While President Ortega employs strong revolutionary rhetoric when addressing his supporters, his government realizes the importance of attracting foreign investors and retirees."

For their part, retirees are drawn by a breathtakingly beautiful country of beaches, lakes, volcanoes, and pine forests, with vivid green parrots swooping through mangrove swamps. It has the same natural rain-forest beauty as do Costa Rica and Panama, only wilder and less explored. Sun-worshipping expats seeking a sybaritic beach life head to San Juan del Sur, a popular resort town on the Pacific Coast. Many others have gravitated to graceful, historic Granada, one of the loveliest colonial cities in Latin America, located along Lake Nicaragua, where they enjoy remarkable housing bargains and an easygoing lifestyle amid pastel buildings and welcoming cafés.

Four years ago, Darrell and Amy Bushnell, 60 and 54, moved to Granada from Charlotte, North Carolina, where Darrell worked in a large finance firm and Amy in home development. They purchased a three-bedroom, 3,500-square-foot colonial house with patio and pool for \$180,000. They rent out one bedroom for \$400 a month. "We wanted somewhere inexpensive," says Darrell, "and we looked at other Central and South American countries, but we kept coming back to Nicaragua, due to the cost of living, the beautiful country, and the gentle people." Darrell cautions that government corruption is a fact of life in Nicaragua, but he extols the opportunity for finding yourself: "You can live the tropical life in your dream house on the ocean, start a business in the mountains, or work with a foundation to help people and their children. Every day is an adventure."



Jack Unruh

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