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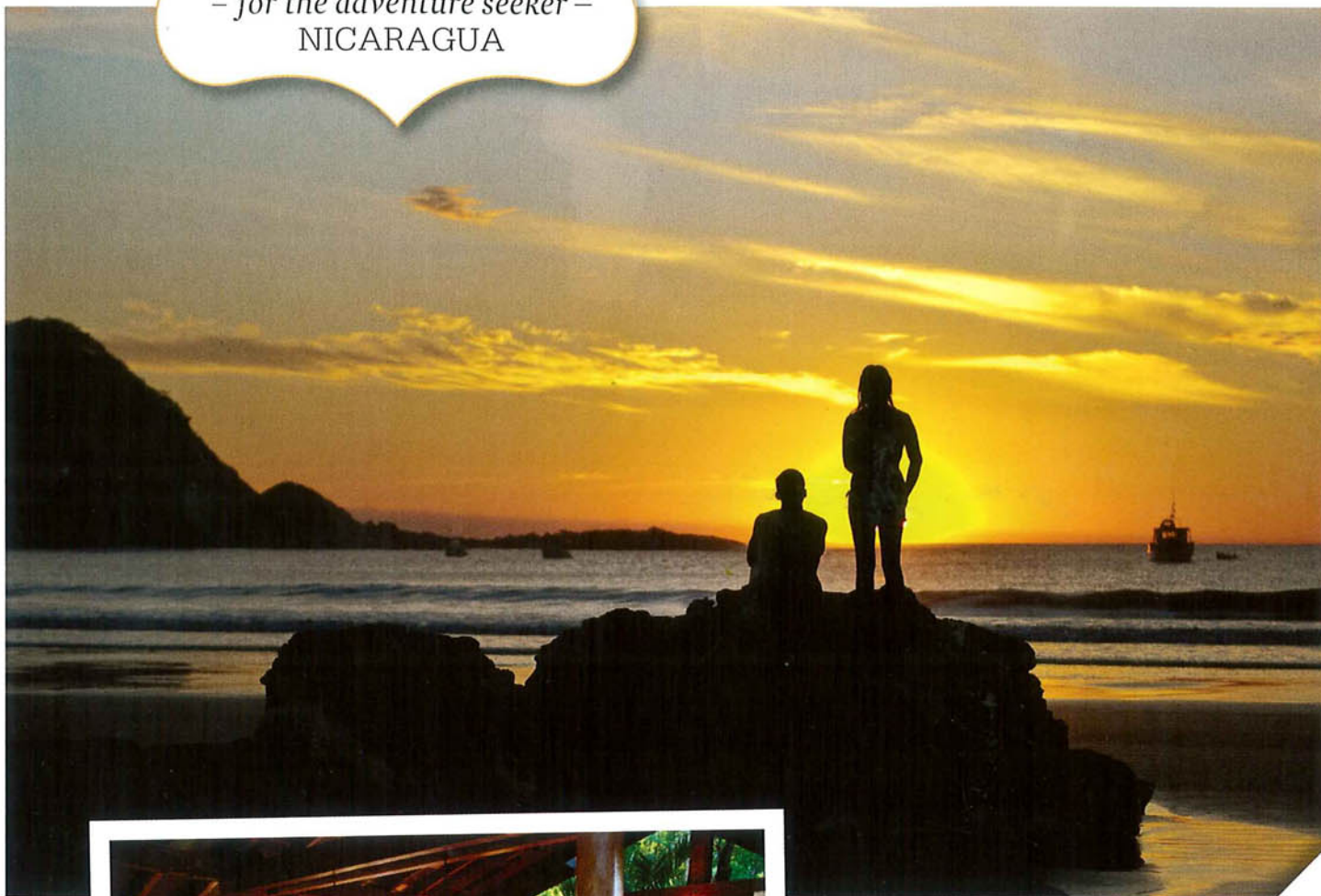
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— for the adventure seeker —
NICARAGUA



BAREFOOT LUXURY

Treetop villas, private beaches, and friendly howler monkeys are part of the charm of a Nicaraguan getaway.

{ by Kristiana Heap-Butler }

IF YOU ARE A COUPLE who seeks adventure and secluded beaches, Nicaragua is worth a closer look. Bordering the North Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, Nicaragua's natural beauty goes to rugged extremes. The country is often referred to as "the land of lakes and volcanoes" for good reason: Nicaragua is home to 50 volcanoes and some of the world's largest crater lakes.

Mombacho, one of Nicaragua's active volcanoes, is a nature lover's paradise, with a breathtaking cloud forest, 100 types of orchids, and two species of fauna that have only been found atop the volcano.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE: Forget Virginia. Nicaragua is for lovers—ones who can live without air conditioning, anyway.

WHERE TO STAY

MORGAN'S ROCK HACIENDA & ECOLOGE

Rates start at \$161 and include daily breakfast and dinner. morgansrock.com

AQUA NICARAGUA

Rates start at \$159, meals not included. aquanicaragua.com

JICARO ISLAND ECOLOGE

Rates start at \$480 and include three meals per day. jicarolodge.com

GETTING THERE

American Airlines (aa.com) flies from DFW to Managua, Nicaragua, with a connection in Miami. By car, it takes about two hours to get from the airport to the resorts. Most ecolodges can arrange car transport from Managua to your hotel.



Mombacho overlooks the 3,000-square-mile Lake Nicaragua and towers over the city of Granada, which was colonized by the Spanish in 1522. Granada is an easy day trip from most towns in the western part of the country and offers a glimpse of Nicaragua's early colonial history. The parks, cathedrals, and pastel-hued homes line cobblestone streets that are often crowded with locals headed to one of the busiest markets in the area.

Granada's museums and restaurants provide a fun excursion, but the real stars of Nicaragua are the private properties. Several of the resorts that have sprung up in recent years focus on providing ecologically responsible vacations without skimping on high-quality surroundings. The architectural and interior design outfit *Simplemente Madera* has had a hand in creating three of the region's most impressive ecolodges: Morgan's Rock Hacienda & Ecolodge, Jicaro Island Ecolodge, and Aqua Nicaragua.

Twenty-five minutes from the Pacific surfing town of San Juan del Sur lies Morgan's Rock, one of the country's oldest high-end eco resorts. It boasts 15 freestanding bungalows,

13 of which are accessible only by a 100-meter pedestrian suspension bridge. The vast property includes an almost-2,000-acre nature reserve, a large private beach, and a hatchery for giant sea turtles. Each bungalow has an outdoor queen-size hanging bed, and inside, bungalows have fully screened walls that allow for unrestricted views (most bungalows provide views of the ocean below).

Not only can you see the ocean, you can hear it, because there is no television or air conditioning to drown out the sound of waves crashing on the beach. Morgan's Rock is teeming with nature, from the blue and orange crabs scurrying about the property's hundreds of tiered steps to the howler monkeys that hang out overhead.

Down on the beach, shaded cabanas outfitted with hammocks and reclining loungers give guests an opportunity to spend all day by the sea. Take note: the bar will provide coolers of local beer upon request, but no one will interrupt you while you play surfside.

If sleeping in the treetops is more your speed, there's Aqua, the newly opened yoga retreat and eco resort just up the coast from

Morgan's Rock, next to the small fishing and surfing village of Gigante. Aqua's villas rest atop stilts, and many have their own treetop plunge pools and attached kitchens. It is only a short hike from the villas to the beach below. Half of Aqua's private beach is pristine white sand, and the other half is filled with enormous craggy boulders that are home to an elusive ancient iguana. An oceanside yoga platform provides an ideal place to de-stress postwedding, and Aqua plans to bring in health and wellness gurus to help any vacationer take relaxation to the next level.

Once you're finished with the beaches, a private island might be just the thing for you and your new spouse. Situated in the shadow of Mombacho volcano on Lake Nicaragua, the island resort of Jicaro is a serene slice of paradise. The property has nine private casitas, each with a deck overlooking the water and stunning two-story wooden interiors.

Nicaragua isn't for everyone, but for a nature-loving couple seeking adventure in an eco-friendly package, it's the perfect fit. Who needs air conditioning when you're in love, anyway? **D**