

# BACKPACKING NICARAGUA TRAVEL GUIDE

**JUMP TO :** Nicaragua [Travel Itineraries](#) | [Places to Visit](#) | [Where to Stay](#) | [Travel Tips](#) | [Cost of Travel](#)

Backpacking Nicaragua was without a doubt my favorite adventure in Central America. With chilled surfing beaches, heady party towns, towering volcanoes and stunning landscapes, backpacking across Nicaragua is an experience unlike any other and there really is something for everybody.

Traveling to Nicaragua is relatively easy and you can arrange pretty much all of your travels yourself. Best of all, Nicaragua is a very easy country to go backpacking in; it's cheap, safe, and small - meaning the travel distances aren't too awful. Nicaragua is fast becoming the most popular backpacking destination in Central America.

Whether you dig beach time, adventure sports, hiking, partying, or all of the above, Nicaragua has some pretty awesome adventures to get into. This Nicaragua travel guide has everything you need to prepare for your backpacking trip in one of my favorite countries on earth.

Get information on Nicaragua travel itineraries and backpacking routes, maps, travel tips, safety, things to do, and much more. Most of all you will walk away with all the inspiration you need to make the most of your trip without breaking the bank. *Vamonos Pues!*



Ometepe island, Nicaragua

## Where to go Backpacking in Nicaragua

Backpacking in Nicaragua offers up the opportunity to explore and experience a variety of landscapes and local culture. Most people will start their journey on the coast if they are arriving from neighboring [Costa Rica](#) or Honduras. The capital city of Managua is home to the international airport.

If you are flying in, you can catch a bus from Managua to most places of interest. There is a booming scene of expats who are committed to spending most of their year surfing Nicaragua's Pacific coast. Learn to surf before heading inland to do some epic [volcano boarding](#). Nicaragua's colonial cities of Granada and [Leon](#) are full of interesting locals, open-air markets, history, and friendly locals.

The volcanic island of Ometepe is straight outta backpacker heaven. You can explore miles of dirt roads on a motorbike, swim under waterfalls, and hike a volcano. Then there is the rum. The Caribbean coast is isolated, wild, and stunningly beautiful. A journey to Nicaragua's less-visited Caribbean coast is full of exploration potential. Luckily, the Corn Islands are yet to be touched by the backpacker hordes.

## Best Travel Itineraries for Backpacking Nicaragua

Below I have listed several travel itineraries for backpacking Nicaragua. If you have a month or more to visit Nicaragua, it's easy to combine a couple of these itineraries and put together a larger backpacking route.

## Backpacking Nicaragua One Month Itinerary #1: Nicaragua Highlights



### 4 Weeks: Nicaragua Highlights

A month is a perfect timeframe to see a generous swath of the country. This Nicaragua itinerary has you starting off from the capital Managua; however, you can easily start from the north or south as well. Soak in the vibes in Granada before heading to Ometepe. You can catch a ferry from Rivas to Ometepe for about \$2 USD. For the loudest party, and also most gringofied town in Nicaragua, head to San Juan Del Sur. There are some great places to surf directly around SJDS. The quieter beaches are a short drive south. You can check out more great beaches as you cruise the coast north towards [Leon](#). From Leon, head to [Somoto Canyon](#) to explore one of Nicaragua's most beautiful natural landscapes. From here you can carry on to the interior of the country if you wish, or you can head back to the coast to chill and drink rum on the beach. If you still have a bit of time to work with you can head to the Caribbean coast, either by air or by boat. Catching a boat is way more fun. Like way more fun. Think untouched rainforest, dense jungle, and slow scenic travel.

## Backpacking Nicaragua Two Weeks Itinerary #2: Coast, Cities, and Volcanos



### Two Weeks: Explore Pacific Coast, Cities, and Volcanoes

Some of my favorite places in Nicaragua are relatively close to each other. This means tackling a two week backpacking route is easy and also shouldn't involve a single 10-hour bus ride. Of course, this backpacking loop can be flexible according to your own interests and tastes. If you love Ometepe, stay there for a week. Keen for some surf? You can dig into to life at a surf camp. If cities and history are your thing, spend a couple extra days in Leon or Granada. Some of the best, untouched beaches in the country can be found on the coastal stretch between San Juan Del Sur and El Tránsito.

## Backpacking Nicaragua 10 Day Itinerary #3: Caribbean Adventure



### 10 Days: Explore the Caribbean Coast

When it comes to getting to the [Caribbean](#), you have two options. You can either fly to Big Corn Island from Managua (with returns costing around \$180) or you can take a series of buses and boats for around \$30. From Managua, catch a bus to El Rama and then a boat down the river to BlueFields, maybe pause a day in BlueFields to check out the legendary cocaine scene. From Blue Fields, catch another boat to Big Corn Island and then a panga - a small boat - to Little Corn. Little Corn is a great place to spend a few days exploring, swimming and snorkeling. You could also check out the [Pearl Keys](#), but you would need to hire a boat and this would be expensive. Whilst the Corn Islands do receive a bit of tourist traffic, a vast majority of the Caribbean coast sees far less backpacker traffic than other parts of the country. The potential for off the beaten path travel here is enormous.

## Places to Visit in Nicaragua

Now that we've covered some of the best travel itineraries for backpacking Nicaragua, let's dive in and explore some of the best places to visit in Nicaragua on your adventure...

## Backpacking Managua

When I first arrived in Managua I was greatly underwhelmed. The city is not exceptionally pretty and it felt strangely Americanized due to all of the American fast-food joints and strip malls. Managua is a major transportation hub for the country, so if you are traveling around Nicaragua, you are bound to pass through Managua at some point. There are some fun things to do in Managua, however. If you have a day or two to kill in Managua, I recommend a hike to the highest point in the city: the hill of Tiscapa. From here you can escape the chaos of the city while catching some great views. The Santiago Cathedral is an impressive building worth a visit. Fun fact: the cathedral is one of the few old buildings in the city that wasn't completely destroyed by the devastating 1972 earthquake that wreaked havoc on most of the city.

***[Book Your Managua Hostel Here!](#)***



Santiago Cathedral in Managua. Photo: Wikicommons

## Backpacking Leon

This stunning colonial city is a great place to get stuck. I ended up lingering here for nearly two weeks in the extremely comfortable [Trailwinds Hostel](#). Wherever you stay, try to find a hostel with a kitchen as eating out in Leon every day gets expensive.

The Pan Y Paz bakery is well worth finding for delicious bread, pastries and coffee and if you really fancy splashing out head to Carnivore for amazing meat dishes or Antonino's for big pizzas.

In the evening, there are plenty of hopping bars with one of the liveliest scenes being at the Bigfoot Hostel. Make sure to check out the stunning cathedral in the main square, for just a dollar you can get right up on top of the whitewashed roof where you will be rewarded with stunning panoramic views of the city.

The nearby art museum, [Museo de Arte fundación Ortiz guardian](#) is also well worth a look and a good place to spend an afternoon. Whilst in Nicaragua keep an eye out for the greatest smoothie chain in the world - Siembras y Cosechas - I recommend going for the raspberry, blueberry and pineapple shake! You can also arrange a visit to a [cigar factory](#) from the city and this is a great way to spend an afternoon.

***[Book Your Leon Hostel Here!](#)***



Stunning Cathedral of Leon, Photo Courtesy: Audley Travel

## **Volcano Boarding**

One of the main attractions of Nicaragua is that you can have a crack at volcano boarding, racing down a 45 degree, jet black, ashen slope on a longboard.

There are several volcanoes to choose from with [Cerro Negro](#) being the most popular. It's easy to arrange a day-trip from Leon or, if you prefer, you can even sign up for a 3 day hike across multiple volcanoes. You can read more about my experience [here](#).



Volcano boarding like a boss!

## **Backpacking Somoto Canyon**

This is a must for any adventure-junkies itinerary. Exploring Somoto Canyon is definitely worth it if you have the time. Just bear in mind that the canyon is a five hour journey from Leon by chicken buses and so you can end up losing two whole days just getting there and back from Leon. I do not recommend going with a tour company; it's a waste of money. Instead, just rock up at the canyon entrance and hire a guide for \$25 for the day. The guide will provide you with life-jackets and everything else you need to explore the canyon safely, you will spend the day floating, swimming and jumping into the river winding through the canyon. Some of the jumps, many of which are optional, are up to eighteen meters high! If you choose to spend the night, I recommend crashing at 'Henri's Farm'. Read more about my experience [here](#).





Absolutely stunning landscape!

## **Backpacking Granada**

An easy hop from Leon by chicken bus, Granada is another colonial city with gorgeous buildings, a vibrant night-life and historical sites. You don't need too long, perhaps just a day, to get a feel for this city but make sure you visit the cathedral and bargain hunt for hand-made souvenirs in the central square. Be sure to stay in the incredibly good value [Oasis Hostel](#) and to find the Hot Dog Connection for some of the cheapest and tastiest burgers in all of town. If you're feeling adventurous, you could also check out the nearby Pojo de Rojo Treehouse hostel but be warned, this hostel has seen much better days and the vibe just feels all wrong.

[Check out my ultimate guide to the best hostels in Granada here.](#)

***[Book Your Granada Hostel Here!](#)***



Vibrant colonial city, Photo: Charlieontravel

## Backpacking Laguna De Apoyo

My all-time favorite place in all of Central America is Laguna De Apoyo, you should definitely make the effort to head to this enormous fresh-water lagoon, which is a short hop from Granada. Stay in Paradiso for a couple of nights, you won't regret it. Love [photography](#)? Capture Nicaragua's different shades of color as the tangerine sun dances along the edges of the lake.



The pristine fresh water lagoon, Photo: Tao Ruspoli

## Backpacking Ometepe Island

From Granada, take a chicken bus to Rivas and another bus to San Jorge to catch the ferry to [Ometepe Island](#). Most travellers opt to spend a couple of days here: one exploring the island by motorbike (you can hire one for around \$20 a day) and another to hike to the top of Madera Volcano. You can easily spend a week here. I recommend staying at the [Landing Hostel](#), it is cheap, friendly and right next to the ferry dock. For breakfast, check out the Corner House. Ometepe has it all. Once you have a motorbike you can leave the main traveler hubs to discover an island that is surprisingly underdeveloped. La Cascada de San Ramón is a waterfall tucked back in the hills close to the village of Merida. Hint hint... Go there and cool thyself! Long story short a hike there is rewarded with a brilliant swim in the pool underneath the waterfall. The water is crisp and cool and feels like heaven with the mid-day sun burning over head.

**[Book Your Ometepe Hostel Here!](#)**



Atop the Madera Volcano, Photo: Must see places

## Backpacking San Juan Del Sur

As soon as you arrive in Central America you will start seeing 'Sunday Funday' tank tops upon hordes of backpackers. This near-legendary event consists of getting well and truly plastered on a Sunday pub-crawl. My sources have informed me that both cocaine and MDMA are available in [San Juan Del Sur](#), but I met more than one backpacker who had been screwed over so be careful.

Inside San Juan Del Sur itself, there isn't much going on, besides an amazing Italian Gelato place (go for the Nutella!). SJDS is mostly just a party town. The real charm is in the surrounding beaches. It makes for a good pitstop if you are enroute to Costa Rica, or just feel like a few days of eating and drinking. To get a proper idea of what the area is about, definitely hit up the beaches just outside of town.

***Book Your SJDS Hostel Here!***



The smashing Sunday Funday, Photo: Kiwisoffcourse

## **Backpacking Playa Madera**

A popular surfer hang-out, this is a good place to rent a board for a day (\$10) and hit the waves. Most travelers backpacking Nicaragua want to have a crack at surfing and this is one of the best places to learn.

This beach is however normally pretty busy and the food is very expensive. Bring snacks. Likewise, it is an expensive place to stay although if you have a tent you can camp for free. I recommend turning right (as you face the ocean) and walking along the beach, over the rocks and onto the next beach along.

This is a much quieter place to stay with just one small restaurant and two guesthouses, Matilde's is the best option. If you have the time, you can rent a house to live in from just \$20 a day. The next beach over from Matilde's is completely isolated - it takes just two minutes to walk there but there are currently no buildings, whatsoever.

It is pretty much like having your own private beach. If you're there at the right time of the year, you may see baby turtles scrambling down towards the sea.



Surfer's Paradise, Photo: inside elsewhere

## **Backpacking Bluefields**

If you're keen to check out the Corn Island, then you will certainly pass through Bluefields first. One can score some of the best ceviche in Nicaragua from one of the food stalls here.

Rumor has it that Bluefields is a place where drugs, specifically cocaine is abundant. While it can be a good time to sniff a few lines, do not blow your entire budget on getting high. Also, keep in mind that the cocaine trade is responsible for thousands of deaths across Central And South America. Not to make you feel bad, but it is important to keep that in mind when deciding where to spend your cash.

Reserva Silvestre Greenfields is a beautiful nature reserve where you can go hiking or rent a canoe. It is located near the town of Kukra Hill, a 30-minute boat ride from Bluefields. Return transport from Kukra Hill to the reserve costs US\$10 per visitor. It is possible to take a ferry from El Rama or Bluefields to the Corn Islands. The departure times can be vary based on sea conditions. Typically the journey takes 5-7 hours and costs roughly \$8 USD.

**[Book Your Caribbean Hostel Here!](#)**



Beautiful, untouched beaches, Photo: Latin Odyssey

## **Backpacking Little Corn Island**

Little Corn Island is the clear winner for backpackers between the other Corn Islands. Welcome to paradise amigos! The beaches of Little Corn are something out of a dream. It would be hard to find a better place suited for lounging in a [hammock](#) with your favorite book.

The best thing about Little Corn? It is really mellow. You won't find huge gangs of backpackers slamming drinking buckets (thank god). The stunning natural beauty and the chilled out vibe make the effort to reach the island totally worth it.

Just in case you weren't psyched enough to visit Little Corn, get this: there are no cars on the island! Cheers to keeping it simple and just walking or biking everywhere! It is possible to take a PADI open water diving course here if you are keen to learn how to dive. The certification usually takes three to four days and can cost about \$300 USD.

**[Book Your Little Corn Hostel Here!](#)**



The best place in Nicaragua to go native and find coconuts. Photo: Wikicommons

## **Off the Beaten Path Travel in Nicaragua**

There is a definitive "gringo trail" in Nicaragua consisting of the popular surf towns and the colonial cities. The river systems of interior and Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua are especially wild. Exploration potential is endless here. I am sure that as time marches on, Nicaragua will continue to be more and more developed as is the case everywhere. So get yourself to Nicaragua and explore the many hidden gems this country has to offer!

## **Backpacker Accommodation in Nicaragua**

Most regions in Nicaragua have a wide variety of budget accommodation options. These range from your standard backpacker hostel to crude surf camps on the beach to jungle bungalows. Prices vary but the average price of a dorm bed throughout Nicaragua is between \$7-12 USD. If you are traveling as a couple it usually ends up making sense to go for a private room as the price will be about the same.

You will be pleased to know that Nicaragua has some of the cheapest hostels anywhere in Central America. A dorm bed in neighboring Costa Rica can often be double the price of a Nicaraguan dorm bed. If you are keen to camp, many hostels offer camping as an option.

There are many places where you can camp on the beach for free. Otherwise, [Couch Surfing](#) is the cheapest (free) way to go, and a great way to meet other locals; however, some of the places will not have much of a couch surfing scene. Airbnb is huge in Costa Rica, and you can find some awesome apartments for cheap prices. Follow [this link](#) for \$35 free credit.

## **Book Your Nicaragua Hostel Here!**

### Where to Stay in Nicaragua

Location	Hostel	Why we like it?!
<a href="#">Managua</a>	<a href="#">Pachamama Managua</a>	Fidel Castro stayed here before it was a hostel of course. Plus there is an epic swimming pool.
<a href="#">Leon</a>	<a href="#">Mango's Hostel</a>	Beautiful gardens and free beach shuttles.
<a href="#">Granada</a>	<a href="#">El Caite Hostel</a>	Free breakfast, cool staff, and great location.
<a href="#">Rivas</a>	<a href="#">Hostal de Julieta</a>	Cheap. Cheap. Cheap. A good place to land if you are heading to Ometepe the next day.
<a href="#">Ometepe Island</a>	<a href="#">The Landing Hostel</a>	Reasonably priced private rooms and a fun bar.
<a href="#">San Juan Del Sur</a>	<a href="#">The Thirsty Turtle</a>	Just the right amount of party atmosphere. Plus there is free breakfast!
<a href="#">Playa Madera</a>	<a href="#">Selina Maderas</a>	Free fast WiFi, on-site bar, a yoga deck, a co-working space as well as a swimming pool and common areas with games and live music.
<a href="#">Little Corn Island</a>	<a href="#">Green House Hostel</a>	The best budget accommodation in which to enjoy this paradise.
<a href="#">Las Penitas</a>	<a href="#">Mano y Mano Eco Hostel</a>	A truly fantastic community of people run this hostel set right on the beach.
<a href="#">Popoyo</a>	<a href="#">Ruamoko Hostel</a>	Prime location to base yourself for some epic days of surfing.



# Top Things to Do in Nicaragua

Nicaragua is bursting at the seams with awesome things to do. No matter what your timeframe is there are many exciting adventures to be had to suit every backpackers' individual taste. I have listed the **top 10 most popular and best things to do in Nicaragua** below to get your ideas flowing for your next trip backpacking Nicaragua!

## 1. Learn about Sandinista history in Leon

The Sandinistas were a Nicaraguan revolutionary organization active in Nicaragua from the late 1970's to the early 1990's. There are many ex-Sandinista folks living in Leon and throughout Nicaragua. Leon was particularly important as it was a strategic base for Sandinistas during the Nicaraguan Revolution.

## 2. Learn How to Surf

With no shortage of fabulous beaches and surf schools, no backpacking trip to Nicaragua would be complete without hitting up the surf at least once. After catching your first wave, you will be hooked, I promise.



Nicaragua is an excellent place to learn how to surf. Photo: Flickr

### **3. Climb a Volcano**

Nicaragua is home to 19 volcanoes! Ometepe Island is home to the impressive Volcan Concepción. The hike takes a lengthy 10 hours round trip, though you will feel like a badass upon completion of the trek.



Ready, set, hike!

### **4. Explore Somoto Canyon**

Enjoy one of Nicaragua's less-frequented destinations at Somoto Canyon. Hire a local guide and hike, swim, and explore. The canyon is stunning; you will not be disappointed.

### **5. Volcano Boarding in Nicaragua**

As I mentioned before, flying down a volcano at top speed is one hell of a good time. There has never been a more satisfying way to descend a volcano.



What flying down the side of a volcano looks like...

## 6. Hunt for Coconuts on Little Corn Island

It goes without saying that this is clearly the best free thing to do in all of Nicaragua. Once you find some coconuts to enjoy, the next step in honing your coconut-opening skills!



The best place in Nicaragua to go native and find coconuts. Photo: Wikicommons

## 7. Check Out Laguna De Apoyo

The area is home to an excellent nature reserve with plenty of outdoor activities to keep you busy.

## 8. Camp on the Beach

Camping is free (most of the time) and it lets you sleep in some pretty epic locations. Watching a sunrise from the comfort of your tent is a price experience in Nicaragua that I hope you get to have.



Tent view vibes.

## 9. See Ometepe Island by Motorbike

There is simply no better way to explore this beautiful volcanic island. Whilst riding a motorbike, always be safe and remember to [wear a helmet](#) for christ's sake!

## 10. Explore the San Juan River by Boat

If you love winding rivers, epic jungle scenery, and wildlife spotting, head to San Carlos and explore miles of untouched rainforest by boat through the San Juan River. This area is truly mind-blowing. If you love exploring wild places, you will love a boat trip up the San Juan.



Saddle up for the adventure of your life exploring the San Juan River by boat. Photo: Wikicommons

## Nicaragua Travel Tips

Below I have provided essential information and Nicaragua travel tips for your backpacking adventure, including the best time to travel to Nicaragua, how much to budget for Nicaragua, and a guide to Nicaraguan cuisine.

### The Best Travel Backpack?!



Psssst! Not picked the perfect travel backpack yet? The Broke Backpacker team has tried out over thirty backpacks this year! Our **favourite** carry on backpack is the [Nomatic Travel Backpack](#) – Best of all, TBB readers get a massive 20% off! Just use the code: **brokebackpacker20**

Check out this post to read [our full review!](#)

### Books to Read While Traveling Nicaragua

These are some of my favorite travel reads and books set in Nicaragua, which you should consider picking up before you begin your backpacking adventure...

[The Backpacker Bible](#) – Get it for free! Learn how to ditch your desk and travel the world on just \$10 a day whilst building a life of long-term travel with an online income. To inspire and help

the next generation of Broke Backpackers, you can now grab 'How to Travel the World on \$10 a Day' for free! [Get your copy here.](#)

**Lonely Planet Nicaragua Travel Guide** - It's always worth having a Lonely Planet packed away, plenty of useful info on bus routes and where to go.

**The Jaguar Smile** - In this intriguing book, Salman Rushdie brings to the forefront the palpable human facts of a country in the midst of revolution and political disturbance.

**Blood of Brothers Life and War in Nicaragua** - This book is a vibrant portrait of the Nicaraguan people and their volcanic land, a cultural history rich in poetry and bloodshed.

**Nicaragua At the Foot of the Volcano** - This book is a rare portrait of Nicaragua today. A must read for anyone visiting Nicaragua for the first time.

**Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle** - A great book on the history of Nicaragua, its political and foreign relations, with emphasis on the U.S. influence in shaping Nicaraguan life.

**A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua** - A detailed history and analysis of the Nicaraguan Revolution and the American response to it.

**My Car in Managua** - Another take on Nicaragua's political history but the illustrations by Nicaragua's celebrated political cartoonist Róger Sánchez Flores really enliven the text.

**The Sharks of Lake Nicaragua: True Tales of Adventure, Travel and Fishing** - Randy Wayne White is one of America's most adventurous travellers. In this collection, he writes about the pleasures of being alone and on the move. He studies anti-terrorist driving techniques, dives for golf balls in an alligator-infested pond, hunts his fellow man with a paint gun, ice-fishes for walleye with X-ray-stunned night-crawlers, and goes pig-shooting.

Here are some more amazing [books to read](#) during your Nicaragua backpacking trip.

## **Nicaragua Travel Phrases**

Learning a bit of Spanish is a great way to get the most out of your trip. When I became fluent in Spanish, it really changed the way I was able to travel in Nicaragua and beyond. It is such a useful language to know! You can speak it in over 20 countries!

Here are a few helpful Nicaragua travel phrases with English translations for your backpacking Nicaragua adventure:

**Hello** - *Hola*

**How are you?** - *Cómo estás?*

**Very good** - *Muy buena*

**Beautiful** - *Hermoso*

**Cheers** - *Salud*

**Shit** - *Mierda!* (a very light weight insult)

**Shit eater** - *Come Mierda* (for better effect!)

**What?** - *Qué?*

**Where?** - *Dónde?*

**Do you have a lighter?** - *Tienes un encendedor?* [/su\_column]

**No plastic bag** - *Sin bolsa de plastico*

**No straw please** - *No paja por favor*

**No plastic cutlery please** - *No hay cubiertos de plástico por favor*

**Two beers please** - *Dos cervezas por favor*

**Down that beer!** - *Hasta que la cerveza!*

**Can you give me a ride** - *Me puedes dar una vuelta?*

**What is your name?** - *Cómo te llamas?*

**How much does this cost?** - *Cuánto cuesta?*

**Can you give me a discount?** - *Me puede dar un descuento?*



Beautiful Nicaraguan sunset, Photo: Amazonaws

## Staying Safe in Nicaragua

In general, Nicaragua is a very safe country to go backpacking in. That said, Nicaragua's population suffers from high unemployment and the subsequent poverty. Any time you visit a country with socio-economic problems it is possible that someone will try to take what you have. [Targeted robberies](#) against foreigners are rare but they do happen.

Being out late, drunk, and alone is a recipe for trouble anywhere in the world. There have been reports of backpackers getting held up on remote sections of beach on both coasts. Odds are you should be just fine. If ever you run into a hold-up situation give them what they want and don't resist. Your Iphone and wallet are never worth dying over, ever!

Pick yourself up a [backpacker security belt](#) to keep your cash safe on the road, and check out [Backpacker Safety 101](#) for tips and tricks to stay safe whilst backpacking Nicaragua.

I strongly recommend travelling with a headlamp whilst in Nicaragua (or anywhere really – every backpacker should have a good headtorch!) – check out my post for a breakdown of the [best value headlamps](#) to take backpacking.

Be aware that Nicaragua is home to many species of poisonous spiders, snakes, and other dangerous creatures. Always watch your step when trekking through the jungle. Never stick your hand somewhere you haven't first seen with your eyes.

**As of 2018, the safety situation in Nicaragua has changed.** [Be sure to check out our dedicated safety guide](#) for more information on security issues and civil unrest in Nicaragua.



Want to save the world? Single-use plastic bottles are a huge threat to Marine Life - Be a part of the solution and travel with a **filter water bottle**.

The [GRAYL GEOPRESS](#) water bottle is the ONLY all-in-one filter water bottle setup you'll need. Whether you need to purify the water from a hostel sink in Kathmandu or a stream trickle in the Andes, the Geopress has got you covered. Check out our [full review](#) here for more convincing.

## Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Noll in Nicaragua

Nicaragua has long been renowned as one of the party capitals for travelers backpacking Central America. Cocaine is cheap and pretty easy to find if that's your bag. Booze is cheap and Nicaraguans enjoy sinking a few beers in the evening.

The people are friendly, Tinder works a treat to meet up with locals and other backpackers, and there are plenty of beach parties, clubs and raves... if you know where to look!

Avoid traveling with drugs in Nicaragua, the police sometimes strip search backpackers and never cross an international border carrying drugs. If you do choose to indulge in heavier partying whilst in Nicaragua, take it easy - cocaine in Nicaragua is strong, cheap and addictive.



## Get Insured Before Backpacking Nicaragua

Even if you are only going on a short trip, you should always travel with insurance. Have fun on your backpacking adventure but please do get insurance – take it from someone who has racked up tens of thousands of bucks on an insurance claim before, you need it.

As a wise man once said, if you can't afford travel insurance, you shouldn't be travelling – so be sure to get your backpacker insurance sorted before you head off on a backpacking adventure! Travelling without insurance would be fucking stupid. I highly recommend [World Nomads](#).

Find out why I recommend World Nomads, check out my [World Nomads Insurance review](#).

## What to Pack for Nicaragua

On every adventure, there are five things I never go traveling without:

	<p><b>1. Security Belt with Hidden Pocket:</b> I never hit the road without my security belt. This is a regular looking belt with a concealed pocket on the inside – you can hide up to twenty notes inside and wear it through airport scanners without it setting them off. This is hands down the best way to hide your cash.</p>
	<p><b>2. Travel Water Bottle:</b> Always travel with a water bottle – it'll save you money and reduce your plastic footprint on our planet. AR bottles are tough, lightweight and maintain the temperature of your beverage – so you can enjoy a cold red bull, or a hot coffee, no matter where you are. For every AR bottle sold, we donate 10% to PlasticOceans.org – an initiative to reduce plastic in our oceans!</p>
	<p><b>3. Microfibre Towel:</b> It's always worth packing a proper towel. Hostel towels are scummy and take forever to dry. Microfibre towels dry quickly, are compact, lightweight and can be used as a blanket or yoga mat if need be.</p>
	<p><b>4. Headtorch:</b> I would never travel without a head torch. Even if you only end up using it once, a decent head torch could save your life. If you want to explore caves, unlit temples or simply find your way to the bathroom during a blackout, a head torch is a must. Currently, I'm using the Petzl LED headlamp with red light (which insects can't see).</p>



**5. Hammock:** Taking a tent backpacking is not always practical but hammocks are lightweight, cheap, strong, sexy (chicks dig hammocks) and allow you to pitch up for the night pretty much anywhere. Right now, I'm rocking an Active Roots parachute hammock – it's light, colorful and tough.

For plenty more inspiration on what to pack, check out my full [backpacking packing list](#).

## Look Awesome, Do Awesome!



Want to embrace the hippy backpacker style and look? [Active Roots hippy trousers](#) are chic, comfortable and perfect for yogis, backpackers and adventurers alike. Help us **support the elephant conservation centre in Laos!** 10% of your purchase goes towards saving the Asian elephant population so you can look awesome, feel awesome and do awesome – all at once. Pretty fucking awesome right? [Use the code ' TBB10 ' for 10% off your order.](#)

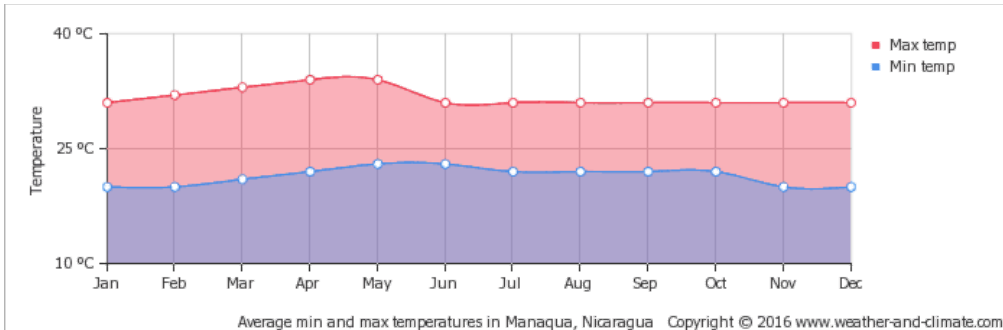
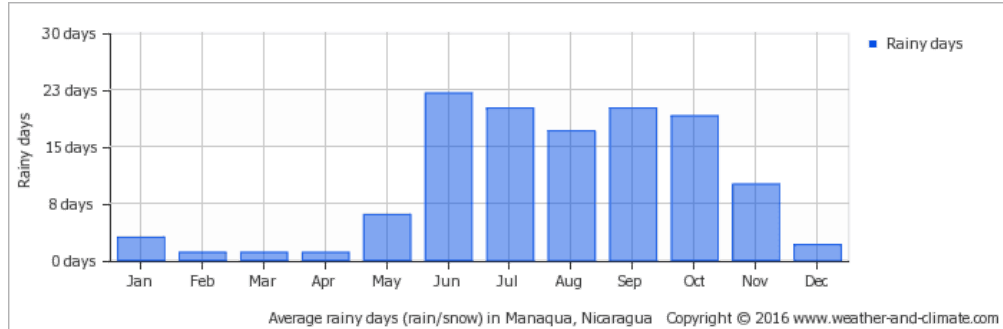
## Best Time to Travel to Nicaragua

If you can, try to avoid the rainy season and visit the country from November to April. The really popular guest-houses fill up fast so this is a country where it can definitely be worth making reservations.

The best time to go scuba diving or snorkeling in the Corn Islands is December- March. Expect more travelers in general around the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Low season is May to October. As it's raining all the time, making some rural area are hard to pass & hiking trails super slippery. However, this weather pulls in some of the biggest swells, especially on the Pacific side of Nicaragua, where all the good surfing breaks are.

High season is between December & April, when the sun is shining. Like everywhere prices increase, accommodation books out & the tourist hot spots are packed! [Check the weather in Nicaragua here.](#)



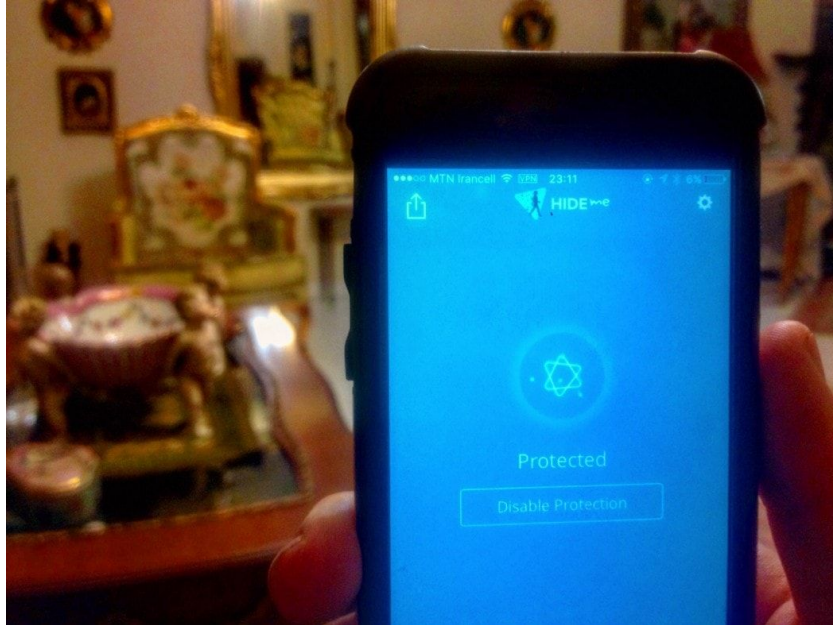
## Apps to download before traveling to Nicaragua

Be warned, free wifi in Nicaragua is hard to find and will probably be painfully slow. Don't use your precious moments downloading apps while backpacking Nicaragua, prepare before you go!

**Maps.Me** - Prone to getting lost or taking that 'shortcut' that adds another few hours onto a simple walk? This app is definitely for you. My favourite offline maps app, download your map and route before you venture out to keep you on track while backpacking Nicaragua.

**XE Currency** - I used this a lot when backpacking Nicaragua. It is a great help while calculating expenses.

**HIDE.ME** - I always have a VPN ready to go on both my phone and laptop, I personally use Hide Me which is one of the fastest and most reliable options out there. This particular VPN allows for up to five connections which is handy for keeping all your devices connected without having to purchase multiple VPN packages.



Surfing the web in private using hide.me

## Nicaragua Travel Guide to Getting Around

Many backpackers fly into the international airport in [Managua](#) and start their adventure there. If you're already backpacking Central America, you can cross to Nicaragua from Costa Rica or Honduras by bus or car.

Bear in mind that you will have to pay \$12 at any land crossing. There are no international trains going into Nicaragua, but there are international buses available between Managua and San Jose, Costa Rica, San Salvador, El Salvador and Honduras.

They are air conditioned and make fuel and food stops along the way. If you are planning to go by bus make sure you book in advance as the buses between the major cities can fill up days ahead of departure dates.

The companies [Transnica](#) and [Tica Bus](#) are fairly reliable.

There are also cheap but terribly uncomfortable "[chicken buses](#)" a few times a week between Managua and Guatemala City for \$20. It is quite an experience traveling to Nicaragua in a chicken bus, they are seriously funky...

## Entry requirements for Nicaragua

Citizens of some countries like the US, UK and a lot of European countries can travel to Nicaragua without a visa. Other tourists can obtain a **Tourist Card** for \$10 valid for 1 month to 3 months (depending on citizenship) upon arrival.

You need to have a valid passport with at least six months to run to enter Nicaragua. There is also a \$32 departure tax which is included in airfares with major airlines. This departure tax applies only if you are flying out of the country. The exit fee at a land border *should* be around \$3 USD.



## How to Travel in Nicaragua

Nicaragua offers a crazy range of travel experiences. It might take some getting used to, but boy is this country fun! To properly explore Nicaragua I recommend catching buses - they are cheap and very frequent. Be sure to try out at least one chicken bus experience!

**Bus** - This is definitely the main mode of travel in Nicaragua, and a great way to get to know the country's geography, people, and even the culture. You cannot be polite on a chicken bus; grab a seat and grab it fast or end up sitting on a sack of rice (if you're lucky!).

Often your backpack will be thrown on top of the bus, never fear; shit doesn't tend to go missing. Still, keep your valuables in your daypack and your daypack on you. Most long-distance buses have TVs (surprisingly!) that play popular films and they also serve snacks and drinks during the journey and at stops. Beware of the endless loops of terrible Latino movies...

A chicken bus seat would cost you roughly \$1. You could also catch an Express Bus, be sure to book it at least a day in advance. A ticket should cost you about \$6. Another option could be to catch minibuses.

They run regularly between Managua and nearby cities like Granada, Leon, Masaya, Jinotepe and Chinandega. Like Express buses they make fewer stops but expect them to be overcrowded as jamming more people in means the drivers make more cash... There are many advantages to being a shorter backpacker when travelling in Nicaragua!

**Plane** - This is obviously more expensive than catching buses, but if you're short on time this is the best way to get anywhere on the Atlantic Coast.

**Boat** - Boat is the only way to get to some of the islands like Isla de Ometepe. You could also take weekly trips if you are comfortable on a boat for long hours. It's a pretty cool way of exploring Nicaragua.

**Taxi** - Be very careful and [haggle](#) as much as you can in Managua. Check that the taxi sign is on the roof and that the taxi operator license is clearly visible in the front seat. In smaller towns, there is a fixed rate so it's fairly easy.

## Hitchhiking in Nicaragua

[Hitchhiking](#) is generally easy whilst backpacking Nicaragua. Most people don't have cars, so if you are in a rural area, the few with cars or trucks tend to stop for lots of people. They get a kick out of foreigners. So make sure you act like a fascinating and exotic tourist.

Hitchhiking is common in rural areas and small towns, but not recommended in Managua. Nicaraguans themselves usually only travel in the backs of trucks.

Some drivers may ask for a little money for bringing you along but it's usually not more than a dollar. Like in most of Central America, there are lots of mini buses and it's not so easy to spot taxis on the road, be sure you know if you're paying or hitching free when you climb in any type of vehicle.



Thumbing a ride in the back of a pickup truck in Guatemala

## Helpful Hitchhiking Travel Phrases in Nicaragua

Here people refer to hitchhiking as *ride*, *Hacer ride* or *buscar un ride*

Hello - ***Hola***

Are you driving to - ***Quizá está usted viajando a ...?***

Can I ride with you? - ***Me permite viajar con usted?***

Can I get out right here? - ***Quiero salir aquí, por favor.***

Thanks for the ride - ***Gracias por llevarme!***

East, West, North, South- ***Este, oeste, norte, sur.***

Without money – ***sin dinero***

I don't want to pay – ***No quiero pagar***

## Travel Onwards from Nicaragua

There are several land border crossings between Nicaragua and El Salvador, [Honduras](#), and [Costa Rica](#). It is easy to do this on your own; just catch a local bus to the border town, walk across, and you're on your way!

## Nicaragua Backpacking Costs

Good news amigos: Nicaragua is one of the cheapest countries in Central America to go backpacking. You can eat well, move from place to place with ease, and score some pretty cheap accommodation.

I spent on average between \$25-30 USD a day whilst I was backpacking in Nicaragua. It is certainly possible to do it cheaper than that if you are camping heaps, hitchhiking, and cooking some of your own food.

Here is a breakdown of what you can expect to spend on your backpacking Nicaragua adventure...

**Dorm Bed in a Hostel:**\$8-12

**Small Basic Room for Two:**\$25-30

**Short public bus ride (1 hour or less):**  
\$1.50-4

**Long distance bus:** \$5-10

**Set meal in a local restaurant:**\$3-5

**Dinner in a tourist western-style restaurant:**\$8-12

**Beer in the shop:** \$1-2

**Fresh Coconut Water:** \$1.50-2



Kayaking in the beautiful waters, Photo: Traveltipsor


## Money in Nicaragua

There are lots of international ATMS, but they can be tough to find once you are outside of the cities and are in more remote areas. It's advisable to avoid small ATM transactions and get out a bunch of cash at once - just make sure you hide it well.

If you need to transfer money internationally, [use Transferwise](#), it's the fastest and cheapest way to move money around when travelling.



You should always have some emergency cash hidden on you and I've written an entire post on the best [places to hide your money](#).

	<p>You should always have <b>emergency cash hidden on you</b> - pick up this awesome security belt with its hidden pocket before you travel, it's perfect for hiding money, a passport photocopy.</p> <p><a href="#">GET IT HERE</a></p>
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## Top Tips for Broke Backpackers

To keep your spending to an absolute minimum whilst traveling in Nicaragua I recommend sticking to these basic rules of budget adventuring....

**Camp:** With plenty of gorgeous natural places to camp, Nicaragua is an excellent place to take a tent. Check out this post for a breakdown of the [best tents to take backpacking](#).

**Cook your own food:** I took a small [gas cooker](#) with me to Nicaragua and cooked a lot of my own meals whilst hitching and camping, I saved a fortune.

**Pack your bible:** Learn how to travel the world on \$10 a day whilst you get your shit sorted, discover the secrets to long term travel and build an online income. [Check it out here](#).

**Hitchhike:** In Nicaragua, it is so so easy to thumb a ride and it is an ace way to keep your transport costs down and instead spend it on smashing experiences. So hitchhike as much as you can when backpacking Nicaragua.

**Pack a travel water bottle** and save money every day!



Camping out in the open

## Volunteering in Nicaragua

Long term travel is awesome. Giving back is awesome too. For backpackers looking to travel long-term on a budget in **Nicaragua** whilst making a real impact on local communities, look no further than [World Packers](#). World Packers is an excellent platform **connecting travelers with meaningful volunteer positions throughout the world**.

In exchange for a few hours of work each day, your room and board are covered.

Backpackers can spend long periods of time volunteering in an awesome place without spending any money. Meaningful life and travel experiences are rooted in stepping out of your comfort zone and into the world of a purposeful project.

Worldpackers opens the doors for work opportunities in hostels, homestays, NGOs, and eco-projects around the world. We've tried and approved them ourselves - check out our [Worldpackers in-depth review here](#).

If you're ready to create a life-changing travel experience and give back to the community, [join the Worldpacker community now](#). As a Broke Backpacker reader, you'll get a special discount of \$20. Just use the discount code BROKEBACKPACKER and your membership is discounted from \$49 a year to only \$29.

## Travel Nicaragua for Free

Are you a native English speaker looking to earn cash whilst traveling the world? Teaching English online is a great way to earn a consistent income—from anywhere in the world with a good internet connection. Depending on your qualifications (or your motivation to obtain


qualifications like a TEFL certificate) you can teach English remotely from your laptop, save some cash for your next adventure, and make a positive impact on the world by improving another person's language skills! It's a win-win! Check out this detailed article for everything you need to know to [start teaching English online](#).

In addition to giving you the qualifications to teach English online, [TEFL courses](#) open up a huge range of opportunities and you can find teaching work all over the world. To find out more about TEFL courses and how you can teach English around the world, read my in-depth report on [teaching English abroad](#).

Broke Backpacker readers get a 35% discount on TEFL courses with [MyTEFL](#) (simply enter the code BACKPKR), to find out more, please read my in-depth report on teaching English abroad. Whether you are keen to teach English online or looking to take your teaching game a step further by finding a job teaching English in a foreign country, getting your TEFL certificate is absolutely a step in the right direction.

## Internet in Nicaragua

You can get free wi-fi at pretty much any hostel, hotel, or café. Internet has greatly improved in Nicaragua in the last few years. However, in smaller beach towns don't expect fast internet, if at all. The Corn Islands and other remote parts of Nicaragua are also off-the-grid, so enjoy it!

	<p>One of the best investments you can make is a <b>worldwide travel adapter</b> that will work anywhere! The one featured here is tough, reliable and a solid buy - Don't leave home without one.</p> <p><a href="#">GET IT HERE</a></p>
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## Must Try Experiences in Nicaragua

### People in Nicaragua

I found that Nicaraguan locals were very welcoming people. They have not yet felt the jaded indifference that sometimes accompanies mass tourism destinations.

They are full of humor and dirty jokes. Learn some Spanish so you can understand them! In talking to some ex-Sandinista revolutionaries, I gained invaluable perspective on what life was like in Nicaragua during that period. I found them to be surprisingly open about their experiences.

If you visit any farms in Nicaragua, expect a very warm welcome. Farm owners/workers are happy to tell you about what they do, and you can score some fantastic coffee if you visit a coffee operation. Support fair trade and organic agricultural practices at all cost!

## Food in Nicaragua

Eating delicious food is one of the best parts about traveling. There are no shortage of tasty things to try in Nicaragua. Eat local as much as possible!

You will find many fast food joints, especially in the cities. But you certainly did not come to Nicaragua to eat at Mcdonalds, right?

**Gallo Pinto** — A dish as famous in Nicaragua as it is in Costa Rica. This tasty bean and rice combo is a national staple of the country.

**Fresh Seafood** — If you find yourself on the coast, trying the fresh fish is a must.

**Ceviche** — One of my favorite foods of all time. A dish made up of raw fish marinated in lime juice, which usually includes onions, tomatoes, cilantro, and chili peppers.

**Chicharrónes** — Fried pork belly or pork skin, typically served with a dipping sauce or as part of another dish. A great bar snack.

**Arroz con Pollo** — Chicken served with rice and fried plantains. A tasty comfort food and often great bang for your buck.



A typical tasty plate in Nicaragua.

## Trekking in Nicaragua

Do you love trekking? You have come to the right place my friends. Nicaragua offers up some excellent trekking opportunities for those looking to spend time outdoors.

There are plenty of awesome day hikes to be found all over the country. If you are looking for a multi-day backpacking trip, [Quetzaltrекkers](#) is a great organization offering just that. All the money they make from running trekking trips goes directly in supporting kids and local schools. A trip with them is very reasonably priced and was a great experience for me. I can't say enough good things about the folks at Quetzaltrекkers!



Trekking in Nicaragua is the best way to get out and explore!

## Scuba Diving in Nicaragua

The Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua has some excellent places to go diving. If you do not have a PADI certification, you can take an open water course on one of the islands. It is not the cheapest place in Central America to get certified, though to be honest I can't think of a better location to do it in.

If you already have your PADI cert and you make it to the Corn Islands, it is an obvious choice to go diving! The water visibility can be terrific when the sea is calm and the sun is shining (which is often, see *weather in Nicaragua* section).

I recommend shopping around at the different dive shops to see who has the best prices. If you intend to do multiple dives, usually you can negotiate a deal with the price.

## Surfing in Nicaragua

If you haven't figured it out by now, Nicaragua is home to some world-class surf beaches. If you are looking for somewhere to dig in, learn to surf, and become a beach bum, Nicaragua is one of the cheapest places in the world to do that.

The surf in Nicaragua varies, but in general the waves are perfect for both beginners and those with more advanced levels. Hit the beach, catch some waves, and leave (or not) with immense satisfaction.



Surf and smiles for days... Photo: Pixabay

## Festivals in Nicaragua

Nicaraguans love to party. There are a variety of fun festivals taking place though out the year.

**Magma Festival:** Nicaragua's largest EDM festival in the shadow of a volcano on Ometepe Island. Come on out for an epic couple of days.

**Rio San Juan Carnival:** Lucky enough to be in San Juan in January? This festival should not be missed if you're in town! Expect plenty of dancing, local artisans and delicious food.

**International Poetry Festival, Grenada:** An annual international festival that takes place in the city of Granada. More than 150 poets from all parts of the world congregate at this event to recite their best poetry.

**Latin American Surfing Competition:** As much as surfing in Nicaragua has evolved, so have surfing-related activities developed throughout the country. This event is the biggest of its kind in Nicaragua. Come out to see some excellent surfing and the associated fun night life. This fest takes places just outside of San Juan Del Sur at Playa Madera.



A carnival celebration in Nicaragua...

## **Brief History of Nicaragua**

Nicaragua's modern history is rooted in the story of the Sandinista rebellion, their brief success, and ultimate defeat suffered at the hands of a US backed military apparatus. Wounds from the revolution period have healed to a degree, but there are still many people who currently live in Nicaragua whose lives were changed forever during the years of revolution.

Although the initial overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1978–79 was a bloody affair, the Contra War of the 1980s took the lives of tens of thousands of Nicaraguans and was the subject of fierce international debate.

During the 1980s both the FSLN (a leftist collection of political parties) and the Contras (a rightist collection of counter-revolutionary groups) received large amounts of aid from the Cold War super-powers (respectively, the Soviet Union and the United States).

The Contra War ultimately ended following the signing of the Tela Accord in 1989 and the demobilization of the FSLN and Contra armies. A second election in 1990 resulted in the election of a majority of anti-Sandinista parties and the FSLN handing over power.

It is unbelievable to me that the USA government so openly supported the Contras and were never held accountable for crimes against humanity, which certainly occurred in many forms during the war. [CIA trained Contras](#)? Yeah that was a thing.

## Modern Life in Nicaragua

Post revolution life in Nicaragua has seen slow development of the country's economy and standard of living. In recent years, Nicaragua's economy is on the rise, especially in the tourism sector.

As Nicaragua's tourism industry expands, it is my hope that the natural treasures of the country are protected in a reasonable way, the way things have been organized in Costa Rica.

Nicaragua is decades removed from war, and there is a feeling of peace felt through out the country. I hope for the sake of Nicaragua and it's people that it stays that way. The way things are looking now in Nicaragua, I am filled with positive optimism for this beautiful country.



Members of the counter-revolutionary force, the Contras in the early 1980s. Photo: Wikicommons



## Being a Responsible Backpacker in Nicaragua

**Reduce your plastic footprint:** Perhaps the best thing you can do for our planet is to make sure you do NOT add to the plastic problem all over the world. Don't buy one-use water bottles, the plastic ends up in landfill or in the ocean. Instead, pack a [tough travel water bottle](#).

Go and watch A Plastic Ocean on Netflix – it'll change how you view the plastic problem in the world; you need to understand what we are up against. If you think it doesn't matter, get off my fucking site.

Don't pick up single use plastic bags, you're a backpacker – take your daypack if you need to go to the shop or run errands.

Bear in mind, that many animal products in countries you travel through will not be ethically farmed and won't be of the highest quality. I'm a carnivore but when I'm on the road, I only eat chicken. Mass-farming of cows etc leads to the rainforest being cut down – which is obviously a huge problem.

Recently, my gear-venture, Active Roots has started to sell water bottles. For every [Active Roots water bottle](#) sold, we donate 10% to PlasticOceans.org – an awesome initiative aimed at educating people on the risk of single use plastic and helping to clean up our oceans. Help save the planet, whether you take an Active Roots bottle or not – TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for your plastic footprint, don't be a dick.

Need more guidance? – Check out our post on [how to be a responsible backpacker](#).

Backpacking Nicaragua can be one hell of a party at times. Take it from me, it can be easy to get carried away. It is important to keep in mind that you are an ambassador for your country, which is awesome. We can make a positive impact on people when we travel and get rid of any ugly stereotypes that may be associated with your country.

Avoid eating at fancy gringo-owned restaurants. I don't care how badly you want that lasagne and red wine. You make a choice with every dollar you spend. Try to spend your money in places where the experience is mutually rewarding.

I know it can be hard, but do your best to use the **least amount of plastic water bottles** that you can. Refill the ones that you do buy! Use a Steripen. Refill at your hostel! There are plenty of ways to reduce plastic!!!

Backpacking Nicaragua or any country for that matter often illuminates some of the great socio-economic inequalities of the world. Never take it for granted that you are healthy and

financially able to go traveling. Show the world around you some gratitude and help to make a positive impact on it.

## Final Thoughts on Nicaragua

I hope you have enjoyed this Nicaragua travel guide. You are now ready to get your boots on the ground and experience this magical country for yourself amigos! Backpacking Nicaragua was one of the most fun and rewarding times of my life.

Nicaragua is one hell of a good time and it remains one of my favorite countries I visited in all of Latin America. I am certain that you will leave hungry for more. One trip simply isn't enough to absorb all of the awesomeness that Nicaragua has to offer. Enjoy the hell out of the paradise that is Nicaragua!

**[Want to learn how to travel the world on \\$10 a day? Check out the Broke Backpacker's Bible for FREE!](#)**

*“**Yay for transparency!**Some of the links in this post are affiliate links. This means that if you book your accommodation, buy a book or sort your insurance, I'll earn a small commission at no extra cost to you. I only link to stuff I've actually used and never endorse crap. Your support helps me keep the site going.”*

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## Need More Inspiration?

- Onwards to [Guatemala Backpacking Guide](#)
- Onwards to [Costa Rica Backpacking Guide](#)
- [Is Nicaragua Safe?](#)
- Check out the [Best Hostels in Leon](#)
- [Somoto Canyon in Nicaragua](#)
- [Central America Travel Guide Itineraries](#)
- [Is Honduras Safe?](#)