

Ecological Tourism

Eco-tourism aims to be ecologically and socially conscious, it focuses on local culture, wilderness, and adventure. Nicaragua's eco-tourism is growing with every passing year, it boasts a number of eco-tourist tours and is the perfect places for adventurers. Nicaragua has three eco-regions, the Pacific, Central and Atlantic which contain volcanoes, tropical rainforest and agricultural land

Nicaragua is home to 78 protected areas covering over 20% of it landmass, and is home to 7% of the world's biodiversity, more than Costa Rica, which is thought to hold more natural areas than Nicaragua. Nicaragua is also home to Bosawas, located in Northern Nicaragua, which is the largest rainforest north of the Amazon in Brazil, and the largest lake in Central America, Lake Cocibolca. Lake Cocibolca attracts its fair number of tourists yearly, most of which primarily visit Ometepe, which is a large volcanic island formed by two volcanoes in the lake. Tourists typically visit and explore the flora and fauna found in the Charco Verde Nature Reserve.

Nicaragua's rich biodiversity also attracts many tourists to protected areas such as the Indio Maíz Biological Reserve, which holds a higher number in species of trees, birds, and insects than all of Europe.



Ometepe Island (archaeological site):



Ometepe Island is an important archaeological site, located in Lake Nicaragua in the Republic of Nicaragua. The island has an area of 276 km² and is the largest volcanic island in the world located within a lake. The two volcanoes, Concepción and Maderas, are joined by a low isthmus to form one island in the shape of an hourglass. There are an enormous amount of prehispanic statues, petroglyphs and pottery found on the island, and the area is believed to be an important ceremonial center for the its ancient inhabitants. As of June 2010, Ometepe was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Preserve

The island is known for its various tourist related activities including, kayaking, hiking, mountain biking, dirt biking, and kite boarding. Because of the volcanic ash in the soil, it serves as one of the main agriculture points of the country, housing many organic farms that produce a variety of goods for various hotels and eco-establishments.

Volcanos

Volcán Concepción (once named Ometepe Volcano) is on the northwest half of the island. Concepción is a symmetrical cone, and is an active volcano. Concepción reaches an altitude of 1,610 m making Ometepe the world's highest lake island. Concepción is considered the

most perfectly formed volcano cone in all of Central America.

The southeast half of the island consists of Volcán Maderas, which has a crater lake and supports a diverse rainforest environment. It has a large lagoon inside of its crater, and is surrounded by an exceptionally diverse cloud forest. The volcano is covered with coffee and tobacco plantations, and is a very popular eco-tourist destination.

Apoyo Lagoon Natural Reserve

Lake Apoyo has various tourist attractions such as dark sand beaches for swimming, kayaking, hiking, SCUBA diving, bird watching, paragliding, and boating. Recently, petroglyphs and artifacts of indigenous peoples have been found in the reserve. Strict laws limiting human activity exist in the reserve, and all development is in accordance with the laws regarding Nature Reserves in Nicaragua.

The reserve houses a tropical dry forest ecosystem, within the reserve the flora consists of over 500 species of plants and tropical dry trees and a large variety of orchids. The fauna consists of mammals such as Variegated Squirrels, opossums, anteaters, pacas, jaguarundis, Howler and White-faced Capuchin-monkeys, as well as a variety of reptiles such as green iguanas and common boas. Over 230 species of birds have been documented in the reserve, as well as two-hundred twenty species of butterflies. Lake Apoyo also contains a variety of fish species, including six species of mojarras, which are to be found exclusively in the lagoon. There is a multinational research team directed by the Nicaraguan NGO, FUNDECI/GAIA, which manages a research station on the shore of the lake.

Laguna de Apoyo is a clean, blue, and thermally vented 48-square kilometer body of water contained inside the crater of the Apoyo Volcano. Laguna de Apoyo is one of Nicaragua's most beautiful natural wonders, and for anyone traveling through Nicaragua it should not be missed.



Solentiname Islands

(featured in the NY Times Travel Section: *In Lush Nicaragua, Legacy of a Priest*)

The **Solentiname Islands** are an archipelago towards the southern end of Lake Nicaragua. They are tropical in every sense. They are covered in tropical tree species, transitional between wet and dry tropical, and are home to various colorful bird species, including various kinds of parrot and toucans.

The 36 islands are close enough for kayakers to paddle from one to another, but they're far enough into the lake that a private motorboat or a public ferry is needed to reach them. Only four of the islands have full-time inhabitants, and the total population today is about 750. Yet, thanks in large part to the efforts of a Roman Catholic priest named Ernesto Cardenal, vivid art produced on the islands can be found all over Nicaragua and has been exhibited far beyond. The islands' tranquility and color variety are likely what has attracted artists to their shores. Painters and woodcarvers share the islands with farmers and fishermen.



Somoto Canyon National Monument

The **Somoto Canyon**, one of oldest rock formations in Central America, has become one of the main attractions of Northern Nicaragua due to its recently "discovered" tourist potential. It is an impressive site with a unique scenario. Between its walls, visitors can undertake various activities.

The vertical walls extend for approximately five miles, on a sinuous path whose width varies between 10 and 15 meters. The waters from the Comali River (from Honduras) and Tapacali join to form the Coco River. In its bottom, the calmness of the water is interrupted by rocky formations that have created seven or eight small ponds with an environment filled with life, plants and fish.

Somoto Canyon is made up of volcanic rock (about 10 million years old), and metamorphic rocks, (about 50 million years old). The canyon is the result of faults in the area near Somoto, where they are intermingle with different geological terrains.



Miskito Cays

Striking, turquoise-colored Caribbean Sea, 45 kilometers offshore, speckled with more than 70 marine formations including islands and mangrove forests that provide shelter to a stunning variety of plant and animal life. Small communities of fishermen reside in houses built above the water, isolated from the outside world and dedicated to artisanal fishery. This is an area, only accessible by an 80-kilometers private boat ride that offers one of Nicaragua's most interesting destinations for adventurous visitors.

In the center of the Miskito Cay there is a shallow, circular lagoon that is connected to the sea through a natural canal. This lagoon is connected to areas that include swamps with fresh/brackish water and mangrove forests. Around the cays there are also important areas where large seagrass beds provide feeding grounds for marine turtles like the Hawksbill Turtle and the Green Turtle who generally nest in Costa Rica but feed in this area.

Their natural splendor can be enjoyed by cruising around them in a boat, or by hiking one of the few Cays that actually possess a sandy base. The largest Cay of all, Miskito Cay, offers a wide variety of natural environments. A large inner lagoon surrounded by mangrove forest provides spectacular views and can be easily accessed by boat. The mangrove forest itself can be explored as well.

