JOURNEY
LATIN AMERICA



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SIGNATURE NICARAGUA: FIRE, WATER AND REVOLUTION

13 days from **£3,075pp**

NICARAGUA / RIO SAN JUAN / GRANADA / OMETEPE ISLAND / PACIFIC COAST / LEON



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love

OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

A medley of Spanish colonial cities, visible wildlife, volcanoes and the continent's largest freshwater lake. Travel down jungle-fringed Rio San Juan, visit tranquil Ometepe Island, relax on unspoilt beaches on the Pacific Coast and learn about a history of rebellion and innovation.

DAY 1	**Arrive in Managua. Transfer to your hotel in the capital.**
DAY 2	**Drive to San Carlos; by boat along Rio San Juan to El Castillo; caiman spotting.**
DAY 3	**Nature walk in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve; guided fortress tour.**
DAY 4	**Return by boat to San Carlos, continue to Granada.**
DAY 5	**Guided tour of colonial Granada, lake boat trip to las Isletas.**
DAY 6	**By ferry to Ometepe island with its twin volcanoes.**
DAY 7	**Guided tour of the island, its nature reserves and pre-Columbian artefacts.**
DAY 8	**Return to the mainland by ferry; Continue by road to San Juan del Sur.**
DAYS 9 &	**At leisure on the Pacific Coast**
DAY 11	**By road to León.**
DAY 12	**At leisure in León.**
DAY 13	**Road transfer to Managua airport for international flight home.**

ITINERARY

The variety you will discover on your highlights holiday is staggering - the volcanic and jungle-choked scenery, timeless colonial cities, cultures ranging from Spanish to indigenous communities: you could extend your trip to visit its English speaking Caribbean Corn islands.

Nicaragua, following a history of political and economic upheavals is now a peaceful and congenial place which has become impressively reconciled with the conflicts of its past. Visitors are increasingly drawn to its wonderfully unspoilt landscapes, where the bucolic tranquility of countryside little changed over the centuries has as its counterpoint seething volcanoes and the legacy of earthquakes in times gone by.

Here you'll find a couple of the continent's finest Spanish colonial cities, Granada and León. Spruced up now, with their central Spanish cores faithfully restored, they have a real historical atmosphere, with lovely old mansions, baroque churches and cobbled lanes.

Beyond, rising from the vast silvery waters of Lake Nicaragua is the dozy island Ometepe, whose isolation has protected it from the political upheavals of the past, and held back modern development. Rio San Juan is too important a river to be called a backwater, but its jungle-fringed banks have a timeless, wilderness feel, and the quaint little port of wooden houses on stilts, El Castillo, will make you feel you are on a real adventure of discovery. San Juan del Sur, a rustic and laid-back fishing village on the Pacific Coast, has a string of yawning, golden sand beaches where turtles hatch between September and April.

DAY 1

Arrive in Managua. Transfer to your hotel in the capital.

You will be met at the airport by out local representative who will accompany you on the transfer to your hotel in the capital, Managua.

DAY 2

Drive to San Carlos; by boat along Rio San Juan to El Castillo; caiman spotting.

Travel along the shores of Lake Nicaragua, the second largest body of freshwater in the Americas, using the new yet still little-used road through rolling cattle country and small cowboy towns, to San Carlos on the south-eastern shores of the lake.

The liveliest part of quiet and somewhat ramshackle San Carlos is down by the pier: ferries and private launches jostle for space with fishing boats. The roads from the north end here: to travel east to the settlements along Rio San Juan you have to take a boat.

You'll embark on a 90-minute river journey by river. The banks are initially farmed, with fields of maize and grazing cattle punctuated by small jetties and rural homes. However, as you travel downstream, the vegetation gradually becomes dominated by natural tropical forest. There's plenty of wildlife to be seen: scores of snowy ibis alight upon the branches overhanging the water and you may spot monkeys swinging through the taller trees or a caiman lazing on naked logs.

You turn a bend in the river to be greeted by a spectacular and unexpected sight: on a rare hilltop a vast, stone-built Spanish fortress glowering over a series of white-water rapids and the squat, wooden stilted houses of the quirky little port El Castillo.

In the evening, go searching for caimans by boat under the moonlight, accompanied only by a specialist guide. As you glide for 90 minutes through the darkness, a journey orchestrated by the nocturnal sounds of the rainforest, the guide will be using a spotlight to reflect the beady red eye of caimans (alligators) at repose in the tropical vegetation along the water's edge.

DAY 3

Nature walk in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve; guided fortress tour.

Just 3km downstream from El Castillo you reach the Indio – Maíz Biosphere Reserve, dedicated to the preservation and research of its biological diversity. Set off with your guide on the 2km Bartola Trail, a clear path which winds its way through the forest, which is replete with tall, thick-waisted trees overhanging, outsized tropical plants with huge waxy leaves, and ferns sheltering poison-dart frogs not much larger than a fingernail. You may be lucky and spot a family of monkeys watching you from the safety of a branch; or a battalion of leaf-cutter ants may cross your path. If the weather and river levels allow you can kayak along the San Juan or Bartola river spotting sunbathing turtles and caimans.

El Castillo fortress, the oldest building in Nicaragua, dating back to 1673, was founded by the Spanish to protect the affluent trading city of Granada from what they considered to be European pirates. This location was chosen because the fort could be constructed on the top of a relatively high hill, from which the soldiers could have a 360 degree view of the jungle around and the river approaches: the fort was also protected by the presence of the rapids below. You will be escorted on a tour of the fort, with its silent cannons; you can enjoy the expansive views with a more pacific intent. Illustrated boards relate the story, including the capture and brief tenure of the fort by the British Navy led by Horatio Nelson (aged 22).

DAY 4

Return by boat to San Carlos, continue to Granada.

Return by boat to San Carlos, travel by road through the back waters of rural Nicaragua to the beautiful colonial town of Granada, on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. Here, it appears to the observer as an inland sea, with silky silver waves tipped by white horses when the wind blows.

Founded in 1524, Granada lies at the foot of Mombacho volcano and is the oldest city in the New World. At its height, it became very rich on the back of the gold trade. The city was regularly plundered by pirates and completely razed by American mercenary William Walker at the beginning of the 19th century. However, Granada has since been wonderfully restored and its colourful colonial houses and cobbled streets that run down to the shores of Lake Nicaragua are a delight.

DAY 5

Guided tour of colonial Granada, lake boat trip to las Isletas.

Take a private guided city tour of Granada, visiting its colonial churches, strolling down the narrow streets and passing graceful colonial houses. Many of the places of interest are within the vicinity of the main square. These include the beautiful, baroque La Merced church, the Casa de Los Tres Mundos – now a cultural centre for local musicians and dancers; and the 16th-century San Francisco convent.

Embark on a small launch for a relaxing boat ride in the sheltered waters around the peaceful Isletas, hundreds of tiny, bright green and thickly forested islands created by eruptions from the bulky Mombacho volcano which looms over the region. Depending on the weather and time of day, you may observe prolific bird life. Small fishing communities live here and some islands host impressive weekend retreats owned by wealthy Nicaraguans.

DAY 6

By ferry to Ometepe island with its twin volcanoes.

Embark a ferry to take you across the lake to Ometepe Island (1hr). The relaxed, tranquil island rises majestically from Lake Nicaragua. It is dominated by twin conical volcanoes, Concepción and Maderas. The island is partially blanketed with lush jungle vegetation populated by monkeys and a plethora of bird species.

The island is also peppered with citrus, banana, watermelon, avocado and cacao plantations – thanks to the island's fertile volcanic soil. Life here has been unchanging for decades if not centuries, in spite of the upheavals caused by revolution and civil war elsewhere. Only one road has been fully paved, and this, along with the fact that it is only reached by boat, has ensured the enduring feeling of remoteness. Your hotel overlooks the loveliest beach on the islands, fringed by waving palms.

DAY 7

Guided tour of the island, its nature reserves and pre-Columbian artefacts.

Guided tour of the island which only has one proper road, circumnavigating it close to the coast. Among other varied activities, visit the little El Ceibo museum of pre-Columbian art and petroglyphs scattered around the island.

You'll stroll through an attractive nature reserve, Charco Verde, where palm trees and densely-packed, fruit-bearing tropical vegetation define the lake shore, which is indented with small volcanic beaches. The reserve is enlivened by the presence of over 200 howler monkeys, and by the calls of migratory and indigenous birds.

DAY 8

Return to the mainland by ferry; Continue by road to San Juan del Sur.

Return to San Jorge and continue by road to San Juan del Sur on the Pacific coast. San Juan del Sur is a fishing village at the head of a horseshoe-shaped bay peppered with private yachts and fishing boats. The laid-back, rustic village has clapboard Victorian houses, open air beach-side restaurants and brilliant sunset views from its tiny bays. Understandably, plenty of European and American ex-pats have put down roots here and the village now has a lively tourist scene.

DAYS 9 & 10

At leisure on the Pacific Coast

North and south of town you find a clutch of unspoilt crescent-shaped bays harbouring soft golden sand, slapped by surf-tipped rollers and backed by rugged hills and cliffs smothered in emerald rainforest. Surfing, fishing, snorkeling, scuba diving and mountain biking are all popular pursuits you might have a go at, and between September and April, Olive Ridley turtles hatch on the beaches just south of town – a spectacular sight.

DAY 11

By road to León.

Proceed to the city of León.

León was founded in 1524 and moved to its present site after being devastated by an earthquake in 1610. Formerly Nicaragua's capital, it has retained much of its ecclesiastical and intellectual heritage. Many of the building walls are daubed with colourful Sandinista and anti-American murals and riddled with bullet holes – a poignant symbol of Nicaragua's turbulent past.

DAY 12

At leisure in León.

Explore Nicaragua's most ebullient city – enlivened by its University and a thriving intellectual and cultural life – and a colonial masterpiece rivaled only by Granada.

DAY 13

Road transfer to Managua airport for international flight home.

By road to Managua airport for your international flight home.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office

Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides

All land and air transport within Latin America

Accommodation as specified

Meals as specified

Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

El Castillo: Caiman-spotting by night

El Castillo: Guided walk in Indo Maíz Biosphere Reserve

El Castillo: Guided tour of the fortress

Granada: Guided city tour

Ometepe Island: Guided tour of the island

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities

Meals other than specified

International flights to Latin America

Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket

Optional excursions

ESSENTIALS

TRANSPORT
6 road journeys; 2 motor launch river journeys, 2 lake ferry journeys & lake boat journeys.

ACCOMMODATION
In general you will be staying in small, mid-range hotels with reasonable facilities. Some are family run and offer a friendly and homely welcome.

MEALS
Breakfast daily, full board days 2, 3.

GUIDES
We carefully select our local partners, some of whom we have worked with for over 25 years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS
13 days, 12 nights: Managua 1; El Castillo 2; Granada 2; Ometepe 2; San Juan del Sur 3; León 2.

CURRENCY
The unit of currency in Nicaragua is the córdoba.

HOW TO TAKE IT
Cash machines are available in Managua airport, and in Granada and León: taking a debit or credit card with a PIN number is the most convenient way of withdrawing money while on your trip and in the more upmarket shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, or the phone line to the bank may be down, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds. You might authorise your bank first, and withdrawals may be limited.

We recommend that you take a reasonable quantity of dollar notes (no more than is covered by your insurance). Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused.

DAILY SPEND
Daily spend It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US$35 per day should cover the cost of meals not included in the holiday price, drinks and the odd souvenir. Eat at the best restaurants and you will pay considerably more.

TIPPING
Tips are welcomed and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will expect a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Tipping guidelines can be found in our Briefing Dossier.

INSURANCE
Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

AIRPORT TAXES
If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TRIP SUITABILITY

Generally this holiday is suitable for all able, reasonably fit travellers including families with children, who accept the sometimes uncertain and rudimentary nature of travel to remote places.

If you have a disability which we should be aware of, please contact us.

CLIMATE

This itinerary takes you to tropical climes where the sun is strong and temperatures high – often over 30°C. Those travelling between May and October should encounter higher temperatures (around 35°C) and high humidity. The 'official' rainy season is May to October.

TRIP SUITABILITY

Bring plenty of light cotton clothing and good, comfortable walking shoes. A waterproof jacket is also advisable. We suggest that you plan to 'layer' your clothing; it is easier and more efficient to put on a couple of light layers than one thick jumper, and sensible to have long sleeves for areas where mosquitos may be lurking. Sandals are a good informal option for evenings. Protection against the sun (sunblock, sun hat) and mosquito repellent are essential and you should bring swimwear. A daypack is useful for carrying sunblock, guidebook, water and any extra layers.

Please note Nicaragua prohibits certain items, including binoculars with night vision capability. Whilst it's our understanding that you can bring a pair of normal binoculars into the country, some travellers have experienced delays upon entry whilst these are checked by customs.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following; typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. For specific requirements you must consult your GP.

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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