



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE NICARAGUA: ADVENTURES BY ROAD

14 days from **£2,350pp**

**NICARAGUA / MATAGALPA AND THE NORTH / LEON / GRANADA / OMETEPE ISLAND /
PACIFIC COAST**



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 self-drive holiday offering freedom and flexibility in an unspoilt, ultra-friendly country. Visit mountainside coffee plantations, restored colonial cities and even a super cool surf-beach resort.

DAY 1	Arrive in Managua, transfer to hotel in a smart residential district.
DAY 2	Pick up your car; drive to Selva Negra cloudforest, Matagalpa
DAY 3	At leisure in the Selva Negra Cloud Forest Reserve.
DAY 4	Drive to León.
DAY 5	Explore León with a local guide
DAY 6	Drive from León to Granada.
DAY 7	Explore Granada with a local guide
DAY 8	At leisure in Granada. Evening visit to Masaya Volcano (conditions permitting).
DAY 9	Drive from Granada to San Jorge and take the ferry to Ometepe Island.
DAY 10 & AMP;	At leisure on Ometepe.
DAYS 12	Ferry back to the mainland and drive to San Juan del Sur.
DAY 13	At leisure on the Pacific coast.
14	Drive back to Managua airport, drop off car, take international flight.

ITINERARY

Nicaragua is one of Latin America's remaining true adventure destinations. Although its civil war ended in 1990, this friendly country still feels relatively off the beaten track, especially when compared with its near neighbours. And this is exactly where Nicaragua's appeal lies: gorgeous rural scenery, crossed by sometimes empty roads where you are more likely to come across cattle being herded by cowboys or rickety overloaded buses than queues of cars. You're never far from a hammock or rocking chair and age-old traditions survive.

As roads and infrastructure improve, more adventurous self-drivers have begun to discover Nicaragua. Whether driving west or east over the continental divide you are never far from a spectacular volcanic view. The landscape is peppered with colonial cities, tropical forest reserves and defined by a rugged stretch of golden Pacific coastline. In your pre-booked hire car you can drive at your own leisurely pace, with the freedom to stop off at interesting little market towns or a panoramic viewpoint and still be at your next pre-booked hotel in plenty of time for a sun-downer on the terrace.

Our 2-week self-drive holiday connects cloud forests of northern Nicaragua with Granada and Leon - twin cities with very different histories, before crossing Lake Nicaragua by ferry to Isla de Ometepe. Finally there's time to unwind on the Pacific shores of San Juan del Sur. Our route covers some of the most enjoyable attractions of this land of soothing scenery, tropical warmth, and low-key towns where a genuine welcome is extended by local people to visitors passing through.

DAY 1

Arrive in Managua, transfer to hotel in a smart residential district.

Managua is a vibrant modern city hugging the southern banks of Lake Nicaragua. There is little evidence of its colonial past – the result of a devastating earthquake which virtually flattened the capital in 1972. It is a confusing, sprawling metropolis but offers excellent shopping, good restaurants and a boisterous nightlife.

DAY 2

Pick up your car; drive to Selva Negra cloudforest, Matagalpa

You will set off on your road trip across Nicaragua from the capital, and over the next 2 weeks our suggested route covers approximately 800km with the longest single journey about 4 hours. However, chances are you will be intrigued by a detour, or pause to enjoy a coffee or a picnic in a beauty spot.

Our local partners will be on hand to help with the collection of your vehicle. A standard 4x2 SUV is suitable for the route covered, but upon request we can upgrade your vehicle to a 4x4 if you prefer.

Set off north towards Matagalpa. This busy city is set within a valley surrounded by hills shimmering with the polished green of the coffee plantations. Matagalpa is at the heart of Nicaragua's coffee industry although eco-tourism has also become an important cog in its economy. It serves as a gateway to the country's most picturesque mountains and the Selva Negra Cloud Forest Reserve with its many hiking possibilities

Just 15km beyond the city you reach the cool cloud forest air of Selva Negra and your lodge on a working coffee estate.

DAY 3

At leisure in the Selva Negra Cloud Forest Reserve.

Staying at Selva Negra Lodge on the coffee estate itself, you are well positioned to explore a landscape of cool misty forests of pine and oaks strangled by bromeliads, which create a fairytale environment through which wind over a dozen marked trails. Birds flit between the 30 secretive creeks and around the coffee plantation itself. You may even spot the elusive but dazzling Resplendent quetzal.

The estate is a monument to sustainability and organic flowers and vegetables grown here are served in the lodge's restaurant.

DAY 4

Drive to León.

The total journey total time to Nicaragua's second city of León is 3-4 hours if you drive direct, a distance of 155km. Descending from the highlands, you'll pass coffee plantations and spot roadside stalls laden with orchids and bromeliads. Approaching the hot coastal plains around León, the volcanic scenery is impressive with views of Momotombo across the rice fields.

León was founded in 1524 and moved to its present site 35km away 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 5

Explore León with a local guide

León is Nicaragua's most ebullient city, with a lively university and a thriving intellectual and cultural life.

Your guided walking city tour will reveal the history of the modern day city, a colonial masterpiece rivalled only by Granada, with the trademark adobe colonial façades, narrow streets and pretty squares, dominated by a number of grandiose churches (many connected by tunnels). These include the imposing cathedral, the largest in the Americas, which took over 100 years to build. The city has a history of alliance to revolutionary causes and you'll see what remains of some of the 1970s anti-Somoza murals.

DAY 6

Drive from León to Granada.

Your journey time is about 3 hours (134km). Taking the Pan American Highway you'll be following volcanoes all the way back to Managua – the chain is only broken by the vast Lake Managua. You can visit the town of Masaya and the spectacular crater of Masaya Volcano en route or on your free day in the city.

Finally, arrive at Granada, founded in 1524 and the oldest city in the New World. It lies at the foot of Mombacho Volcano. The city became very rich on the back of the gold trade but 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 7

Explore Granada with a local guide

On a guided city tour visit Granada's 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.

Later, 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. Small fishing communities thrive here and some islands host impressive weekend retreats owned by wealthy Nicaraguans.

DAY 8

At leisure in Granada. Evening visit to Masaya Volcano (conditions permitting).

A free day to further soak up the photogenic charms of Nicaragua's showpiece city.

At sunset we take you on a private (guided) adventure to Masaya volcano set within Nicaragua's first national park, 28km from Granada. We drive up to the rim of the volcano's crater with views into the steaming, sizzling orifice itself, where the boiling, incandescent magma is an impressive sight.

DAY 9

Drive from Granada to San Jorge and take the ferry to Ometepe Island.

It's about 2 hours to the ramshackle lakeshore port at San Jorge, a drive of around 75km from where, local ferries operate to the island of Ometepe in Lake Nicaragua. Boarding a ferry in Nicaragua will feel like

Ometepe is a relaxed, tranquil island rising majestically from Lake Nicaragua. It's dominated by twin conical volcanoes and is partially blanketed with lush jungle vegetation populated by monkeys and a plethora of bird species. Life here has been unchanging for decades if not centuries. Take care where you drive as only one road has been fully paved, but this has helped preserve this special island's enduring feeling of remoteness.

DAY 10 & 11

At leisure on Ometepe.

Enjoy island life with the freedom of your hire car. Or you can park up and let us take you on an island tour, including the luxuriant nature reserve at Charco Verde, alive with the call of howler monkeys and birds. There's a calm lagoon covered in mangroves and fallen trees, creating a fairy-tale atmosphere. The tour continues to the village of Altagracia to view the pre-Columbian statues in the courtyard of the oldest church on the island. You'll also visit a coffee and cacao plantation before stopping off at Ojo de Agua, a forest-fringed natural swimming pool with a café for a refreshing swim in the crystal-clear waters. Alternatively, for the very active, we can arrange guided hikes up Ometepe's volcanoes, Maderas or Concepción.

DAYS 12

Ferry back to the mainland and drive to San Juan del Sur.

It's time to drive back to the port and board the ferry. After heading back across the lake to San Jorge it's only an hour or so to the Pacific coast resort of San Juan del Sur.

As visitors returned to Nicaragua in the 1990s, San Juan's charms were soon rediscovered by backpackers and surfers and it remains justifiably popular for its laid-back vibe and pretty bay, and the shoreline is decorated with a necklet of tiny demerara-coloured sandy beaches. We've arranged a 2-night stay here, and extra nights can be added if you wish to extend it.

DAY 13

At leisure on the Pacific coast.

San Juan del Sur is a tranquil Pacific coast fishing village at the head of a horseshoe-shaped bay peppered with small, 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.

Other visitors are drawn to the area's unspoilt beaches and it has also become an established spot for surfers. Fishing, snorkelling, scuba diving and mountain biking are other popular pursuits you might have a go at – there are local agencies which organise trips. Olive Ridley turtles hatch on the beaches just south of town between September and April – a spectacular sight.

14

Drive back to Managua airport, drop off car, take international flight.

It's around 3 hours' drive from San Juan back to the car rental office at Managua international airport. Hand over your car and proceed to the terminal building to check in for your international flight (not included).

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

León: Guided walking tour
Granada: City orientation and boat trip on Lake Nicaragua

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

Airport transfer upon arrival, 13 days car hire. Your trip is based on a standard 4x2 SUV (suitable for maximum 3 passengers with reasonable luggage). Premium (4x4) vehicles can be arranged on request.

ACCOMMODATION

You will be staying in small, mid-range properties (two are in characterful restored colonial buildings); and an ecolodge on a coffee estate.

MEALS

Breakfast daily.

GUIDES

Our self-drive holiday includes several guided excursions to help you find your feet in Nicaragua. 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

14 days, 13 nights: Managua 1; Selva Negra 2; León 2; Granada 3; Ometepe 3; San Juan del Sur 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

For essential expenses a budget of around US\$50 per person daily should cover the cost of meals, drinks and fuel.

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. For details of insurance relating to your car hire please speak to your Travel Expert.

AIRPORT TAXES

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

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Generally this holiday is suitable for confident drivers and able, reasonably fit travellers who accept the sometimes uncertain and rudimentary nature of travel to remote places.

There is minimum of around 800km of driving over the holiday, spread over 13 days, more if you make detours. There are several days at leisure dotted throughout so you won't have long days of driving on consecutive days. Main roads are paved, other rural roads are dirt and traffic is generally light though coast roads can be busy in the summer.

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

CLIMATE

This itinerary takes you to tropical climates where the sun is strong and temperatures high – often over 30°C. It's cooler – springlike – in the cloud forest region around Selva Negra. Those travelling between May and October should encounter higher temperatures (around 35°C) and high humidity. The 'official' rainy season is May to October.

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Bring plenty of light 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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