

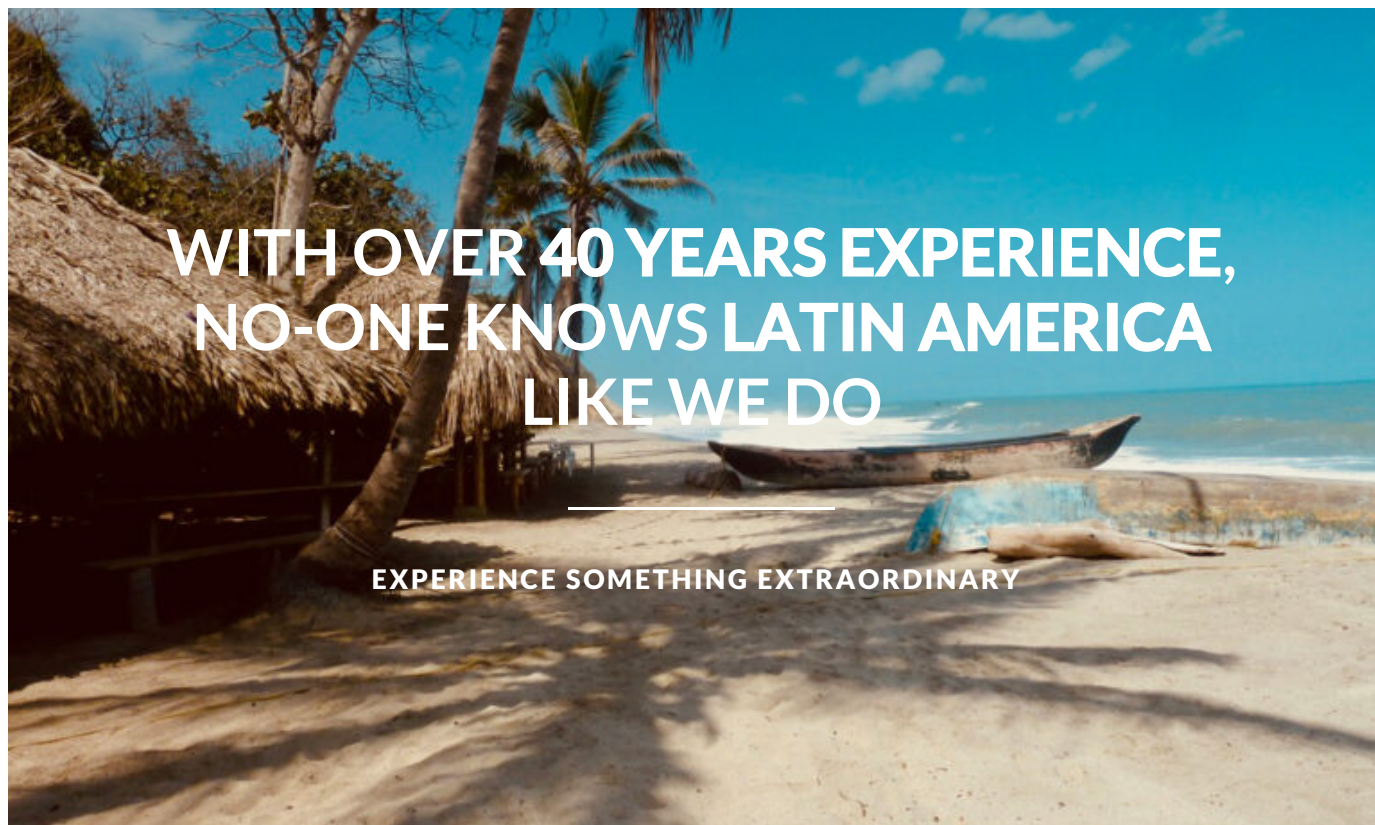


PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SIGNATURE: BEST OF COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA

12 days from **£3,100pp**

**COSTA RICA / SAN JOSE, CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND CENTRAL VALLEYS / ARENAL AND
THE NORTH / NICARAGUA / RIO SAN JUAN / GRANADA / OMETEPE ISLAND**



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

We've picked the natural highlights of two friendly neighbouring republics: discover them on an adventurous holiday with river trips, shimmering lakes, active volcanoes and idyllic islands. Wildlife abounds in luscious tropical landscapes on a tour of Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

DAY 1	Transfer to your hotel in central San José.
DAY 2	Transfer to lodge close to Arenal lake and volcano.
DAY 3	The Skytram and Hanging bridges in Arenal Volcano National Park.
DAY 4	Optional opportunity to luxuriate in natural hot springs at Ecotermes
DAY 5	Visit Caño Negro Wildlife Reserve; boat on Rio San Juan to El Castillo, Nicaragua. Night-time caiman spotting.
DAY 6	Jungle nature trail in Indio Maíz reserve; guided discovery of the fortress.
DAY 7	Boat to the port of San Carlos; by road to Granada.
DAY 8	City tour and boat trip on Lake Nicaragua to las Isletas.
DAY 9	Night-time visit to active Masaya volcano's crater.
DAY 10	Transfer to Ometepe Island on Lake Nicaragua.
DAY 11	Guided tour of the island's cultural and natural top sights.
DAY 12	Ferry to the mainland and transfer to Managua airport for international flight.

ITINERARY

These two central American neighbours have a lot in common: rugged volcanoes, luscious rainforests, prolific wildlife and relaxed tropical vibes. But there are big differences too: Costa Rica is very popular, while Nicaragua remains relatively undiscovered, so combining these countries allows you to experience both Costa Rica's world-famous nature tourism and Nicaragua's hidden treasures.

The heritage of Nicaragua's colonial and revolutionary history is still very much in evidence, while Costa Rica has become one of the world's top eco-destinations and hub of active adventures. On this adventurous holiday, we introduce you to the highlights of both countries.

We've put together a range of adventurous yet undemanding experiences which include a tropical river trip and an island stay on Lake Nicaragua. You get to peer down into an active volcanic crater, clamber over a Spanish colonial fortress once besieged by Nelson, and go spotting exotic birds and spider monkeys swinging through trees where iguanas laze. You'll be staying in independent simple and hospitable lodges and small hotels carefully selected to complement a holiday where you'll come to know and love the gentle pace of life. If you've time to linger longer, both nations offer palm-flecked Caribbean and Pacific beaches which invite relaxation.

DAY 1

Transfer to your hotel in central San José.

You will be met at the airport by our local representative who will take you to your hotel in the centre of San José. Founded in 1737, the capital was built on the profits of exporting coffee, produced from the fertile soils of the surrounding Central Valley. These days little remains of the city's colonial or indeed agricultural heritage. It does though have some fine museums and restaurants as well as a lively nightlife

DAY 2

Transfer to lodge close to Arenal lake and volcano.

You'll be picked up from your hotel and driven by public coach to the Arenal region, a journey of about four hours. The fertile volcanic landscapes are overshadowed by the conical Arenal volcano (1,674m), which used to be very active: nowadays lava flow and volcanic eruptions are infrequent (there's been nothing since 2010).

DAY 3

The Skytram and Hanging bridges in Arenal Volcano National Park.

The Sky Tram, a gondola up to the highest point of the private Arenal reserve, is a fun way to spot wildlife in the tree tops before taking in the views of the surrounding mountain range and rain forest, and of course of Arenal volcano, from the viewing platform at the top. Follow a gentle 3km trail over six hanging bridges and eight fixed bridges, some measuring up to 22m in length and constructed from galvanized steel and aluminium designed to blend with the natural environment.

The bridges are situated at the junction of upland and lowland forest, this blending of ecosystems means that there is a high diversity of both plant and wildlife species (over 700 species of flora and 300 of bird have been recorded here). Expect to be able to observe a range of birds, butterflies and plants (including lianas and giant ferns); snakes, frogs and lizards inhabit the forest here but are harder to spot.

DAY 4

Optional opportunity to luxuriate in natural hot springs at Ecotermes

Optional excursion to Ecotermes hot springs. These waters provide a more off-the-beaten-track experience than their better known and more overcrowded cousins. The farm on which the falls are situated is well back from the road that runs between the lake and the town of La Fortuna. The springs, five free-flowing pools, are set in a natural river gorge vary in temperature from 38°C to 43°C depending on the pool. To add to the convivial atmosphere, facilities include a restaurants and small bar serving cocktails and beers.

DAY 5

Visit Caño Negro Wildlife Reserve; boat on Rio San Juan to El Castillo, Nicaragua. Night-time caiman spotting.

Drive to Caño Negro Wildlife Reserve near the Nicaraguan border. This protected area embraces a lowland forested wetland and was established to be a safe haven for migratory birds. You'll be driven to the small town of Los Chiles to begin your nature cruise. It's an enchanting three hour boat trip up the Río Frío through the reserve to Caño Negro lake, a shallow overflow from the river in the wet season (it's dry in March-April). En route you'll be looking out for sloths, monkeys, caimans, bats and tropical flora. Finally, settle down to a lunch at a restaurant on the river bank, after which you continue to the border crossing point into Nicaragua.

The rest of today's adventurous journey is by motor launch on the stately and serene Rio San Juan, which connects Lake Nicaragua with the Caribbean coast. The trip is delightful, the banks sheltering a mix of farmland (cattle, fruit, maize) and pure tropical forest, speckled with egrets and other, more timid riverine creatures. It's increasingly wild, tightly forested and unpopulated, so it comes as a shock to round a bend in the river and be confronted by a huge stone fortress atop a hill overlooking the little river port El Castillo. The fort was built by the Spanish to protect the affluent city of Granada from attacks by pirates. Your hotel is on the narrow 'main street' of the vehicle-free town.

After nightfall, go searching for caiman under the moonlight, accompanied by a specialist guide. As you glide through the darkness, a journey orchestrated by the nocturnal sounds of the rainforest, the guide's spotlight will reflect the beady red eye of watchful caiman as they rest in the vegetation along the water's edge. You may be able to get up close to one to see its delicate markings and maybe its razor-sharp teeth. The baby caiman are particularly endearing, and could fit into the palm of your hand (don't pick one up though!).

DAY 6

Jungle nature trail in Indio Maíz reserve; guided discovery of the fortress.

Just 3km downstream from El Castillo you'll come to the Indio Maíz Biosphere Reserve. This area of rainforest is bursting with wildlife, including huge scarlet macaws and big cats (jaguar and puma lurk here but sorry, you won't see any of those). But on your guided walk around the small part of the reserve open to visitors you might spy a tapir, a manatee, a Harpy eagle and American crocodiles..

The trail is two kilometres long and you may take over two hours to follow it. Wildlife used to be hard to observe in the thick woodland but since a hurricane thinned out the trees it's easier to identify a profusion of exotic birds and frogs while enjoying the company of watchful lizards and lithe spider monkeys swinging from branch to branch.

Later, it's the human history rather than the natural world history which comes under the spotlight as you are taken on a tour of the formidable fortress, constructed in the 17th century to defend Granada from European pirates. Its location above the town-on stilts which carries its name is above foaming rapids which would have impeded progress by river of any intruders. The guide and a series of placards will narrate its extraordinary history, which included an assault by a youthful naval officer named Horatio Nelson. It's very evocative: you may well be the only visitors, able to imagine how the guards felt as they surveyed the forest below for unwelcome visitors. Those views from the top over uninterrupted rainforest are as impressive as the monumental stone walls and rusted cannons themselves.

DAY 7

Boat to the port of San Carlos; by road to Granada.

By boat back to the rickety port San Carlos on Lake Nicaragua and on by road to Granada on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. Founded in 1524, Granada is the oldest city in the New World and lies at the foot of Mombacho volcano. At its height it became very prosperous 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 which run down to the banks of Lake Nicaragua are a delight. Visitors are carried about in horse and carriages reminiscent of its glory days, but the city is now able also to offer some excellent contemporary restaurants, bars and artisan shops within its gracefully arched colonnades.

DAY 8

City tour and boat trip on Lake Nicaragua to las Isletas.

On your guided walking tour to explore the city with its baroque churches, narrow streets, markets, colonial mansions and convents you will be told about the city's eventful history. The historic core is so compact that you can experience much of it on foot with many of the most interesting places within the vicinity of the main square.

Later, you'll head off for a boat ride on Lake Nicaragua. The vast lake, more like an inland sea, with surf-tipped waves and reflecting fiery sunsets, is the largest body of freshwater in the Americas after the Great Lakes. The gentle cruise takes you around some of the myriad of forested islets formed by eruptions of the looming bulk of the waterside Mombacho volcano, many of which now host the private villas of Nicaragua's wealthy classes.

DAY 9

Night-time visit to active Masaya volcano's crater.

Relax in delightful Granada during the day, for at sunset you will head off on a private adventure to Masaya volcano set within Nicaragua's first national park. It's an easy drive up to the rim of the volcano's crater with views into the steaming, sizzling orifice itself, where the boiling, incandescent magma (it's on its way down, by the way, so there is no danger of an eruption) is an impressive sight. You should be able to observe the bright green parakeets approaching the volcano to roost. You may also watch a cloud of fluttering bats departing from their caves, another extraordinary natural spectacle.

There follows a visit to an underground tunnel which was formed by lava streams. Equipped with flashlight and helmet, you enter the tunnel to observe the contorted rock formations. The exhilarating experience ends with a visit to a viewpoint where you can spend a few minutes looking down at the red and glowing lava in the fiery depths of the crater mouth.

DAY 10

Transfer to Ometepe Island on Lake Nicaragua.

You'll be driven to San Jorge port, a jumble of rickety buildings also sprawling on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. The road takes an inland route through farmed fields and countryside, and half the distance covered is on the fast Pan-American Highway. From there embark a car and passenger ferry to Ometepe Island, dominated by its twin volcanoes.

Ometepe is a serene and as yet undeveloped island. Even in comparison with the rest of Nicaragua, the infrastructure is basic with rough (but gradually improving) roads and simple accommodation. Much of the surface is still covered in primary rainforest home to many different species of monkeys and parrots. The island is also peppered with citrus, banana, watermelon, avocado and cacao plantations – thanks to the island's fertile volcanic soil. It has a long history of human occupation though and there are collections of pre-Columbian stone statues and petroglyphs, carved by the Chorotega Indians centuries ago.

DAY 11

Guided tour of the island's cultural and natural top sights.

Ometepe Island, where the people have been spared many of the political upheavals which have afflicted the country, has a human presence stretching back thousands of years. Your full day guided tour will take you first to the nature reserve at Charco Verde. 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 the calls of migratory and indigenous birds. There's a calm lagoon covered in mangroves and fallen trees, creating a fairy-tale atmosphere – the area is famous for its mythology.

Move on to the Pre-Columbian Museum El Ceibo, where there are archaeological displays of ancient artefacts found on the island including a number of intricate carvings of animals and people. Continue to the village of Altagracia to view the pre-Columbian statues in the courtyard of the oldest church on the island. After lunch you will drive to an organic coffee farm to learn about the entire process of coffee production. Finally, stop off at Ojo de Agua, a forest-fringed natural swimming pool with a café for a refreshing swim in the crystal clear waters.

DAY 12

Ferry to the mainland and transfer to Managua airport for international flight.

Return to San Jorge on the ferry and drive on to Managua airport for your international flight.

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

Arenal: Sky Tram and hanging bridges

Caño Negro Wildlife Reserve

Rio San Juan: Nature trail in Indo Maiz rainforest reserve

Granada: Guided city tour and las Isletas boat trip

Granada: Night-time visit to Masaya volcano crater

Ometepe Island: Guided cultural and landscapes tour

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

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

12 days, 11 nights: San José 1; Arenal 3; Rio San Juan 2; Granada 3; Ometepe 2.

ACCOMMODATION

This trip uses independent mid-range accommodation that we think is great value, comfortable, well-located and which showcases a touch of local character. Properties vary in heritage from colonial style to resort-style lodges, but will all be well-equipped with rooms that have private bathrooms. All accommodation is flexible and can be tailored to meet your specific preferences and requirements.

TRANSPORT

5 journeys by road, or road and boat.

MEALS

Breakfast daily, full board days 5 & 6.

GUIDES

Our local, trusted and carefully selected partners understand the expectations of our customers very well, and their staff and guides are consistently singled out for praise by clients on their return. On this holiday, you will be joined by different guides for each activity and or region, ensuring you benefit from specialised expertise and knowledge, often from someone local to the area.

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

As well as any included activities, this Private Journey includes some free time for optional excursions. As optional excursions are often subject to availability, we recommend you discuss and arrange them with your Travel Expert as early as possible before you depart.

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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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