

NICARAGUA WINTER GET-AWAY

January 19, 2015 - 18 Days



a world to experience



Fares Per Person:

\$5395 double/twin

\$5835 single

Tour is exempt from GST



tour
a more intimate travel experience

> **Early Bookers:** \$280 discount on first 10 seats; \$140 on next 6

> **TIC Travel Insurance:** Plan 3-Comprehensive
\$513 double/twin, \$554 single

Redeem Experience Points: Book by **November 6** and redeem up to **105 e-points**

Includes

- Transportation to/from Seattle Airport
- Flight from Seattle to Managua, Nicaragua, and return on United Airlines
- Air taxes, fees and fuel surcharges
- Transfer from Managua Airport to hotel and return
- 17 nights accommodation and hotel taxes
- Coach transportation throughout Nicaragua
- Expert local guides and naturalists
- Ruben Dario Museum
- Ortiz Gurdian Art Foundation
- Leyendas y Tradiciones Museum
- City tour of Esteli
- Agriculture tour of La Garnacha
- Coffee plantation tour at Matagalpa
- Sustainable farm tour
- Cultural Centre Convento San Francisco
- Dona Elba Cigar Factory tour
- Truck transportation to top of Mombacho Volcano with bird walk
- ChocoMuseo tour with chocolate tasting
- Boat tour to Zopango Island with bird watching
- Village tour of San Juan del Sur
- Ferry to/from Isla de Ometepe
- Tour of island with Punta Jesus Maria and Ojo de Agua
- City tour of Managua with Cathedral and National Palace
- Luggage handling
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers and naturalists
- Knowledgeable Wells Gray tour director
- **46 meals:** 17 breakfasts, 14 lunches, 15 dinners,

Experience Points: Earn **105 e-points**

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NICARAGUA — A WINTER PARADISE

Nicaragua is the largest country in the Central American isthmus, bordering Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south. The Pacific Ocean lies to the west and the Caribbean Sea to the east. The country's physical geography divides it into three major zones: Pacific Lowlands, Central Highlands, and Caribbean Lowlands. Nicaragua has an abundance of biologically significant and unique ecosystems, and nearly one fifth of the country is protected in national parks, nature reserves, and biological reserves. Tourism is growing rapidly and became Nicaragua's #1 industry in 2007. There are still more tourists who visit Costa Rica, but Nicaragua is catching up and is still more reasonably priced in the winter months.

During this unique tour, we travel through some of the richest habitats of Nicaragua, from the Pacific Lowlands to the Central Volcanic Highlands, from Central America's two largest fresh water lakes (Lago de Managua and Lago de Nicaragua) to the Pacific beaches, and from colonial towns built in the 16th century to modern cities. The tour is accompanied throughout by a Wells Gray tour director and a bilingual Nicaraguan guide. A variety of fine hotels are arranged such as Barcelo in bustling Managua, El Convento in historic Leon, and Alhambra in colonial Granada. One highlight of the tour is our four-night stay at Pelican Eyes Resort, situated on a hillside overlooking the Pacific at San Juan del Sur.

Come and admire the natural and historic wonders of Nicaragua and get away from a Canadian winter for two relaxing weeks.

Itinerary

Monday, January 19:

Transportation is provided to Seattle. We stay overnight at the Quality Inn in Renton near the Seattle airport.

Tuesday, January 20:

Meals: B,D

We check in at United Airlines and fly via Houston, Texas, arriving in **Managua** in the evening. **Welcome to Nicaragua.** Our overnight stay is at the four-star Hotel Barcelo.

Wednesday, January 21:

Meals: B,L,D

Leaving Managua, we drive about two hours northwest to the **colonial city of Leon**. It was founded in 1524 by Spanish conquistadors at the base of Momotombo Volcano. We check in for two nights at Hotel El Convento, the finest in Leon, and have lunch there. The San Francisco Convent was founded in Leon in 1639 and operated for two centuries until it became a school. The hotel is a modern building on the site of the school with architecture that respects the convent and school. Our afternoon tour includes the impressive **Basilica Catedral de La Asuncion**, Ruben Dario Museum which celebrates Nicaragua's greatest poet, and the Ortiz Gurdian Art Gallery with paintings, sculptures and contemporary works.

Thursday, January 22:

Meals: B,L,D

We spend the morning at **Las Peñitas Beach**, a splendid stretch of sand on the Pacific Coast. In the afternoon, back in Leon, we take a walk around the **San Jacinto Hot Springs** viewing its bubbling mud pots and steaming fumaroles. Then

we go to the **Museo Leyendas y Tradiciones**, built inside an old prison, where 14 myths and legends about Leon are explained. Next, we visit the Subtiaba Indigenous Town where pre-Columbian artifacts have been found.

Friday, January 23:

Meals: B,L,D

We head north from Leon into the forested mountains of the Central Highlands and reach **Esteli** on the Pan-American Highway. It is a modern city because it was heavily bombed during the civil war of 1978. Esteli is best known for tobacco production with plantations and quality cigar factories. We have a city tour in the afternoon. Accommodation for two nights is at Hotel Hex.

Saturday, January 24:

Meals: B,L,D

This morning, we drive to **La Garnacha**, a community and natural reserve near Esteli. Attractions here are a cheese factory, the stone craft workshop "zopilote", and a medicinal plants farm, and there is a shopping opportunity to buy these products plus natural juices and local coffee. A worm farm and a goat farm are here too. The afternoon is free time in Esteli.

Sunday, January 25:

Meals: B,L,D

It is a short drive of two hours through the highlands to our next destination, **Matagalpa**. The city has a beautiful setting on the continental divide. It was an indigenous town of the Matagalpa Indians when the Spaniards arrived in 1528. Today, it is noted as an ecological community with an economy based on coffee plantations. We stay two

nights at **Selva Negra Mountain Resort**, one of Nicaragua's most famous hotels according to Fodor's. In the 1850s, a couple from Germany settled here and named their coffee plantation for the Black Forest in Spanish, Selva Negra. The resort opened in 1976 on the plantation. This afternoon, there is a tour of the farm and coffee processing plant, along with delicious tasting.

Monday, January 26: *Meals: B,L,D*

The morning is devoted to a tour of sustainable farming methods, an organic laboratory, greenhouses, homes of workers and another coffee plantation. The afternoon offers some optional eco-tourism activities such as bird watching or mountain hiking and horseback riding on 12 miles of trails. Selva Negra covers 1,000 acres and includes a cloud forest, the coffee plantation and a wildlife sanctuary that protects many species of birds, animals and plants.

Tuesday, January 27: *Meals: B,L,D*

We drive south out of the highlands and down to **Lago de Nicaragua**, the country's largest lake (and 19th largest in the world) covering 3,200 square miles. Over a century ago, a canal across Nicaragua was proposed instead of the Panama Canal and this idea has been periodically revived; the lake would be an integral part of this project. We arrive at **Granada** on the northwest shore of the lake. The city was founded in 1524 by the Spanish explorer Cordoba (who also founded Leon) and he named it for Granada in Spain. It has a rich colonial heritage, seen in its architecture, huge plazas, and restored buildings. Our first stop is at the Cultural Center Convento San Francisco which offers a fascinating collection of historical objects, paintings and statues. In the afternoon, we tour **Dona Elba Cigars** where you can roll your own and purchase a souvenir. We stay three nights at Hotel Alhambra, the grand old dame of Granada. It is located on the Central Plaza and has a façade of pillars and arches leading to a lobby with lots of atmosphere.

Wednesday, January 28: *Meals: B,L,D*

In the morning, we visit **Mombacho Volcano** which rises to 4,400 feet south of Granada. It last erupted in 1570 and is considered extinct. We drive to the top in a truck and admire the panoramic view over Granada and Lago de Nicaragua. We take a walk on the trail around the crater which offers excellent bird watching and a cloud forest. This afternoon, we tour La Merced Church which dates to 1539 and was rebuilt in 1781. Next

is the **ChocoMuseo** where we taste chocolate in its purest form, learn how to make a chocolate bar from cacao seed and listen to the stories about how cacao was first used in Central America.

Thursday, January 29: *Meals: B,L,D*

Offshore from Granada is a group of over 300 little islands in Lago de Nicaragua. We take a boat excursion out to one of them, **Zopango Island**, which is a private ecological reserve. Swimming, boating, bird watching and trail walking are some activities. The imposing Mombacho Volcano rises just west of the islands. Lunch is included on the island and there is free time after returning to Granada.

Friday, January 30: *Meals: B,L,D*

Continuing to the south end of Nicaragua via the Isthmus of Rivas, we stay four nights in **San Juan del Sur**, a Pacific Coast town and a major tourist beach resort. A crescent-shaped bay with magnificent sandy beaches fronts the town. A short driving tour is included. We stay at **Pelican Eyes Resort** which has a stunning location on the hillside above the town with panoramic views of the Pacific. Facilities include infinity pools, a spa, two restaurants, open-air bars and lush gardens. The resort is located about ¼ mile from the beach and transportation is available (there is only one small hotel on the beach).

Saturday, January 31: *Meals: B,L,D*

Sunday, February 1: *Meals: B,L,D*

Mornings are leisure time. In the afternoons, transportation is provided to nearby beaches such as Marsella and Maderas. As an alternative, you may wish to stay around Pelican Eyes and enjoy the resort facilities.

Monday, February 2: *Meals: B,L,D*

It is a half-hour drive across the Isthmus to San Jorge Port on Lago de Nicaragua where we board a ferry to **Isla de Ometepe**. The island was formed by two volcanoes and the western one, Concepcion, last erupted in 2010 and is over 5,000 feet tall. We have lunch at Hotel Charco Verde, located in a Natural Reserve on the lakeshore. A tour of the island is included with stops at Punta Jesus Maria and Ojo de Agua. The island was settled about 2000 BC and natives carved petroglyphs that date to about 300 BC. In late afternoon, we take the ferry back to the mainland and return to San Juan del Sur.

Tuesday, February 3:*Meals: B,L,D*

Leaving the Pacific Coast, we return to **Managua**. In the afternoon, a city tour is included with visits to Salvador Allende Port on Lago de Managua, the old and new Cathedral of Managua, the National Palace and the Tiscapa viewpoint. The overnight stay is at Hotel Barcelo. Our farewell dinner is at El Segundo Restaurant and is a chance to reminisce with fellow travellers about our winter getaway to Nicaragua.

Wednesday, February 4:*Meals: B*

We depart on United Airlines in early afternoon, change planes in Houston, and arrive in Seattle tonight. Accommodation is again at the Quality Inn in Renton.

Thursday, February 5:*Meals: B*

Transportation is provided back to our Victoria departure points.

Tour Notes:

Currency & Expenses: The currency in Nicaragua is the cordoba, \$1 CND = 21 cordobas as of June 2014. US dollars are widely accepted and exchanged. Gratuities have been included for all group meals and for local guides, naturalists and drivers. As this tour has been planned and priced seven months before departure, it is possible that exchange fluctuations could affect the fare, in which case you will be notified of the increase or decrease. All meals are included in Nicaragua. The US\$10 per person Nicaragua entrance fee is included.

Flight: Current flight schedule is with United Airlines from Seattle to Managua with a plane change in Houston. Travel time including the stop is about 10½ hours each way. Nicaragua is two hours ahead of British Columbia in winter.

Documentation: A passport is required, valid 6 months after return date. A visa is not required.

Triples: Triples are not available on this tour due to the different nature of hotel rooms.

Health Clinic: Visit a travel health clinic two months before departure to discuss possible

inoculations for this tour. Bring this itinerary. There are currently no required inoculations, but you may want to discuss Hepatitis A/B.

Mobility: Due to the historic nature of some cities and attractions, and walks looking for birds and animals, it will be necessary



to climb stairs, walk on uneven surfaces and walk at least a kilometre, plus stand for an extended time on walking tours. Pelican Eyes Resort is on a hillside with many steps or inclined walkways, but our rooms are close to dining and the pools. Assistance in walking or climbing stairs cannot be expected from the tour director or local guide. There can be long walks in airports and you are urged to request a cart or wheelchair in advance if this could be a concern. Please consider these mobility issues prior to booking this tour.

Beverages: In many countries outside Canada and USA, it is not standard practice to include beverages with tour meals. On this tour, coffee, milk or bottled water is included at breakfast, and a soft drink, juice or water is included at lunch and dinner; wine and beer can be purchased.

Tour Policies

Payments: A deposit of \$500 per person is requested at the time of booking and the balance is due November 6, 2014.

Discounts: Early bookers receive \$280 discount on first 10 seats and \$140 on next 6 seats for booking early with deposit. The discount is not offered after November 6.

Cancellation Policy: Up to October 6, 2014, your tour payments will be refunded less an administrative charge of \$70 per person. From October 7 to November 6, the cancellation charge is \$250 per person. From November 7 to December 4, the cancellation charge is 50% of the tour fare. From December 5 to December 18, the cancellation charge is 80% of the tour fare. After December 18, there is no refund.

Fare Changes: Changes to taxes and currency exchange, and surcharges from airlines and other tour suppliers can occur at any time and are beyond the control of Wells Gray Tours, therefore Wells Gray Tours reserves the right to increase fares due to such changes up until the time of departure.

TIC Insurance: In addition to Plan 3-Comprehensive, plans are available for Trip Cancellation & Interruption only and Extended Medical Coverage only. Policies can be purchased no later than at final payment.

Photo Credit: San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua Tourism Board

Tour 25: This is a Tour 25 departure, meaning capacity of tour is limited to 25 participants or less for a more intimate travel experience.

E-points: This tour earns 105 e-points. Each time you travel on a Wells Gray tour, you earn Experience Points, or e-points. 1 e-point equals \$1. Redeem your points on select tours or accumulate enough points to earn a free tour! Redemptions offered until Nov. 6.

Travel Wholesaler License: #65842