

The Washington Post

In the News | Syria | Chris Christie | Hillary Clinton | 'Downton Abbey' | MLK | Peyton Manning



washingtonpost.com > Arts & Living > Travel

» FOLLOW THE TRAVEL SECTION ON:

Page 5 of 5 < [Back](#)

My Nicaragua

Selva Negra opened as a resort in the 1970s -- I saw my first squirrel ever there. The name, which translates as Black Forest, is rooted in history: In the 1880s, Nicaragua offered money and land to German immigrants willing to come farm coffee. Selva Negra is run by two of their descendants.

During the contra war, Selva Negra's owners had run-ins with both sides of the combat. One even left for a while. Yet, in the end, they prevailed.

The resort is centered on a large wood-beamed hall at the edge of a gorgeous mountain lagoon. Around it are several small guest chalets (charmingly, the decor in ours included several close-ups of reposing dachshunds). But the real draw is in the surrounding land: almost 300 acres of thick, never-cultivated woodland, home to sloths, howler monkeys, toucans and quetzals. Fourteen hiking trails, ranked easy, medium or difficult, crisscross it. It was on the "Indiana Jones" trail that we ran into our monkeys.

The lodge's kraut and schnitzel was fair at best, so on the last full day of our visit, we headed north to Jinotega, a town I'd never visited, to eat.

It turned out to be the most delightful discovery of the trip.

Though Jinotega is the district capital, the town doesn't get many foreign visitors. Its typical hotel guest is much more likely to be a farmer or rancher looking to pick up provisions, get a pair of boots made or sell some cattle. Its tidy streets convey a sense of purpose: Through open doorways, you can see lawyers drawing up contracts as clients wait on wooden chairs, or cowboy-hatted farmers weighing bags of coffee.

Had we had more time, we would have sampled more of what Jinotega had to offer.

Greeting the Evolution

Whenever I leave Managua, I always think back to flying out during the war. Back then, soldiers guarded the departure lounges and chaotic mobs pressed up against the doors. This time, though, all traces of that era were gone: Since my last visit two years ago, the airport has been remodeled. It's now as smooth and bland as airports everywhere, with the requisite duty-free shops and tall windows.

In the next few years, as Nicaragua stretches to build a reputation beyond its traumatic history, that's bound to happen to more and more of the markers of my wartime memory; they'll be elided, erased. That's good, I think. But all the same, I'm glad I made it back when the country was still evolving -- on the way to becoming, rather than all the way, changed.

DETAILS *Nicaragua*

GETTING THERE: Several airlines fly into Managua from the Washington area, including American, Northwest and Continental. We flew the Central American airline TACA (<http://www.taca.com/>) from Dulles for \$550 round trip, but ticket prices currently start at \$650.

GETTING AROUND: On local buses in Managua, the crowding and pickpocketing are legendary. City-to-city, though, buses are safe and, especially if you pay extra for the express, comfortable. From the market, Mercado Roberto Huembes (pronounced "WHEM-base"), the express bus to Granada costs less than \$1 for the 30-mile trip; to San Juan del Sur, 65 miles away, less than \$3.



Sunset on the bay of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. (Richard Leonardi - Tours Nicaragua)



Car rentals are available in major cities: Managua, Granada and Rivas, among others. If you book online, though, make sure you're aware of all the charges: Our rate of \$90 per week turned into \$228 after the agency added a previously undisclosed, but obligatory, insurance fee.

WHERE TO STAY:

· *Managua*: For a splurge, try the new *InterContinental*, a peach-colored, five-star behemoth in front of the Metrocentro shopping mall (Costada Sur Centro Comercial Metrocentro, 011-505-2-784545, <http://www.icmanagua.gruporeal.com/>; doubles start at \$115 per night). Or, for history's sake, the iconic, pyramid-shaped InterContinental (now officially a *Crowne Plaza*), where American journalists bivouacked during the civil war (101 Octava Calle Sur Oeste, 011-505-2-283530, <http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/hd/MGAHA>; \$84). A clean, comfy, cheaper alternative is the *Hotel Los Robles de San Juan* (Galeria Casa de los Tres Mundos 1c abajo No. 238, 011-505-270-2114, <http://www.brandtshotel.com.ni/>), with doubles from \$35 a night. Those seeking \$10-a-night beds should look in the backpacker-heavy *Martha Quezada* neighborhood.

· *Granada*: We stayed in the stylish, gorgeously renovated *Hotel Alhambra* (Costado Oeste del Parque Central; 011-505-552-4486, <http://www.hotelalhambra.com/>), on the town plaza. The huge doubles start at \$50 a night; ours, with a balcony and endless hot water, was a well-worth-it \$75.

· *San Juan del Sur*: The blocky *Hotel Casablanca* (Paseo Maritimo, 011-505-568-2135, <http://www.sanjuandelsur.org.ni/casablanca>) isn't loaded with charm, but it's beachfront and offers both secure parking and an ATM. Doubles start at \$50 a night; ask for the top floor. Locals recommend the cozy, B&B-ish *Hotel Villa Isabella* (Diagonal Norte Iglesias Catolica, 011-505-568-2568, <http://www.sanjuandelsur.org.ni/isabella>), which has cable, a pool and Internet access; rooms are \$50 with a shared bath, \$65 and up with a private one. On the other hand, share a room in the Meanie-blue (but slightly run down) *Hotel Estrella* (Paseo Maritimo, 011-505-458-3310), on the main drag, and you could end up with a second-floor beachfront balcony for as little as \$5 a night.

· *Selva Negra Mountain Resort*: The resort (Km 140 Hwy. Matagalpa-Jinotega; 011-505-772-3883; <http://www.selvanegra.com/>) offers a range of choices, from \$10 for a bunk in a dorm-style hostel to \$30 for a hotel room, to \$50 for a private bungalow.

WHERE TO EAT: In Managua, we sought out traditional Nicaraguan food at the *Cocina de Doña Haydee* (three locations in central Managua; <http://www.lacocina.com.ni/portada.html>), where entrees are under \$10.

In Granada, *El Zaguán* (011-505-552-2522), behind the cathedral, grilled a mean filet mignon; dinner and drinks for two ran about \$24. We also had our best breakfast of the trip, for about \$3 each, at the expat-heavy *Nica Buffet*, on Calle Morazan just one block over from the park.

In San Juan del Sur, *Ricardo's Bar* (Paseo Maritimo, <http://www.sanjuandelsur.org.ni/ricardosbar/main.html>) is the place to go to get boozy with other travelers (drinks are under \$2), borrow a book or watch a movie on Mondays.

In Jinotega, *La Colmena* (011-505-632-2017), a block east of the main plaza, may look plain, but its green tablecloths signal the nicest restaurant in town. Lunch for two ran \$16.

INFORMATION: Guides dedicated to Nicaragua can be hard to find in local bookstores, so you might want to go online. The Footprint and Moon Handbook guides are a couple of years old, but for the most part accurate.

The *Nicaraguan Tourism Institute* (INTUR), <http://www.intur.gob.ni/>, has offices in several cities in Nicaragua, including Managua and Granada. Its Web site lists several tour operators. Another site worth checking out for its innovative programs is *Tours Nicaragua* (<http://www.toursnicaragua.com/>).

-- Sandy M. Fernandez

< [Back](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#)

More in Travel



Memory's point

Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula brings out your **childlike wonder**.

- Tasting Tel Aviv, Israel's culinary capital
- Where you'll want to land in hot water
- Catching a wave in Costa Rica
- Delicious wine, food to sample when traveling in France



Never Never Land

Campers in Australia can explore the continent from **south to north**.

- Happy campers, under the Italian sky
- Meals that rise above frozen fields
- Postcard from Tom: New York City
- Beach chic on the Carolina coast

© 2005 The Washington Post Company

The Washington Post **SUBSCRIBE** PostTV Politics Opinions Local Sports National World Business Tech Lifestyle Entertainment Jobs

<p>More ways to get us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home delivery Digital Subscription Gift Subscription Mobile & Apps New sletter & Alerts RSS Facebook Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Washington Post Live Reprints & Permissions Post Store e-Replica Archive 	<p>Contact Us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help & Contact Info Reader Representative Digital Advertising New spaper Advertising New s Service & Syndicate 	<p>About Us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the community Careers PostPoints New spaper in Education Digital Publishing Guidelines 	<p>Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WP BRANDCONNECT® CA BU The Capital Deal exp FASHION WASHINGTON find MASTER CLASS PA service alley El Tiempo wj wine club
---	--	---	--	---

washingtonpost.com © 1996-2014 The Washington Post Terms of Service Privacy Policy Submissions and Discussion Policy RSS Terms of Service Ad Choices