

SURFING

Swells from South Pacific storms pound Central America during the North American summer months, especially in June and July. The shape of Nicaragua's long, isolated beaches and direction of the shoreline help form these pushes of water into perfect overhead barrels. On the southwest coast around San Juan del Sur, lake-generated offshore breezes often blow year-round.

Waves are still being "discovered" and named, and more than once, we have been asked not to print details about certain legendary breaks and knowledgeable boat drivers. One old-school surfer we encountered compared Nicaragua to Hawaii's unspoiled North Shore in the 1970s.

Nicaragua, once a blank spot on the world's surfing map, now hosts international competitions and draws an increasingly well-informed crew of sponsored and non-sponsored shredders from across the planet. Meanwhile, a few young Nicaraguans have picked up the sport and caught the attention of surf journalists and documentary filmmakers, while small eco-surf camps spring up along the entire Pacific coast. In short, the secret is out.

Most surfers head straight to **San Juan del Sur** (a.k.a. Sin City) where they can get oriented, rent or buy a board, socialize, and arrange transport to breaks north and south of town. You'll find plenty of accommodations, guides, surf shops, and beach shuttles – none of which existed only a few years ago.

Start your research with the **Nicaragua Surf Report** (www.nicaraguasurfreport.com), the longest-running online daily wave report in the country, plus a full complement of services for visiting surfers (rentals, equipment, transport, etc.). Another option, especially if you'd prefer to explore the north coast, **Rise Up Surf Tours Nicaragua** (www.riseupsurftoursnicaragua.com) offers fully-guided surf tour packages to Nicaragua's Central and Northwest Pacific coast; the owners are surfers based in León.

Women surfers can check out the **ChicaBrava Surf Camp** (U.S. tel. 832/519-0253, www.chicabrava.com), the first all-girls surf operation in the country. The second, **Suave Dulce Women's Surf Retreat** (SuaveDulce@gmail.com, www.suavedulce.com), was opened in 2010 by pro-surfer Holley Beck, on the Nicaraguan north coast.



Nicaragua's surf spots are no longer a secret.



Most visitors come to San Juan del Sur for the m

Day 4

Using Granada as your base, make a day trip to the city of **Masaya** and its the active volcano of the same name. Start early at **Masaya National Park**, then browse handicrafts in the Old Market. Return to Granada that evening.

Days 5-7

Pack up and head south. Catch the bus from San Jorge to **Ometepe**. Spend 2-3 days exploring the island's unique getaways. Consider arranging a guide to take you to the base of one of the volcanoes for more adventurous travel.

Days 8-9

Catch the boat back to San Jorge and head south through Rivas to the beach town of **Juan del Sur**. Spend at least one night here, but tag on a few more if the surf's up and the turtles are laying.

Days 10-11

Catch the early express bus to Managua. Transfer directly to **León**. It's been a long trip, so relax, walk around the hot t

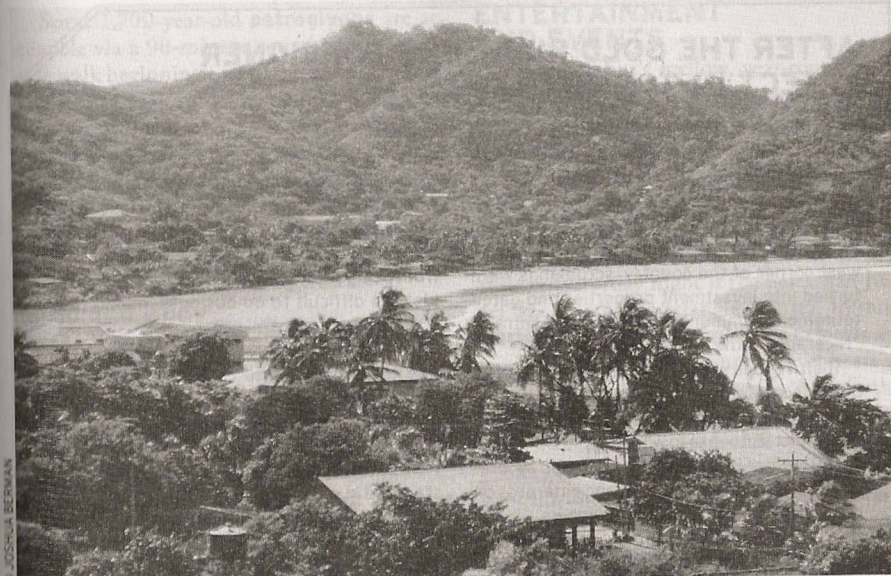


brothers, who learned to surf on a secondhand board left behind by a tourist. They can arrange boards, gear, transportation, and lessons. **Action Tours** (tel. 505/8668-4407, www.actiontoursurfnica.com) runs private surfing, fishing, and chilling charters. The \$220 full-day trip includes lunch.

Good Times Surf Shop (across from the casino, tel. 505/8675-1621, www.goodtimesurfshop.com) sells handcrafted boards manufactured in Nicaragua using renewable

materials, and can help you arrange for a repair if you mash up your board. They also offer boat trips to local surf breaks starting at \$20 per person.

Chicabrava (tel. 505/8894-2842, www.chicabrava.com) is the first all-women's surf camp in Nicaragua, with both nightly and weekly rates at their beach house in town (drop in for a day's lesson and gear rental) and high-end, all-inclusive packages that cover lodging, food, equipment, six days of instruction, and



San Juan del Sur and its perfect crescent bay

transportation. You can also stay at their flagship "cloud farm" nature retreat with many activities available.

☾ Sunset Cruise

San Juan Surf & Sport (20 meters west of the market, tel. 505/8984-2464) offers a sunset cruise in a fancy *panga* for \$16 per person. Expect great photo ops, a merry crowd, and just a bit o' booze. Keep in mind that San Juan Surf & Sport can also take you fishing: Darío and his laid-back crew provide the equipment and will show you how to cast; you can keep any fish you catch.

Sailing and Diving

Gypsy Sailing (tel. 505/8608-9498, justin@rootsengineering.com, \$30–40 pp) offers all-inclusive half or full-day trips, or you can charter the **Pelican Eyes** yacht for an all-day jaunt (tel. 505/2563-7000, www.piedrasyolas.com, \$90 pp) including lunch on a deserted beach and an open bar.

The Pacific lacks the visibility of the Caribbean

waters, but fish are plentiful and there's a sunken Russian shrimp boat offshore, so it can be fun. The expert divers at San Juan's Nicaraguan owned and operated dive shop, **Neptune Watersports** (tel. 505/2568-2752, www.neptunenicadiving.com), will rent you gear and take you underwater (\$85 for two tanks, \$350 for open-water certification) if you already have your license and are an experienced diver.

Canopy Tour

Da Flyin Frog (tel. 505/8611-6214, daflyinfrog@yahoo.com, \$30 pp, closed Sun.) is a 17-platform, two-kilometer canopy tour through the trees with great views of the ocean. It's located just outside town on the Chocolate road; arrange free transportation directly from the company.

Hikes

The statue of **Jesús de la Misericordia**, a 15-meter fiberglass thank-you note for the restored health of the gentleman who built