

# Hiking in Costa Rica and Nicaragua

Journey through the contrasting Central American countries of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Hike up volcanoes, discover remote waterfalls, and learn about tropical forests. Look out for the diverse wildlife living in the tree tops and wake up to the sound of howler monkeys. Stay on Ometepe, a picturesque volcanic island on Lake Nicaragua, and enjoy the relaxed pace of life there - a contrast to the more energetic feel of the fascinating colonial cities of Leon and Granada.

# Trip highlights

- ★ Primary forest walk At La Selva Biological Station
- \* Arenal Volcano Hike in the tropical forest around this famous volcano
- ★ Exotic tropical wildlife Look out for howler monkeys, toucans and humming birds
- 📩 Isla Ometepe Experience the laid back atmosphere of this island in the middle of Lake Nicaragua
- ★ Leon and Granada Explore these beautiful colonial cities

#### **ACCOMMODATION GRADE:**

#### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

#### **WALKING GRADE:**

#### Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.

## **GROUPSIZE:**

#### 10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# **Itinerary**

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1-Trip starts in San Jose

Trip start in Costa Rica's capital, San Jose, in the country's Central Valley.



Accommodation: Villa Tournon (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Walk in Braulio Carrillo National Park. Drive to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiqui

This morning after breakfast we travel to Braulio Carrillo National Park, where we take a short walk through the tropical forests. This protected area, though only a short distance from the capital, is a significant natural reserve and home to over 500 species of birds and 150 species of mammals, including howler and white faced capuchin monkeys. On our return to our bus we continue our journey to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiqui.

Today is an easy introductory walk. We walk for one hour covering one and half kilometres through tropical forest with 300m of ascent and descent.



Accommodation: Hotel Ara Ambigua (or similar)



Standard Hotel





Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Follow trail through primary rainforest at La Selva. Free afternoon

Today we visit La Selva, the Organisation for Tropical Studies' biological station, and follow the trail through their primary forest with a local guide. En route we learn about the flora and fauna here and about the station's research. The afternoon is free and optional excursions include white water rafting, a hike around Tirimbina Reserve and a chocolate tour (please note that you will only have time to do one of these activities).

Today's walk is also an easy walk through primary forest following a marked trail. We cover six and a half kilometres in approximately three hours.



Accommodation: Hotel Ara Ambigua (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Travel to Arenal. Local walk. Optional thermal baths

This morning we leave Sarapiqui and travel for around three hours to La Fortuna, close to Arenal volcano. Arenal Volcano has until recently been one of the world's most active volcanoes, but since 2010 activity has reduced. It however continues to have a dramatic and picturesque presence in the area. It is surrounded by rainforest which provides great hiking and has a large attractive lake to the west, formed as part of a hydro-electric power scheme. In the afternoon we take a gentle walk in the national park to learn about the area. This evening, we can enjoy an optional bathe in nearby hot springs or a two hour night walk.

Our walk today covers five kilometres and takes approximately two to three hours with 100m of ascent and descent.



Accommodation: Arenal Montechiari Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Hiking in Arenal Volcano National Park

Today we take to the tree tops for Arenal's famous 'Hanging Bridges' canopy hike. This involves walking on suspended bridges and walkways high up in the jungle canopy. A completely different view of the Arenal National Park than the trails on the ground and a great opportunity to view the wildlife that lives in the trees. We should also get some stunning views of the Arenal Volcano itself from up high. In the afternoon we can visit some nearby hot springs where there are eight pools to choose from!

Today's hike takes approximately four hours and covers six kilometres with 300m of ascent and 200m of descent.



## Accommodation: Arenal Montechiari Hotel (or similar)

Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Drive around Lake Arenal and on to Rincon de la Vieja National Park

This morning we depart for Rincon de la Vieja. We drive part way round Arenal Lake before heading north-west to another national park with an active volcano, Rincon de la Vieja. Here we stay in a lodge not far from the park entrance.



## Accommodation: Canon de la Vieja Lodge (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Hike thorough Rincon de la Vieja Volcano National Park to waterfall

After driving into the park we begin our hike through Rincon de la Vieja Volcano National Park to a local Waterfall. Within the park we willl walk through the dry tropical forest, keeping an eye out for white faced howler or spider monkeys and other flora and fauna surrounding us. On our return it is possible to include the 'Pailas Loop' to see more of the park and evidence of volcanic activity, mini geysers and bubbling volcanic mud.

The Waterfall hike is six kilometres and takes approximately four hours with 200m of ascent and descent. The additional Pailas Loop is another four kilometres and two and a half hours.



Accommodation: Canon de la Vieja Lodge (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Cross the border to Nicaragua. Take ferry to Isla Ometepe

Today we leave Costa Rica, crossing over into neighbouring Nicaragua. We travel to Lake Nicaragua, one of the world's largest freshwater lakes, and take a ferry across to the volcanic island of Ometepe. Ometepe has been home to indigenous tribes and cultures for many centuries, demonstrated by the pre-Colombian petroglyphs and artefacts found here. The island was made from the formation of two volcanoes - Concepcion (1610m) and Maderas (1394m) that give the island its distinctive profile as you approach the island by boat. On Ometepe we stay in a small natural reserve on the shoreline.

Our stroll around the lake takes approximately an hour and covers one and half kilometres.



Accommodation: Hotel Charco Verde (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Hike through cloudforest to San Ramon Waterfall

After breakfast we drive to the start of today's hike to San Ramon Waterfall. The waterfall is on the southern slopes of Maderas Volcano, about four kilometres from San Ramon village. We walk through dense jungle, home to howler monkeys and a wide variety of birds and butterflies, some of which are endemic to the area. The waterfall is most impressive during the rainy season when there is the most water but remains a beautiful spot throughout the year. Along the way to the waterfall we will see the pipes from the local hydroelectric station. The crystal clear water from here is also bottled for drinking. This afternoon we can take an easy walk around the nearby lake to a viewpoint.

Todays hike is eight kilometres and takes approximately four hours with 400m of ascent and descent.



Accommodation: Hotel Charco Verde (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Ferry back to mainland and drive to the colonial city of Leon

Today we take the ferry back across the lake to drive north-west to the colonial university city of Leon, home to the countries main universities. In the afternoon we take a walk around the fascinating old town with its historical buildings, churches and cathedral listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Accommodation: Hotel Los Balcones (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Drive through Los Maribios and volcano hike on El Hoyo

Our walk today is on a distinctive volcano - El Hoyo can easily be recognised from a distance by the large hole in the on one of its slopes, and is actually a complex of several volcanic structures, the most significant of which are two round craters and several fumaroles. We arrive to the start of our hike by driving through Los Maribios, Nicaragua's impressive volcanic chain. As we ascend we will have views down over other volcanoes and Lake Managua, the large lake to the north of Lake Nicaragua.

Our hike today takes approximately seven hours and covers twelve kilometres with 500m of ascent and descent.



Accommodation: Hotel Los Balcones (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Drive to Granada, one of Central America's most beautiful cities; explore on foot

Granada, on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, was founded in 1524 and is thought to be the second oldest Spanish city in Latin America. Today much of the city centre has been renovated and it has a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere. On our arrival we take a tour of the city including the Merced church and a local market. The rest of the day is free to explore this attractive city further or relax in one of the many cafes.



Accommodation: Hotel El Almirante (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Four-wheel drive and hike along the Puma Trail on a walking tour of Mombacho Volcano

Covered by cloudforest, Mombacho Volcano can be seen from Granada. This morning we drive to the top by four wheel drive and visit the scientific station there. We then take a guided hike along the Puma Trail, learning about the volcano and the flora and fauna found in this special environment. From the top there are stunning views down to Lake Nicaragua.

This volcano hike is seven kilometres and takes four hours with 400m of ascent and descent although this will feel like more due to the amount of ups and downs.



# Accommodation: Hotel El Almirante (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - Free day in Granada

Today we have a free day in Granada. Possible optional excursions include a boat trip or kayaking through Las Isletas on Lake Nicaragua and a visit to Masaya Volcano.



# Accommodation: Hotel El Almirante (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - Trip ends at Managua airport

We drive to Managua airport where our trip ends.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

# Walking and Trekking information

# DAILY DISTANCES Day 2 1.5km Day 3 6.5km Day 4 5km Day 5 7.5km Day 6 Day 7 6km 4km Day 8 1.5km Day 9 8km Day 10 Day 11 12km Day 12 Day 13 7km Optional Walks

## Walking grade

Moderate

#### Trek details

Walks on 6 days of this holiday to Costa Rica and Nicaragua for between 1 to 7 hours. Some walks are graded easy, some moderate. The trip has been graded as moderate overall because of the effect that heat and humidity may have.



# What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 14



**Transport** 

Bus 4WD Ferry



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

9 nights standard hotel 3 nights premium hotel 2 nights standard lodge

# **Trip information**

## **Country information**

## Costa Rica

#### Climate

Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page. Costa Rica has a tropical climate with high temperature humidity and rainfall. The average temperature is  $21^{\circ}$ C in the highlands and variable in the lowlands. The rainy season is from May to November and the summer from December to April, but it does still tend to rain, usually in short bursts. Bear in mind that Costa Rica has 12 microclimates and weather can vary significantly in one day.

#### Time difference to GMT

-6

#### Plugs

2 Pin Flat

#### Religion

Christian, Roman Catholic

#### Language

Spanish

## Nicaragua

#### Climate

Tropical, with little seasonal variation in temperature. The heavy rainy season is May to October but it can rain at any time along the Caribbean coast of Rio San Juan. There are 3 main climactic zones, the hot tropical lowlands and the cooler hill region, which has a larger range of daily temperature.

#### Time difference to GMT

-6

## Plugs

2 Pin Flat

#### Religion

#### Language

Spanish

## **Budgeting and packing**

## **Optional activities**

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Puerto Viejo Sarapiqui - White water Rafting (class I-III) US\$60; (class V) US\$110; Canopy US\$59; Canopy and rafting US\$100; Chocolate tour US\$34; Tirimbina hike US\$34

La Fortuna - Hot Springs: US\$41 (Entrance); with dinner US\$65; Night walk US\$40 2 hours

Granada - Las Isletas boat trip US\$35 (2 pers); US\$25 (3 pers +) Las Isletas kayak US\$35; Masaya Volcano US\$30; Masaya Volcano and craft market US£50 (2 pers); Masaya Night tour US\$45 (min 2 pers)

## **Clothing**

Lightweight clothing is essential for most of the year, though a warmer jumper is advisable for cooler evenings at higher altitudes. A good lightwaterproof is essential, and you could consider waterproof trousers. The jungle lowlands are hot and muggy, and it can rain at any time of year. Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts are recommended on jungle walks.

## **Footwear**

We recommend you bring lightweight walking boots with ankle support, make sure that your boots are worn-in and comfortable before the start of the trip. Also trainers or sandals for relaxing and general wear. We suggest that on international flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that will be irreplaceable.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daysack.

## **Equipment**

A waterbottle, sunhat, sunglasses, insect repellent and sun protection cream are essential. Bring poles if you are used to walking with them.

## **Tipping**

#### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

#### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip. For this trip we recommend US\$60 contribution.

#### **International Departure Taxes**

Please allow US\$20 for border taxes.

#### Country Information

## Costa Rica

## Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£13

Dinner price

£13

Beer price

£З

Water price

£1.3

## Foreign Exchange

#### Local currency

Costa Rican Colon.

#### Recommended Currency For Exchange

Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange. USD can be used in some places in Costa Rica. You may wish to take extra cash to cover the cost of optional excursions – please see the budget for your trip section on the trip notes.

#### Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

#### **ATM Availability**

Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

#### **Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

#### **Travellers Cheques**

Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

## Nicaragua

## Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£10.00 - 12.00

Beer price

£2

Water price

£0.8

## Foreign Exchange

## Local currency

Cordoba

#### Recommended Currency For Exchange

Carry all your funds in US cash NOT Sterling or Travellers Cheques which are more difficult to exchange. We recommend to take a minimum of US\$400-\$500 of your total spending money in cash, in mixed denominations. Notes should be in good condition otherwise they might be difficult to exchange. USD can be used in some places in Nicaragua.

#### Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

#### **ATM Availability**

Available in Major towns. Always have some cash as back-up as they are not always reliable

#### **Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit cards are useful and can be used in many places, but may be subject to a 10% service charge

#### **Travellers Cheques**

Travellers Cheques can be awkward or expensive to change

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

## **Transport Information**

Bus, 4WD, Ferry

## **Essential Information**

## **FCO Advice**

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click here

#### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

#### Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. Booking Conditions

## Visa and Passport Information

Costa Rica: Citizens from the UK, US, Canada and most E.U countries do not require a visa for a stay up to 90 days. Citizen of Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland do not require a visa for stays up to 30 days.

Nicaragua: Visas are not required for UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens. There is an entry charge of 10USD. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

USA: (including those in transit) Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) - where you apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), which applies if you enter the country by sea or by air. This must be done on line - https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip are likely be refused boarding.

You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover.

If you have visited Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan since 2011 or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot travel with an ESTA and instead you will need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel.

Please note for your ESTA application you will be required to supply Point of Contact information. Explore's USA contact information will be listed on your final documentation which you will receive approximately 3-4 weeks before departure. If you are leaving for the USA before this, please call the Explore team to get this information. (Not necessary if in transit)

For further information please check out the US embassy website. Visa applications - http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/apply.html

Canada: An electronic travel authorisation (ETA) is required by British citizens transiting via Canada. For more information see the official Canadian government website: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/eta.asp

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

## **Booking conditions**

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## **Transfers**

Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.

#### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

#### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click here

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

#### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

#### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Costa Rica

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

## Nicaragua

#### **Vaccinations**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please note many countries in Central America, South America and the Caribbean require a yellow fever vaccination certificates if travelling from infected areas. A detailed list of these countries can be found on the NaTHNaC website - http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries. Also on the NaTHNaC site there is a list of Countries (and specific areas within a country) which are at risk of infection and a vaccination is therefore recommended. All travellers coming to Nicaragua from the following countries (even if only in transit) must present an international certificate of vaccination: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Panamá, Paraguay and Venezuela. From the African Continent, all countries are included except Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Somalia. This list is regularly updated please check NaTHNaC for the most up to date list. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.