

Surfer's Chart New Frontier: Nicaragua's World-Class Waves

Surfers, True Seekers

"Few things will teach you more about humility, or the real world, than surfing"

It's like learning to walk on water. Seemingly impossible and charged with defeats. The trying, waiting, welling, build up, chase, loss, foam and froth of it. But the moment you finally stand on an unbroken wave and dissolve into water, you become part of a whole. Surfer and author Steve Kotler refers to the "watery communion" many surfers experience in the water. It's not even about harnessing the incredibly powerful forces of nature that converge to make epic waves; "holy" is perhaps never felt more acutely than from a board in the middle of the ocean, that heartless immensity, surrounded by waves rising and falling with each glorious breath.

Others relate the primordial, elemental nature of water: if life on earth began in the oceans, then surfing connects people to the collective unconscious of our planet. But beyond mysticism, surfing puts you into present-moment awareness that asks you to be vulnerable and brave at once. It requires strength, trust and perseverance to gracefully balance through the chaos of water. Ultimately, surfing is also just a hell of a lot of fun.

The quest for the perfect wave and that profound experience of being in the ocean has taken adventurers with just a board tucked under their arm to far-flung corners of the globe. It's the reason why diehard surf enthusiasts have been drawn to humble fishing villages or unnamed coves thousands of miles from home. It's the reason why the true seekers coming to Nicaragua, the new frontier for world-class waves. Part of 30-mile stretch of unspoiled Pacific Coastline, Nicaragua is a hidden gem of the Emerald Coast. It's abundant in stunning natural beauty and pristine beaches, but still undeveloped and uncrowded by thrill seekers. Those in the know come for one thing primarily...

Legendary Surf

Nicaragua's geography and shape play a key role in creating this incredible surf enclave. The country's long, isolated shorelines transform the pounding swells from spring storms in the South Pacific into perfect overhead barrels. With a unique topography of numerous points, reefs and creek-fed beaches, there's no shortage or variety of solid swells. Trade winds sweep unopposed across the bodies of inland lakes Nicaragua and Managua towards the ocean, giving Nicaragua incredible 300+ days of offshore winds. That golden wind keeps the waves open longer, resulting in slow-breaking, seemingly slow-motion rolls into perfect waves and great surf conditions throughout the entire day. Glassy waves, offshore winds and uncrowded breaks: this is why faithful surf seekers travel from all over the world to get here. And why they don't mind bouncing down rocky cow paths or jungle roads that lead straight to stunning ocean sides.

Nicaragua's southwest coast produces ten different kinds of peaks and breaks, ranging from open-face beach breaks, to fast hollow reef waves, to massive outer reef barrels for those with extreme physical prowess and skill. What's nice is that you also get gentle, long whitewater lines for beginners, so seasoned shredders can share the water and total experience with family and friends of varying skill levels.

Breaks Worth Traveling For

Here are just a few insider surf spots worth the journey, in order of sanity.

Playa Hermosa is a dramatic stretch of handsome and rugged Pacific coast. One of the remarkable features of this stunning beach is the rock cropping a mile offshore that looks like a giant sphinx or some majestic beast with two great wings rising from the ocean. This is where Survivor Nicaragua filmed their first season and where you get clear views to Costa Rica across the water. Depending on the swell direction, there are 5–7 different peaks along this mile-long stretch, long walls and more than the occasional barrel. The inside sections have a reform that's great for learning and the outside segments gives you many swells and hollow tubes for intermediate and advanced surfers with both lefts and rights to shred.

Playa Maderas, adjacent to Lake Managua (ah, offshore winds), is a mostly sandy beach offering hollow lefts and rights that handle long period swells quite well. It's excellent for beginners and more seasoned gunners. The waves break in layers, so even a beginner can grab a wave on one of the smaller sets that break closer to shore. The outer sets are consistently great for more advanced surfers. Waves can range anywhere from chest high (3–5 ft) and crumbling to double overhead and barreling (holds up to 8ft+), depending on the swell size and direction.

Playa Santana (formerly Playa Jiquiliste) is a beautiful long beach surrounded by green hills and pastures and rocky outcrops at either end of the beach. This is a wedgy beach break that offers plenty of space to find a fun peak to yourself. Santana also throws up barrels and gives you ripable corners. On small swell pulses, this break is punchy with A-frames and air ramps. When the swell gets bigger, it's a full-on barrel fest.

Popoyo just north of Playa Santana is a staple wave that put Nicaragua on the surfing map. Warning: Popoyo is actually home of two waves with two very different personalities. The inside offers powerful reef break with lefts and rights with the left being more favorable. You also get long, powerful walls and a thick barrel section at lower tides. Popoyo is very consistent and accommodates all swell directions. Even better, it magnifies the smallest swell and holds up to double-overheads. The only drawback is that there's only peak, which means some wait.

The outer reef 400m offshore is only an option for the extremely skilled and brave (crazy people). When the swell pushes past six or seven feet, the big wave hell-raisers head this way. Expect machine-like barrels throwing as wide as they are tall and breaking at about three to five times overhead, with a scary shallow reef below. The shallow rocks, boils and riverine currents sculpt heaving, beastly barrels that easily handle 20ft faces and plummet rapidly on the drop at this higher tide spot.

Launch Your Next Surf Adventure from the Trees

TreeCasa is perfectly located in the surf epicenter of San Juan del Sur, but this treehouse resort and retreat space is nestled in the jungle canopy and a world apart. Launch your active surf holiday from this ideal base with fun and safe lessons for beginners as well as direct daily shuttles to plunge seasoned gunners straight into the water. [Add bit on the experience/background of trusted surf instructor]

Besides surf packages and access to the best beaches, TreeCasa provides quality accommodations, healthy food, spa and wellness treatments and a unique social vibe ideal for solo travelers, couples and family/friends alike. The expansive 10-acre property features stunning nooks to relax in after a day of hitting the breaks, or engage in happenings at the pools, organic farm-to-table restaurant, three-story tree lounge, hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking trails.