



Nicaragua

San Juan River Kayaking

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



Itinerary

Nicaragua • In the footsteps of Mark Twain

11 Days • 10 Nights

Managua – Granada – San Carlos – San Juan River – Indio Maiz Biological Reserve – Village of El Howe

Optional: Beach extension at San Juan del Sur

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit the spectacular Indio Maiz reserve, home to pumas, jaguars, tapirs & primates
- Walk around the incongruous fortress of El Castillo that looms above the wildest rapids on the river
- Visit the ruins of Old Greytown, a once prosperous British settlement in the Caribbean that has been reclaimed by the forest
- Get to know Granada, a colonial gem backed by an impressive volcano

TOUR ESSENTIALS

Tour Style	Kayaking Adventure
Tour Start	Granada
Tour End	Managua
Accommodation	Lodge, Camping, Hotel
Included Meals	10 Breakfasts, 8 lunches, 8 Dinners
Difficulty Level	Very difficult

This epic river journey combines first class wilderness with rich history and more than a little adventure. We will paddle from the majestic Lake Nicaragua down the jungle lined San Juan River along a route once favoured by pirates and buccaneers with eyes for the gold of the Spanish colonial empire. On the way we will drift pass the impenetrable forest of the Indio Maiz reserve, one of the best preserved areas of tropical rainforest in the region. We will also visit charming riverside towns, historic ruins and hidden Caribbean lagoons. This unparalleled expedition takes you to the heart of this rarely visited part of Latin America.

Overview

If you are after serious adventure, breathtaking wilderness, rich culture and history then our Rio San Juan expedition is tailor made for you. A challenging, sometimes arduous but fascinating journey down one of the great rivers of the Americas, this trip has it all.

Our expert guides will show you how to perfect your technique in the canoes as well as point out the best ways to get close to nature in your boats, after which you will be ready to launch out into the phenomenal wilderness that forms a key component of the Mesoamerican biological corridor.

In addition to diverse birdlife, monkeys, and crocodiles, we may see tiny frogs that indigenous tribes used to poison darts and perhaps even tapirs or some of the mighty felines that inhabit the area.

The natural wonders are just part of the attraction the area, the Rio San Juan was once one of the most important transport routes on the continent, linking the Caribbean and Pacific long before the Panama Canal was even conceived. The Spanish conquistadores used it to communicate with new world settlements on the isthmus, while pirates including William Dampier and Henry Morgan made numerous trips up river to sack the wealthy colonial city of Granada. During the gold rush, steamboats moved thousands of passengers up the river to make the onward journey by ship to California.

During the course of the expedition, we will visit the Spanish fortress at El Castillo. We will also explore the ruins of Old Greytown, once a thriving British colony that has since been taken over by thick jungle. At the end of our expedition, we will find ourselves in a truly original 1970's hunting lodge set deep within the rainforest.

Itinerary



DAY 1: MANAGUA & GRANADA (D)

Upon arriving in Managua we will be met at the airport before being our transfer to our hotel in Granada (29 miles away).

Granada was founded in 1524 and is believed to be the second oldest city established in mainland Latin America by the Spanish conquest. During colonial times, Granada saw much unrest as the city was attacked several times by pirates. Nowadays Granada is characterized by bright-colored Spanish-colonial architecture, visible throughout the city center. The ambiance is very pleasant and there is a wide array of nice restaurants and bars, especially along the boulevard from the central park to the shores of Lake Nicaragua. A city tour by horse-drawn carriage will give you a good sense of the rich history and authenticity of Spanish-colonial Granada. While the city in itself is already an impressive attraction, the immediate surroundings make Granada a place where you will want to spend a couple of days.

Overnight Hotel Casa del Consulado (or similar)

DAY 2: DISCOVERY OF GRANADA & BOAT TRIP ON LAS ISLETAS – LAKE NICARAGUA (B)

After breakfast you will set out on a tour of the city's beautiful historic center and what better way to visit it than on a traditional horse-drawn carriage. On this privately guided walking/carriage tour you will explore the San Francisco Church and neighboring San Francisco Convent built in 1529. Now functioning as a museum, as well as being a stunning building consisting surrounding a couple of courtyards, the Convent is home to an impressive collection of pre-Columbian art. Continue on to the beautiful Merced Church where you will have the opportunity to climb to the top of the bell tower and take in spectacular views over the city, Lake Nicaragua, and the Mombacho Volcano. Next, head over to La Polvora Fortress to learn the history of the old fortress before finishing your tour in the oldest part of the city where you will visit the Xalteva Church and the old city walls. Throughout the excursion your guide will provide you with an informative and unique perspective of this beloved colonial city.



From here we will head to Lake Nicaragua (or Lake Cocibolca as it is also known) as we set out on Las Isletas - Boat Tour. A boat trip through the Isletas of Granada is a great way to explore Lake Nicaragua. You will board a private motor boat and explore Las Isletas of Granada.

Situated at the foot of the impressive Mombacho Volcano, the area we visit consists of around 365 small volcanic islands which were formed when the Mombacho Volcano erupted about 20,000 years ago. These small islands are inhabited by families who make their living from fishing, while other islands play host to extravagant villas owned by Nicaragua's rich and famous. You make a stop at the San Pablo fort, built in the 18th century to protect Granada against English pirates. Additionally, you visit Monkey Island - a sanctuary for monkeys previously held as pets. Before heading back and enjoying a complementary drink at a restaurant located on one of the islands where you can soak up the beautiful views or take a dip in the pool.

The rest of the day will be spent at leisure – depending on your, there are a number of optional tours to or if you prefer you can simply relax in the central park or by the pool, or watch the world go by at La Casada.

Overnight Hotel Casa del Consulado (or similar)



DAY 3: FROM MANAGUA TO SABALOS (B,L,D)

After breakfast this morning we set off back to Managua airport for our flight to San Carlos, before our short transfer to San Carlos. Here we will have lunch before taking the public boat (approx. 3hrs) to Sabalos Lodge, where we will start our jungle adventure. Sabalos Lodge is located on the San Juan River and practices real ecotourism, where nature, a rustic setting, and the elemental comforts needed in the middle of the wet tropical jungle of Nicaragua are combined. It is surrounded by abundant native plants and resident and seasonally migratory animals: a large number of birds, varieties of mammals, and many species of reptiles, among others. It's a paradise for bird-watchers.

Your home tonight will be a charming riverside cabin, all providing spectacular views of the San Juan River as you relax in your hammock.

The well-equipped restaurant specializes in serving fresh fish from the river. Different hikes can be easily undertaken, using one of the several trails in the private natural reserve.

Overnight Sabalos Eco-lodge

DAY 4: KAYAKING TO BARTOLA (B,L,D)

After being woken up by the daily chorus of howler monkeys you will have a leisurely breakfast before your kayaks are brought to you. Today your expedition really begins as we set off into the Nicaraguan wilderness on the first day of our 100 mile trip down the San Juan River. Here the river is wide and surrounded by wetlands (the home of turtles, caimans and crocodiles). This part of the river offers some of the best bird watching on the continent, with numerous migratory species perching along logs and rocks all along the riverbank.

This morning we will set off towards El Castillo, an easy 2/3 hour/10 mile paddle. We will have lunch at El Castillo and a chance to explore the ancient Spanish fort built in 1675, before setting off to negotiate the rapids around the town and paddling downstream for another couple of hours to the Bartola river, the boundary of the Indio Maiz reserve. In this stretch the jungle growth begins to get a bit more substantial, with bigger trees filled with birds and the odd troupe of monkeys. The forest paths wind through trees, covered by a canopy of vines which teem with interesting birds, mammals, butterflies and insects. Orchids and Bromeliads add a splash of colour to the shades of the green rainforest foliage. Tonight we will stay at the Hostel Refugio Bartola, a biological research station which doubles as a hostel.

Overnight Hostel

DAY 5: KAYAKING TO BOCA SAN CARLOS (B,L,D)

Today, we have a full day kayaking as we make the 30 mile journey (approx. 8 hours) to the Boca San Carlos. The river is narrower in this stretch and is surrounded by thick jungle on the Nicaraguan side while there are some farms and the occasional settlement on the Costa Rican side, where we will spend the night. Throughout the day we are likely to see crocodiles sunning themselves on logs as well as turtles and monkeys in the surrounding trees.

Overnight camp

DAY 6: INDIO MAIZ BIOLOGICAL RESERVE (B,L,D)

This morning we head into the Indio Maiz Biological Reserve as we head towards Sarapiquí, on another full day of canoeing (25 miles – approx. 8 hours). This reserve is considered to be one of the best preserved natural reserves in Nicaragua and is home to a wide variety of rainforest birds and animals including toucans, hummingbirds, sloths, pumas, monkeys and even the spectacular manatee. Although a couple of short treks in this reserve is possible from Bartola, the rest of the rainforest does not allow hiking, so travelling by boat is one of the only and best ways to experience this



pristine environment in the rainforest. Tonight there are no lodges available so we will set up our own camp (or possibly even stay at a rangers station)

Overnight camp

DAY 7: KAYAKING TO EL JOYO (B,L,D)

After an exciting night camping in the rainforest we will be no doubt be woken early by the terrific bird songs surrounding our camp. Today we have another full day of canoeing ahead (approx. 6 hours). We will stop at the delta checkpoint for lunch before continuing to kayak to the indigenous village of El Howe. We will have dinner with the villages before setting up our camp again within the community. El Howe is an idyllic community that shares the border with Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Many of its inhabitants are of indigenous Rama tribe who used to live deep in the forests. The community has its own riverside school and church, a sudden but welcome change to the panorama of thick jungle on the San Juan River.



Overnight camp / Village house

DAY 8: KAYAK TO RIO INDIO LODGE (B,L,D)

We will get in our kayaks for the last time as we set off on our final part of our journey down the San Juan river (6 hours). The landscape changes spectacularly from thick jungle to lowlands with palm trees and wetlands. The river starts to run a bit slower before reaching the Caribbean Sea. Here we will arrive at our accommodation for tonight as we step back into a bygone era of 1970's luxury at the Rio Indio Lodge. It is by far the most luxurious hotel in the San Juan river region – an eco-lodge with much of the comforts of a luxury hotel. Surrounded by virgin forest, abundant wildlife and fishing, it was once Central America premier hunting lodge (and still a favourite for big game fishermen). , it is still a stunning place providing real jungle decadence. You get a true sense of its past glory and it feels like a very special place to end your epic river journey. The rooms are huge and have private terraces overlooking the Rio Indio.

Overnight Hotel

DAY 9: FREE DAY (B,L,D)

Free day at the Rio Indio Lodge. This morning we can cross the bay to visit the ruins of Greytown, once a bustling British Caribbean outpost and departure point for the steamboats that carried tens of thousands of passengers up the Rio San

Juan. You can also arrange a variety of optional activities (additional costs apply) including birding, fly fishing, and kayaking (amongst some of the much smaller channels)

Overnight Hotel



DAY 10: TRANSFER TO MANAGUA (B, L)

After a relaxing morning you will take the small domestic flight back to Managua (flight time 1 ¼ hrs). Upon arrival at the airport you will be met by our driver and transferred to your hotel Hotel Europeo – a tranquil hotel well situated near shops and restaurants.

Overnight Hotel

DAY 11: FLIGHT HOME OR OPTIONAL BEACH EXTENSION (B)

Following breakfast we'll be transferred to the airport for our onward flights. Alternatively you can opt for a beach extension at San Juan del Sur.

What our clients have said

'Just got back today! The kayaking trip itself was fantastic. Brilliant guides, good food, comfortable camping and accommodation, lots of wildlife. Be prepared for quite basic accommodation & amenities at times (although we did not mind it at all!! Thank you for organising. Cheers'

- K. Datta



Important Information

INCLUDED

- 🌍 All meals as described (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- 🌍 Accommodation in hotel, lodges and camping as mentioned or similar
- 🌍 Flight Managua - San Carlos : Greytown -Managua
- 🌍 All transfers
- 🌍 Public river transport San Carlos - Sabalos
- 🌍 Tours as mentioned with services of English speaking guide during guided tours
- 🌍 Local English speaking guide Rio San Juan
- 🌍 Kayaks
- 🌍 Camping gear
- 🌍 VAT / taxes

NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Meals other than mentioned
- Immigration fees
- Personal expenses
- Optional tours/activities
- Tips for porters

Additional Information

ACTIVITY DURATION	6 to 8 hours per day
SEASON	All year apart from October/November (when there is an increased likelihood of hurricanes)
BEST TIME TO GO	July, August and September is probably best as the sun isn't so strong (rainy season), and everything is lush without excessive rainfall. During the dry season (Jan – April) the river is lower and slower but is still easy to navigate and it is easier to spot alligators and crocodiles on the riverbank. It is much hotter during this time though and the sun beating down on you can be wearing.
GROUP SIZE	2-8 persons (a supplement applies for groups less than 4)
DIFFICULTY LEVEL	Our grades have been designated based on our perception of the degree of physical activity you are likely to require to enjoy the adventure. These are only a guideline. This itinerary has a 'very difficult level' (challenging activities for more than 7 hours per day). This means that you will need to be fit and training will be required.
EXPEDITION SCHEDULE	Due to internal flights, this trip itinerary starts on a Tuesday. This is a real once in a lifetime expedition, please see our website or email us for scheduled group departures.

