

NATURE STAYS

From the DREAM beach resort of Nicaragua's FIRST BILLIONAIRE to a hammock-strung BEACH hostel SAVING sea turtles from poachers, these ECO LODGES invite travellers to RECONNECT and stay awhile.

WORDS SERENA RENNER



SURFING TURTLE LODGE

This rustic solar-powered beach hostel on the northern Pacific Coast lives up to its name – it's all about surfing and turtles. That and socialising at the open-air lounge or at the beach bar where swings hang over the sand. Since opening in 2009, the lodge has released tens of thousands of olive ridley, leatherback and green sea turtles, many of which would have otherwise been poached. surfingturtlelodge.com



MUKUL

This 37-room golf and wellness resort, set amid 675 private hectares along Manzanillo Bay, is the vision of Don Carlos Pellas, the local billionaire behind such renowned Nicaraguan businesses as the Flor de Caña rum distillery. Bedroom headboards are made of rum barrel staves, and the Palapa Lounge offers rum tastings. Egg-shaped soaking tubs, oceanfront infinity pools and six spa sanctuaries have raised the bar for Latin luxury. mukulresort.com



HACIENDA PUERTA DEL CIELO

The recipient of a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award every year since 2013 was originally created as a second home by Nicaraguan-born yacht designer Juan Carlos Espinosa. Colour-splashed rooms, orchards of fruit trees, and 180-degree panoramas of Masaya Volcano National Park truly make this lodge a doorway to heaven – the English translation of its name. haciendapuertadelcielo.com

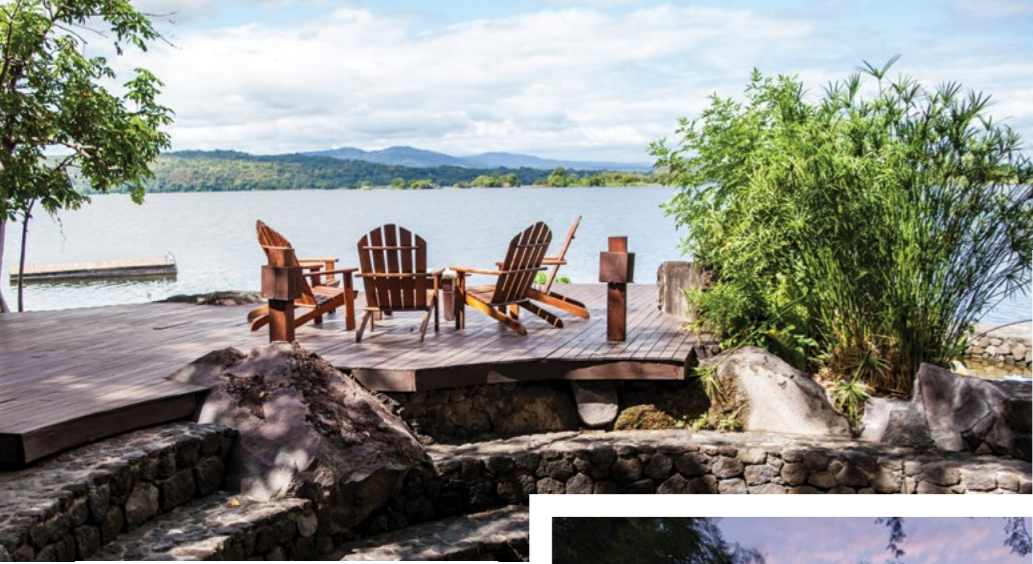
MORGAN'S ROCK ECO LODGE

This retreat, tucked into protected jungle about 10km north of San Juan del Sur, boasts 15 bungalows and three two-bedroom villas, complete with private pools and glass-wall views. Learn to make tortillas at the organic farm, discover nocturnal creatures on an evening nature walk, and release sea turtle hatchlings into the Pacific. morgansrock.com



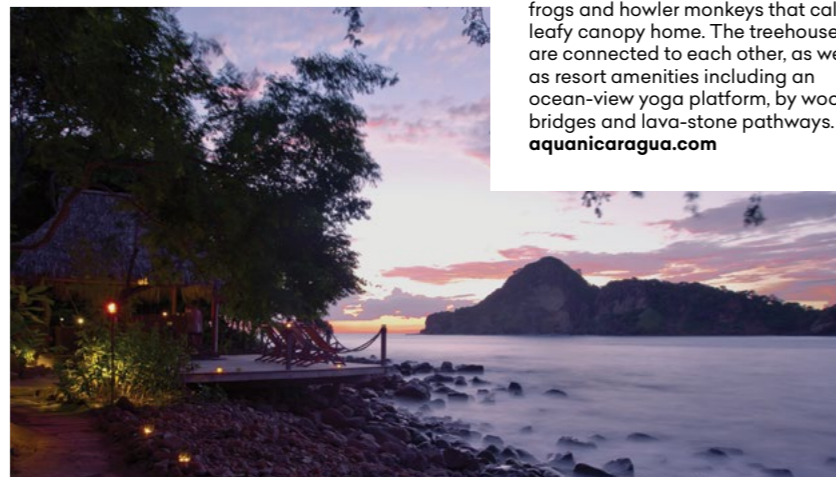
THE INN AT RANCHO SANTANA

In 2015, a 'ranch' with houses, villas and casitas added a 17-room boutique hotel to its accommodation options. The surrounding 1100-hectare property features horse stables, hiking trails, an organic garden and five private beaches with standout surfing. Many of the Inn's furnishings were custom-made at the on-site wood shop and iron works. ranchosantana.com/the-inn



JICARO ISLAND LODGE

Built from trees felled by 2007's Hurricane Felix on an island in Lake Nicaragua, a short boat ride from Granada, the all-inclusive Jicaro Lodge offers nine modern casitas stilted over the ground. The wood is Rainforest Alliance certified, and community programs support local workers, schools and villages. It's no wonder Jicaro is a member of National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World. jicarolodge.com



AQUA WELLNESS RESORT

Treetop villas with private plunge pools and wraparound decks put guests in touch with the macaws, butterflies, tree frogs and howler monkeys that call the leafy canopy home. The treehouses are connected to each other, as well as resort amenities including an ocean-view yoga platform, by wooden bridges and lava-stone pathways. aquanicaragua.com



MEN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
NATIO BROAD SPECTRUM SUNSCREEN SPF +50 AU\$11.95 natio.com.au
CHOBANI CHILLI LIME RANCH MEZÉ DIP AU\$3.99 coles and leading independent supermarkets
KANKEN BACKPACK AU\$129.95 theiconic.com.au
KINGSMAN + **SMYTHSON** PANAMA NOTEBOOK APPROX. AU\$61.80 mrporter.com

TRAVEL SET

Pack your bag with this mix of LIFE'S little LUXURIES to keep your travels GOING.



WOMEN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
LE SPECS ASHANTI GARNET SUNGLASSES AU\$119 lespecs.com
LONELY RUSH CAMI SMOKED ROSE AU\$182.30 lonelylabel.com
AQUAZZURA WILD THINGS SUEDE FRINGED BLOCK-HEEL AU\$600 matchesfashion.com
DODO BAR OR EMBELLISHED EMBROIDERED COTTON-GAUZE WRAP MINI SKIRT AU\$274 net-a-porter.com

WANT TO MAKE THE MOVE?

Here's how it stacks up, according to **PRONicaragua**, the country's investment promotion agency.

1 Note to potential hotel owners and tour operators: Nicaragua's tourism industry is on the rise. The country's Central Bank reports revenues from tourism increasing 18.7 per cent between 2014 and 2015, due in large part to people staying longer than before.

2 The process of registering a company can be fast-tracked (to approximately 13 days) by using the services provided by the one-stop-shop Unique Office for Investment – or Ventanilla Única de Inversiones (VUI).

3 The workforce in Nicaragua is young and dynamic: 76 per cent of the population is under 39 years, and the labour force consists of 3.2 million people. Workers are known for being flexible and productive, with a good work ethic and capacity for quick learning.

4 Nicaragua offers one of the most competitive cost structures in the region when it comes to operational costs and overheads, for everything from water to internet and phone services.

5 The Foreign Investment Promotion Law provides equal treatment of foreign and domestic investment, eliminates restrictions on the way foreign capital can enter the country, and recognises the right of foreign investors to own and use property without limitation.

6 In recent years, Nicaragua has become one of the safest countries in the western hemisphere. In 2016, the homicide rate was seven for every 100,000 inhabitants – it sits at one per 100,000 in Australia – and the incidence of theft is one of the lowest in the Americas, too.

Three creative businesses that

GIVE BACK

ONE

EL LIBRO VOLADOR

Translating to 'The Flying Book', this mobile library makes bi-weekly visits to rural schools in Estelí and Jinotega to lend books to teachers and students, so they don't have to move towns. Its umbrella organisation, Café Luz y Luna, runs a hostel, café and tourism office to fund the library bus as well as other social projects.

TWO

EQUILIBRIO

Founded by Argentinian yogi, poet and dancer Gabriela Prado and her US surfer, juggler, writer partner James Womack, this six-hectare retreat near Playa Guasacate was built to inspire, with writing desks and art supplies available for creative minds, plus you might just stumble upon a drum set. The couple also run the Fundación Aprender which provides school uniforms and supplies for youths in rural Las Salinas de Nahualapa.

THREE

CHURECA CHIC

The social enterprise arm of the UK charity Earth Education Project, Chureca Chic makes stylish jewellery and accessories to fund scholarship programs that teach women from marginalised areas (including the Chureca rubbish dump) life skills and artistic trades to break the cycle of poverty.

