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Nicaragua, tourism

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Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America (130,370 km²; 509,336 mi²) with a population of 5,788,531 (Figure 1). The 2012 GDP was US\$27.1 billion. Along with coffee, beef, textiles, and gold, tourism is a principal export accounting for \$421.5 million in foreign exchange (INTUR 2012). Natural amenities include Central America's largest lake, landscape-dominating volcanoes, highland forests, white sand beaches, and the largest neotropical rainforest outside of Amazonia. A Chinese company recently secured rights to develop a transoceanic canal likely to drastically alter the country's economic, environmental, and geopolitical situation (Meyer and Huete-Pérez 2014).

The 1978–1979 Sandinista Revolution ended the 40-year Somoza dictatorship. The subsequent decade of counterrevolutionary conflict brought tourism to a halt. With the end of hostilities and the Sandinista loss in the 1990 election, the government advocated tourism. *Ley de Incentivos para la Industria Turística* and *Ley General de Turismo* (tourism laws passed in 1999 and 2004, respectively) provide international and local developers exoneration from importation, sales,

materials, equipment, vehicle, and property taxes for tourism-related activities. With these policy changes, international arrivals grew by 340 % between 1997 and 2012 (from 358,000 to 1.2 million), while revenues quintupled from \$74.4 to \$421.5 million. Ports in San Juan del Sur and Corinto received up to 60 cruiseships per year (INTUR 2012). The country was one of few to experience tourism growth during the global economic recession in 2008 and 2009 (UNWTO 2010) and currently has the 2nd highest projected growth in Latin America. According to WTTC (2014), in 2013 the total contribution of tourism to Nicaragua was 9.1 % of GDP (\$1.01 billion) and 3.3 % of employment (195,500 jobs).

Outside the capital of Managua, tourism is concentrated in the colonial city of Granada, on Lake Nicaragua's twin-volcano island of Ometepe, and along the Pacific Coast. Surfing is a popular activity near San Juan del Sur (INTUR 2012), where unregulated growth is driven by investments of internationals and elite Nicaraguans. Local residents thus question tourism's contributions to wealth disparities, human wellbeing, and protection of nearby environments (Hunt 2011). Yet immense natural resources, rampant poverty, and perpetual underemployment provide Nicaragua with tourism-related ► [conservation](#) and ► [development](#) opportunities. The Universidad Centroamericana and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua offer tourism degree programs. Tourism ► [training](#) is further supported by the

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Figure 1 Map of
 Nicaragua



nongovernmental sector. Under-regulated development and sparse opportunities for local residents remain key challenges to tourism's ► [sustainability](#). While research prospects are many, the transoceanic canal will feature prominently in research undertaken in Nicaragua in the coming years.

See also ► [Coastal tourism](#), ► [community development](#), ► [developing country](#), ► [nature tourism](#), ► [rural tourism](#).

References

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