



GREAT ESCAPE

Life in the slow lane: La Bahia's open-air cabanas

## Nicaragua's New Paradise

A FLAWLESS BEACH RESORT LESS THAN A DAY AWAY

THOUGH NICARAGUA HAS BEEN MAKING THE NEWS IN recent years for revolution and financial collapse, an excursion into its wild countryside — more specifically, to a new surf-friendly resort run by American expats — holds a wealth of unhurried adventures.

### DAY 1

Fly into **Managua** and drive two and a half hours northwest — or, during the rainy season from May through October, until your tires spin aimlessly in the mud (best rent a workhorse SUV or just hire a driver) — to **La Bahia Beach Hotel**, where you'll be greeted with a cold beer, fresh ceviche, and the sinuous curve of the Pacific shoreline. The hotel's open-air lodge, set amid teak trees, is a minimalist's dream: pristine pool, modern lounge, and four airy cabanas with alfresco showers. Proprietors Jimmy Hahn and Lisa Dorfli chose the remote location based on the rock reef — waves peel off consistently in both left and right point breaks. Suit up and hit the water; first-timers can arrange lessons with surf pro Holly Beck (top right). Head back to the hotel for dinner and sip the pride of Nicaragua, **Flor de Caña** rum, but be sure to get a quick mosquito-net tutorial before tucking in.

### DAY 2

Wake at sunrise to hike **Cosigüina**, a lush crater-lake volcano with a lagoon visited by fewer than 20 people a year. A guide (with both a machete and a



knack for avoiding fire ants) is a must, and **Green Pathways** (\$75 per person; [greenpathways.com](http://greenpathways.com)) is the best service around.

### DAY 3

Surf more, or kayak the nearby **Padre Ramos Estuary**. For lunch, hop in Hahn's old Land Cruiser and appeal to a fisherman on the beach: For just a few bucks, he'll turn red snapper, sea bass, and lobster into tacos and sliders like magic.

### DAYS 4, 5, 6, 7...

Don't ignore your open-air cabana, where homemade banana bread and passion fruit juice can sustain you for an afternoon — or a lifetime — of hammock swinging (*from \$150; [labahiabeachhotel.com](http://labahiabeachhotel.com)*).

—JERALYN GERBA

## Instead of the Galápagos... Ballestas Islands, Peru

Every year 216 different marine species visit the rocks of Peru's Ballestas Islands, about three miles off the coast of the country's Paracas National Reserve. Located about 130 miles south of Lima, near the town of Pisco (as in Pisco sour — be sure to drink one), the islands boast an abundance of wildlife (largely due to the lack of nearby natural predators) that has earned them a reputation as the Peruvian Galápagos — though without the many restrictions and early-booking requirements of Ecuador's islands.

Humboldt penguins, Turkey vultures, and Peruvian boobies roost amid the Ballestas' many caves and atop their natural arches; the sky is thick with pelicans and Inca terns, and the beaches and surrounding waters are populated

with more than 5,000 sea lions (you're welcome to swim with them if you feel like braving 60-degree temps), along with a variety of dolphins, flamingos, turtles, and whales.

Back on the mainland, the mysterious Nazca Lines — a series of 200 B.C.-era etchings of monkeys, sharks, and lizards spanning 190 square miles of the desert — are discernible only from high above. For a quick look, have a cab take you to the accessible lookout on the Pan American highway. Close out your visit in the nearby Sechura Desert, where a professional driver will launch you over the edge of 400-foot sand dunes at sunset and then drop you off at a tent oasis for champagne and a gourmet dinner under the desert night sky. —KITT DOUCETE



Rowing the perimeter of the Ballestas



**GETTING THERE:** Paracas National Reserve is three hours from Lima by car — or a 10-mile cab ride from Pisco. For a local feel, shack up at the legendary Hotel Paracas, built in 1944 and rebuilt after the 2007 quake (*from \$365; [starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com)*).