

# PIONEER EXPEDITIONS

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Do something extraordinary.....

## In the footsteps of Mark Twain • Nicaragua 13 Days • 12 Nights • from £2650

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 to deserted beaches on the Caribbean sea 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

### Highlights

- Visit the spectacular **Indio Maiz** reserve, home to pumas, jaguars, tapirs, primates as well as fascinating plant life.
- Walk around the incongruous fortress of **El Castillo** that looms above the wildest rapids on the river.
- **Paddle** along mighty rivers that offer some of the best bird watching on the continent.
- 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

### 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 but relaxing 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 will see tiny frogs that indigenous tribes used to poison darts, walking trees and perhaps tapirs or some of the mighty felines that inhabit the area.

However 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. Built in 1675 to stop pirates reaching Lake Nicaragua, the fort over the rapids held firm for more than a century until a British expedition led by a young Horatio Nelson captured it in 1780. We will also explore the ruins of Old Greytown, once a thriving British colony that has since been taken over by thick jungle.

And after five days of paddling, we will reach the Caribbean, where we will visit indigenous Rama villages, swim in mystic lagoons inhabited by manatees or relax on deserted beaches.

## Itinerary

### Day 1

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

**Hotel, Dinner**

### Day 2

Today we have a day of leisure to explore this charming Colonial city set on Lake Nicaragua. Depending on your preferences, there are a number of optional tours to take today or if you prefer you can simply relax in the central park where our hotel is situated.

**Hotel, Breakfast**

### Day 3

After breakfast this morning we set off back to Managua airport for our flight to San Carlos, before our short transfer to our hotel the 'Esquina del Lago' in time for lunch. This jungle river lodge is situated in the tranquility of Los Guatuzos National Park on the corner of Lake Nicaragua, the Rio Frio and the San Juan river and is only accessible by boat. In the afternoon we will explore the rainforest by kayak and will also allow us to go through some of the kayak safety instructions before heading back to the lodge in time for dinner.

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

### Day 4

Today the first chapter of our expedition really begins as we set off into the Nicaraguan wilderness on the first day of our 128 mile trip down the San Juan River. Here the river is wide and surrounded by wetlands that are full 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. Tonight, after travelling 25 miles, we will overnight in the treetop cabins at the Sabalos Lodge and private reserve....don't be surprised if you are woken up to the sound of howler monkeys!

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

### Day 5

Following a hearty breakfast we will set off again towards El Castillo, an easy 2 hour/10 mile paddle. 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. We will have lunch at El Castillo which is home to an ancient Spanish fort built in 1675 before setting off to negotiate the rapids around the town and paddling downstream for a relaxing hour to the Bartola river, the boundary of the Indio Maiz reserve. The forest paths wind through trees,

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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 Hotel Refugio Bartola, a biological research station which doubles as a hotel.

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

## Day 6

Today, we have a full day kayaking as we make the 30 mile journey 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.

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

## Day 7

This morning we head deep into the deep into the Indio Maiz Biological Reserve as we head towards Sarapiquí, on another full day of canoeing (25 miles). 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, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

## Day 8

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. 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, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

## Day 9

We will get in our Canoes for the last time as we set off on our final part of our journey down the San Juan river. The landscape changes spectacularly from thick jungle to lowlands with palmtrees and wetlands. The river starts to run a bit slower before finally reaching the Caribbean Sea. Tonight we will sleep in luxury at the Rio Indio Lodge, where our rooms have private terraces overlooking the Rio Indio.

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

## Day 10

This morning we will 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. In the afternoon we will take a private boat across the open sea for a couple of hours to the remote indigenous Rama village of Punta de Aguila, one of the last Rama communities in the country. We will take another 30 minute boat trip to the Creole community of Monkey Point, a laid back Caribbean village where English is the language of choice. Here you can swim in secluded bays surrounded by jungle, take a guided hike in the forest or check out the farms and traditional way of life. Tonight we will stay at a small eco-hotel set in a great position (though with basic facilities)

**Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

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## **Day 11**

Today is our last full day in Nicaragua and we will be able to spend the morning swimming in the Caribbean Sea or soaking up the sun... We will then take a one hour private boat to Bluefields, where we enjoy lunch before our flight back to Managua. Tonight we will enjoy a folklore show whilst we have our farewell dinner together.

***Hotel, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner***

## **Day 12**

Following breakfast we'll be transferred to the airport for our onward flights. Expedition ends

***Breakfast***

## **EXPEDITION SCHEDULE**

This expedition is open all year apart from October / November (when there is an increased likelihood of hurricanes) for group sizes 2 – 8 (a supplement applies for groups less than 4). In terms of best time to visit 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.

This is a real once in a lifetime expedition and as such we only run a group departure once a year, for 2012 we have the following scheduled group expeditions:

15<sup>th</sup> July 2012