

Central America



Nicaragua, El Salvador and Panama

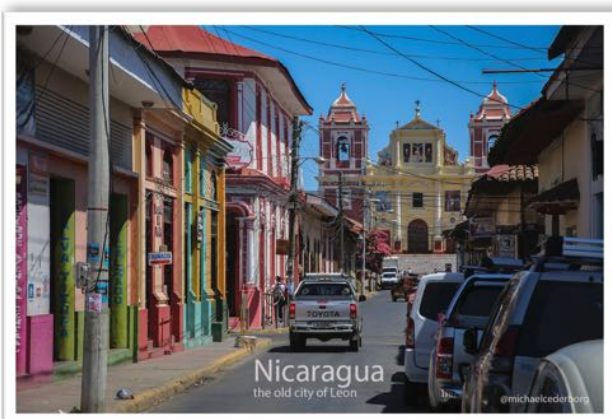
February of 2017



First stop Nicaragua!

With a 6 hour stop-over (at the airport) in Panama – no better connections, I finally arrived to Managua in Nicaragua late on the Monday evening. A tiny airport for a city of 2 million people and capital of Nicaragua. The custom clearance, picking-up of luggage baggage control only took me some 10-15 minutes. My driver – Samuel – was there to pick me up and transfer me to Hotel La Pyramide in Managua.

The hotel is much recommended with the German owner – Manfred – also assisting with all sorts of practical arrangements which can be helpful as always upon arrival into a new country. This hotel www.lapyramidehotel.com is a budget hotel with A/C rooms and breakfast at the rate of ca: 50 USD.





León – the first capitol of Nicaragua

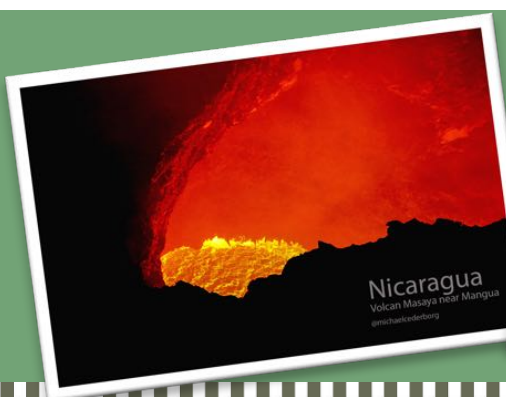
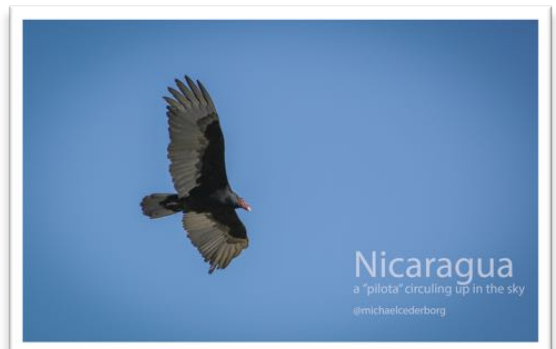
Visiting both León Viejo as well as the new León

Made a full day tour with the help of my driver Samuel. Started off in the morning to León Viejo near the Vulcan Momotombo. This is a 1 ½ hour drive from Managua. Old León is only ruins today – a site established in 1524. Not so much to see, but still important for the Nicaraguans. This used to be the capital until it was destroyed later by an eruption by the volcano nearby.

We continued onwards to León which is today a sprawling city off some 200 000 inhabitants. This colonial and most beautiful town has many churches and of course colonial buildings. Well worth a visit just to sit at the Plaza Mayor in the centre of town and watching all the tourists and locals walking by.

Daniel Ortega is still the President and has disputed the constitution, which he helped put in place back in the 90-ies when he served his first term in office. The constitution says you can only serve 2 terms in total. What else is new in these countries where dictators want to serve for a lifetime. He then appointed his wife as vice President, and she now seems to making all the decisions as Daniel is terminally ill.

At sun-set we headed out for Volcano Masaya to see the evening and sky being lit up by the lava flowing. This was a most spectacular view. We had to wait until they opened up the gates to the National Park at 6 PM. Then driving the last 6 km up to the top. Highly recommended.





The annual colourful carnival in Granada

I took a mini-bus to Granada 1 ½ hour with locals getting on/off as usual along the way. The cost is 1 usd per person. Was lucky to get off just walking distance from my hotel in central Granada: **The Colonial Hotel** www.hotelcolonialgranada.com. A lovely old colonial hotel as the name implies with an inner yard equipped with a pool and lush bougainvillea's. A very good choice of hotel, with walking distance to everything in the centre near Plaza Mayor. I started off by arranging for transport up to the **Volcano Mombacho outside of town**. I was lucky to catch the AM 10:30 onward 4-wheel bus up to the very top of the Volcano. This is the only way to get there. Up at the top you can choose from various tracks around the volcano. I opted for a shorter one which took about 1 hour.

Back down to the foot of the Volcano and my waiting transport who took me back to the hotel. A quick shower and a new set of clothes – all ready to catch the 3 PM carnival in the centre. What a marvellous and colourful show. So, lucky to catch this once per year performance. Got some really good pictures. I got a bit too much sun today, so I have been resting up in the late afternoon at the hotel. Ate a very good burrito and enchilada washed down with a couple of beers at the Plaza. This place crawling with American tourists – young and old. The local food such as burritos, enchiladas, quesadillas etc. are just the best. Spent some quality time at the pool just relaxing after having wandered the streets checking for good photo-ops'.





Ruta de las Flores (El Salvador)

The picturesque country trail

Upon arrival at San Salvador airport it was a question of how much I should get ripped off for or if anyone would even take me at this rather late hour of arrival all the way to Juayúa some 100 km up in the hill areas to the north. It seemed my worries were uncalled for as I negotiated the price to 50 USD (2 hour plus drive). Had been warned it should cost between 70-100 USD.

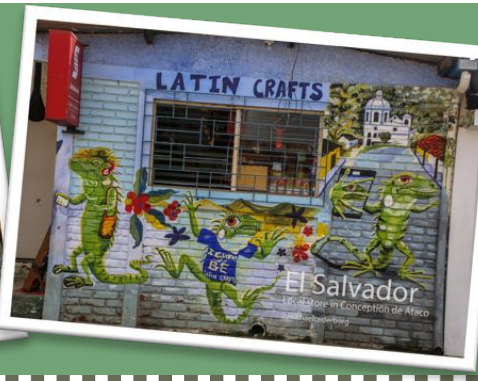
Not easy however to find the small hotel (establishment) as it was dark and no one seemed to have heard of the place. The owner, Albert came after some time and checked me in. The only guest at the hotel this night. Got a cold beer, had a shower and went to bed. www.hotel-juayua.com

Alberto offered to take me to town and show me around a bit. Juayúa and the surrounding seemed to be the stronghold of Albert and his family going back generations. His grandfather was a General and also owner of some considerable coffee plantations – some of which had been sold off today. Albert was proud to mention that he had met both **Che Guevarra** as well as **II Comendante Fidel Castro**. These guys had both been trained by Alberts grandfather – so he said.

We then went on to **Concepción de Ataco** – a small picturesque village along the famous route. He let me off here to explore the area on my own.



The Village of Juayúa and Ataco





The weekend food fair in Juayúa

A colourful afternoon in Juayúa with the weekly weekend food fair. Lots of people, food stalls and souvenir stalls in play. Got some great photos this day ...

Afternoon was spent strolling around Juayúa and the surroundings. Went down to eat at the local restaurant Sugey to eat the local favourite dish: Pupusas – A double cornbread filled with seafood and cheese topped up with vegetables, tomato sauce and other spices. I was taken here by Alberto who also shared some more histories from his past. Apparently, he had worked as a senior government official in the 90-ies “selling” El Salvador to other countries. He also had lived partially in Cuba where he grew up and played with the son of Fidel Castro. Sitting in the evening high up at the Hotel Juayúa and looking at the village and 6 volcanos in the background – makes quite a setting.

A leisurely start on the Saturday and then a quick walk to the centre of Juayúa to catch the weekend food fair. Food-stalls everywhere and a lot of people in motion. Also selling of clothes, souvenirs and what have you. Had some really good seafood at the centre this day.

Took a *tuc-tuc* from the hotel down to the bus-stop to catch the local bus to Sonsonate. This worked well and took less than an hour. I then managed to negotiate a cab to take me back to San Salvador and my hotel booked there for the last night. The hotel – **Quality Real Hotel Aeropuerto** – was packed with American military on leave who were probably waiting to catch a flight back home to the US.





Panama City

...a 2 million bustling cosmopolitan city



Got an early start this morning at 04:30 AM getting ready to catch the shuttle bus from the Quality Real Hotel Aeropuerto outside of San Salvador. Everything went smooth and at 06:50 we were on our way to Panama City. Landed and took a taxi to my hotel: **Grace Hotel in the city centre**. This is a fairly new and modern establishment with prices around 1400 sek / night. Good, specious rooms with a balcony with sun-beds.

Decided to take a taxi down to Panama Viejo and try the fish market and their food. Highly overrated in my opinion. Stay away... They will try and cheat you with the price, which are too high to start with – that's not counting the inferior quality of the food. Won't come again – that's for sure. Took a walk all around the old parts of Panama City which has mostly been restored. Very touristic – but still worth a stop.

A city with mixture of the old and new





Decided to make a visit to the obligatory **Panama Canal** – a must when here of course. It seemed impossible to do this without joining an organized tour with outrageous prices to go with it. You also needed to know what approximate times the ships would be let through the locks in order to time your visit. This they were not so keen to share without signing up for a tour.

Anyway, I managed to find out and then just took a cab out to **Miraflores locks**, which is the closes of the three locks on the Canal. It was of course interesting to see, but an hour in total there including a historical film about the Canal and seeing the ships come in and leave the locks is quite sufficient. Not a 4-6-hour tour which is suggested. Managed also to catch a dress up festival in Panama Viejo (pictures below)

