

Granada, Colonial Colors

By Peter Majerle

Across Costa Rica's northern border, everything changes. The first thing you notice is a machinegun-fire Spanish peppering the air, which is heavy with the scent of cooking cabbage and roasting pork. The architecture changes, with small villages clinging to deteriorating adobe buildings with dirt floors. Vendors roam the crowded isles of ramshackle buses, barking their wares: Fresh vigorón, three pairs of socks for fifteen córdobas, bags of fruit juice. Hot air accentuates the different odors.

The next thing you'll notice, if you get a chance to talk to the locals, is a strong sense of history and national pride. "You see that lake there," a bus passenger pointed out to me as the vista opened up to an immense body of water, flanked by twin, conical volcanoes. "It's the only freshwater lake in the world to have sharks," he beamed.

Nicaraguans have reason to feel pride in their country. There has been peace for over ten years, and many hope that a burgeoning tourism industry will bring many families out of the intense poverty that has plagued the country for decades. "There are more of you coming every day," said Rosa López, referring to suitcase-and-backpack-toting gringos. López, a taxi driver who shuttles tourists from the border to tourist destinations in southern Nicaragua, is banking on more blonde heads and green dollars passing through the country.

It's beginning to happen. And Granada, the oldest colonial city in the Americas (founded 1524), is the hub. CR Traveler visited the historic city, capturing some images of what life is like in the heart Nicaragua's most famous city.

How to get there: Two international bus companies, Tica Bus (255-4771) and Transnica (223-4242), have daily departures from San José to Granada in comfortable, air-conditioned coach buses. The trip takes between eight and ten hours and costs about \$10 one way (\$20 round trip). TACA (www.taca.com) has frequent flights from San Jose to Managua, taking around an hour and costing about \$200. Granada currently has no international airport.