

FREE GUIDE — AUGUST 2026 EDITION

The Nicaragua Relocation Readiness Guide

What to know before you move — every figure sourced, nothing assumed.

Visas · Residency · Tax · Cities · Costs · Healthcare · Banking · The Risk Brochures Skip

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Before you read: how this guide works

Moving to a country you have not lived in is stressful, and most of what you'll read online makes it worse by pretending it's simple. This guide does the opposite. Every number in it comes from an official source or a named provider; each section tells you where the information came from, and where something is uncertain or risky, we say so plainly — including one thing most relocation content leaves out entirely.

We are Expat Connect Services. We connect relocating expats with vetted, licensed local professionals — lawyers, doctors, accountants, and property experts. We do not give legal, tax, or medical advice ourselves, and this guide is not that advice. It is the map, not the lawyer.

All figures were verified in August 2026. Rules change; check the cited sources or ask us for a current introduction before acting on any of them.

Getting in: the 90-day rule

Nicaragua is one of four countries in the CA-4 free-mobility agreement, alongside Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Most nationalities enter on a tourist card (around \$10 cash on arrival) and can stay up to 90 days — and that 90 days is a shared clock across all four CA-4 countries, not a fresh count at each border.

Key facts

- Tourist card: ~\$10 USD cash on arrival, valid up to 90 days
- Extensions: \$25 per additional 30 days, up to 90 additional days total
- Overstay fine: roughly \$3 per day without an extension
- The 90 days is combined across Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras

Sources: Terrana, Tripadvisor Nicaragua forum, U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua immigration guidance — cross-checked August 2026.

Staying: residency routes in 2026

Pensionado visa — retirees with documented pension, Social Security, or annuity income. Minimum age 45. Requires **\$1,000/month** verified income.

Rentista visa — any other documented passive income (rental, dividends, royalties). No age minimum. Requires **\$1,250/month** verified income.

Add \$250/month per dependent joining you.

Why so many sites still say \$600 and \$750: those were correct before August 2024. Law 1210 (Nicaragua's new General Tourism Law) repealed the older Law 694 framework and raised both thresholds. The same law cut a step from the process — applications now go directly to the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners (DGME) instead of routing through INTUR first, saving an estimated 4–6 weeks.

Residency is temporary for the first year, renewed annually through year four, after which you become eligible for permanent residency or naturalisation.

Sources: IMI Daily, Nica-Biz, Destination Nica, Stamped Nomad — cross-checked August 2026.

The risk most relocation guides don't mention

This is the section other Nicaragua guides skip, and we think that's a disservice to anyone making a real decision.

As of the U.S. Embassy's May 2026 update, Nicaragua carries a **Level 3: Reconsider Travel** advisory from the U.S. State Department. That's not boilerplate caution — the advisory names specific, current risks:

- **Wrongful detention risk** — the State Department has determined there is a risk of wrongful detention of U.S. nationals by the Nicaraguan government.
- **Arbitrary enforcement of local law**, particularly against anyone seen as a government critic — including online criticism, which has led to detention or expulsion.
- **Unreliable property rights enforcement** — the government has seized private property without compensation or due process; the advisory specifically recommends extreme caution when investing in or buying property.
- **A new border-zone rule** — since August 5, 2025, all land within 15km of a national border is classified "border territory" and subject to seizure.

None of this means relocation to Nicaragua is impractical — hundreds of expats live there without incident. But a guide that only shows the \$1,000/month residency threshold and beachfront rent prices, without this, isn't giving you the full picture. Work with a licensed local attorney before any property purchase, avoid political activity or public criticism of the government while resident, and check the current advisory yourself before booking anything irreversible.

Sources: U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua, Updated Nicaragua Travel Advisory (May 15, 2026); travel.state.gov — checked August 2026.

Tax: the 0% headline, and what it leaves out

Nicaragua runs a **territorial tax system**: only income earned inside Nicaragua is taxable, regardless of residency status.

What this means in practice: a foreign pension, US brokerage dividends, or rental income abroad — none of it is taxed by Nicaragua. Nicaraguan-sourced income is taxed under the normal domestic system: personal income tax progressive up to 30%, corporate tax 30%, VAT (IVA) 15%. Tax residency kicks in at 183+ days present, but even tax residents owe nothing locally on foreign-source income.

What it doesn't mean: your home country's obligations don't disappear. US citizens are taxed on worldwide income regardless of residence and must still file, though the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion and Foreign Tax Credit can reduce what's owed.

Sources: *Live and Invest Overseas*, *TaxAtlas*, *Armenian Lawyer tax guide* — cross-checked August 2026.

Choosing your city: Granada, San Juan del Sur, and León

Granada is the most established expat community outside the coast — colonial architecture, Lake Nicaragua views, a walkable centre with restaurants, co-working, and easy services.

San Juan del Sur is the Pacific coast hub: the strongest expat community, the best English penetration, a beach lifestyle — and the most expensive of the three.

León is the university and arts city — the cheapest of the three established expat centres, with more local, less expat-dense character.

An honest caveat: there is no reliable, current census breaking down exactly how many expats live in each city. Anyone quoting precise percentages of “where expats live” in Nicaragua is estimating, not citing data.

Sources: *Armenian Lawyer cost-of-living guide*, *TheLatininvestor*, *Independent Territory*, *InvestNicaragua* — cross-checked August 2026.

What it actually costs to live

Ranges below are mid-2026, in US dollars. Your number depends on neighbourhood and how close to the beach or the plaza you want to be.

Item	Granada	San Juan del Sur
1-bed apartment, central	\$300–500/mo	\$600–800/mo (beachfront)
Comfortable single budget, rent incl.	~\$1,400–1,800/mo	~\$1,600–2,000/mo
GP visit, private clinic	\$20–35	\$20–35
Utilities (no heavy A/C)	\$50–100/mo	\$50–100/mo

León runs cheaper again on rent and overall budget than either city above — realistic single-person budgets across Nicaragua's popular expat destinations span roughly **\$1,200 to \$1,700/month** depending on city and lifestyle.

Currency: the córdoba (NIO) trades at roughly 36.6 to the US dollar as of early 2026, and has been stable. US dollars are widely accepted in tourist and expat-facing businesses; local markets and public transport run on córdobas.

Sources: *Armenian Lawyer*, *TheLatininvestor*, *Independent Territory*, *InvestNicaragua*, *NestFinder* — cross-checked August 2026.

Healthcare: better than you expect, cheaper than you're used to

Private healthcare is the story in Nicaragua, and Hospital Metropolitano Vivian Pellas is the name most expats end up knowing. It runs a membership-style discount program rather than traditional insurance: membership starts around **\$50/month** (rising to \$60–70/month over 65), with Gold and Silver tiers discounting diagnostics, hospitalisation, surgery, and ICU care by up to 70%, physical therapy by up to 50%, and pharmaceuticals by up to 30%. One real example: roughly \$100/month combined for a couple on the Gold tier — about \$1,200/year, with a further discount for prepaying annually. This is a discount program, not insurance.

Outside the membership system: a **GP visit runs \$20–35**, a **house call about \$35**, and a **lab test \$10–15** — private hospitals exist in Managua, Granada, and León.

Dental is a genuine standout. A single implant runs roughly **\$1,200–1,800** against \$3,000+ in the US; a crown runs \$300–500 and a routine cleaning about \$25. Many Nicaraguan dentists in expat-oriented clinics trained partly in Costa Rica or Mexico — the savings reflect Nicaragua's lack of a US-style insurance billing markup, not lower quality.

Sources: BestPlacesIntheWorldToRetire, TreatmentAbroad, ExpatLifeInNicaragua, Destination Nica — cross-checked August 2026.

Banking: simpler than the regional headlines suggest

Unlike some neighbouring markets where account-opening has tightened sharply, Nicaragua's process for expats has stayed comparatively straightforward — you do not need residency to open an account, though it can take some shopping around to find a bank willing to work with a temporary-visa holder.

Which bank: Banco Lafise is the most commonly recommended for newcomers — bilingual staff and more experience with international clients than some alternatives (BANPRO, Banco Avanz, Banco FICOHSA are the other major options).

What it takes: minimum opening deposits of **\$20–100 USD**, an in-person process taking **3–5 business days**, and a choice between USD and córdoba accounts — most expats default to USD.

One thing worth watching, not a current problem: correspondent banking de-risking has affected other countries under similar sanctions or advisory pressure. It hasn't materially disrupted Nicaraguan banking for individual expats as of this writing, but it's worth asking a local professional about.

Sources: Live and Invest Overseas, Life in Nica, NicaSeeker — cross-checked August 2026.

The readiness checklist

You're ready to book the flight when you can check every box:

- I know which residency route applies to me — pensionado (45+, pension income) or rentista (any age, other passive income)
- I've read the State Department advisory directly and understand the current risk picture, not just this guide's summary of it
- I have verified my monthly passive income meets the \$1,000 / \$1,250 threshold, with documentation ready
- I've talked to a cross-border tax professional about my home-country obligations
- I know my target city and have priced real rentals there, not estimates from an old blog post
- I have a bank identified and understand I can open an account before residency finalises

- I have healthcare sorted, with current pricing confirmed directly
 - If property is part of the plan, I've spoken to a licensed Nicaraguan attorney about title verification and the border-zone rule first
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What we cannot tell you yet

Exactly where expats live, in percentages. No current, reliable census breaks this down by city — treat any precise number you see elsewhere, including in this guide, as an estimate.

How consistently the border-zone seizure rule is applied away from literal, obvious border regions. The rule is real and recent (August 2025); how broadly it's enforced in practice is still becoming clear.

Where Nicaragua's political situation goes next. We're not going to pretend to forecast this. What we can tell you is what the current advisory says, sourced and dated — check it again yourself before you act on anything in this guide.

We'll update this guide as clearer answers become available.

Your next step

If Nicaragua is on your shortlist, don't navigate the residency paperwork — or the property risk section above — from a forum thread. Talk to someone who knows. Connect with ECS at expatconnectservices.com and we'll introduce you to vetted, English-speaking professionals: immigration lawyers, accountants, doctors, and property attorneys. Free for expats — no fees to search, ever.

Full source list

Entry & visas: Terrana, Tripadvisor Nicaragua forum, U.S. Embassy immigration guidance · Residency thresholds & Law 1210: IMI Daily, Nica-Biz, Destination Nica, Stamped Nomad · Travel advisory & property risk: U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua (May 15, 2026), travel.state.gov · Tax: Live and Invest Overseas, TaxAtlas, Armenian Lawyer · Cities & costs: Armenian Lawyer, TheLatinvestor, Independent Territory, InvestNicaragua, NestFinder · Healthcare: BestPlacesInTheWorldToRetire, TreatmentAbroad, ExpatLifeInNicaragua, Destination Nica · Banking: Live and Invest Overseas, Life in Nica, NicaSeeker. All accessed August 2026.