

# Supporting Ecotourism in Nicaragua: A TCD Practitioner Project

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*Written for Tropical Conservation and Development Newsletter December 2014*

As I watch the boat's wake churn brightly around us, I dip my fingertips into the water and watch sparks of bioluminescence spin off of them. We're slipping down the estuary, passing mangrove trees in the dark on our way back from watching juvenile Olive Ridley sea turtles shuffle into their new ocean home. We are in the Isla Juan Venado Nature Reserve on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, nestled between the small towns of Las Peñitas and Las Salinas. The reserve consists of a 22 km-long barrier island and a variety of habitats including beaches, mangrove forests, and hardwood hammocks – all teeming with life, from elusive crocodiles to proliferations of tiny crabs scuttling in and out of holes in the mud. Only once in the northern reaches of Canada do I remember being able to see as many stars dotting the skies as I do here.

My first journey to the reserve in March of 2013, was as a co-site leader for a Florida Alternative Break (FAB) marine life conservation trip. FAB, housed within the University of Florida's Center for Leadership and Service, is a student-led organization that sends students on domestic and international community service trips focused on a variety of salient issues. There we met the reserve's director, Don Marvin Hernandez, an unassuming, soft-spoken man with a knack for building partnerships and securing the trust of local community members. Much of our time was spent knee deep in mud hand-planting mangrove seeds, part of an effort to combat the recent effects of storm damage and overharvesting on mangrove forests that among other things, serve as natural nurseries for many important fish species in the area. We also worked closely with Pamela Fletcher, a woman having ties to both UF's Sea Grant Program as well as NOAA, and who served as our FAB "learning partner," helping to give us context and expertise on the conservation and management challenges the reserve experiences.

It also quickly became clear the reserve matters to many of the locals. During our time there, the visitor center was a hub of activity. School children stopped by as part of a local educational program, and in the free moments after class, cannonballed into the water for a quick swim. Nearby residents stopped by to attend meetings, catch up on news, or even pitch in with painting or repairs.

When chatting casually with Pamela about the reserve, she described their interest in developing an ecotourism brochure. Isla Juan Venado, while part of Nicaragua's national park system, sees little funding beyond what they are able to secure for themselves. Tourism is a way for them to bring in money to address management shortcomings, to educate visitors about their rich estuarine resources, and to continue to support and foster community involvement. The brochure would help the reserve capture more interest from visitors and prompt them to book directly with staff rather than outside tour operators that might not stop to pay entrance fees.

Producing a long-term product for the reserve piqued my interest and I decided to start drafting a brochure. However, I soon realized securing some funds to assist with the process in addition to supporting an initial run of an English and Spanish version would be invaluable. I was able to secure support on behalf of the TCD Practitioner Grant in addition to the Graduate Student Council and the Office of Research, framed in part as an opportunity to continue my own professional development and to strengthen ties between UF and Isla Juan Venado. In March of 2014, I returned to the reserve in order to meet and plan with Don Marvin, to take photographs, and also to share my experiences with this year's FAB trip. The process that followed became a lesson in patience as I navigated design software, long-distance conversations, and challenges in choosing and streamlining content. My Spanish leaves a significant amount to be desired, so fellow SNRE and TCD PhD student Farah Carrasco Rueda, and recently graduated environmental engineering masters student Lucia Zarba gave me the gift of their time, helping me to decipher emails and translate my ideas. The process helped me hone a new set of skills while cultivating a sense of accomplishment in taking a concept to completion.

The brochure has been finished and will soon be on its way to the reserve. I hope it will be a small step in helping the Isla Juan Venado Nature Reserve meet their goals. But I am also grateful for the brief glimpse I was given into this little corner of the natural world and the amazing community that works hard to keep it safe.

## Why Visit Isla Juan Venado?

Isla Juan Venado is an environmental jewel - hosting an incredible diversity of wildlife and natural areas.

**Explore** the island with the help of reserve staff – the most knowledgeable and experienced guides available.

**Witness** sea turtles hatching and their first journey into ocean waves.

**Stay** overnight at local pristine beaches.

**Learn** about the local ecosystem which includes over 195 species of fauna.

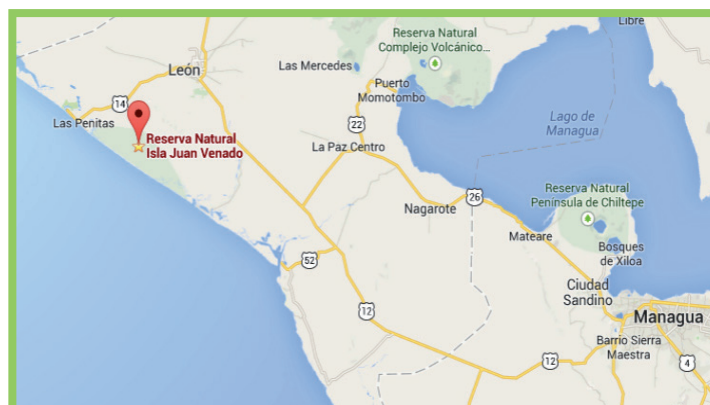
**Enjoy** and interact with the local community.



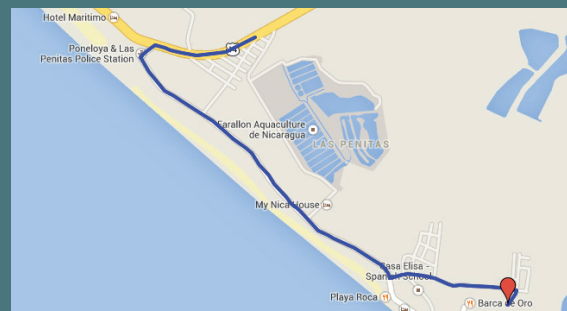
Help support the nature reserve and local community by booking your visit directly with nature reserve staff at the visitor center. We work for the conservation of resources and for the community!

Contact: Marvin Hernández Pavón  
Claro 505.8857.1638,  
Movistar 505.8995.1199

Address: 300 meters East of Hotel Barca de Oro  
Las Peñitas, León,  
Nicaragua, Central America  
centrodevisitantemhp@gmail.com  
<http://www.reservajuanvenado.org/>



Directions: A bus can be boarded in León at the Sutiava Market ("El Mercandito"). You will travel 20 km to Las Peñitas.



Brochure partially  
funded by

**TCD**  
Tropical Conservation &  
Development Program



Isla Juan Venado  
Nature Reserve



Love Nature?  
Let Us Introduce You.





## What's At The Nature Reserve?

The Isla Juan Venado Nature Reserve is a beautiful natural area located on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua. The island is a 15 minute drive from the colonial city of León and is nestled between the coastal towns of Las Peñitas and Las Salinas.

The reserve consists of a 22 km-long barrier island with pristine beaches, mangrove forests, and hardwood hammocks - all teeming with life. Visitors can search the island for crabs, crocodiles, sea turtles, and iguanas. Over 135 species of bird have been documented in the reserve - making it a bird watcher's paradise.

Let reserve staff help you plan an unforgettable experience!

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## Planning Your Visit

### Wildlife Treks

Knowledgeable and friendly staff will take you on a tour of the reserve by boat. You will move through waterways to view wading birds, crabs, fish, and crocodiles. All boat tours include a stop at the Palo de Oro beach project. Guided walking tours also available.

3 hour tour - see some of the most pristine areas of the reserve

- \$40 US dollars for 2 people\*
- 2 person minimum

5 hour tour - travel further into the reaches of the reserve and visit crocodile habitat

- \$80 US dollars for 2 people\*
- 2 person minimum

\*Decreased pricing may be available for larger groups

## Sea Turtle Night Walks

From July to March, participate in an environmental education lecture and nighttime beach walk to view sea turtle nesting and hatching.

- \$15 US dollars per person + park entrance fee\*

## Beach Activities

Stay for the day or overnight in one of the beachfront cabanas.

24 Hour Cabana Occupancy:

- Starting rate is \$15 US dollars per person per day + one time park entrance fee\*
- For groups of 3 or more, rate is \$10 US dollars per person per day + one time park entrance fee\*
- Cabanas can hold a maximum of 8 people
- Meals are available on-site, but must be purchased separately

\* Park entrance fee is \$2 US dollars for Nicaraguans and \$4 US dollars for all others





## Por Qué Visitar Isla Juan Venado?

Nicaragua es una maravilla ambiental – el país alberga una increíble diversidad de flora y fauna silvestre y áreas naturales listas para ser exploradas.

**Explore** la isla con la ayuda del personal de la reserva - los guías más conocedores que hay.

**Vea** tortugas marinas anidando y su primera travesía hacia el mar.

**Pase** una noche en las vírgenes playas de la región.

**Aprenda** acerca del ecosistema local, que cuenta con más de 195 especies de animales.

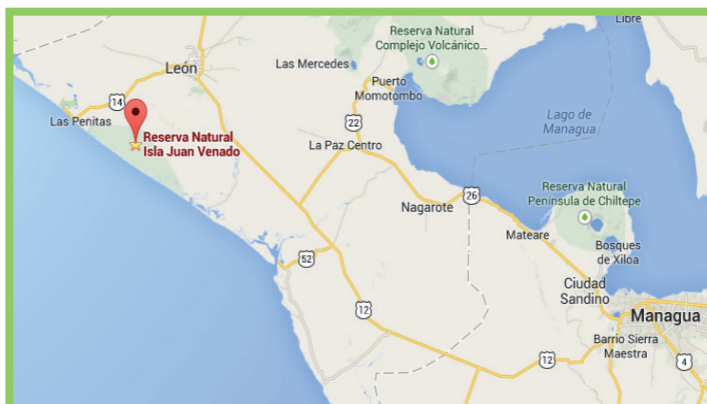
**Disfrute** e interactúe con la comunidad local.



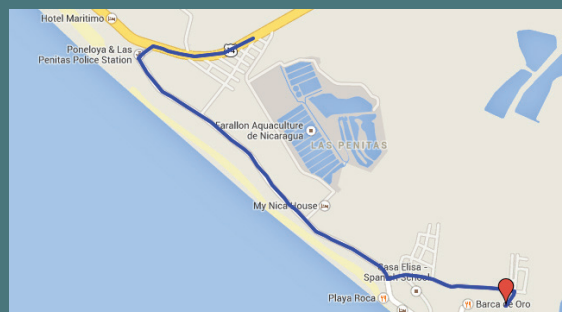
Dé su apoyo a la reserva y a la comunidad local reservando su visita directamente con el personal del centro de visitantes de la reserva. Trabajamos por la conservación de los recursos y para la comunidad!

Información: Marvin Hernández Pavón  
Claro 505.8857.1638,  
Movistar 505.8995.1199

Dirección: Hotel Barca de Oro 300  
Mts. al Este, Las Peñitas, León,  
Nicaragua, América Central  
centrodevisitantemhp@gmail.com  
<http://www.reservajuanvenado.org/>



Cómo llegar desde León: tome el bus que sale del mercadito de Sutiaba hasta Las Peñitas. Baje en el Hotel Barca de Oro y camine en la arena 300 mts. al este hasta el centro de visitantes.



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financiado por

**TCD**  
Tropical Conservation &  
Development Program



Isla Juan Venado  
Reserva Natural



Te Fascina La Naturaleza?  
Ven A Descubrir Esta Maravilla!





## Qué Hay En La Reserva Natural?

La Reserva Natural Isla Juan Venado es una hermosa area natural ubicada en la Costa Pacífica de Nicaragua. La isla está a 15 minutos desde la ciudad colonial de León, entre los poblados de Las Peñitas y Salinas Grandes.

La reserva consiste en una isla barrera de 22 kilómetros de largo con playas vírgenes, manglares y bosques de madera preciosa - todo rebozante de vida. Los visitantes pueden recorrer la isla en busca de cangrejos, cocodrilos, tortugas marinas, e iguanas. Con más de 135 especies de aves, la reserva es un paraíso para los que disfrutan del avistaje de aves.

Deje que el personal de la reserva lo ayude a planear una experiencia inolvidable!

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## Planee Su Visita

### Paseos De Fauna Silvestre

Personal capacitado y amable lo llevará en un tour en lancha por la reserva. Recorriendo el estero marino para avistaje de aves acuáticas, crustáceos, peces, y cocodrilos. Todas las excursiones en lancha incluyen una parada en la playa del proyecto turístico Palo de Oro. También ofrecemos caminatas guiadas.

Tour de 3 horas - conozca los recovecos más hermosos de la reserva

- 1,000 Córdobas por 2 personas\*
- Grupo mínimo 2 personas

Tour de 5 horas - aventúrese reserva adentro y llegue hasta el habitat de los cocodrilos

- 2,000 Córdobas por 2 personas\*
- Grupo mínimo 2 personas

\* Consulte descuentos por grupos numerosos

## Caminatas Nocturnas De Las Tortugas Marinas

Desde julio a marzo, participe de charlas de educación ambiental y caminatas nocturnas por la playa para ver desove de tortuga marina y liberación de tortuguillos al mar.

- 375 Córdobas por persona + costo de la entrada al parque\*

## Actividades En La Playa

Venga a pasar el día o quédese a pernoctar en las cabañas frente a la playa.

Estancia en las cabañas:

- 375 Córdobas por persona las 24 horas + costo de la entrada al parque\*
- 250 Córdobas por persona las 24 horas con grupos al menos de tres + costo de la entrada al parque\*
- Hasta 8 personas por cabaña
- El precio no incluye comidas, pero se pueden comprar en la playa

\* Costo de la entrada al parque es 50 Córdobas para ciudadanos nicaragüenses y 100 Córdobas para visitantes internacionales

