

SCUBA News

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Welcome to *SCUBA News* number 203. This month Bill Mashek gives the low-down on diving Nicaragua's enchanting Little Corn Island.

I hope you find the newsletter useful - you can download a pdf version of [it here](#).

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Letters

PADI Tec50 to CMAS

I am Padi Tec50, can I apply for CMAS certification? if yes what is the equivalent certification? Thank you in advance.

Vincent Guenoden

Hi Vincent

You can't just convert your PADI card to a CMAS certification, but will have to take a CMAS course. According to the CMAS/PADI agreement (<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/training/cmas-padi-agreement.pdf>) you would be able to enroll in a CMAS 3 star course.

However, that ignores your technical diving experience. The pre-requisites for taking, for example, a CMAS Extended Range Nitrox Diver Training Programme is that "the participant shall hold a CMAS Advanced Nitrox Diver or equivalent certification"

(<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/training/CMAS.Extended.Range.Nitrox-diver.pdf>).

What an equivalent certification comprises they don't say.

I think you will need to contact a CMAS centre to find out for sure.

Do you have the answer for Vincent? Contact news@scubatravel.co.uk and we'll pass your message on.

Diving into Caribbean Yesteryear - Corn Islands Nicaragua

An article by Bill Mashek

The Corn Islands are located about 50 miles east off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Little Corn is an interesting place; it is only about 1.5 sq miles in size, no cars, motorcycles or golf carts, but full of amiable folks, great diving, diverse cuisine, and lots of charm. You can walk an Island loop in about 45 minutes. Little Corn was the only destination where I experienced gregarious encounters with "friendly" nurse sharks on every dive.



Nicaragua is a great location for a variety of adventure sports. There is spear fishing, and great surfing on the pacific, even an accessible whitewater run. Going inland you have the colonial cities of Leon and Granada which is bordered by the imposing, Lake Nicaragua with the Volcanic Islands of Omatepe and of course The Corn Islands on the Caribbean. The Corn Islands have always been on my "bucket list" as a dive destination. When I got invited to a wedding in Nicaragua I got my excuse to go. We spent 6 days on the pacific, 2 inland and 8 days on the Corn Islands.

Getting here: First of all, travel in Nicaragua is situated out of Managua. All domestic flights and buses are based at the international airport in Managua as well. You can use a travel agency to get to Managua, (I just made my reservations online) but you have to book your own domestic flight to get to Corn Islands. It is recommended to do this a couple days in advance online. The cost at the time of this writing was approximately \$184/person round trip. Hard core photographers should go light on your gear as there is a 30 pound limit on stored luggage. I just took my Cannon g-12 in an Ikelite case, no strobe, it fit fine in my carry on and I got great shots.

Though I had no problems with flights, I have been informed that La Costena airlines can be subject to delays, and on occasions your bag may arrive the day after you do! In other words don't have a tight schedule. Allow for chaos, as anything can happen, especially during busy season (December to May). You will

hear stories about saving money by taking a 6-8 hour bus trip to Bluefields and departing by freighter across the channel to Big Corn - don't do it.

Tip: I found about this online: Domestic online booking fees can be expensive and they are going up. The fees were, 18/person when we were there. To get around this and to get the cheapest prices you can call La Costena's office in Managua airport on (505) 2298 5360 (option 2) to get the standard fares without online fees.

As with most of Nicaragua, you can use either the local Cordoba currency here (cheapest) but US dollars are also accepted everywhere, provided they are in good condition with no rips, tears or defacing. There is one ATM machine on Big Corn Island. Many places including our hotel, some of the restaurants and the dive shops accept credit cards however you will have a 6% Nicaraguan fee plus what every your local bank charges for international use. I used both Cordobas and US dollars. But mostly US dollars as I didn't want to come home with useless Cordobas. I also booked with the hotel directly instead of going through the 3rd party sites. It was actually cheaper.

Once we landed in **Big Corn**, we took a taxi (\$1.00/person for anyplace on the island) to our guesthouse and next day to the harbor to catch the panga (\$6.00/person) to Little Corn. Check out: <https://youtu.be/3UUNUNKY7i8>. Again, plan for delays; If the ocean is too rough, you may not get across that day. And it can be a "wet and wild" ride, I would recommend bringing a garbage bag to cover your personal gear.

I was told that they are soon going to have a bigger enclosed boat which will handle the larger swells but this is a poor country and who knows when.

Big Corn has 2 dive shops, I only talked to one. It is called Dos Tiburones. We spent the night on Big Corn at Comedor Maris Danet's Phone: (+505) 2575-5135, A very good location, excellent food (\$9.00 lobster dinner) and only a couple hundred yards from Dos Tiburones. There is also a quaint little bakery next door with savory treats and great coffee. There are several dive sites off Big Corn including the infamous Blowing rock. If for some reason you can't get to Little Corn you have other options.



Little Corn: I was watching the weather with anxious anticipation (mistake) and it looked like hostile conditions, I even called Adam at Dolphin Divers to see if they were going out. His response: "of course, we have great conditions, a little wind and bump but all is fine". Unless there is a hurricane or 35 plus knot winds, you will still dive.

I made advanced reservations with [Sunshine Hotel](#). The website said "only 2 rooms available. I think there were only 4 or 5 other folks staying in this 20 plus room hotel. During busy season it is probably a good idea to make advanced reservations. Our stay at the Sunshine hotel included a simple but classic Nicaraguan breakfast each morning and 5% discount with [Dolphin Divers](#). Sunshine is also the only hotel I found that had air conditioned rooms. The folks who run the place were nice and at \$55/night a bargain. They also had the only (mini) "farmica" on the island. I would recommend staying here. There are several rustic piquant eateries nearby and It was less than a five minute walk to Dolphin Divers from the hotel.

Every day after my second dive I would go to Havanas, a Cuban cuisine, between our hotel and Dolphin divers and get a delicious ham and cheese sandwich or fish sandwich on coconut bread.

Dolphin divers offer up to 3 dives per day and night dives. Since there are only a couple of dive shops on the island, I would recommend making advanced reservations during the busy winter season.

Because of all the weight restrictions and the extensive traveling we were doing. The only dive gear I brought was my Sunto "zoot" wrist computer, underwater camera set up, a mask and snorkel. Dolphin Divers supplies all equipment including wetsuit, if needed at no extra cost. They did not supply computers; I think you can rent one. Their regulators and BC vest were well maintained and in good condition. For photographers, the boats are too small to hold heavy gear but they do have a shower and dunk tank at the shop.

The Diving: Because of the underwater topography in Corn Islands, we dived reefs and small canyons but not walls. Subsequently, most dives are between 50-80 ft (15-25 m), except for Blowing Rock which is a small volcanic seamount, about an hour boat ride away.. It is considered the best dive site on the Corn Islands primarily because of its preponderance and variety of fish. There are no deep channels and spectacular walls like Cozumel. The water temperature was a consistent 84 °F (29 °C), making wetsuits optional.

I never prepaid for my dives, just showed up every day at the shop. However, the more you dive the cheaper the price is. A two tank dive is 65. And a 10 dive package is 280. I had 12 dives and at the end of the trip paid 28/dive plus my 5% discount. The boats launch from the beach less than 50 ft from the shop. The divemasters loaded our tanks and BCs, we were only responsible for carrying them back after the dive. Dive times varied, though usually 45 minutes unless folks were low on air. When it was just our group, we stayed down longer, especially in the shallower dives.

There were many good sites but my favorite was **Suenos**, It was about a 15 minute boat ride to get there. It was our last dive, the ocean was calm and pellucid blue-green. Visibility was well over 150 ft (45 m). Here we saw several reef sharks. They were not as friendly as the nurse sharks and didn't want to be approached. They did however, provide for interesting encounters. I saw several eagle rays, and a goliath Grouper the size of a wine barrel. We saw Parrot fish for the first time and more trigger fish. Also saw a hawksbill turtle here. Surprisingly, I saw only 2 turtles. I guess they don't nest here.



Cost for 10 or more dives 28/dive or 65 for a two tank dive, equipment and wetsuit included.

Sunshine Hotel: basic but nice rooms, air conditioned 55/night including breakfast. Coffee was ready by 7 am each morning.

Before travel, one should check for recommended vaccines for Nicaragua by the [Center of Disease Control](#).

We had no bug problems but Zika virus and dengue fever have been identified in Nicaragua hence, it is recommended to bring a good supply of insect repellent and of course sun screen. Since there is limited night lighting and power can go out at any time I would bring a good flashlight. I brought a LED headlamp and small 350 lumen flashlight and used them both.

The easy access, clear water, minimal currents and healthy flora and fauna made Little Corn a nice dive destination for me. I also enjoyed the "island vibe" and delicious eateries. Though, this destination is (thankfully) not for everyone. LCI is somewhat isolated. It has no regular power, no mail service, no bank, ATM or Western Union and minimally reliable phone, internet and electrical service. Lodging here is mostly simple and inexpensive. There are no resorts - no 5 star hotels, but you can pay over 400/night to stay at a yoga retreat, One has to be flexible and willing to change plans if you encounter adverse weather/ocean conditions. The diving is good but not fantastic; you will see better coral reefs in

Bonaire, Cozumel and other places which are much easier to access.

Nonetheless, If you like to dive in a "low key" uncrowded environment, with small groups of divers, mix with the locals, relax with a cold beer, meet new friends of diverse cultures and enjoy tasty haute cuisine of fresh, local seafood daily, Little Corn can be a journeys end.

by Bill Mashek

<http://www.rubiconadventures.com/>

Diving News From Around the World

Our round up of the more interesting underwater news stories of the past month. For breaking news see our [Twitter page](#) or [RSS feed](#)



[How Egypt's government plans to save the turtles](#)

The Egyptian Ministry of Environment is launching a National Plan for the Protection of Turtles. The plan includes a task force for rapid intervention along the coasts to monitor fishermen and fishmongers, to ban the trade of turtles and to release captured ones in the closest natural habitat.



[Baby whales whisper to evade predators](#)

Baby humpback whales avoid the attention of predators while communicating with their mothers by using intimate grunts and squeaks. The quiet noises enable the young to keep track of their parents during long and precarious migrations without being overheard by killer whales.



[Manatees can sense the world around them using nothing more than body hair](#)

Manatees have something no other mammal does: body hair with super powers.



[Squid and octopus can edit and direct their own brain genes](#)

Octopuses and squid have confirmed their reputation as Earth-bound "aliens" with the discovery that they can edit their own genetic instructions.

[5 myths about oceans and why you should care](#)



The seas are as vital to life on Earth as terra firma, and with their hugeness and depth, they provide that much more room for myths and mysteries. Here are five of the most persistent.



[New technology could pull toxic metals out of a contaminated sea](#)

By placing galvanized steel in seawater, and charging it with a weak electrical current, researchers have pulled metal ions out of the solution. Good news, but it would be better not to pollute the ocean in the first place.



[Trillions of Plastic Bits, Swept Up by Current, Are Littering Arctic Waters](#) The world's oceans are littered with trillions of pieces of plastic - bottles, bags, toys, fishing nets and more, mostly in tiny particles - and now this seaborne junk is making its way into the Arctic.

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