

# Little Corn Island

## Scuba Diving off the Beaten Path in Nicaragua

Article and Photos by Lisa Harris

A few inches above the sandy bottom, I slithered my way through Little Corn Island's coral caves. Fish darted in the opposite direction, their school flowing around my daughter, Lyda, and I as we explored the reef. With only a flashlight illuminating the way, we followed our dive master into a grotto.

We swam in a straight line to make the tight fit. Holding our arms close so as not to scrape against the walls, we wound our way in one cave entrance and out the next, swimming from the bluish-tinted sunlight into darkness. One passage was so narrow that my tank clanged on the ceiling and my stomach scraped the sand. Out in the sunlight, purple fan palms

swayed in the current. The dive master pointed out camouflaged sting rays and tarpon lurking in the shadows.

Nicaragua's Little Corn Island, like its underwater wildlife, is elusive. Off the beaten track, the tiny island offers few amenities found on other Caribbean islands, but that is its attraction.

Reaching Little Corn is an adventure in itself. We flew from Managua to Bluefields, Nicaragua's largest city on the Caribbean coast, and after taking on more passengers, our little plane flew to Big Corn Island. There, we grabbed a taxi to the port and waited for enough people to fill a dory to skip across the waves to Little Corn, a 40-minute boat ride away.

Little Corn Island is the place to go for people who want to travel to the end of the road and escape the hubbub of urbanization. There are no roads, phones, and on most of the island, no electricity or water during the day. Getting around is either by boat or on foot. Put simply, life on Little Corn Island is laid-back. Very laid-back.



View from our beach cabin



Little Corn Island Beach, Nicaragua.

Accommodations are located near the dock or on the other side of the island, reached by a dirt trail. We booked a room on the other side, at Carlito's, the last group of cabins on the beach. I figured if we're going to the end of the road, we might as well literally stay at the end of the road, or footpath in the case of Little Corn.

I had called Carlito's several times before we left the States, but only left messages. When I booked our scuba diving trip with Dolphin Dive, one of two dive shops on Little Corn, I left another one. Sandy, the owner, told me cell phone reception was poor at Carlito's, but she'd raise him on her ham radio (the island's preferred form of communication) or run "over" with my reservation information if that didn't work.

Running "over" meant a thirty-minute walk along a dirt path, as we found out when we stepped off the panga from Big Corn. Chickens scattered as we picked our way through fallen mangos and star fruit. The island's interior was thick with vegetation. After crossing the width of Little Corn carrying our luggage, we walked down the back side of a sand dune, rounded a bend and stopped dead in our tracks when the path abruptly turned right.

We stared at a jaw-dropping white sandy beach with swaying palm trees, and beyond, the turquoise blue sea. We walked parallel to the ocean without spotting a soul for another 15 minutes before we found Carlito's.

After I introduced myself, worried that our reservation never made it, Carlito leaned back in his chair and asked in Caribbean English what the fuss had been about. He'd gotten my telephone message, no need to have called the dive shop, too. His tone advised me I should have left my uptight attitude on the mainland.

Our cottage was a one-room shack on stilts. At first I thought the high-in-the-air elevation was protection from the tide, but after night fell, I realized it was to keep the crabs out. They prowled the sands at dark, sending everyone screaming.

The door separating the bathroom and bedroom was a shower curtain hung from a broken broomstick. The accommodations were primitive, but I thought we should try it for one night.

The bathroom sink, hung from

the plywood wall on two nails, came off in my hands when I grabbed hold of it in the middle of the night. There I was sitting on the toilet with PJ's around my ankles holding the sink. As I refastened it (and the PCP plumbing, too) I swore we were leaving. I'd had enough of the "end of the road" get-a-way.

But at dawn, I woke to the rustle of swaying palm trees. Walking five paces to the edge of the sea, I sat in the warm sand and watched the waves break over the reef as the sun rose. My only companions were a few stray crabs and seagulls. I decided we'd stay.

The list of Little Corn activities is short: scuba diving, fishing, and swinging in a hammock tied between two coconut palms. We don't fish, so after a few more explorations of the reef, we succumbed to the locals' favorite activity. My worries about the not-to-code bathroom construction flew into the wind along with my city attitude. We spent afternoons hanging out, lost in a hammock, happy to be at the end of the road.

If You Go  
Corn Islands Accommodations:  
[bigcornisland.com](http://bigcornisland.com)

Dolphin Diving  
(Operated out of Hotel Delfines):  
[hotelosdelfines.com.ni](http://hotelosdelfines.com.ni)



Ava hanging out on Little Corn Island.

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