

Southeastern University

**FireScholars**

---

Selected Faculty Publications

---

2021

## **Transnational Surfistas and the Development of Nicaragua's Emerald Coast**

Jason R. Old

Follow this and additional works at: [https://firescholars.seu.edu/seu\\_papers](https://firescholars.seu.edu/seu_papers)



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), [Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)


### **Copyright Statement**

Southeastern University works are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

---



## Transnational *Surfistas* and the Development of Nicaragua's Emerald Coast

Jason R. Old<sup>a,b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Department of Humanities, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL, USA; <sup>b</sup>Department of History, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA



### ABSTRACT

This article weaves together data from the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR), online mainstream media sources, and surfing magazines, to tell the story of the development of the Emerald Coast, a historically overlooked periphery in southwestern Nicaragua that evolved into one of the country's most high-profile and sought-after tourism destinations. The argument is that it is impossible to effectively explain the development of the Emerald Coast without first understanding the role surfing played in this phenomenon. This also serves to contextualize these foreign surfers as part of another wave of transnational engagement with Nicaragua, a country that has long been impacted by foreign actors from the United States and Europe. The convergence of opportunity – cultural, economic, and political forces – and environment facilitated the rise of Nicaragua's surf tourism industry, which in turn engendered subsequent forms of leisure tourism. Over the course of three decades, this new industry shifted the economic focus of Nicaragua, as tourism became the leading contributor, in terms of revenue, to Nicaragua's overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This article places foreign surfers at the center of this phenomenon by telling the story of the development and evolution of the Emerald Coast through the lens of surfing.

### KEYWORDS

Nicaragua;  
surf tourism;  
surf transnationalism;  
US-Nicaraguan relations;  
neoliberalism

Nicaragua's complex history of relations with the United States is surprisingly unknown to a large percentage of the American public. Many perhaps only vaguely remember the Reagan administration's low-intensity war of attrition waged against the Sandinista government in the 1980s. In recent decades, however, Americans have come to consider 'La Tierra de Lagos y Volcanes' as a viable surf tourism destination, and in more recent years, an ideal place for retirement. Analyzing this new wave of transnational engagement, through the lens of surfing, places surfers at the center of Nicaragua's economic development and the expansion of tourism in the Tola Municipality of southwestern Nicaragua, now known as the *Costa Esmeralda*, or Emerald Coast. As I argue in this article, it is impossible to effectively explain the development of the Emerald Coast, without first understanding the role surfing played in this phenomenon.

**CONTACT** Jason R. Old  [jold@usf.edu](mailto:jold@usf.edu)  Department of Humanities, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL 33801-6099, USA.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

In order to understand the political, economic, and social conditions that facilitated the arrival of these surfers, it is important to contextualize the history of Nicaragua over the past two centuries, particularly the latter half of the twentieth century. At the same time, it is essential to consider the international forces that have shaped Nicaraguan history, specifically the role the United States played in Nicaragua's historical development. While Nicaragua has a long history of transnational engagement with people from the United States and from other Central American countries, this watershed moment marked the first time that surfers from all over the world began to explore the southwestern coastline of Nicaragua.

### **Brief History of US Involvement in Nicaragua, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

US involvement in Nicaragua is by no means a new phenomenon. For several centuries, communities of foreigners have taken root in the country for various reasons. Like the transnational surfers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many of them came from the United States and Europe. Between the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the American Civil War (1861–1865), a select few Americans, known as filibusters, felt compelled to amass their own private armies in order to expand US influence beyond their formal borders. While illegal according to US law, filibustering was nonetheless lucrative and therefore attractive to those who had the means to carry out these expansionary projects. In 1855, US filibuster William Walker led an expedition to Nicaragua with 57 men wherein he assumed control of the country, declaring himself president of the republic.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the nineteenth century, as the United States looked for more strategic ways to expand their influence beyond their contiguous borders – and as a way to facilitate a much more efficient passage to the Pacific – US government officials and private investors saw Nicaragua as a viable option for a canal project. To the dismay of the Nicaraguans who anticipated this project, US president Theodore Roosevelt decided to build off the failed French canal project in Panama approximately one year after Panama became independent of Colombia in 1903.<sup>2</sup> Less than a decade later, US Marines occupied Nicaragua militarily from 1912 to 1933 as a way to ensure regional security, particularly as Germany became increasingly more powerful and even considered a canal project in Nicaragua.<sup>3</sup> This marine occupation provoked the Sandino Rebellion (1927–1933) and the subsequent creation of the Nicaraguan National Guard under the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

With the advent of the Good Neighbor Policy, the United States' relationship with Nicaragua changed in important ways. The US government bolstered the Nicaraguan National Guard under the guise of maintaining regional security.<sup>5</sup> From this constabulary, a dictatorship that weighed heavily on economic and military aid from the United States, the Somoza dynasty, dominated the political landscape of Nicaragua from 1936 to 1979. This 43-year-long dynasty was bolstered by the United States as a way to ensure that Nicaragua would sympathize with US policies in the region through World War II (1939–1945) and much of the Cold War (1947–1991).

A watershed moment in this relationship came on July 19, 1979, when the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN), or *Sandinistas*, launched a final offensive that deposed the long-standing, Somoza dictatorship. This radically transformed US-Nicaraguan relations, as the FSLN's revolutionary government was sympathetic to both Cuba and the Soviet Union, two countries antagonistic to US foreign policy and US hegemony. Following the inauguration of Ronald Reagan on January 20, 1981, the US government began to illicitly funnel economic and military aid to counter-revolutionary forces (the Contras) intended to destabilize the FSLN government.<sup>6</sup> This protracted, low-intensity war of attrition ended in 1990 with the election of Violeta Chamorro (1990–1997). Under Chamorro's leadership, Nicaragua reestablished relations with the United States and legislated policies more favorable to US economic penetration.<sup>6</sup>

An unusual and perhaps unforeseen beneficiary of these neoliberal economic policies were foreign surfers who, upon discovering the world class, uncrowded waves of the Tola Municipality in southwestern Nicaragua, decided to purchase private property and start businesses. The economic and political forces that fostered conditions favorable for surf tourism coalesced and were encoded into law under the Chamorro administration on June 19, 1991. The new Nicaraguan government passed Law #127, a law designed to encourage foreign investment by allowing for the foreign ownership of private property.<sup>7</sup> The neoliberalist economic policies crafted under the Chamorro administration engendered an environment conducive to the development of a surf tourism industry. Law #127 was further bolstered by Chamorro's successor, Arnaldo Alemán, with the creation of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) in 1998 and with the introduction of Law #306 in 1999.<sup>8</sup> These policies spurred on foreign investment by fostering an environment increasingly more inviting for foreign capital and international tourism. While uncrowded world class waves drew surfers to what eventually became known as the Emerald Coast, the new economic and political policies that allowed for the foreign purchase of these historically rural farmlands along this coastline would keep them coming back.

While the late 1990s was the first-time surfers began to buy land and start surf camps *en masse*, there were some earlier precedents to this history. In *The Encyclopedia of Surfing*, Matt Warshaw tells the story of a Brazilian surfer, Adrian Kojin, who rode a motorcycle from California to South America in 1987.<sup>9</sup> According to Kojin's account of his experience in Nicaragua, he was astonished by the 'beautifully groomed five-foot beach-and pointbreak surf'.<sup>10</sup> Kojin's travels through Nicaragua were against the backdrop of the Contra War (1981–1990).<sup>11</sup> While Kojin did note the tensions of being in Nicaragua at this time, he made an effort to avoid the more contentious hot spots, noting that much of the conflict was taking place at the border and in the mountains.<sup>12</sup> Kojin's focus was on surfing, which conveniently for him, was on the coast and away from conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Five years later, in 1992, two years after the decade-long conflict had come to an end, two professional surfers from the United States, Matt Archbold and Brock Little, visited Nicaragua and stayed at the luxurious Montelimar resort during their first surf trip to Nicaragua.<sup>14</sup> Little, having settled into the resort, and perhaps amazed by the grandeur and historical significance of the resort, remarked, 'We ate dinner in a part of the hotel that has played a role in recent Nicaraguan history'.<sup>15</sup>

The building that enclosed the restaurant was at one time a beachfront retreat for deposed Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza. According to *New York Times*' journalist Steven Kinzer, this luxurious estate was converted into a resort by the Sandinista government in the 1980s in an attempt to more effectively integrate Nicaragua into the global tourism economy.<sup>16</sup>

Situating the arrival of pioneering transnational surfers such as James Joseph Yemma, Lance Moss, and Dale Dagger in the late 1990s, helps to historically contextualize the birth of the modern surf tourism industry in the Emerald Coast. The start of their surf-tourism businesses, Popoyo Surf Lodge (PSL) and Surfari Charters in the Popoyo Area in 1999 and 2002, respectively; and Nicaragua Surf Lodge in Gigante Bay in 2002, gave rise to the modern surf tourism industry in the Emerald Coast.<sup>17</sup> These three surf camps helped legitimize, and promote, surf tourism throughout southwestern Nicaragua.

According to Travis Levis of CNN, this area starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s was 'an insider secret amongst diehard surfing enthusiasts, drawn to humble fishing villages like Gigante and Popoyo Beach's world-class waves.'<sup>18</sup> The introduction of this new industry into the Emerald Coast quickly shifted its economic focus, as many local Nicaraguans began to work in the tourism sector as surf guides, cooks, housekeepers, and other related jobs. This encouraged a growing dependency on surf tourism, which in turn changed how the local residents imagined their future, both in terms of their own social and economic mobility, as well as how these transnational communities would affect their way of life and culture.<sup>19</sup> Intersecting this sequence of events further underscores the environmental, cultural, economic, and political circumstances that coalesced to create the conditions favorable for a surf tourism economy. Contextualizing this phenomenon has yet to be explored by historians.

## Historiography

Scholars of nineteenth and twentieth-century Nicaraguan history pay close attention to the impacts of US hegemony in Nicaragua by way of military interventions, and cultural, economic, and political influence. Historians of this period also place Nicaragua within the larger context of US-Caribbean Basin relations, as US imperialism and foreign (and economic) policy throughout the region was inextricably connected to US power and economic penetration. In particular, Michel Gobat, Hector Perla, Jr., and Andrea Beer's work on US transnationalism in Nicaragua throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries helps to historically contextualize the proliferation of surf transnationalism within a broader context of US engagement with Nicaragua.<sup>20</sup>

Historians of tourism, as it relates to the Caribbean Basin, have tended to focus on two particular themes: Mexico's tourism industry and its historic relationship with the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the relationship between foreign policy and tourism. Denis Merrill's work in this area provides a case in point regarding this relationship, showing how US foreign policy and tourism at times work in tandem.<sup>21</sup> This is not to suggest that tourism was a state-led initiative promulgated by Washington. Rather, Merrill and others highlight how the

promotion of tourism destinations such as Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, as viable and safe, tend to fall in line, historically, with US foreign policy trends.

In the realm of surfing, historians such as Isiah Walker and Scott Laderman view politics and the expansion of US adventurism and culture through the lens of surfing. Laderman's *Empire in Waves* broadens the way historians understand US hegemony and their interaction with the world.<sup>22</sup> Isiah Walker's *Waves of Resistance* is a history of surfing in Hawaii that uses surfing as a frame through which to view the process of colonialization and resistance, particularly as it relates to *haole* encroachment in the Hawaii islands starting in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

This article sits at the confluence of these scholars' work by demonstrating how the proliferation of surfing in Nicaragua is inextricably linked to political, economic, and cultural forces that coalesced to create an environment conducive for surf tourism. Weaving together data from INTUR and online mainstream media sources and surfing magazines, I use surfing as the frame to tell the story of the development of the Emerald Coast, a historically overlooked periphery in southwestern Nicaragua that evolved into one of Nicaragua's most high-profile and sought-after tourism destinations.

More broadly, this article contributes to the historiographies on tourism, US-Nicaraguan relations, and surf studies by using mainstream media publications, tourism data, and surfing magazines to analyze the development, proliferation, and evolution of surf tourism on Nicaragua's Emerald Coast. In doing so, I engage an interdisciplinary range of scholars whose research is centered around the surf habitus of the Emerald Coast. Lindsay Usher, a scholar of Tourism Studies, focuses on transnationalism and the local's perception of the surf tourism industry in the Popoyo area.<sup>24</sup> Her work helps to better understand the rise of localism within the surf contact zones, as well as better understanding the development of surf tourism in terms of its impact on local culture and way of life. Geographers Mathew Taylor and G. Thomas LaVanchy, along with political scientist and Global Studies scholar, Sarah Romano, study water security and water governance.<sup>25</sup> Their research considers the relationship between water and surf tourism, paying special attention to its scarcity as a finite resource along the Emerald Coast. Taylor, along with Nikolai Alvarado, also evaluates the repercussions of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) on local fisheries in the Gigante Bay found in the southern part of the Emerald Coast.<sup>26</sup>

Rikke Broegard and Xavier Matteucci look at land rights and conflicts associated with the purchase of private property facilitated by policies legislated under the Violeta Chamorro administration (1990–1997), and later under the Arnaldo Aleman administration (1998–2002). These laws, specifically Law #127 in 1991, and Law #306, in 1998, fostered an environment conducive to the purchase of private property for transnational surfers, and foreigners in general. As Mark Everingham notes in 'Agricultural Property Rights and Political Change in Nicaragua', this became increasingly more problematic as foreigners began to purchase land previously redistributed by the Sandinista government during the Nicaraguan Institute for the Agrarian Reform, launched in 1981.<sup>27</sup> Xavier Matteucci offers a case in point in, 'Second Home Tourism', providing a concrete example of a conflict over land rights at Playa Sardinas – now more commonly known as Popoyo Reef – which was heavily contested by the local population. This led to protests over the land; however, to the

dismay of local protestors, the foreign investor eventually secured the rights to the property. The impacts of the neoliberalist policies, encoded into law starting in the early 1990s, continue to shape the trajectory of the Emerald Coast through the present. The evolution of this coastline over the course of two decades is perhaps best articulated in the 2010 documentary *Land* by Julian T. Pinder.<sup>28</sup>

This article weaves together online articles from mainstream media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *GQ*, *Condé Nast*, *La Prensa*, and *La Barricada*, with tourism data from the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR), to track the rise of surf tourism starting in the late 1990s. In order to cull out the most relevant publications, I used the query ‘Nicaragua Surfing’ in the search engine Google. Intersecting data from INTUR and online publications allowed me to draw a correlation between the media coverage promoting surf travel to Nicaragua and the subsequent development of a surf tourism economy on Nicaragua’s Emerald Coast. The introduction of this new surf tourism industry into what is now called the Emerald Coast, quickly shifted its economic focus, as many local Nicaraguans began to work in the tourism sector as surf guides, cooks, housekeepers, and other related jobs. This encouraged a growing dependency on surf tourism, which in turn changed how the local residents imagined their future, both in terms of their own social and economic mobility, as well as how these transnational communities would affect their way of life and culture.<sup>29</sup> What follows is a brief history of the inception, development, and evolution of the surf tourism industry on the Emerald Coast (Figures 1 and 2).

### **Introduction of Surf Tourism in the Emerald Coast, 1990s to 2000s**

While surf tourism started in Nicaragua in the late 1990s, the early 2000s marked the beginning of a steady flow of publications promoting the nascent Nicaraguan surf tourism industry and its world class waves. The first major newspaper article to document this new surf tourism phenomenon was published on March 20, 2005 by the *Los Angeles Times*’ journalist Susan Stroh. This article was followed by two articles from the *New York Times*’ journalist Mark Sundeen on May 15 and 18, 2005.<sup>30</sup> The *Los Angeles Times*’ article, titled, ‘Tranquility in An Old Trouble Spot bridges the gap between the recent, tumultuous past and the bright, optimistic future in Nicaragua. Stroh’s article focused on the surf spots in and around San Juan del Sur, a town that was budding into an ex-pat alternative to Costa Rica’s Playa Jacó. While Stroh’s article highlights the waves in San Juan del Sur, notably Playa Yankee and Playa Maderas, an underexplored area was slowly emerging as the new hidden gem for the adventurous surfer: the beaches of the Tola Municipality. These early publications help contextualize the rise of surf tourism in the Emerald Coast, as during these years it was in its infancy and only known by those who were more inclined to seek out an off-the-beaten-path experience with less amenities otherwise found at other well established surf tourism destinations such as Costa Rica, Nicaragua’s neighbor to the south.

The uncrowded world-class waves and a conflict-free Nicaragua promulgated by the mainstream newspapers piqued the interest of US citizens looking for a new place to travel and surf. The amount of North American tourists traveling to



**Figure 1.** Map of Nicaragua with the Emerald Coast highlighted. Figure indicates where the Emerald Coast and San Juan del Sur are located in southwestern Nicaragua.<sup>83</sup>

Nicaragua between 2001 and 2005 increased from 107,255 to 176,949. The majority of North American visitors came from the United States, which grew from 18.30% in 2001 to 20.68% in 2005.<sup>31</sup> During these years, surfing was the third most popular reason for travel to Nicaragua. This is noteworthy, particularly because surf tourism was such a nascent industry for Nicaragua. To see such exponential growth in this form of tourism is indicative of the quality of waves and the boundless potential of surfing to generate tourism revenue.

Coincidentally, this new boom in surf tourism coincided with a watershed moment in Nicaragua, as Daniel Ortega (1984–1990; 2006 to present) and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) regained political and economic control with their electoral victory on November 5, 2006. Ortega, the former Nicaraguan revolutionary leader and member of the FSLN junta that took power in 1979 was also instrumental in the creation of the Nicaraguan Institute for the Agrarian Reform, starting in 1981.<sup>32</sup> With the conflict years of the 1980s still in the collective memory of most US citizens, the reelection of Daniel Ortega, who took office on January 10, 2007, brought about a reticence and apprehension among US citizens interested in investing in Nicaragua.<sup>33</sup> This tenuous and unusual relationship between Ortega and the United States is succinctly articulated by Matt Walker in ‘Nicaragua: The Ferrell Frontier’, asserting that Nicaragua was in a ‘state of blessed limbo for being the one place





**Figure 2.** Surf Map of Nicaragua. Figure shows the three main surf regions in Nicaragua.<sup>84</sup>

American surf tourism just cannot get a grip on, much less steer.<sup>34</sup> This statement by Walker epitomized the precariousness and reticence surrounding Nicaragua's surf tourism economy and its international participants, particularly with President Ortega once again at the helm. The assumption was that President Ortega would launch a new agrarian reform much like the one in the 1980s, wherein the Sandinista Government confiscated large tracks of lands formerly owned by the Somoza family and their political and economic allies, and systematically redistributed the properties to landless *campesinos*. However, this time the assumption was that it would be US citizens, not the Somoza dynasty and their allies, whose property would be confiscated and redistributed. Fortunately for investors, these concerns did not come to fruition, and as predicted, tourism started to rebound again, starting in 2008.

This, however, did not deter surfers from visiting *en masse* to Nicaragua to surf, as the INTUR data does not indicate a decline in growth for these years. In fact, the percentage of surfers coming to Nicaragua in 2006 and 2007 only deviated slightly from the previous years. According to the data, surfers and investors were not dissuaded in any significant way by these events. From 2006 and 2007, surfing was the number one reason for travel to Nicaragua. In 2006, 25.6% of tourists came to surf; and in 2007, 30.4% of all tourist came for surfing.<sup>35</sup> During these years, US citizens comprised more than 20% of all travelers to Nicaragua, which rose from 21.9% in 2006 to 22.9% in 2008.

*La Prensa Magazine's* article, 'Los Reyes del Surf', or 'The Kings of the Surf', in 2008 elucidated the growth in popularity of the sport amongst local Nicaraguan, as well as the development of a surf culture that was engendered by the introduction of surf tourism to the area.<sup>36</sup> This culture, as the article demonstrates, goes beyond the transnational surfers who originally introduced surfing to the Emerald Coast and

its inhabitants. Over time, local Nicaraguans, as the article emphasized, were integrated into the surfing culture and surf habitus. With quotes such as, 'Surfboards have conquered the way of life of the southern beaches, because surfing is not just a sport, it's a culture', it was clear that surfing had grown beyond a sport reserved only for the most adventurous transnational surfers, to a sport that broadened its participants to include locals from Tola and beyond.<sup>37</sup> The proliferation of the sport of surfing among Nicaraguans engendered the rise of surfing clubs such as L2 (Limón Dos) and the Popoyo Surf Club, two surf clubs comprised of local Nicaraguans from these respective surf towns. This major cultural shift is inextricably linked to the introduction of surfing by foreign surfers. The integration, or acceptance, on the part of this transplanted culture by local Nicaraguan is a clear indication of the pervasive nature, and impact, of surfing and surf tourism on the area.<sup>38</sup> The *La Prensa Nicaragua* article, 'The Kings of Surf', provided a case in point, and perhaps even a watershed moment, in terms of this shifting culture.<sup>39</sup> This is significant, as surfing had been, excluding a few unique cases, a sport reserved for foreign surfers or expatriates who had access to surfboards and surfing equipment.<sup>40</sup> However, as foreigners began to share surfboards they no longer had use for, or guests from the surf camps gifted their boards to locals they met, locals began to embrace, and excel, at the sport. This shift in culture further entrenched surfing in the local Nicaragua culture wherein locals and foreigners both participated in surf contests and engaged with one another in the surf zones. The surf zones, and contact zones, further fostered a surfing culture wherein the local Nicaraguan surfers found themselves to be active participants in the growing surf culture.

Nicaragua continued to experience a growing tourism economy until 2008, when the United States suffered its greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression of 1929. The effects were subsequently felt in Nicaragua in the areas of tourism and foreign investment in 2009 and 2010.<sup>41</sup> This was due in large part to the precarious financial future felt by many travelers, not just surfers, from the United States, and the Global North more broadly.

As the global economy once again came back into balance, Nicaragua once again began to experience new growth. In fact, very few articles, surfing or news outlets alike, were published promoting tourism, as the economic collapse pervaded the financial well-being of most travelers. As the global economy rebounded, and Nicaragua once again regained traction as the new frontier for surf travel, magazines and news outlets would once again promote surf tourism, and tourism more broadly, encouraging travelers to come experience 'Twains Nicaragua: 144 Years Later.'<sup>42</sup> This article by Freda Moon marked a tangible turning point in Nicaragua tourism, as surfing, and tourism in general, was becoming increasingly more mainstream and less of an off-the-beaten-path adventure, engendering a new wave of transnational traveler to the Emerald Coast. With the growing surf tourism industry, the need for luxurious surf accommodations catering to affluent surfers became increasingly more imperative.

### **The Proliferation of Surf Tourism in the Emerald Coast, 2010s**

By mid-2010s, the Emerald Coast had grown from an off-the-beaten-path surf destination, to an area replete with hotels, restaurants, and amenities capable of

accommodating the more well-off surf clientele. With articles titled, “Endless Summer” at 50: Create your Own Surf Adventure at Posh Nicaragua Resort’, journalist Brian Clark aptly captured the evolution of the growing surf tourism industry in the Emerald Coast. His *Los Angeles Times* article focused specific attention on the most recent addition to the Emerald Coast, the luxurious Mukul Beach, Golf & Spa, a 1,675-acre community in the southern part of the Emerald Coast. In this article, Clark’s focus transitioned away from the trailblazing surf travelers of the late 1990s and early 2000s to highlight the ‘posh surfer’ of the 2010s, individuals interested in a more lavish surf travel experience.<sup>43</sup>

This article, published by the *Los Angeles Times* on September 3, 2016, is important for two key reasons. First, it showcased the shift in demographics regarding the evolution of surfers now visiting the Emerald Coast. The ‘posh’ surfer in his/her 50s was looking for a more luxurious experience, which included all of the amenities found in the developed world, along with Nicaragua’s world class waves. Second, it highlighted how surf tourism had grown since surf camps such as Popoyo Surf Lodge first opened its doors in 1999. Articles from *Vogue* in 2016, and CNN in 2017, focused more broadly on the Emerald Coast as the ‘new eco-travel darling of Central America.’<sup>44</sup> These articles provide a road map to track the course of the development of the tourism economy in the Emerald Coast, a course that, since the early 2000s, had expanded to include a wide range of activities for tourists, not just surfing. By 2017, this stretch of coastline was no longer the ‘insider secret amongst diehard surfing enthusiasts.’<sup>45</sup> Rather, southwest Nicaragua had grown into a full-fledged, internationally known tourism destination. This was made evident by the articles by *Vogue* and CNN, in 2016 and 2017, respectively, touting Nicaragua as the ‘new darling’ and a country that now has a ‘must-visit list.’<sup>46</sup> During these years, US citizens traveling to Nicaragua comprised approximately 20% of all visitors to the country.<sup>47</sup>

### Surfing as Economic Lifeline, 2018 to 2019

On April 18, 2018, student activists took to the Camino de Oriente in Managua, Nicaragua, to express their dissatisfaction with social security legislation that they felt would have far-reaching negative impacts on senior citizens. While a large number of Nicaraguans used this as an opportunity to express their disapproval for Daniel Ortega, it was the death of 15-year-old Alvaro Conrado at the hands of paramilitary forces on April 20, 2018 that engendered nationwide protests. Conrado’s ‘*me duele respirar*’ (‘it hurts me to breathe’) subsequently became a hashtag that served as a rallying cry for anti-government protestors.<sup>48</sup>

This watershed moment had a staggering impact on Nicaragua’s economy, plunging the country into a state of economic paralysis. On November 27, 2018, after approximately eight months of clashes between government forces and anti-government protestors, the White House issued a warning to President Daniel Ortega, condemning him for his unlawful use of force against his own citizens.<sup>49</sup>

Allegations of state-sanctioned violence against citizens, along with pictures of roadblocks on the Pan-American highway, compelled a large percentage of tourists to discontinue travel to Nicaragua. This would have far reaching economic

implications, which negatively impacted the tourism economy, including surf tourism.<sup>50</sup> This was further exacerbated by a Global Level 4 Health Advisory placed on Nicaragua by the United States Embassy, recommending that US citizens ‘reconsider travel to Nicaragua due to crime and civil unrest.’<sup>51</sup> The economic impact was palpable, as the number of tourism projects approved under Law #306 declined precipitously from 39 in 2017 to six in 2019. According to the World Bank, 2018 and 2019 showed a significant decline in GDP: –3.5% in 2018 and –.5% in 2019.<sup>52</sup> This is a staggering decline from the US\$840.5 million generated in 2017.<sup>53</sup>

While the United States Embassy discouraged their citizens from traveling to Nicaragua, *Stab Magazine* and *Surfer Magazine*, among others, encouraged surfers to go to Nicaragua. These articles, published in 2018, help to highlight the mindset of surfers as risk-taking adventurers willing to endure unsafe travel conditions for the promise of good surf. This is important because it demonstrates two things: the adventurous spirit prevalent amongst surfers and the importance of surf tourism for the Nicaragua economy.

Although the socio-political upheaval of 2018 had a devastating impact on the Nicaraguan economy, surfers – intrinsically motivated by the desire to surf uncrowded, world class waves – provided an economic lifeline to the Emerald Coast in the midst of this tumultuous year. The small percentage of surfers compelled to travel to Nicaragua to surf, combined with the resiliency of the surf tourism economy, helped the Emerald Coast mitigate many of the austere economic woes experienced by other parts of the country. As Tim Johnson of McClatchy Washington Bureau argued, ‘This country relies on it.’<sup>54</sup> By ‘it’, Johnson is referring to surf tourism, and tourism more broadly. This was echoed by Lucy Valenti, the president of the Nicaraguan Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR), asserting that ‘surfing was the only activity that survived the crisis.’<sup>55</sup> An article by Matador Network further substantiated this notion that surf tourism, in the wake of the socio-political unrest, and in defiance of the travel warnings discouraging US citizens and Europeans not to travel to Nicaragua, helped stave off much of the austere economic downturn suffered by other part of the country less involved in the surf tourism economy.<sup>56</sup> While well-known surf camps such as Popoyo Surf Lodge were only running at 15% occupancy, there were surfers still trickling in nonetheless.<sup>57</sup>

With articles titled, ‘Nicaragua Is Burning, But Should That Stop You From Going?’, Australia-based *Stab Magazine* encouraged surfers to go to Nicaragua to surf the uncrowded waves of the Emerald Coast.<sup>58</sup> This proved effective, as 46.2% of travelers from Oceania in 2018 specifically came for surfing.<sup>59</sup> While there is no doubt that all forms of tourism – including surf tourism – were negatively impacted in a number of significant ways, these surfers’ desire to take advantage of this watershed moment in Nicaraguan surf history provided an economic lifeline to effectively stave off much of the austere economic downturns experienced by those outside of the formal surf tourism economy.

According to the data gathered by INTUR, these surfers, much like the early transnational surfers of the late 1990s, were willing to endure precarious conditions for the promise of uncrowded waves. And much like the early 1987 adventure of Brazilian surfer Adrian Kojin, the surf zones provided surfers with a place free from the conflict and tumult experienced by other parts of the country such as Managua,

Granada, León, and to a much lesser extent, the city of Rivas. In Kojin's case, the conflict zones were at the borders and in the mountains.<sup>60</sup> In 2018, the conflict, which included protests, demonstrations, and clashes between government forces and anti-government groups, were found in the major cities around the country. Fortunately for the surfers willing to take the risk, even against strong warnings by the US government, there was a way to circumvent the conflict – something of which many foreign surf travelers took full advantage. The Emerald Coast Airport (ECI), which was inaugurated on October 23, 2015, played a significant logistical role, helping international travelers to circumvent the roadblocks and demonstrations that brought the Pan-American highway to a standstill.<sup>61</sup> With the vast majority of the flights flying into ECI from neighbouring Liberia and San Jose, Costa Rica, this allowed surfers more convenient access to the waves. By flying into ECI from Costa Rica, travelers avoided weaving in and out of roadblocks and averting city-wide demonstrations and protests to get to the Emerald Coast.

Amidst this tenuous and precarious situation, surfers bolstered the struggling Nicaraguan economy, specifically within the Emerald Coast.<sup>62</sup> In a blogpost published in 2018 by *surfholidays.com*, Nick Kelly provided reasons as to why it was safe for surfers to come to Nicaragua in the midst of the travel warnings and negative press, arguing that 'For those looking for empty lineups then Nicaragua is the surf destination to be and it is now safe to travel to Nicaragua.'<sup>63</sup> With a number of blogposts, social media posts, and articles by surf camps and surf media outlets encouraging surfers to visit Nicaragua for the high yield of uncrowded waves, it comes as no surprise that surfing surpassed all of the other tourism activities in 2018.<sup>64</sup> While the number among US citizens was low (15.8%), surfing was significantly higher than the other reasons for travel such as *senderismo* (6.2%) and *escalar volcanoes* (4.1%). While it is hard to quantify these surfers' motivations, it seems that the publications by *Stab Magazine* and other surf magazines succeeded in motivating surfers to travel to Nicaragua for the hope of surfing world class waves with minimal crowds.<sup>65</sup>

While mainstream media outlets such as Fox and CNN paid special attention to the clashes between government and paramilitary forces and anti-government groups, surfing magazines continued to encourage surfers to travel to Nicaragua.<sup>66</sup> *Stab Magazine*, for example, published an article on July 9, 2018, with quotes from surf camp owners suggesting that 'Surfers need to keep coming. The lineups are empty and the situation has not affected the peace out on the beach at all.'<sup>67</sup> This was followed up by another article titled 'How Badly is Nicaragua Really Burning?', by Rory Parker, where he talked about investigating Nicaragua first hand, and in the process hoped to find 'a few empty beach-break barrels along the way'.<sup>68</sup> This was in stark contrast to the major media outlets such as the *New York Times* and CNN who, at that same time, focused almost exclusively on the plight of the Nicaraguan citizens and the violence associated with the sociopolitical crisis.<sup>69</sup>

In 2019, once the socio-political crisis in Nicaragua was no longer front page news, *Condé Nast* was once again promoting Nicaragua as a viable tourism destination with articles titled 'The Newest Wave of Surf Hotels Are Built For People That Don't Surf', promoting surf hotel options to less avid surfers, and even people who wanted the surf hotel experience, minus the surfing.<sup>70</sup> This also elucidates the

resiliency of the surf tourism economy, which rebounded much quicker than the rest of Nicaragua.<sup>71</sup> Places such as Granada, a city, as Sheila Croucher contends, had become a 'popular site for settlers from the global north', suffered a crippling decline in tourism, as it was one of the epicenters of the unrest.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, on May 15, 2019, Sandinista newspaper *La Barricada*, republished an article by *Condé Nast*, where they hailed Nicaragua as one of the best places for surfing.<sup>73</sup> These articles highlight two key things: the resiliency of the surf tourism economy and people's desire to visit this relatively new travel destination, once tensions eased socio-politically, and things were deemed safe for travel.

News reporting in 2018, on Nicaragua, by major US media outlets seemed reminiscent of the 1980s, when major news outlets peddled the violence and conflict in Nicaragua, once again falling in lockstep with Washington's position in condemning the actions of President Daniel Ortega. However, the negative press was short lived. On May 10, 2018, the *New York Times* was once again reporting on surfing and Nicaragua. This time, they were reporting on Airbnb's global ambitions to offer surfing lessons, in collaboration with the World Surfing League, as part of their Airbnb Experience Category. In Nicaragua, as the article notes, something was already being offered, even by upscale Mukul Beach, Golf & Spa's, whose Surf Sensei program in Guacalito de la Isla offered surf lessons for \$165. This new interest in providing surf lessons is due in large part, according to Kristiana Choquet, an adviser with the New York City-based travel company Artisanal Experiences, to the 'new allure to surfing', noting that, 'Travelers are definitely more interested in wellness than ever before, and surfing is a part of that trend.'<sup>74</sup>

While clashes between government forces and protesters raged on throughout the year, major news and tourism outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Condé Nast*, *Today Nicaragua*, and *Vogue Mexico*, refocused their attention on promoting surf tourism, and tourism more broadly.<sup>75</sup> This included a *Today Nicaragua* article written by Rico Torres on November 6, 2019, titled, 'Tourism Is Bouncing Back In Nicaragua', which talked about the resiliency of the tourism industry, as it is 'recovering very rapidly' following the political unrest and subsequent travel ban by the British Foreign Office.<sup>76</sup> On February 12, 2019, Latin American Travel Association (LATA) announced that the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) had changed its position on Nicaragua, now only recommending visitors to 'exercise a high degree of caution.'<sup>77</sup>

The US Embassy and US State Department continued to monitor the situation in Nicaragua, even issuing warnings well after the United Kingdom and LATA considered Nicaragua safe for travel and tourism. Still, the US Embassy in Managua continued to label Nicaragua as a Global level 4 Health Advisory for US citizens traveling to Nicaragua, issuing regular warnings of demonstrations and unrest well into 2019.<sup>78</sup> However, travel magazines and media outlets had once again started to promote Nicaraguan tourism. While surfing magazines and other surf-related businesses were promoting surf travel throughout the entirety of 2018, something that, as the INTUR data indicated, helped to sustain, albeit modestly, the surf tourism industry in the Emerald Coast, travel magazines and newspaper outlets started to promote Nicaragua on November 11, 2019 with articles titled, 'The Guide To Nicaragua: The New Great Destination In Central America' by *Vogue Mexico*.<sup>79</sup>

It was as if nothing had happened, and these travel and news outlets refocused their attention on the growing tourism economy of Nicaragua. Promoting Nicaragua continued on through 2019 and into 2020 up until the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought global tourism to a grinding halt. That said, surfing would once again provide an escape for those wishing to flee the crowded cities of Europe and the United States in a post-pandemic world. As Jen Murphy of Bloomberg wrote, 'Nicaragua is where this travel writer plans to gather friends and clear her head post-pandemic'.<sup>80</sup> Her article, published on May 5, 2020, nearly 15 years to the day after Sundeen's *New York Times* article 'Chasing the Unridden Wave' provides a case in point in terms of how much the surf tourism industry has evolved over the course of 15 years.<sup>81</sup> In less than two decades, a place once considered an insider secret, reserved for the most adventurous surfers, had evolved into a well-known getaway for all types of transnational tourists looking to recover from the residual aftereffects of a global pandemic.<sup>82</sup> While the future of COVID-19, and the implications it will have on global travel are still to be determined, it is perhaps a fair assertion to suggest that surfers will be the first group willing to take the risk to travel, particularly if the promise of uncrowded, world class waves are awaiting them at their final destination.

Understanding the proliferation of the surf tourism industry on the Emerald Coast helps to expand the scope of how historians of Nicaragua, and Central America more broadly, understand the long history of engagement with the United States and other transnational actors. It also provides historians with a lens to analyze the impacts of surfing, surfers, and surf tourism on local cultures and local economies. While there are varying ways this phenomenon can be approached, weaving together mainstream media sources, surf-related sources, and tourism data allowed me to track the development of surf tourism in Nicaragua. The tourism boom in the Emerald Coast marked a notable shift in attention wherein this once peripheral rural coastline in southwestern Nicaragua became one of the leading destinations for surfers and other foreign visitors. This is significant because of its cultural and economic impacts on the Emerald Coast, a place historically considered a periphery to the more economically significant cities of Managua, León, and Granada. It also provided me with a point of departure for viewing US-Nicaraguan relations in the wake of the Contra War (1981–1990) and the subsequent election of Violeta Chamorro in 1990. Viewing the mainstream media coverage of Nicaragua, starting in the 1990s, sheds light on the changing relations between the Sandinista years (1979–1990) and Contra War and the US-friendly, neoliberal governments of the 1990s and 2000s. Lastly, this approach allowed highlighting of the willingness of surfers to endure precarious conditions for the promise of good waves, be it during the late 1990s, or during the sociopolitical upheaval of 2018. Understanding this mindset also helps to explain the resiliency of surf tourism in Nicaragua over the course of three decades. While surfing in and of itself tends to be a non-organized, decentralized, and self-interested activity, the pervasive nature of surf tourism is wide-reaching in terms of its cultural impacts on local communities, as well as its economic implications in developing nations such as Nicaragua. This is something that is yet to be explored in any significant way by historians of Central America. In short, this contribution aims to broaden the way historians of Central America

analyze surfing vis à vis its relationship with the United States and other foreign actors, as well as its cultural and economic implications on the host country and its citizens.

### The Future of Critical Surf Studies Research in Nicaragua

Given the recent boom in tourism and associated development along the Emerald Coast, this area is wide open for research and academic inquiry for other historians of sport and surf studies. While my research focuses primarily on the inception and the proliferation of surf tourism, and tourism more broadly, there are multiple other ways for scholars to approach the development of a surfing culture on the Emerald Coast. With the introduction of surf tourism, and tourism more broadly, more attention has been paid to this region by tourists, investors, and even the Nicaraguan government, yet only recently have academics paid attention to the richness of this area. Thus far, only a limited range of interdisciplinary scholars have explored the Emerald Coast academically. What we all share in common, and perhaps what originally drew many of us to the Emerald Coast, was our passion for surfing. As surfers, we can appreciate the world class waves found along the Emerald Coast. As researchers, our affinity to analyze even surfing through an academic lens led us to provide a more profound analysis of the cultural, economic, and environmental changes that are taking place as a result of surfing.

That said, conducting research in this area does have its limitations. While it is possible to conduct oral interviews and even gather photos, maps, and other ephemera to conduct academic research, the Emerald Coast has only recently begun to develop as a tourist destination. This means that resources at times were limited, with very few being digitized. The digitized data from the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR) is extremely helpful for scholars hoping to examine the growth of surfing throughout the Emerald Coast, and Nicaragua more broadly. However, there are only a few archives that are digitized and readily available. This could limit some scholars' research. Oral histories, on the other hand, are useful in trying to weave together a cohesive narrative about the history of the area. Oral histories also provide a way to articulate the colonial process taking place due to the arrival of large numbers of foreigners to the area, starting in the late 1990s. Analyzing the arrival of, and proliferation of, the transnational and expatriate communities through an imperial lens is a worthy scholarly endeavor for historians of sport and surf studies as well. In short, the Emerald Coast is open for scholars to conduct research in wide ranging and interesting ways. This article is merely one lens through which one can understand the development of the Emerald Coast as a transnational surf space.

### Notes

1. Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Andreas Beer, *A Transnational Analysis of Representations of the US Filibusters in Nicaragua, 1855-1857* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Andreas Beer, 'El Nicaragüense y Los Enlaces Transnacionales De Los Filibusteros', *Revista Humanismo y Cambio Social*, (2017): 10–23.



2. Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).
3. Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
4. Alan L. McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*.
5. Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
6. U.S. Presidential Inaugurations: Ronald Reagan, 'U.S. Presidential Inaugurations: Ronald Reagan' (Virtual Programs & Services, Library of Congress), <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/inaugurations/reagan/index.html> (accessed February 7, 2021); CIA-Contra-Crack Cocaine Controversy, <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/special/9712/appa.htm> (accessed February 7, 2021); Héctor Perla, Jr. 'Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement', *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 80–100.
7. LEY DE INVERSIONES EXTRANJERAS, [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/\(\\$All\)/DB0CD5CBF23F4722062570A100577C44?OpenDocument](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/($All)/DB0CD5CBF23F4722062570A100577C44?OpenDocument) (accessed January 30, 2021).
8. LEY DE INCENTIVOS PARA LA INDUSTRIA TURSTICA DE LA REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA, [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/\(\\$All\)/E3C09E1FF516CDDC0625724100672E24?OpenDocument](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/($All)/E3C09E1FF516CDDC0625724100672E24?OpenDocument) (accessed February 11, 2021).
9. Matt Warshaw, *The Encyclopedia of Surfing* (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2003); Matt Warshaw, *The History of Surfing* (Chronicle Books, 2010); Walter Blair Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration: North American Surfers in Mexico, El Salvador and Nicaragua' (Master's diss., Sonoma State University, 2013).
10. Matt Warshaw, *The Encyclopedia of Surfing* (Harcourt, Inc., 2003). Matt Warshaw, *The History of Surfing* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010); Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration', 96.
11. <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/archive/special/9712/appa.htm> (accessed February 7, 2021).
12. Adrain Kojin, 'Heart of the Highway', *Surfer*, March 1989, 92; Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration', 96.
13. Kojin, 'Heart of the Highway', 92; Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration', 96.
14. 'Best Beaches in Nicaragua – Expert Guide to Traveling & Surfing in Nicaragua', Surflife, <https://www.surflife.com/travel/nicaragua-surfing-and-beaches/3617476> (accessed February 10, 2021).
15. Brock Little, 'Latin Lines', Brock Little, *Surfer*, November 92, 62; Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration', 97.
16. With reports of widespread unrest in Nicaragua, most tourists opted for the more stable Costa Rica, Nicaragua's neighbour to the south. Nevertheless, in an attempt to turn the tide of widespread anti-Sandinista propaganda that flooded the mainstream media, the Daniel Ortega administration made an attempt to bolster a tourism economy, which in 1988 started with using Anastacio Somoza's estate in Montelimar as a resort for tourists. As Steven Kinzer notes, was an attempt to integrate Nicaragua into the tourism market, as the Sandinista government was desperate to fix their ailing economy. Stephen Kinzer, 'Nicaragua's Ideology of Sun and Surf', *The New York Times*, November 23, 1988.
17. 'Best Beaches in Nicaragua – Expert Guide to Traveling & Surfing in Nicaragua', Surflife, <https://www.surflife.com/travel/nicaragua-surfing-and-beaches/3617476> (accessed February 10, 2021); 'Guided All-Inclusive Nicaragua Surfing and Fishing', Surfari Charters, July 7, 2019, <https://www.surfaricharters.com/surfari-charters/>; 'Nicaragua Surf Lodge – All Inclusive', Nica Surf, <https://nिकासurf.com/nicaragua-surf-lodge/> (accessed February 10, 2021).

18. Travis Levis, 'The Emerald Coast: Nicaragua's Hidden Jewel', CNN. Cable News Network, December 15, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/nicaragua-emerald-coast/index.html>; The Emerald Coast, as a name used to describe the approximately 30-mile coastline of pristine beaches in the Tola Municipality became popular starting in the mid 2010s.
19. Florence E. Babb, *The Tourism Encounter: Fashioning Latin American Nations and Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Lindsay E. Usher and Deborah Kerstetter, 'Residents' Perceptions of Quality of Life in a Surf Tourism Destination: A Case Study of Las Salinas, Nicaragua', *Progress in Development Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014): 321–33.
20. Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*; Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018); Beer, *Transnational Analysis*; Beer, 'El Nicaragüense y Los Enlaces Transnacionales De Los Filibusteros', 10–23; Héctor Perla, Jr, 'Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement', *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (November 2009): 80–100.
21. Denis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
22. Scott Laderman, *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).
23. Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai'i*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011).
24. When referring to the Popoyo Area, I am referring to the Playa Guasacate, Gringo Hill, Las Salinas de Nahualapa, Flor de Mayo, Playa Sardinas, and Playa Popoyo.
25. G. Thomas LaVanchy, Sarah Romano, and Matthew Taylor, 'Challenges to Water Security along the "Emerald Coast": A Political Ecology of Local Water Governance in Nicaragua', *Water* 9, no. 9 (2017): 655; G. Thomas LaVanchy, Matthew J. Taylor, Nikolai A. Alvarado, Sveinsdóttir Anna G., and Mariel Aguilar-Støen, *Tourism in Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua: Struggles over Land, Water, and Fish* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020).
26. Nikolai A. Alvarado and Matthew J. Taylor, '¿Del Mar Quién Es Dueño?: Artisanal Fisheries, Tourism Development and the Struggles over Access to Marine Resources in Gigante, Nicaragua', *Journal of Latin American Geography* 13, no. 3 (2014): 37–62.
27. 'Nicaragua's Agrarian Reform and Revolution 40 Years On', Land Portal, October 21, 2018, <https://landportal.org/news/2018/10/nicaraguas-agrarian-reform-and-revolution-40-years>.
28. *Land*. Directed by Julian T. Pinder. Canada: Deliberate Films, 2010.
29. Usher and Kerstetter, 'Residents' Perceptions of Quality of Life in a Surf Tourism Destination', 321–33.
30. Mark Sundeen, 'In Nicaragua, Chasing the Unsurfed Wave', *New York Times*, May 15, 2005; Mark Sundeen, 'Surfing Nicaragua: The New Frontier', *New York Times*, May 18, 2005; Susan Stroh, 'Tranquility in an Old Trouble Spot', *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 2005.
31. <https://www.intur.gob.ni/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/estadisticasTurismo2005a.pdf>
32. 'Ortega Wins Nicaraguan Presidency', *The Guardian*, November 8, 2006; 'IFES Election Guide: Elections: Nicaragua Pres Nov 5 2006', IFES Election Guide | Elections: Nicaragua Pres Nov 5 2006, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2027/> (accessed February 11, 2021); 'Daniel Ortega', Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Ortega> (accessed February 12, 2021); 'Nicaragua's Agrarian Reform and Revolution 40 Years On', Land Portal, October 21, 2018, <https://landportal.org/news/2018/10/nicaraguas-agrarian-reform-and-revolution-40-years>.
33. Susan B. Stroh, 'Tranquility in an Old Trouble Spot', *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 2005; National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration, <https://georgewebush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070108-8.html> (accessed February 13, 2021).
34. Matt Walker, 'Nicaragua: The Feral Frontier', *Surfing*, September 2002. 98.

35. [https://www.intur.gob.ni/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Estadisticas\\_de\\_Turismo\\_2010.pdf](https://www.intur.gob.ni/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Estadisticas_de_Turismo_2010.pdf)
36. Redacción Magazine Magazine es una revista que cuenta historias a través de crónicas. ‘Surfistas De Una De Las Playas Del Sur’, *La Prensa Nicaragua*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/magazine/reportaje/los-reyes-del-surf/> (accessed February 11, 2021).
37. Original quote in Spanish: ‘Las tablas han conquistado la vida de las playas del sur, porque surfear no es sólo un deporte, es una cultura.’
38. Ford and Brown, *Surfing and Social Theory: Experience, Embodiment and narrative of the Dream Glide* (London: Routledge, 2006), 58; Tom, ‘Surfer Exploration and Migration’, 5.
39. Redacción Magazine Magazine es una revista que cuenta historias a través de crónicas, ‘Surfistas De Una De Las Playas Del Sur’.
40. It is worth noting that Ronald Urroz, a Nicaraguan native from Managua, and his friends were some of the earliest surfers to officially surf this area, starting in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the 1990s, foreign surfers were the ones that dominated the lineups and formally introduced an economy based on surfing to the area.
41. Robert Rich, ‘The Great Recession’, Federal Reserve History’, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/great-recession-of-200709> (accessed February 12, 2021); ‘Timeline on the Great Recession’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 8, 2013, <https://www.csmonitor.com/Business/2013/0908/Timeline-on-the-Great-Recession>.
42. Freda Moon, ‘Twain’s Nicaragua, 144 Years Later’, *New York Times*, September 16, 2010; Earle-levine, Julie. ‘Review: The Victoriano Hotel in Nicaragua’, *New York Times*, May 7, 2009.
43. “‘Endless Summer’ at 50: Create Your Own Surf Adventure at Posh Nicaragua Resort’, *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2016; ‘Mukul Beach, Golf & Spa: Nicaragua’s Secret Gem’, Mukul Beach, Golf & Spa | Nicaragua’s Secret Gem’, <https://mukulresort.com/> (accessed February 13, 2021).
44. Victoria Lewis, ‘6 Reasons Nicaragua Should Be on Your Must-Visit List’, *Vogue*, January 12, 2017.
45. Levius, ‘The Emerald Coast: Nicaragua’s Hidden Jewel’.
46. Lewis, ‘6 Reasons Nicaragua Should Be on Your Must-Visit List’.
47. <https://www.intur.gob.ni/estadisticas-de-turismo/>
48. Brian Strassburger, Gerard O’Connell, Carlo Calleja, Michael J. O’Loughlin, and Bill McCormick, ‘What I Saw at the Mother’s Day Massacre That Stunned Nicaragua’, *America Magazine*, May 31, 2018.
49. Aris Folley, ‘Trump Condemns Nicaragua Government over Violence against Protesters, Defends Press Freedom’, *The Hill*, July 30, 2018; Frances Robles, ‘In Just a Week, ‘Nicaragua Changed’ as Protesters Cracked a Leader’s Grip’, *New York Times*, April 26, 2018.
50. Ashtyn Douglas, ‘How Political Unrest Hurt Surf Tourism in Nicaragua This Summer’, *SURFER Magazine*, November 1, 2018.
51. U.S. Embassy Managua. Topics: Alert. ‘Message to U.S. Citizens – April 23, 2018: Reconsider Travel to Nicaragua Due to Crime and Civil Unrest’, U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua, April 23, 2018.
52. ‘Public Documents’, Public Documents Profile Viewer. World Bank’, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/726341542818388766/Global-Economic-Prospects-Jan-2019-Latin-America-and-Caribbean-analysis>, 84, (accessed February 11, 2021).
53. <https://www.intur.gob.ni/estadisticas-de-turismo/>
54. Tim Johnson, ‘Waves of unrest washed out the Nicaraguan economy’, *McClatchy Washington Bureau*. July, 30, 2018; Stab magazine, ‘Nicaragua Is Burning, But Should That Stop You From Going?’, *Stab Magazine*, July 9, 2018.
55. Lucy Valenti, President, National Chamber of Tourism of Nicaragua. Phone interview, January 11, 2020, Managua, Nicaragua.
56. Morgan Bernard, ‘After the Protests, Surfers Are Saving Nicaraguan Tourism’, *Matador Network*, August 19, 2019.

57. Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning'; Surfnicaragua, 'About Us'. Surf Nicaragua – Popoyo Surf Lodge - Guasacate, Nicaragua, <http://surfnicaragua.com/about-us/>.
58. Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning'.
59. [https://www.intur.gob.ni/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Boletin-de-Estadisticas-de-Turismo-Nicaragua-2018\\_1.pdf](https://www.intur.gob.ni/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Boletin-de-Estadisticas-de-Turismo-Nicaragua-2018_1.pdf), 2018, 28.
60. Warshaw, *Encyclopedia of Surfing; The History of Surfing*; Tom, 'Surfer Exploration'.
61. 'Private Nicaragua Airport FAQ & General Info: Costa Esmeralda'. Aeropuerto Costa Esmeralda, <https://www.aeropuertocostaesmeralda.com/faqs> (accessed February 7, 2021).
62. Bernard, 'After the Protests'.
63. Nicky Kelly, 'Is It Safe to Travel to Nicaragua and Surf?'; *Surf Blog*, 2018, <https://www.surfholidays.com/blog/is-it-safe-to-travel-to-nicaragua-and-surf/>; Johnson, 'Waves of Unrest Washed out the Nicaraguan Economy'; Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning, But Should That Stop You From Going?'; *Stab Magazine*, July 9, 2018.
64. Tim Johnson, 'Washed up Nicaragua Relies on Surfers', *Times Colonist*, August 10, 2018.
65. Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning'.
66. Frances Robles, 'Nicaragua Protests Grow Increasingly Violent, 100 Killed Since April'; *New York Times*, May 31, 2018; Nicole Chavez, Samantha Lugo, and Elizabeth Plaza, 'More than 40 People Were Killed in Unrest in Nicaragua, Rights Groups Say', CNN. Cable News Network, April 29, 2018; Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning'.
67. Stab Magazine, 'Nicaragua Is Burning'.
68. Stab Magazine, 'How Badly Is Nicaragua Really Burning?'; *Stab Magazine*, August 7, 2018.
69. Natalie Gallón, 'At Least 317 Killed in Ongoing Protests in Nicaragua, Rights Group Says', CNN. Cable News Network, August 5, 2018. Kirk Semble, "'There's No Law": Political Crisis Sends Nicaraguans Fleeing', *New York Times*, August 6, 2018; Mary Lee Grant, "'I Will Continue to Fight": How Nicaraguan Students Are Leading the Push to Oust Ortega', *Washington Post*. WP Company, August 26, 2018.
70. Annie Daly, 'The Newest Wave of Surf Hotels Are Built For People That Don't Surf', *Condé Nast Traveler*, May 2, 2019.
71. Bernard, 'After the Protests'.
72. Sheila Croucher, 'Rooted in Relative Privilege: US 'Expats' in Granada, Nicaragua', *Identities: Global Studies on Culture and Power*, 25, no. 4 (2018): 436–55.
73. 'Condé Nast Traveller Posiciona a Nicaragua Entre Los Mejores Lugares Para Hacer Surfing', BARRICADA, May 16, 2019.
74. Shivani Vora, 'Airbnb Sets Its Sights on Surfing', *New York Times*, May 10, 2018.
75. Ibid.; Fernanda Pérez Sánchez, 'La Guía De Nicaragua: El Nuevo Gran Destino De Centroamérica', *Vogue Mexico*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-05/a-nicaragua-surfing-trip-to-forget-the-pandemic-travel-guide> (accessed February 12, 2021); 'Condé Nast Traveller Posiciona a Nicaragua Entre Los Mejores Lugares Para Hacer Surfing', *La Barricada*, May 16, 2019; Rico Torres, 'Credible and Independent Since 2012 -Tourism Is Bouncing Back in Nicaragua', *Today Nicaragua*, November 6, 2019.
76. Torres, 'Credible and Independent Since 2012'.
77. 'THE FCO RELAXES TRAVEL ADVICE TO NICARAGUA', LATA, February 12, 2019, <https://www.lata.travel/news/the-fco-relaxes-travel-advice-to-nicaragua/#sthash.uBeaxKgU.dpbs>.
78. U.S. Embassy Managua, Topics: Alert, 'Demonstration Alert: U.S. Embassy Managua, Nicaragua (May 26, 2019)'; U.S. Embassy in Nicaragua, May 26, 2019.
79. Fernanda Pérez Sánchez, 'La Guía De Nicaragua: El Nuevo Gran Destino De Centroamérica', *Vogue Mexico*, (accessed February 12, 2021).
80. Bloomberg.com. Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-05/a-nicaragua-surfing-trip-to-forget-the-pandemic-travel-guide> (accessed February 12, 2021).
81. Ibid.; Mark Sundeen 'In Nicaragua, Chasing the Unsurfed Wave', *New York Times*, May 15, 2005.

82. Walker, 'Nicaragua: The Feral Frontier'; Tom, 'Surfer Exploration and Migration', 104.
83. Photo Credit: Lisa Enns ([www.ennsanalytics.com](http://www.ennsanalytics.com)) credit for the GIS image/design.
84. Photo Credit: <https://www.surfholidays.com/destinations/nicaragua>.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on Contributor

*Jason R. Old* is an Associate Professor of History and Spanish at Southeastern University, as well as a PhD candidate in History at the University of South Florida. A historian of twentieth and twenty-first century US-Latin American relations, his research centers around the development of a transnational surfing community in the Emerald Coast of Nicaragua, starting in the late 1990s. His research has two principal aims: First, to show how external conditions created an economic framework conducive to buying property and developing this part of southwestern Nicaragua. Second, to highlight the development of the Emerald Coast as a cultural contact zone for transnational surfers.

## ORCID

Jason R. Old  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1897-9037>