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中米のニカラグアと聞けば、どんなイメージが浮かぶでしょうか。ゲリラ？ジャングル？？ニカラグアの近代史は、内戦を抜きにしては語れません。特に、1936年から約半世紀続いたソモサ独裁政権がサンディニスタ革命で崩壊した後に出現した社会主義路線の政府と、米国の支援を受けた反政府武装勢力コントラとの対立では、1990年の内戦終結までに5万人以上が犠牲になりました。

しかし、その後は比較的安定した状態が続いています。今回、旅の筆者が訪れたのは、同国南部にある中米最大の淡水湖、ニカラグア湖。大きさは琵琶湖の約12倍で、湖内には多くの島々が浮かんでいます。二つの火山、コンセプション山とマデラス山が連なるオメテペ島が最も大きく、約3万5000人が暮らしています。

「オメテペ」とは現地の言葉ナワトル語で、「二つの山」という意味です。マデラス山は死火山ですが、コンセプション山は今でも火山活動が活発で、筆者が島に到着してすぐに噴煙を上げたようです。

筆者は、噴火の恐れのないマデラス山の頂上を目指しました。進むにつれ足場はだんだん悪くなり、時には途中で見かけたサルのように、木々の枝につかまりながら何とか登りきりました。ところが頂上では深い霧が視界を遮り、あまり景色はよくなかったようです。でも、下山後は、滝を見物したり、カヤックで川へこぎ出すなど、オメテペ島の滞在を存分に楽しみました。(の)

## 中米最大の淡水湖に浮かぶ二つの火山の島 Ometepe Island, NICARAGUA

By Jeffrey Tanenhaus  
Freelance Writer

**I**t didn't take long to learn why this island is called Ometepe. In the native language, *ome* means "two" and *tepetl* means "mountain." Here in Nicaragua, those two mountains are, in fact, volcanoes, and minutes after I arrived, one of them erupted.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" I cried. "Stop the car!"

My taxi driver slowed to a stop on an empty dirt road. I jumped out to witness one of the island's two famous residents waking up in the middle of the day.

Concepcion is the most picture-perfect volcano in Central America. Her symmetrical cone occasionally smokes with activity, but Ometepe's other volcano—called Maderas—has fallen asleep forever. In 1867, American author Mark Twain described this landscape as "two magnificent pyramids clad in the softest and richest green."

I was seeing gray. While Concepcion often wears a white hat made of clouds, smoke was suddenly spewing from her head. Volcanic ash arcing across the sky was an exotic yet uncomfortable sight. This wasn't a TV program I could turn off. I was on an island with nowhere to run if things got worse.



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The mini-eruption, which had also happened the day before, was national news but didn't alarm the locals. Ometepe is home to about 35,000 people on 276 square kilometers, making this the world's largest island in a body of freshwater. Farmers take advantage of the rich volcanic soil to grow coffee, corn, bananas and watermelon.

Lake Nicaragua was almost chosen as the site for a major shipping canal later built across Panama. Standing at the water's edge, one of the 25 largest lakes in the world, it looks and sounds more like an ocean.

A laid-back atmosphere attracts visitors to an island where the fastest moving thing is the breeze. Active tourists put on hiking shoes to climb two natural skyscrapers—Concepcion (1,610 meters) and Maderas (1,395 meters). Going up Concepcion was out of the question, but Maderas would do just fine. I stayed at Hacienda Merida, a farm once owned by the Somoza dictatorship that is now a backpacker resort near Maderas. I joined a Swiss

couple in their late 20s for an all-day ascent with a local guide.

マデラス山頂まで道なき道を

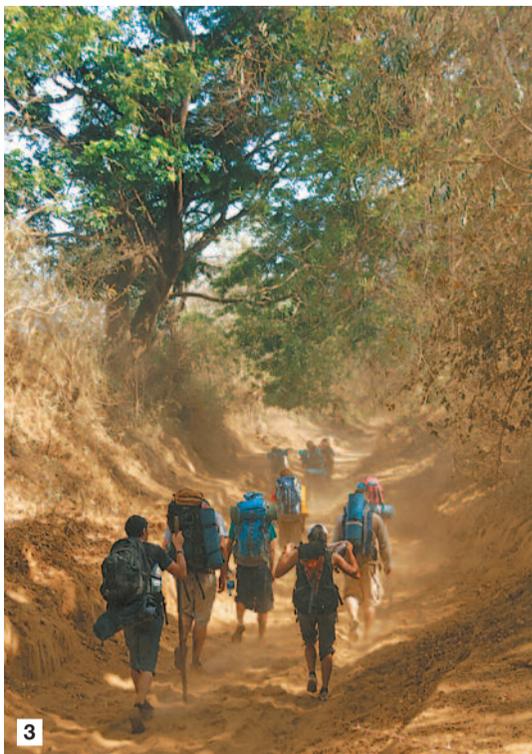
We began at 7 a.m. At first, the path was easy. Chirping birds provided a cheerful soundtrack while we walked through woods that are home to two species of monkeys, which were having breakfast in the



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trees. Climbing higher, the path got steeper and wetter as we entered the cloud forest. Moss covered trees. Roots and rocks multiplied in number and complexity. Sometimes I had to grab low branches to push myself up the rocks like a monkey.

At 10:45 a.m. we reached the top, but a dense fog blocked the view. We climbed down one hour to a crater lake to have sandwiches and rest. Mist added a prehistoric element to the green landscape. It was hard to believe I was on a crater that once bubbled with toxic gases like Concepcion.

After a well-deserved break, our guide led us down the mountain on a different path. The trail was a muddy mess, and I struggled, wearing only sneakers. The cloud forest gradually dried out, and so did my dirty shoes. Nine hours after my first step up the mountain, I re-

turned to Hacienda Merida. I collapsed into a hammock with a bowl of homemade coconut ice cream and watched the sun redden as it lowered into the lake.

The next day I hiked alone to San Ramon waterfall. No guide was necessary to reach this cascade that flowed into a pool of refreshingly cold water on a hot, dusty afternoon.

My last day on Ometepe I explored by water. I had scheduled the day off to relax, but at breakfast a friendly 20-year-old guide named Luis asked if I wanted to take a kayak trip. So at 8 a.m. Luis and I began rowing a two-person kayak in Lake Nicaragua.

We paddled to Rio Istian, a shallow river at the narrowest point of the island. The water level was so low that we almost got stuck in the mud. Birds watched us from a safe distance. Magpies and herons, alarmed at our uninvited presence, shattered the stillness.

Hiding among the aquatic plants was a camouflaged crocodile. It was so close that I would have hit it on the head with my oar had Luis not warned me to steer clear. As the vegetation thickened, it became harder to tell water from land until finally we had to turn around.

Paddling back to Hacienda Merida, Maderas came into view. Behind me, clouds covered Concepcion. The kayak quietly rolled over the waves in between two magnificent pyramids. Everything looked so peaceful, but on an island of two volcanic mountains I knew that paradise could suddenly turn perilous.

- 1 活発な火山活動を続けるコンセプション山
- 2 オメテペ島へ向かうフェリーから、ニカラグア湖に浮かぶコンセプション山を望む
- 3 マデラス山の険しい山道歩く
- 4 中南米に生息するクモザル
- 5 今は静かな湖となったマデラス山の噴火口
- 6 熱帯オメテペ島のオアシス、サン・ラモン滝
- 7 イスティアン川をカヤックでのもんびり楽しむ
- 8 ふたつの火山から形成されるオメテペ島の様子がよくわかる地形模型
- 9 ニカラグア湖に沈む夕陽
- 10 11 宿泊したアシエンダ・メリダの食事。パンケーキとスクランブルエッグ、オートミールに、フレッシュなマンゴーとパイナップル、スイカをそえた朝食と、魚がおいしい、ご飯の昼食



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