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Nancy Stoller offers color pens to a trio of friends in the city of Matagalpa, Nicaragua. (Courtesy of Nancy Stoller)

WHERE THEY WENT

## Pacific and Atlantic, peaceful and boiling, cities and forests

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By Diane Daniel

Globe Correspondent / March 25, 2007

**WHO:** Howard Axelrod, 59, and Nancy Stoller, 54, of Ashland**WHERE:** Nicaragua**WHEN:** Nine days in December

**WHY:** "We've traveled extensively and have been to many countries in Central America. We like to go in December because it's warm," Axelrod said. "We like places that are relatively primitive, so it was really based on the process of elimination, and after discussing it with people. Everyone said, 'Nicaragua is Costa Rica 20 years ago. You'll see the same sights at a fraction of the cost with no tourists.' It was true. The country is gorgeous, unbelievably stunning."

**PRIVATE GUIDE:** The couple decided to use a guide and chose Tours Nicaragua, which they found online ([toursnicaragua.com](http://toursnicaragua.com)). "They're a local company, which we like," Axelrod said. "We had a driver and guide." They chose an itinerary that would keep them on the Pacific coast. "Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. You can either do one side or the other or the middle. On the Pacific side, there are colonial cities and cloud forests, and on the Caribbean side are the rain forests."

**BRUISED BUT UNBEATEN:** "The country's had a lot of issues. Between wars, hurricanes, and earthquakes, the place has been flattened a few times," Axelrod said. "You can still see what happened during the war: some broken-down tanks, fallen statues. The war history alone is a tour unto itself. But the people are just great."

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The Boston Globe

**THINGS GOT CLOUDED:** After spending a day in the capital Managua, the couple was off to Selva Negra Mountain Resort above the city of Matagalpa. Their cabin was on a coffee plantation and in a private orchid-filled cloud forest reserve. After that, they visited the beautiful colonial cities of Leon and Granada.

**DOWN TO EARTH:** They spent several hours in a village near Selva Negra. "People live in little huts, with no electricity or plumbing," he said. "We'd brought gifts to hand out, including coloring books, colored pens, playing cards, nail polish and lipstick, stuffed animals, rubber bugs, and a little football. Everyone in the village of about 75 families went crazy. The boys had never seen a football and looked at it like it was the holy grail." Axelrod, an amateur travel photographer, has already sent villagers a set of prints from his photos and he and his wife are fulfilling the locals' wish to have their own camera.

**SENSORY SIMMER:** Although he loved the rural cloud forests and urban colonial architecture, Axelrod was most impressed by the volcanoes in the Maribios Range and other locations. "There are 28 and six are active," he said. "We went to several. Just as you'd expect, they're steaming hot and smell like sulfur, and stuff is boiling down there. You can look right over the rim. Others are dormant, and left in their wake are these beautiful azure blue crater lakes, with cloud forest growing up all around it." ■

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