A budding island HOT SPOT

The sandy shores of Lake Nicaragua on Ometepe Island are inviting but beware of bull sharks.

By KAREN GATCHEL • Special to the Star Tribune

Seen from the air, Ometepe Island looks like an hourglass with a slim isthmus connects the crater of dormant Maderas Volcano to the very much still active cone of Concepción Volcano. It was these volcanoes that inspired Ometepe’s name, which is a local Nahuatl word that means “island of two hills.”

Though a new airport is scheduled to open on Ometepe this year, most visitors still arrive by ferry across Lake Nicaragua. Also known as Lake Cocibolca, this 3,000-square-mile lake is the largest in Central America and was once filled with bull sharks that adapted to the freshwater conditions and became infamous man-eaters. They ruled the lake until fishermen nearly wiped out the population for their fins. Hardy descendants still patrol around Ometepe.

The sight of the island’s volcanic craters from the wind-swept waters of Lake Nica-

ruga inspired Mark Twain to write “they look so isolated from the world, so tranquil, so dreamy” as he traveled through the country in 1866. It’s an observation that held true as I journeyed across Lake Nicaragua in 2012. Though Twain never laid foot on Ometepe, I did.

Twin volcanoes, tumbling waterfalls, innovative adventures and a soon-to-open airport are tempting travelers to Nicaragua’s Ometepe Island like never before.

Find the best eggs Benedict at the Cornerhouse Café in Moyogalpa on Ometepe Island.

Ometepe’s main port town of Moyogalpa may be small, but residents take pride in their island home.
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GETTING THERE

A small international airport is set to open on Onetope in 2013 with initial flights originating in Manus. Onetope’s airstrip is less than 1.5 miles long, and the runway will be able to handle flights from daily San Juan on the mainland to the new island. The layover in San Juan will be several hours. Onetope lies less than 480 miles from the island on the south of the island, and therefore more stable over the atoll-chopey nature, making the tourist-hunting much more pleasant for islanders.

WHERE TO EAT

Tourists can enjoy the unique cuisine and atmosphere of the island’s numerous restaurants. Most restaurants around the island are open all week. The majority of their cuisine is local, including delicious seafood and vegetable dishes. The most popular dish in Onetope is the famous ‘fish and chips,’ which consists of locally caught fish fried to perfection.

WHERE TO STAY

There are several hotels and resorts on the island, offering various accommodations. Some of the most popular include the Beachcomber Resort and Spa, the Eco-friendly Paradise Bay Lodge, and the Island View Hotel. These establishments offer a range of amenities, including swimming pools, restaurants, and spa services.

GETTING AROUND

Visitors on the island can explore the island by car or bike. The island is relatively small, and most attractions are within a short distance from one another. Some of the most popular include the secluded beaches, hiking trails, and local markets.

KAREN GARDYN

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The scenery of Onetope Island, one of the most active volcanoes in Manusia.

* Onetope from G

Surviving the island

In 2010, the same year the entire island was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the seven-mile-long linear fissure erupting, the volcano’s activity increased dramatically. In fact, the entire island was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the seven-mile-long linear fissure erupting, the volcano’s activity increased dramatically.

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