

EXPLORING NICARAGUA

Granada Still Bullish for its Religious Festivals

By Sam Jacoby

Nica Times Staff

In the coming weeks, one of the oldest colonial cities in the Western Hemisphere will again celebrate one of its oldest and proudest annual traditions.

Honoring Granada's saint – the Virgin of the Ascension – for the next two weekends the city's colorful streets will play host to a series of raucous street parades, equestrian events and carnivals.

The festivities begin Aug. 12, when a dozen bulls are sent charging down the city's packed principal avenues, driven by a large group of equally thunderous cowboys.

Hundreds of *Granadinos* – including many young men emboldened by liquor – run through the streets alongside the bulls, slapping them as they run by or jumping into trees to avoid the reach of their horns.

The Granada bull run, though not the spectacle of its counterpart in Pamplona, is prone to a sense of unpredictable wildness not seen on the relatively contained streets of the famous Spanish bull run (see sidebar).

The following Sunday, Aug. 19, is the markedly safer horse parade, the city's most celebrated annual event and tourist attraction. The streets, hotels and restaurants of



Tim Rogers | Nica Times



Tim Rogers | Nica Times

Proud Tradition: *Nicho Cuadra (above, left), one of Granada's most revered statesman and veteran horseman, says that the city's annual horse parade (right) is still considered one of the best in Central America.*

the city are packed all weekend with tourists, cowboys from all over Central America, Nicaraguans of all socio-economic levels and waving politicians.

Dionisio "Nicho" Cuadra, a veteran Granada statesman and horseman, says that the Granada *hípica* – the oldest horse promenade in the country – began at some point in the mid-18th century as part of the celebrations that surrounded the day of Ascension, Aug. 15.

The event, in addition to being the city's popular religious festival, quickly became an annual gathering of all the powerful and wealthy families in Nicaragua.

"The *hípica* was a unifying event," Cuadra said. "The richest, the poorest, everyone came together here in Granada, the center, the capital."

Before Nicaragua's capital was moved to Managua in 1857, Granada was the country's largest business center, and vied with its rival

León for political dominance. León, at that time, didn't celebrate a *hípica*, making the Granada event all the more important.

Following the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, many wealthy landowners sneaked their purebreds out of the country, or had them confiscated.

Today, however, many have brought them back to Granada. Cuadra estimates that nearly 70% of the horses in the parade are descended from the Peruvian or Andalusian horses that were ridden here in the 1970s.

Though more than a dozen cities and towns hold their own *hípicas*, León included, none rival Granada's tradition, or its drawing power, Cuadra insists.

"Granada has the best horse breed in Central America," Cuadra said.

Visitors from all over the world line the streets to watch the richly decorated horses

and cowboys promenade through the crowds. Some 40 Granada families, many long-established in other countries, return each year to participate in the *hípica*.

"They come back just for the *hípica*," Cuadra said. "Some are in Miami, Houston, San Francisco; they keep horses here in Granada, just for this."

That does not mean, though, that the *hípica* is only for the wealthy.

It is true, Cuadra notes, that money does create a distinction between cowboys.

"The more money you have, the better you equip your horse," he said.

But that does not stop the lower and middle classes from participating. After all, the *hípica* is a "tradition that is in the Nicaraguan blood," he said. "One that we consider very much our own, the best of the best in the world." ■

The Flying Bull

The Granada bull run is a very emotional event. The crowd, which one second can be relaxed and festive, drinking beers and talking to neighbors and friends, quickly becomes manic when the word spreads that the bulls are coming.

Realizing how volatile the crowd atmosphere is, many young pranksters send false alarms by screaming that the bulls are coming and running down the street, sending a wave of panic and fear through the crowd as everyone scrambles to get out of the way of the invisible stampede. When people realize it was a false alarm, the screaming turns to nervous laughter, as the crowd goes back to drinks and light chatter until the next false alarm.

This can go on for hours before the bulls are actually charged through the streets.

As if the day weren't intense enough, last year's bull run was spiced with an extra element of danger, when one of the massive bulls made an unexpected turn off of the main street of Real Xalteva and into Xalteva Park, where dozens of people were watching the bull run from what they thought was a safe distance. The bull's presence in the park – almost literary like a bull in a china shop – sent people running and screaming in every direction, not sure where the bull was or where it would turn next.

Several astute cowboys charged on horseback into the park after the bull, and managed to drive it through the parting masses and toward the eastern side of the park, where it proceeded to jump off a six-foot high flight of stone stairs, flying completely airborne toward a group of spectators scrambling to get out of its way (you haven't experienced panic until you see, out of the corner of your eye, a two-ton bull flying through the air toward where you are standing).

The bull cleared the sidewalk and landed on the street in a full belly-flop, with spectators running in every direction, hysterical by the fact that charging bulls were now in front of them, behind them and – for a brief terrifying second – in the air above them. Miraculously, no person – or bull – was hurt.

–Tim Rogers



Tim Rogers | Nica Times

Ahead of the Pack: *Young Granadinos throw cation to the wind to run with the bulls through the city streets during the first Sunday of Granada's religious festivals.*

THE NICA  TIMES

Read Us Online:
www.nicatimes.net



Best Investment Opportunity right now in Central America

- Luxury Condominiums & Townhouses
 - Exclusive golf & beach resort
 - Rental pool & property management
- Prices from \$161,500 to \$240,000+
Tel. (626) 407-4250

www.IguanaGolfCondos.com



Our advertisers say:

"I feel that this is an excellent medium directed at the foreign sector that opens doors to a new market for us. We have (The Nica Times) on sale in our restaurant and we sell out before the week is over – there is that much demand for it!"

Grego Granja, Restaurante El Timón
San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua

"The Nica Times is a positive and interesting medium that has brought us excellent results. If it hadn't, we wouldn't still be using it!"

Luigi Roy, Hotel Darío
Granada, Nicaragua

"Being the only English-speaking newspaper in Nicaragua, we have had success with our advertising in your publication. Also, we enjoy your articles on current stories to keep us updated on what is happening in Nicaragua. Keep up the excellent reporting."

Kenneth Cole, President, Brisas del Lago
Granada, Nicaragua

THE NICA  TIMES

To place an ad, please contact Vanessa Marengo
Tel. (505) 436-1280,
E-mail: vmarengo@ticotimes.net