

EXPLORING NICARAGUA

Hotel Plaza Colón Unveiled in All its Glory

By Sam Jacoby

Nica Times Staff

After a meticulous renovation and expansion process that lasted more than a year and a half, the Hotel Plaza Colón in Granada recently celebrated the work's completion. The colonial-style luxury hotel fronts directly onto the Central Park, adding to a growing suite of high-end accommodations clustered in the city's center.

"We cater to the visitor who requires a complete set of services," said Alan Chamorro, the hotel's owner. "Power, water, cable TV; we're the only hotel with air-conditioning in every room."

The renovation also included a new space for Nicaragua's only distributor of international wines, Enoteca.

"We are bringing wine to Nicaragua," said Elizabeth Sáenz, Enoteca's manager. "It's a culture totally different from ours, a new palate."

The new bar's well-stocked shelves house fine wines from all over the world, which can be ordered by the glass or bottle.

In addition to such luxuries, the number of rooms at Plaza Colón was tripled – there are now 27 – and a large electric generator capable of supporting the new power-hungry services was installed. With frequent outages plaguing much of the country, such miniature power plants have become a requisite to doing business here.

"It is an absolute necessity that we improve the national infrastructure, the services that the government provides," said Lucy Valenti, president of the private National Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR). "That will ultimately mean more tourists and more investment; more growth across all economic sectors."

Hotel Plaza Colón, well-equipped for any hiccups in the power and water supply, is



Tim Rogers | Nica Times



Tim Rogers | Nica Times

Improving the Offering: Hotel Plaza Colón, on Granada's Central Park, has just completed its expansion to include new rooms, a pool and a cozy new wine bar, where the always-friendly Francela Gómez (right) serves up wine and good cheer.

already seeing the benefits of its expansion. The hotel, which has been housing guests through the construction process, is booked solid through August.

"We've been really busy this month," said María Isabel Cantón, the hotel's general manager. However, she added, "in July, business was way below normal."

Cantón blamed the high-season lull on the problems with energy and water last year.

"It's stuck in tourists' minds now," she said. "They remember how inconvenient it was."

Still, such concerns did not put a damper on the evening's festivities Aug. 8, when tourism industry leaders from all over the country attended the hotel's grand opening.

Mike Cobb, who is developing the 2,500-

acre Gran Pacifica project an hour west of Managua, sees the Hotel Plaza Colón expansion as a significant vote of confidence in the country's tourism growth by native Nicaraguans.

"Talk is cheap," he said. "Where's the money? Alan [Chamorro] has invested a lot in rebuilding this place, and that speaks volumes about his optimism."

The Hotel Plaza Colón didn't seek out foreign investment.

"Our capital is 100% Nicaraguan, and not only that, 100% Granadino," Chamorro said, referring to the city's residents.

The hotel strove to use furniture and linen produced by local craftsman and artisans.

"The only thing not made in Nicaragua in

here is the television," Chamorro said, proudly showing off a model room on the ground floor.

The expansion also preserved as much of the colonial-era building's historic architectural elements as possible. The wood floor dates to the original construction more than 100 years ago, as do the supporting pillars of the front colonnade.

A guest in the hotel, Hortense Simmons, had nothing but praise for her stay.

"I'm a world traveler," she said. "And nowhere have I found a more hospitable people, or better service."

For more info on Hotel Plaza Colón, visit its Web page www.hotelplazacolón.com, or call 552-8489. ■

CALENDAR

*First time in Calendar. Listings are in chronological order. E-mail Calendar submissions to trogers@ticotimes.net by 11 a.m. Monday, five days prior to date of publication.

Managua

***Concert:** Peruvian singer Carla Kjaerby and her band will perform as part of their "Doble Sentido" tour, Aug. 25, 8:30 p.m., Denis Martínez National Baseball Stadium, \$6 cover.

***Art Exhibit:** "One hundred necklaces from 100 days of solitude," necklace exhibit by artist Christine Lahij, all the necklaces are for sale, opens Aug. 25, 9 a.m.- 1 p.m., Galería Tierra Di Siena, Barrio Bolonia, 100 meters west of Japanese Embassy.

Art Exhibit: Exposition of children's plastic arts, Nicaraguan Hispanic Culture Institute, Residencial Las Colinas, Km 8.1, Carretera Masaya, Opens Aug. 17 runs all month, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., free entrance.

Art Exhibit: Photograph exhibit 'Miradas,' Bar Punto Zero, Los Robles, Aug. 28, 5-11 p.m.

Granada

***Benefit Concert:** Folk music legend Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy will be performing a benefit concert at the Hotel Dario, Aug. 24, 7 p.m., entrance is \$30, proceeds go to help hotel general manager Luigi Roy recover from accident, tel. 677-6587, info@hotel-dario.com.

Live Music: Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. Hotel Casa San Francisco, next to Convento, 552-8235.

Leon

Live Music: Every Wednesday night, area singer Carola in concert, dancing, Olla Quemada, one block west of Rubén Dario Museum, 8 p.m., 433-1163.

Night of Romance: Friday nights at vegetarian restaurant CociArte, live acoustic music

and candlelight dinner, 6 p.m., north of Iglesia El Laborio.

How to Get Involved: Volunteer Groups

La Esperanza, volunteer in community schools and local health projects near Granada.

505-837-3497

www.la-esperanza-granada.org

Building New Hope, volunteer with children and other projects in Granada.

(U.S.) 412-421-1625

www.buildingnewhope.org.

Fundación A. Jean Brugger, seeks donations and school supplies for children in San Juan del Sur.

505-568-2453

www.piedrasyolas.com/brugger_eng.htm

San Juan del Sur Biblioteca Movil, donate books and volunteer with children in San Juan del Sur.

505-568-2338

www.sjdsbiblioteca.com

Travel Alive, volunteer projects and Spanish classes in the northern city of Ocotol.

(U.S.) 708.434.0448

www.travelalive.com

Witness for Peace, volunteer opportunities with venerable peace group.

(U.S.) 202-544-0781

www.witnessforpeace.org

Habitat for Humanity, help build homes for the needy.

505-222-3146

www.habitatnicaragua.org.ni

The Nest Trust, volunteer at coffee growing-towns in northern Nicaragua, helping communities learn English and diversify local business.

www.thenesttrust.org.uk